The Golden Books are a joint project by NTGent and the Berlin publisher Verbrecher Verlag. It is a series on theatre, aesthetics and politics as well as background pieces on projects by NTGent. A series on both the theory and the practice of an engaged theatre of the future.

For the 5th volume, after months of cultural lockdown, when live arts were in a state of emergency and the whole institution rethought their priorities, NTGent asked more than 100 of the most influential artists and intellectuals in the world the question: Why theatre? Why is this art form so unique, so beautiful, so indispensable? From classical theatre to performance art and dance, from activism to political theatre and the performativity of everyday life, authors of all continents and generations delivered short essays, memories, manifestos, letters. Moments of aesthetic epiphany meet strong emotion, critical insights into the problems of representation and populism compete with utopian texts about the theatre of the future: more than 100 voices about the state of performing arts in 2020.
WHY THEATRE?

Why Theatre? – Golden Book V
Published by NTGent

© NTGent 2020
Published by Verbrecher Verlag, Berlin.
© Verbrecher Verlag 2020
Proofreading: Eline Banken, Kaatje De Geest, Carmen Hombostel,
Lesley Van Damme, Sophie Vanden Broeck
Layout: Nina Wolters
Printed in Germany
ISBN: 978-3-95732-458-0
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**EDITORIAL** ................................................................................................................... 15

**001 A constant journey of doubt and experimentation**  
Mohammad Al Attar ............................................................................................................. 16

**002 Things I would miss**  
Lola Arias .......................................................................................................................... 20

**003 Theatre as a spiritual path**  
Hector Aristizábal ............................................................................................................. 22

**004 The Lion King**  
Back to Back Theatre ....................................................................................................... 26

**005 The Think Tank Theatre**  
Yael Bartana .................................................................................................................... 30

**006 The same air**  
Vincent Baudriller ........................................................................................................... 34

**007 Saving the world**  
Jérôme Bel ......................................................................................................................... 36

**008 Theatre humain**  
Chokri Ben Chikha (Action Zoo Humain) ....................................................................... 40

**009 Why oh why?**  
Bread and Puppet Theatre .............................................................................................. 44

**010 Art is not about producing, it’s about implementing**  
Tania Bruguera .................................................................................................................. 46

**011 Suspension of disbelief**  
Luanda Casella .................................................................................................................. 48

**012 The art of those who dare**  
Nora Chipaumire .............................................................................................................. 52

**013 On vulgar acting**  
Benny Claessens ............................................................................................................... 54

**014 About wild capitalism & its patriarchal performance in our lives**  
Colectivo LASTESIS ........................................................................................................... 58

**015 Home**  
Kelly Copper (Nature Theatre of Oklahoma) ................................................................... 62

**016 A letter to dance**  
Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker .......................................................................................... 66
017 I was theatre, but theatre was never me
Mihaela Drăgan ................................................................. 70

018 "All the world’s a stage," (really?)
Radha D’Souza .............................................................. 72

019 Re: Theatre does not entertain me
Tania El Khoury ................................................................ 74

020 Dinner is served
Nicoleta Esinencu .......................................................... 76

021 Not even the dead will be safe if the enemy wins
Douglas Estevam (MST) .................................................. 84

022 One day we will all be free
Tim Etchells (Forced Entertainment) ............................. 86

023 Sustaining the sky
Cibele Forjaz ................................................................ 88

024 On theatre, absence, disappearance and bodies
Oliver Frljić ................................................................. 92

025 You know you want it!
Gob Squad .................................................................. 96

026 It has eaten up all the others
Julien Gosselin ................................................................ 100

027 Together in the dark
Sébastien Hendrickx ..................................................... 102

028 For a life in action
Florentina Holzinger ..................................................... 106

029 Living in theatre
Hsin-Chien Huang ........................................................ 108

030 Need I say more?
Isabelle Huppert .......................................................... 110

031 Wet dreams
Manuela Infante ................................................................ 112

032 When we still do not know what theatre is
Christiane Jatahy .......................................................... 116

033 Whatever you do is theatre
Jojo & Joyee (House of Muchness) .............................. 120

034 Stop pretending
John Jordan .................................................................. 122

035 Because
Stefan Kaegi (Rimini Protokoll) .................................... 126

036 A is not. Any more than B.
Alexander Karschnia (andcompany&Co.) ..................... 129

037 The infinite game of becoming
Susanne Kennedy ......................................................... 132

038 The less good idea
William Kentridge ......................................................... 136

039 Never becoming the concrete answer
Amir Reza Koohestani .................................................. 138

040 Our opera is a body, is a vessel, is a village
Aino Laberenz ............................................................. 142

041 Born from the inside out
Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui ..................................................... 144

042 Embodiment
Ursina Lardi ............................................................... 146

043 I need company
Jan Lauwers (Needcompany) ......................................... 148

044 Let us be invaded
Marco Layera ............................................................. 152

045 Theatre belongs in a museum
James Leadbitter (The Vacuum Cleaner) ...................... 156

046 Why sea stars?
Frie Leysen ............................................................... 158

047 About the ineffable: the mystical conception
Ángelica Liddell ........................................................... 160

