

steirischer herbst 24/09 – 18/10/2009

All the Same – What is valid if everything is valid?

What is valid if everything is valid? We experience this paradox every day: On the one hand we live in a society whose constitution guarantees the equality of all people. On the other hand we know that equal opportunities are far from being a given even in highly industrialised nations. On the contrary, in many different respects the lower classes are finding it increasingly difficult to overcome social boundaries – not to mention the situation in other parts of the world. The equality postulate is thus becoming an increasingly distant goal. The economic development in recent years and decades has accelerated this widening of the social gap to an extent that we are sensing more and more clearly that nothing is equal any more, that there is not enough sameness in society any more, and that certain values are only valid for a few people. Based on the theme of "All the Same", the 2009 steirischer herbst plays with this notion in all its connotations – from indifference as lack of interest to equality as utopia and everyday challenge.

A temple stands at the beginning of the festival like a portal. A "Temple of Reason", developed by **Theater im Bahnhof, raumlaborberlin** and **steirischer herbst**, built for the **opening of steirischer herbst 2009** in the Helmut List Halle. This is a place for questioning routines in life, learning new skills, marvelling, contradicting, repeating, measuring and giving answers. However, the priests in this Temple of Reason are all representatives. What is representation, what is authenticity? What is certain is that **Phantom Ghost** (Dirk von Lowtzow and Thies Mynter) will be giving an exclusive performance from their album "Thrown out of Drama School" on this opening evening.

A two-year exhibition project curated by **Sabine Breitwieser** plays a special role in this year's programme. The **herbst exhibition** "Utopia and Monument" looks into the question of the validity of art in the increasingly privatised and monitored public space. Provocatively it focuses the discussion on two concepts that have largely disappeared from the debate on the public sphere: utopia as a space of possibility and the monument as a space of memory.

As its **festival centre**, steirischer herbst 2009 is occupying the Orpheum in Graz. Architects Michael Rieper and Siegfried Frank (**MVD Austria | frank, rieber**) have built a "Schauhaus" on the front of the building, thus temporarily concealing the entire face of the old familiar concert centre behind a public platform for communication and confrontation. The show house offers access to numerous actions, activities and events but also to the box office, the information desk, the terrace, the Club and – last but not least – the sun deck.

The large stage of the Orpheum is also the central theatre venue for this year's festival. The opening production "Radio Muezzin" by **Stefan Kaegi / Rimini Protokoll** – known and internationally acclaimed for their documentary theatre – puts people on stage who feature as a cliché, if at all, in the heated debates on Islam: four Egyptian muezzins. They are the protagonists in a reconstruction of their own life, self-exponents of a religious culture whose many faces are often reduced to simple negative stereotypes in Europe.

"you are here" by the **deepblue** ensemble embarks in turn on a friendly journey into the inner workings of theatre at Dom im Berg. Poetic and fleet of foot, they join with us to explore the mechanisms of theatre as a black box in the double sense. The choreographic video installation

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“dead reckoning” by the internationally renowned Austrian choreographer **Philipp Gehmacher** and video artist **Vladimir Miller** opens up a very different space, near and yet distant.

In a very unusual way, the young Danish choreographer **Mette Ingvartsen** links the challenging tradition of conceptual dance with the playful curiosity of contemporary culture. She presents two premières at MUMUTH on the second weekend of the festival: While in “GIANT CITY” she explores emotions, intensities, speeds and forms of expression of nomadic bodies, in the second piece, “evaporated landscapes”, she creates a landscape devoid of people.

“Laughter” by **Antonia Baehr** is a mixture of experimental set-up, lecture, yet also very physical performance. Based on “laughter scores” written for her, the choreographer, director and performer questions the phenomenon of laughter as an individual and unique distinctive feature. At long last the legendary British **Forced Entertainment** theatre company is visiting steirischer herbst – with “Void Story”, a black-humoured and always ambiguous photo-novel: A couple suddenly thrown out of their flat and their accustomed life flees through a disturbingly hostile world: a flight that feels like science fiction of the dark, mysterious kind.

In addition to the **herbst exhibition** “Utopia and Monument”, some other projects also deal with the public space this year. “Annenviertel. The Art of Urban Intervention” by < **rotor** > explores the living conditions and changes in this socially complex district, while the **Institut für Kunst im öffentlichen Raum Steiermark** presents “(out)”, a project in which young Serbian artists formulate their questions and ponderings on their own identity in the urban space of Graz. The “talk talk” exhibition at **Kunstverein Medienturm** looks at the methods and techniques of interviewing in the context of contemporary art forms. **Camera Austria** is presenting “Democracies”, a series of documentary films, and other works by Artur Żmijewski, the first solo show by the Polish artist in Austria. Based on the very different positions of Adolf Loos and Siegfried Kracauer regarding the ornament, “Provisional Yoga” by **Grazer Kunstverein** examines the contradiction between universal design agendas and the aspect of individual scope. The exhibitions and discussions at “Real Energy World / NIGER DELTA” at **Forum Stadtpark** focus on the representation of catastrophes by looking at the concrete example of the ecological, social and humanitarian disaster caused by oil production in the Niger Delta. The theme of “All the Same”, the validity of value systems in our society, shows through in all of these and in other exhibition projects at steirischer herbst 2009 not mentioned here, allowing numerous concrete and associative links.

musikprotokoll features the piano project “Seven Last Words” and the special international performance project “Touch this Sound!”, along with concerts by the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, Klangforum Wien, and ensemble recherche, as well as premières by Olga Neuwirth, Bernhard Gander, Rebecca Saunders and Johannes Maria Staud.

As part of the herbst theory programme **Playing Field Research**, there will be a “Conference of Elective Affinities” with renowned international theorists in addition to the established workshops. The aim of this theoretical focusing of the theme “All the Same” is to foster a culture of diversity by independently answering questions of equality and validity, of standards and options in separate lectures. At the same time, however, it is also a matter of commitment and affirmation: for each guest is invited to this conference by the previous speaker.

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Argentinean director **Federico León** presents "Yo en el futuro" ("Me in the future") on stage, an astonishing generation-mirror game reminiscent of fifties cinema. Author, director and actress **Lola Arias**, also from Buenos Aires, is billing for the second time at steirischer herbst – and her play "Mi Vida Después" ("My life after") also revolves around generation relations: With the aid of photos, letters, tapes and memories, six actors reconstruct the very different youth of their parents during the military junta. Arias condenses these true personal stories into a poetic, harsh and yet confident evening of theatre. Choreographer **Hooman Sharifi** of Iranian descent operates in the realm between theatre, dance and visual arts; for him, unlike hardly any other contemporary choreographer, the motto is "art is politics". The project "Lingering of an earlier event" tells the story of a country that tries not to go to war. **Berlin**, the Belgian multimedia artist's group, specialised in theatrical city portraits and billing at last year's steirischer herbst with their "Bonanza" installation, take their own idealised childhood memories of Moscow's national circus as the starting point for their research, and let cleaners, political activists, millionaires and acrobats tell of their Moscow. The result – on six movable screens and accompanied live by a string quartet and a pianist – is "Moscow", a musical film portrait of the city that will be showing in a specially designed tent at the Volksgarten in Graz to round off the steirischer herbst festival.

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