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ТЕЛАБОРАТОРИЯ

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photo by Katya Poloz

Telaboratoria – a dance and theater improvisation program for the LGBTQ+ communities in Russia to heal, empower and activate.

Telaboratoria is a free therapeutic dance and theater improvisation program for the LGBTQ+ communities in Russia. It strives to deal with trauma of discrimination and stigma of the LGBTQ+ people in Russia, builds solidarity and engages queer and trans Russians on an emotional and a physical level. The goal of Telaboratoria is ultimately to see LGBTQ+ community politically potent and activated around change.

Telaboratoria is based in St. Petersburg, Russia and was launched in September 2017. It engages community of 200+ participants through creative movement classes, weekend-long workshops, lectures and gatherings. It applies dance and theater improvisation methods that put creativity, empathy, collective empowerment and self-love at the center of its philosophy.



Who organizes Telaboratoria?

Currently it is run by Dasha Che and Natasha Kim, both active members of the trans and queer communities in St. Petersburg. Che, the founder of Telaboratoria, is a Russian American queer performance artist and a dance activist who studied theater at Flying Actors Studio, has a BA in Interdisciplinary Studies and Performance Studies from UC Berkeley of California, USA and MA courses in Gender Sociology from European University from St. Petersburg, Russia. Kim, who administrates the project, is a multiethnic visual artist and an organizer with BA in Philosophy from Perm' State University, Russia and MA in Film Studies from Ohio University, USA.



Dasha Che,
the founder and a facilitator of
Telaboratoria



Natasha Kim,
the administrator of Telaboratoria



photo by Dzhessi Oliver



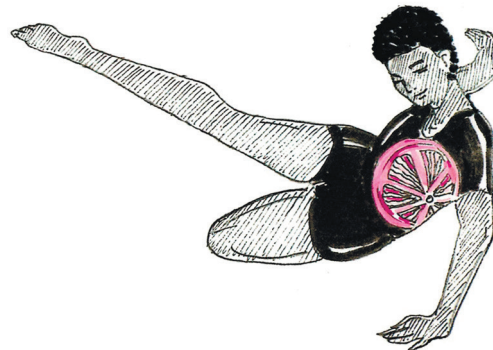
What has Telaboratoria done so far?

- Provided 350+ hours of workshops, classes and seminars to more than 200+ LGBTQ individuals in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Samara, Yekaterinburg, Kiev, Ukraine and beyond.
- Helped to build a strong network of support for the project's participants
- Assisted queer and trans communities in developing acceptance of and connection to their bodies and finding their voices
- Invited local and international dance and theater guest teachers into the project turning them into important allies of the Russian LGBTQ movement
- Made a biweekly safe and welcoming space for trans and queer folks in St. Petersburg, Russia
- Collaborated with more than ten Russian and international LGBTQ, feminist and community art initiatives and organizations, including providing advocacy sessions for non-LGBTQ+ identified arts organizations



How does Telaboratoria make change?

- By directly addressing Russian activists' burnout and fatigue through creative dance and theater practice services
- By strengthening the community when bringing LGBTQ+ activists and non-activists together
- By amplifying – locally, nationally and internationally – LGBTQ+ voices in hopes of building partnerships outside the LGBTQ+ community and press for social and political change.
- By creating safe and empowering spaces for trans and gender nonconforming people in Russia
- By training LGBTQ+ organizers to implement innovative self-care and community building tools in their leadership
- By teaching Russian dance educators from more traditional dance institutions about the needs and issues of the LGBTQ+ community to make conventional dance studios more inclusive



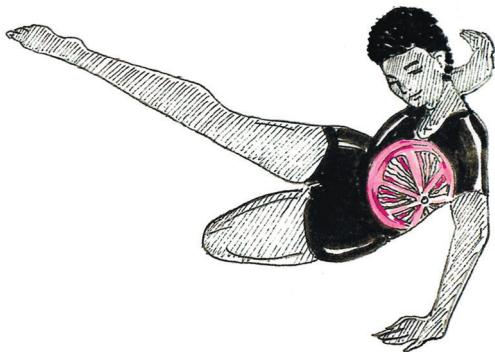
Why is Telaboratoria a political and civic engagement project?

- It works with and empowers marginalized bodies who can then self-advocate
- It brings people of different identities together and develops a strong grassroots network of support
- People who participate in the project often become actively engaged in other civic initiatives
- It deals with burn out of activists

What are Telaboratoria plans for the fall 2018/spring 2019?



- To bring Telaboratoria to at least ten more regional LGBTQ+ community centers in Russia
- To make an educational documentary about Telaboratoria for the LGBTQ+ communities in Russia as a unique program that empowers and cultivates empathy
- To engage LGBTQ+ Russians with disabilities and elderly LGBTQ+ individuals
- To create a dialogue between Russian dance institutions and the LGBTQ+ communities by bringing the two together and educating Russian dance pedagogues on the LGBTQ+ inclusivity issues
- To maintain ongoing classes for the LGBTQ + community of St. Petersburg
- To empower more individuals and communities through helping them to find a connection to their bodies and each other



What do Telaboratoria participants say?



“When I am in the safe space [like that], I can connect to my body, actually remember that I have it and enjoy having it.”

A.

“I never thought I could dance till I started attending the classes. Last week I danced in front of other people and didn’t care that they looked at me; I felt like I inspired others too”

L.

“I look forward to every week of it, it is like I forget about my anxiety and troubles. I am learning how to bring this [practice] into my other parts of life and share with others”

V.

“This project is so needed for our community, so we can all support and care about each other a little more”

M.

“Sometimes I feel that my body itself, a trans person body, is already activism. Being comfortable in my body, communicating with it is crucial in order not to be afraid to help others.”

L.

“Practice like this gives self-confidence and understanding of yourself. You need this integrity to be an activist.”

I.



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