

L Tanz 26: Hinter Türen

Voice Over Text English

Every city has its secrets. In every house, in every basement. Some would claim that «oh no», this does not apply for a city like Lucerne. Go instead to Germany they would say, or if you are up for something really frightening, to Austria. Well, the power of denial is strong. Next time you take an evening walk in Lucerne, you should stop and listen carefully. What you thought was the wind or the sound of the river, is actually a distant clattering. Coming from the houses. From the closets in the houses. From the hidden skeletons.

Now, secrecy is a virtue not to be messed with. Swiss citizens know that more than others, but what if the revealed truth is of such character, that it may not compromise a city, but actually enrich it? The answer is clear - we should let people know. And display what's really going on in the basements of Lucerne.

This is Herr und Frau Lustenberger. He, a consultant in the finance business, she, a shop owner for useless things of high quality. They like culture, and especially contemporary dance, nevertheless they are hardly ever to be seen in any theatre. Why? It's said that art should reflect society, but dancers never look like people in society, do they? They wear strange costumes, they do pirouettes, and scream or talk into microphones. Do we do such things at home? No, we don't. So Herr und Frau Lustenberger don't bother to sit with other hostages in a theatre, pretending to like avant-garde when they have the resources and space in the basement to order a something they actually can identify with. A dance performance with people... just like them.

Frau Lustenberger is a good hostess. Making people around her feel comfortable is a token of her Lucerninan nature. But what about she herself, does she feel comfortable? The previous dance was difficult. It seemed like a competition. Or a fight. She knew quite a bit about aggression herself. After all, there was a reason why they had to buy a new set of plates and cups every year. But her solution was a deep breath, and yoga, and meditation, therapy groups, hidden bottles of alcohol, a wide selection of pills, and frequent eurhythmic workshops in Dornach. The easiest option though, was to close her eyes and wait for a gust of wind to blow her worries away.

Herr Lustenberger knew a lot about currencies and interest rates, but less about women. And especially his wife. She complained about him not understanding her, but did she ever give him any clues? He did want to learn though, if he could only discover that thing she called «intuition» was. Sometimes he would wake up at night, soaked in sweat, realizing there are 7 billion people out there, out of which 3,5 billion are females. Of course, one can learn quite a bit on warm summer days, and in magazines during wintertime, but being one to one with someone was different.

She smelled of soap, her skin was soft, mysterious eyes she had too, but at the same time, the shape of her head reminded him of Roger, his best friend from high school. His skin was soft too, by the way. Very soft. As Herr Lustenberger was not a man of conversation, he felt an overwhelming gratitude. The thing with dancers is that you don't have to talk to them. You can just watch, and feel, and perhaps...no, you cannot touch, or can you?

Things do not always turn out the way you expect. And if there is something we, as humans, are good at, it is to excuse ourselves. Things just happen. It was a misunderstanding. It wasn't as it seemed. Apologies have as many names as there are reasons to apologize. Maybe this was why Herr

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L und Frau Lustenberger were so passionate about contemporary dance. There was never anything to apologize. It was art. It was abstract. Anything that happened was nothing but associative.

Now, you may think that this is very peculiar, to order a private dance show. But the surprising fact is that in 100% of all houses checked, basements were secretly filled with contemporary dance. It turns out that Lucerne is nothing less than the contemporary dance capital of the world. We just don't see it because of all the secrecy. Dancers from all countries use this opportunity to deposit their talents, and they benefit from that typical Swiss politeness, no one asks where and from whom they have learned to dance. Some say that the dance world is rotten and stench with suppression and injustice, but who can judge a pirouette, it is what it is. If foreign governments claim insight into the matter, they will of course be denied. Again, secrecy is a virtue not to be messed with.

This is Herr und Frau Federball. He, a gym teacher. She, the same. They are not just consumers of contemporary dance, they depend upon it. A weekly dose of dance, designed to match a miserable life, can restore a balance and minimize expenses for social health care. Gym teachers, as a species, have an incredible ability to withstand progression and modernity. They are always lost in the past. Everything was better before.

But there are snakes in every paradise. You ask dancers to do something pretty, but once you turn your back, there is always someone who decides to break the rules. They call it improvisation.

