

FRÉDÉRIC MOSER AND PHILIPPE SCHWINGER

05.10.2011-31.10.2011

Cinema and Theatre – Referentiality in the Work of Frédéric Moser and Philippe Schwinger

Frédéric Moser and Philippe Schwinger draw on a repertoire of imagery that embraces media events and war reporting, but also independent film and fringe theatre. The last of these references is especially significant, not least because when the two artists began working together – and before they studied art – they were running the theatre company “l’atelier ici et maintenant” in Lausanne from 1988 to 1991. Working with theatrical spaces and modes of representation is therefore one of their distinctive hallmarks.

In “Capitulation Project” (2003), they take their cue from the play “Commune”, premiered in New York in 1971, where audience interaction was used to convey a massacre of Vietnamese civilians perpetrated by American soldiers during the Vietnam War. Although the artists have reconstructed the original stage situation for their remake, they have completely reworked the script. In other pieces, they reshape film sequences for the stage (as with the fragment from John Cassavetes’s “Opening Night”) or use the Monica Lewinsky affair (in “Unexpected Rules”) to initiate role play that observes human behaviour strategies. Screening these theatre-based works in the exhibition room, however, calls for more than the technical accessories of cinema. Recreating the stage situation is an important aspect of the installation. Firstly, using the empty stage to seat the spectator recognises the gap in time between the making and the viewing of the film. Secondly, exposing the conditions of production reconstructs that direct experience between audience and play that is unique to theatre. For this reason, works intended exclusively for cinematic presentation were selected for screening in the Berlinische Galerie.

Acting Facts (2003)

The work “Acting Facts” likewise centres on the Vietnamese massacre at My Lai. The enquiry launched in the United States in 1970 was a major catalyst behind declining public support for the Vietnam War among Americans. The events of the day, recited by an actor, are based on soldiers’ testimonies before the “Peers Commission”; the actor switches between narration and physical

performance. In this way, the film becomes a medium for communicating facts and at the same time a place for confronting an episode of war.

France, détours. Episode 1. Devoir et Déroute (2009/10)

In French primary schools, the text book “Le Tour de France par deux enfants” was not merely a standard reader, but played a key part in rooting the idea of the “Grande Nation” in the minds of children. In 1979 French television broadcast the documentary series “France/tour/détour/deux/enfants” by Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville. Taking the book as their reference, the film-makers interviewed two French children about their dreams and expectations of the future, but the result painted a quite different picture from the “Grande Nation” evoked by the school text. In the first work of their series to focus on France, Moser and Schwinger were inspired by Godard’s documentation in more than just the formal sense. They, too, use interviews to communicate with young people in the “problem neighbourhood” of Bellefontaine in Toulouse. Their questions do not refer explicitly to the pessimistic clichés fostered by the media and politicians in response to high youth unemployment and poor schooling. The answers, however, show how familiar these youngsters are with the clichés and how little they identify with them; rather, they are resisting a social and economic system that seeks to regulate people and increasingly prevents social groups from mixing.

Revival Paradise (2005)

“Revival Paradise” is a restaging of Jim Jarmusch’s “Stranger than Paradise” (1984), but set instead in present-day Poland. Many sequences in the film echo the action in the original, but the central theme has changed. “Revival Paradise” addresses cultural differences between the urban and rural populations in Poland, the transformations witnessed by the country since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the younger generation’s quest for new models to base their lives around.