



Re-CONNECT. The new, major online festival for graduate students. We are very proud of all our participants from ATKA, Mime, Theatre Directing, SNDO, Scenography, Theatre in Education, Production and Stage management and Design & Technology. Of course every festival is always unique but this edition is even more so. It differs from a 'normal' festival in every way; every aspect had to be re-invented at short notice. Very short notice.

Of course this is not a 'normal' graduate class; its students received a very special, unasked for gift. As singular generation they followed a completely live study and tasted a completely new reality: how do you deal with the unexpected, the immense world outside yourself and explore your artistic boundaries? From what a student in pre-Corona days described as a 'theatre school bubble' – to an absurd form of *real life* in one fell swoop. As part of a script, you would probably reject it as over-dramatic.

No matter how pleased everyone is with the festival, we are also frustrated: we would rather have staged it differently, live, like we used to. Or like Pip phrased it in *Het Parool* last Saturday, "One day I think: this is the new way of making theatre, and the next day I think: never again". It makes some people depressed and motivates others. In the same article Jasper says: "When the next pandemic hits I'll know: you can also make something from nothing."

I'm extremely curious what will happen after this unique festival: does it taste like more or never again? Will we opt for this form of festival more often? Not because we have to but because we can? What does it have to offer? Will it yield new forms, different insights or break-throughs? Will Corona turn out to be a saucepan of warm tomatoes in disguise as referred to by Nan van Houte in her 'Actie Tomaat' commemoration speech in November last year?

Because, let's be honest: it's high time something actually happened. It's been said so often in all kinds of ways but little really changes. Every four years another group of 'influential' people from the cultural sector (*Het Parool* 24 June) declares that the system is outmoded and that 'radical reform' of the subsidy system is unavoidable (*Theaterkrant* 24 June). This is followed by a lot of evaluations and commotion before everything reverts back to how it was. But I don't want to sound cynical and remain hopeful nonetheless.

Even so, how is it possible that 50 years after 'Aktie Tomaat' we are again stuck in, to quote Nan van Houte, a "system that increasingly empowers institutions while repeatedly thwarting flexibility and small-scale initiatives?" How is it possible that everyone remains where they are and I quote "nobody moves over to make room for people of colour?" How is it possible that, and here I quote from a text by Marysia Weide, "that in 1983 we protested side by side, black and white, young and old, against racism, against oppression and for equality in the Netherlands" in reaction to Kerwin Duinmeijer's murder. Has so little changed? Or will we follow through this time? Are the protests broader and louder? And did they just need something more than a saucepan of warm tomatoes to be heard?

I hope this period is a key to innovation. And that you as 'Corona year class' will wear this title as a badge of honour. Because you also represent the modernization that was triggered by this sudden lockdown - through reflection and disruption, through bewilderment and confusion. I hope you take on board all that has happened and use it to ask each other questions and listen closely to the answers. Connect by granting the other space and look them in the eye. Not 'creating space and connecting' as a standard text in a subsidy application because it generates money, not because you

have to, but because you are really convinced this is true and because during all those years at the academy you have learned to act on your convictions and question and elaborate on them.

Make it real, your “manifesto for connecting, singularity and strength”: experiment, don’t be afraid, grieve well and beautifully, ask for help, make your field colourful and promote art in society – be flexible. Look after yourself and watch over your neighbour; don’t forget to involve those who make it all possible, look behind the scenes at the people who turn the spotlights on you: the producers, scenographers, technicians, light and sound professionals. Connecting...

Pre-corona we all said obediently that we ‘connected’ with our public. But was that really the case or was it mostly just transmitting? Now unavoidably the question is: how do you really *connect* with the world? How can you ensure – despite Corona – a meaningful interaction with your audience? Finding a satisfactory answer demands not only the utmost of your sensitivity and inventiveness; connecting online with an audience too numerous to fit in an auditorium, is, in my opinion, also a crucial skill for today’s artist. Occupy, #MeToo, Wikileaks, #BlackLivesMatter: major social upheavals currently all start online in a web of unexpected connections. And then it’s up to you to use everything you’ve learned to create something, to make something happen and reveal your strength. Don’t be afraid to connect with each other and when now and then things become too complicated, ask for help, at the academy, from each other. Above all stay true to your hopes and dreams!

*“Lift up your eyes upon
The day breaking for you.*

*Give birth again
To the dream.*

*Women, children, men
Take it into the palms of your hands.*

*Mould it into the shape of your most
Private need. Sculpt it into
The image of your most public self.*

*Lift up your hearts
Each new hour holds new chances
For new beginnings*

Maya Angelou, (1928-2014, American poet, writer, civil rights activist)

Marjo van Schaik 26 June 2020