

UNPACK THE ARTS

European residency programme for cultural journalists

**AUCH RESIDENCY
CIRCA FESTIVAL
31 OCT. – 03 NOV 2012**

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Presentation

Circus arts are an art form like theatre or dance, but have not yet a profound level of intellectual, cultural and institutional recognition it deserves, in Europe as well as at national and local level. Thereby political and financial support to this sector is quite low and there are structural weaknesses. There are strong imbalances in comparison to other creative areas, even when comparing the realities between regions or countries.

Despite the growing success of circus by the audience and programmers, circus arts are not covered by abundant literature, academic research, in-depth articles, reviews,... and artists themselves often experience difficulties in producing theoretical writing that communicates their practice, their creative processes and their productions. They rarely have the chance to exchange with critics and experts from the performing arts on theoretical or conceptual terms.

Also, many art writers are clueless about contemporary circus. Cultural journalists don't know the disciplines and techniques and overall they lack the contextual understanding to tackle a piece's dramaturgical choices, to reference other productions, or to interview artists creating non text-based works.

That's why Circuscentrum and 9 important circus festivals all over Europe conceived Unpack the Arts. Unpack the Arts is a European project – granted by Europe Culture – that provides residencies for cultural journalists in the

context of twelve major festivals programming contemporary circus. The goal of the project is to facilitate the circulation of knowledge and experience, to develop the critical discourses of its participants, and to further the role of the media within the circus arts and contemporary society.

12 Residencies – 120 Articles

Unpack the Arts consists of 12 residencies in 8 countries, spread over 2 years (August 2012 – February 2014). Each residency is set within the framework of a festival and follows the same format: over the course of 4 days, the participants contribute to a series of moderated thematic discussions, attend lectures by key circus experts, see 3-5 shows, and meet with and interview programmed artists along with a representative of the host festival. After the residencies, each participating journalist delivers one article. These texts are collected, translated and turned into an online, multilingual publication.

This second publication collects the texts of 10 European journalists who attended the residency at CIRCa Festival in Auch, France, 31 October – 3 November 2012.

We wish to thank all participants and all collaborators who made this residency a success.

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Director, Circuscentrum (project leader)

YOHANN FLOCH

Adviser

On circus time

BAKK ÁGNES

CIRCa – Festival de cirque actuel, which has been organised in the French town of Auch for the last 25 years, was founded as a meeting-place for circus schools but has since become one of the most prominent events in the circus calendar. Although French circus schools continue to present their most impressive productions here, the organisers also invite the world's most famous circus artists and companies to give performances. Within the framework of the Unpack the Arts programme, ten cultural journalists were given the chance to see a slice of the festival's programme and to try to tackle the questions raised by the contemporary, new and traditional circus genres.

The performances belonging to the genre of contemporary circus have an innovative approach to the work of dramaturgy: the dramaturgy of the performances is often organised around a story, but this is usually depicted with the assistance of acrobatic stunts. This is a kind of dichotomy, as we can recognise the circus acts by the allusions to them, and yet the artists have built these around a narrative. The relative presence of the *numéros* generates a different sense of time compared to the sense of time that exists in the theatre, however, and it is worth investigating the effect of this more closely.

Circus and the video clip aesthetic

Educational institutions for circus are much more common in France than in Eastern Europe. One of the recognised higher education institutions for circus, CNAC (Centre National des Arts du Cirque), sends its graduates on their way with a state-recognised certificate of higher education. And for all graduating classes the school invites a director to work with the students and create a performance which they then take on tour for a year. The young French director David Bobee worked with this year's graduating CNAC class to create the performance *This is the End*. The production reflects on the following question:

Cirkusz időben

BAKK ÁGNES

A franciaországi Auchban immár 25 éve megrendezett *CIRCa – Festival de cirque actuel* először csak a cirkusziskolák számára megrendezett találkozó volt, 2012-re viszont a kortárs cirkuszfesztiválok egyik kiemelkedő eseményévé vált. Bár a francia cirkusziskolák továbbra is bemutatják legkiemelkedőbb produkcióikat, de már a világ leghíresebb cirkuszművészeit és társulatait is meghívják a szervezők egy-egy fellépés erejéig. Az Európai Unió által finanszírozott, két évig és 12 fesztivál erejéig tartó *Unpack the Arts* nevű program keretében most 10 kulturális újságíró is megnézhetette a fesztivál programkínálatának egy szeletét, majd próbál választ adni az új, a modern, a kortárs illetve a hagyományos cirkusz műfajai által feltett kérdésekre.

Az új cirkuszi műfajához tartozó előadások újszerűen tekintenek a dramaturgia feladatára: az előadások dramaturgiája egy cselekmény köré szerveződik, de ezt rendszerint akrobatikus mutatványaik segítségével ábrázolják. Ez egyfajta kettős állapot, hiszen utalásszerűen tetten érhetjük a cirkuszi számokat, de ezeket immár egy narratíva köré építik az alkotók. A *numérok* viszonylagos jelenléte viszont másfajta időérzékelést generál a színházi időérzékeléshez képest, ennek hatását érdemes közelebbről megvizsgálni.

Cirkusz és a videoklip-esztétika

Franciaországban a cirkuszi oktatási intézmények sokkalta népszerűbbek, mint Kelet-Európában. Az egyik elismert cirkuszi felsőoktatási intézmény a CNAC (Centre National des Arts du Cirque) államilag elismert felsőfokú végzettségi bizonyítvánnyal engedi útnak végzős hallgatóit. Minden végzős évfolyam számára pedig az iskola meghív egy rendezőt és az ő közreműködésével létrehozna egy előadást, amelyet aztán egy évig turnéztatnak. Az idei végzős évfolyammal David Bobée, fiatal francia rendező közreműködött, melynek végeredményeképpen létrejött a *This Is*

'What would you do if you only had five minutes before the world came to an end?' The graduating class present ten pre-apocalyptic premonitions, into which each has poured their own specialisation. Naturally, this end of the world does not necessarily mean the *real* end of the world, but instead can be interpreted as the last sprint of their student lives and the jump into the unknown that will follow. Their displays, whether individual or in small groups, are mixed with personal confessions (recorded and played), with tension-generating music, and with a stack of multimedia techniques: the continuous projection of photographs of the performers and an ever-present countdown clock all build tension and heighten the production's rhythm. All of these methods bring to mind the aesthetics of video clips. In the chapter entitled 'Time' in his book *Postdramatic Theatre*, Hans-Thies Lehmann mentions that it is typical of the video clip aesthetic of this kind that time be segmented with media clips – mixing recordings and live action – in some instances rather like a television series would be segmented. The plot of *This is the End* is based on the repetition of sequences. The repetition of scenes, which are always longer than the real five-minute timeframe before the promised apocalypse, deepen the dramatic depth of the passage of time by presenting the events of these last five minutes from a number of perspectives. By telling of the turning points in their destinies, the young performers condense their entire lives into these five- to ten-minute personal confessions, which concern their roots on the one hand and their future on the other. These verbal statements will later symbolise the meaning of the physical displays. These stunts, albeit in a slightly naive and attention-seeking fashion, represent the very struggle which the freshly graduated students have to undergo and which all the final-year students ultimately succeeded in overcoming. The personal confessions also give the performance a kind of documentary character: there is not only emphasis on the *numbers* performed; the performer and their background also become more emphasised. They are not just a body, but a face, with a destiny, and with their own private battle to win. The dramaturgy is built on the dramatic nature of a generation in crisis, and also

the End című előadás. A produkció azt a kérdést járja körbe, hogy: „Mit tennél, ha még öt perced lenne a világ végéig?” Az osztály szinte valamennyi tagja tíz preapokaliptikus előképet mutattak be, amelybe ki-ki belefoglalta saját specializációját. Természetesen ez a világvége nem feltétlenül az igazi világvégét jelenti, hanem az ő diákviláguk utolsó száz méterét és az azt követő ugrást a bizonytalanba. Az egyéni vagy kiscsoportos mutatványaik keveredtek a bejátszott személyes vallomásaikkal és feszültségkeltő zenével, illetve a multimediális eszközök halmozásával: saját fényképeik folyamatos vetítése, az állandó visszaszámlálás növeli a feszültséget és fokozza a produkció ritmusát. Mindezek az eszközök a videoklipek esztétikumát idézik. Hans-Thies Lehmann *A posztdramatikus színház* című könyvének „Idő” fejezetében említi, hogy az ilyesfajta *videoklip-esztétikára* jellemző, hogy médiaidézetekkel, az élő jelenlét és a felvételek keverésével, esetleg egyes esetekben a televízió sorozatokhoz hasonlóan szegmentálják az időt. *A This is the End* cselekménye szekvenciák ismétlődésére épül. Az ismétlődés, amely mindig túlmutat a valós öt perc keretén, elmélyíti a múlt idő dramatikus súlyát azáltal, hogy egy adott időintervallum történéseit a több szempontból mutatja be. Ugyanakkor ezekbe az öt-tíz perces a személyes vallomásokba, amelyek egyrészt a gyökerekről másrészt a jövőről szólnak, a fiatalok teljes élete belesűrűsödik azáltal, hogy elmesélik sorsuk buktatóit. Később ezek a verbális megnyilatkozásokat szimbolizálják a mutatványok jelentését is. Ezek a mutatványok, kissé tán naiv és hatásvadász módon, de magát a harcot jelképezik, amelyet a frissen végzett egyetemistáknak meg kell nyerni és amelyet végül tisztességesen „letudott” minden végzős tanítvány. Az elhangzott személyes vallomások ugyanakkor egyfajta dokumentarista jelleget is kölcsönöznek az előadásnak: nem csak az előadott *számokon* van a hangsúly, hanem hangsúlyossá válik az előadó és annak háttere is. Nem csak egy test lesz, hanem egy arc, sorssal, saját harccal. A dramaturgia a generációs válság drámaiságára épít, ugyanakkor arra a kortárs problémára, hogy most már az egyetemen végzettek sorsa kiszámíthatatlan és sokszor kilátástalan.

on the contemporary problem that the future for those with university qualifications is uncertain and sometimes hopeless.

