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/ CHOREOGRAPHY FOR FAMILIES

Soft Choreographies

On Experimental Dance Performances for Families

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Abstract

The article discusses characteristic dramaturgical and ethical strategies that appear in the field of experimental dance for families. It describes selected works of Anna Wańtuch (*Contact Families Show*) and the Holobiont collective (*_on_line__*) in which children and their guardians are invited to participate in a creative process. Moreover, kids do not imitate adults, but are encouraged to act and perform according to their own wishes and conditions. Both projects practise care and affectionate relations, value the process as an element of production, and are inspired by change. The article argues that these interactive performances can be described as examples of what Mette Ingvarsten calls 'soft choreography', i.e. a choreography that produces a safe space for a dialogical meeting and particularly stresses the importance of being attentive and responsive to the different needs of others. It proves that dance works that embody non-hierarchical social systems and do not objectify young audiences have enormous emancipatory potential and can be treated as speculations about possible, more inclusive futures.

Keywords: experimental dance; multigenerational projects; affirmative ethics; Holobiont collective; Anna Wańtuch; soft choreography

Tender coexistence

The article unpacks selected choreographic strategies present on the dance for families scene on the examples from the oeuvres of Anna Wańtuch and the Holobiont collective (co-formed by Hanna Bylka-Kanecka and Aleksandra Bożek-Muszyńska). One of the perspectives adopted in the text is the position of viewers who are not mothers and thus interpret the watched performances outside the context of family participation in a performative event. We combine this problem-based approach with the one focused on organization and production, since the synthesis of these two approaches[1] allows us to better understand the specificity of experimental choreographies for families in Poland, which lack stable support and are produced from the bottom up thanks to the active work of artists[2]. The non-institutional working environment in which these choreographers create their work provides them with a degree of autonomy while at the same time significantly limiting their production capacity and, importantly in the context of improving sustainability[3] of new dance, the utilization of emerging presentation formats.

Holobiont's family performances and Anna Wańtuch's *Contact Families Show* (*CFS*) are examples of contemporary dance practices addressed to children and their close adults. At their ethical and political foundation sits the philosophy of attachment parenting. The Holobiont collective structures its pieces around the assumption that 'every participant of the performance – regardless of age and experience – is a fully competent recipient of art[istic practices]'[4]. Wańtuch, on the other hand, seeks to 'create the kind of format that would allow for a utopia of family choreographies where democracy and equality reign supreme' (Czarnota, Wańtuch, 2021). Both approaches share an interest in the family experience: they are not exclusively performances

for children, but rather multi-generational projects that establish a field of shared practice and knowledge beyond the realm of valuing and (aesthetically, as well as affectively) evaluating the results of collaboration between adult and non-adult artists, spectators and viewers.

CFS was planned as a live meeting with the families invited to the project before the pandemic impeded its development, moving the already started rehearsals to the Zoom app[5].The premiere featuring the Kraków 'pioneers' as well as the subsequent shows took place on a virtual stage. This improvised stage experiment can be repeated with and adapted to other families and different contexts. In turn, *_on_line__* by the Holobiont collective[6] is performed mainly at dance and art festivals for children[7]; during the pandemic, the piece was transferred online and became an interactive event[8].

The projects discussed in this article are based on the tender relations within a group of artists; on valuing the process as an element of production; on drawing inspiration from the change that each successive course of performance-play signifies, regardless of whether it occurs live or online. Using the terminology proposed by Mette Ingvartsen, Holobiont's and Wańtuch's activities can be conceived as a type of 'soft choreography,'[9] based on 'arrange[ing] conditions for encounters to occur' (Ingvartsen, 2013, p. 68). In *CFS* and *_on_line__*, the encounters occur within the limits of a preplanned time and format (preplanned primarily in terms of the age and concentration capabilities of the youngest participants). Their framework is determined by specific scenarios (including improvised elements), as well as verbal instructions for participants or agreements between performers and participants. We perceive this clarification of rules that, though sometimes meticulous, are not completely rigid and allow for free play (in accordance

with the accepted rules), as an affirmative strategy of softening the dramaturgy of a dance performance. As Ingvartsen notes, 'The softness of choreography applies not only to human physical movement, but also to the organisation of space, the organisation of a group in space and of its behaviour. The softness carries a persuasive quality. It has a seductive but not sexual undertone, the seduction of being part of a collective, sharing a certain time and space, in order to construct something together. […] Soft choreography brings a group of people together, for a short, but precious moment in time' (Ingvartsen, 2013, p. 68). The final scene of *_on_line__* (discussed in detail later in this article), in which everyone comes together to collectively describe the 'piece' created together, seems to be the fullest realization of Ingvartsen's artistic manifesto.

The utopia of family choreographies

In her dance pieces, Wańtuch strengthens the awareness of hierarchy inherent in functioning within a family, critically examining the position of an adult in a relationship with a child[10], valorizing errors and shortcomings in the course of developing a piece (and in upbringing itself), and empathetically approaching the expectations of both sides; most of all, however, she creates new ways of being together in and outside of artistic situations.

Contact Families Show produces and shows appreciation for a relationship based on the sense of attachment between adult and non-adult participants. Wańtuch encourages them to take an active stance and co-create relationships not only in the course of the process, but at two levels. Firstly, it was about developing an active and democratic mode of work in the workshop, engaging and developing each member of the family and creating

a show where everyone would feel comfortable and at ease. Secondly, the family audience attending the final show was also to feel involved and encouraged to engage in the work; ideally, after some time it would be difficult to recognize who was part of the original group' (Czarnota, 2021).

