



Karin Cerny
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It reveals the invisible

OB:SCENA "[...]" is a thrilling encounter between composer Georges Aperghis, choreographer Willi Dorner, and experimental film-maker Martin Arnold. What all three have in common is their how they make empty space speak.

Imagine choreographer Willi Dorner is a therapist who, in his innermost personality is a level-headed engineer. Or maybe the other way around: he is a binary code researcher fascinated by the power of the sign. In any case, it would help to imagine a person working at the interface where contradictions collide. Precisely at this point is where Dorner cuts in with his equally smart, sensual and witty dance essays.

One of the contradictions Dorner researches is how we perceive our bodies and how its appearance, as an image, is seen by others. How could it be possible that others see our body as a clearly distinguishable and self-contained entity, while at the same time, we are not quite able to grasp it as a whole ourselves? We live with the contradiction that we experience our body from within or through contact with others, but are never able to view it as a full image from outside our bodies. In Mazy (1999), one of the choreographer's most well known pieces, a series of solos and duets, reflects through dance on "the characteristic seclusion of people from themselves."

Willi Dorner is not alone as he ponders questions involving images of the body, paradigms of perception, and the conveyance of images, for colleagues, such as Xavier Le Roy and Jérôme Bel have also racked their brains over these topics.

Since the early 1990s, Dorner has worked as a choreographer. As he began with more narrative work, he soon proceeded to pursue philosophical questions. Despite his well-developed conceptual approach, he continues to question how one "can be honest and straightforward in one's dance." Despite their level of abstraction, his choreographies are packed full of emotionality. Aside from that, they make you laugh and Dorner explains, "I need jokes to revive myself, and to keep it fresh; I noticed that you can address serious and weighty topics when you allow for laughter in between, that keeps the audience open."

His piece [...] – as its virtually unspeakable title alludes to – is about the invisible, the unseen, about one's gaze and view on things – and about obscenity. We usually assume that obscenity is represented by things that are "in our face" or by explicitness. What remains visible, for example in a porno, when the actors are cut out of the film? Are these empty spaces really neutral spaces? Or are these also coded with a certain gaze, which openly exhibits one's own curiosity to gaze/look (Schaulust)? Dorner chose to collaborate with experimental film-maker Martin Arnold, because he was interested in his work and in "how he deals with absence, and what becomes visible through working with it."

Reminiscent of his previous work (such as *Deanimated*), in [...] Arnold also almost completely deletes the actors – here the actors are out of a 1980s porno flick about an incestuous relationship between mother and son. This deletion aims to explore the remnants of the obscene within the essence of the space. What does absence reveal? The film is shown parallel to the choreography. "During rehearsals we took a look at where the dance intersects and meets the film, but also where friction occurs," as Arnold remarks. He also sees parallels in his work on deconstruction, the slowing down of and musical repetition of images in film in connection with dance, which deconstructs movements into singular elements and then puts them together in a different way.

Dorner and Arnold have much more in common, such as their pleasure in stumbling, faltering and in the mechanics of movement. Dorner's *not at all* (2002), a 30-minute dance-video-installation and his *threesconds* (2001) deal with the transformation of a human into a sign. The dancers' jerky movements made them look as if they had come fresh out of a video game, as they slowly mutate into living pictographs or comic figures. Both of these pieces were realized in collaboration with video artists with music (composer Heinz Ditsch) that – specifically not at all – attributed to the work the essence of soundtracks of different film genres.

The third element involved in this exceptional project – that proved quite difficult to coordinate through its demand for intensive exchange among three artists of three different fields – is composer Georges Aperghis. An intriguing question within [...] will be how will the music, dance, and film add to or comment upon one another. Aperghis has proven his extraordinary responsiveness and curiosity within this complex, interdisciplinary cooperation. His *Récitations*, the basis for the evening performances, is an existing composition that dates back to 1977/78 that skillfully and wittily plays with the relationship between semantics and semiotics. In certain passages you feel like you can almost understand the text, yet what you heard were merely the sounds you easily mistook for content.

In [...] the music will be played from a recording. Aperghis' complete score, consisting of 14 pieces for one voice, is broken down into pieces some of which are selected, extracted, re-improvised with a singer (Donatienne Michel-Dansac), and made into new material in his sound studio in Paris. His compositions contain key words from TV soaps, and some sound like the subtitle of a movie, while other texts are speed-read. Dorner was especially interested in specific passages that Aperghis reworked for this piece, such as lines from soap operas or a singer stuttering.

[...] is about the gaze, which otherwise remains unseen. For example, the empty yet all-ready pornographic gaze in TV shopping shows that obscenely tries to sell a product no matter what it is. Dorner perceives this type of selling gaze on stage in the following. "When a dancer performs a piece for the 300th time, you can see that he is bored to death, but his gaze leads us to believe that he is happy. The way the dancer's gaze separates itself from the body is also a form of shopping: he is selling himself." The piece will also deal with how one can uncover this particular gaze and that of the audience and even deliver this gaze as a topic.