Quite tangible in this production is the conflict between the virtual-electronic temporal space and real moments from life. This is greatly increased by the nature of the circus performance genre, as the presentation of special exercises in circus is symbolic, yet, if we consider the context of this production, they are also reflecting real moments in their lives – and as such the performance is a genuine example of the duality of the circus and theatre genres.

Durative aesthetics and the workings of the imagination

In contrast to the previous example, Johann Le Guillerm's performance *Secret* presents new horizons with its slowness, with the repetitiveness of certain sequences, and with its complex mix of the specifics of physical theatre and circus. Le Guillerm beguiles his audience with magic displays and the construction of astonishing structures. At CIRCa he also presented his production in his own circus tent, thereby showing how his act is carefully worked out to the very last detail, and how important a familiar environment is to him.

Topography, astronomy, philosophy, mathematics, geography – *Secret* formed in Le Guillerm's mind under the influence of all of these disciplines, while the organising principle behind the production was suggested by the techniques of architecture. He uses nothing except wood and rope, and from these constructs structures which are long-lasting, yet which he can destroy with a few movements. The constructions he builds are seemingly independent of one another, but by the end of the production the real unity of the dramatic and intellectual performance is established.

His 90 minute show robs those sitting around the arena of a realistic sense of time. Using a meditative, almost Buddhist approach, the piece demands complete attention. Le Guillerm put together this 'mental circus' display after many years of experiment and inquiry. First he crawls along wooden planks arranged like dominoes. Then he draws on a blackboard with chalk, before turning the board around and showing us an

Ebben az előadásban a virtuális-elektronikus időfelület és az élet valóságos pillanatának lappangó *konfliktusa* érhető tetten¹. Ez a cirkuszi előadás műfajosságában meghatározódik, hiszen a speciális cirkuszművészi gyakorlatok bemutatása egyrészt szimbolikus, de az előadás kontextusát tekintve nagyon is az életük valóságos pillanatainak tartozékai – így az előadás a cirkusz és színházi műfajok kettőségének valóságos példája.

A duratív esztétika és a képzelet működése

Ez előző példával ellentétben Johann Le Guillerm *Secret* című előadása lassúságával, az időszekvenciák „újralejátszásával” valamint a tárgyszínház és a cirkusz műfajának sajátosságával új horizontokat mutat fel. Igazi varázslómutatványokkal, elképesztő szerkezetek felépítésével ámította el közönségét. A CIRCA fesztiválján is saját cirkuszi sátrában mutatta be produkcióját, ezzel is jelezvén, hogy a produkciója a legapróbb részletek is kidolgozott és nagyon fontos számára a más ismert környezet.

Topográfia, csillagászat, filozófia, matematika, földrajz – mindezen tudományterületek hatására állt össze az alkotóban ennek a folyamatnak a képe, az előadás szervezőelve pedig az architektúra. Le Guillerm mentális cirkusznak nevezi előadásának műfaját. Nem használ mást, mint fa vagy kötélanyag, viszont ezekből alkot meg olyan szerkezeteket, amelyek tartósak, ugyanakkor egy pár mozdulattal szét is rombolhatja azokat. A felépített konstrukciók látszólag különállnak egymástól, produkció végére összeáll a valódi dramatikus-intellektuális előadás egység.

Másfél órás produkciója megfosztja a porondot körbeülőket a valós idő érzékétől. Szinte meditatív, buddhista fogalommal élve egyhegyű figyelmet követel. Le Guillerm hosszú évek kísérletezése és vizsgálódása eredményeképpen állította össze ezt a *mentális cirkuszi* mutatványát. Először egymáshoz dominószerűen simuló falapokon vonszolja be magát. Majd egy fekete lapra rajzol krétával, azt megfordítván

1 Hans-Thies Lehmann – A posztdramatikus színház. 190



Cirque ici – Johann Le Guillerm – Secret © Ph. Cibille

exact copy of the drawing. Later he carefully wipes his drawing so as to reveal the image of a series of Arab numbers, then walks off with his cloth over his arm as might a waiter. And the viewers applaud this, too. They fall into a trance.

It is in the last third of the performance that it fully becomes hypnotic: it puts a spell on the audience with a series of structures created then dismantled. The complicated shapes are immediately destroyed, almost in line with the mandala principle, and another shape is built in their place. This emphasises the process of creation, the projection of Le Guillerm's ideas in space in such a way that the object, the result of this creative process, is not significant.

As a performer, Johann Le Guillerm can be seen as a shamanic or meditational leader, in a kind of trance, who does not glance at the audience for a moment, and who occasionally accompanies his slow, cautious movement with loud exhalations. He completes his experiments dressed in huge cowboy boots, trousers reaching up almost to his chest, and sometimes a long coat. He is the creator and stage master of objects: for him, the circus is a place where different points of view are gathered. It is in this space that he collects the various traditional circus exercises; then, by experimenting with them, he sometimes changes and redefines them. In his opinion, the circus as a genre is itself an imaginograph, an aid to the

megmutatja a rajz pontos mását. Később óvatosan törölgeti rajzát úgy, hogy előtűnik az arab számsorozat képe, törlőrongyával pedig mint egy pincér kísétál. És a nézők ezt is megtapsolják. Transzba esnek.

Előadása az utolsó harmadban válik igazán hipnotikussá: sorozatosan felépített majd lerombolt szerkezetekkel ámitja el a nézőket. A bonyolult alakzatokat mintegy a *mandala-elv*hez híven azonnal lerombolja és másikat épít fel helyükbe. Az alkotás folyamatát hangsúlyozza ki, saját gondolatainak térbeli kivetülését úgy, hogy az alkotás folyamatának eredménye, a tárgy nem számít.

Johann Le Guillerm előadóként egyfajta transzban mozgó sámáni, vagy meditációs vezetői megtestesülésben látható, nem tekint ki szinte egy pillanatra sem közönségére, lassú, óvatos mozgását időnként egy-egy nagy fújtatással kíséri. Hatalmas cowboy-csizmában, egy szinte mellkasig felnyúló nadrágban és időnként egy-egy hosszú kabátban megjelenve hajtja végre kísérleteit. Ő a tárgyak teremtője és színpadmestere: számára a cirkusz a különböző nézőpontok gyűjtőhelye. Ebbe a térbe gyűjti össze a különböző tradicionális cirkuszi gyakorlatokat, majd azokkal kísérletezve időnként meg is változtatja, újradefiniálja azokat. Meghatározása szerint a cirkusz műfaja maga egy *imaginográf*, egy segédlet a képzelet számára. A cirkuszban

imagination. In the circus it is not the object we see that matters, but the imagination that surrounds it.

In his scenes, acts of creation (and destruction), and their repetition, transform the audience's sense of time: this is the result not of the Wilson durative time aesthetic, but rather of the alternate sense of time that lies in the archaic nature of the act. It is the imagination surrounding the objects emphasised by Le Guillerm which determines the essence of this durative temporal aesthetic.

If the spectacle hurts

One of the most famous performances of the pretty much legendary Australian group Circa is *Wunderkammer*, a.k.a. *The Cabinet of Curiosities*. This production evokes the world of the variety act: although we mostly see displays of strength and skill, one or other member of the company occasionally sings or presents a seemingly relatively easy exercise – as a form of relaxation – between more strenuous and spectacular acts. Of course, this lighter touch is relative, as during their performance the majority of the audience has repeatedly gasped at the pain visibly endured and has squirmed at the sight of physical suppleness previously considered inconceivable. There are traces of a narrative thread to be found in the performance, but these are mostly rooted in the lyrics of the songs played: their intention is to create a simple process of audience empathy, and so their stunts are played to well-known and catchy tunes about love. The artists present displays that are vaguely in line with the themes of the songs, but it is first and foremost the erotic references which are brought to the fore. Here it is not the personalities of individual artists that we see. At least, with European eyes, this is not how we would classify the performers: we would instead call them bodies called on to implement something. These bodies are characterised by power, suppleness, and, we could say, sexual attraction tending towards perfection. Seen through a gender studies lens, the performance repeatedly portrays the sexes humiliating each other: one of the female performers clambers up on the trapeze such that she tramples on the genitals of one of the male performers; meanwhile, the men often appear in a macho role in which women are at their disposal.

nem a látott tárgy a lényeg, hanem az azt övező képzelet.

Jeleneteiben a teremtési (és rombolási) aktusok és ezek ismétlődése alakítja át a közönség időérzékelési képességét: ez nem a *Wilson-féle duratív időesztétika*, hanem inkább az aktus archaikusságában rejlő másfajta időérzékelés eredménye. A Le Guillerm által hangsúlyozott tárgyakat övező képzelet határozza meg ennek a duratív időesztétikának is a lényegét.

Ha a látvány fáj

A már-már legendás ausztrál CIRCA társulatának egyik leghíresebb előadása a *Wunderkammer*, azaz a *Furcsaságok szobája*. Ez a produkció a varietéket idézi: bár leginkább erő- és ügyességi mutatványok láthatóak, a társulat egy-egy tagja időnként énekel vagy egy viszonylag könnyebbnek látszó gyakorlatot mutat be – pihenésként – egy-egy megerőltető és látványosabb mutatvány között. Persze ez a könnyebbség relatív, hiszen előadásuk alatt a közönség nagy része többször is felszisszent a látott fájdalomtól és az eddig elképzelhetetlennek tűnő testi hajlékonyság látványa okozta kényelmetlenségi érzettől. Az előadásban nyomokban felfedezhető egy narratív szál, de ezek leginkább bejátszott zeneszámok szövegeiben gyökereznek: egyszerű nézői átérzési folyamatot akarnak generálni, úgy hogy fülbemászó, szerelemről szóló ismert dalokra végzik a mutatványaikat. Az artisták a számok tematikájának némileg megfeleltethető mutatványokat mutatnak be, de legfőbbképpen az erotikára utaló jelentéseket domborítják ki. Itt nem alkotók egyéniségeket láthatunk, európai szemmel legalábbis nem így határoznánk meg az előadókat, hanem végrehajtó testeket. Ezeknek a testeknek a jellemzői az erő, a hajlékonyság és mondhatni a tökéletességbe hajló szexuális vonzerő. Gender-olvasati szemüvegen keresztül nézve az előadás többször is nemek egymás megalázását ábrázolja: az egyik előadónő úgy kapaszkodik fel a trapézra, hogy közben rátapos az egyik férfi nemi szervére, vagy például a férfiak gyakorta, mint nőt birtokló macsó szerepben tűnnek fel.

