Mother P.

“Letter to my children. On intergenerational solidarity in times of existential crises.”

01 January – 21 May 2020

My nickname for this blog-entry is Mother P. I practice Science and Technology Studies and Technology Ethics at a German university. I live with my husband, my mother-in-law and my two sons (now 3 and 5 years old) in a village outside a large German city. We inhabit an old house together with seven other families. We share a courtyard as well as an ornamental and kitchen garden with each other but live in separate apartments. This is not a field diary in the strict sense. It is a series of letters to my two sons. In these letters I write down for them what moved me during their early childhood. I write from the perspective of a scholar, an ethicist as well as from that of a mother. The letters address my two sons as young adults. They start on 1.1.2020. Since they build on each other, I am also including the first two letters, whereby Corona becomes the central theme only from the 3rd letter on. I have changed all names for reasons of anonymity.

Part 1.

written on 01.01.2020

Dear Matteo, dear Gabriel,

today is New Year. The year 2020 has just begun and we spent a beautiful New Year’s Eve with fire bowl and torchlight run together with the neighboring families. You are 2 and 4 years old, have everything you need, you are healthy, and one could describe

you as two lively and curious children. When I look at you as you grow, play, thrive, I get sad, thoughtful, yes, sometimes even a little desperate in my private little happiness. The reason: I wonder what I will tell you when you ask me in maybe 15 or 20 years, why we – that is, my generation – have not done more to prevent a climate destruction that could still have been prevented in 2020. I am very afraid of this question. Sometimes I look at you getting lost in your pillow fights or while conquering the world as tiger babies, and suddenly this sadness appears in me. How can I love you and at the same time watch your livelihood being destroyed? What if one day you despise me because I have not done more for your future? Because I have been part of a machinery that so obviously destroys this planet, your/our habitat. What if your life, which began so beautifully, will be marked by the fact that you will have to witness and suffer from this planet transforming itself into an uninhabitable desert where billions of animals, people and plants will die? If I hardly know how to deal with my grief about the dying of the birches, maples, hedgehogs and bees around me, how will you deal with it in the future?

If I am afraid of something, then I normally face this fear by confronting it. This letter to you is such a confrontation. It is a confrontation with my fear that one day you might despise me. A contempt that I would understand all too well. I myself occasionally feel it towards my fellow human beings, when I see how they become entangled in hypocritical patterns of justification to mask their own comfort and immobility in it. The other side of this contempt is the dismay I feel when I see the committed and concerned young people at the Friday school demonstrations we occasionally attend, who simply cannot compete against a neoliberal ideology of freedom that declares unrestrained consumption as an individual right.

When I decided to become a vegetarian, to stop flying and to wear secondhand clothes, I asked myself a simple question: If I had to choose between cutting down those eight imposing chestnuts around my parents' house and giving up air travel for the rest of my life: what would I choose? The answer for me is clear. I would choose

the life of the chestnuts.

I am writing these following letters as a mother, but also from the point of view of the representative of a generation that knew but did not act. I address my letters to you children, who in twenty years' time will be young adults and will have to cope with what we have left you. My letters are a form of confrontation. They are a justification. They are letters of sorrow and love, and at the same time they are an admission of guilt. I hope that they will help you to understand why we, that is, your daddy, me and my whole generation, have such a hard time changing.

12.02.2020

Dear Matteo, dear Gabriel

in this letter I would like to write about something that already concerns you today, because it is the reason why I am sometimes emotionally difficult to reach. It's about something that psychologists have recently dressed in a new buzzword: Eco Grief.

Eco Grief refers to a grief over the destruction of the environment, which can become so strong that it can sometimes even turn into despair and fatalism. It is a mourning about the state of the world: the extinction of species, the disappearance of beloved places, the disappearance of diversity, of smells, sounds, images. A mourning also for the sake of the future. In a report I read about it, three forms of Eco-Grief were distinguished. The first form concerns our personal well-being. We need green recreation areas to avoid becoming depressed, oxygen to breathe, fresh food to supply us with nutrients. The second form concerns my relationship with you, as a mom who only wants the best for the future of her children and at the same time watches helplessly as this future becomes more and more doubtful. The third form concerns my relationship with my environment, with the other species around me.

