

REGARDING THE SEARCH FOR A CULTURAL IDENTITY FROM THE BODY

Johannes Odenthal examines the social dimensions of the esthetic and cultural structures in the heterogenous German independant dance scene, the freie Tanzszene.

If the history of modern dance is an *art history of the body*, then Dance Theatre is causing its end. Dance Theatre detaches humanity from its esthetic forms, as they have been carried over

til today, and confronts him with a desolate social reality, which in its pluralism, forms everything other than a harmonic unity. Dance Theatre does not develop itself by placing esthetic questions and neither does it contain the dimension of an esthetic development. Dance Theatre is first of all a substantial break, which can no longer be closed by formal means. Comparable with the invention of landscape

painting in the 16th century, it would be fully false to measure its appearance by the religious pictures of the Byzantine Middle-Ages. Dance Theatre is iconoclastic in the sense of a radical destruction of social codes, the traditional iconography of human behavior. In this far, Dance Theatre joins itself with the Ausdruckstanz (Expressive Dance) of the 20's and 30's. It broke with the body images of a handed-down Order and searches after the capacities of life.



GERHARD BOHNER Foto: Klaus Rabien

REGARDING THE SEARCH FOR A CULTURAL IDENTITY FROM THE BODY

The intentions of Dance Theatre and independent groups merge at this level. The earnest critique of a historical Illusionism, which expresses itself in the incomparable materialization of wealth in the Federal Republic of Germany, inquires about the presence of social communication, about the quality of life and about the mechanisms of power. In Dance Theatre, the Individual becomes that which it is; the process of a visionary freedom. So Dance Theatre is not alone a conscious refusal of the substantial dominance of classical dance, it also undermines the unreflected fascination of the mass assemblies of the 30's, in which the unconscious individual could directly merge, absorbed in the rhythm of the multitudes, into the ornament of the masses.

While the wealth of individual body histories has solidified into an artistic

spectrum of social reality, the *second generation* in Dance Theatre are dismissed as *Epigons* by the critics. The works of Rosamund Gilmore (Laocoon), Jutta Czurda, Birgitta Trommler, Judith Kuckart (Skoronel), Norbert Servos or Vivienne Newport have bestowed a new liveliness upon the social-critical inclination of Dance Theatre. Precisely in the multiplicity of its personal points of departure, Dance Theatre develops aspects of a new art, which reacts like no other in this time in Germany to the political realities in the land. Certainly, its course would have run otherwise without the artistic revolution on the State Theatres through Pena Bausch and Hans Kresnik. And it is indeed they, with their completely own languages and with their entirely different themes, who fill the burst-open space for an expressionistic theatre.



GERHARD BOHNER Foto: Klaus Rabien



LAOKOON Einmarsch Foto: Josef Dürport

REGARDING THE SEARCH FOR A CULTURAL IDENTITY FROM THE BODY

The form which is thereby created, is not developed from *one* technique. Entirely different dance techniques could each be an instrument of the forming of processes, in which emotional events also become repeatable for the stage. In the end it remains secondary whether a dancer moves, speaks or sings. Jutta Czurda speaks of a mental movement in the onlooker; Judith Kuckart, of dance ribosomes as vagabond units which settle themselves firmly down into the onlookers; Norbert Servos, of a process in which dancer and onlooker sound out the borders of that which is really to be moved. Accompanied by the search for an authentic movement language in Theatre and for a cultural identity in the body, young choreographers have spoken themselves free from a further romantic dance esthetic. The heterogeneous character of the single productions as much as the heterogeneous image of the scene have made it difficult to speak of a *new German Dance Theatre*. It nevertheless exists as an increasingly consolidating movement; not in the sense of an esthetic form, but rather in the sense of a critical process. Under the external form, the diversity of emotional process and structures breaks up, appears to be the stuff from which society comes into being.



GERHARD BOHNER Foto: Gert Weigelt

Paths to a new esthetic form were only partially developed at the same time. A tradition has been formed only by the Folkwang-Hochschule in Essen, in the following of Kurt Jooss; but especially the work of Hans Züllig

and Jean Cébron has created an expressive movement theory on the basis of classical dance. Here is not only the starting-point for Pina Bausch, Reinhild Hoffmann and Susanne Linke to be seen, but also the development of the Dance Theatre work of Christine Brunel, Wanda Golonka or the Folkwang-Tanzstudio.

Dance is a foreign language for the Germans, said Hans Züllig, referring to a strong tendency to expressionism in the choreography of Susanne Linke and Gerhard Bohners. This expressionistic potential was only conditionally allowed in the strict classical form. It was however, precisely the central theme in the movement theory of Hans Züllig. Folkwang and the ballet tradition of the Komische Oper in Berlin, under the direction of Tom Schilling, have set free exactly this potential. Dancer-choreographer Gerhard Bohner on the other hand, has returned to the ground elements of dance and theatre as they were conceived of in the theories of the Bauhaus; as a renewal of art. His solo work over the last 10 years is equally an attempt to follow a tradition broken by the Second World War; or to make these possibilities present once again at all.