The choreographic performance for families with children involves six performing groups which, in preparation for the final show, take part in a creative process lasting several months and comprised of theoretical and practical classes. The participants perform choreographic tasks together as well as individually at home. They also learn about certain phenomena in the history of contemporary dance, selected somatic practices, as well as Wańtuch's other projects. The Kraków version featured children aged from two to nine, who grew up alongside the project and its subsequent implementation[11]. In the final presentations, each family performs under a name given to them jointly, and the audience is similarly encouraged to come up with a creative name for their avatar. The musical layer is created by Franciszek Araszkiewicz, who uses electronics controlled by his own brainwaves of different intensity, processed into sounds in real time. At specific moments in the performance, viewers can trigger the camera and join in on the fun.

The final score[12] consists of two parts: in the first part, the family-performers draw lots for exercises (mainly physical); in the second, the lots are drawn for tasks (improvisational) that have been developed in the course of the shared creative process. The audience is encouraged to participate in the latter part. However, the audience is not given precise instructions, but instead receive mere catchwords and their interpretations from the performers (fin the form of frames visible in Zoom windows). Each task/catchword, represented by a drawn lot, stands for a specific activity: for

example, ‘microadjacencies’ refer to touching one’s partner with the smallest body surface, while ‘choreoobjects’ trigger the use of objects in an improvised movement. In some activities, words are choreographed (e.g., when everyone describes selected elements of the environment solely with the epithets ‘soft,’ ‘cold,’ ‘red’), while in others it is the objects that appear on the screen that program the gaze of the beholders. Task-based improvisation here allows for dynamic reactions from both children and adults, which – again, this is part of an intra-project ‘contract’ – are devoid of judgment and evaluation[13]. Children-performers are not forced to learn repetitive circuits or to perform a set of exercises precisely; instead, on the basis of trust and jointly acquired knowledge, they formulate methods of cooperation with their close adults.

By organizing a family show which transgresses traditional family and artistic hierarchies, and by treating the creative process above all as a meeting in which non-normative ways of being together are practiced, based not so much on identification with the group as on a tender cherishing of differences, Wańtuch participates in the process of democratizing what Jacques Rancière calls the ‘distribution of the sensible’ (Rancière, 2007a) or, to put the philosopher’s thought in shorthand, the drawing of the common social field by rendering some subjects within that field visible (audible, perceptible) and others invisible (inaudible, imperceptible). In the hegemonic systems of knowledge and power, what is excluded (and thus deprived of agency) from the communal space is above all the Other: alien, not human, queer, and non-adult. The changes of the existing configurations of the perceptible are effected not only by politics but also aesthetics; hence their immanent interconnection in Rancière’s thought.

The subversiveness of the activities proposed by Wańtuch consists, among

other things, in rendering all the participants of *CFS* equal. However, what seems particularly important is that children not only act on the same terms as adults but they can also decide for themselves whether they want to be seen and co-create successive choreographies. Sensitivity towards difference, which retains the right to individuality and escapes the mechanisms of unification, marks the ethical horizon of Wańtuch's participatory project. Such actions can be discussed in the context of Rosi Braidotti's (2012) affirmative ethics. The author of *Nomadic Subjects* points to the necessity of moving beyond the postmodern logic of negativity and designing new, more inclusive communities based on the idea of a multi-species collective, reinforcing the agency of all its contributors: human, non-human and post-human subjects, open to and constantly undergoing new transformations. It is a project focused on the possible futures emerging on the horizon of experimental practices that expand the collective sensorium by including new actors in its space and explore their potentialities. Examining *CFS* from this perspective, one sees that the deconstruction of traditional hierarchies also has an affirmative dimension. By departing from the normative divisions of the common field in her soft choreographies of attachment, Wańtuch and the participants imagine and embody a heterogeneous alternative to the family model in which children primarily replicate adult behavior and do what their parents expect them to do.

From the perspective of the entire event, whose democratic structures are based on the foundation of the relational ethics of care, the choreographing of objects that concludes the performance appears not only as a dramaturgically impressive finale but above all as another stage in the process of introducing new causal subjects into the field of sensuality. It should be emphasized that the objects that appear in the windows – T-shirts[14], teddy bears, kitchen utensils, more or less eccentric ornaments,

textiles, souvenirs, or bizarre finds of uncertain ontological status – are not treated here as puppets in a fictional play (for children), and thus do not mediate human stories but activate the kinesthetic imagination of the participants. Thus, the objects seem not so much animated as recognized by the performers. They become partners and triggers of movement. Their textures and specific materialities affect the bodies of children and adults, eliciting specific actions. Female and male performers enable non-human beings to be creatively present. Recognizing things as equal actor-networks, to recall Bruno Latour's terminology, enables one to connect the closing images of *CFS* with the emancipatory aspirations of the entire project. Thus, acting on their own terms, the empowered children are joined by subsequent Others in the anthropocentric and privileging perspective of Goffman's 'normals,' i.e. the white middle-class adult men (males).

