

Überengelheit

Stéphane Bouquet, Laurent Goumarre, Mouvement
June/September 1999

vibration above angels

From her first solo piece *Waw*, to *Überengelheit* a quartet made with Kasper Toeplitz's music, Myriam Gourfink's dance works with bodies in micromovements. An understanding of space gives means to create resonances from one body to another, without consideration for any sort of hierarchy.

Myriam Gourfink didn't dance for Merce Cunningham but she kept his theories in mind. Like him, but in her own way she relies on uncertainty and combination. She uses these elements throughout her compositions. In the solo she is currently writing for Jerome Bel she says " I finished with sixty-three moments, mixing different elements; amongst them, respiration, concentration, localisation of thoughts in the body, shapes, sight etc. Then by using a computer to evaluate averages I found the most common combinations".

ÜBERENGELHEIT, this superb quartet of solo pieces with: (Julia Cima, Laurence Mathouret, Françoise Rognerud, and Myriam Gourfink) is made according to Cunningham's principals. Myriam Gourfink works with each performer separately bringing them together only on the day of the performance. "I see them at home and place them in tiny spaces: bathrooms, corridors... then by making oral propositions we start working on respiration, (e.g: filling the lungs with air and holding them in apnea) followed by work on the spine, taking shapes and holding postures. They hold a position and I wait to see what happens next, observing the position as it deflates, the slips that take place, the micromovements, that are generated.

There are no rehearsals until the day of the dress rehearsal. There, the performers are brought together for the first time, randomly, four bodies that previously ignored each other, now together in the same space evolving without the help of cues to guide them.

On the same theme, music and dance are dissociated. Kasper Toeplitz, following a tradition now well established, composes prior to having seen anything of the dance. On stage, music and dance don't coincide exactly in the way in which we are accustomed. The dance will have been evolving for twenty minutes before Kasper starts to play. "The preliminary silence being part of the composition". He carries on playing after the dancers have left and will stop only as the last person in the audience leaves. Theoretically, the concert could be endless (we just have to imagine a few people in the audience eager enough). The audience's sense of what they are seeing is disturbed, a

concert? a choreography? This freedom ("what did I come to see") is, however, limited: Desire eventually confirms the decision; the audience came to see a "dance" ; and when they realise that the music is the only thing left, they leave.

Überengelheit, also works on the audience. Firstly, it proves across the board, that we are not all equally disposed to everything. We are not as ready as we imagine to welcome the unexpected. Secondly, we are frustrated, denied the possibility of commenting on our feelings, with no chance "to have the last word"; ("I liked it a lot, quite liked it") If there is an exchange between the stage and the audience, it doesn't happen at the end, with applause, as is the usual returned gift, but happens instead during the performance, through the vibrations of shared space we are experiencing.

Space is one of the essential elements of *Überengelheit*. Gourfink explains : I didn't want to create any form of hierarchy between the dancers, the only link is the space. The same is true for Kasper and the four girls. The manifest references to Master Eckhart in the title are meaningful. (Master Eckhart believed human beings superior to angels, he saw angels trapped in hierarchy, where human beings are moving continually. He called this superiority *Überengelheit*; for super-angelity). We can see how this concept, that denounces hierarchy, delighting a choreography; the democracy of the space becomes the means for the performers/audience to resonate through each other.

Myriam Gourfink gives precise cues concerning the places the dancers inhabit and the lines that they should follow, depending on the premises: The Crestet Art center, the TCD rectangular stage, the circumference of the TIPI in G.Pompidou center; it's all work in situ.

For the dancers, seeing one another is not essential. At the Crestet for instance, the premises were shaped and the dancers couldn't see each other, the important thing was that they knew where each other were.

