

EYJA

de-SCRIPT-ion

EYJA, de-script-ion

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This book holds a de-**script**-ion of *Eyja* (Island in english) a site specific and human specific performance situated in Hrísey, an island off the north coast of Iceland. *Eyja* was performed in August and October 2020 as a part of my artistic research project How Little is Enough? *Sustainable Methods of Performance for Transformative Encounters* at The Theatre Academy of Malmö, Lund University.

This text is a second person description of one guest's journey through the performance with occasional overview glimpse. As a reader you are invited to take on the perspective of that guest.

The words on paper will never substitute the embodied, immersive experience nor do they describe the actual work that emerges in the guests being, under and after the performance. In my understanding the actual work is the affect that remains with the guests and participants after the series of encounters on the island. To me an affect is a complex web of thoughts, emotions, sensations, memories and in this particular case, the aspirations for the future to come.

Eyja is a piece about what it means to belong; what ties a person to a community or a place and what kind of commitment it requires to be a part of something.

The challenges of the island reflect the global challenges of current times. In the performance guests are invited to critically investigate their own ideas on what it means to belong.

The guests are invited to mirror themselves in a staged journey through the life and values of the islanders. Through walks, observations, genuine exchange, symbolic gestures and structured dialogue, topics on quality of life on the 'island' are contemplated.

I created the piece in collaboration with Gréta Kristín Ómarsdóttir who is a theatre maker and a former student of mine from my time as a dean at the Iceland University of the Arts. Gréta comes from Hrísey and while working on the piece we lived in her childhood home. We collaborated with Hrísey Primary School and members of the local community in Hrísey. The work was produced by Akureyri Theatre Company, the biggest professional theatre outside Reykjavik, with the support of Eyþing sustainable strategy mission fund.

The work was performed in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and we had to adjust all our ideas to the restrictions that were in place at the time. The performance was originally a part of Akureyri Culture Week in August of 2020 that was partially cancelled due to the conditions. Despite that, we were lucky to be able to perform in a period between the second and third wave of the pandemic where things opened up for a short while. The performance was also a part of A! Performance Festival in October, an international performance festival held annually in Akureyri and surroundings.

The work is made for and by the islanders and could not have happened without their hospitality, generosity and their energy that generated our artistic engine.

Thanks to Gréta's family, the staff of the Hrísey School, the hosts and the children. Thanks to the birds. Thanks to the whales. Thanks to the flowers and the rocks. Thanks to the mountain Kaldbakur. Thanks to the wind, to the sun and to the sea. Thanks to Hrísey.

Steinunn Knúts Önnudóttir

ISLAND

A Journey

Sævar

You meet up at the harbour of Árskógssandur in North of Iceland, where Sævar, the Ferry to Hrísey, waits for its passengers.

A person from the Akureyri Theatre Company welcomes you and gives you a number.

You are invited to leave your phone and/or camera on the boat. You are told that you will be navigating the work in a small group and that the journey will take approximately 2,5 hours including the sailing.

You are invited to embark the boat and asked to go down stairs and find a table that has your number on it. You search for table number one and sit down.

A woman dressed up as a toll guard stands behind a desk and welcomes you. You notice a big loudspeaker on the desk. The chief engineer of the boat distributes Island-passports to the guests and invites you to fill the blanks.

Name of bearer:

Residence:

Nationality:

Place and date of birth:

Color of eyes:

Color of hair:

Mission:

Peculiarities:

Life principles:

The passport also has six empty boxes for stamps.

The toll guard distributes pencils and offers you help to fill in the document.

The boat leaves the harbor and sails towards the island.

After a while a voice is heard from the loudspeaker.

The boat rocks you gently while you listen to the voice and you may close your eyes or watch the ocean and mountains out of the window.

The voice is soft and hypnotic:

Farfuglar

Migrating Birds

You are a bird of passage.

A migrating bird.

You are flying.

With others, many others.

You are one of them.

You fly between continents,
south and north, west and east.

Over land and sea.

On your way from home, on your way home.

Home is potentially everywhere.

You visit the same places again and again.

The whole world is your home.

You choose a good place to live and when conditions change
you fly to a new and better place.

What is important, is that there is enough to eat and that the
weather-conditions are favorable, but the most crucial aspect
is security, that you are safe.

