



## DREAMING THE BODY

### BENOÎT LACHAMBRE ABOUT A SHAMANIST APPROACH, GENDER ISSUES, BODY PRACTICES, TEACHING, CIRCUS & THE SPECTACLE, AND HIS RESEARCH CENTRE

#### A conversation with Sabina Holzer

**corpus:** Can you tell us a bit about the work you are currently involved in?

**Benoît Lachambre:** I am always in transition, so it is a bit difficult to pin it down. At this point I am working on two creations. One is “O oui” which was initiated by the dancer Annik Hamel. She asked me to make a piece with her and Céline Bonnier, who is an actress; the other, “Chutes incandescentes” is a solo with the Singer and Musician Clara Furey. “O oui” is a very physical piece, dealing a lot with language. We did a lot of research, which started by working with Body Mind Centering and with different kinds of written texts, like daily conversations, or dreams we shared.

**corpus:** Did the texts emerge from your physical practice?

**Lachambre:** In this piece the text did not mainly emerge from the physical practice, it came more from an emotional practice or a psychological space which was provided. It emerged from a story. We were interested in dreams. The story came together from the different dreams we shared. We wrote our dreams down. For instance I had a dream about Annik and Céline weaving. They were weaving silk at the sea in a weaver factory. I wrote it down as a stream of consciousness, half asleep. Through connecting our dreams, we sort of created another dream. It was influenced by how they dreamed their relationship. It was a very emotional process.

**corpus:** What is *dreaming* for you?

**Benoît Lachambre:** For me dreaming is a state of malleability, of drift and transformation. I am not so much looking at the symbolism of dreams. I am more intrigued by the idea of shamanism, where the dream has the function of telling you things. It plays a role in the passing of different stages in your life. It is sort of an important mirror – you look at it and you connect with it again. It can help you to understand what you need to go through in your life. These are important issues for me. What you are facing in your life and why. The dream engages you in these functions.

**corpus:** Images of dreams are connected with movement and therefore can give you the possibility to pass through states emotionally. They can offer different ways to perceive images and emotions.

#### To address a symbol in motion

**Benoît Lachambre:** Yes, it is very important to address the symbol in motion. If you try to give a symbol movement, you can engage in its function differently. And it is definitely a shift in play and performance to find a character through dreaming. So we are researching a lot. It is quite an adventurous journey.

**corpus:** You said before that you started from an emotional space rather than a physical one. How do you differentiate the physical and the emotional?

**Benoît Lachambre:** They are nevertheless totally embracing each other. They are caresses which are very much interwoven. While you practice Release Technique, or BMC, or Somatic work, the dreaming as well as the body are expanding together. These are very physical practices and yet totally embracing the dream. They are inclusive of the dream. They do not separate the dream from the body.

**corpus:** You mean these ways of working emphasize the connection between body, mind and imagination?

**Benoît Lachambre:** Yes, they are totally connected and you face this within these practices. The body is organized in a holistic way and within that it is very physical. For me this is important and of never ending interest. Sometimes it seems to me that women have more sense of these connections. Maybe it is because of the different functions of the female body, the possibility of motherhood. The whole productive system in the female body is much more intertwined. In the male there is more division. At least that is mainly the way we are socialized. The female allows to intertwine. So that is interesting.

In the beginning of “O oui” it came up that Annik Hamel and Céline Bonnier were conjoint twins. For me we were in the womb together like triplets. We imagined that either two were born and one died, or one was born and two died. We were separated as a trio and it became a duet.

Parallel Jonathan Inksetter and me made a film with myself and two other men, Stephen Thompson and Fabrice Ramalingom. This video is part of the piece. We wanted to open the heterosexual hegemony. I often feel that in society the queer side, the more complex sexuality is not represented. I like to explore different relations which are sexual in different ways. In the duet the woman are either sisters, twins, the same and also mother and daughter. It is a piece about women's relationships. It is matriarchal as a piece. The video with us men is a kind of journey in which two of the men become women. So it is about potential transformations of sexual identities.

**corpus:** Your title seems to be a visual translation.

**Benoît Lachambre:** The title means “oh we” and also “water yes”. We wanted a floating title, which conveys meaning, sound and sign. The material of the video was filmed in a river. So water has a very important part in the piece, as a medium of submerging and transformation.

### Working with the energetic fields of the body

**corpus:** It seems that you put the body in certain circumstances. An actor puts him- or herself in certain circumstances by taking on a certain part. But in your case it is not a part but it is a state which is triggered by the water, by dreaming, and you process material to perform from there.

**Benoît Lachambre:** Yes, or the sofa, which we use now on stage, or fabric or memory – or fabric memory.

**corpus:** In which way do you use language to represent the things which are important to you?

**Benoît Lachambre:** In this piece we are very much in the intuitive land of body and dreams. It is very physical. There is touch and hugging and kissing and fighting, there is confusion and separation. And there is coming together again. It is a lot about human dynamics.

I am very much working within the energetic body, into the energetic fields of the body. At a certain point Meg Stuart came to work with us. She works with the dynamics of play and the use of characters. So it is a very interesting combination of complementary work approaches. We looked how different uses of language can transmit something by changing the tonality, the breath, the use of body centers, the emotion.

For instance we are just using “wow” as a language to communicate. How is it possible to communicate just by changing the tonality of the “wow”, by changing the emotion? How does the mind transfer all the shifts? We also have the use of “normal” verbal language and we have verbal diarrhea. It came from an intense dream I had about the violence that happens to women. It was a dream of unweaving the anger, about healing the mothers.

