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Manifesto for a National Choreographic Centre

Boris Charmatz

> I am not losing my temper; I simply wish to propose removing the word "Centre", then the word "Choreographic", then the word "National"!

The word "Centre" in National Choreographic Centre is the result of an impressive public policy which has proved that the centre could be plural and multiply elsewhere than in the capital of France. And in order for this impetus to remain, a further emancipation must be expressed today: the question of centre and decentralization would then give way to a space where such issues would continue to surface only in traces.

The search for the "centre"... For a dancer, this word resonates physically first of all. Not so long ago, the dancer, when he was training, was systematically told to "find his centre". But today, it is generally acknowledged that the body has no centre, and he doesn't miss it. The body of modern times has no need for a centre, because that absent centre, the core which would enable one to feel reassured, isn't there, has ceased to be there. For in the void of a body expropriated of its centre, there is room for dance.

This is why one can also erase the word "choreographic", in order to approach it from another angle. Dance certainly includes a properly choreographic dimension, but it also happily overflows beyond this framework. Dance is much broader than what is simply choreographic: its territory must enlarge if we wish to see the overly enclosed space open up, in which it still stands in our society. The space of a National Choreographic Centre must expand well beyond that which is simply choreographic. It should even be possible to transfer the direction of such an institution to a dancer (and not only to the choreographers)! A dancer is both more, and less, than a choreographer: he is someone who works under the direction of other choreographers, who also supports more than just his own work, and who knows that his body is worked upon by the work of many others, the body of his parents, the body of his teachers, the entire body of society. And if he sometimes is the interpreter of a choreographic script, a dancer can also be just anybody, because almost everybody has tried, at one time or another. I propose erasing "Choreographic" because a National Choreographic Centre is much more than a space that enables a choreographer's art to flourish. Beyond the supporting of dance companies, one must also think outside the choreographer-interpreter-company framework in order to create a richer symbolic content . . . Everybody then, the ones who practice, the believers, the artists, the non-believers, the outcasts of the world of art, wrongly believed to be excluded from it, the others, all the others, who do not yet know where the Choreographic Centres are to be found, could discover there a place to activate their

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Dancer and choreographer **Boris Charmatz** maintains an extensive touring schedule and also participates in improvisational events while continuing to work as a performer. He has co-authored two books: *undertraining / On A Contemporary Dance* with Isabelle Launay and *Emails 2009–2010* with Jérôme Bel, and he single authored *Je suis une école*, related to the project Bocal, a nomadic and ephemeral school. Associated artist of the 2011 Festival d'Avignon, Charmatz has been since 2009 the director of the Centre chorégraphique national de Rennes et de Bretagne.

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imagination. What makes a dance should go well beyond the restricted circle of those who structure it in everyday life, and open itself up to an anthropological dimension that joyfully explodes the limits induced by the strictly choreographic field.

And then the "National" isn't sufficient anymore either. The mental space of a far-reaching action must be at least locaglobalregioneuropeinternationabretontranscontinensouth.

Universal and distinctive.

Also, on the façade, one could simply write:

dancing museum

I therefore propose to transform a National Choreographic Centre into a Dancing Museum.

Seriously.

Seriously and joyfully.

I propose mixing all the tasks normally associated with a National Choreographic Centre and shaking them together inside a framework that would be both ancient and modern, humorous and antiquated, dusty and stimulating, a Museum with no equivalent in the world. I would like to put into effect a transfiguration which would give a meaning to the tasks which have been fashioned in the course of this institution's history. Every activity that takes place would be reviewed through a different prism, a prism that would be able to combine in one single movement the patrimonial and the spectacular, research and creation, education and fun, openness to singular artists and the desire to produce a collective work. It seems to me that the designation "Museum, Dancing Museum" could function like a door flung wide open to culture and the art of dancing that we will not change into a sanctuary.

A new National Choreographic Centre project cannot today be content with merely developing and enhancing the systems that were established during the course of its development. If one wishes the National Choreographic Centre of Rennes and Brittany be the matrix of an infinitely larger diffusion of dance, and to play more than ever its part locally, to become a pole of international stature, it seems to me that its global policies must be carried by an artistic project which would give shape to all of its activities. The city of Rennes and the region of Brittany possess both the conditions and the energy necessary to produce a symbolic vehicle that will transport everybody, the artists, the audiences, the amateurs, the professionals, the teachers, the pupils, the spectators, the students, the politicians, the visitors, the tourists, the research workers, the journalists, the citizens, everyone above and beyond those who are usually on board. And they also have the dynamism so that such a vehicle can fulfill all the tasks of a Choreographic Centre while taking a radical, new and unusual direction.

There are few museums of dance. Very few indeed around the world. "There are in France one hundred and eighteen museums of the wooden clog, but not one museum of slavery." I often think of that remark once heard on the radio… There isn't a real museum of dance either, in this country. Dance and its actors are often defined in opposition to the arts that are said to be perennial, lasting, static, for which the museum would be the favourite place. But today if one wants to stop obscuring the historical space, culture and choreographic heritage, even the most contemporary, then it is time to see, to make visible and bring alive the moving bodies of a culture which largely remains to be invented. And if one wishes the choreographic tradition to pursue the new technological trends and truly embrace the trans-media space of the contemporary world, then it seems to me that under the designation of "Museum" the artists will be able to have fun and create freely.

