

On "They Called it the XXth Century (from The Impostor in the Waiting Room)" Christine Peters

"All displaced persons, exiles, deportees, refugees, deracinated, nomads have in common two sighs, two poignant memories: their dead and their language".

This citation, taken from Derrida's book "Of Hospitality" was one starting point my reflections on performance for the Theater der Welt programme.

The Impostor in the Waiting Room by Raqs Media Collective, their figure of the trickster is one of a witty survivor, and a disguised nomad, who is "capable of altering an angle of perception, or a trajectory of thought capable of reconfiguring normative discourses. He performs the roles of thief, shape-shifter, agent provocateur or liar - a liar more in the sense of how Oscar Wilde defined him = as one who uses his imagination". 1

The waiting room - or, as Raqs Media Collective put it = "the antechamber to modernity, consisting of small enclaves that subsist in the shadow of the edifices of legality" - is not a space of hospitality at all, but one of indifference, a mute zone, a temporary, transitory, provisional and fleeting space which not only demands flexibility but also the strength & capacity to re-structure and re-collect memory and to re-invent identity, a space in which one is dependent on chance.

The Impostor in the Waiting Room is about the dreams of shadow existences in disguise, about waiting and biding time. There is no such thing as "wasting" time, because there is nothing else to do anyway. Because Godot might show up very soon. And if not, maybe next day and then finally, "real life" will start, dreams will become true. -

If we look back to Homer's Odyssee as a classical example for a nomadic art of storytelling and combine it with the Impostor or trickster subject as a performed narrative that does not offer an explanation, but allows the listener / watcher to reflect upon its meaning, we get close to the very nature of performance itself:

In search of the wandering minstrel that fills the memories of humankind, we find in performance today nomadic existences that tell of pain, rage, mourning, confusion, infatuation, affection, love – in short, of feelings – and turn these into compelling events.

Perhaps this is precisely why such terms as "living archive" or "collective memory" are so tenacious. Performance as a transitory medium refers to the age-old theatre question of meaning and non-meaning, permanence and transience, life and death, place and utopia, standstill and movement, confirmation and questioning, affirmation and experience.

It is the ideally permeable vehicle and store for an emotional and intellectual state that is inherent in art – as a form of potential, as a utopia, as a dream.

Concerning the pieces I've seen before by Raqs Media Collective I was both emotionally touched and intellectually challenged - their storytelling and text

writing is both poetic and theoretically exquisite, their resources politically fuelled and their works show an elaborate state of social and artistic responsibility. Moreover, what I especially like in their work is, that they smash back responsibility to the viewer and reader by challenging his/her imagination.

Or - and to finish with - as Walter Benjamin says "Actually it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it...It is left up to (the reader) to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks."² "Things left behind, when found, unravel. Memories travel. Inscriptions survive" .

----- 1 From the essay "Embodied subversion" by
Jean Fisher, in: Live Art and Performance, Tate Modern, 2004 2 Walter Benjamin,
"The storyteller", Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn, NY, 1968, p.89