You dwell where there is not too much competition for space
and food.

Now you are on your way to the island.

You are in a flock of birds.

You fly together.

On the island, there is enough food, ample space and few
threats.

It is good to raise your young on the island.

But the conditions are changing.

You do not know if you will be back next year.

You are a bird of passage.

In migration.

You fly.

You do not own a land.

No land owns you.

For you the land is necessary.

For the land you are necessary.

Before the long flight you gather, you, the migrating birds, to prepare and practice – together you wait for the right weather for the journey.

You are an excellent weatherforecaster.

You are sensitive to air pressure and time your migratory flight to favourable weather conditions.

There are many things that can affect your flight and important to take all variables into account before taking off.

You want to use your energy wisely, it is not endless. One depression on the way can drag you down. It is better to have tailwind, it is better to wait for the right winds.

You fly

You are a bird of passage

Leaving

Migrating

Passing through

In transit

Arriving

Arrival bird

Immigrating bird

Where do you come from?

Where are you going?

What are you seeking here?

You fly

To the place where the conditions are favorable

But the conditions are changing...

Rapidly.

You are seeking a place where there is safety.

Now you are flying there...

Out to the island.

The island.

You forget everything that has gone before...

You are a migrating bird on your way to the island.

Out to the island.

The island...

Island

An island

One island

one

One

Two

Three

Many

To the island...

You

Me

They

Us

Them

Together

Apart

Wings

Open wings

Open

Sky

Sea

Silence

Lighthouse

Harbour

Passage

Journey

Travel

Traveller

Travelling

Anchor

Moorings

Ties

Shackles

Floating

Swimming

Lying

Crawling

Motionless

Motion

Life

Accident

Sorrow

Solidarity

Peace

Embrace

Empathy

Silence

Energy

Endurance

Force

Forceful

Work

Value

Tick

Tock

Time

Tide

Flow

Blow

Wind

Sail

Sailing

Waves

Weather

Breeze

Freeze

Frost

Shield

Protection

Safety

Sense

Senseless

Self

Source

Intuition

Home

Homecoming

Away from home

Abroad

Land

Shore

On shore

Off shore

Escape

Duty

Depth

Body

Bodies

Adult

Child

Elderly

Family

Form

Formation

Transform

Change

Channel

With

Against

Alike

Different

Diverse

Belonging

Alienation

Rejection

Story

Collective

Sharing

Memories

Memorize

Recollect

Collect

Forget

Loose

Seek

Find

Lifeline

Remote

Outside

Luck

Bad luck

Shock

Trauma

Ruin

Ruins

Powerlessness

Power

Struggle

Black

White

Red

Grey

Green

Blue

Weather

Wind

Mountain

Country

Nation

Town

Gathering

Assembly

A Part

A Part of a whole

Independence

Song

Scream

Squeak

Nest

Egg

Youngster

Resource

Breeding

Breeding place

Sanctuary

Reserve

Nature reserve

Nature

Land

Property

Fence

Garden

Gate

Permission

Permit

Sanction

Boarder

Boarderless

Boundaries

Bind

Connect

Connection

Empty

Full

Open

Closed

Inside

Outside

Sunrise

Sunset

Horizon

Line

Circle

All

Nothing

When the voice has silenced the boat has reached the island and is about to dock. When you cross the gangplank, you see a row of children aged 7 to 14 standing on the harbour, holding boards with numbers from 1 to 8. A woman dressed as a toll guard is sitting by a table on the pier.

On the table there is a stack of papers and a tin cookie jar. The woman gives you a sign to approach her and soon the guests have formed a line in front of the table.

You stand in line and when you reach the table, the woman welcomes you to the island and gives you a stamp in your passport. She informs you about the structure of the journey:

"It is like a treasure hunt. You need to visit certain places on the island and to solve assignments to retrieve stamps in your passport. You need to collect six stamps in total. You will get the last stamp on your return to the harbour on the condition that you have fulfilled your personal mission."

She then invites you to draw the mission from the cookie jar:

"The mission is for your eyes only and will be your secret during the journey."

She points to a child that is going to be your guide for the journey and gives you a simple map of your route.

Personal missions

Find a beautiful stone on your way and show it to a fellow traveller.

Find a wildflower on the island and remember its colours.
Describe the colours to a fellow traveller.