My reverence for the diversity and complexity of life and the grief over the loss of it. In the report that I have read about eco grief it was presented as if these three forms of grief could exist independently of each other. In my view, however, all three forms are integrally interrelated with each other because they all stem from a single impulse: compassion. For myself, for you, for my environment. What about the compassion of my fellow human beings? The SUV driver, the cruise ship passenger, the meat eater? Crudely asked: Don't they have that compassion? Why don't they care about what they are doing to the environment? Many people talk about the fact that people today are alienated. But the environment has not become alien to us; on the contrary, we have fathomed it, disenchanted it, straightened it out, instrumentalized it, forgetting that we ourselves are part of this environment. We have instrumentalized ourselves. Perhaps this is the reason why we lose our dignity and our compassion.

I am part of the generation that has understood that we are in the process of destroying ourselves. I do not want to talk my way out of this. As a teenager, I myself jetted around the world, went to every continent several times, left cigarette butts on lonely beaches and made lean beef my main source of nutrition in numerous low-carb diets. I am no better than the others. I myself first had to have children of my own to realize that our luxury has a price we cannot escape. It is only since you were born that I have stopped flying, taking the bus, train and bike, wearing secondhand clothes whenever possible and being a vegetarian. I got involved with Scientists for Future, went on demos, tried to be a good role model. But I also realize this is all a sham. I continue to function as a cog within the very system that is destroying the planet. Actually, we shouldn't be busy with anything else but working with all our strength for an ecological and social change. I should be doing permaculture instead of organizing international conferences. Planting trees instead of writing e-mails. Nothing is more important than to restore the ecological balance. Nothing is important if we do not succeed in this restitution. Actually, we all know that. But there is an uncanny laziness around me when it comes to giving up comfort. It

already starts with the small children. With your friends. With yourselves. You are used to air-conditioned cars, tons of toys, and strawberry puddings in winter. On the other hand, I feel like a leper ever so often when I collect garbage in front of our house and ride my bike even when it rains. It seems to me that because the people around me have distanced themselves so much from the plants and animals, I automatically distance myself from my fellows as soon as I approach the animals and plants. How can we solve this dilemma?

1st week of the "Corona crisis"

Today we write Monday the 16.03.2020. Meanwhile you play together very nicely. Great is that you Gabriel, started speaking in whole sentences. This way we can all communicate much more smoothly with each other. Since three days you sleep together in the loft bed. That will surely weld you two even more together. When I was a child, I always wanted a brother or a sister. I felt this wish most ardently at night when I woke up and could not fall asleep again. In one of the novels that I devoured *en masse* during those lost nights, it was described from the point of view of a big brother, how the quiet panting of his little brother calmed him when he became afraid in the dark. I found the idea so beautiful that I sometimes imagined I had a little brother like that sleeping with me in the room. The idea alone calmed me down.

All daycare centers, schools and kindergartens have just closed. Even we adults no longer go to work. We are instructed to work in the home office. That is a big challenge, since you are at home, too. Arun and I take turns. Sometimes I work and Arun takes care of you, sometimes he works, and I take care of you. In the last few days I was annoyed more often than usual, and I bitched at you sometimes because I feel much pressure. I fear the competition with other young scientists who do not have children, and can now fully use the time to research and publish, while I provide

you with pancakes and handkerchiefs, settle disputes, remind you to clean up, assist you with puzzles, and so on. Then being productive again at the push of a button, thinking my way into scientific topics, arguing glibly in video conferences. I don't always succeed as well as I would like. Nevertheless, I try to be gentle with myself. I just manage as much as I manage. No more, no less. Basically, I ask myself how we should master our lives in the next few weeks, now that the daycare centers are closed. Your grandpas and grandmothers cannot take care of you either because they are afraid of the so-called Corona virus. This virus is not dangerous for you and us. We are young and agile. But older people can die from it. Several 10,000 people in Europe have already died by the average age of 79.8 years.

