

On „We - a solo“

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Exercises in Group Dynamics with Andreas Liebmann

(...)

Liebmann presents [his piece] in a gymnastics outfit with a little belt, reminiscent of 1920s fashion, i.e. the decade when community became ideology – from the leftist workers’ movement to the Nazis. Liebmann plays with such associations when he deconstructs individual terms like group, leader and admiration during the discursive parts of his solo. His stories about group excursions and boating accidents are also astute; the performer projects them onto fluttering flags, accompanied by his cello playing – a silent movie without an image, so to speak. Thus, Liebmann trusts our imagination entirely – he even repeatedly instructs us to join him on stage inside our heads and participate in his exercises in group dynamics. Are our experiences of community, our feelings of belonging all confined to our heads, then? But what about our families, which – according to Liebmann – weld us to people who we would probably never have met without these blood ties? These questions, the very ones that Liebmann poses with his solo, make We so remarkable.

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Translation: Alexa Nieschlag

Portrait in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung

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Theater as a Communication Machine

Stage Director and Performer Andreas Liebmann from Zurich Presents Wir – ein Solo at the Rote Fabrik

Wir – ein Solo (We – a Solo), recently shown in Berlin and currently at the Rote Fabrik in Zurich, explores the subject of the group on various levels, all the way to the state. The basic assumption of Andreas Liebmann’s piece is that groups result from imaginings. By Claudio Steiger It’s the last cool evening before early summer arrives. Andreas Liebmann appears in front of the lake panorama of the Rote Fabrik, disarmingly unpretentious already in his greeting. A few words are sufficient to know that here is a man who understands people, exchange, theater as dialogue.

Feeling one’s way around the world

*Interaction is a central pillar of Liebmann’s dramatic and performance works, ever since he joined the collective “Gaststube” in Berlin. “Theater is a communication machine. It can initiate things – like a stone thrown into water creates waves,” says Liebmann. This attitude has become his principle, not only for interview-based productions like *Malade Public* (2011) and *Zornbörse* (2008). “One should open up to the people who live where one is performing. I create a product that is on the move,” declares Liebmann, who moves right along with it, with Berlin as his home base. After working as an actor during the 1990s (including for Hesse/Müller at the Neumarkt), projects took him to Ohio, Bordeaux, Vienna, Freiburg and La Paz, among others. His most recent play, bearing the poetic but bulky title *Emotional Training for Worldwide Bodies*, was performed in seven German and Swiss cities.*

*What drives Liebmann, who has recently turned 40? It is the question of the dialectics of group and individual, engagement and ennui, love and indifference. *Emotional Training* used acrobatic elements to explore the “disparity between being totally informed and being emotionally involved” – which has been a topic not only since the advent of Web 2.0*

"We were interested in finding out whether the empathy dogma can be fulfilled," Liebmann says. The question was: how do emotions and their physicality relate to the digital abstractness of information? "Can one love the entire world? Perhaps thinking is better," says Liebmann. Wir – ein Solo, recently shown in Berlin and currently presented at the Rote Fabrik, is a sequel for Emotional Training. Its subject is the group, "on several levels of zooming-in" – all the way to the state. The piece's basic assumption is that groups result "from imaginings". "If we keep telling ourselves that we are Swiss, we will start believing it at some point," says Liebmann. Such analysis of attributions tends to lead Liebmann away from direct political statements. "During recent years, there has been much talk of humanity again. I am very sympathetic to this metaphor, I just don't know whether it works," says Liebmann, who has performed for asylum seekers and supported the antiglobalization protest of Attac.

"For example, I have studied the issue of basic income. But just saying in a play that a basic income is a good thing, that would seem totally stupid to me. I would then also need some traps and contradictions." In the era of post-dramatic theater, however – where the political element is not measured so much in terms of content, but of means – Liebmann's projects still seem engaged and activist.

"I approach something that concerns not just my most intimate circle, and I put a magnifying glass to it – in that sense, it seems to me, my work is political," he says himself. Either way, Wir – ein Solo, conceived as a dialogue (and including collaborators Martin Clausen, Beatrice Fleischlin, Augustin Maurs, Julia Schreiner and others), and its sequel project Hängengeblieben (Left over) pursue a policy of encounters: from May 3 to 24, Liebmann will be present in front of the Rote Fabrik, awaiting its visitors and their stories. The material collected in this way will be turned into another performance on May 25. What remains in the end – the individual or the group? Wir – ein Solo can be expected to keep things hanging in the balance. There may be a basic tendency, though. "I once did an exercise where we told the actors that they should move in some way – just not like anybody else," Liebmann recounts. "Of course it was impossible. A good image against individualism." At the same time, he says that a group is always a precarious situation. "And if one pretends that it is a stable situation, it gets dangerous – inwards as well as outwards." Recent history proves Liebmann right.

The performer as a citizen of the world

"Let us always depart and never arrive" – Jürgen von der Wense's motto, which can be rediscovered these days at the Fabriktheater, also seems befitting for Andreas Liebmann. Traversing the boundaries of municipal theaters and countries as a kind of boyish polymath of performance, Liebmann is not a Wutbürger, or angry citizen, but rather a citizen of the world, working with sound and physicality, but also capable of thought and reflection. His interventions are intellectual, but they do not succumb to the linguistic activism of "discourse theater" – instead, they are carefully constructed momentary edifices, erected with full consciousness of the strange and precarious nature of human communities. Is this perhaps slightly ambivalent, after the acid bath of post-modernism? Of course. And yet, is it non-cynical, suffused with energy and a radical concept of "we", where others keep saying "I" all the time? The answer is yes.

Zurich, Fabriktheater, May 2, 4 and 5.

Translation: Alexa Nieschlag