Find a wildflower on the island and remember its scent.
Describe the scent to a fellow traveller.

Pick a wild flower and give it to someone you meet on your journey.

Give someone a compliment at least twice on your journey.

Give thanks to someone at least four times during your journey.

Throw a stone in the sea and observe the ripples.

If you see litter on the ground, take it with you and throw it in an appropriate bin.

If you find a guestbook, write your name in it.

Offer your help at least twice on your journey.

Invite your fellow travellers to go first at least twice on your journey.

Try to keep eye contact with the one you are talking to.

Give your fellow travellers a smile while you talk to them.

Give your guide a complement for their performance.

Take responsibility for the group tasks, that they are properly solved.

Take responsibility for keeping the dialogue lively on your journey.

Pay attention to everything that is red, remember at least three things.

Pay attention to everything that is yellow, remember at least three things.

On the paper you drew from the cookie jar it says:

Pick a wildflower and give it to someone you meet on your journey.

You find your guide, a teenage boy, that stands on the harbour waiting for his guests. He is holding a sign with your number. One other guest approaches the boy and soon he joins a younger boy and his guests. You are now four guests and two children in your group.

Child 1: Hi my name is Patti, and I am 8 years old.

Child 2: And my name is Stefán, and I am 13 years old. We will be your guides for today. Before we start the journey, we would like to get to know you a bit better. What are your names?

You and the other guests tell their names.

Child: What is your favourite toy or thing?

You, the other guests, and the children tell each other.

Child: What are your hobbies?

You, the other guests, and the children tell each other.

Child: What is your favourite song?

You, the other guests, and the children tell each other.

Child: Now we are going on a walk, and you can ask us questions or just talk amongst yourselves.

During the journey the atmosphere is relaxed. You may converse with your fellow travellers and the children while walking between 'stations' if you are not invited to walk in silence. On the way the children answer questions about the island and point out places on the island that they have a special relation to. Sometimes, the children suggest games to play while the group is waiting for clearance to continue from the toll ladies that oversee the piece. Throughout the journey you are seeking opportunities to fulfil your personal mission.

Sæborg Sea City

You stop by the shore where a tin cookie jar is placed on a big rock between the sea and 'Sea City' the towns community hall.

Child: We will stop here and solve our first task.

The children open the jar and take out a card and one of them reads out loud:

In Hrisey there are many kinds of migrating birds that visit the island each year, amongst them are the owners of the holiday homes. We islanders call them migrating birds. Some migrating birds transform into a resident bird, this is true for both birds and people.

The child then asks one of the guests to read the assignment.

SÆBORG ASSIGNMENT I

Read the descriptions of the migrating birds out loud.

Which bird resembles you the most?

What bird do you relate to?

Take turns in reading the descriptions.

Tell each other which bird you think your are.

You stand in a circle and take turns in reading the bird descriptions.

Kría

Arctic tern *Sterna Paradisaea*

Arctic Tern is a strong character, very straightforward, determined and possesses great leadership skills. Arctic Tern is an adventurous social being that is not afraid to enter the spotlight and is prone to risktaking.

When Arctic Tern arrives on the arena, it does not go unnoticed. The Tern has a strong sense of justice and beneath the intense and perhaps arrogant surface, Arctic tern has a big and caring heart.

Maríu Erla

White Wagtail *Motacilla Alba*

White Wagtail is a diligent and homely bird with a lively imagination. Wagtail is open, warm and sociable, but prefers to keep private affairs to itself. Wagtail has few but close friends. Humour and lightness are the main characteristics of the Wagtail that is extremely cheerful and creative. Wagtail wants to have fun and enjoy the moment and has remarkable acting skills.

Hrossagaukur

Common Snipe *Gallinago Gallinago*

is a down-to-earth and rather reserved thinker, perhaps one could say that it is pragmatic in nature. The Snipe would never rush into anything. Snipe carefully chooses each move, relying on its strong intuition that is so precise at times that it seems like pure prophecy.

Common Snipe is not very sociable but has a unique charm, humour, and enjoys strolling around with dignity, giving into a friendly chat given the right circumstances.

Æður

Common Eider *Somateria Mollissima Borealis*

Common Eider is a soft and tender romantic that moves slowly and effortlessly and is good at all things. Maybe Eider seems shy at first, but when the ice has been broken the bird is the best friend and most generous host, loving, trustworthy and caring.

