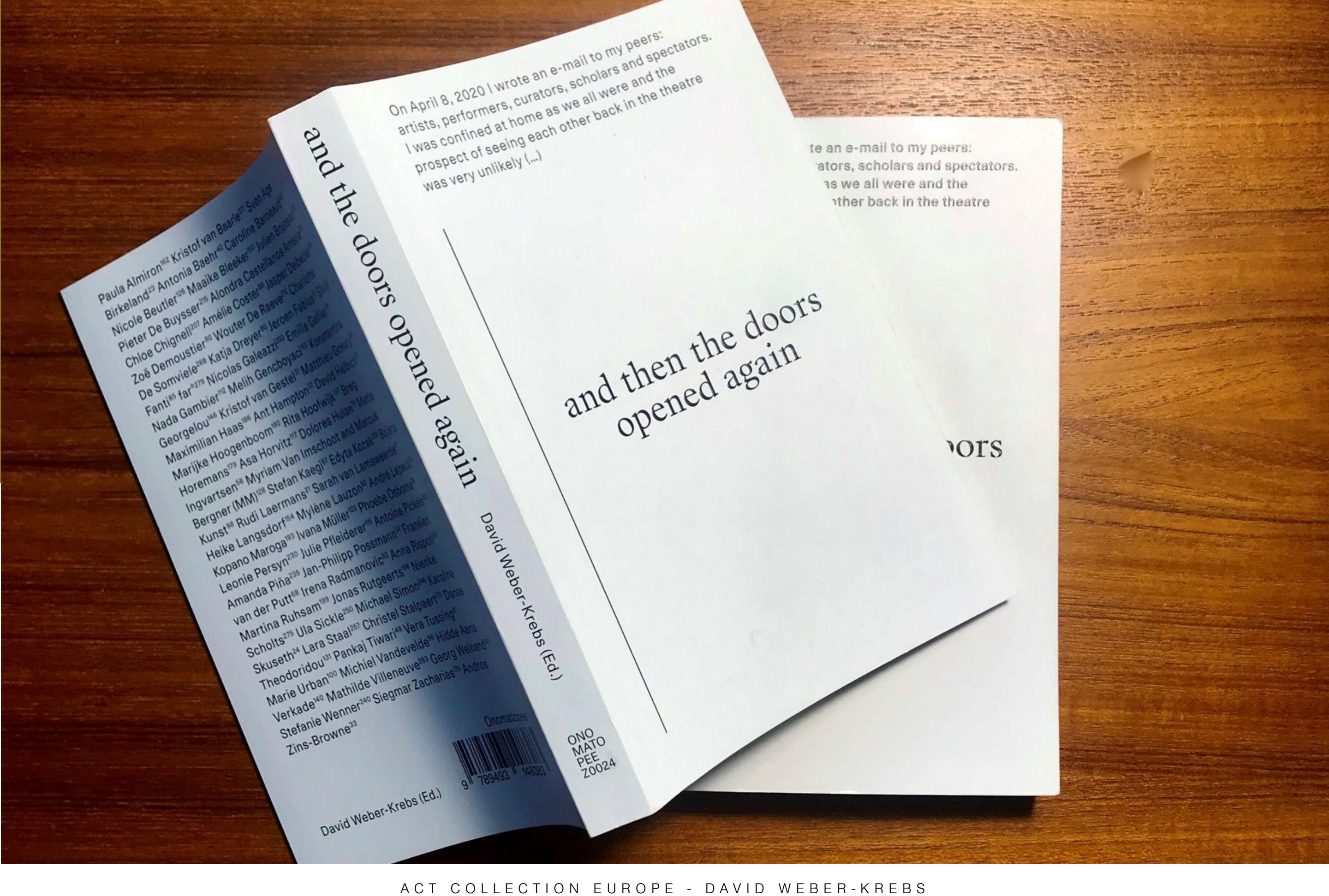


17 DECEMBER 2020

take care

MEETING DAVID WEBER-KREBS

BY ARIE LENGKEEK



ACT COLLECTION EUROPE - DAVID WEBER-KREBS

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A scientist needs his laboratory to conduct his research. A priest needs his congregation to perform his rituals. A politician needs to walk the corridors of power to perform it. Just so, David Weber-Krebs needs the enclosed space of the theatre, and an audience of spectators to practice care and responsibility. I meet him online and talk about his curiosity, and what becomes visible in the current situation, with the inability to work actually in his workplace, the theatre-space. David Weber-Krebs is the first artist we present in the series 'Collection Europe'. His work with ACT starts with the book 'and then the doors opened again'. He initiated and edited it. We talk about his work, the essence of this book and the possibilities of extending the curiosity behind it further, to the spectator, in diverse European cities and contexts.

and then came the donkey

'For me, it's all about fragility and taking care', David begins. 'Theatre is: convening people in a space, the doors closing behind them. An implicit contract is agreed upon when entering. A certain concentration and sensibility is invoked, and the audience agrees to pay attention.' For David, it starts with the potential that every spectator has, in respect to the whole: everyone has agency over what happens. In his work, he creates a form that's as fragile as possible, that demands to be taken care of by the spectators. Every one of them.

It started with *'Balthazar'*, the piece he made in 2013. 'I have a strong tendency to want to control, to master the situations I create. But I choose to introduce elements that cannot be controlled', he says. For *Balthazar*, a period of rehearsing with students of the mime school (AHK, Amsterdam) was concluded at the end of the week with the arrival of the pivot of the play: a donkey. Not a trained circus animal, but a donkey that came straight from its field. 'At the moment it entered the space it became clear that all the scenes we had prepared would appear to miss the point. The donkey breaks the code of the theatre. Actors try to create something with and around the donkey. But when the audience laughs, or coughs, the donkey turns its head around in that direction, and breaks the implicit code of the theatre by looking straight into the eyes of the spectators'

