

Brussels, 5.2 2021

Dear Kaaitheater

Dear Theatre

Dear

This is a letter to you from the other side of what was a very important, very curious two weeks for the five of us. We don't usually work together. Over the last year we each mostly worked all alone. It is partly what we do, it is also, of course, a consequence of the Corona-times. We applied for a residency to have a space in which to come together and ask questions that usually come before any residency takes place, questions that fall into either 'research' or 'personal reflection' or a 'small discussion over a beer somewhere'. Questions we would usually ask away from you, the theatre. Questions we ask ourselves to develop strategies to engage you, seduce you, work with you.

On our first day together we signed a 'Declaration of Honour' that we would not contaminate each other. We took off our masks and for two weeks we let our breaths and thoughts mingle.

We worked with shared questions and objects from our practices that didn't quite have a 'proper place yet'. We had long winding conversations and more head-on attempts to tackle what arose. We documented the commonalities and we loosely searched for protocols for a curated walk we plan for the 2nd of May. We wrote with black markers on brown paper and stuck it on the walls. We filled up the dancefloor with objects, slowly marking territories with marbles, salt circles, cardboard speech bubbles, letters, geology books, Chinese documentaries and fruit teddies. We proposed walks and games to each other, as a way to practice the concepts and thoughts that were floating in the room. In many ways, all this is not particularly special but we felt it important to share this with you. Otherwise this kind of processes, the unspectacular beginnings, might miss your attention.

It is important, because all this might seem simple or obvious but the beginning inside, the being together, the mingling breaths, the ease of access, all this allowed us to look back at 2020 and try to understand how the last year has changed our work and how it might continue changing. We looked back and noticed it wasn't all bad. We found there had been for us a welcomed attention on a diversity of outcomes and forms, an appreciation of the process as the work and a certain trust in the work itself. We had learnt to say NO. We had awoken an awareness and a questioning of the artist-institution relations and we had loved, beyond borders, what was there and what was absent. Love, was a theme that kept coming back in our discussions. We reached a consensus that in our practices - that we consider poetic activism, an activism with space for doubt and uncertainty - long term processes and engagements are the way forward.

And there is in this optimistic look at change, a privilege of all kinds. We are all alive, healthy and financially all right. And a particular timing too. Only after an initial period of paralysis in the autumn and summer could we recognize the small spaces and opportunities for change.

We felt we needed to write you this letter, as a way to document and share our two weeks because the privilege of the simple context of a room with a view onto a white-washed firewall where we could look backwards or forwards without anxiety, without a promise of a future but before anything else is not to be underestimated.

To summarise everything that happened in the room would be to do injustice to the complexity and messy trajectories of our experiences and conversations, but what we found together was a confidence and strength in the art-work that is extra-institutional, personal and that emerges slowly from our given landscapes, broadly understood. The need to write you this letter came because it felt important to allow our thinking to become visible to you and to others who may read. Not at a point of publication, but in the process of it being articulated.

We talked a lot about dreams, desires and the relationships we want to foster. Ondine wants to live in the countryside, Eszter dreams of studying among bookshelves, Nada wills for teleportation. We were busy talking in circles defining and doubting relationships, ecologies, kinship, what is in a city, what we mean by comfort and comforting, encounters with strangers, nature, the audience, what are our relationship with positions of power, the research process, invisible details, our colleagues and how do we reach between 'bubbles'.

We dream of hugs like everyone else too.

We found ourselves wanting to have relationships with things. We want things to spill into other things, and sometimes not. We also want protective magic circles, institutional support and playgrounds. But also spills to be acknowledged as part of it, as part of the work. Literal spills, social spills, personal life and work spills, institutional spills, existential spills, spilling through participation, misunderstanding spills, category spills, reality and fiction spills, educational spills. Negative as well as positive spills.

We found a need to invent categories of spilling but also categories that spill. Because it is in these spaces that we can come together with our doubts, questions, dreams of hybrid forms and flexible borders, or better yet, no borders.

Spaces where you and me, us, can ask ourselves:

How do we want to work today? What kind of artistic processes do we want to engage in?

Kindest Regards,

Ondine Cloez, Nada Gambier, Eszter Némethi, Michiel Reynaert, Gosie Vervloessem

PS. Beyond this letter we are also 'publishing' our findings through walking on the 2nd May. A walk that is a collectively curated space in which ingredients from our two weeks at Kaai will resonate. These ingredients -or instructions- are; brave guarding, using material that is there, invitation to play / playground, the unheimlich – adventure, touching / physical relation to the world, learning process, need for mess – category subversion, taking into account the weather, ambiguity of roles and poetic activism. You are most welcome to join!