Eider is sensitive towards injustice and shows compassion for and solidarity with beings less fortunate.

You discuss the birds and their characteristics, the people and their personalities and through the assignment you get to know your fellow travellers a bit better. When everyone has chosen a bird the children give you a stamp in your passport. The children ask one guest to read the next assignment.

Child: Can I ask you to read the next assignment to the group?

The child gives one of the guests a card from the tin jar. The guest reads the assignment out loud.

SÆBORG ASSIGNMENT II

Walk in a V formation to the next place. Keep two meters distance and walk in silence. Please organize the formation by yourselves and keep it until you arrive at your next destination.

With the help of the children, you create a V formation and start the walk with the older child in front.

Orkulindin *The Power source*

You walk for a while out of the village up a hill and into a gravel path that leads you to a spring surrounded by cliffs. You walk further on the path into low woods until you reach a clearing with a view to the sea and mountains. On your way you noticed an information sign about this place, that is called the Orkulind (power source). It is believed that the mountain Kaldbakur, one of the mountains you see, is a source of spiritual energy and that it can be both felt and heard from this spot. The children stop by a tin cookie jar, standing by one of many bird signposts on this path. The children open the jar and read from the card.

Child: Now we have reached the Power Source, another name for the nature that surrounds us. Can someone please read the next assignment out loud?

You volunteer to be the one and take the card from the cookie jar and read for your fellow travellers:

ORKULIND ASSIGNMENT I

Open your arms and inhale deeply. Then lie down on the grass, watch the sky, and listen to the mountains.

You return the card to the tin jar and look for a good spot on the ground. You lay down on the grass and observe the movements of the few clouds in the sky. You close your eyes and listen to the mountains.

After a while one of the children says:

Now that you have recharged your batteries it is time to move forward. We will now give you stamps.

When the children have handled the passports, they say:

We will now ask each of you to draw one or two questions each from the cookie jar. When you have memorised them, put them back again.

You draw two questions. When everyone has returned their questions to the cookie jar the child speaks.

Child: Does anyone want to read the instructions?

A guest reads from a card.

ORKULIND ASSIGNMENT II

Here the group splits in two, please follow your guide to the next destination. The questions are food for conversation on the road, remember to keep a safe distance between everyone.

You now leave with your guide and one other guest. Your guide gives you a choice of two routes to the next destination, which is a private home in the village. One route is via an asphalt road, the other one is over a meadow, a route that only the children walk. You choose the meadow. On the way you pick wildflowers.

Questions for the walk

What is under your feet?

What is beauty?

What is welcome?

What is not welcome?

When do you own yourself?

When do you own a land?

What do you leave behind?

What does the island tell you?

What do you tell the island?

Who owns you?

Who owns the island?

Where does your energy come from?

From where are you coming and where are you going?

Why does one leave?

Does the island follow you?

Which is better, to be firm or loose?

The home

Your guide leads you to the doorsteps of a house and rings the bell.

He leaves you by the door.

The host, a woman in her late thirties, invites you into her living room and brings you coffee and tea. While she is preparing the coffee her husband joins you and you chat about the weather. When the woman returns you give her the flowers and she laughs and thanks you for the flowers. Her husband takes the flowers and returns with them a moment later in a vase that he puts on the sofa table.

Host: Welcome. My name is Hrund, before I go any further it would be nice to hear a bit about you.

You and the other guest, tell your names, where you come from and your occupation. The host couple then introduce themselves and their family.

Host: Here on the table is a cookie jar with questions that we can answer together and hopefully they can lead us into interesting discussions. It would be great if we take turns in drawing from the jar.

You take turns in drawing questions from the jar and answer them. Some questions lead to long discussions, while others you tackle quickly, and occasional questions turn into a new question. After a while the child appears and tells you that it is time to move on. The host gives you a stamp in the passport. When you are leaving the house, your host says:

I want to give you one question from me personally for the journey.

She whispers a question in your ear:

What is the colour of hope?

Questions for the private home

What is special about the island?

How do you think about the island when you are away?

Can you describe a really good day on the island?

How has the island shaped you?

How have you shaped the island?

What does the island give you?

What do you give to the island?

What is the color of the island?

If the island was an animal, which animal would it be?

What does it mean to be an islander?