The encounters with broadly defined otherness initiated by Wańtuch – including technological otherness (after all, not everyone is accustomed to the online world, not to mention digital exclusion) – are not based on domination and do not seek to erase or nullify difference. On the contrary, difference is nurtured and strengthened, which can already be seen at the basic level of *CFS*'s dramaturgical structure. Female and male performers do not strive to synchronize their actions, and the objects dancing in one window do not resemble their neighbors. Conducted in a posthumanist spirit, this celebration of the strange, unusual and non-normative is one possible realization of an affirmative ethics. In this collective choreography, the youngest viewers are not reduced to little adults (or 'little ones' or 'munchkins'). Human motor skills are not imposed on objects, so the subsequent tasks proposed by the choreographer can be seen as exercises in opening up to the human and non-human Others. Treated as partners whose 'incalculable choreographies'[15], soften the common sensorium, introducing

an element of queer revolt into its territory[16], children participate in the process of democratizing the ossified structures of the rationally and patriarchally conceived public sphere.

To give up a ‘nice experience’

Since 2016, Wańtuch has been exploring the ContaKids method developed by the Israeli choreographer Itay Yatuva, of which she is a certified teacher. ContaKids is a practice of improvisation and play with a child aged between two and four, derived from selected elements of contact improvisation, such as democratic interaction, developing bodily awareness, non-verbal communication, attentiveness becoming more important than virtuosity, willingness to accept the risks inherent in a dialogical and non-hierarchical encounter with the Other, mutual support and acting on impulse[17]. When working with a child, it is important to restore the younger partner’s agency, to let him or her experience movement in its fullness: different levels and pace, dynamics and distance, joint and individual action. Rolling, flipping, ‘sliding’ and ‘rocking,’ running and jumping, belly and back work, acrobatic exercises: all of these constitute elements of Yatuva’s workshop practice (Duda, Wańtuch, 2016). According to Yatuva, during the classes adults change the way of being with the child to one that is less restrictive of their freedom. The tasks performed boost the younger practitioners’ confidence and increase their motoric skills when, for example, they are no longer constantly protected from falling[18]. Therefore, by practicing how to give up the nice experience that adults want children to have (Yatuva, 2016), parents work with their own expectations towards the experience of non-adult participants in the process.

As is the case in Yatuva’s method[19], *CFS* allows for ‘chaotic’ play, falls,

changes in the improvisation scenario[20]; it is the close encounter between adults and children that is considered to be of utmost importance[21]. The dramaturgy of the project is defined by change and unpredictability, including the reactions of the spectators invited to join in on the fun. The authors' attempt at the (unforced) activation of the Zoom meeting participants is not always successful. Nevertheless, from the perspective of this project, such a market-economic category of performance assessment does not apply. No performance is deemed a failure. In Wańtuch's project, the softening of choreography implies an attitude of openness and affirmation towards the surprises that occur in the course of the show, an openness towards the way the pre-selected material resonates in a given moment: whether it evokes a desire to play or rather a rejection of the camera lens, both among the audience and the performing families[22]. The individualized approach in the guardian-child relationship (and the already existing relationships between adult and non-adult performers and performers) carries over to the level of collective relationship, in which 'any activity (or lack thereof) is accepted' (Wańtuch, 2021).

Ingvartsen's notion of 'soft choreography,' cited at the beginning of the article, refers to a performance that takes place soft choreography is one that is 'carried out in relation to the specific desires of a specific group of people at a certain time' and 'cannot exist without an audience.' While it is true that *CFS* can take place with a tacit (hence invisible if the camera remains switched off) participation of the audience, the line between an encounter and a planned event is blurred here (Ingvartsen, 2013, p. 68). The natural reactions of the male and female performers to the tasks drawn reinforce the impression of a friendly atmosphere in which one can express one's own needs, even if they are resistance and rebellion, or the child's unwillingness to continue playing (or a sense of boredom that may occur as a

result of playing). These moments of interruption or twist – which result in a person disappearing from the screen or refusing to draw lots in a successive exercise – are integrated into the open structure of the performance, sensitive to refractions and imperfections. Family performance does not have to be productive. On the contrary, the methodology of the project focuses on failures or misunderstandings in the relationship between the adult and the child, and more difficult situations are discussed on the forum, 'softened' so that their performative potential is also perceived (the child's rebellion can be an inspiration for the next improvisation only if he/she is treated as a subject, and his/her feedback on a given task is taken seriously). As Ingvartsen summarizes, soft choreography 'is a risky performance that might as well not happen. It is a fragile situation that asks the audience to share the responsibility for it' (2013, p. 68).

Contact Families Show, which addresses micro-community politics and familial interdependence, also does not shift responsibility (for some assumed effect) to non-adult performers. The show is a family event, undoubtedly a 'fragilesituation' because it is based on the changing, communal, human-to-human relationship dynamic.

Democratic collectives

In biology and medicine, the holobiont refers to a collective in which a multicellular organism (host) symbiotically associates with microorganisms (microbes). An example of such an association is a coral, but also a human being. The human body is a vessel for the flow of a pluralistic microcosm of interdependent entities, a vessel that could not live outside of this open, changing ecosystem. In her essay 'Ognozja' [Ognosia] from the volume *Czuły*

Narrator [The Tender Narrator], Olga Tokarczuk draws on the concept of Lynn Margulis, who sees the acts of interspecies symbiosis the driving force of evolution, and creates an affirmative metaphor of the world as a democratic republic of different beings. The opposite of this heterogeneous alliance is a hierarchical monarchy with its homeostatic, normative order, overseen by homo sapiens: a white male in a suit, separated from the flora and fauna. By departing from anthropocentric obsessions and unsealing human monoliths, we can see ourselves as part of a plurality, replacing the dialectics of power and subordination with a relation of reciprocity. 'We are,' contends the Polish Nobel Prize winner, 'no longer a biont but a holobiont, that is, a set of different organisms living in symbiosis. Complexity, multiplicity, diversity, mutual interaction, metasymbiosis: these are the new perspectives from which we perceive the world' (Tokarczuk, 2020, p. 17).

