

## steirischer herbst 2008

### Strategies for avoiding misfortune

Write lists: that's what you do when you've lost track. When you want to sort out possible courses of action or get some order into a chaos.

The search for "Strategies for avoiding misfortune" (the theme of this year's steirischer herbst) generated such a list. The array of one hundred concepts includes switching off, liberating, criticising, blowing up, recycling and moving together. It is in the nature of lists that they sometimes appear paradoxical. At first glance, this list also appears to have been scribbled on a beer mat on the spur of the moment – but in fact it can be applied to many spheres of existence: It was the inspiration and starting point for many discussions with artists and colleagues. For where political philosophy, neurology and aesthetic theory astonishingly all insist on dismissing conscious, controlled action and causal action as naive, more and more people are nevertheless demanding the right to the working hypothesis that, by acting, we can, if not find happiness, then at least develop "strategies for avoiding misfortune". Our rescue attempt oscillates between pragmatism and utopia, and the modesty of the formulation does not imply making do, but rather the pragmatic will not to be held back by fundamental disputes concerning a far, far distant future. "Strategies for avoiding misfortune" stands for a sceptical belief in the possibilities of action. Action between image and deed, post-ironic but not un-ironic, active but not activist. Pathos as an everyday reality: It is still about doing something, moving something, changing something. But how can we escape the paralysis of thought and action in view of the claim that the age of (often abused) utopias and grand social visions is a thing of the past? Does our power of discernment not hone itself precisely in the little, manageable areas of life?

Like our list, the programme also brings together approaches, interventions and creative options large and small – there will be opportunities throughout to reflect on aspects of action or to be an actor yourself, demonstrated from the outset by the festival opening: **Christoph Steinbrener** and **Rainer Dempf** are making the herbst opening a subject in itself, as a social event, along with all the guests. The "Wagner-Biro-Straße public baths", the Helmut-List-Halle as a walk-in sculpture in which individual initiative and co-operation are required, or at least helpful, and that is appropriated by the audience and adapted to its needs.

The artist-architects from **raumlaborberlin** pick up the idea of the disaster for the 2008 festival centre and – inspired by a sequence from Antonioni's film classic "Zabriskie Point" – build their own version of an explosion outside and into the empty historical Joanneum museum building. The **endlich Katzensatz – Wurstenden 14,90 (ekw 14,90)** group founded in Graz will set up a "substitute herbst camp" there – prepared for all unforeseen occurrences that might jeopardise the smooth running of the festival. For every artistic contribution on the programme there is a substitute event: associative transformations of the works originally scheduled, that will be used if a disaster was already unavoidable. In a separate wing of the Joanneum, the artist duo **SIGNA** will create a psychiatric hospital from the fifties. During the ten-day non-stop performance installation, visitors will become part of the hospital as patients and the object of the "Complex Nord Method" for amnesia patients. The constructed reality gradually unmasks taboos regarding disease, vulnerability, dependency and power structures. And becomes a theatre that is so comprehensive that the question of fiction and reality loses all relevance.

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Five Alsatians and a dog handler, a psychoanalyst, a philosopher, a former legionnaire. This is the strange personnel that French theatre artist **Michel Schweizer** brings together on stage in "Bleib opus #3" to discuss fundamental questions of future social orders against the backdrop of the Davos World Economic Forum in 2001. In "Bonanza" by Belgian artist group **Berlin** only seven inhabitants are left. A microcosm, a world of its own, that is portrayed in this film installation – along with the seven loners damned to live in a community, with their different strategies of finding happiness but still unable to avoid misfortune. "Dance #1 / Driftworks" by Hungarian choreographer **Eszter Salamon** is a constant game with our perceptions and a serious search for the meaning and necessity of movement. The **Nature Theater of Oklahoma** are back in town: In "Poetics: A Ballet Brut", in just over one hour the young ensemble of performers with big hearts, big personalities and practically no formal dance training develop a show that takes up more space than the entire auditorium.

