Johannes Paul Raether: Interview with Johannes Paul Raether

JPR: I am convinced that the term “public” is one of the most useless constructions of the cultural industry. “Performer” and “public” seem to me like mere decimals – terms for subject and object forms, which I perceive as idealised and displaced. For me, this is important to note, because in my work – speaking in terms of theatre – it’s the fourth wall, the apparent fiction of an insurmountable barrier between the character and audience which you get in naturalistic theatre, simply isn’t there. Indeed, my work functions in the opposite way: the characters are kind of other-worldly, obviously fictitious and offensively different in appearance and features, yet they form an offensive “we” – a unity between those present. Their existence doesn’t work without those present, so that the illusionary moment of a sharp separation, such as in theatre, is reversed by my art pieces through a moment of constructed solidarity.

AY: Your practice is also based on continuous editing of the texts, which are developed through different performances. What is the role of text in your practice?

JPR: I use text in its specific form as the spoken word. For me, the aspect of text from which speech comes has the greatest interest. The texts I use are therefore more like headings – theoretical figures, fragments of political standpoints and their inter-relationships – thus not really ‘complete’ texts. I accuse a great deal of ‘political art’ of ‘textualism’: it doesn’t take the text itself seriously as a physical instrument, namely as an instrument of political action, but puts it simply as a positivist leaflet.

AY: What is your expectation from the audience in Stuttgart?

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JPR: I could say that I feel the same way about my characters as parents do about their biological children. They are a part of me. Yet at the same time, as the author of their existence, I don’t have full control of their needs. For me, it is productive to consider my characters as a kind of higher authority. The fictionalisation of authority interests me, be it only that of the author towards his own work, because it puts under pressure the belief in the autonomy of art: the contemporary fetish of creativity and the idealised role of the artist in society. I find it thrilling to portray these processes as involuntary, withdrawn from my control, consciously mystifying and evidently constructed. By picturing, criticising and commenting the work of the State and market authorities whilst simultaneously putting my own authority under pressure, I want to overturn societal conventions. If I use authoritarian characters at the same moment when they are not at all credible, I am attempting to create a moment where authority itself is brought into question.

AY: Our conversations started with an interest in working in the public space, and later we were convinced about the fact that public space today is not only outside of the institution. This brought a need for a new work, and you came up with a poster, which would/could be seen in the city environment and linking you to the internet at the same time. How is your experience?

JPR: I am convinced that all my characters have to go out into the public space at a certain time – like children, who have to grow up and are confronted with the requirement of being ‘valuable members’ of this society. However, there are some problems with the appearance of my characters on the street or in what we normally call a “public domain”. Firstly, the public domain is itself an institution, or as Marx said, “a solidification of political sentiment”. Secondly, the conditions of this institution are very constric tive, particularly nowadays and – in contrast to Berlin – particularly so in Stuttgart. Consumption and entertainment are the cultural exchange processes that are legitimate in the public sphere, yet basic information and some forms of education do not occur in public spaces. If you consider that the desire of my characters is to politically inspire other people, to engage and productively unsettle, then it must be said that the institution of the public domain is initially a hostile place for my characters.

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Adnan Yildiz: For me, one of the most challenging questions in our discussion process was about how to develop an installation and a performance with such a performance based practice. So, instead of an opening, we decided that we will have three event based structures that activate the exhibition process?

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editted by: Mariene Laube

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