Tokarczuk's monarchy-republic opposition can be transferred to the family space. It will involve the traditional family model whose foundation is marked by adult authority, on the one hand, and the non-hierarchical, attentive and empathetic parenting of closeness, on the other. In the latter paradigm, which is in many ways revolutionary but not necessarily anarchic, the child is empowered from the start: at the level of wants or needs, he or she does not have to 'grow up' to be autonomous. Supporting the child's development, argues Bylka-Kanecka, borrowing from Agnieszka Stein, 'does not consist […] in teaching specific content, but in providing such forms of coexistence in the family that would allow the needs of all its members to be respected' (Bylka-Kanecka, 2020, p. 139)[23]. The Holobiont collective[24] takes these postulates into the realm of experimental dance. The choreographies of proximity co-created and co-practiced by the collective's founders embody the idea of democratic alliances between different bodies, sensitivities and imaginations, moving each other within the leaky framework of a dialogical

encounter.

In *_on_line__*, this leakiness or capacity of borders – both one's own and those of others – somehow gains a material shape. Within the uncertain, blurred edges of *_on_line__*, dance is combined with something that could be described as collective action painting, except that instead of paints the participants use pastel crayons on stage[25]. The abstract drawings are not created entirely spontaneously; they follow the on-stage movements of Bożek-Muszyńska/Bylka-Kanecka, Dana Chmielewska and Paweł Grala, as well as those of the participants, whose movement trajectories – though uninhibited – result from specific movement tasks. Thus, steps and lines intersect on paper. The latter become a dynamic record of an ephemeral meeting. At the meta-level, the image created 'here and now' appears as a material allegory of the relationality of existence, the processuality of individual and collective subjectivities, and the openness or fluctuations of the human holobiont.

In Bylka-Kanecka's and Bożek-Muszyńska's practice, the blurring of boundaries is a constant element of their political strategy of choreographing alternative (i.e. non-hierarchical) ways of being together and dismantling or 'softening' (Bylka-Kanecka, 2020, p. 143) conventional structures of cultural events for children. The curator of Roztańczone Rodziny (the Dancing Families) program[26] details the dramaturgy of this process on the example of the *DOoKOŁA* (roundABOUT) performance (Bylka-Kanecka, 2020, pp. 140-142). Since similar mechanisms are also activated in other Holobiont productions[27], it is worth reconstructing them here. Firstly, free play is embedded in the dramaturgical fabric of the performance (it is not a separate, post-presentation part thereof), and thus the audience members participate in the creation of the on-stage worlds. Secondly, the

identities of everyone on stage are fluid and nomadic, meaning that the audience alternately acts and observes, while the performers (and Paweł Grala in the case of *_on_line__*) initiate movement or follow the suggestions of the guests and hosts; after the finale, as Bylka-Kanecka points out, 'they [the performers] change their status from the hosts of the event who give instructions at the beginning of the show to the recipients of the participants' feedback, before finally returning to the former capacity when they bid farewell to the successive families leaving the room after the performance' (p. 142). Thirdly, the end of the performance does not necessitate a prompt departure from the stage, or an immediate return to reality. On the contrary, the soft framework of the performance remains hospitable in this respect, too.

For example, the finale of *_on_line__* features the ceremonial lifting of a collectively created image and its exposition on the wall, in the light of colored floodlights. The audience gazes at this collective, holobiont-like creations, amidst abstract flourishes, identifying familiar shapes (traces of reflected hands and feet, outlined contours of small and large bodies, uninterrupted lines, colorful spots of movement) and interpreting them individually. One can name the work, take photos against the background of the drawing, talk to the artists and the creator. Thus, the inner world of the show dissolves, as it were, into the everyday, which also (so we think) carries political significance. The practice of closeness, which the collective encourages, becomes both an embodiment and a projection of alternative ways of being together, including, if not primarily, outside the theater. The softening of the individual parts of the performance and the boundaries between art and life thus completes the process, initiated by the unsealing of the creator/observer divide, one that involves the deconstruction of traditional hierarchies, both in the field of art and within the family

structure. In the tender spaces of attentiveness created by Holobiont, adults and children occupy equal positions and engage in acts of creation on identical terms.

Bylka-Kanecka's and Bożek-Muszyńska's successive performances activate similar political and dramaturgical strategies. The structure of the events is also repetitive: they all start with a concise, clear and direct instruction (Bylka-Kanecka, 2020, p. 143), followed by the presentation of the choreographic material, and a non-invasive invitation extended to the children and their guardians, who may enter the common space and participate in the performance. On the other hand, sequences of presentation and casual, non-violent interaction are configured differently in each production. *_on_line__* is divided into three two-element segments. What unites them is the challenge of inventing new ways of using pastel crayons (broken into smaller and smaller pieces in the successive parts of the show, from large crayons to pastel cuttings)[28].