Another text Annik wrote was about a natural spring and smooth rain. But the spring turns into floods of rain and the stream becomes a huge devastating river. There are earthquakes and volcanos. A major cataclysm. But she talks about it very bare without any emotional attachment. So we work a lot on text and different kinds of relationships with it. Working on different ways of communication is interesting, because we are dealing with both theatre work and dancing.

**corpus:** Are you also dealing with dreams in your teaching?

**Benoît Lachambre:** I try not to specify the dreams in the teaching. It is more an open space. So people can have their own dreams and recognize and embody them. It depends very much on what is triggered. I think by releasing the body, you connect to the dream. I give imagery; some of the imagery I learned from Skinner Release Technique. I work with shining a lot as a way to send energy through space and opening body spaces, or the imagery of the rayfish for the sacrum. When the sacrum is mobile and energized, then there is movement around the muscular structure of the pelvis, which allows movement impulses to be completed by the pelvis, the muscular and fascia system. So it turns around the sit bones, around the femurs, around the trochanters, to free the femurs and the hip sockets. In this way I facilitate the body in motion and at the same time allow the body to dream.

### To leave room for process

**corpus:** It is also a way to let the body discover its own way of movement, or to articulate different states of movement.

**Benoît Lachambre:** What I want to promote primarily is safety. Something safe for the body.

**corpus:** So it is not about pushing the body.

**Benoît Lachambre:** Sometimes, yes, you have to push, but always with awareness. It is necessary to really feel how much the body can take. In the other piece I am working on with the singer and musician Clara Furey, there is a moment where she is totally twisted and strained, but she still continues to sing and play the piano.

**corpus:** How was that developed?

**Benoît Lachambre:** The solo is based on a myth of the Ramayana which connects to our individual dreams. There are also poems of the great Sufi master Rumi, with which Clara Furey composed songs. I developed texts from my dreams and she performs them. The movement developed in accordance with the inner symbolic. It is a cross-gender piece. I am gay and she is lesbian. She explores the masculine and feminine side of her personality. She likes to explore different ways to express herself. So do I, so it is interesting to work together. We started to work with the straight piano and we added a tail to it. I like to say that it is a straight piano that thinks it is a grand piano.

In the case of the duet I have been working a lot with teaching methods from the beginning of the process, in the case of the solo we're starting now there are totally different processes. I have to say I don't want to commit myself to style. I am too excited to leave room for the process, what it can offer. It offers so much.

**corpus:** Yes, it is great to let oneself be informed by it.

**Benoît Lachambre:** It is very fertile ground. I also like to relate my teaching to process. In my method I try to give a lot of kinetic possibilities to motion. So the body can be dreamt. Dreaming the body and the body dreaming. For that it is important not to restrain the body in positions but to allow the body to flow. Even if it looks strained from the outside.

### Access to multiplicity

**corpus:** I heard that you are setting up a research center.

**Benoît Lachambre:** For me it is a very hopeful move as a project. I want to create a very open communication center. I discovered in my artistic practice that it is essential to meet different people, it is essential to meet different processes, it is good to challenge oneself with other ideas. Together with André Malacket, who is my partner in this, we want to build a center where this is happening. In Québec the youth has been very much informed by classical and modern dance. Somatic, experimental and conceptual ways of working have to make their way through it and this is a struggle. The Cirque du Soleil has taken a lot of place and by taking a lot of room it has pushed the spectacular very far.

**corpus:** You mean the aesthetic regime of the spectacular?

**Benoît Lachambre:** Yes, it is a regime. And I want counteract that. I am not against circus in general, it can be

brilliant. But Cirque du Soleil is a big multinational cooperation. Its extreme aesthetics work as a very imposing rule. It feeds a lot into the arts community. A lot of dancers go to work for the circus.

**corpus:** Really?

**Benoît Lachambre:** Nearly the whole crew consists of dancers. The cirque pays a lot. A lot of ex-dancers making a lot of cash.

**corpus:** You say ex-dancers?

**Benoît Lachambre:** The new systems which are created for dance in the community are taken by the circus. I am in disagreement with the circus, which is not easy. I would like to have a place to promote ecology.

**corpus:** What would you like to happen at the center? As a place for research and meeting, will there also be performances?

**Benoît Lachambre:** Because of the regulation, we do not have the possibility to invite so many people. So we can invite little groups and small audiences. It is in the middle of a mountain region. We cannot have a hundred people coming. We can have thirty. It is fine. We have a studio, which has all the equipment of the theatre, and another studio. One can also work outside and take long walks and listen to nature. We keep looking for some more funding.

I make the center to invite people. I always want to invite 2 or 3 young people that they can observe the process. So the youth can be informed about different processes. There will be also more conventional forms, like Modern and Classical Dance, but I want to have it in relation to somatic ways of movement, so that people can also approach more conventional forms but be fed with different information. I will also do some symposiums and laboratories. Some have to be bigger scale and also small. So you have to bring the names in, but you also have to bring in art. The North-South Research I was doing at Tanzquartier and also "On Listening" as a mixture between theory and practice, of different media meeting was very good.

The center is for dance and connective art. It can't be just about the body dancing. It has to be also about the mind, the philosophy and theory.

**corpus:** Theory is very necessary and supportive for practice.

**Benoît Lachambre:** Yes, there are many thought systems which are very rich. I think it is primordial that people know that and that they have access to multiplicity, not just to one thing. Multiplicity also as a way to bring in different cultural approaches, different ways to see dance and art as creation. So I want to place that where ideas can be challenged.

I need to be in a surrounding where that is present. I cannot be in a surrounding which is just promoting my work. Otherwise it is too much of one school of thought. And this is not how I want to evolve or what I want to commit to. It is not even that I am against circus. It is just to keep it malleable and open and not have a restricted view. And for me the center is a tool for that. To open the minds and bring accessibility to people and to challenge the minds of the creators.

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