

(Post-) Modernism as we have never seen it before
by Pieter T'jonck

Just a year ago the Greek Georgia Vardarou amazed the world with her solo 'Hardcore research on dance', an utmost unsexy title for an hour of pure pleasure. She twisted her body into many shapes and dance languages. A confusion of tongues that did not feel like a punishment but like a freeing. 'Phenomena' is the sequel to this performance, but this time with a trio.

'Phenomena' is certainly still Hardcore. The dance performance opens in complete silence, undisturbed in the first quarter of an hour. The bright white floor leaves room for three coloured planes in the elementary colours blue, yellow and red. They are lighted by a spot. This Spartan strictness is known to us: it is (post-) modernism of the pure shape or movement which should be interesting in itself. However, it leaves us slightly with a feeling of unease. In this sacred room no improper word may be spoken.

But: 'Who's afraid of red, yellow and blue' anyway these days? A whole generation of art historians has been working like mad to expose the male, white preconceptions behind this puritanism (known in dance as the heritage of Cunningham). Modernism: the real expert looks down on it. However, the bloody seriousness still reflects the rites of 'skilful' dancing.

Vardarou is doing something else with it though. She settles and snuggles up in that paradigm. She takes it completely serious, but it does not prevent her from looking around. In the first place she looks at what this credo has done to her. What laws has she been marked by? And secondly: what are the blind spots thereof: what pure movements do not seem to be so pure after all that they still can be acceptable?

In a crazy, but also completely non-ironic, serious way she discovers what the modern image keeps secret. It does not stand alone, but stands opposite an uncontrollable abundance of (dance) history and everyday (dance-) phenomena. Different from a real modernist she does not keep them secret, but uses them on the same basis as 'traditional' material.

Independent of a very precise spatial articulation of the three female dancers – sheer joy – she follows a number of clear strategies. In the beginning the three women seem to discover each for themselves all possibilities of their bones and legs. Too much to tell – and so deadly boring and demonstrative. Until the dance gets stuck in turn, in the same demonstrative way, but unpredictably (I do not know how they do it) at the exact same moment with all three of them. This emphasizes the fact that all that pure beauty also "works" simply by the effect. It is not as pure as it seems.

Strategy 2: improper movements and empty effects. Vardarou bent over and strolling around with feeble arms, or silly games with folded bodies scuttling on stage. Also a pure movement, but without grace or solemnity.

Strategy 3: there is never any contact between the dancers, only for functional purposes.

Until the last scene. In the mean time you have had almost enough of the 'new age' editing of the music by Philip Glass. But then there is a moment of intense, be it denied contact between Stav Yeini and Vardarou, whereas Eun Kyung Lee remains fully out of the picture. No matter how pure we wanted to be, dance is about contact, bodies, vital rhythms.

This performance does not become a loaded indictment against modernism, as it settles completely in the modern paradigm. It becomes an enthusiastic pleading for the subversive lightness and indefiniteness, being its fundamental programme. Marvellous.