Az előadás a freakshow-k műfaját is felidézi: míg korábban a közönség a torzszülötteket vizsgálta kíváncsisággal, most az ausztrál

The production also evokes the genre of the freak show: while previously the audience could inspect dwarfs with curiosity, now it can delight in or be disgusted by the twisted poses of the Circa performers. Voyeurism has always been an attribute of the observer.

The performers from Circa, working with company director Yaron Lifschitz, build their production on the physical empathy between performer and viewer and on the need for bizarre sights: it is thanks to the energetic radiance of the performance, and to the strong physical presence typical of its artists, that the audience can experience the feeling of pain associated with the twisted poses, and sigh with relief when they're completed. Unlike the performers. For them, the 'only' goal is to bring pleasure to the audience with their surprising and dangerous stunts.

The performance, taking place as it does in real time, can also act as an explanation for the immediate physical feeling generated in the viewer. A real-time narrative is also a feature of pornographic film, where physicality and achievement likewise come to the fore, and where the creators also expect their viewers to empathise with the characters at once. Back in the Fourth Century, Saint Augustine identified *curiositas* as a disease, one which, paradoxically, is satisfied by uncomfortable, even repulsive phenomena. Ever since the avant-garde, this kind of aesthetic pleasure has been at least as exciting as *voluptas*, which is based on the five senses, and the main objective of which is to cause delight. Visitors to the traditional circus might be motivated mostly by *curiositas*. And yet, here, the unflinching and unemotional face of the performers recalls pornographic film, only occasionally, and for good dramaturgical reasons, changing to a more empathetic emotion.

The avant-garde aesthetic of the video clip

The international group My!Laika's production *Popcorn Machine – A Domestic Apocalypse* is an absurdist revue. The loosely joined scenes are connected by humour, the grotesque and brutality. Two female artists are fighting, pulling each other's hair; a sad bride hangs from the trapeze and enacts shocking exercises;

társulat előadóinak kicsavart pózaiban gyönyörködhet és szörnyülködhet. A voyeurkodés mindig is a szemlélő attribútuma marad.

A CIRCA társulat előadói és rendezője, Yaron Lifschitz, pontosan erre az előadó és a néző közötti testi empatikusságra és a bizarr látványok iránti igényre építi fel produkcióit: a közönség ennek az erőteljes, artistákra jellemző erős testi jelenléttel bíró kisugárzásnak köszönhetően átérzi az ún. kicsavart pózokkal járó fájdalom érzetét és sóhajt fel megkönnyebbülten ezek befejeztekor. Nem úgy mint az előadók. Nekik „csak” az a céljuk, hogy a nézőiknek örömet okozzanak, meglepő és veszélyes mutatványaikkal.

A valós idő síkban történő előadás magyarázatként is szolgálhat a nézőkben megszülető azonnal testi érzetre. A valós időbeli ábrázolás a pornófilmek műfajára is jellemző, ahol ugyanúgy a testiség és a teljesítmény kerül előtérbe valamint az alkotók ugyanúgy a nézőik azonnali átélésére számítanak. Már Augustinus is elkülöníti a *curiositast*, amelyet paradox módon a kellemetlen, sőt taszító jelenségek gyönyörködtetnek. Az avantgárd óta ez a típusú esztétikai élvezet legalább olyan izgalmas, mint az öt érzékünkön alapuló *voluptas*, amelynek célja főképp a gyönyörködtetés. A tradicionális cirkusz nézőit is inkább a *curiositas* irányíthatta. A pornófilmek műfajára utal ugyanakkor az előadók rezzentelen és érzelemmentes arca, amelyet csak időnként, egy-egy jól dramaturgiai megfontoltságból kihangsúlyozandó érzelem kedvéért változtatnak meg.

Az avantgárd videoklip-esztétika

A nemzetközi My!Laika csapatának *Popcorn Machine – A Domestic Apocalypse* című előadása egy abszurd revü. A lazán összefűzött jeleneteket a humor és a groteszk valamint a brutalitás köti össze. Két női artista verekedik, egymás haját húzzák, egy szomorú menyasszony a trapézon lóg és meghökkentő gyakorlatokat hajt végre, egy olaszul fecsegő férfi pedig egy furcsa, nehezen kormányozható biciklit hajt, szinte elesik, miközben a nő üldözik őt birtokló, gyilkosságba hajszoló szerelmükkel.

A társulat ars poeticája szerint mindenkinek megvan a saját otthoni kis apokalipszise és ezek

and a man jabbering in Italian rides a strange bicycle that is hard to navigate, almost falling off it, while women chase him with a possessive love that eventually drives him to murder.

According to the groups' *ars poetica*, everyone has their own little domestic apocalypse, and these visions can be seen again in these absurd scenes. They rehearsed *Popcorn Machine* for almost two years: they were looking not for some final conclusion or greater meaning; instead it was precisely the absurdity of meaninglessness that they were searching for. The company started to rehearse with no outside, directorial eye, but after awhile a director became involved in the process – and mostly just to brush up the scenes, not wanting to find meaning in them, or in the way they were built upon one another. In their search for meaninglessness(!), the company kept returning to the issue of violence, and this is how the creators came to an examination of the aesthetics of brutality. Ultimately, perhaps as the result of this mix of the absurd and the humorous, violence appears in every scene of their performance.

The production can be compared to a long drawn-out video clip, in which the artists perform gags with masterful cleverness. The effectiveness of the violent acts, presented in lightweight form through these gags, is only heightened by the supple artists. It is not that we see them suffer: it is that they embody suffering. Meanwhile, with a stretched-out fixed pose or a group picture, they evoke the genre of the freak show. Their props are in line with this, and reflect the atmosphere of Tim Burton's films. The rhythm of their movement speeds up the performance. The other factor that quickens things and which makes the show, hardly longer than an hour, even more volatile, is its remix nature. It is as if pseudointertextualisations and pseudo film clips were being arbitrarily presented. In their brief but effective series of scenes they put inverted commas around the humour, just as around the violence and the brutality. The audience, wearing curious expressions, accept the scenes of violence with no surprise, as these are based on the mechanism of aesthetic acceptance that is *curiositas*.

az abszurd jelenetekben ezek a képzetek vizionálhatóak. Szinte két évig próbálták ezt a produkciót: nem egy végső lényegret vagy értelmet kerestek, hanem pontosan a lényegmentesség abszurdítását kutatták. A társulat külső, rendezői szem nélkül kezdett el próbálni, majd időközben bekapcsolódott egy rendező is a folyamatba, aki inkább csak kifésülte a jeleneteiket – de nem akart értelmet keresni a jelenetekben, vagy azok egymásra épülésében. Az értelmetlenséget (sic!) kutatva folyamatosan az erőszak problematikájával találkoztak, így jutottak el az alkotók a brutalitás esztétikájának a vizsgálatához. Végül előadásuk minden jelenetében talán az abszurdum és a humor eredményeképpen megjelenik az erőszak.

A produkció egy hosszan elnyújtott burleszk videókliphez hasonlítható, amelyben a gegeket mesteri ügyességgel hajtják végre az artisták. A gegek által könnyed módon bemutatható erőszakos cselekedetek hatásfokát a hajlékony artisták könnyedén fokozhatják. Itt nem a szereplőket látjuk szenvedni, hanem ők ábrázolják a szenvedést. Eközben a freakshow-k műfaját is megidézük, egy-egy kimerevített póz vagy közös kép erejéig. Kelléktárukat is ehhez igazítják és a Tim Burton által rendezett filmek hangulatát idézik meg. Mozgásuk ritmusa felgyorsítja az előadást. A másik gyorsító tényező, amely az alig több mint egy órást előadást még illékonyabbá teszi az remixszerűség. Mintha ál-intertextusokat és ál-filmbetéteket mutatnának be önkényes módon. Rövid, de hatásos jelenetsoraikban ál-idézőjellel látják el úgy a humort, mint az erőszakot és a brutalitást. A kíváncsi nézői tekintetek pedig csodálkozás nélkül fogadják be az erőszak jeleneteit, hiszen ez is a *curiositas* esztétikai befogadásmechanizmusán alapszik. A My!Laika társulat előadása a remix-technika által egy felgyorsított időképzetet alakított ki. Ezt a felgyorsított időérzetet egyrészt az abszurdból származó brutalitást ábrázoló képekkel érték el, amelyek a közönség számára a mindennapi képáradatból is ismert, valamint a sajátos jeleneti remixtechnikájukkal is.

A CIRCA fesztiválján bemutatott általam vizsgált négy cirkuszművészeti produkció más-más módszerrel veszi birtokba a nézői figyelmet

My!Laika's performance has, with the remix technique, developed a sped-up notion of time. This quickened temporal sense is in part achieved with images depicting brutality emerging from the absurd, and in part by the unique remix technique added to the scenes.

The four circus art productions at the CIRCa festival which I have examined all engage the audience with different techniques, by having very different attitudes in their approach to the sensation of time and its relation to dramaturgy. CNAC's performance breaks up the real time of the show by continually replaying a short unit of time from different perspectives – while the huge count-downs on the screens constantly remind us just how the time of the performance is progressing. In his production *Secret*, Johann Le Guillerm alters his viewers' concept of time with the act of creation, even though he bases his own mental circus on circus acts in the traditional way. With its astonishing displays, the Australian company Circa makes use of a real sense of time and of *curiositas*, as an aesthetic pleasure, in order to entertain the audience (entertainment is not problematic for them: they too see their work as being for the exclusive pleasure of the viewer) – and the viewers are indeed granted a pleasant experience. My!Laika's creation is an entirely autonomous performance born entirely of the imagination of the performers: it is brutality and absurdity and humour which all determine the rhythm of the show. Their production uses the tools of remixing, and their performance could come to an end at any moment, just as a remixed song might. In contemporary circus performances, just as in theatre ones, we can see the influence of the latest habits for experiencing time, as established by electronic media. Viewers' attention spans have decreased, and so there is a need for more and more stimulus and feeling for performers to retain that attention. But it cannot unambiguously be said that it is just the sped-up technical nature of video technology that retains attention, as this is also achieved by the mental circus, which, precisely constructed in dramaturgical terms yet much slower in its rhythm, inspires the viewer's imagination using a kind of 'self-entertainment'.

