

On the Interfaces of Space and Existence.

Micha Purucker and His Work

He collects texts. Condensed into montages of quotes, they have their place in program brochures and the theatrical process: as spoken text, as projected words, as a flickering band of subtitles. Reports about the „The World Where the Tick Works“, something about Yuri Gagarin landing on the moon, literature by Burroughs and Pessoa. And Georg Büchner's Lenz hikes among the mountains „... uphill and down. He felt no tiredness, but he sometimes felt the unpleasantness of not being able to walk on his head.“

The origins of these fragments of text are extremely heterogeneous, their implementation is extremely rigorous. Micha Purucker, a choreographer from Munich and artistic director of Dance Energy, doesn't only assemble sentences which serve as catalysts of the imagination or sources of atmosphere. These sentences also provide him with material for a choreographic research project, an investigation of the relationships between space, perception and body-image concepts.

This plexus of textual quotes does more than provide Purucker with a database about space, perception and the human body. He uses that plexus in ways which enable the texts themselves to constitute spaces: acoustically via the speaking voice; metaphorically via the semantics of the text; and virtually via the associations which the quotes evoke in their recipients. Purucker's choreographies establish unstable spaces which are ambiguous and mutable. They form themselves from light and shadow, stillness and movement. The formative impulse here does not derive from the designed spaces installed by visual artists. Instead, the spaces here are created through play and through semantics, and those spaces can intersect with one another at the performance site. Their contours blur, as do the contours of the creatures who inhabit them. The relationship between space and body once again serves as the theme of Purucker's latest production: Bodycape-s: Shifting Stills was premiered in November in Nancy and will now be performed at Dance Platform Germany.

Born in Würzburg in 1958, Purucker began choreographing during the mid-1980s. In pieces like Darwin Waltzes (1988), Chicago-Tashkent (1990) and Andrej (1992), the dancers whirled about in hard, eruptive movements like particles in an energetic field. His initial interest here involved the spatial patterns which formed as his dancers whirled, raced and chased one another across the stage. Gradually he turned his attention to the shape of the dancer. How is this shape formed by the space? How is it formed within the space? How do spectators perceive this? The solo entitled How to Destroy Angels (1989) is an early example of this shift from spatial pattern to „space number“, a shift which Purucker has continued to explore in many new variations ever since.

He has evolved three forms in which to present the fruits of his research. First, there are the „Hidden Dances“, small sets which combine site-specific film and video installations with live dancing. A truck's cargo space, a modular container like those used at construction sites, an excavation in the ground, or underground cellar rooms serve as the theatrical spaces in which these aesthetic investigations into the perception of movement and dance are situated. They enable the spectator to see a dancer, for example, from a great distance and at the same time temporally shifted in close-ups on video monitors (Far Distant Solo). Another presentational form are the so-called „Patches“, installations which do not include live dancing. The arm solo from Comfort & Pain is particularly impressive: in this video, Purucker's dancing appears as a black shadow against a white plane. Movement itself is depicted as a sculptural form in the „Patches“. Elements from „Hidden Dances“ and „Patches“ can also be combined with one another and allowed to flow into a third presentational form, namely, the evening-length productions.

One such production is entitled Unrest – A Garden (1995), a work which broke away from the conventional theatrical situation in which the audience sits passively in an auditorium while dancers perform on stage. Instead, the spectators stroll from station to station through the performance like visitors at an art exhibition. First they find themselves in a small room surrounded by video projections of the moon landing, then they follow a path which leads them from one stage situation to another. They pass a dancer balancing upon a ball, see another performer dancing behind a pane of glass; solos form a spatial and dramatic axis as well as the framework for a group piece. Although little or nothing happens in unison, one must nevertheless decide which place one wants to occupy, which viewpoint one wants to observe from, and one runs the risk of overlooking something. „But we always overlook the majority of things anyway“, Purucker says, „because the stimulus filter which we put on and through which we view the world is essential for our survival in daily life. But one can attempt to reconstruct that filter now and then.“



Bodyscape-s: Shifting Stills, Choreographie: Micha Purucker; Photo: Philippe Fresard

Purucker designs plans for actions rather than images. For many years, he has been supported in this project by long-term collaborators Robert Merdzo (composition), Rainer Michaelis (video), and Michael Kunitsch (light). A „sound track“ runs along with the „movement track“. Both „tracks“ can vary to a certain degree and the timing can vary from performance to performance, but this situation is intentional and welcome because it allows a somewhat different configuration to occur each time the piece is performed. Certain key points provide the dancers with the orientation they need: the dancers too must constantly be alert to potential changes.

Liquid Text — Liquid Spaces (1996) began a new chapter in Purucker's investigations into space, the body and perception. Spectators and dancers were obliged to accommodate themselves to changing experiential structures — the spectators, because they had to follow each new (stage) space as it established itself; the dancers, because they had to adapt their performance to timings which varied from evening to evening. But this was not all: Purucker also added a third level of complexity. In dance and in mutable landscapes composed of light, sounds and words, Purucker used the character Lenz from Georg Büchner's tale to exemplify the translation of means of perception and

states of being. The bodily contours of the two female dancers and one male dancer concretized themselves in rapid and vertically emphasized movements, only to blur again. Their shapes oscillated: out of focus, silhouettes, shadows. Seldom did they dance in unison; even more seldom were the moments when they touched one another; but they nonetheless encountered one another upon the shared surfaces of their existence and in the intersections of various spaces.

Congeaed concepts of reality and habitual ways of seeing ought to begin to dissolve and flow: Purucker stages the frameworks and the pre-conditions needed to facilitate that dissolution. His desire to break down traditional theatrical structures, to perform in spaces outside the theater or outside theatrical spaces not only confuses his spectators, but can also pose problems for event organizers. After all, these large-scale „itinerant“ productions invite a mere 150 spectators to wander through a hall which would otherwise provide seating for (and financially essential income from) an audience of 400 or more. Here too, organizers are challenged to restructure their accustomed ways of perceiving.

Studies of perceptual diversity, presented as aesthetically woven, condensed, many-layered yet simultaneously permeable, variously textured, atmospheric and highly intensive fabrics: descriptions like these come to mind when one tries to put a label on Purucker's work. Space itself, for Purucker, is the fundamental paradigm of human perception. And the human body in (danced) motion establishes the integrating site which, because it is identical with the flesh-and-blood body, is uniquely able to bundle perceptions even as it remains in motion. But what would a bodily image look like which was commensurate with our present day and age? The search for answers to precisely that question is the intention of Micha Purucker's ongoing choreographic endeavor.

TANZPLATTFORM DEUTSCHLAND

1994	1996	1998	2000
Berlin	Frankfurt	München	Hamburg