

# A state of a body produced by a plant

Notes on foraging and the performance URBAN  
PLANTARIUM by michela filzi



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*Majestic. My heart melted. Peace. Growth and richness of a heart. A dark open night and a daybreak. Filled heart. A friend. The plant opens a pathway, a dark green circular-shaped one. Like a cave or inside a worm, a caterpillar. Mutual eating that is sovereign. Power eating, meaning, a teacher. Not seeking, it is what is sought; sight of clear vision of embedded feeling. Deeply.*

Authors notes from one of the somatic foraging walks

When I started writing this text, I wanted to challenge myself by answering the question: how can a sentence be a leaf, both touched and heard? A flat leaf that is rich in color, with its veins as rivers as pathways, and the tiny hairs that both stand up on mine and the leaf's skin. This made me dream. What if this text is to be published in braille? And then to hold a reading, where one can simultaneously touch the words and hear the words. In this way I would repeat how I was first introduced to filzi's work – by touching a plant and hearing about it at the same time.

I first encountered filzi's work when she had extended an open invitation to join her while foraging in the greeneries of Berlin. On these walks, filzi was our guide and teacher. As participants, we would meditate and pair up to facilitate a meeting between a plant and a human. One partner, with closed eyes, would touch and listen to the sensorial description of a plant given by the other. These trips gave me a pre-relation to the performance URBAN PLANTARIUM.

A promise in the face of a plant

In Finland, solstice is a celebration and a ritual in favour of a good harvest and the fertility of the soil. We eat food and drink, make bonfires, dance, and get rowdy to scare off the evil spirits and to receive an ample yield. The Finnish solstice ritual is to bring people together; that spent togetherness is understood as the act of a ritual itself. Traditionally it is also the night on which you might foresee your suitor. We gather wild plants and ask the night to reveal our future love's face.

URBAN PLANTARIUM was more like a happening than a performance, fitting well to the ritualistic tradition of summer solstice celebrations. Outside, under the evening sun, we were brought together to enjoy some food and drinks. The performance team provided us with dances, music, singing, and a speech that ended with us all giving salutations to plants as friends. It brought me to recall Finnish traditions of prayers for a good harvest and the seeking of our future in love.

The URBAN PLANTARIUM solstice ritual took place at the small greenery of Uferstudios. Upon arriving, I was instructed to take my time and was invited to gaze at and enter the impossible forest. Chit-chat filled the air of the arriving audience members, and I stopped to look at a performer slowly moving amidst the long grass.

There was a white tent in the yard, open to its sides and providing protection to us from above. As though in silent understanding, we as audience members gathered under it, and “ta-ta-ta” went the musician Sebastien Faust with a foraged and self-made instrument out of acorns, mimicking the rhythm of recorded birdsong. The performers gathered in the tent as well and gave us their first dance. They lay on their backs, folding and unfolding their joints like petals. With time, their focus opened to their hands, observing, and studying them. I was laying down as well, on a bean bag, and I noted down in my notebook “To be a recipient and what it is to perhaps live in a prayer.”

Spreading to the yard, we ate foraged food and learned about the ingredients. We gathered with drinks to listen to the speech michela filzi and Beatrix Joyce had prepared. They talked about homeopathy and the importance of plants, their grief amidst endangered ecosystems and ecological disasters, and of the history of solstice celebrations. The speech ended with us giving salutations to various plants. A track made of breathing sounds started and the performers fluidly moved between the audience members. I was again brought to the leaves, which circulated oxygen. I felt us all as a forest, breathing.



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Returning to the tent, I watched as the performers slowly bowed down and rose again while singing “Green Grass” by Tom Waits. The song arrived through an accumulation of voices joining together, stressed by the effort of bodies descending and ascending. In the end, we were all invited to join in a guided meditation by filzi. Her words climbed from the core of the body to the crown of the head. It didn’t feel like an end, but rather an extended space to linger in. And like the solstice celebrations in Finland, the audience members remained, grabbing self-brewed and foraged drinks to chat in the opening of the night. Along with two friends, I formed a circle in which we shared stories and impressions of the URBAN PLANTARIUM ritual that flowed out of us like a curious river. Other people joined us and left us, until for us too it was time to leave. I walked away carrying a question: What can plants teach us? Of togetherness, hospitality, and of tomorrow?

*Joyous lungs, electricity received through the fingertips, the yellow rivers running through the veins of the arms to the solar plexus. Healing lungs. A red sun. A yellow bud rooting at the belly button and its roots running, open, fanning into the lungs at its center solar plexus as an excited joyous river, a water providing nutrients and safety like a mother to its yellow bud. Healing, softness, tenderness. A safety. Returning and a reminder to forget, a sense of a child’s liberation.*

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