I just don't know what to make of this situation politically. I really did not expect that the daycare centers would actually close. Nevertheless, a part of me is not really surprised. Just recently I did some research on the use of Open Data governance in connection with drought disasters in Capetown. In this context, I also learned about epidemic skin diseases that thousands of township residents* suffer from and that cannot be treated or contained due to the lack of water. Those who can afford it, in turn, are drilling holes in their gardens out of their own pockets, thus drying out the surrounding soil even more. Social inequality in times of climate destruction. In the recently published appeal of 11.000 climate researchers* in the magazine "Nature" they speak of the fact that unspeakable suffering is about to come over mankind. That this includes epidemics and diseases is obvious to me. It seems only logical to me that the destruction of the ecological balance will also have striking effects on the behavior of viruses and bacteria. Or am I too fixated on ecological topics? After all, there have always been epidemics and epidemics. Do I imagine a connection between ecology and corona, which does not exist at all?

19.03.2020

Because of the corona virus, more and more drastic measures are prescribed. Public life is lame, people are not supposed to stay on the streets with more than three people. Queues are forming in front of grocery stores because people are only allowed to enter the stores in small groups to do their shopping. Cafés, museums, swimming pools, sports clubs, restaurants, playgrounds: everything is closed. The borders to the neighboring countries are also tight. In Italy, Spain and China, this "shut down" of public life has been going on for several weeks now. Nobody talks about the many people fleeing from the war zones in the Middle East. Sometimes hundreds of them camp in the no man's land between Turkey and Greece. Nobody wants them. Hardly anyone even wants to know that they exist. That they are desperate. They are all busy with themselves. Yesterday I heard a girl on a walk with her girlfriend complaining that she can't use her Douglas voucher now because it's only valid for two weeks. But the Douglas store is closed until mid-April. This fragment of conversation is indicative of the extent of global inequality that currently prevails on this planet.

Part of me is happy about the peace and quiet that is gradually being restored due to this virus. Basically, it is what I have been longing for over the past ten years. Hardly any cars on the roads, no tourism, clear skies. No contrails produced by the hundreds of airplanes that take off and load in Frankfurt every day and which we don't use. No more fun culture with barbecues, where masses of meat are distorted and just as much garbage is produced. The plants, animals and waters breathe a sigh of relief. In the truest sense of the word. Current measurements confirm that already after only a few weeks, the CO2 content in the affected areas of the shutdown is lower than last year at this time. In Venice the water birds and fish return. The water shows its blue color again. The brown silt of exhaust fumes and contaminated mud has sunk to the bottom of the canals of this city, which has once been a place for dreamers, but has been turned into a playground for the big corporations in the echo of the Berlusconi government. Protests of the inhabitants* remained without consequences. As a child and teenager, I was very often in Venice, because your

grandpa Claudio lived there for a while. I spent beautiful and formative times there. At some point I could no longer bear it. I have never been there with you. Who knows if you will ever get to know this place...

20.03.2021

My fantasy does somersaults. I imagine a great conspiracy of climate researchers and environmental activists who have created this virus that is currently paralyzing public life and provoking a kind of collective mass detox. The hope is that the state-imposed compulsory break will sensitize people to the beauty of their immediate surroundings, make them aware of the value of the local, let them enjoy the luxury of tranquility. But this is of course nonsense. Hundreds of people die daily from the virus. To such a coup even the most radical among the climate activists* would not be capable. And yet: the reality of a sixth mass extinction is becoming ever more insistent and perceptible: the rising sea levels, the heat waves, the storms, the forest fires, the acidification of the oceans, the melting permafrost soils in which over the last millennia bacteria have been trapped that, once released, could upset the entire ecological balance. No one listens to them, the ecologists, biologists, activists and geographers who are warning more and more forcefully. Most of the politicians don't, and only a small percentage of the population does. Except for a few, everyone continues as before. And then came the Corona Virus. Many people expressed their worries before. But they did not change their consumption, eating, travel and mobility patterns. We think we are not part of nature. Many talk about how important it is to protect "nature", or how much they love "nature", how "it" helps them "come to their senses", that "it" – meaning "nature" – is important to them. For me there is only one thing expressed in these remarks: that we continue to cling to the mistaken belief that we ourselves are not part of "nature". "Nature" is somewhere "out there". Yet, we are nature just like everything else that surrounds us. When I watch you kids at your nudie parties, where you dance around the apartment with

your young, free bodies, it becomes absolutely obvious to me. You are nature. Never let yourself be talked into anything else!

