

steirischer herbst 2007

20/09 – 14/10/2007

Close Enough

“Close enough” describes a dynamic state, a moment in time: Being close enough – that is yearning, movement towards and away from each other. In love, in all relationships: Never close enough and then again too close. In geopolitics: Europe that is growing closer together, Africa that is drawing closer, the economic closeness of the globalised world. And in art: Art touches us when it repels or holds us, but also when it throws us back on ourselves, on a moment, a memory, a repressed occurrence perhaps. A fleeting sense of closeness. Or, on the other hand, abstract realisation, a premonition of clarity, sudden comprehension.

This too much and too little, this never being right, this paradox that is at the same time the driving force of interpersonal, political, artistic and performative force and motivation, is the leitmotif of steirischer herbst, the central thread that runs through the festival.

“Close enough” is an aspect of various theatre, dance and performance works: “That Night Follows Day”, a project by style-forming British Forced Entertainment author and director **Tim Etchells** together with the Belgian **Victoria** theatre, for example, is based on observations of how the adult world shapes that of children. A play for adults, performed by children. In “reportable portraits”, choreographer duo **deufert + plischke**, who see themselves as an artist twin, focus their analysis on this closest of relationships. The extremely entertaining and sceney production “No Dice” by the New York Off-Off Broadway ensemble **Nature Theater of Oklahoma** is based on more than one hundred hours of phone conversations discussing the last questions of art, religion and work as well as more personal concerns. Sputnik space travel is the starting point from where the young performance collective **andcompany&Co.** begin their story, a different story of the twentieth century about the forgotten promise of a past future. This time around, the Graz-based **Theater im Bahnhof** is performing on a vast field on the grounds of the Reininghaus brewery: “Between bones and rockets” brings together stray dogs, a handball team, a porn film script, two Kazachs, and a bone identifier. In the work by the Italian artist group **Orthographe**, the audience finds itself sitting in the middle of a camera, a large camera obscura. The actual performance takes place outside the box, we only see the projected image. Reversed and upside-down. In “disappear or Night is abolished”, **Gerhild Steinbuch** (director **Roger Vontobel**) sets out in search of the definition, the creation of identity, starting out from the Antigone myth. For the first time in Europe, the festival will be featuring three short productions by the young Argentinean choreographer **Lola Arias**. In the trilogy “Striptease”, “Sueño con revólver” (Revolver dream), and “El amor es un francotirador” (Love is a sniper), she presents six biographies at a crossroads.

But the leitmotif of steirischer herbst also runs through the festival’s exhibitions: “Active Agents” at **Kunstverein Medienturm**, for example, focuses on the relationship of corporeality and technology, that has undergone marked change, or come close, in recent years. Its “Volksgarten” exhibition sets out to give a comprehensive portrait of the districts of Lend and Gries, at the intersection of which **Kunsthau Graz** is located. The exhibition explores systems of

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identification and strategies of belonging within certain communities in this multicultural setting. The exhibition "What We Bought" at **Camera Austria** shows the excesses of consumer and throw-away society – albeit not as a criticism of capitalism, but rather with an affirmative fascination with the never-ending flow of commodities, with mass and surface, staged with a disconcerting hyperpresence of the real. How close to or how far away is a building from those who planned it and those who spend their everyday life in it? **Haus der Architektur Graz** looks into this question in "Architecture 24/7": Architects are asked to take one picture of their buildings that shows them in use. The occupants will then comment on these pictures. "Un/Fair Trade" at **Neue Galerie Graz** combines art and science in a newsroom scenario of tightly packed images of a different kind of commerce – fair trade or, more fundamentally, fair exchange. Further exhibitions and projects, for example at **Grazer Kunstverein, Forum Stadtpark, Minoriten-Galerien Graz im Priesterseminar**, by <rotor> **association for contemporary art**, by **kultur.at: verein für medienarchitecture** in Gleisdorf, and the **Pavel House** in Laafeld go to round off the picture – with a wide range of different curatorial approaches.

Spielfeldforschung (Playing field research), the theoretical backbone of the festival, focuses on the "close enough" theme from very different angles: In the **herbst academy** workshops or in the major "Close enough – Walking Conference" set to take place on Oct. 13. The key **musikprotokoll** productions this year also operate in the wide field between "close enough" and "too close" and between the poles of a conceptual immediacy, on the one hand, and an emotional immediacy, on the other. The opening production of steirischer herbst 2007 is one example: With "Closed enough", **Staalplaat Soundsystem** will be coaxing sound out of the venue itself, the Helmut List Hall.

The leitmotif can be found – sometimes more obvious, sometimes more concealed – in the numerous festival productions that, again this year, are almost all productions or co-productions of steirischer herbst. This is not without risk – after all, you never know in advance where the artistic process will take you. But it is important to uphold this tradition: to enable and not just present art. Once again, this gives rise to numerous works that will subsequently be on show around Europe and beyond.

40 years of steirischer herbst

Forty years – that is remarkable for an interdisciplinary festival of contemporary art and by no means a given. A particularly remarkable fact is that the public has accepted and continues to accept the herbst festival, for all its unwieldiness, agitation and challenge, as a key factor of cultural identification.

At the same time, herbst is too young for wistful reflection, formal speeches and memorial exhibitions. Instead, we are seizing this occasion for more general considerations: Some of the works on show examine our stance towards earlier avant-garde positions.

At well over forty, the Norwegian **Baktruppen**, among the most original European theatre ensembles, decided to devote themselves to dance – and to a piece by Merce Cunningham, to boot. In "tempo 76", **Mathilde Monnier**, one of the greatest choreographers of our time, looks into the possibilities of unison, synchronised movement, a form of expression usually shunned in contemporary dance. And in "feminine delight", **Frans Poelstra, Robert Steijn** and **Martin**

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Siewert set out on the tracks of Martha Graham and Trisha Brown, following the paths of the work and life of those women who helped to establish modern dance.

In the forty years of its existence, the question of the relationship between art and the public sphere has always been of key importance to steirischer herbst: In the special herbst exhibition "Reading Back And Forth" at **stadtmuseumgraz**, seven artists look into these questions and develop specific interpretations of the history and present situation of the festival. The GPS-controlled audio tour by artist duo **plan b** follows the traces that the festival has left in the minds of visitors and collaborators. In "Fortysomething", forty individuals talk about memories of events, happenings, performances, concerts and art works created in the public space in Graz in the course of the festival. Public participation is also to the fore in another key project at this year's festival: **Hannah Hurtzig** and the **Mobile Akademie** gather one hundred experts on the subject of the ambivalent practice of giving gifts. These experts will pass on their knowledge to interested visitors in a "Blackmarket for useful knowledge and non-knowledge No. 8" on Sept. 30. The result is a hallucinatory adult education centre in which knowledge, life/survival strategies change hands in a non-institutional manner.

The Theatre

Scrutinising its own aesthetic positions but also its own structures is one of the essential traits of steirischer herbst. For the development of our festival centre, some forty international artists, theorists and architects took up the invitation of the Swedish artist collective **International Festival** to examine the fundamental principles of theatre as architecture in an eighteen-month process. The result is not so much an architectural spectacle as an attempt to comprehend the social event that is theatre as architecture itself. The Theatre sees itself as a performance and transforms everything about theatre that is not usually theatre into theatre – from the location in Karmeliterplatz square to the temporary building to the hopefully active discussions and celebrations.

press-contact

Heide Oberegger
steirischer herbst press office
Sackstraße 17 / 8010 Graz / Austria

t +43 316 823 007 61
presse@steirischerherbst.at

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