Überengelheit, definitely questions space. What we are left to comprehend is how the dance modifies space. One can question the point made in *Waw*, her previous piece (a solo for dancer and latex). Myriam Gourfink drew a line, straight ahead, in a very slow movement on the ground, her body subject to gravity, except for some tension points placed here and there (sometimes the fingers, or the elbows etc...). Then she stood up, returned to the point where she started, slipped on some shoes and moved along the same line, but this time with a vertical sensation. This solo piece tilts from horizontality to verticality, without any evidence of expansion. *Waw* defines a geometrical plan which confines the body to a determined space. The solo ends with expressive gestures, almost expressionistic (mimed screaming, face distortion, the sex partially exposed) It's not difficult to see that moves generated in such a narrow space are more connected to anxiety than to freedom.

The music in *Waw*- the sounds of latex being manipulated and distorted (by Norscq) - participates in this experiment of anxious space. Firstly because the sound track plays with sound impact and violence, (even to the point of being

nerve-wracking) and secondly, because it comes from behind the audience. The sound-track creates depth, whereas the dance holds on to a rigid planisphere. The opposition therefore is stressed and even choreographed between stage and audience, between the line drawn by the body and the power of the sound hitting the audience.

The status and the position of music has changed since *Waw*. In *Überengheleit* the comprehension of space is grasped differently. Kasper Toeplitz plays live; frontally, placed in the center of any performance space. The four dancers evolving in the periphery.

"The downfall of music, says Kasper, is that space is all too often ignored, or more precisely that the musical space is not questioned. Usually, we're allowed devices that play mainly with stereo, with the notion of balance being between left and right. Here I'm concentrating on a single point" the music is placed in a central position, breaking with the usual tradition of the orchestra pit or to one side of the stage, in the stewardship. This abolishes any idea of hierarchy between the five performers and echoes Kasper's idea of the music being free from formal patterns of construction and graduation: twenty minutes of silence, bassy lines for forty minutes then high pitched sounds and variations on the power of volume. This is of great importance, because again even in live performances volume tends to be completely sacrificed.

"From then on, the music strikes directly, abolishing any sense of left/right, court/garden, front/back of stage. The premises disappear under the music, a flood of vibrations, with no sense of hierarchy. The effect goes beyond that of performers/audience to include - we come back to it - the space in general: No more walls, floor, ceiling; only an abstract space, free of marks."

"I'm speaking as a performer, because as a choreographer, establishing a relation between music and dance, didn't interest me. I kept in mind concerts of noise music I heard in Japan. Those of CCCC (Cosmic Coincidence Control Center) especially. They don't exist anymore. I remember the physical effect I felt. A shower effect, the sensation of being bolted to the ground, and the feeling of perceiving gravity through lightness, without forcing anything, and not by warming-up to something over an hour. Because this music plays less on sound levels than on vibrations. These vibrations fill the body, entering the flesh, relaxing the muscles like an hour or two of yoga practice. My choice to work with Kasper was to find this same feeling through the body. I asked him to work in the same direction as CCCC. I could apprehend again this same feeling coming from bassy sounds, a seated feel, a flexibility in the pelvis. Medium sound accesses the body on the level of the thorax and flows to the heart; For me, high pitched sounds hit the brain; I have the feeling that my spine is enlightened, suspended and vertical - Laurence Mathouret says that it "enlightens the organs that sustain the body".

The feelings of enlightenment that confront body in micromovements, a dance that moves according to decline, following an idea of loss. Gourfink's dance, a story of degradation, micromoves perceived as a graduation of unbearable positions. Therefore, a composition based on decline, with this young choreographer, is always searching out a passage from one position to another.

Centered again on her body, the dancer isn't isolated, neither is the audience, they are all flooded by the music;

The "kinesphere" inflates, dismantling any marks or hierarchy, enlightening the moving body; the floor, the walls, shade away leaving the feeling of horizontal or vertical planes. In short, we see the performing space - which showed a choregraphie - drift into a volume (like the sound volume we were talking about): The abstract space built in, during "Überengelheit". It becomes fascinating to experiment with something different than a geometrical abstraction (as in Cunningham's work), or with body language (egoistic expression), but instead, on the construction of a movement abstraction that is at once space; and state of supra-angelity.