– úgy, hogy más-más attitűddel közelíti meg a nézői időérzékelést, azaz a dramaturgiai szerkesztés elvét. A CNAC előadása az idő egy rövid egységének más-más szempontból történő, de mégis folyamatos újrajátszásával tagolja az előadás valós idejét – miközben a kijelzőkön látható hatalmas visszaszámológó folyamatosan emlékeztetnek arra, hogy miképpen telik az előadás ideje. Johann Le Guillerm *Secret* című előadásában a teremtés aktusa által változtatja meg nézőinek időérzékelését, bár ugyanúgy cirkuszi számokra alapozza saját mentális cirkuszi produkcióját. Az ausztrál CIRCA társulat meghökkentő mutatványaival a valós idő érzékelését és a *curiositast*, mint esztétikai élvezetet, használja ki ahhoz, hogy nézőit szórakoztassa (a szórakoztatás számukra nem problematika: ők is úgy tekintenek saját munkájukra, hogy azt a néző kizárólagos öröméért teszik) – eközben pedig a nézőiknek kellemes időöltésben van részük.

A My!Laika társulat alkotása egy teljesen autonóm, teljességében az előadók fantáziájából megszületett előadás: a brutalitás és az abszurdum valamint a humoron átívelő gondolatiság az, amely meghatározza az előadás ritmusát. A produkciójuk egy hosszabb remix eszközeit, miközben akár bármelyik pillanatban vége is szakadhatna az előadásnak, akár egy remixelt számnak. Az új cirkusz előadásain ugyanúgy, mint a színházi előadásokon felismerhető az elektronikus médiumok által kialakított újabb időérzékelési szokások lenyomata. Csökkent a nézők figyelmének az ideje, ezért egyre több ingerre és érzetre van szükség, hogy a figyelmet az előadók ébren tarthassák. Nem jelenthető ki viszont egyértelműen, hogy csak a videótechnika felgyorsított technikai mivolta az, amely ébren tarthatja a figyelmet, hanem ugyanúgy, a dramaturgiailag pontosan felépített, de ritmusában sokkal lassúbb mentális cirkusz is, amely a néző képzeletét hívja elő, és önönmagát „szórakoztatja”.

Cyrkoteatr

Journalist:
Do you do 'new' circus?
Ashtar: I do circus.

ANNA BYŚ

"Simply circus," said Ashtar Muallem, one of the performers in the piece This is the end, the graduating show, directed by David Bobee, of France's National Centre for Circus Arts (CNAC). "Simply circus" – are you sure? Bobee has been shaped through his work in the wider theatrical arts and he doesn't deny this inheritance. The show itself is on the verge of theatre and circus.

Circle

The circle – a perfect, finite shape. It is difficult to conceive of a better space to talk about Armageddon than a circle – or a circus arena to be more precise. A circle starts where it ends. It's dynamic and passive at the same time. It reflects both life and death. If we think about the Mandala symbol, the circle is the unison of female and male traits. *This is the end* takes place within the few minutes leading up to the Apocalypse and employs the human body as its major means of expression. The bodies it uses have been perfectly shaped by a continuous and torturous training. The muscles are strained, veins clearly visible. Not only are these bodies perfectly carved, but they are also under total control: body movements are well coordinated; not a single element of randomness is allowed. All body lines are clear and precise. If we join the concept of the circle and the human body together, we will arrive at the notion of the Vitruvian Man created by Leonardo da Vinci. The drawing of the Vitruvian Man, depicting harmony, proportion, strength and vitality, serves as the embodiment of the Renaissance ideals. It is impossible not to consider the values of the Renaissance while admiring the body of a circus artist. However,

Cyrkoteatr

**Journalist: – Do you do
"new circus"?**
Ashtar: I do circus.

ANNA BYŚ

Po prostu cyrk. Tak powiedziała w czasie rozmowy po spektaklu Ashtar Muallem z CNAC, występująca w spektaklu „This is the end” w reżyserii Davida Bobee. Po prostu cyrk – czy aby na pewno? Reżyser wywodzi się przecież z teatru i nie wypiera się tego dziedzictwa. Powstało widowisko na styku świata cyrku i teatru.

KOŁO

Koło, czyli figura idealna. Skończona, bo przecież „This is the end”, jak głosi tytuł spektaklu. Trudno wyobrazić sobie lepszą przestrzeń do mówienia o końcu świata niż właśnie okrąg – cyrkową arenę. Zawiera w sobie początek i koniec. Dynamikę i stagnację. Życie i śmierć właśnie. Pierwiastek męski i żeński, jeśli pomyślimy o figurze mandali.

Tematem spektaklu jest apokalipsa, a narzędziem opisu – ludzkie ciało. Wyrobione wieloletnim, katorżniczym treningiem. Z idealnie wyrzeźbioną masą mięśniową, na której wyraźnie znać żyły. Chodzący atlas anatomii. Ciało nie dość, że perfekcyjnie uformowane, to jeszcze do perfekcji ujarzmione. Ruchy skoordynowane, pewne, lubujące się w czystych liniach i klarownych przebiegach. Jeśli połączyć te dwa hasła: okrąg i ciało, to ciąg skojarzeń musi prowadzić do „Człowieka witruwiańskiego” Leonarda da Vinci. Klasyczna harmonia, proporcjonalność, siła, prostota, witalność – ciało opiewa ideały epoki odrodzenia. Nie sposób nie myśleć o wartościach renesansowych, gdy patrzy się na ciało artysty cyrku. Gdy jednak przyjrzymy się uważniej twarzy modela da Vinci, znajdziemy w jego oczach zupełnie nierenesansową trwogę, niepokój –

after proper analysis of the renowned drawing, one can sense a non-Renaissance anxiety and a fear behind the eyes of the male figure – as if the Vitruvian Man can see the coming apocalypse.

The circular arena is a natural space for circus artists, whereas for people connected to theatre it is a novelty, a mystery, the source of new possibilities... The turning platform *This is the end* uses adds to the dynamism of the whole picture. The closer the apocalypse, the more often the performers run in circles, heading in the opposite direction to the rotation of the platform. The symbolism of this action is quite obvious – trying to escape the inevitable, to change one's fate, or, simply, acting irrationally. However, it's not a new idea. *Penthesilea*, by Luk Perceval of the Schaubühne Theatre, also contains many of the the aforementioned ideas. Running in a circle was the leitmotif of *Penthesilea* and symbolised weakness and wartime chaos. By running, the actors attempted to express themselves – it was a kind of safety valve. In both Perceval and Bobee's pieces the overwhelming feeling of irrationality and inevitable catastrophe builds up – as if we were looking at the intimidating negative of *The Dance of Life* by Henri Matisse or a deceitful *danse macabre*.

David Bobee eagerly pushes performers to the edge of the circle to give them a chance to stare bluntly and provocatively into the audience's eyes and to analyse their reactions. The relationship between the artist and the audience is extremely significant in this production, but we will get to this point a little bit later. It is not always possible to maintain intimacy within the actor-audience relationship. The circus performance has its own rules, and moments of true intimacy are disrupted by the pageantry of the show.

When attempting to transfer theatrical poetics to the big top, some limitations of the circus space become apparent. The viewer can get the impression that David Bobee forgets that he is not on a typical apron stage with curtains and wings at his disposal. The reception of the piece is disturbed by stage-setting during the show, which takes place in semi-darkness, all witnessed by the audience. Because of that, the dramaturgy of the piece is diminished.

jakby męzczyzna dostrzegał już nadchodzącą apokalipsę.

Przeźnięć arenę, która dla artysty cyrku jest oczywistością, dla człowieka teatru okazuje się zaskoczeniem, zagadką, źródłem nowych możliwości. Tu dodatkowo podest obraca się, co podnosi dynamikę obrazu. Im bliżej apokalipsy, tym częściej pojawia się motyw biegania po okręgu, w przeciwnym do ruchu podestu kierunku. Symbol dość oczywisty: ucieczka przed Nieuchronnym, walka z losem, irracjonalne działanie wynikające ze strachu. Przypomina się „Penthesilea” w reżyserii Luka Percevala z Schaubühne. Leitmotywem spektaklu był właśnie bieg aktorów po kole jako wyraz bezsilności, wojennego chaosu. Bezsensowna próba wyładowania się, wentyl. W obu przypadkach rodzi to dojmujące uczucie irracjonalności działań, nieuchronność katastrofy. Jakby przerażający negatyw „Tańca życia” Matisse’a, przewrotny *danse macabre*.

Bobee chętnie wypycha wykonawców ku krawędzi okręgu, aby ci mogli bezczelnie, prowokacyjnie patrzeć w oczy, przyglądać się widzom i ich reakcjom. Relacja artysta – publiczność jest w tym spektaklu szczególnie istotna, o czym za chwilę. Nie zawsze jednak udaje się utrzymać teatralną intymność tego kontaktu. Spektakl cyrkowy rządzi się swoimi prawami i wymóg widowiskowości niszczy osiągniętą na sekundę bliskość.

Arena niesie jednak ze sobą także sporo zagrożeń, jeśli chcieć dosłownie przenosić poetykę teatru do namiotu cyrkowego. Wydaje się, że Bobee chwilami zapomina, że nie znajduje się w tradycyjnym teatrze, na scenie pudełkowej, z kulisami i kurtyną. W odbiorze przeszkadzają zmiany scenografii i przyrządów, które odbywają się na naszych oczach, przy słabym wyciemnieniu. Niszczy to dramaturgię całości.