Dorner's work presently pursues a question dealing with the presence of dancers. He is fascinated by the immediacy they present (make visible) on stage, which emerges through a state of physical exhaustion or extreme fatigue, for this inevitably puts formalist criteria on dance into question. Yet it wouldn't really be a Dorner piece if all of these fascinating elements were not ambiguous as such, a facet that [...] artfully makes us conscious of. Isn't it obscene when a performer's presence on stage becomes more immediate through their exhaustion?

[...] at Wien Modern, November 8 (première), 9, 13 -16, 2003, at 8:30 p.m., at Tanzquartier.

Carsten Fastner

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GEORGES APERGHIS

### **The Composer as Director**

For three years Wien Modern has been following the artistic course of the composer Georges Aperghis. Not only his "Récitations", the 14 pieces for solo voice, which now form the musical basis for Willi Dorner's choreography "[...]" (see article above), could be heard in the original at the festival – a breathtaking concert with the singer Donatienne Michel-Dansac in 2001. Alongside solos, chamber music and choral works, two music theatre productions were staged by the Greek, who has been resident in Paris since the 1960s: "Machinations" (2001), which plays equally with archaic and hypermodern elements, and "Paysage sur surveillance" (2002) after Heiner Müller's text "Bildbeschreibung", a murky scenario on the border between virtuality and reality.

Aperghis' affinity to the scenic has become clear not just through these two unconventional stage works; even in some solo pieces such as "Récitations" the composer, who is known and appreciated above all in France, goes back to theatrical elements, incorporates for example the opportunities for physical expression on the part of the soloist or even allows her to realise the dialogue for one voice. "Even as a small boy I painted and cut out soldiers to play with," says Aperghis in the interview, amused about the beginnings of his passion for theatre. "The most important thing was that you could always see who they were. So I just wrote 'Roman' or 'Egyptian' on them. Those really were cast performers."

Growing up as the son of a painter and a sculptor in Athens, the now 58-year-old obviously had little time for the kind of plays staged in the Greek capital: "I could never stand the pathos, the grand gestures which are even today customary in the Greek theatre because of its pride in the antique tradition." Aperghis' own plays are characterised by a high degree of functionality. Five years after the première of his first music theatre work, "La tragique histoire du nécromancien Hieronimo et de son miroir", in 1971, he founded the socially committed Atelier Théâtre et Musique (ATEM) in Paris, which he managed for over twenty years up until 1996. There he perfected his pragmatic and often quite witty attitude to circumstances: "I like it when things on a stage are just what they are. We need a slide projector? OK, then let's just put one here."

Aperghis' procedure as a composer is similarly uncomplicated. Naturally, he has also written pieces that are precisely noted down to the last detail; but he finds it much more interesting to develop his material in improvisation processes and then, almost like a theatre director, to "stage" them together with the musicians. The choreographer Willi Dorner's wish to have the freest possible material available for "[...]", which should only be put in its final form in the course of the scenic work, was therefore no problem at all for Aperghis' very similar style of work. Even if his role in this work is by no means that of a classical composer, "[...]" will nevertheless also be completely "à l'Aperghisoise".

Carsten Fastner

Andrea Amort

"Kurier" 10.11.2003 page: 30

Where the omitted makes itself felt

There is moaning, approaching, loving. A woman and a man are having sex. That much can be heard. The film, however, shows only crumpled bed linen. Shortly afterwards, four dancers perform live, telling moments of movement. [Erotically]. Later, a male dancer slowly spreads his legs; a female dancer grins at the audience. The grin turns into a grimace . . .

Willi Dorner's working title "ob:scena" has now become "[...]". An unspeakable title. Signs that in academic writing mean something is a quote and the rest is not so important. In any case, however, what is put between the brackets is not readable. The content is missing. It is precisely this unreadability that the choreographer Dorner has staged in collaboration with the composer Georges Aperghis and the film maker Martin Arnold. A big plus for the one-hour performance, still running in Hall G from November 13 to 16: the underlying intention of the artistic trio and the four remarkable dancers, Helena Arenbergerova, Anna MacRae, Michael O'Connor and Matthew Smith is recognisable through all the irrationality. The invisible becomes visible. That which is not shown and sung, all the omissions, turn up on observation - at least partly. And all this in such a light-footed and, in the best sense of the word, consumable form.

Otherwise, the premiere does everything to avoid customary forms of performance. Abrupt dramaturgy, crumbled connections, distorted humour. But there is none of the heaviness of some theory-laden performances about the Tanzquartier and Wien Modern premiere of "[...]" - Andrea Amort