048 Laboratories of the future
Matthias Lilienthal ....................................................... 162

049 The suspension of freedom
Edouard Louis ............................................................. 166

050 Theatre as assembly
Florian Malzacher ....................................................... 170

051 Creating a climate of change
Katie Mitchell ............................................................. 174

052 Forever changes
Sanja Mitrović ........................................................... 178
053 A sort of genesis
   Ariane Mnouchkine ................................................................. 180
054 Technicians of Dionysus
   Ermanna Montanari & Marco Martinelli (Teatro Delle Albe) .... 184
055 Excursus
   Maia Morgenstern .................................................................. 188
056 The role of theatre in the struggle against neoliberal hegemony
   Chantal Mouffe ...................................................................... 192
057 There will always be theatre
   Yolanda Mpelé ......................................................................... 196
058 Between here and here
   Rabih Mroué ........................................................................... 198
059 Exile and territory
   Kornel Mundruczó ................................................................. 200
060 Why as a responsibility to awe
   Ogutu Muraya ........................................................................ 202
061 Second exit after the soul
   Nganjii Mutiri ......................................................................... 206
062 Theatre, because freedom
   Jeton Neziraj ........................................................................... 212
063 Hello darkness
   Daniela Nicolò & Enrico Casagrande (MOTUS) ..................... 214
064 Theatre of vulnerability
   Boris Nikitin ............................................................................ 218
065 Why water
   Mamela Nyamza ...................................................................... 222
066 Dear grandma,
   Markus Öhrn .......................................................................... 226
067 Fiction coming to life and intercontextualisation
   Toshiki Okada .......................................................................... 230
068 We sit as an audience in the now
   Suzanne Osten ........................................................................ 234
069 States of emergency
   Thomas Ostermeier .................................................................. 236
070 Like breathing
   Bouchra Ouizguen ................................................................. 238
071 The grass is greener on the stage
   Lies Pauwels ............................................................................ 240
072 For God’s sake why?
   Luk Perceval ........................................................................... 244
073 Nurture the audacity
   Alain Platel .............................................................................. 248
074 This is a recording
   René Pollesch ........................................................................ 252
075 Thinking of the end of the world in costume by the sea
   Philippe Quesne ....................................................................... 254
076 Indispensable ritual
   Mokhallad Rasem ..................................................................... 256
077 Theatre is a place of truth
   Milo Rau .................................................................................... 262
078 Put on another show
   Falk Richter ............................................................................. 264
079 To stay in life
   Tiago Rodrigues ......................................................................... 268
080 The curtain should rise on the right side
   Kristin Röggla .......................................................................... 270
081 Piece of evidence
   Pia Maria Roll & Hanan Benammar ........................................ 274
082 Believing before seeing
   Didier Ruiz ................................................................................ 278
083 Creating a new world
   Amir Sabra (Stereo48) ............................................................. 280
084 Why art, why now, why ever?
   Farah Saleh ............................................................................... 282
085 In closed spaces
   Fabian Schneider ...................................................................... 284
086 Why, honey?
   Dennis Seidel ........................................................................... 286
087 Antibodies against lies
   Kirill Serebrennikov .............................................................. 290
088 Slowly getting high
   She She Pop ............................................................................. 294
089 For as long as I can remember, I’ve been performing
Buhlebezwe Siwani .......................................................... 298

090 Lack of guarantee
Mårten Spångberg .......................................................... 300

091 Half world
Veit Sprenger (Showcase Beat Le Mot) .......................... 304

092 Towards emancipatory performance
Lara & Jonas Staal .......................................................... 308

093 Ghost choirs
Botho Strauß ................................................................. 314

094 We got it all wrong
Tea Tupajić ................................................................. 316

095 Some call it universe, I call it theatre
Carole Umulinga Karemera ............................................ 318

096 Confusionists
Igor Vamos (Yes Men) .................................................... 322

097 Art is a human right
Ivo van Hove ............................................................... 326

098 A world that needs ceaseless reconstruction
Gisèle Vienne ............................................................... 330

099 The condition of community
Dmitry Vilensky (Chto Delat) .......................................... 334

100 The fifth wall
Marc-Antoine Vumilia .................................................... 336

101 Everything is open
Sasha Waltz ................................................................. 340

102 Why not
Miet Warlop ................................................................. 350

103 Tough love
Joanna Warsza ............................................................. 352

104 Incomprehensibility
Apichatpong Weerasethakul ......................................... 356

105 Escalation!
Zentrum für politische Schönheit .................................. 358

106 The art of unmasking
Dominique Ziegler ....................................................... 360
Why theatre? We can’t ask ourselves a more basic question than that and at the same time no question is harder to give an answer to. Why do we make theatre? What purpose does it have or does it even need to have a purpose? Usually, the answers are given by the making of theatre itself – but suddenly we find ourselves in a situation that has shaken up our ways of searching for the answers. In March 2020, NTGent was closed for an unknown period of time, like most theatres all over the world, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

So we wrote the following letter to more than 100 artists and intellectuals all over the world:

“Dear friends,

In times when theatre and performance as live art are in a state of emergency and societies rethink necessities, we ask you: Why theatre? For two years now, we have been publishing the series ‘The Golden Books’ at NTGent, together with the Berlin based publisher Verbrecher Verlag: books on the theory and practice of contemporary performance art, on individual plays and general social questions. In volume 5 of the book series we want to broaden the focus and ask: Why theatre at all? Why is this art form so unique, so indispensable? What is YOUR personal ‘why’ as a theatre-maker, spectator, activist, citizen – or simply as a human being? We are interested in the whole range of theatre: from classical theatre to performance art and dance, from activism to political theatre and the performativity of everyday life.

