

ENVIRONMENTS IN ENVIRONMENTS



Photo of rehearsal of GOOD QUESTION from Susanna Yilkowski.

Image description: Performer András lit by a phone and street lights through windows, at the darkened performance space, of the work GOOD QUESTION.

The text is constructed in three parts, mimicking the structure of [*GOOD QUESTION*](#), a performance by Tomaž Simatović and András Meszerics that premiered as part of Tanzhausfestival Salzburg, in October 2021. The first part of the text untangles the authors reflections after witnessing a rehearsal run of the named work on the 20th of September 2021.

The second part is an answer in form of a personal letter the author sent to performer András Meszerics, after witnessing the performance [*Extraordinarily Intolerable*](#), by Tomaž Simatović, performed by András Meszerics and Nayana Keshava-Bhat. The work premiered in Toihaus Theatre Salzburg in June 2019. The letter follows the authors reflections after witnessing the performance for a second time on the 14th of September 2019.

The third part is an invitation for the reader to interact with the author's memory of the work *GOOD QUESTION*, as a ghost, transformed through the authors interaction. The third part as well mimics the structure of the named work.

The first part being the longest, the second the shortest, and the third, in hope, the one left in resonance and sum of the previous parts.

GOOD QUESTION

GOOD QUESTION is an interactive performance involving the audience and the two performers. The audience, me and two others, enter the darkened performance space, the Tanzhaus studio. What is perceivable to the eyes are the two performers, two decks of cards, some cardboard boxes, and two phones. We make our choices in seating and find a booklet informing and inviting us to take part to a three-part performance. As a starting point we are introduced to the question WHAT IS RADICAL CHANGE? Inviting us to join the performers in an exercise of active listening, and to write down questions that we might find helpful for the performers. The two performers are asking each other questions and tarot- or cards with words written on are being drawn. Hinting to a game of some sorts and guiding the performers in their acts.

THE DEER

“That is a conclusive question. Please ask me a non-conclusive question.,” András says for the third time to Tomáš. This makes me a hint uncomfortable, how is Tomáš not understanding to ask non-conclusive questions? How many times will he be needed to be told that? The first Tarot to be drawn is described by András: he sees a deer, looking to its left, with rainbow-colored antlers and a lighter shade fur in its head and upper torso. Tomáš lights up the left corner of the space, and the deer is here.

As they conclude the first part of the work, the work lights turn on, and we have our chance to share our helpful questions with the two performers. Drawing our questions from a common box, we are again greeted with the same “This is a conclusive question. Only non-conclusive questions get a card.” I want to hit myself, as I only now realize that the first part was full of hints: how, how gets a card with words, and what, why gets a tarot card. How these cards have written on them spatial, musical, light cues, etc. to serve as a toolbox for the performance. I jump to realize I depended, heavily, on visual and imagery eyesight throughout the first part. We, the three invited audience members, have mostly written conclusive questions. Together, we the audience, pick our favourite questions that are now laying in front of us, with or without cards. With an increasing speed we are forced to make our decision fast: what is the question we want to stay with for the rest of the show?

“WHAT IS FIXED ALREADY?”

“How long would you stay with something if you don’t know when it will end?” (Card: CURTAINS). This is the question we stay with and so the final part starts with the slowed down tunes of Elmore James (The Sky is Crying). Now the two performers perform our chosen question to us. I see that the deer is back in space: playing with my memory. I see the hermit walking out from their cave: how do we receive and store information? I see the previously rearranged hut made of carboards being illuminated by the phone light, and I am reminded of the etymological root of **focus**: a point of convergence / hearth, fire. And our said starting point of passing of knowledge: storytelling, to gather with a shared story around a fire. It feels almost too perfect ironically, to transfer that function to our phones: our tool to warm ourselves and to share our stories.

After the showing, we gather to share on each one’s perceptions of what happened. I share about my frustrations and shame of not picking up on the guidelines in the first part, and questions of **how can I help them**, when the moment to help comes after the initial situation? **What is my status of power**, when I cannot affect alone, but rather through a communion? **What is a radical change**, when our decisions affect the work similarly to the act of casting a stone in the river: only the ripples on the surface being perceivable? We can meet the resonance of our actions, and use of power but never in an immediate, brutal, hit-in-the-face way. I am reminded of Micel de Certeau’s models of tactics (individual / time) and strategies (society / space): finding myself in the same boat as the performers together with the other audience members, navigating through various tactics the pre-existing strategies that inhabit and construct the performative situation.

After hearing the audience, Tomaž shares with us an anecdote. When watching the News - How do we take information and to what information do we pay attention to? What of it affects us? How do we then act, to help?

RADICAL CHANGE

One day, then three days and then two weeks after the show, I cannot seem to get rid of it. As if Tomáz, András, and the *GOOD QUESTION* were constantly there, present behind the mind, itching and making my skin jump. I am flooded with memories in the form of questions, or even questionable memories, of a past work of Simatović: *Extraordinarily Intolerable*, that I witnessed in 2019. The work in question was part of the artists *Performing solidarity project*. I cannot help but wonder the etymological sources of both subjects.

The word solidarity originates from the French language and is a communion of interests and responsibilities. Responsibility famously is a meeting of the words ability to respond, which opens a mouth-watering doorway to look at the named models of tactics and strategies. In an interactive performance setting, to what and how do we respond to? When given the choice. Solidarity is corporeal as how could it not be? It does contain, literally, the word solid in it. After both shows of Simatović, I cannot help but feel the concreteness of my own body and the ability to face myself and to bear the consequences of my actions. Acts and their points of emissions, impulses: do we mirror (mimic), react, comment, or respond (add on to), is a question to be asked at each situation we find ourselves in.