21.03.2019

More and more urgently, scientists* are now warning not only of the fatal consequences of climate destruction, but also of those of the corona virus. Young people only feel the virus in the form of slight cold symptoms. So, it is not surprising that despite all warnings from official bodies, young people all over Germany are now celebrating the mild, life-friendly spring weather after the ultra-hot summers in the last two years and the rainy winters. To put a stop to this, an appeal is being made to the morale of young people: Show solidarity with the old!

This moral appeal to the young confuses me. How can one be so bold as to appeal to the solidarity of those young people who last year demonstrated so desperately for their future. Mostly in vain. Hardly anyone *really* listened to them. What about solidarity with the right to a future? Why do we not hear any moral appeals from politicians in this regard? And what about the right to a life of all those species that are currently dying out by the thousands because of consumerism and the convenience of many (young and old). Extinction! Irretrievably. The tigers that fascinate you, Matteo, so much that you have begun to delve into factual documentation about them with your tender four years, are threatened with extinction. There are only 3800 specimens left in the wild. And what about the solidarity towards all those who, because of the effects of climate destruction, the heat, the floods and the western addiction to oil, have been suffering from epidemics for years, without a health system, without any prospect of recovery?

I notice with myself how, in the face of these global developments and the dramatizing imbalances of power, my attitude to values like solidarity is changing. I

find this very sad, because for me solidarity is one of the most important values of all. It is the positive answer to fascism. But unfortunately, it is becoming increasingly difficult for me to deal freely with a form of solidarity that currently has so much to do with welfare states and so little to do with global responsibility. How much I hoped for solidarity last year with the demands of the youth and also with all those who have to flee for reasons in which the West is anything but uninvolved. Why does our understanding of solidarity currently seem to be limited to the present and why does it remain within national borders?

For me, what we are currently experiencing is an expression of a new form of ethical conflict in which no one is left out. In this conflict, the guns are not passive objects and they do not belong to either side. Rather, they are active, dynamic, uncontrollable actors: viruses, bacteria, wild animals, weather forces. What is the conflict about? About life itself. In the near and distant future. Some want to enjoy their lives and others demand renunciation in the name of our responsibility as a species. Why do we cling so much to this life anyway? Why do we insist so much on it? Why are we so afraid of death? Basically, death means transformation. What is so threatening about change?

22.03.2019

In the past, I have repeatedly been annoyed by rhetoric in public debate in which vocabularies such as “rule” and “ban” became red rags. Even the Green party have recently only dared to talk about “crash barriers” anymore. Anyone who was nevertheless bold enough to demand prohibitions was declared the enemy of freedom. I think that we need rules and bans to be able to live together freely. To no longer be able to swim in natural waters because they are polluted and littered is not freedom. If prohibitions can cause that these waters become clean again, then prohibitions mean a gain in liberty for me.

Now suddenly there are drastic prohibitions. Within only one week they were arranged. But not under the sign of climate protection, but under the sign of Corona and the protection of the old and vulnerable. Civic rights are being restricted as drastically as never before in liberal democracies. One knows this only from dictatorships, from fascism, and from China. From now on every citizen in China has to wear a barcode which gives information about the respective health status. That reminds of the Star of David. But the Chinese barcodes promise the future of fascism, which will take on much more perfidious features than that of the Nazis. I am just very grateful that we do not live there right now.

2nd week

26.3.2021

In our village, every day now seems like Sunday. Many people are on the road, not in a hectic rush, but in Sunday peace. I have rarely seen so many fathers with their children. A beautiful picture. Our garden is so well tended as I have never seen it before. We are collectively hammering the earth with a spade, as if this is how we can keep the virus away from us. At least we finally got rid of the blackberries that had overgrown an entire corner of the garden and what came out? A fig tree. What a nice surprise! Where the blackberries were, we have now created three new beds. Right now, we are all highly motivated, but I am afraid that the motivation will fade away as soon as normality returns. And what if the summer becomes so hot and dry again? We barely managed to water the front six beds last year, wedged in between job and family... I'm almost ashamed when I sometimes find myself wishing this crisis would last a little longer. I wish it for us and our environment (which I think is the same) and I am ashamed because I know that I can enjoy this situation just because I live a very, very privileged life. I know that many people are suffering a lot right now.