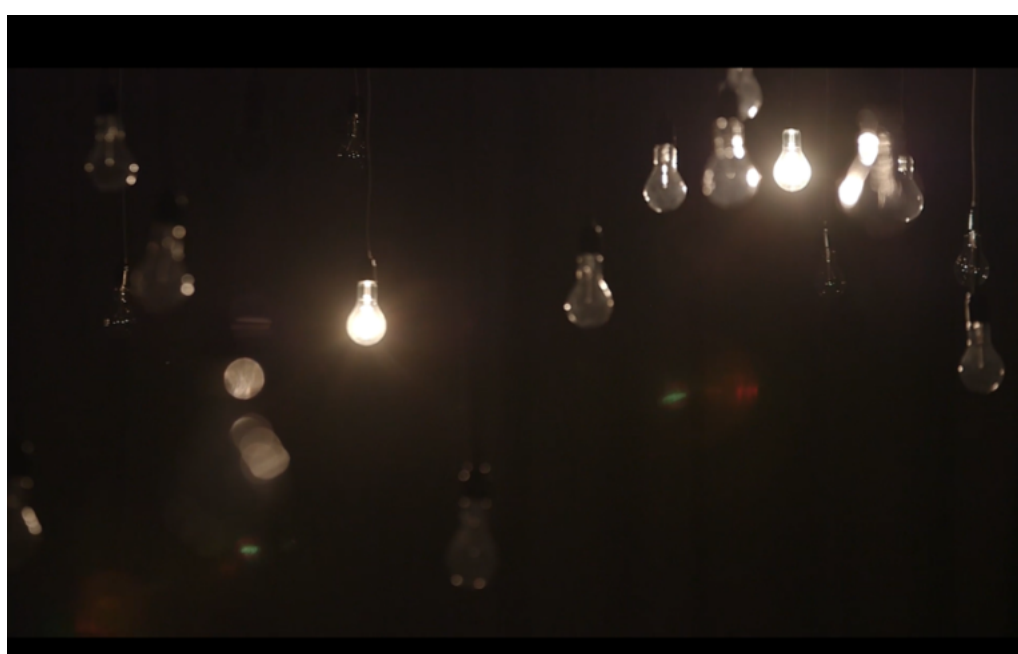


and then came the virus

Suddenly the streets were empty. Frequency and speed of the cars was massively reduced. You could encounter someone, only to perform a sort of sidewalk-ballet, to keep distance. Avoiding to meet with each other, everybody withdrawn in his own space, in his own body. Fragility and taking care were ubiquitous, while the doors of the theatres were closed, nothing was taking place in these places. 'For me', David says, 'it felt like the collective speculation about the possibilities of these places was at stake. I decided to write an email to my peers, asking them to imagine: What will happen on your first theatre visit after the lockdown?' He sent out the message to his fellow theatre-makers, artists, performers, curators, dramaturgs, and theoreticians. He decided to provide similar constraints in space and time, to seek for a 'closed form'. 'I wanted to capture the exceptionality of the situation, so we needed to have the contributions before the first steps to 'return to normal' would be taken. We also decided it should have this printed form. It could become some sort of time capsule. A time capsule of these exceptional months when all we could do was to fantasize about a reality we temporarily lost, about the place we were not allowed to access.' I ask him about this place. I sense it's more than just the moment 'the doors were opened again.' Yes, he says: 'the place I was fantasizing about was Kaaistudios. I felt my imagination was blocked, but it was blocked for that specific place because it is at walking distance from my home and I've produced a lot of my work there and attended so many shows there. I could not access it. I could not access the possibilities it opens on to. It's a very physical experience. In the book is the email I received from someone relating to the very strict lockdown in France. Here it is the same: Once the doors opened, the doors of imagination opened as well.'

the porous walls of the theatre

I get an understanding of the meaning the theatre space has for David. But I sense as well, that what he stages there has profound significance for the 'everyday world'. You can philosophize for ages about the agency of non-humans, or the consequences of wandering around in the Anthropocene, or the collective and the individual being responsible and making a change. Covid is a world-wide experiment in taking care and negotiating the fragility between humans. In his 2016 production *'tonight, lights out'* everyone in the audience had a light-switch connected to one lightbulb above the stage. The production was about collectively switching off the light, and consequently spending time together, in the dark. Is the theatre a micro-space, with well-conditioned circumstances, to rehearse the out-of-scale issues society faces today? 'It is complex, he says. 'My answer to your question is: yes... But for me, it only happens there and then, with those who are present. It can only be a shared experience. *'Tonight, lights out'* IS a comment on the climate issue, but ALSO something that only happens in that space, during that time, with that group of people. With the donkey, the only one who has no 'contract': yes it IS about ethical issues, about non-human agents, but ALSO about what happens in that space. I strive to create a form that's as fragile as possible. It invokes the responsibility of taking care for what and who we are facing, for what or who we have to spend our time and share a space with. For me, in my work, it's not an issue but an experience. It has no pedagogy, no Brecht, no explanation or introduction. Confronted with this fragility, you as spectator are called to responsibility, to response-ability. It's about the situation being fragile - not the donkey being fragile.'