For we are in an exciting era in which museography is opening itself up to ways of thinking and technologies which are enabling something completely different to emerge rather than simply

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having exhibitions of remnants, faded costumes, models of stage settings, and rare photographs of productions.

We are at a time in history where a museum can be alive and inhabited as much as a theatre, can include a virtual space, and offer a contact with dance that can be at the same time practical, esthetic and spectacular. . .

We are at a time in history where a museum in no way excludes precarious movements, nor nomadic, ephemeral, instantaneous ones.

We are at a time in history where a museum can modify BOTH preconceived ideas about museums AND one's ideas about dance. Because we haven't the slightest intention of creating a dead museum, it will be a living museum of dance. The dead will have their place, but among the living. It will be held by the living, brandished at arm's length.

In order to do so, we must first of all forget the image of a traditional museum, because our space is firstly a mental one. The strength of a museum of dance consists to a large extent in the fact that it does not yet exist. That it doesn't yet have a suitable place. . ., that the spirit of the place emerges before the place. . ., that everything remains to be done, and that the daily life of this construction site makes room for every audacious idea and every eccentricity.

First of all, a museum can "take place" every Saturday.

(A national choreographic centre is also run like one runs a cabaret, a ball or a dance floor. Or also like one holds a siege. One can hold it against wind and tide because one is upheld by some kind of faith.)

The museum would comprise of and include the spectacle, because to our way of thinking, the museum contains the dance studio, the theatre, the bar, the school, the exhibition, the library.

This itinerant museum will be the Trojan horse within a radical expansion of the normal NCC's dance "production". The collective building of a future Dancing Museum aims at transforming an institution into a symbolic space of epic proportions: one must imagine a policy of provocative diffusion that will meet the need to radically expand the number of people concerned. The Museum will not be content with merely "programming" events, but will be a means of breathing life into a place, an audience, an adventure, and will become a place where one can go, like in the case of a museum, without knowing in advance the day's programme. An unlikely place for the workshop meeting, the dance hall, the show; initiation in the strongest sense of the word.

To not cut the matter short, ten commandments :

a micro-museum

but a real one. It fully embraces its museum tasks and maintains a balance between its various functions of conservation, creation, research, exhibition, diffusion, raising of public awareness, mediation, without neglecting any of them. Such interdependence is what justifies the creation of a museal structure.

a museum of artists

researchers, collectors, curators exhibition commissioners participate in the life of the museum, but above all it is essentially artists who invent it by creating works. It is therefore an artistic project initiated by Boris Charmatz, but produced by numerous artists.

an eccentric museum

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it intends to be an introduction, an appetizer, a place for enhancing public awareness of dance and choreographic culture in the broadest sense, of the history of the body and its representations. However, it is not centred exclusively on choreographic art: it does not seek to establish a taxonomy of dance, its goal is not to offer a settled definition of the subject. Its ideal isn't to give an exhaustive representation either of the different dances performed around the world. It wishes to stimulate the desire for knowledge.

an incorporated museum

it can only develop provided that it is built by the bodies moving through it, those of the public, the artists, but also of the museum employees (attendants, technicians, admin staff, etc.), who bring the works to life, even becoming actors themselves.

a provocative museum

it approaches dance and its history through a resolutely contemporary vision. It spends time questioning the ingenuous knowledge everyone has about dancing. It induces unlikely links, confrontations between worlds usually poles apart from one another. It questions the accepted conventions that circulate about dance... and therefore elsewhere in society.

a transgressive museum

it fully acknowledges the fact that its activity does not limit itself to the quest for and the representation of the "authentic" object; it encourages artists and visitors to make works their own, it stimulates plagiarism. Artistic creation and the visitor's experience are at the core of its action. Being a place of life, a social space for controversy, a place for talking and interpretation, it is not only a space for accumulation and representation.

a permeable museum

it defends the principle according to which an openness to a broader concept of dance means allowing other movements to influence us, to leave behind a fixed identity. To open up to difference.

a museum of complex temporalities

it deals with both the ephemeral and the perennial, the experimental and the patrimonial. Active, reactive, mobile, it is a viral museum which can be grafted onto other places, can spread dance in places where it was not expected. It is also a museum with a programme evolving with the rhythm of seasons, able to relocate to beaches in the summer period or to propose a winter University...

a cooperative museum

it is independent, but works in connection with a network of partners, cooperates with institutions linked to dance (contemporary, classic and traditional, scholarly and popular), to museums, to art centres and galleries, to research centres and universities, and it in no way sets itself against them. It builds deep relationships with individuals, whether they be artists of international fame like Mikhail Baryshnikov, Steve Paxton, William Forsythe, or passionate amateurs.

an immediate museum

it exists as soon as the first gesture has been performed.

Written in Leipzig, Berlin, Vienne, Rennes, Vanves, Bruxelles, Montreuil, in the space of a few obstinate nights (2008).

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