What does it mean to be a visitor?

When do you feel belonging?

When do you not feel belonging?

How do you fit in?

How do you stand out?

Which is better, to stand out or fit in?

Who is indispensable?

What are your life principles?

What values guide you?

The Church

The Child walks you to the last destination, the church. On the way your fellow traveller uses the opportunity to ask the child about things they want to know about Hrísey and the life on the island. Outside the church the child explains that this is where you part and shows you where the last cookie jar is placed inside the church by the entrance. You thank the child for the company and their service.

On entrance to the church, you see instructions on the wall above the tin jar.

CHURCH ASSIGNMENT I

Draw one or two questions from the jar, memorise them and put them back. Then sit down on a chair with a note, paper, and a pencil on them. Wait for everyone to enter the church before starting assignment II.

You find a chair and sit down. On the chair is a small piece of paper and a card with instructions.

CHURCH ASSIGNMENT II

Write your own question or contemplation on the paper.

When all the guests have arrived, you are ready to circulate the notes. Give your note to the person sitting in front of you. Accept the note from the person sitting behind you and read it, then pass it on to the person in front of you and accept the note from behind you. Keep passing on notes and reading them until you get your own note back. Then put your note in the cookie jar, stamp your passport and walk to the harbour and find the toll guard.

You observe the last guest enter and find their seats. You write your note, and you sense the concentration while the other guests are thinking and writing. Then you feel a tap on your shoulder followed by a note, and you hand your own note to the person in front. Then you start to get each note after the other. To start with, the movement is insecure and clumsy but gradually the action becomes smoother. When you get your own note, you wait. The door opens and people start to leave the church. When you feel it is your turn, you leave your note in the jar and stamp your pass.

Questions for the church

What was the purpose of your last visit to a church?

What meaning has a church to you?

What other places have the same meaning as churches?

Where do you seek your strength?

What is the most soothing word someone has given to you?

What is the best encouragement?

What is your most urgent need?

What do you want to thank for?

What unites?

What divides?

Who cares about you?

Whom do you care about?

Whom do you depend upon?

Who depends on you?

What is the nature of things that unite us?

What is the nature of things that divide us?

What makes you the person you are right now?

Selected notes from the guests

I take responsibility for myself and am grateful for everything.

There is strength in joy.

I think it is good to be here and now on this island, with others, to reflect and talk about ourselves. In peace.

Is there a golden power source under the island or is it not?

Life is not marked by the times we are pushed to the limit.

Existence is within me.

Where is the dream?

Live in the now.

This has been a pleasant afternoon.

Partly meditation

Partly inspiration

Partly a gift

What is it that splits us? Conflict.

What is lacking in your life?

Is peace to be found here and now?

Cultivate friendship with acceptance and love – also with yourself.

How wonderful it is to be open towards new experiences.

The best words of comfort I have received are “I know that you are a good person”.

What is it that gives you joy?

What is faith?

What is peace too you?

Joy (drawing)

What is your connection to your surroundings?

I want to thank for the still wind.

How is connection created?

Things that split people are things that feeds the ego.

To walk around Hrísey brings forth peace of the mind.

I count on myself, my partner, family, and friends. I am a rich person.

What is the best comfort? To think that there is always someone with you in the heart.

The search for happiness gives results especially if you accept challenges and allow yourself to enter things that come to you. Life is wonderful

This was just amazing!

To be kind to one another.

This was just an incredible journey.

Is there anything to eat?

Is this contemplation important enough?

The Pier

You walk slowly towards the pier in an unregular stream of guests coming from the church. You place yourself at the end of the line to the toll guard, that sits by the table with paper stacks and stamps. When you reach the table, she speaks to you.

Toll guard: What was your personal mission during the journey?
Did you succeed?

You tell her about the flower mission.

Congratulations, you have completed your mission successfully.
Here you have the last stamp.

The toll guard stamps your passport.

I invite you to embark on the boat. Your assignment is accomplished, and the performance is over.
Thank you for participating. Have a safe journey.

You embark the ferry. On board you get a questionnaire and a pencil. The boat starts moving and before you know the island is far behind. You may exchange experiences with your fellow travellers about the journey as you fill in your feedback on the paper. Before docking at Árskógssandur the toll guard collects your feedback and thanks you for your participation.

And your journey continues...