

P. A. R. T. S.

- Opening PARTS 20 – Speech by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker – Director -

There are myriads of ways to inaugurate a speech of the kind I was asked to deliver today. There is a given set of 'formats', if you may, which figure frequently in these matters. One could imagine me giving a speech in which I make no mention of any affairs which concern the school itself, and in which I engage in pure philosophical speculation: about dance, choreography, the meaning of 'performance' in our contemporary world... As will be clear from the rest of my speech, this is not my intent.

I must yet say that also for me these formats are inescapable, and more specifically: that of chronology.

Twenty years ago, in the first program booklet composed for PARTS, I first formulated my basic attitude towards the new project which I was part of as follows:

“To learn someone how to dance, I can't. Dance, one learns oneself. But maybe I can give a desire. And experience. A place for challenges.”

Twenty years later, except for some of the meditative rhetoric perhaps, I very much still ad-here to these words. I still believe it is impossible to teach someone how to dance. This might sound as a strange utterance, certainly for someone who has tried to commit herself as much to choreography as to the pedagogy which comes with it. Why come to PARTS then, if in the end, there is no learning to do here in the first place?

Looking at the second part of my motto, the message becomes much clearer. Few of us will be unfamiliar with the connection that exists between 'learning' and 'desire'. It is not without reason that we speak, sometimes a bit squeamishly, of the 'eroticism of learning': there is love knowledge which comes with every pedagogical process. This is why philosophers ranging from Socrates to Nietzsche have agreed on the fact that it is not the Greek goddess Athena which embodies 'learning', but rather the god of love, Eros. Following up on their basic intuition that every form of learning is indeed a form of recollecting, Socrates and Nietzsche agreed that every process of learning requires the right 'erotic' attitude to the object of knowledge. One must, as Nietzsche put it, 'orient' oneself in the right way, rather than simply accumulate – something his Eros embodies perfectly.

I suggest we do not engage in all too risqué metaphors here. What is worth recalling - and this is very much to the idea I tried to convey in the first motto – is that the same goes for dancing. I repeat: we cannot teach someone to dance. That is something one must look for in the regions of therapy or leisurely pursuits. Here, there is no place for that.

What we do teach, is desire. That much was clear from the very first moment we began. 20 years ago, PARTS defined itself more as an artistic project rather than a school in the classic sense of the word. Even though PARTS is definitely a school, the spirit of a 'project', or a relentless 'work in progress' remains.

Examples abound. There is only one group of students. There is no established team of teaching staff. There are no formal examinations.

As Theo so aptly put it, our school offers no recipes, but possibilities. This is of course implies that the student is also responsible for his own development.

And this brings us back to the point of 'eroticism' which was first made at the beginning of my speech. Desire can be awakened, it can be stirred, but only by fiat of the person involved.

Looking back, I concede we were aware of this fact. In 1982, when I created Fase, nothing worth mentioning existed in Belgium in the field of contemporary dance. Here and there an isolated initiative, such as those of Pierre Droulers, was waged. In 1995, Belgium had a flourishing dance scene, including figures such as Alain Platel, Wim Vandekeybus and Meg Stuart, but the state of dance education was dire nonetheless. We must not forget that it was a burdensome task to take up the thread of contemporary dance education in Brussels. As a matter of fact, it was almost a historical mission. As an artist-in-residence at La Monnaie one operated in the footsteps of Maurice Bejart, who founded 'his' Mudra in 1970, to finally witness its shutdown in 1988. Notwithstanding this major drawback, we could still feel the presence of a 'desire', or a *gusto*, as the Italian expression has it, which could not be tempered that easily.

As for today – 20 years later – there is an almost explosive load of dance activity in our Belgian capital. In Brussels all our students can go and see several different pieces every week, the whole year through.

PARTS has played a considerable role in this. In the 2015-2016 season, no less than 50 former students presenting their work under their own name in theaters in all of Belgium. If we would add to that the number of PARTS dancers that can be seen in the work of other choreographers, the list becomes even more prideful.

This achievement is a story of many. Not just of students and teachers, but also of selfless dedication. I would like to mention Bernard Focroule, who can pride himself on occupying a pivotal position in PARTS' early days. I also would like to mention Kees Eijrond, Guy Gypens and Theo Van Rompay; who stood with me at earlier stages of development. I would also like to mention Christine Tinlot and Lieve Demin, who went beyond official working hours and laid the very foundations of this school. Then we must move to the pedagogical coordinators who have overlooked the quality of our education: from Kitty Kortess Lynch, Elizabeth Corbett and Mia Lawrence, to Christine De Smedt, Steven De Belder and Salva Sanchis, all three still active in the school. Not to forget the administrative managers of the house, as the president mentioned in his speech, with whom the more 'businessy' side of the school was always in good hands. And lest we forget our cooks, Mieke Pieters-Vervecken and Arnauld Tabary, and their many associates who've been preparing a

healthy, pure and tasty lunch for nearly 20 years now, every day for a hundred persons or more.

My thanks also go out to all of the teachers, who have assured the quality and the professionalism of our training. PARTS has always grown as an artistic practice, and many teachers have always had an active artistic career. Some of our teachers have been with us for all of these 20 years, such as Lucy Grauman, Rudi Laermans, David Hernandez, Dominique Duszynski, Lance Gries and Janet Panetta.

My final thanks go out to the almost 430 students that have been in PARTS the past 20 years. A school is only as good as its students, because without their talent, their very hard work, their very critical attitude, their strong artistic ambition and their generous community spirit, the work and the development that the school proposes could never bear fruit. And it has been producing a lot of very diverse fruits, which I am very thankful for.

As it goes with these sort of enumerations, the list is always endless.

At the beginning of this speech, I first hinted at the existence of a certain 'format' which is inevitable when it comes to compiling such talks. I now see I have followed these formats diligently, although I must admit that I do not feel entirely comfortable with it.

One can talk of the eroticism of learning and the importance of 'choreographical methodology', but still, one cannot dance oneself into denial. As for myself, I have tried this persistently, and must now admit that it cannot be done. Confronted with death – be it of migrants, be it of democracies – in the heart of our European continent, one is quickly confronted with the utter *uselessness* of our trade.

It is a divine uselessness – as are so many forms of art – but is a uselessness nonetheless. We must never forget that ours is a wicked world indeed, whose wickedness is of such a kind that it cannot be remedied by getting on a stage and delivering a 'performance'. There will always be a problematic frivolity to it, which becomes even more acute in our own times.

Yet I am not pessimistic. I do not believe that, as dancers, our role is destined to be vacuous. When the fumes have settled, there is a task for us to fulfill. It is all too easy for me to become lyrical when it comes to these sort of matters.

In 1994, I made the piece 'Amor constante mas alla de la muerte'. The title of the piece was based on a poem by the 17th century Spanish author Francisco De Quevedo. The last line of this poem can be seen as a tribute to our métier: 'Polvo seran, mas polvo enamorado' or 'We will be dust, but amorous dust'. For me, this is what these 20 years have been: a love letter, a desire and love for the language of dance and the potential of bodies to change the world. Dance as a language, as a means to express our deepest desires and strongest doubts about who we are, where we come from and where we go to.

But before I get too lyrical myself, I prefer to cite TS Eliot, who has summarized quite shortly:

*At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.*

I thank you,

ATDK, , Brussels, 8.9.2015.