“Usually, the poetry of the memory is destroyed by confrontation with its origin.” (Tarkowsky, Andrey) The word RADICAL stems from Latin: of or having roots; a cause and an origin. This begs the question of my own personally constructed ideologies, world views, and belief systems. How diluted or saturated they are. And how, by changing something at its origin, at its root level. That image, relation, becomes distorted – a part of it dies. Art, like activism, brings us to a state of mind, of being. We cease to merely think, as more than one sense is active. We are affected and affect as we have reached a state. We are holding a place whether the desire is to change or to maintain it. Tomaž, after having shared his analogy on News, stated the reason for using non-conclusive questions might be of this. Rather, how can we help, than if we can help.

The question of state becomes of curiosity, both in its societal and physiological aspects. What is the strategical state of our Society? And what is our tactical, and so tactile, bodily state? The word state, existing both as a noun (a position) and as a verb (to set in position), locates us to an immediate and exact relativity. What is the society we live in? And what about our status? How do we hold, create, and leave spaces? And desire? To look at states through our informative bodies, perhaps enables a multitude of logics and possibilities to co-exist. We become an environment ourselves that is in an environment. A state in a state.

Now, one month after the initial performance, I can perceive the effects of this root level radicality. I feel I have been a bit reprogrammed in the acts of how I understand communal work, placement in power, and levels of engagement. True to its subdued question, WHAT IS RADICAL CHANGE, and to the law of Thermodynamics: the only mode of (energy's) existence is transformation.

Extraordinarily Intolerable

Dear Bandi (András),

I am writing this letter to thank you, Tomaž, Nayana and Ana-Barbara and whoever has been part of this process and in your life.

I don't know where to start. My chest feels very heavy, or in pressure now, as it would be in the process of expanding.

Your solo was so cruel today and made me hate myself. Currently with Barnaby we are working with stories of afterlife, there is one story called 'mirrors', it ends with stating that one dies when one meets oneself.

In the beginning of your solo, I somehow was brought to birth, then to death, when you returned to the room the last time and had changed the lights again. It was so ugly, yet beautiful, and I almost cried. And I found myself wondering, if death is when one is utterly alone; unable to respond or to be with this world... Not existing in time...isolated. That's why it was so cruel when Tomaž and Ana-Barbara came to you, you were dead and these gestures of them, I didn't know if they were there to help you or not as for me, you were not there, you were dead. And I wanted to come and support your head, but I didn't, and I hate myself for that, for that lack of courage or whatever it might be.

I also thought of if death is returning. Also, that if death is when the innermost is brought to light and all that is in surface dies. Now one lives in another form, and in another realm.

You have left us to exist in another unspeakable, un-understandable way, it can only be felt.

The experience with Nayana was also very different, we were so many, and this time I couldn't leave you, you were constantly with me and when you entered the theatre space I wanted to cry, then to run to you and hug you, but didn't... I was shy.

This time with Nayana I actually got a bit mad, of how fucked up our society is. And I wanted to make a change, whereas last time I felt I wanted to help and be part of a group. Do you know of this old saying that there are two types of people in the world? Those who mimic/copy and those who act, and as I was following in the beginning the conversations and interactions of people, who all of us knew what would happen in the future, but we all needed that one person to make that decision so that all of us could join, and this happened in all the sections of that part... I wonder why it is so difficult for us to make a choice, whatever it will end up being and so we copy what others do around us and wait for orders and actions.

Even though, Nayana so simply and clearly offers us the space and the space to make a choice. When I look at the word, offer, I feel it as peripheral, it's a horizontal word for me, there is no hierarchy, and it can go to any direction. Are we so used to live under a rule? Under verticality?

I am.

It's crazy how my experience this time was so different. And I find it amazing and beautiful that both times I've seen the work, no one rebels.... It's crazy when you think about it, we all behave so well

and there is kindness in that. I shared with you already what I experienced as the last image, with the papers and the ventilator, that it was you and somehow that it was us who teared you apart, reassembled you, destroyed you, and made you as our liking... it was awful, and I felt such cruelty.

If you have read until here, thank you and I hope the sincerity of this text comes through, one never knows with words, how do we read them? I feel the tears will come out soon and something will leave. I already feel I left a part of myself there....

We talked about it with Jin afterwards, we both felt such intense movements, emotions inside the body that There are no words. We both now want to see the work again, what would we experience then?

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Much love,
Suski

invitation

Hello!

Welcome.

Dear reader, this is an invitation for you to interact with the text.

There are three parts in this exercise.

The **first** part is to remember.

What do you remember of what you just read?

What other pieces of information or people does it invite to your memory by what you read?

How does it make you feel?

What do you want to do with this information?

The **second** part is to choose one memory.

Take in your surroundings, what is present now and let it meet with the information of your memory.

List your thoughts, senses, emotions.

Stay with that list for a while, and

Formulate a question you'd like to stay with.

What will be your question?

The **third** part is to share your question with someone else, be it anyone.

What will change or not change upon this sharing?

What other information, relations will be revealed within the exchange?

Glossary:

source: etymonline.com

common = belonging to all; of public nature or character

solidarity = communion of interests and responsibilities; mutual responsibility

radical = of or having roots

root = cause, origin

communion = participation in something

focus = point of convergence; hearth, fireplace; home, family

power = ability; ability to act or do

help = assistance

transform = trans: across; beyond, form: create; give life to

state = from PIE root: to stand

Bibliography:

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Tarkovsky, Andrey. Sculpting in Time. University of Texas Press. 2021.