You Matteo, have been very restless, rebellious, fidgety and cheeky the last few days. But since yesterday we have relaxed the rules a bit. You can now play with your friend Leo again. Like crazy, you have been scuffling around in the garden all day, climbing, running, fantasizing. You simply need the common hooliganism. Otherwise your energy becomes destructive. I wonder how other families who don't live as open and free as we do here manage their kids these days. I am very happy that we don't live in the city. Here, there are bushes, paths, small woods where you can let off steam and where we don't have to constantly avoid other people with two meters distance. How would that be in the city, where it is much narrower? In fact, I haven't left our microcosm here since March 14th. But already at the bakery and in the pharmacy, I find it more than bizarre at the moment.

3rd week

28.3.2020

This morning we spontaneously went to the bakery because you wanted pretzels. I wasn't allowed to pay cash for reasons of hygiene, but I didn't have a card with me either. Apart from the fact that I wasn't allowed to buy anything, the situation annoyed me more fundamentally. At first, I didn't understand what it was that bothered me. A protective measure. What should be wrong about that. Only later did I realize it. I was annoyed because I appreciate cash as a way to remain anonymous when buying small things. As a surveillance and privacy researcher I am very sensitive to such issues. I find it important that I at least have the opportunity to slip through the system every now and then if I want to. I don't like it if every pretzel I buy is traceable in principle.

I just heard the Pope's speech on the occasion of Corona. In it he mentioned that we are "all in the same boat". What he means is that the virus can affect everyone

equally. But I think he is wrong. According to the papal boat allegory, those people who live in rich countries with a well-functioning health system are sitting in a fancy yacht, while people in poor countries are sitting on a raft with holes. Not the same boat. It fits that the "he-who-must-not-be-named"-administration announced yesterday that the US-government plans to pump 2 trillion dollars into the post-Corona economy. This sum scares me. 2 trillion US dollars. Where does the money come from? Does it come from the weapons industry, the real estate industry, the gambling industry? Where does it come from and WHERE IS IT MISSING? I am terrified of the idea that the Corona virus will hit the poorest countries the worse. In the daily news there are only reports about Europe and the USA anyway. Maybe thousands of people in Bogota are already dying of the virus and the Global West is not even taking any notice of it.

1.4.2020

In the meantime, we have almost gotten used to life in times of Corona. I work in the morning and Arun in the afternoon. I talk on the phone a lot, write e-mails. I have few appointments, only now and then an online meeting. Apart from that I'm working on an essay publication. Basically, it's similar to the semester break. I'm used to working part-time anyway due to my parental leaves. And basically, I find part-time work much more humane than hanging around in front of the computer all the time. After 5 hours at the desk, I need to crawl through the bushes, watch earthworms or go nuts on the trampoline. Today you, Matteo, skyped with your friend Oscar. I have never experienced anything like that before! You were kind of raving with each other, only everyone in his living room, screaming at each other on Skype and laughing to death over the same stupid poop poop jokes. I should have filmed it and played it for you, Matteo, if you ever become a financial lawyer or tax consultant, between two meetings with clients...

2.4.2020

This afternoon we were down in the yard with our community. Nobody wanted to be in home office anymore, some are on short-time work anyway. Beer was drunk, the children played frolicsomely, and the atmosphere was good. Then, completely unannounced, Mr. Andorfer came along, the man who leases us our adjacent garden property. He is over 90 years old. He is an extremely grim old man. He also owns the horse farm, where you guys also take riding lessons from time to time. Especially you, Gabriel, love this place. We have to go there all the time. It is enough for you to just see the horses. You do not want to pet them, feed them or ride them. Just to see them.

But back to Mr. Andorfer. His reputation precedes him. Some of us can't stand him. Others like him. I am one of the latter. Mr. Andorfer is dear to me because he cares about the trees, the bees, and the butterflies. In the course of the last two summers, almost all the maples in the entire area have died of a fungus from the Mediterranean, and all the spruces have died of thirst. Mr. Andorfer first blamed us for the fact that several trees had to be felled on our property as well. We should have watered them better, he said. I replied that all around us these same types of trees were dying. That it is not because of our lack of care, but that there is a more fundamental problem going on. He then said that just because the trees all around are dying or being felled we do not have to do the same thing. He had planted the old birch tree himself and it is important to him, he said, that we treat it well. Otherwise he would have to revoke our lease. He is right. But even with a few buckets of water we can't change the fact that the climate is changing in a way that certain tree species here can no longer tolerate. When I said that, he mumbled to himself. Then he hobbled into the back of the garden and sat there on a bench for a while. When he came back, he said that he didn't understand what was going on with us young people. Why we no longer pay attention to the environment. Why we prefer to go to

Aldi or fly to the Canary Islands instead of eating the fruits that could grow in our front yard. As an old, shaky man, he faced us young people. I found him very brave at that moment.

