

**Franziska Burger und Theresa Schütz: »Charity is too easy«.
An Interview with Seth Honnor and Olivia Winteringham
(Kaleider) on *The Money*.**

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»Charity is too easy«

An Interview with Seth Honnor and Olivia Winteringham
(Kaleider) on *The Money*

The Money, a Kaleider production directed by Seth Honnor, is a show-game which takes place in spaces of civic decision-making and reconfigures the relation between spectators and performers. The audience are offered the choice of being either Silent Witnesses or, for a reduced fee, Players. The latter decide on what to spend the evening's proceeds on, provided it is neither charitable nor illegal, while the former silently follow the debate. For an additional fee, Silent Witnesses may become Players at any time. If a unanimous decision is not reached by the Players within an hour, the money is safeguarded until new Players determine its use.

Franziska Burger/Theresa Schütz: Which term do you think best describes *The Money*: a game or game show, a social experiment, concept art, participatory theatre, or something else?

Seth Honnor: I tend to call *The Money* a ›showgame‹ because it resembles both a game and a show without quite fitting into the genre of game show. It isn't a social experiment either because no one is recording what happens and drawing conclusions. And I tend not to call it ›participatory‹ – I mean it obviously is, but participatory theatre brings to mind images of being dragged on stage with low levels of consent. *The Money* is consensual play. I guess I'm not very interested in the conceptual box *The Money* fits into. We're quite obsessed with how to categorise things. But aren't the best and most exciting things those that defy categorisation?

Franziska Burger/Theresa Schütz: Olivia, what is your job as Host? What are the dos and don'ts of the role? Are you allowed to intervene, or is there an exit strategy in case the discussion gets out of hand?

Olivia Winteringham: As Host, I'm not permitted to judge or interfere in the proceedings, much like the Silent Witnesses, who also are not allowed to influence the game unless they pay the buy-in. My main job is to enforce the rules at the beginning of play. It is possible for Players to ask us questions, but we have to keep answers short because entering into a lengthy discussion means we may, unhelpfully, influence the direction of the game and the decisions the Players make. Our role isn't to influence the game. *The Money* is about the process of making a unanimous decision, and if we start getting engaged in this process it might affect the outcome. And yes, there is an exit strategy should things get out of hand. According to our security protocol, if we are unable to defuse the situation ourselves by asking people to leave, then we call front of house staff, the duty manager or even the festival management to our assistance. If these measures fail, we call security or, in severe cases, the police. But things tend not to get difficult – if there's ever any sign of difficulty amongst the Players the group tends to sort it out very quickly. We've never had to intervene because of an altercation of any kind.

Franziska Burger/Theresa Schütz: Our next question focuses on group dynamics. It concerns the debate after a decision has been reached or time has run out. Though it is an integral part of the performance, you do not attend this debate. Why is that?

Olivia Winteringham: I think it's important we don't join the debate because it's neither the end of the show nor an after-show drink. It's an opportunity for the Players and Silent Witnesses to start to talk about what happened, and if they want to, to start deconstructing what has happened; to start thinking about it objectively. But the debate also opens up a space for emotional response. And since it lasts only twenty minutes, it allows participants just enough time to process the show without being able to gain full closure, which means they can

continue to think about it afterwards. The tension after the show on Wednesday in Bern was palpable, you could feel it in those last couple of minutes. At one point, my heart leapt and my instinct as a compassionate human being was »I want to give that person a hug« because I felt for her.¹ But my job is to remain objective and detached from the decision making process of the group. If I had engaged in the situation, it could have affected the course of events. The role of *The Host* is not to pass judgement in a way that affects the outcome of the game. We set up the game and we enforce the rules.

Franziska Burger/Theresa Schütz: Please explain the development of the rules of *The Money*.

Seth Honnor: Well, originally, I wanted to gather £100.000 and let a group of people decide who should have the money. But I didn't have £100.000. So my aunt suggested I make it a TV programme. So I got a meeting with a TV executive. But before I went I thought I ought to test my idea first. So I asked a group of 18 friends whom I was on holiday with if they'd be willing to try. They all arrived at a caravan one day and put £10 each on the table. All they had to do was decide on what to do with the money. There were no rules, no need for unanimity. It was pretty full-on! I think some of them still haven't forgiven me! But I knew from that moment that it was a very rich idea. We discussed it with the TV executive, but the idea that TV would turn the idea into a monster scared me. So Emily Williams, a producer at Kaleider, suggested we make a live version of it in order to maintain authorial control. We brought in artist Alice Tatton-Brown – who toured with the show as the main Host until the end of 2016 – and designed the experience with her, which in turn enabled me to specify the rules. But since we couldn't rehearse the show, the first time we tested it was with a live audience, including the eminent theatre critic Lyn Gardner, which was quite scary. Halfway through, I noticed a small loophole in the rules (which no one else noticed so it wasn't a problem). I closed it the following night, and since then the show has barely changed.