TROSKA

Nie sposób pisać o tym spektaklu, nie wspominając o publiczności. Wykonawcy i widzowie to w tym przypadku ten sam „gatunek”: młodzi artyści cyrku, dopiero zaczynający profesjonalną ścieżkę. Poziom emocji po obu

Care

This piece cannot be properly analysed without some reference to the audience. At the CIRCa Festival in Auch, the performers and the audience are from the same background – both groups are composed of young circus artists on the threshold of their professional careers. Also, the level of emotion seems to be comparable on both sides. Visitors to the circus are generally not bound by strict etiquette, which cannot be said of theatre-goers. Even before the performance has started, the audience really are really enjoying themselves – they sing, form a Mexican wave, and chant for the artists to come into the arena. During the show they eagerly applaud the artists for the complex acrobatics they perform. These celebratory emotions aren't the only ones to emerge though. Watching novice acrobats evokes care, affection and concern in the viewers. These young artists – although extremely fit and well-prepared for the job – are still devoid of self-confidence. They are under stress – revealed by their shaking extremities, facial expressions and nervous breathing. It is also expressed by the extremely scrupulous and careful way in which, for instance, the teeterboard acrobats will prepare each other's landing. This 'awkwardness' makes the audience even more involved in the performance, and it's clear that this engagement is very uplifting for the young performers. One of the final scenes can serve as a perfect example – when Luca Bergandi falls from his tightwire, the audience breaks into rapturous applause, and it's this ovation that encourages him to finish his number. These remarks aren't meant to point to a theatrical dynamic that's really *new* – comparable emotions are usually triggered by other sorts of shows in which novices participate. However, each 'initiation' of a young artist is an equally solemn and joyous event. It stems from the fact that young artists have the honesty or naivety to go to extremes during their performances. They are diamonds in the rough.

The intimacy between artist and audience lies at the heart of this piece. The director heavily based *This is the end* on the personal experience and the lives of his students, and it's clear that he himself established a close relationship with the performers. (He is after all just 34 years old – not much older than his students.) Improvisation on

stronach również wydaje się podobny. Ale też publiczność cyrkowa może pozwolić sobie na więcej niż ta teatralna. Jeszcze przed początkiem spektaklu widzowie zabawiają się, śpiewając, formując „meksykańską falę” czy wywołując krzykami wykonawców. Już w trakcie przedstawienia raz po raz nagradzają oklaskami i okrzykami aprobaty co trudniejsze ewolucje. Emocje nie płyną jednak jednostronnie. Oglądanie debutantów rodzi szczególnie rodzaj troski, czułości, niepokoju. Młodym ciałom – chociaż niezwykle sprawnym i prawidłowo przygotowanym do wykonywania zawodu – brak jeszcze pewności siebie. Zdradza ich drzenie kończyn, niepewność na twarzy, nerwowe wstrzymywanie oddechu. Widać to również w gorliwości i hipertrosce, które przejawiają, gdy asekurują się nawzajem. Ich „nieporadność” sprawia, że podświadomie podwójnie silnie angażujemy się w spektakl, stajemy się widzom do kwadratu, akuszerką w cyrkowym debiucie. Czuć, jak wsparcie widowni cieszy młodych wykonawców. Świetnym tego przykładem jest jedna z ostatnich scen, gdy Luca Bergandi spada z liny. Widzowie zagrzewają go oklaskami do powrotu na górę i już do końca *numero* każde zawahanie ciała odpędzają gorącym aplauzem. W tych spostrzeżeniach nie ma nic odkrywczego – oglądanie prawie każdego spektaklu z udziałem debutantów rodzi podobne uczucia. Nie przeszkadza to jednak za każdym razem cieszyć się i celebrować udział w tym swoistym rytuale „wtajemniczenia”. Bo młodzi artyści są w swoim scenicznym „byciu” ekstremalnie. Ekstremalnie szczerzy, naiwni, niewyrachowani. Piękni, choć często to jeszcze piękno nieco chropawe, nieociosane.

Poczucie bliskości na linii widz – artysta leży u podstaw tego widowiska. Reżyser zbudował scenariusz, korzystając z prywatnych przeżyć i biografii studentów. Czuć, że udało mu się nawiązać bliski kontakt z adeptami – sam jest przecież niewiele starszy od nich, ma zaledwie 34 lata. Młodzi ludzie wychodzili od improwizacji na zadane tematy, oczywiście, przy wykorzystaniu techniki cyrkowej, w której się specjalizują. Nie oglądamy więc teatralnych postaci, ale po prostu ludzi, pokazujących nam nie tylko sprawność ciał, ale też zakamarki duszy. Znamy ich imiona, bo

assigned subjects was the starting point of the devising process, with circus arts the means of expression. Thanks to this approach, instead of theatre characters, the audience can see ordinary people, who demonstrate their exceptional fitness but, more than that, reveal their souls. We know the names of the artists, because they are used to title the scenes of the piece. What is more, scene by scene we learn about certain personal imperfections and dramatic events that took place in the performers' lives. The students each had an enormous influence on the final version of their respective scene. CNAC emphasises that its graduates should avoid reproduction of a work of art, but rather consciously create their own pieces of art. Such an approach was demonstrated by a Cambodian hand to hand duo, who rejected the melancholic music suggested by the director and went for a pop soundtrack of their own choosing. Some solutions adopted in the performance, such as the clock counting down the seconds remaining till the doomsday, seem naïve. However, these flaws can be easily forgiven because of the youthful honesty and truthfulness of the production, and because of the lack of necessary experience among its cast – young artists have the right to learn from their own mistakes.

The Spoken Word

“What would you do if you had just 5 minutes of life left?” – each performer answers this question publicly. The answers are far from original. However, the underlying idea of the director should be appreciated: making young artists face the Absolute, and in doing so pushing them to extremes, is a creative formula for a graduation performance. Students turn into heroes and heroines in the blink of an eye. The Russian playwright Ivan Vyrypaev came up with a similar idea when he suggested that his own play *UFO* should be used for the graduation performance of the National Theatre High School in Cracow. *UFO* consists of ten monologues from speakers who all claim to have had contact with extraterrestrial civilization. Each protagonist has a different background and profession. The descriptions of the UFO encounters also vary. However, what all the monologues have in common is the awareness of facing something significant and

stanowią tytuły poszczególnych scen. Znamy ich ułomności czy dramatyczne detale życiorysów, o czym później. Studenci mieli duży wpływ na kształt swoich występów. CNAC kładzie nacisk na to, aby absolwenci tej szkoły byli nie odtwórcami, jedynie wykonawcami zleconych numero, ale świadomymi artystami. Nie tylko dzielili się swoimi historiami i przeżyciami, ale mieli także wpływ choćby na dobór muzyki, kształt całości. Przyznaje się do tego duet *hand to hand* z Kambodży, który odrzucił zaproponowany przez reżysera nastrojowy utwór na rzecz pełnego energii przeboju pop – do którego pewnie prywatnie się bawią, jak miliony młodych ludzi. I choć czasem niektóre rozwiązania wydają się bardzo naiwne (np. wprowadzenie zegara, odliczającego sekundy do nadejścia końca świata), to wybaczają się to, w imię młodzieńczej szczerości, prawdziwości i wynikającego z braku wystarczającego doświadczenia – prawa do popełniania błędów w swoich pierwszych pracach.

SŁOWO

Każdy w wykonawców publicznie odpowiada na pytanie, co by zrobił, gdyby pozostało mu 5 minut życia. Odpowiedzi nie zaskakują oryginalnością. Należy jednak docenić pomysł reżysera, bo zetknięcie młodego człowieka z Absolutem, postawienie go w sytuacji ekstremalnej to świetna formuła na spektakl dyplomowy. Student z miejsca staje się herosem czy heroiną – „nadczłowiekiem”. Na podobny pomysł wpadł w Teatrze STUDIO w Warszawie rosyjski dramaturg i reżyser, Ivan Vyrypaev. Jako przedstawienie dyplomowe studentów aktorstwa Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Teatralnej w Krakowie zaproponował własny tekst „UFO”. Składał się on z dziesięciu monologów osób, które twierdziły, że miały kontakt z cywilizacją pozaziemską. Bohaterów różnił wiek, pochodzenie, wykonywany zawód, sposób opisu samego spotkania z UFO. Wszystkie zeznania łączyło jednak wrażenie spotkania z czymś ostatecznym, najważniejszym, kwintesencją. Daj się poznać w sytuacji ekstremalnej, a okaże się, kim jesteś.

Co niespotykane w cyrku, Bobee każe swoim wykonawcom mówić. Znowu nie ma sensu



Chabatz d'Entrar – Perchés © Silvere Bartoux

final. Our behavior in extreme situations tells us who we really are.

David Bobee makes his students speak – something that can come as a surprise in circus shows. There is no point in analysing all the monologues – they are casual, colloquial, even predictable. The introduction of spoken word to the circus performance is quite puzzling. Due to technical issues, the performers have to use microphones. On the one hand, the students' untrained voices sound genuine (in their amateurism); on the other, their unsuccessful attempts to apply the director's guidelines make their speech pretentious. They are not dramatic actors – they speak in a 'casual' way, sometimes inarticulately, sometimes with an exaggerated intonation, as if they were participating in a school ceremony.

The human body as a means to fight gravity

The genuineness, though, is hidden in the performers' bodies. The spoken word seems flat in comparison with the artistic expression of strained muscles. The body of the acrobat appears to be the means to fight gravity. At one moment a caption appears saying: "Je veux voler

analizować poszczególne kwestie – są bardzo codzienne, kolokwialne, wręcz banalne. Zastanawia sam zabieg wprowadzenia słowa do cyrku. Ze względów technicznych studenci posługują się mikrofonami. Ich nieszkolone głosy wypadają z jednej strony prawdziwie (w swoim amatorstwie), z drugiej: pretensjonalnie, gdy nieudolnie próbują oddać założoną przez reżysera intencję. Nie są aktorami dramatycznymi, mówią „od siebie”, czasem niewyraźnie, czasem z przesadną dykcją – jak uczniowie na akademii szkolnej.