4th week

8.4.2020

I have not left our village for several weeks now. I enjoy this very much. After your births I did it very similarly. I also enjoy the community we have here. The many people around me, who are so different and yet have one thing in common. They care: not only for themselves, but for their surroundings, their fellows, the world. I also see more and more people from Frankfurt who come here on their bikes to enjoy the beautiful surroundings. In every bay of the Main there are young people, couples or families. They picnic, go for a walk, look around, explore the surroundings. They do not sit in cafés, go to events or go shopping. They are simply there. I find that very pleasant. I have also seen many couples with children hugging or kissing. This is a nice sight, because I know how hard it is to maintain a loving relationship in this stressful time with small children.

I actually wanted to go to the hardware store and a nearby nursery today to buy seeds, pots and soil for planting. But there were only warnings from all sides. Do not do this to yourself. You gotta wait for hours until its your turn. Then I had an idea. I went to the local cemetery nursery. While all “non-system relevant” stores have to stay closed, the cemetery nursery is in full operation. That’s kind of macabre, but it got me a whole bicycle trailer full of herbs, perennials and earth. And I was spared having to go to the hated shopping center.

10.4.2020

You are doing well these days. You are outside from morning to night. The surroundings here are just like a fairy tale forest. The wild garlic is simply everywhere. Last year I was disappointed because there was so little. But this year I can't get enough of it. This juicy green with the fine white flowers. Since this winter 50% of all trees had to be cut down, everything is now full of germinating offspring. This is a very hopeful picture. I am happy about it, like a little child. But I would probably not be me if I could simply enjoy this present beauty without any ulterior motives. I increasingly perceive how the earth is becoming drier again from day to day. And that in April!!! All of us in the house are already watering like crazy again, at least everything around our house, but we just can't keep up. What frightens me especially is that I lift up stones and it is almost death underneath. I remember what a test of courage it always was as a child. If you lifted a stone, dozens of insects appeared underneath it. Fascinating but also with a goosebump factor. After all, you don't want to rub shoulders with centipedes, woodlice, maggots and spiders. Especially not as a child. And yet you want to see them over and over again. Now it is really special when we discover an insect somewhere. They are simply gone. Decimated. There are hardly any left. Even the snail shells are all orphaned. What kind of generation will you two belong to that hardly knows about contact with insects anymore?

11.4.2020

Yesterday, in the course of my current studies on digital detox, I read some articles about the animals that now live in the restricted zone around Chernobyl. There they seek protection from human civilization. There are eerie, highly contaminated perches there, which are almost three meters long and have nothing to fear from predators. Many animals have mutations, especially the birds. The spider webs are

asymmetrical. In some, especially contaminated areas, trees grow, but even in spring you do not hear a single bird chirping. What a strange world I have born you into! How long will it be before the animal and plant world ever recover from glyphosate, which is now used everywhere? Even here, in our neighboring gardens. Why do we first need disasters to change things? We are supposedly so intelligent.

If more retail stores have to close down as a result of the Corona crisis than was already the trend, how can the power of the big corporations and lobbyists be stopped? ICOM, BlackRock, Monsanto, Amazon. If we carry on as we have been doing, we will soon be completely helpless in the face of these companies. And what about countries like Spain or Italy, which economy crucially depends on tourism? How will they be able to prevent China from buying up even more of their real estate than it already does? I also have the impression that the public debate now revolves only hypocritically around Corona, and it is already much more about the question: Who will be the winners of this crisis? I am very worried that we are heading for a turning point that will herald a new economic age, which I do not like at all. I fear that the big corporations and China will emerge from this crisis even stronger than they are already and that their power will be so drastically confirmed that nobody will see any point in not surrendering to it.