Franziska Burger/Theresa Schütz: Why did you have to add the ›no charity‹ rule? Rumour has it that it was because of an incident that occurred in the USA – is this true and if yes, what happened?

Seth Honnor: I love that there are rumours about the show... Charity is too easy. I banned it to allow people to think more creatively about what to do with the money without having to worry about appearing heartless. Of course, people are still desperate to do good. Emily used to say we should have a ›charity dance‹, so that whenever anyone says the word charity, a group of dancers would come out and do a silly dance. I loved the idea. It was in Australia, during the Melbourne Festival, that I finally rewrote the rules to ban charity. But yes, the American audiences found it really, really hard to think beyond charity.

Olivia Winteringham: Sometimes the process of decision-making revolves entirely around that particular ›no charity‹ rule. The Players may have a lengthy discussion about what constitutes charity in the first place. But if the Players genuinely believe that what they have unanimously decided on is not charity and everyone has filled out the paperwork, then I usually accept the decision and consult with the Silent Witnesses. If Silent Witnesses veto the decision, then I might ask the Players if they want to modify their agreement in any way. But if the document isn't completed before the time is up, no way will the Players be given the money because the rules clearly state this as a requirement. And whenever they talk about splitting the money, I'd remind them of the rules. I'd stand up and say: »Players, you are reminded that the rules clearly state that you cannot give the money to charity or split the money and cannot do anything illegal«. But if the Players are determined to give the money to Greenpeace, for example, then they might find a way around my injunction.

Franziska Burger/Theresa Schütz: What happens more often: that the Players try to find a consensual solution, or that they get caught up in discussing meta-level questions like »What does charity really mean?«, »What are the dis-/advantages of decision-making based on consen-

sus?«, or »What do we learn about democracy in this way?« Which approach do you prefer?

Seth Honnor: The task is very exacting so it's extremely hard for audiences to critique the show from within. Silent Witnesses are more able to voice criticism from their outside position – but in general they also get drawn into the task. I enjoy it when people adopt a playful approach, when they try to bend or break the rules. But they haven't been able to break them yet.

Franziska Burger/Theresa Schütz: Have you recognized specific differences between the 120, 90 and 60 minute versions, or between performances in which the participants already knew each other in comparison to those in which they did not?

Seth Honnor: I love the 120 minute version. At about two and a half hours running time including the drinks section, it's quite long, but it has a beautiful dramatic arc. The tempo dips right down after one hour and then slowly climbs before it often goes through the roof as the clock reaches zero. I guess it's like the other versions but the dynamics are more greatly accentuated. But there's something neat about an hour. The show still works really well. And it's a lot more practical for both audiences and us to perform. There was an absolutely amazing episode in London where it slowly became clear that eight of the Players (nearly half) were from one family – and they were brilliantly playful, competitive, challenging, and funny with each other and the rest of the audience. It's one of my top five.

Franziska Burger/Theresa Schütz: How would you evaluate the influence of the site-specific performance spaces, that is the civic decision-making rooms, on the decision-making process? Does the process change depending on the location? Do you feel differences in the aura or spirit of the rooms?

Olivia Winteringham: As often as possible, the show takes place in a civic decision-making room familiar to the community. Spaces like

this hold an atmosphere, they are places where important decisions are often made. The grandeur of the space adds weight and gravitas to the decision-making process of the Players. Some of those spaces are absolutely beautiful, and to have the permission to use them as a site for a ›showgame‹ is quite special. Before coming to Bern, we performed *The Money* at the British Embassy in Paris, which meant that the process by which the audience entered that space was very specific – they had to have their bags searched and their passports checked, so that when the group was playing the game there was real tension in the room because of what had come before the game had even started.

Franziska Burger/Theresa Schütz: As we were able to experience first-hand in Bern, the Silent Witnesses have a lot of power because they can choose to buy in last-minute and challenge the consensus-based decision of the Players. In this case, the theatrical model being played out seems to be less democratic than autocratic. What are your thoughts on this?

Seth Honnor: Everyone has the same power, provided they wish to (and can afford to) exert it. Once a Player, you are free to articulate your ideas and try to sway other Players. I suspect that such an equal distribution of power is neither a democracy nor an autocracy. Is it an ›isocracy‹ perhaps?

Notes

- 1 During this performance, the Players discussed spending the money on an operation of a young female Player's grandfather. Shortly before the deadline to reach a decision expired, a Silent Witness payed the buy-in and vetoed the decision. This intervention gave rise to a considerably emotional debate afterwards.

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