CIAŁO JEST NARZĘDZIEM DO WALKI Z GRAWITACJĄ

Prawda jednak tkwi w ich ciałach. Słowo wypada blade wobec siły wyrazu pracujących mięśni. Ciało akrobata jest narzędziem do walki z grawitacją. Na ekranie pojawia się napis „Je veux voler et mourir dans l'air” – marzenie każdego z tych młodych ludzi? Spełnia się właśnie w rzeczywistości przedstawionej – swoje ostatnie 5 minut życia studenci spędzają na arenie cyrkowej. Świat pęka w szwach, przestają obowiązywać prawa fizyki, ciśnienie atmosferyczne spada. Unoszą się nie tylko ciała, ale i elementy scenografii. Zwyczajne, domowe meble,

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et mourir dans l'air" (I want to fly and to die in the air). This dream comes true, in a way. The students spend the final five minutes of their lives in the circus arena. The world comes apart at the seams; physical laws are no longer valid, atmospheric pressure keeps falling. Ordinary furniture, attached to lines, is drawn up to the dome of the big top. The paintings of Marc Chagall come to one's mind. Of course his paintings devoted to the circus arts, but also his portraits, in which models reject gravity and fly. It turns out that the apocalypse can have a fairytale character.

Nudity

The body has a symbolic meaning in theatre, especially when it's naked. Nudity stands not only for eroticism, but also for nature, the freedom from etiquette, simplicity and honesty. Nudity, which is a heavily exploited motif in the theatre arts, appears to be a worn-out subject. Nakedness is no longer shocking; it's almost invisible. However, in circus nudity is a novelty. Scant costumes are a norm in circus, but they are not central to the show – we concentrate on the impressive possibilities of the human body, not on the body itself. David Bobee attempts to change this perspective. In the final scene of *This is the end* the performers strip to their underwear and stand at the edge of the stage. The stage turns slowly so that we can have a closer look at every performer. The bodies come to a standstill. They are no longer tensed; they seem natural and private. The bodies are young, but already tired of torturous training. These bodies don't want to reveal the effort and pain that accompanies them in everyday life. This scene is extremely expressive, yet its powerful impression is spoiled by the view of 'hidden' performers dressing in semi-darkness. Such technical shortcomings are common: what ruins the reception of this show as a whole is its dramaturgy. The piece is structured with a countdown so that each circus act brings the doomsday ever closer. In the middle of the ten-to-zero countdown a feeling of boredom becomes predominant. The acceleration of action would be desirable. When the last five-minute countdown begins, a nagging thought occurs: "Please, hurry up!"

przymocowane na linach, lądują pod sklepieniem namiotu. Przypominają się obrazy Marca Chagalla. Zarówno te poświęcone stricte cyrkowi, jak i wiele portretów, których modele podobnie nie poddają się grawitacji i lecą. A więc apokalipsa może mieć też nutę bajkową.

NAGOŚĆ

W teatrze ciało jest znakiem. Ciało „per se”. Zwłaszcza, gdy mowa o nagim ciele. Symbolizuje nie tylko erotykę, ale naturę, wyzwolenie z konwensu, prostotę, szczerość. Nagość, tak chętnie eksploatowana przez reżyserów teatralnych, już nieco się zużyła. Przestała szokować, stała się niezauważalna, funkcjonuje jako oczywisty kostium aktora. W cyrku to jednak nowość. Oczywiście, oglądamy skąpo ubrane ciała akrobatów, ale nie one są przedmiotem widowiska – skupiamy się na możliwościach ciała, nie kontemplując jego samego. Bobee stara się odwrócić perspektywę. W ostatniej scenie wykonawcy rozbierają się do bielizny i stają na krawędzi sceny. Ta powoli się obraca i możemy przyjrzeć się wszystkim. Ciałom wreszcie w spoczynku, stojącym naturalnie. Ciałom występującym prywatnie, w swoim imieniu. Ciałom jeszcze młodym, ale już mocno zmęczonym ciężkim treningiem. Ciałom, które nie chcą mówić o bólu i wysiłku, który towarzyszy im na co dzień. To mocna scena, której działanie niszczy niestety „potajemne” ubieranie się na powrót w mroku nie do końca ciemnego wyciemnienia. Takie montażowe wpadki powtarzają się wielokrotnie, co burzy odbiór widowiska jako całości i sprawia, że dramaturgii bardzo kuleje. Każde *numero* w oczywisty sposób zbliża nas do końca „scenicznego” świata. Jako że liczy się od dziesięciu do zera, w połowie odliczania jesteśmy już dość znudzeni i chętnie przyspieszylibyśmy akcję. Gdy w projekcjach pojawia się motyw zegara wyznaczającego ostatnie minuty do katastrofy, w głowie pojawia się wykrzyknik „Proszę, szybciej!”.

CYRK POSTDRAMATYCZNY?

Właśnie, projekcje. To kolejny sztandarowy element teatru postdramatycznego, wykorzystany przez Bobee. I znowu: w teatrze dawno przestał zaskakiwać (raczej czujemy się zaskoczeni, jeśli w spektaklu nie ma projekcji), ale

Postdramatic circus?

Video projections are another commonplace element of the postdramatic theatre that appears in Bobee's show. While projection comes as no surprise in theatre (these days we are rather surprised if there is no video projection in a play), it is some kind of a novelty in the circus arts. Three rather small, rectangular screens are installed on the walls of the big top. The titles of scenes are displayed on them – and to make it more personal the names of the performers are used. We can also see the faces of the artists – enlarged and clear.

By referring to the personal histories of his artists, David Bobee introduces completely new topics to the circus arts. A Palestinian artist, Ashtar, who performs aerial dance, tells a moving story about her childhood in the Gaza Strip. Her words are accompanied by an expressive choreography. During a breathtaking act by a Cambodian hand to hand duo we learn that one of the boys is deaf and dumb. Before the doubles piece, he dances for a while in front of the audience, and we realise that he feels the rhythm only thanks to the sound-waves' vibrations. The director takes up subjects that were never discussed in traditional circus: politics, war and disability. Of course an in-depth discussion of these topics cannot be expected, because there are no means to express this. However, the symbolic meaning remains. The range of feelings experienced by the audience is extended thanks to the introduction of new, previously unknown topics. Circus is no longer associated only with activities that impress, amuse and frighten their audience. Circus can also be a place for reflection. *This is the end* can be classified as a postdramatic performance. The piece, which pulls together the students' separate acts, can be perceived as fragmentary. Reality blurs with the imagined. On many occasions all the performers are present in the arena, although only some of them are doing their 'act'. The rest behave in a natural, everyday manner. They turn into observers and follow the plot. The set design is assembled within the arena during the show, however, which ruins the magic of circus: the audience witnesses unattractive technicalities. The video projections are trite elements of the postdramatic theatre (not to mention the

dla świata cyrku stanowi nowość. Trzy nieduże, prostokątne ekrany zostały umieszczone na ścianach namiotu. Wyświetlane są na nich tytuły kolejnych scen – to imiona wykonawców, co dodatkowo kieruje naszą uwagę na ich prywatność. Widzimy też ich twarze: wreszcie powiększone i wyraźne. Artysta cyrku rzadziej posługuje się mimiką twarzy jako narzędziem ekspresji, podczas gdy dla aktora teatralne to niezbędne narzędzie pracy. Oto więc obserwujemy kolejny zwrot ku estetyce teatru.

Bobee wprowadza, poprzez odwołania do biografii swoich artystów, zupełnie nowe tematy do świata cyrku. Tańcząca na szarfach Palestynka Ashtar opowiada nam poruszającą historię swojego dzieciństwa w strefie Gazy – słowem towarzyszy pełen ekspresji układ. Znowu, gdy oglądamy brawurowy pokaz *hand to hand* w wykonaniu duetu z Kambodży, wiemy już, że jeden z chłopaków jest głuchoniemy. Gdy przed rozpoczęciem ćwiczenia tańczy chwilę przed nami, mamy świadomość, że rytm odczuwa dzięki drganiu fal. Reżyser wprowadza do cyrku tematy dotąd tu niespotykane: polityka, wojna, niepełnosprawność. Oczywiście, nie można oczekiwać pogłębionej dyskusji, brak tu do niej narzędzi i środków. Liczy się jednak symbol. Wraz z poszerzeniem tematyki, wzbogaca się też paleta emocji wzbudzanych w widzach. Nie chodzi już tylko o wzbudzenie zachwyty, strachu czy rozbawienie. Cyrk staje się miejscem refleksji.

„This is the end” można czytać jako spektakl postmodernistyczny. Scenariusz składający się z osobnych całości można nazwać fragmentarycznym. Realność przenika się z tym, co przedstawione, sceniczne, wymyślone. Wielokrotnie zdarza się, że wszyscy wykonawcy przebywają na arenie, choć działają tylko niektórzy. Reszta ma przyzwolenie na prywatność w postawie, wyrazie twarzy, geście. Z pozycji obserwatora mogą przyglądać się akcji. Zmiany scenografii i przyrządów oraz przebieganie się na scenie niszczą iluzję – oglądamy „mięso” teatru. Nagość wykonawców oraz wizualizacje to wręcz sztampowe środki teatru postdramatycznego. Nie można zapominać o ważkiej społecznie tematyce, jak wojna i niepełnosprawność.

inclusion of such weighty social matters as war and disability).

Yes, this show can be perceived as 'postdramatic', with far-fetched interpretations devised to prove it so, but what for? How can we actually qualify *This is the end*? This is a show directed by a theatre artist, in which graduates of a circus school participate. The enterprise depicts new directions that circus can follow, and demonstrates some of its new potential, but this cooperation of arts also reveals many technical shortcomings. The circus arena cannot cope with some complex set design and lighting solutions. What is more, a circus artist is not the same as a dramatic actor, which is why some attempts to use the spoken word are ineffective.

But the artists cannot be blamed for these flaws – because they are young. We turn a blind eye to their imperfections because freshness on stage is always much better than routine. The production is naive at many points, yet this makes it even more authentic. As viewers we can be sure that not only do the performers want to show us their mastered abilities; they also wish to share their life experience.

