

Forming chalices

taz, Annette Jaensch, 23.02.2013

The artist duo WILHELM GROENER investigate the promise of **“Healing”** in the Uferstudios – without becoming unbearable

Artist duo WILHELM GROENER certainly activated the association machine by calling their latest production “Heilung” [healing]. A high-kitsch waterfall landscape glows in the sunset on the poster, dripping with irony the programme text informs us that very soon complete health will be upon us, and we’ll be dancing jauntily into our deepest dotage and communing directly with the source of life itself.

When the performance begins the three performers absorb the audience’s carefully groomed expectations with a meditative sequence: softly swinging their arms to the sound of projected ocean waves. Then a minimalist chamber piece begins whose sound is produced solely by its actors.

Anna Melnikova, Günther Wilhelm and Ulrich Huhn move through the room in measured steps, sometimes diagonally, sometimes straight towards the audience. The common thread that runs through all the works of Wilhelm Groener to date is their playful linking of abstraction and ambivalence. Here the actors propagate a vocabulary of allusions: in muted concentration arms cross torsos, hands rub vigourously for a while or form chalices, every now and then a head is carried gently by the others. The trio bursts into mantric singing and then breaks off again mid-note.

“Heilung” meshes these images into a colourful ring dance of body-awareness exercises and dance-therapy techniques, without committing to any one in particular. Movement presents itself as cure-all; the key to catharsis, it seems, has been found. So far, so good.

Imperceptibly, though, the performance becomes infiltrated with forces that undermine the yearning for deliverance. The ritual dignity begins to crumble; on the surface of the performers’ earnestness a fine comic craquelure appears when, out of the blue, Wilhelm and Huhn suddenly launch into Kung Fu-type movements accompanied by a loud hissing, or Melnikova mimics the wind with much ecstatic swooping of her arms.

Their approach is more collage-like than linear, Mariola Groener says. The creative team keep returning to the gap between their own experiences and presentation to fuel the artistic process. Günther Wilhelm, choreographer and long-term member of the VA Wölf’s “Neuer Tanz” in Dusseldorf, joined forces with visual artist Mariola Groener in 2001. They have since created 15 pieces, initially focussing on the relationship between the body and space and later fusing this with socially relevant themes. “Hotel Hassler” (2008) showcased scenarios of meaninglessness; “Am Anfang war das Ende (2009) touched on religious rituals; “exercitatio et labor: JOY” (2011) was set up as meeting of artists who reflect on questions of individual responsibility and joint action. The most recent production opens yet another space for interpretation, with some tongue-in-cheek treatment of healing illness and imbalances in a wider sense as the *conditio humana*.

At the end of the 55 minutes we see a close-up of a mountain spring, it’s the source of life again. Since we saw it last, the performers have been through sequences which had them lying on the floor laughing and twitching. At the end they are no closer to salvation than they were at the start. The finale ironically closes the loop.

You have to adjust to the tempo and the subtly packaged messages. But if you can appreciate finely nuanced minimalism, WILHELM GROENER will do you a power of good.