5th week

17.4.2020

I have the feeling that fewer and fewer people here take the virus really seriously. I just met some friends who were invited to a barbecue party. Tonight, one of our housemates is celebrating her birthday down in the garden. In a small circle and very discreetly. Nobody questioned whether this was immoral. Although at present it is actually “illegal”. Our children play together all the time anyway. Either we all get it –

or none*.

Yesterday I saw a report about Brazil. In this report, several people were interviewed about their opinions of Bolsonaro's lax course. Platt said, the following message came across: The rich are afraid of Corona and want to see stricter measures. The poor approve of Bolsonaro's policy because, according to one interviewee, if he is not allowed to work and his little store goes bankrupt, his family will die of starvation. Then better cough for two weeks.

One of my favorite journalists from Amsterdam described Corona as an elite crisis. In many respects, that is probably true. I don't believe the various conspiracy theories that are currently circulating, but I do think that a big part in the handling of this pandemic lies in the new architecture of our communication infrastructures, the algorithms programmed for hype and panic and the generally stronger networking that Corona has taken on such (not health-related, but) social, economic and political dimensions. Technocracy and Big Data certainly also play a role in this.

18.04.2020

Today our Serbian neighbor Spelim threw a party in his garden. He blocked off his property with building fences and tarpaulins so that it is not visible. But you heard him and his guests anyway, even from the street. He had about 20 other Serbs visiting. All men. Most of them are guest workers. They do not speak German. They are here without their wives and children. Working on the construction site. During the day they played soccer, slaughtered two whole piglets and roasted them. In addition, they have been drinking moonshine and beer without interruption. Arun was over there for an hour together with our friend and neighbor Ismael. In that short time, they drank 6 schnapps and two beers. Later Spelim brought us all plates of roast pork. He and his friends sang Serbian folk songs until late into the evening.

Now half of them are lying half asleep in their cars around our field. The men had great voices. Their singing has plunged the whole area here into a very peculiar, unusual mood. Somehow melancholic and sentimental, but also very beautiful. All the time I had pictures of a trip to Romania in my head, which I had undertaken as a child with my parents.

Since Corona we have much more to do with Spelim than before. We help him, he helps us. His girls sometimes play on our trampoline, our boys in his sandbox. I think it's nice that we arrived here in such a different way through Corona. It's a pity when everyone always wants to be everywhere but never really arrives anywhere. It's a pity for the places and for each other.

After Spelim was there to bring the pig and a bottle of Schlibo over, you, Matteo, asked me what war is. You must have overheard something. But how do you explain that to a 4-year-old? I said that houses are being destroyed because there was a bad fight, many people are dying and many more are starving. Arun said that my description was much too drastic. Maybe, but on the other hand: Some 4-year-olds are not only told such a bad thing, they have to experience it. You also asked if there will be war soon because of the virus. I told you not to worry.

Later, when you were already asleep, Arun and I made a try. We watched all sorts of boulevard news broadcasts on different private stations in comparison. While in the daytime news two minutes were "sacrificed" to the situation of refugees at the European borders, the news on all other stations revolved around Corona throughout. Always with a focus on Germany, or at most on Europe. Anything that takes place more than five hundred kilometers away from your own garden fence does not seem to be of interest.

19.4.2020

Today, the drought was finally featured in the news. It is already spreading again. Yesterday there were a few drops. We were happy, very excited, and then it was already over again. Also, the tree death and the bark beetle were addressed. And that in April. What will it be like in August? I feel cold running down my back. But not a word about climate destruction. Zero context.

6th – 8th week

29.4.2020

This week I was invited to an interview for a professorship. The whole thing took place via zoom.us. In the past, I have also communicated a lot about proprietary providers. Skype, Microsoft teams, etc. But with such an official thing I felt very uneasy. Also, because all of a sudden everybody is using zoom.us now. The Corona crisis is providing these companies with a new flood of data that will further cement their power over us. And again, we are the generation that talks about the fact that this could be problematic, but in the end, we are quietly and devotedly participating. I, too, have quietly and devotedly participated. As an applicant, I was in a weak position after all. I did not want to make myself unpopular. But I felt terrible about it. In the interview I also talked about the importance of integrity when I was asked what I thought was good teaching. I made the value of integrity my own, while at the same moment I did not act with integrity myself because I used a service whose logic I reject. I actually wanted to mention this in the conversation. I had firmly decided to do so. But then the whole situation made me so insecure that I didn't dare. However, I find it completely unacceptable that we are now coming under massive pressure at German universities to use programs that we know are used by US companies to trade our data. Even if it is only metadata: We now know how much power this form of data holds. The so-called Tina-argument is used again and again: There is no alternative (to zoom.us). That is of course pure marketing. Sure, there are

