

On April 8, 2020 I wrote an e-mail to my peers:  
artists, performers, curators, scholars and spectators.  
I was confined at home as we all were and the  
prospect of seeing each other back in the theatre  
was very unlikely (...)

and then the doors  
opened again



from

## Stefanie Wenner

at 11:23

The invitation was subtle but beautiful. The old ensembles had finally been shut down. There wasn't even a big struggle about this going on. Somehow, it was clear. After all these conflicts about what theatre was and what it had to be, about race and gender issues and eurocentrism, and about the whole patriarchy incarnated in the theatre body, it became easy. Theatre was part of the Pisces era. Now we had to move on. So we left the buildings and left the idea behind. After a period of experiencing loss and grief, of nostalgia all centred around the European bourgeois practices of theatre, a certain relief started to take over. The fatigue that had taken over the whole body of theatre a long time before – the problems of finding audiences, the question of relevance of topics that were tackled in its apparatus – was in itself like a virus that in the end worked as a catalysing force to finally destroy this apparatus. The wrongness of all the contracts between people, between matter and meaning, between form and content, became apparent and vanished into a void that had long awaited the exodus. Self-exploitation and subservience to an idea of culture which in following the enlightenment narrative opposed nature, which became so bright it cast no shadow and allowed no moments of rest: all this needed to be over. Once left behind, a strong urge to find the new started to

emerge. To metabolise light became a task, to digest the blinding light of culture. Turning to plants was, therefore, the easiest move. Plants digest light and make it accessible for our food chain. If, at the beginning of the 21st century, German theatres worked like a Fordist machine then the independent scene functioned as a post-Fordist technology. If the whole idea of culture in this era was inspired by measures of quantification borrowed from the agricultural sector, then it was clear where we had to begin. So we started to build a small farm. A small farm capable of feeding the people working there. A small farm that embodied care from the perspective of nourishment. Nourishing not only humans, but the whole area. And beginning with nourishing our bodies right here, right now. Breathing – plants being the greatest teacher and the most valuable body as well as the greatest resource for all. How to learn from plants, how to create an understanding of 'being with' rather than 'being in' the world through their practices of embodiment, sensitivity, sharing, seeding? Interweaving bodies, entangled species. The whole process being inspired by the breathing of a caterpillar, respiratory organs being the only part that remains intact in the chrysalis. While reformulating itself as a butterfly, it breathes. We are breathing through our skin, our bodies. We are breathing each other, we are digesting and metabolising the world through air-made bodies. At the place of that ensemble, the old body of the theatre, a farm was built. Leaving behind what was toxic, while at the same time facing destruction and its forces. Communion and community – being the breath of theatre, bodily contact, now take a new form. Earlier, we had brought plants into the theatre. They died there. Then we remembered ancient



theatre taking place in nature – a landscape theatre. Now we were establishing an earth theatre. Reconnecting to the earth, to compost, to soil, to the ground. Looking at stones, touching them, reconnecting them to planets and further, leaving heliocentrism behind and starting a new astrology, one that tried to connect to the bigger picture, one that acknowledged us embodying the universe, the universe being embodied in us. In all humbleness, in all perspectivity, still trying to connect, remaining open for the new parts of ourselves, that at the beginning so frequently appeared to be the Other. So we reconnected to the female, the long-neglected life force and put it at the centre for a moment, just to be able to reconnect to its potential. We revisited the idea of nature, a long-cherished opponent of culture – the organic as the opponent of the machine – and let it all go. Life has long been misused by churches and science. Still, for lack of a better phrase, this is ‘what it’s about’: life in stones, in a glass, the life of all the bodies creating this body, creating this apparatus, co-created and intra-acting this new beginning that I am witnessing and thus myself co-creating. Let the show begin, in the oldest sense of the world. Where it is connected with witnessing an instant of becoming, an event of communion, a ritual that can be seen and theorised. Where it is connected to the German word *Schau*, which is more directed towards that which is not visible, not understandable, but still perceivable, bringing forth this being in the world that we are. The theatre is made of plants. It is homegrown, it is edible, not an edifice. It is wildlife in the middle of whatever setting. It is a place to gather and to engage with human and non-human bodies. It is the embodiment of a new idea of culture that leaves behind us

the nature-culture and invites us to be seen and to see in a new way. My experience of it is luscious, full of play and joy: sad and funny, sensual and abstract. I remain silent when I leave. I don’t want to leave this place. I want this to grow all around me, all throughout me, and to transform the world as a whole.