It just so happens the title of this performance recalls the lyrics of Adele's theme to the latest James Bond film *Skyfall* – not a lofty remark, so please take it with a pinch of salt. However, this pop-reference reflects the overall character of the show. If the production was released after the world premiere of the film, Adele would certainly spur the artists into action with her song:

*This is the end
Hold your breath and count to ten
Feel the earth move and then
Hear my heart burst again
(...)
Let the sky fall
When it crumbles
We will stand tall
Face it all together*

Tak, można myśleć o tym spektaklu w kategoriach widowiska postdramatycznego i tym samym bawić się w wydumane, nieco naciągane interpretacje. Tylko po co? Bo czym właściwie jest „*This is the end*”? Widowiskiem wyreżyserowanym przez artystę teatru, w którym biorą udział absolwenci szkoły cyrkowej. To spotkanie otwiera przed cyrkiem zupełnie nowe możliwości, dodaje mu kolorów. Powoduje jednak również sporo niezgrabności, głównie natury technicznej. Arena cyrkowa nie jest w stanie przyjąć wielu bardziej skomplikowanych rozwiązań scenograficznych, oświetleniowych. Artysta cyrku nie jest też aktorem dramatycznym, dlatego jego potyczki ze słowem często wypadają groteskowo.

Wybaczamy to jednak artystom, bo są MŁODZI. Patrzymy z przymrużeniem oka na niedoskonałości, bo zawsze wolimy świeżość od rutyny. Wiele w tym spektaklu naiwności, ale dodaje to wypowiedzi autentyzmu. Mamy pewność, że artyści przyszli do nas nie tylko pokazać swoje świeżo nabyte umiejętności, ale też opowiedzieć o swoim życiu.

Tytuł spektaklu *Bobee* w zabawny sposób rymuje się ze słowami piosenki „*Skyfall*” Adele do nowego filmu o przygodach Jamesa Bonda. Odwołanie nie najwyższych lotów i podaję je z lekkim przymrużeniem oka, ale takie „pop-nawiązania” dobrze wpisują się poetykę tego spektaklu. Gdyby powstał po premierze filmu, Adele niechybnie śpiewałaby młodym akrobatom do boju:

*This is the end
Hold your breath and count to ten
Feel the earth move and then
Hear my heart burst again
(...)
Let the sky fall
When it crumbles
We will stand tall
Face it all together*

In the mind of Johann Le Guillerm: A detailed look at *Secret*

DESPINA PSALLI

I first heard the name Johann Le Guillerm within the green chapiteau of *Cirque Ici*, at the 25th edition of Auch's Festival CIRCa, a few minutes before the show *Secret* was due to begin. Having been invited to attend the performance, I knew absolutely nothing beforehand about Le Guillerm or his work. Despite the fact that my journalistic experience is mainly focused on reviewing dance performances, and in spite of having only a basic introductory knowledge of circus, it became obvious in the very first minutes of the performance that this was a special case, a case one rarely comes across on stage.

Poetry, magic and clear images: a thin rope that departs from the stage like a quiet, noiseless snake; enigmatic wooden constructs; other constructs, made of metal, reminiscent of insects in flight; a jet of smoke, evoking mystical associations; a piece of paper, transforming into a dove; a thin, flexible metal tube fluttering like a ribbon; at the centre of the stage, Johann Le Guillerm as a silent force, literally taming his props; a unique atmosphere, coloured with electronic music and sounds that enhance and decisively contribute to the final result. Lighting that discreetly follows the performer and, at times, creates smaller scenery sets.

There is no end to my questions! How did Johann Le Guillerm reach such an authentic result, with clear, minimalist forms emanating a genuinely primeval force? How does his relationship with his constructs emerge? How does he manage,

Στο μυαλό του Johann Le Guillerm Μια αναλυτική ματιά γύρω από το *Secret*

ΔΕΣΠΟΙΝΑ ΨΑΛΛΗ

Άκουσα για πρώτη φορά το όνομα του **Johann Le Guillerm** μέσα στο πράσινο **Chapiteau** της ομάδας του **Cirque Ici**, λίγα μόλις λεπτά πριν ξεκινήσει το **Secret**, στο 25^ο Φεστιβάλ Σύγχρονου Τσίρκου, στην **Auch**. Καλεσμένη να παρακολουθήσω την παράσταση, δεν γνώριζα πιο πριν απολύτως τίποτα ούτε για τον ίδιο, ούτε και για τη δουλειά του. Παρόλο που η δημοσιογραφική μου εμπειρία προέρχεται κατά κύριο λόγο από το χώρο της κριτικής Χορού και διαθέτοντας εισαγωγικές, **λιγιστές μόνο γνώσεις** γύρω από το Τσίρκο, ήταν ολοφάνερο από τα πρώτα κίόλας λεπτά, ότι εδώ έχουμε να κάνουμε με μια ιδιαίτερη περίπτωση, από αυτές που συναντάς σπάνια στις σκηνές.

Ποίηση, μαγεία και καθαρές εικόνες. Ένα λεπτό σχοινί που σαν ήσυχο και αθόρυβο «φίδι» αποχωρεί από τη σκηνή. Ξύλινες αινιγματικές κατασκευές. Κάποιες άλλες μεταλλικές που θυμίζουν ιπτάμενα έντομα. Ένας πίδακας από καπνό που φέρνει μυστικιστικούς συνειρμούς. Ένα κομμάτι χαρτί που μεταμορφώνεται σε περιστέρι. Ένας λεπτός και εύκαμπτος μεταλλικός σωλήνας που στροβιλίζεται σαν κορδέλα. Στο κέντρο της σκηνής, ο Johann Le Guillerm ως ήρεμη δύναμη να «δαμάζει» κυριολεκτικά τα αντικείμενά του. Μια ατμόσφαιρα ιδιαίτερη, ντυμένη με ηλεκτρονική μουσική και ήχους που τονίζουν και συμβάλλουν αποφασιστικά στο τελικό αποτέλεσμα. Ένας φωτισμός που ακολουθεί διακριτικά και δημιουργεί κατά τόπους μικρά σκηνικά.

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seemingly aloof during the performance, to rivet the attention of his audience, while simultaneously communicating with them?

My meeting with him the day after the performance answered many such questions, but also raised many more...

Imagination supports...

It is clear that Johann Le Guillerm creates a special relationship on stage with the constructs of *Secret*. The star of this – seemingly – one-man-show is not the only circus performer – his constructs take up this role as well. Their common feature being the natural materials they are made of and a noticeable absence of modern technology, the objects with which Le Guillerm converses are not what one would call ‘circus props’; however, they do invoke memories, mainly of traditional circus shows. For example, the rope creeping across the floor is reminiscent of a snake, the flexible tube in a circular-elliptical shape brings to mind a hoop, the planks and ropes remind one of trapeze swings.

The constructs used, exceptionally austere yet sophisticated, are the product of persistent personal observation rather than specialised knowledge. Many of them – particularly wooden ones – may bring to mind Leonardo da Vinci’s ingenious machines – except that Johann Le Guillerm is not seeking out utilitarian items. He aims to prove the “intelligence” of objects, to bring their “secret life” to the surface, and to propose a way of perceiving them completely, from all directions. “As people, we are used to adopting a forward-facing perspective of things, rather than a spherical one,” he explains. In his search for the different, invisible characteristics of objects, the 360° circular space of the circus provides him with a wide territory for this perspective to be deployed.

Diving into Topography, Architecture, Calligraphy, Maths, Philosophy and Geometry to draw forth necessary information, Le Guillerm essentially ‘re-reads’ the Art of the Circus through his constructs, seeking out new forms and manners of expression. He abandons the old, traditional Circus and searches for lines to help him

Τα ερωτήματα... βροχή! Πως έχει φθάσει ο Johann Le Guillerm σε ένα τόσο αυθεντικό αποτέλεσμα, με τις καθαρές και μινιμαλιστικές φόρμες, που αποπνέουν μια γνήσια, πρωτόγονη δύναμη; Πως προκύπτει αυτή η σχέση που δημιουργεί με τις κατασκευές του και πως, δείχνοντας απόμακρος κατά τη διάρκεια της παράστασης, καταφέρνει να καθλώνει το κοινό του, ενώ συγχρόνως επικοινωνεί με αυτό;

Η συνάντηση μαζί του την επόμενη μέρα της παράστασης έδωσε αρκετές απαντήσεις στα ερωτήματά μας, αλλά γέννησε και άλλα τόσα..

Υποστηρικτές φαντασίας...

Είναι φανερό ότι ο Johann Le Guillerm δημιουργεί μια ιδιαίτερη σχέση επί σκηνής με τις κατασκευές του *Secret*. Σε αυτό, το εκ πρώτης όψεως one-man-show, πρωταγωνιστής δεν είναι μόνο ο circassian performer, αλλά και οι ίδιες οι κατασκευές του. Με κοινό σημείο τους τα φυσικά υλικά από τα οποία είναι κατασκευασμένα και με τρανταχτή την απουσία σύγχρονης τεχνολογίας, τα ευρεσιτεχνικά αντικείμενα με τα οποία συνδιαλέγεται ο Le Guillerm δεν αποτελούν αυτό που θα λέγαμε αντικείμενα τσίρκου. Ανακαλούν όμως μνήμες από το παραδοσιακό κυρίως τσίρκο. Για παράδειγμα, το σχοινί που σέρνεται στο πάτωμα θυμίζει φίδι, ο εύπλαστος σωλήνας σε κυκλικό ελλειψοειδές σχήμα φέρνει στο νου στεφάνι, οι σανίδες και τα σχοινιά θυμίζουν ακροβατικές αιώρες.