Innocent play, however, has a subversive potential here because, unlike at school, the crayons are not set in motion to create the most beautiful and realistic drawings possible, to be compared with one another, but to stimulate kinesthetic imagination, unfettered by expectations. Abstract doodles thus become both an affirmation and a manifestation of the potential for being together in a social holobiont, for casual creativity, and for existing outside the neoliberal imperative of productivity. Children who are encouraged to create spontaneously, without judgment and independent of adult approval, enjoying the process itself, experience the pleasure of action instead of the necessity of production. After all, the most important thing at play is the nurturing of relationships[29] rather than products.

Laboratories of alternatives

From this perspective, the non-normative ways of drawing presented by the performers in the subsequent parts of the event (painting with the entire body that rolls over the paper trying maintain contact with the crayon; outlining bodies in motion; crushing the crayons or moving them with one's foot, etc.) may seem an affirmation of strangeness and difference, an attempt to tame the non-canonical and thus – given the presence of families – an encouragement to abandon conservative educational methods, to test new arrangements and configurations. The choreographic material that Bylka-Kanecka and Bożek-Muszyńska work with and that is expanded by the children and their guardians also evades the traps of normativism, in this case identified with Logos, meaning and representation[30]. Thus, experimental dance turns out to be an ally of new attachment (Gałkowski, Morawska-Rubczak, 2020), on the one hand, and of the revolutionary practice of teaching by building experience and embodied (albeit not necessarily rational) knowledge, on the other (Bylka-Kanecka, Zerek, 2020, pp. 87-88)[31]. It produces a field in which alternative social networks are designed and tested, based primarily on attentiveness, empathy, and affective communication. Importantly, the Holobiont collective seeks to sensitize one not only to the Others but also to oneself. For this reason, the performers make sure that everyone feels safe and open to engaging in somatic dialogues on their own terms, allowing the choreographies of other bodies to permeate or extend their own autonomous movements.

Establishing a safe space and caring community in _*on_line*__ begins even before entering the theater hall, namely in the foyer. It is there that the participants are provided with instructions, repeated (in whole or in part) by the performers and the performer to make sure everyone understands the

rules of entering and leaving the stage, the division between viewing time and action time. This kind of contract, a social agreement that adults enter into with children, strengthens the latter's agency and sensitizes them to needs other than their own. The concern for the subjective treatment of the youngest participants, inherent in Holobiont's productions, is an integral part of the collective's emancipatory and democratic strategies. In Bylka-Kanecka's own words, '[children] who know themselves, trust their needs and respect diversity – corporeal or otherwise – will have more resources for building a civil society in the future, one that is responsible and capable of dialogue and mutual respect' (Bylka-Kanecka, Zerek, 2020, p. 88)[32].

This unique space of safeness and co-responsibility would likely not have come to be if it were not for the physical, involved presence of the guardians with whom the children came to the performance[33]. Holobiont does not divide the audience into participants and beholders, and thus its youngest members remain close to familiar territories while discovering new ones. In the worlds created by Bylka-Kanecka and Bożek-Muszyńska, the horizons of the familiar and the foreign overlap. In *_on_line__*, a temporary collective of small and large bodies that set one another in motion (not necessarily by means of touch!) to transform a shared pastel image, works symbiotically while nurturing the individualities embedded within the group.

Scenes in which guests and visitors join the performers, becoming artists and performers themselves, set in motion a dialectic of structure and anti-structure. Choreography transforms into improvisation as the ready-made movement material softens, expanded to include new images and identities. Participants unwittingly learn to dance in contact, to study freedom limited only by the Other. Although contact improvisation is only one among the somatic techniques activated by Holobiont (or activated spontaneously),

virtually all of the scenes in _*on_line*__ embody the ethical as well as political and social assumptions of this practice. Susan Leigh Foster notes that postmodern improvisation adopts a vision of democracy as an egalitarian collective effort that results in the accentuation of difference (2013, p. 33). In the performances of the Holobiont collective, concepts such as inclusivity, equality, and heterogeneity gain material shape. They are immanent elements of communication and participation, of choreographing and designing new forms of intimacy, not only intimate but also, or above all, public. Sensitive dialogues, which employ movement to initiate and develop all the people present on stage, embody an alternative to the normative divisions of the perceptible and, consequently, to hierarchical power (including parental power).

Holobiont's performative projects can be described as laboratories of change-in-process. This view is supported by both the structure of these events and their open and soft-framed environment. Bylka-Kanecka refers to the collective's pieces as interactive performances that 'retain a clear "traces of an installation"' (2020, p. 140). These traces are also an archival imprint of Bylka-Kanecka's meeting with the Serbian choreographer Dalija Aćin Thelander, who popularized performative installations for families. What I have in mind here are radically (if not completely) softened forms[34]. It is in these spaces, despite the constant presence of female and male performers, that families can move and act freely, and thus, in accordance with Holobiont's co-founder, expand their agency 'in co-creating the event and building their experience' (Bylka-Kanecka, 2020, p. 139). Nevertheless, the unpredictability of this format, along with its assumed chaotic nature, as emphasized by the theater educator Justyna Czarnota, runs the risk of objectifying it. 'I perceive in myself a trembling anticipation of whether the audience will still perceive this proposal as an artistic event or an outright

playground [laughter]' (Bylka-Kanecka, Czarnota, Lewandowska, 2021). The difference between Thelander's practice and its creative transformation and development proposed by Holobiont could be compared in this context to the difference between anarchy and radical democracy. The political dimension of performances such as *_on_line__* is revealed not so much in the mere negation of established orders and hierarchies, but in the imagining of what is still impossible to embody in other environments and what may in the future transform into a new civic (dis)order.