As all gym teachers, Herr und Frau Federball felt young. And surrounded by students all the time, they didn't feel the need to have children of their own. But something was always missing, they could hear the laughter from their wardrobes, they were joyful, played games, fell in love with each other, such things. And soon they would walk out the door and never come back. Herr und Frau Federball was confined to their own wardrobe though, small and lonely. And it had looked the same way for almost 20 years.

The ones who claim that art is superficial have no idea what they are talking about. For sure, they have never been in any of the basements in Lucerne. What would happen to Herr und Frau Federball, if it wasn't for contemporary dance every Thursday evening. One can only guess. Suicide maybe? Or would they start hurting their students? Maybe they would set fire to the local fitness centre? Maybe a lot of things. So let them enjoy their moment of balance, and slowly close the curtain. As they take a break from reality, maybe we should take a break too. Having seen what's really going on in two Lucernian basements may require serious afterthought. And we're not even half way yet, there are still three basements to come.

The most common mistake people make is to judge a city from its public life. What you see on the streets may be misleading, and perhaps very much so in Lucerne. As in every city, it's rather easy to separate tourists from locals, otherwise one could think Lucerne was a city in China, which of course it isn't. But there are citizens who don't feel like going outside, who don't feel accepted, maybe even not allowed to participate in public life. For these individuals and groups of people, basements are extremely important. For them it is not only a matter of hobbies or luxury problems, it is of a far more existential, cultural and moral importance.

Many people like contemporary dance because it is so expressive. Body language - the language we understand best. And the more body, the better. Some dance shows are even done without costumes. But for those who have seen a lot of contemporary dance, one can agree on two common cha-

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racteristics - dead eyes and sloppy fingers. The paradox though, is that the most expressive features of a human body are exactly eyes and fingers.

Every now and then, secrecy causes suspicion, paradoxically even in Switzerland. Some things should be hidden, others not. Can be confusing at times, indeed, but the good thing is that Luzern is a rather friendly and tolerant city. And not like horrible, awful cities like, for instance, Zürich and Bern. A freshly brewed cup of coffee usually solves most misunderstandings. And if someone for instance likes, let's say, mountain hiking, well, then the mysteries seems to vanish completely.

If you want to achieve credible results in anthropology, you need to study the field of scrutiny broadly. In our case, we need to remind ourselves that basements are not found only in private homes. There are basements also in houses where no one lives. They provide what we can call privacy within groups. And we don't need to go all the way to Dornach to find really really strange things happening.

In many official buildings, for instance, they claim that the basement is full of archives, which of course... it isn't. You often ask yourself why there is so much bureaucracy, why things take so much time, why let's say so many thieves go free due to «postponement of criminal proceedings», such things. Well, maybe you should ask yourself if their basements are filled with other things than what they say they are filled with.

The basement of the Lucerne Police Department. Imagine if this happens in the basement of one governmental institution, imagine what happens in all the others. In the name of honesty, we have to mention that several basement discoveries have been censored prior to this show. The scenes revealed would not fit public display. We won't mention any names of course, since it would seriously harm the reputation. But, instead of compromising a city, we prefer, as promised, to enrich it.

So therefore, as a last case of study, we will take a peak into a basement which cultivates the dearest art form there is - the art of being neutral. Or in this owner's case - being neutralized.

But there is no need for empathy, being neutralized is a wonderful thing. Of course, if the neighbourhood were full of mad dogs or other imminent threats, the situation would be different, but hey, if you're lucky to be born in a safe street, you should enjoy it. While many neutralists gladly go to war against opinions, statements, and annoying boat horns, this basement owner is neutral to the core. She wants neutral bodies, neutral walls, neutral music, even neutral brains, no emotions or dilemmas or problems, in short she doesn't want anything that reminds her of the world out there. Is that good? Or bad? We can stay neutral to that question too. Nevertheless, despite its physical nature, dance can provide neutral stillness. And maybe, maybe this is where it has the greatest potential. As in contemporary dance might be the new quiet. And quiet we need, even in Switzerland.

– Jo Strømngren, choreographer

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