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A questionnaire for revolutionaries

BY BYRON WOODS

On Monday night in search of different answers to the present political crisis, the audience was presented with a questionnaire administered through choreography: the world premiere of **David Dorfman's *Underground*.**

The title itself references the Weather Underground, the name of one of the premier groups of radical activists during the 1960s. In the middle of *Underground*, Dorfman delivers from stage what he terms "a first communique from a huge fan" of the group.

After admitting he doesn't know if he could do what they did--actually, after beginning with the almost incongruous words "I think you guys are so cool"--the choreographer cites what he believes to be the Weathermen's greatest achievement: "You bombed 30 buildings without killing a single person."

After a moment's reflection, Dorfman admits, "Yes, you planned to kill people. But you didn't. And that's the part I like to think about."

On its face, Dorfman's monologue will likely strike some as too simple--and superficial--a reflection on the ethics of revolt. But the work surrounding it poses far more pointed questions to present-day war resisters, political protesters and activists of all stripes. Dancer Karl Rogers holds an imaginary microphone, impersonating a newsman as he poses a series of queries to individual dancers at some points, and to the audience at others. Seemingly generic questions like "Does what you do make a difference?" gradually give way to a list of inquiries like "Are you a pacifist?" and "In a violent world, can you fight for peace?"



Just a few questions, ma'am: Karl Rogers confronts Jennifer Nugent in David Dorfman's *Underground* at ADF.
Photo by Derek Anderson



On the run: Jennifer Nugent, Heather McArdle, Karl Rogers and the cast from David Dorfman's *Underground*.
Photo by Derek Anderson

These are leavened by seemingly more casual inquiries that bear the tinge of psychological profile: "Are birds happy?" "Do sunsets make you sad?"

The questions could just as easily be posed by an interrogator in an undisclosed location as by a newsmen on a set or city street. Future activists must be prepared to face them.

Apparently, they should also be prepared for the culture to misinterpret their actions--or forget them altogether. In a telling closing sequence, Molly Poerstel seems a statue of an activist, frozen in an evocative pose: her right palm flat on the ground, her left hand raised in a fist overhead. Her character is called back by an enthusiastic--and clueless--group of youth much more inclined to cheer her on than to actually assist her in her protest. Poerstel's character repeatedly slingshots between the front lines and a group that throws her back into the fray but never joins her. In this twist on Sisyphus, the activist increasingly looks back to question the people she's actually fighting for--and re-evaluate the cause.

Dorfman's work has few answers for the current generation. It does, however, present an incomplete set of potentially crucial questions.

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