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By inviting families with children to practice soft choreographies, Wańtuch and the Holobiont collective propose new ways of sharing time and space that are alternative to hierarchical structures, and thus in a way equate the political positions of large and small bodies. Although *Contact Family Show* and *_on_line__* are dramaturgically or formally quite different from each other and realize the emancipatory potential of proximity in different ways, they seem to move along a similar heterological[35] ethical horizon. In both pieces, the universal ethics of rules is replaced by the relational ethics of sensitivity[36]; the boundary between the self and the Other (or, more broadly, the world) is shown as osmotic, which also means that the body, like space, is open (or learns to be open) and dialogical; projected experiences of tender coexistence in repeated acts of spontaneous creation become forms of affirmative resistance to traditional family hierarchies in which children are ascribed the role of the subordinated Other; developing empathy and co-responsibility is more important than producing ready-made meanings, scenes and images; difference is more valuable than the universal, the identical and the normative. We are aware of the fact that this provisional enumeration needs to be expanded, therefore we would like it to be treated

as an invitation to further research around the experimental dance scene for families.

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production - in movement management (http://www.performat-production.com/), and she collaborates with female choreographers, Renata Piotrowska-Auffret and Holobiont collective (PL). She is one of the representatives of the polka dot foundation in the Nature of Us V4 project (http://www.natureofus.art/) dedicated to the ecology of production and sustainable methods of artistic work in the era of the ecological crisis. She spends her free time on mountain trails. ORCID: 0000-0002-7318-3683.

Footnotes

1. Dance scholar Alicja Müller was the co-curator of the workshop for female critics 'Jumping Words' (with Justyna Czarnota), which took place on March 8, 2020 as part of the 10th edition of the Dancing Families program under the curatorial care of Hanna Bylka-Kanecka. Karolina Wycisk collaborates with the Holobiont collective as an independent producer and manager. In addition, digital versions of performances _*on_line*__ by the Holobiont collective and Anna Wańtuch's *Contact Families Show* were presented as part of *Online'owa scena dla rodzinnego tańca* (the Online Stage for Family Dance) project of the Performat Foundation, of which Wycisk is president.
2. See a synthesis of recent years of Polish dance scene for children and families in the conversation *Miejsce na różnorodność*, 2021.
3. The Polish translations of the term 'sustainability' (*zrównoważoność* or *zrównoważony charakter*) fail to convey its original capacity, which in the context of performance refers to the need to reformulate work strategies to account for economic (permanent employment of freelance artists), ecological (e.g. rethinking foreign collaborations and dissemination of performances), and creative and stabilizing processes (creating and maintaining production conditions while repeatedly utilizing the existing projects).
4. See the official website of the Holobiont collective at https://www.holobiont.pl/o-nas [accessed: 29.11.2021].
5. *Contact Families Show* was created thanks to Anna Wańtuch's scholarship; it was only later on that the piece landed partnership deals with festivals and foundations. The work on the performance was made possible thanks to the Creative Fellowship of the City of Kraków. Featuring families with young children, the piece premiered on December 12, 2020 on Zoom. The Kraków-based 'pioneer' group was comprised of: Magdalena Kopeć, Alicja Kaczmarczyk, Tomasz Kaczmarczyk, Anna Grabara, Julian Mizerski, Monika Zamojska-Świątek, Marcin Świątek, Szymon Świątek, Rafał Świątek, Marta Mietelska-Topór, Tomasz Topór, Rita Topór, Liwia Topór, Tomasz Sułowski, Zosia Sułowska, Wincenty Wańtuch, Felicja Wańtuch, Ludmiła Wańtuch, Anna Wańtuch, and Filip Wańtuch. The process was supported by Justyna Czarnota and Sandra Lewandowska. The format was repeated as part of 23. Biennale Sztuki dla Dziecka (23rd Art Biennale for Children) organized by Centrum Sztuki Dziecka (the Children's Art Centre) in Poznań. Poznanian families participated in the performance whose premiere took place in May 2021. The list of performers included Adelka Górecka, Ulka Górecka, Basia Górecka, Michał Górecki, Miriam Matuszek-Serafin, Nadia Matuszek-Serafin, Sara Matuszek-Serafin, Monika Serafin, Łukasz Matuszek, Ania Sobczyk, Martyna Sobczyk, Julia Sobczyk, Felicja Wańtuch, Ludmiła Wańtuch, Wincenty Wańtuch, Anna Wańtuch, Filip Wańtuch, Maria (Misia) Zwolińska, Zofia Zwolińska, Anna Maria Brandys, Szymon Zwoliński.