The third festival weekend focuses on two notable premières: In "1 poor and one 0" the complex line-up of the **BADco.** theatre ensemble from Zagreb (consisting of performers, dancers, choreographers, directors, philosophers, etc.) returns to the scene of the first film ever shot – "Workers Leaving The Lumière Factory": the factory gates. And **Meg Stuart**, one of the most important contemporary choreographers, is in Graz for the first time: Together with her company, she develops a piece for a venue that is no conventional theatre space: the big, empty Helmut-List-Halle. What she is developing under the working title "Project.08" up to the moment of the première in Graz is an evening of dance set between celebration and crisis. Additionally at this weekend, "Jerk", a solo performance for one puppeteer, by the young director **Gisèle Vienne** can be seen. She has joined with controversial US writer Dennis Cooper to investigate the crimes of American serial killer Dean Corll und developed a radical theatre project, where the horror of fantasy and the horror of reality are indistinguishable.

Sceptical of the possibilities of action, this year's steirischer herbst exhibition "Common Affairs" (curated by Reinhard Braun) focuses on the theme of the festival; identifying the difficulty of even drafting, let alone implementing suitable possibilities of action. The participating artists pose very contrary questions concerning the possibilities of distinguishing or co-conceiving subjective action and political contexts. American artist **Noah Fischer** sets out in search of an inspiring approach to living with global warming with his "Pop Ark" installation, a juke box-style lo-tech machine and a creative zone conceived as a commune.

The leitmotif of steirischer herbst also runs through the festival's other exhibitions: "(Love) will tear us" looks into the secret potential of love at **Kunstverein Medienturm**. At **Camera Austria**, Elke Krystufek will be "Responsible for a certain amount of Luck", while **HDA Haus der Architektur Graz** is initiating a temporary architectural intervention in Andreas-Hofer-Platz, Graz. Happiness in life for everyone! That fails, stops at the other, the unknown, the unfamiliar. "tit for tat" – a project by **Afro-Asiatisches Institut, ISOP, KHG, Kulturzentrum bei den Minoriten** and **< rotor >** – works on counter-images for thinking and acting outside of national, cultural and religious limitations. Janez Janša is the name of Slovenia's economic-liberal, conservative prime minister – and that has also been the name of three well-known Slovenian artists since summer 2007; officially and with all the necessary papers. These documents are now on show for the first time as art objects in

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"Name" at **Forum Stadtpark**. On the basis of this exhibition, Forum Stadtpark is also carrying out "Winter in Autumn", a project that creates a counterpoint in the public space to the defined local political position. Projects at **ESC im Labor**, **Grazer Kunstverein** and **Neue Galerie Graz** round off the exhibition programme. The latter is presenting the "The African Twintowers" installation by film- and theatre-maker Christoph Schlingensief.

"Strategies for avoiding misfortune" is also the focus of the **Walking Conference** on 11/10. Divided into various themed walks, participants will stroll around the city, looking for and examining such strategies in talks, lectures and discussions: as a theoretical event that is itself a theoretical strategy. **musikprotokoll** is presenting new major themes this year: For the first time, Graz will be part of the "European Cities of Advanced Sound" project (ECAS), and co-operations featuring artists from Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Palestine will be presented in "... as seen from the middle of east ...". For six years the Vienna-based **Fritzpunkt** theatre collective has been working on the radical, complex work of Styrian author Marianne Fritz who died last October. At steirischer herbst they will be staging an eleven-day non-stop reading at Medienkunstlabor and in the public spaces of Graz.

The final weekend pinpoints the theme once again: Seven international writers have been commissioned by steirischer herbst to create short theatre texts on the subject of "Saving the world" as an extreme metaphor for the consciously naive belief in the possibilities of action. Three will be put on stage at this year's festival by equally young, international theatre-makers with very different individual styles. "Biffy and Wutz" by Swiss author **Lukas Bärfuss** will be produced as a film/theatre melodrama by young film-maker **Noël Dernesch**. Argentinean director **Mariano Pensotti** is staging the text "no-one's colleague" by Graz-based playwright **Johannes Schrettle**, and the Dutch-Belgian actor's collective **Wunderbaum** will be putting **Ivana Sajko's** "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" on stage. steirischer herbst closes, finally, with an opera production: "Melancholia", **Jon Fosse's** much-praised novel about the painter Lars Hertervig plunges into the world of pathological depression and manic work. Graz-based composer **Georg Friedrich Haas** translates this story into a hypnotic musical form that is transposed into disconcerting images by his favoured director, Frenchman Stanislas Nordey.

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