You determine the content and format of your contribution: whether you want to start from a concrete artistic experience as a theatre-maker or spectator, or write from a theoretical or utopian point of view. It can be a short essay, a memory, a manifesto, an invented dialogue, a poem, a letter to someone. A moment of epiphany, strong emotion, insight or confusion. A utopian text about the theatre of the future, post-capitalist theatre or one without any ideology, about Oedipus or the performance of birds outside your window. Whatever comes to mind when you ask yourself “Why theatre?”, whatever seems neuralgic to you or makes you feel confident.

With solidarity and kind regards,

Milo Rav, Carmen Hornbostel and Niëtê De Geest”

Why theatre? Because of all that follows...
When the world was seized by collective panic, I was left with the same nagging questions: Who cares about theatre? Who cares about culture at this point, in the middle of a pandemic?

I don’t have easy answers at this time, so I would like to return to March 2011 when the Syrian revolution against the Assad regime started. Back then, I grappled with the same question: “Of what use is theatre today?” My answer was clear. This was not a time for theatre. Playwriting seemed a frivolous pastime compared to writing political articles and organising demonstrations. I held on to this opinion until, upon the urging of a few friends, I began writing the play Could You Please Look Into the Camera? As part of my research for the play, I interviewed 10 young men and women in Damascus, who had been arbitrarily detained by regime security forces during the first few months of the revolution. They all asked me the same question: “What’s the meaning of dramatising our stories today?” My answers sounded confident. I highlighted the role of theatre as a witness, and its power to humanise our stories in a way that the dry prose of news media with its facts and figures fails to do. But deep down I was still searching for answers that could help dispel any remaining doubts about the work I was doing.

The answers emerged during the initial meetings I had with each of the individuals who narrated in detail the horrific experiences they had endured and that shaped the persons they had become. Our discussions about prison were accompanied by conversations about food, music, cinema, and love. The meetings helped me realise that the importance of the work lay precisely in those moments and not necessarily in the prospective act of performance per se. It lay in the participants’ need to talk and my need to listen—in their liberation from unspeakable images and mine from the fear of sharing a similar fate, for it was merely coincidence that separated those who were detained from the ones who survived in Syria. That text later became the medium through which we all—the director, actors, technicians, and I—engaged with the events around us as the regime’s brutality against the revolutionaries grew. Rehearsals became our only safe haven for discussions and arguments. Was our audience able to register any of this later? I can’t be certain, but I believe some of it must have been felt. Through our post-performance discussions with the audience in places far away from Damascus like Seoul or much closer like Beirut, I became convinced that as professionals in the field of theatre we still have a role to play in such a time of devastating wars and crises. And, so I returned to theatre after months of prevarication.

Since that time, I have come to believe that answers will emerge from engaging with the work itself, and that our theoretical knowledge about theatre and its role is not sufficient during times of radical transformations. In the summer of 2013, during a theatre workshop that I held with a group of young people in Raqqa following the liberation of the city from the grip of the Syrian regime and only weeks before it fell under ISIS control, we found meaning in the friendships that developed among us. Theatre didn’t change our lives or fates. Shortly after, one of the workshop participants was killed in a regime airstrike and, later, two others were kidnapped by ISIS fighters and still remain missing to this day. The rest of the group became refugees scattered around the world. All that survived from that workshop are the enduring friendships that have helped us live through the painful memories of loss.

In Beirut, while working on the play Antigone with some Syrian refugee women who lived with their families in squalid camps in the Lebanese capital, once again I struggled to answer the same question posed by the women: “Of what use is theatre today when we lack basic life necessities?” I decided to set aside the arguments I had prepared in advance and invited them to discover the answer together. And, so we did. During three months of working together, we discovered many answers—in their challenging of male authority, their reclamation of the narrative of the Syrian crisis, their growing confidence in themselves, their voices, and their bodies, and their grappling with the racism they had faced in a society dominated by a rigid, hierarchal class system. At the end of one performance, Wafaa, one of the performers, came up to me and, pointing at a group of elegantly-dressed women standing outside the theatre, said: “they used to see me only as another cleaner for their homes, but now they lavish me with praise for my stage presence.” I asked her jokingly, “what about the other women who haven’t seen the play?” She responded with a chuckle, “I don’t care about that anymore—what matters now is how I see myself.”