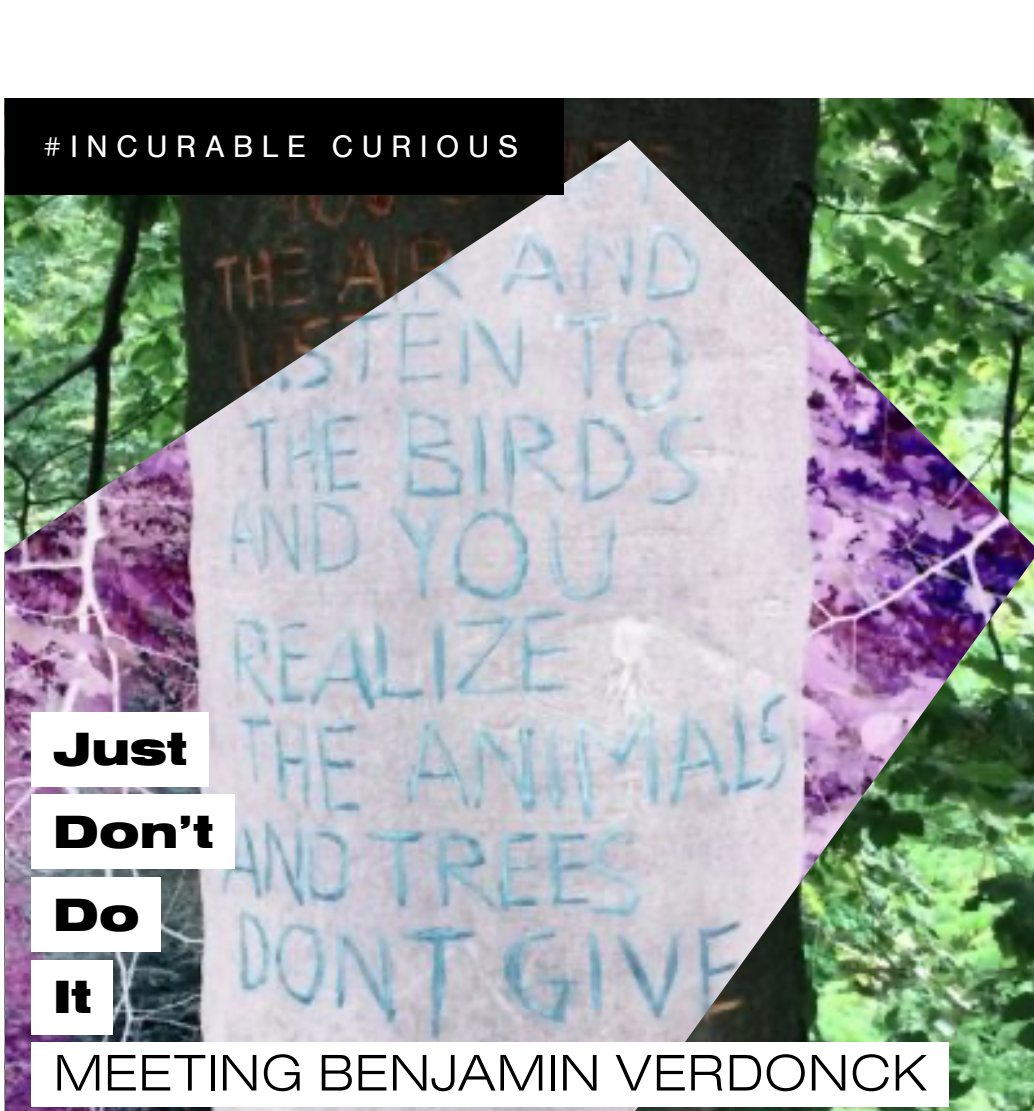


talk very terrestrial

For me, that's very much what the essence of theatre is about. It gives access to an awareness that is not called upon in many other domains of life. It transcends what elsewhere is easily perceived as a gap or a rift. Yet, the theatre space itself is an abstraction. I wonder how it connects to the cities and places where it is rooted. The Collection Europe intends explicitly to make these differences productive, and something to learn from. David is thinking about a continuation of the process that started with the book, together with Rotterdam - *Theater Rotterdam*, Brussels - *Kaaithheater*, Skopje - *Lokomotiva*. 'I'm not ready with the form yet, it's important to explore that deeply. Yes, we're going to talk very locally, 'terrestrial', as Latour puts it. The book is made with the perspective of my peers: artists, professionals, people working in and with the theatre and arts. But I asked them to write me from their perspective as spectators. Now I'm curious to learn from the spectators in these cities, the audience of these theatre spaces, how this space connects to their everyday lives, routines, routes. It's not a sociological research. With these spectators it's much more fragile, than with the ones I invited for the book. I imagine spending time with them in a one-to-one encounter, maybe by organizing some long walks across the cities in which we would converse about theatre. I want to take care of their dignity, as spectators. Yes, dignity. That's where my curiosity is.'

Article written by
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