

P. A. R. T. S.

- Opening PARTS 20 – Speech by Salva Sanchis – Dance Teacher -

I noticed that I am the only person to speak here today which is announced as a dance teacher. I understand from that that I may be expected to speak on behalf of the dance teachers in the school. I am humbled and actually overwhelmed by that request, and ultimately I must say I am maybe not the best person to represent the teachers. And that is because when I think of my relation with PARTS, the word teacher only defines a part of it.

My purpose in the next minutes is to simply try to explain why I personally think that PARTS has been, and remains, a truly exceptional place. But first let me try to define my complex relation with PARTS.

I was a student of the first generation of PARTS, I have been a teacher at PARTS for more than 10 years, I work as a coordinator for PARTS, my life partner is an ex-PARTS student, our child ate her first vegetables in the macrobiotic kitchen here, and was watching dance classes even before she could walk. So, you see, there is little in my life that doesn't have to do with PARTS. One could say that I suffer from PARTS overexposure.

It is because my relation with PARTS is so exaggerated that I may be not the best example (or the average example) of what PARTS can do to your life. However, I do think that anyone who has been a student here, even if for a very limited amount of time, has been affected in a significant way.

Douglas McAdams is an author who studies peoples life's narratives, that is, the way in which people utilize narrative strategies in order to make sense of their own life. He talks about "nuclear episodes". A nuclear episode is an event, or a chapter of your life, around which the rest of your life is organized.

It is an event that has an explanatory power versus the rest of your life, as if everything before was a preparation for it, and everything after a consequence of it. I believe that studying at PARTS has that kind of influence in people's life.

But what makes this place so special?

Well, I think that the most important factor is that it is filled with exceptional people.

When I came here as a student I didn't have any dance background. I was coming from theater studies, and the idea of becoming a dancer was a sort of utopia for me. In helping me become a professional dancer, this place made me believe that anything is possible, given the right amount of dedication and ambition. It continues being a place where the student is inspired by the teacher as much as the teacher is inspired by the student.

It also represents a strong statement against the mind-body division. Even 20 years later it persists in trying to prove that the best dancer has a dancing mind as well: wanting to feed people's minds as well as people's physical experience is very far from a whimsical objective, it is an affirmation of the belief in the full possibilities of human beings; and it is, to an equal extent, an affirmation of the belief that dance can be, by itself (repeat: by itself), a deep intellectual endeavor, as knowledge is to be found not only in detached reflection but also, or I'd say rather, in the full experience of the present body.

Physical experience carries and generates knowledge of the deepest kind even though most often we are at a loss when translating this knowledge into words, and therefore we are also at great pains in archiving and transferring this knowledge efficiently.

Fortunately, in places like PARTS, we can count on the exceptional quality of certain individual practitioners who happen to be able to communicate well as well as to dance well.

So, it's obviously not the place by itself, but the fact all these very special people are gathering themselves in this place. I believe in people, not in buildings. I am in fact not a great fan of architecture. So I was amused to see that, in one of his books, Peter Sloterdijk uses a quote of roman philosopher Seneca that says: "Believe me, that was a happy time, before there were architects..."

But, I must admit that there is something about this building:

There's something about the shabbiness of the place. Even after major renovations a couple years ago, the place still looks to me like a torn down workshop. I come from a country that tends to spend lots of money on erecting modern buildings without thinking of what has to happen inside the buildings. So I like that the opposite is going on here. The building facilitates and responds to the project, and not the other way around. There is also definitely something about how that corridor floats above the studios, maximizing the amount of space that can be used for dancing. And in my opinion, there is something about those windows which offers opportunities that we may be missing.

Let me explain:

I was a student here with the first generation. I remember the day in which, for the first time, a student had the idea of covering one of those windows in order to create privacy for rehearsal. Although I could understand the motivation behind that action, I have always thought that something of the PARTS spirit died on that day.

I have always thought that what makes this place special is the fact that we all learn to deal with each other, which generates opportunities for learning from each other.

I myself, for quite a while, used to tend to hide my work until it was finished. I wanted to 'surprise' people with the result of my research. But at some point I started thinking that trying to surprise people, keeping them out of my process, is maybe a way of addressing people's ignorance, rather than their knowledge. It is also a way of

missing the opportunity of letting people have an influence on you, which is I think the saddest of all mistakes.

I realized at some point that it was not interesting to think of my colleagues at PARTS as my audience. It was more interesting to think of the world as my audience, and of my colleagues as my collaborators. So I stopped hiding from my colleagues, and I started inviting them to see my rehearsals. I found that exposing the work at its most fragile point is actually a strength, and that strengthening the work before confronting it to other people can be a weakness.

So, current students, I dare you,
the next time you have the idea of covering one of those windows, and unless you are preparing a magic trick that really needs the audience to be ignorant think:
who are you hiding from?
Why?
Wouldn't you rather include them than exclude them?

As an ex-student of the first generation of PARTS, I am very sensitive towards the foundational myth of the school. The 20th anniversary of the school offers the perfect context to further enlarge that myth.

Let me state very clearly my opinion in that respect.

Do I think that the beginning of the school was a special and exciting time?
Yes, absolutely, although (or maybe because) it was also uncertain, scary, and quite uneventful on the day to day routine.

Do I think PARTS was a better, more exciting school back then?
From my position, my opinion is no. The school packs together a bigger amount of more interesting activities right now than back then. I think the benefits that the experience of the school offers largely overwhelm the dangers of self-complacency. Although yes, self-complacency and lack of self-criticism remain always a danger to keep in check. And trying to understand the necessities of the new, ever-changing generations of students is very much like groping in the dark, no matter how much experience the school has gathered through the years.

But, in my opinion, there is one crucial thing here: the best teachers still want to teach here, the most talented students still apply to study here. As long as this is so, everything is possible. It is up to us, the people who spend their days here, to decide how to fulfill these possibilities. The idea that after a great start 20 years ago, PARTS can only decay and become more 'institutional' (in the bad sense of the word) is only that, an idea, and this idea is constructed and perpetuated by present people, by us.

There is another possible idea, which is that the future constantly offers us the possibility to do better, that the PARTS of the past cannot become better anymore, because it is in the past, and its becoming better is only an illusion. Us, on the contrary, have no limits, we can do whatever we want because we haven't happened

yet, we are not done. We are not a myth, we are reality.

When talking about the power of collaboration, sociologist Richard Sennet quotes philosophers Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum and their 'capabilities theory', which basically states that (quote) "our emotions and cognitive capacities are erratically realized in modern society; human beings are capable of doing more than schools, workplaces, civil organizations and political regimes allow for".

You see, we constantly try to make PARTS a place that brings out the best in people. But I think people can always do even better than that, they can do better than what we imagine. So, students and future dance professionals, let PARTS not define the goal of your ambition, but rather the starting point of it.

This is a place that we build daily, each of us from their own perspective and position. Whatever power you think you have to influence this place, you probably have a lot more. Let me say this again, without changing any word: Whatever power you think you have to influence this place, you probably have a lot more. So, what do you want to do?

thank you

Salva Sanchis, Brussels, 8.9.2015.