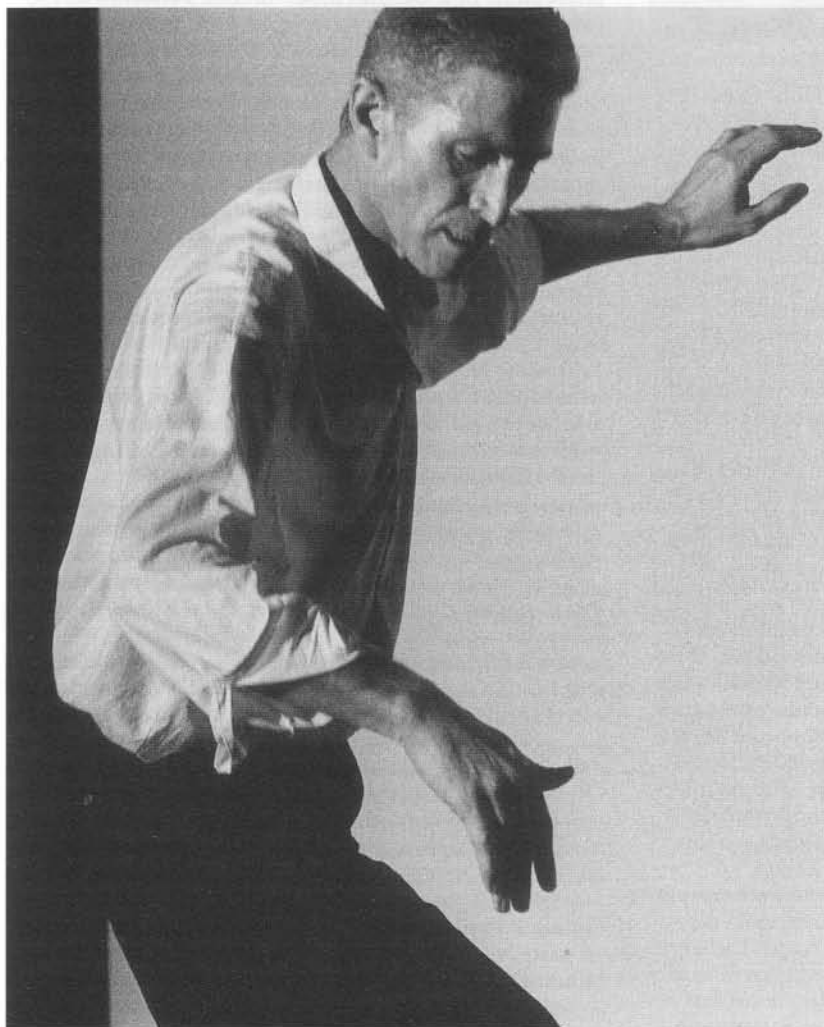
NORBERT SERVOS *Sisyphos* Foto: Burkhard Peter

REGARDING THE SEARCH FOR A CULTURAL IDENTITY FROM THE BODY

Ausdruckstanz did not really survive this historical rupture, in that its ideology was appropriated by the cultural context of the (Nazi) National Socialist cult of the body. The connection to the artistic tradition of the Bauhaus could, however, circumvent the political wall and link a contemporary theatre art with a historical identity. So, in the same manner that Gerhard Bohner takes up the confrontation with tradition in his abstract theater language, it is above all the studio-stages of the independent cultural scene that have become the *research centers* of a new movement. The Tanzfabrik Berlin as an idea-gate for American movement teachings, or the systematic work on body-images, clichés and social restrictions in the choreographies of Dance Energy in Munich or Rubato in Berlin as well, are based on a systematic confrontation with the

history of the body in a social context. The critical earnestness of Dance Theatre, which always preserves the strength of the comic and of laughter, applies as well to the experimental work of the New-Dance groups with an American movement background: it is the research of one's own freedom in the body, the determination of clues to human nature, an ethnology of one's self. Contemporary dance in Germany then assumes a central function for a new cultural and social awareness. The broken form of a handed-down esthetic; above all the dissolution of its criteria, has laid open the burning content of time and left it to its multiplicity. A juxtaposition of the *Independent Dance Groups in the FRG* shows clearly that a description of the independent scene can only be a description of the single companies, dancers and choreographers.

A reference to the tradition of chamber dance, which lives on today in a kind of Studio dance, seems sensible. It is not a question of whether dance occurs in a studio or upon great stages. The concern is much more a qualitative differentiation. In studio-dance the event, the process, the personality, the intimate story of one person stands in the foreground. The burning point of focus is the dancer and not the dominating space. The precondition for this is a common interest between onlooker and presenter, a secret complicity, in which the dancer does not so much *represent*, than he is *present*, communicates through his presence, brings the immediate needs of the onlooker to expression, and makes these needs experiential in an exchange with him. This aspect of a sensual and comprehensive communication indicates the socializing power of dance, by which dance acquires an ever larger significance for an artistic development in the FRG. It is characteristic that contemporary dance in the FRG is carried by a strong layman's movement. Alone the sum of 2500 schools and studios in which contemporary dance and movement forms are taught and in which single schools are comprised of more than 2,000 students, reflects the immense need for a practical experience of movement, for a comprehensive communication. This educational-political aspect, which is also entering the consciousness of established structures, bestows a not to be underestimated foundation to the heterogeneous development of contemporary movement forms. *Johannes Odenthal*



GERHARD BOHNER Foto: Gert Weigelt