6. The performance was produced by the Art Stations Foundation by Grażyna Kulczyk, with the support of the City of Poznań. It premiered in December 2018 at Stary Browar in Poznań.
7. The piece was selected for presentation at the 2019 Mała Platforma Tańca (Little Dance Platform), with Justyna Czarnota naming it the 'Best Performance for Children' as part of the 'Najlepszy, najlepsza, najlepsi' (Best of the best) summary of the 2018/2019 season published by the *Teatr* monthly.
8. In cooperation with the Performat Foundation, *on_line* was presented as part of the Teatr Polska 2020 project held by Instytut Teatralny (Theatre Institute) in Warsaw; thanks to the grant, we were able to arrange a professional audiovisual recording of the performance. The Zoom platform is used for digital presentations. Participating families then receive individual packages (sheets of paper and pastel crayons), which they use in creative interplay with the team hosting the successive parts of online meetings, interspersed with short screenings of the film.
9. In her artistic manifesto, the choreographer/researcher contrasts soft choreography with hard choreography. The latter term 'means: a choreography written down to the smallest detail without much space for deviance' (Ingvartsen, 2013, p. 68).
10. For almost ten years, Wańtuch has been exploring the parent/guardian-child relationship in her work. She first performed with her son Wincenty in 2012, and three years later she and her family participated in the Warsaw version of Zimmer-Frei's *Familly Affair*. She also staged a series of video-performances *Mother K/C*, based on the corporeal experience of pregnancy. Her most recent performance, which she worked on under the auspices of the choreographic program Atlas at ImPulsTanz Festival 2021 in Vienna – *Mothersuckers: Production about Reproduction* – is a solo manifesto of a mother artist (the stage is covered with a pile of clothes and toys), dramaturgically intertwined with pop cultural quotes, pseudo-facts, personal(?) experiences of the artist, images of pregnancy (one of the recordings from the *Mother K/C* series is projected on the screen), and a brilliantly conducted interaction with the audience.
11. The target audience for the performance is families with children aged between 1.5 and 5, but on account of various family configurations, older siblings are also involved. Audience-wise, the piece is addressed to guardians with children from two years of age.
12. Score is understood as a kind choreographic notation, in this context based on tasks and improvisation, i.e. the notation in this case take the form of tasks for performers. In her work on the project, Wańtuch refers to Meg Stuart's notion of pandemic score (Wańtuch, 2021).
13. Among other things, Wańtuch invokes the notion of 'Authentic Movement,' developed by Mary Starks Whitehouse (a student of Martha Graham and Mary Wigman), founded on the absence of intentionality (movement derives from associations and imaginative work) and critical evaluation of the beholder, who becomes an active participant in the shared creative process (Wańtuch, 2021). This somatic practice originated in the 1950s and is still used today in many therapeutic contexts. See two collections of essays edited by Patrizia Pallaro, *Authentic movement: Essays by Mary Starks Whitehouse, Janet Adler, and Joan Chodorow*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London 1999 and *Authentic Movement: Moving the Body, Moving the Self, Being Moved: A Collection of Essays Volume II*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, Philadelphia 2007.
14. The T-shirt exercise was inspired by Jérôme Bel's performance *Shirtology* (1997), one of the founding works of the Western European conceptual dance scene. In ironically using the

symbolism of logos and fashionable inscriptions of T-shirts, Bel commented both on the simplification and commercialization of cultural codes and on the function of choreography as a critical cognitive tool. In *Contact Families Show*, the participants stand in front of screens, displaying T-shirts with inscriptions that are in mutual dialogue and images that are funny or unobtrusively 'childish' (we are thinking here of the clothing industry, which creates an artificial division into pink clothes for girls and darker ones for boys, and the tendency for children to dress up as fairy tale characters).
15. Jacques Derrida uses the category of 'incalculable choreography' to describe dance improvisation. According to the French philosopher, incalculability above all denotes the readiness for change, processuality, affirmative acceptance of the risk connected with what is different, unknown, unrecognized. Derridian incalculable choreographies are thus similar to the soft choreographies we pursue (Derrida, 1995).
16. On the queer potential of children's sensitivity, see: Stępniak, 2017.
17. The confines of this text do not allow a discussion of the history and assumptions of improvisation in dance, let alone its limitations. Nevertheless, we would also like to outline the historical contexts in whose perspective one can look at the experiments conducted by Wańtuch and Holobiont, which is why we mention this technique.
18. As Wańtuch comments, 'In ContaKids, falling is very valuable. A lot of practice results in falling, which happens for two reasons. First of all, falling is great fun. Kids have an incredible amount of fun falling. It's not fun to just climb on your back. It's fun to climb and fall off. That's part of the fun. Second, falling causes everyone to learn. If a mother provokes a fall and shakes her back, the little one figures out how (s)he can grab onto her tighter. The child is sometimes passive because (s)he is used to being carried. When (s)he finds that no one is holding him/her, (s)he begins to think: 'I have to catch myself, I have to take care of myself.' Falling is a great way to learn motoric skills and self-reliance, but moms are afraid of it' (Duda, Wańtuch, 2016, p. 74).
19. In the show, some exercises visualize the premises of ContaKids. For example: bridges, a tree, and a rodeo successively involve passing under a 'bridge' made of a large or small body, a small body climbing over a large body, and a parent tossing a child on his/her back to let him/her try to find a balance on a dynamic surface. The physical activities are designed to increase the participants' awareness of their own bodies in space, but also the mutual trust and care between the parent/guardian and the child.
20. One of the ContaKids rules stipulates that the child can do whatever (s)he wants and the parent must follow the instructions (Czarnota, Wańtuch, 2021).
21. The need to search for new meeting formulas in virtual reality and transferring performances to the online stage is discussed by Paweł Gałkowski and Alicja Morawska-Rubczak (2020). For Wańtuch, Zoom fulfilled 'the need for equity and democracy,' since it offered both children and adults the opportunity to share time together and individually, with varying degrees of involvement (Czarnota, 2021).
22. Turning on the camera can become an act of self-exposure for the viewers: it reveals family configurations, private dwellings, the level of involvement and the very relationships with the children transferred to the proposed tasks. At the same time, the performers, who are visible almost all the time, manipulate the image, covering it with objects, filling the frame with close-ups of body parts, and sometimes even getting the children to disappear from the 'stage' as they leave for another room.
23. See: Stein, 2012.
24. Translating the collective's name, Bylka-Kanecka also cites a biological definition of

