

The RUHRORTER group

How and why were you founded, and what is the group's status now that it is connected to the PostHeimat network?

We already had initial talks about this in 2016 together with the Münchner Kammerspiele (Anne Schulz & Krystel Khoury). In 2017, we succeeded in organising the first joint meetings and workshops. This is also where the idea emerged to organise ourselves better and set up our desire for networking and opening up structurally. The goal was to share experiences, exchange knowledge, and discuss aesthetic issues and their political implications. This is how PostHeimat came into being.

Ruhrorter was founded more than a decade ago from a desire to return political work in theatre back onto the stage, to step back from the enormous expectation built up around theatre as a form of therapy, and to focus on rehearsals, on building a collectivity, on working with sites, spaces, and archives embodied by people and institutions in the Ruhr region – hence also our name, borrowed from the Ruhrorterstrasse between Duisburg, Oberhausen, and Mülheim, and also the site of the rehearsal spaces of the Theater an der Ruhr.

How do you describe the aims of your group – Some groups started years ago; have there been changes in their aim?

The group RUHRORTER now looks back on eleven years of artistic work on the complex themes of migration, flight, administration and law. Initially conceived as a theatre project, RUHRORTER gradually combined more and more elements of theatre, film, radio play and artistic installations to create space for the post-migrant realities in Mülheim an der Ruhr and the Ruhr region. It was and still is important to us not to limit the artistic activity to biographical-documentary approaches alone but to use the potential of fiction and improvisation.

In 2022, we celebrated our 10th anniversary with 1) an audio walk through the city centre of Mülheim an der Ruhr. We followed the voices and traces where our projects once took place or met people important to us. 2) an art installation, and 3) the opening of our archive. Unfortunately, we are still trying to obtain institutional funding and still have no planning security. Currently, we are focusing on our children's theatre group as well as on supporting the projects of former participants, such as

Yazan Abo Hassoun, who is now realizing his second project entitled “We are here” in Bochum and Mülheim an der Ruhr.

How do you describe your strategies, priorities and work aesthetics?

RUHRORTER has realised theatre and installation works with refugees since 2012, which at times and especially at the beginning have been accompanied by anthropological research and includes a children's theatre program. Consequently, the working approaches differ depending on the project. As already formulated above, however, all works have a politically formal claim in common. We do not want to reduce art with refugees to authenticity and documented biographies but rather expand it to include the artistic dimension and the political role of fiction.

Generally, our works occur in spaces unrelated to theatre or art performances. In recent years, we have performed in various abandoned and occupied places. Be it the former women's prison, an empty factory building, or the municipal library/media centre of the city of Mülheim an der Ruhr. The respective histories and relationships that made up these and other places become part of our work whenever possible. In this way, the theatre productions and art installations address the interwoven nature of urban and migration history in the Ruhr region and add contemporary images, languages and ideas to the sometimes historically significant places.

Another unifying element is the duration of the project. To meet the various demanding tasks that we set for ourselves as a group, we plan with work and rehearsal processes lasting several months. We consider such patient and open-ended processes as a requirement for creative exchange between the respective participants, which can then lead to interesting performances and presentations. We work continuously in cooperation with the Theater an der Ruhr, which supports us ideally and infrastructurally as far as possible.

What are the biggest challenges to your group?

As mentioned above, further work approaches arise from direct contact with refugees and their interest in working together or exploring new artistic ways. We are at a point where further interested people from our environment should be supported by us in realising theatre and art projects. Also, some former participants have already taken on tasks in the context of RUHRORTER, such as creating costume designs or directing a children's theatre group.

The RUHRORTER team would happily provide further advice and support, such as taking over the technical infrastructure and a large part of the administrative tasks. In any case, it was and is a great concern for us to offer practical help in the field in which we have professionalised ourselves and could only do so thanks to the help of third parties. One goal here would be to hand over the entire project to former group members, either in its entirety or for the most part. However, these approaches have been in the making for years or have not yet received the attention

they need to have an intensive impact on the overall project. For this purpose, we have tried several times and for years to obtain long-term structural funding in sufficient amounts. So far, we have been unsuccessful.

Which performances did you organise as part of PostHeimat?

“The hum of the laws” – a radio installation by RUHRORTER, March 21st, 2019

How does the Constitution (Grundgesetz) sound? Maybe poetic, auspicious, menacing? The audio installation “DAS SUMMEN DER GESETZE” (“The Buzz of Laws”) is devoted to the fundamental rights that secure the foundation of our coexistence. The Grundgesetz raises questions about dignity, freedom and personal development. It confidently states what seems natural these days: All human beings are equal before the law. The voices of newly arrived people and long-time residents, of international legal experts and translators, have their say. They talk about the beauty of the Constitution and its blind spots, about legal and injustice experiences. While the Grundgesetz was written for eternity, it tells of the continuous transformation of society. Together with the audience, RUHRORTER is conducting a major conversation at four locations in the Ruhr area, in which the effectiveness and limits of fundamental rights are discussed from different perspectives. Original sound recordings, audio and visual documents, as well as atmospheres of everyday togetherness, sounds of fear and dreaming, are condensing and swelling to a buzz of laws.

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