alternatives to zoom.us. At the FernUniversität Hagen, for example, they have been working reliably with Adobe Connect for years. Here, the data is only stored for a short time on an internal server, it does not reach third parties. Pexip is also an alternative. The service is hosted by the German Research Network dfn. And yet a highly privacy-invasive program from a U.S. company is now being declared the norm in the short term. Once again, it's you who will have to bear the consequences if our data is pumped into algorithms that are not programmed to make our lives more sustainable and fairer, but to make private companies richer. Regardless of losses. I am truly ashamed to be part of such a weak generation. I want recognition, that's why I want to be appointed to a professorship, and that's why I'm ultimately willing to let my beliefs go. That's the way it is. Anything else would be hypocrisy.

9.5.2020

"I don't like where I come from. I do not like where I am going. Why do I long to change the wheel with impatience?" This excerpt from Bertold Brecht's text "Changing a tire" reminds me of the mood that prevails right now. We know that our lifestyle before Corona will plunge us and the rest of the planet into ruin. Actually, we cannot go back there. And yet this is described here as a temporary crisis.

Today I walked with you, Gabriel, through the overgrown park on our doorstep. We do that very often. These moments are moments of pure happiness for me. During our forays through the bushes you get stuck with every beetle, every snail, every caterpillar. For hours you can only observe. Without interfering. You do not want to destroy, not domesticate, not dissect. Only to look and understand. I admire you for that.

We came to a bank. There two young women with mouthguards were sitting, talking about the pros and cons of different "Karamell Machiato" suppliers. You walked

straight towards the bench and shouted excitedly: “Mom, fire bug, woodlouse and earwigs – all together! Under the bench some insects were indeed cavorting. Then one of the women said to the other: “The boy knows more about nature than you”. Why is that so? Why is caramel macchiato more interesting than a woodlouse? Why is it not enough for us to look?

Gabriel, you long for nothing in impatience. You’re just where you are. Hopefully this “there” will never be taken away from you.

Week 9-10

21.05.2020

Today is Ascension Day. That basically means nothing to me anymore. Christianity is like a strange parallel world for me. Yet it was so hard for your great-grandfather to bear that I was not officially baptized, that he summoned the parish priest, who was obligated to him by his generous donations, so that he could at least sprinkle me with a little holy water at his home. Your great-grandfather actually believed that otherwise I would go to purgatory. It seems like pure superstition to me today. And yet I have a great deal of respect for the rituals of the church. They touch me. Especially the music. You too, Gabriel. In general, you are very receptive to music. Especially when it is played live somewhere. Singing and instruments fascinate you.

In the park in front of our door there is an old protestant church. It is one of the most beautiful churches I know. It is really cozy, with big windows, lots of wood and old trees all around. Its bell sets our rhythm here. At 7 in the morning we are awakened by the morning chime and at 20.00 when the evening chime begins you know: now is bedtime. In front of the church there is a wood carving. It shows a man

and a woman. Both are looking at their smartphones (which in this case are also carved from wood). Now they each have an additional yellow ball with red hairs in their hands. “The virus!” you always shout when we walk past it. I dare to doubt that at the age of 2 I already had a picture in my head of what a virus looks like and what it does.

Today the pastor held the holiday service outside in the meadow. This way she cheated Corona. There were many people there, but distributed, with enough distance. Above all there was a piano and two bagpipes. You, Gabriel, stood still as if spellbound. We attended the entire service. The sermon of the pastor even appealed to me. It was about how important it is for us human beings to move under the open sky, to look up without the sight of contrails or to look into the foliage of old trees through which a shred of sky appears here and there. She said that these experiences are important to keep a clear mind, to let in new perspectives and because they can comfort us. Problems would not be solved by this, but we would have more strength to cope with them. After her sermon, you could literally feel the sounds of the instruments floating through the park. I was absolutely animated by the whole thing, to use an expression of Christianity. And I think the people around me were too. Some of them I heard humming upon their way back through the park.