holobiont: ‘Holobiont is a biological and philosophical term for an organism composed of many other organisms. A bit like a family and society. This is why the theme of relationships is so important to us, and we consider successful performances to be those that tighten/explore family ties’ (Bylka-Kanecka, Czarnota, Lewandowska, 2021).
25. Among their inspirations, the artists list the creative method of the Segni Mossi collective as well as Arno Stern’s book *Odkrywanie śladu. Czym jest zabawa malarska*, Wydawnictwo Element, Gliwice 2016.
26. The project is a continuation of the Stary Browar Nowy Taniec dla Dzieci – Roztańczone Rodziny (Dancing Families) program, implemented by the Art Stations Foundation by Grażyna Kulczyk. The first curator of the program was Alicja Morawska-Rubczak, followed by Sandra Lewandowska and Hanna Bylka-Kanecka, who has been in charge of the program for the past four years. In 2021, the project – co-financed by the City of Poznań and held at Teatr Polski in Poznań – was organized by the Performat Foundation and the Art Stations Foundation by Grażyna Kulczyk. Last year’s anniversary program consisted of ten workshops for families with children of all ages, performances by the Holobiont collective, a workshop for female critics ‘Leaping Words,’ and an online Media-Library containing audiovisual footage from specific workshops. See the program website: http://www.roztańczonerodziny.pl and *Ruchome dialogi wydane z okazji 10. urodzin programu Roztańczone Rodziny (Stary Browar Nowy Taniec dla Dzieci)*, eds. H. Bylka-Kanecka, M. Rewerenda, https://www.artstationsfoundation5050.com/taniec/wydarzenie/ruchome-dia… [accessed: 25.11.2021].
27. The collective’s first performance was *DOoKOŁA* (roundABOUT), addressed for children between 1.5 and 3 years of age and their significant adults (2017, Art Stations Foundation, Poznań); Holobiont’s subsequent projects include *Księżycowo* (Moonlight), created for children aged six to eighteen months and their parents (2018, Ochota Theater, Warsaw), *_on_line__* for audiences aged five to seven and their parents (2018, Art Stations Foundation, Poznań), and *Gdzie kształty mają szyje* (Where Shapes Have Necks), written for children aged five to six and their guardians (2019, Children’s Art Centre, Poznań). Currently, the artists are working on a new production at the Polski Theater in Poznań, titled *Mój ogon i ja* (My Tail and I), intended for families with children aged three to six [co-organized by the National Institute of Music and Dance as part of the PolandDances / Rezydencje choreograficzne (PolandDances / Choreographic Residencies) project].
28. The change of music (composed by Jozef Buchnajzer) and lighting design (participants are supposed to follow a luminous rectangle on the floor and occupy the places it assigns to them) also constitutes a signal of transition from one part to another.
29. As the performers and performer announce before entering the auditorium, ‘the performance is a family event,’ so both children and adults are encouraged to take off their shoes and play together, ‘using pastel crayons in an unusual way.’ As per the performance synopsis, participants are advised to wear non-restrictive clothes that can get dirty during the play (before the introduction of the pandemic restrictions, the spectators could use the clothes prepared by the collective in order not to destroy their own garments).
30. In the context of producing a family event, it should be added that *_on_line__* does not create a hierarchy of experience in which adults would explain to children what they have experienced or what the final drawing represents.
31. For more on the potential benefits of incorporating experimental dance into a school curricula, see *Taniec dla dzieci*, 2020, pp. 87-88.

32. It is worth adding that the statement quoted above is complemented by the words of Ula Zerek, who admits that, ‘when thinking about building a civil society, i.e. how we come to know ourselves, how our sensitivity evolves, is an important part of the reality we create. How I mark out my space, the space of my body and its boundaries, will have a huge impact on how I relate to the space, bodies and boundaries of others.’ (Bylka-Kanecka, Zerek, 2020, p. 88).
33. Moreover, Bylka-Kanecka emphasizes that the presence of guardians is fundamental to Holobiont’s productions. ‘Children do not live in a social vacuum. Until they are about 12 years old, they almost always participate in performance events accompanied by adults. They may be more (for example, parents) or less (for example, teachers) significant adults, but they nonetheless fulfill a caring function. This aspect is crucial for me because it is related to relationality. It opens up a space for reconsidering the politicality of performative events addressed ‘to the young ones.’ It unveils an entire network of questions related to, among others, care, power, hierarchy, trust, fascination, involvement, expectations, projections and subjectivity, while also motivating us to use these lenses to inspect what and how I offer to them.’ (Bylka-Kanecka, Czarnota, Lewandowska, 2021).
34. One of the items included in Thelander’s manifesto reads, ‘Create extraordinary environments,’ on which she elaborates by noting that a ‘curious and safe setting will enable babies to freely follow their impulses, explore and discover a new form of being-in-the-world. Conceive installation-based and immersive concepts, to propose movement in space as a way of experiencing, and to encourage your audience to constitute their experience based on their choices’ (2021, p. 22).
35. When writing about heterogeneity, we once more recall the thought of Rancière, who understands ‘heterogeneity’ as a way out of the framework of the existing order and its categories, beyond normative sensuality and its divisions (Rancière, 2007b).
36. For more on the differences between these paradigms, see Rorty, 2002.

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