Οι κατασκευές, εξαιρετικά λιτές, όσο και πολύπλοκες αποτελούν προϊόντα επίμονης προσωπικής του παρατήρησης και όχι τόσο ειδικών γνώσεων. Αρκετές από αυτές --κυρίως οι ξύλινες--, ίσως να φέρνουν στο νου τις ευρηματικές μηχανές του Leonardo da Vinci, μόνο που εδώ ο Johann Le Guillerm δεν αναζητά σε αυτές τη χρησιμότητά τους. Επιδιώκει να αποδείξει την «εξυπνάδα» των αντικειμένων, να φέρει στην επιφάνεια τη «μουσική ζωή» τους και να προτείνει, να ωθήσει σε ένα σφαιρικό τρόπο αντίληψης τους. «Οι άνθρωποι έχουμε συνηθίσει να βλέπουμε την κατά μέτωπο όψη των πραγμάτων και όχι τη σφαιρική», εξηγεί. Στην αναζήτησή του για τις άλλες, τις μη ορατές όψεις των πραγμάτων, ο κυκλικός χώρος των 360του τσίρκου, που αποτελεί και το δικό του εργαλείο,

distinguish what he does from it. He speaks of a “Mental Circus” and describes his constructs as “Imagination supports”. Essentially, the *relationship* he establishes with them is the *process* he follows in order to approach his goal.

Body to body

The world of *Secret* is one of machines and constructs that acquire an almost ‘intelligent’ and ‘animated’ essence, conferred to them by Johann Le Guillerm. As the action unfolds, he, alone on stage, develops a dialogue with objects: this is the quintessence of *Secret*. He does not tell stories through this dialogue. The spectacle he creates is not a narrative. By partly setting aside feelings from his personal story, in his own words, he engages in a physical, almost primeval dialogue with his props and becomes a part, an extension of them. During short, one-off episodes with each object, he challenges them to demonstrate their capacities, deploys them over the entire stage, bestows them with being. Through his research, which began in 2001 and focused on the concept of a ‘point’, and through close contact with his props, he experiments and converses with them in a dialogue that always begins with the very material they are made of. “The matter located outside my body helps me shape my thoughts. This matter allows me to record my thoughts... within the matter so that I can later share them,” he says. When watching him perform, one feels that the objects he comes into contact with are a projection of his own body – or vice versa(?). From a different perspective, these objects are his own constructs and his view of them is nothing more than a form of personal, multi-dimensional introspection, a projection of his own quests into matter.

Several objects also present a significant semantic dimension – that of size. A fan, made of enormous planks, that takes up the entire diameter of the chapiteau stage, moves, opens and closes according to the handling of its noticeably smaller operator. The fan has no actual use and Le Guillerm, having scaled it, is doing nothing more than prompting it to demonstrate its use. This relationship, despite the difference in volume and size, does not appear out of proportion. Le Guillerm appears as the ‘driving

το δικό του εφελτήριο, του ανοίγει διάπλατα αυτή την προοπτική για να αναπτυχθεί.

Κάνοντας βουτιά σε Τοπογραφία, Αρχιτεκτονική, Καλλιγραφία, Μαθηματικά, Φιλοσοφία, Γεωμετρία ώστε να αντλήσει την απαραίτητη πληροφορία, ο Le Guillerm μέσα από τις κατασκευές του ουσιαστικά «ξαναδιαβάζει» την Τέχνη του Τσίρκου και αναζητά νέες φόρμες και τρόπους έκφρασης. Εγκαταλείπει το παλιό παραδοσιακό Τσίρκο και ψάχνει τα όρια που θα το διαχωρίσουν από αυτό. Μιλά για «διανοητικό τσίρκο» (Mental Circus) και χαρακτηρίζει τις κατασκευές του ως «υποστηρικτές φαντασίας» (Imagination supports). Επί της ουσίας, η σχέση που δημιουργεί μαζί τους, είναι η διαδικασία που ακολουθεί για να προσεγγίσει το στόχο του.

Σώμα με σώμα

Ο κόσμος του *Secret*, είναι ένας κόσμος μηχανών και κατασκευών που αποκτούν σχεδόν «νοήμονα» και «έμψυχη» υπόσταση. Αυτήν που τους προσδίδει ο Johann Le Guillerm. Οσο εξελίσσεται το θέαμα, εκείνος μόνος επί σκηνής, αναπτύσσει μαζί τους ένα διάλογο που αποτελεί και την πεμπουσία του *Secret*. Μέσα από αυτόν το διάλογο δεν διηγείται ιστορίες. Το θέαμα που δημιουργεί δεν είναι αφηγηματικό. Αφήνοντας κατά μέρος τα συναισθήματα από την προσωπική του ιστορία, όπως ο ίδιος λέει, εμπλέκεται σε μια σωματική, σχεδόν πρωτόγονη συνομιλία με τα αντικείμενα και γίνεται τμήμα τους, προέκτασή τους. Σε μικρά αυτοτελή επεισόδια με το καθένα, τα προκαλεί να δείξουν τις ικανότητές τους, τα αναπτύσσει στο χώρο, τους προσδίδει οντότητα. Μέσα από την έρευνά του που ξεκίνησε το 2001 γύρω από την έννοια του «σημείου», ερχόμενος σε στενή επαφή με τα υλικά του, πειραματίζεται και συνδιαλέγεται με αυτά με ένα διάλογο που κάθε φορά «ανοίγει» το ίδιο το υλικό. «Η ύλη που βρίσκεται έξω από το σώμα μου, με βοηθά να σχεδιάζω τη σκέψη μου. Αυτή η ύλη μου επιτρέπει να εγγράψω τη σκέψη μου... μέσα στην ύλη για να μπορέσω στη συνέχεια να τη μοιραστώ...», λέει ο ίδιος. Παρατηρώντας τον την ώρα της παράστασης, έχει κανείς την αίσθηση ότι τα αντικείμενα με τα οποία έρχεται σε επαφή, αποτελούν την προβολή του ίδιου του σώματός του. Η και το αντίστροφο (;). Από μίαν άλλη οπτική άλλωστε, αυτά τα αντικείμενα είναι

force' of the construct, as the other arm of a mutual relationship. This mutual and interdependent association is also apparent in the erection of a 'ladder' consisting of planks and rope. Through an ostensibly asymmetrical construct that appears 'unsteady' and 'suspended', the performer builds a relationship step by step, tests it and conquers it, moving acrobatically to its highest step. He repeats the same endeavour with a wooden construct reminiscent of an enormous snail. As a living part of the construct, he operates it, moves it, breathes life into it, acting as the demonstrator of an 'intelligent' object.

Using a different, ethereal element, smoke, Le Guillerm opens a dialogue with the intangible, the transparent. Smoke gushes from a specific point on the stage floor and suffuses the space arbitrarily, while also creating a magical, mysterious atmosphere. The concept of a spherical perception of things acquires an additional dimension here, that of abstract and constantly shifting forms.

A common element that is repeated in the contact between Le Guillerm and his constructs is the intent of his gaze focused on them and the dedication with which he handles them. As he explains: "in *Secret*, balances are very fragile. I need to be constantly *present*, so that I can react if something does not work properly." However, this is not merely a practical issue. His dedication and alertness towards his constructs exudes an intrinsic and clear passion – an intent to identify with every object, to stand up against it, body to body, perhaps a tendency to dominate it (?). In his own words, "objects have capacities, they know how to do things". This is what prevails in his contact with objects; it is an "esoteric opening" towards them, aimed at hearing what they have to recount.

All is flux

Johann Le Guillerm explains that he tries "to restore order in chaos, to arrange space in order to form clear images". Through this endeavour, he also initiates a ceaseless process of deconstructing and reconstructing his objects, within a vicious cycle of comprehension and

δικά του κατασκευάσματα και η ματιά του προς αυτά, δεν είναι τίποτα άλλο από μια προσωπική πολυδιάστατη ενδοσκόπηση, μια προβολή στην ύλη των δικών του αναζητήσεων.

Αρκετά αντικείμενα εμφανίζουν και μια σημαντική σημειολογική διάσταση, αυτή των μεγεθών. Η βεντάλια από τεράστιες σανίδες που καταλαμβάνει την πίστα του chariteau από την μια άκρη της έως την άλλη, κινείται και ανοιγοκλείνει κάτω από τους χειρισμούς του αισθητά μικρότερου σε όγκο χειριστή της. Η βεντάλια δε χρησιμεύει σε τίποτα και ο Le Guillerm σκαρφαλωμένος επάνω της, δεν κάνει τίποτα άλλο από το να την ωθεί να δείξει απλώς τη λειτουργία της. Μια σχέση, που παρά τη διαφορά των όγκων και των μεγεθών, δεν μοιάζει άνιση. Ο Le Guillerm εμφανίζεται εδώ ως «κινητήριος μοχλός» της κατασκευής, ως το άλλο σκέλος μιας αμοιβαιότητας. Η αμοιβαία, αλλά και αλληλοεξαρτούμενη σχέση εμφανίζεται και στο στήσιμο μιας «σκάλας» από σανίδες και σχοινιά. Σε μια φαινομενικά μη συμμετρική κατασκευή που δείχνει «ασταθής» και «μετέωρη», ο performer χτίζει μια σχέση βήμα προς βήμα, την τεστάρει και την κατακτά ακροβατώντας ως το πιο ψηλό σκαλοπάτι της. Το ίδιο ακριβώς επαναλαμβάνει με τη ξύλινη κατασκευή που θυμίζει τεράστιο σαλιγκάρι. Εκείνος σαν έμπυχο τμήμα του, το θέτει σε λειτουργία, το μετακινεί, του δίνει ζωή λειτουργώντας ως demonstrator ενός αντικειμένου που διαθέτει «ευφυΐα».

Χρησιμοποιώντας ένα άλλο, αέρινο στοιχείο, τον καπνό, ο Le Guillerm ανοίγει επίσης διάλογο με το μη χειροπιαστό, το διάφανο. Ο καπνός «αναβλύζει» από συγκεκριμένο σημείο στο πάτωμα της σκηνής και διαχέεται ακανόνιστα στο χώρο δημιουργώντας συγχρόνως και μια μαγική, μυστηριώδη ατμόσφαιρα. Η έννοια της σφαιρικής αντίληψης των πραγμάτων αποκτά εδώ και μια άλλη διάσταση, αυτή των αφηρημένων και διαρκώς ευμετάβλητων όγκων.

Ενα κοινό στοιχείο που επαναλαμβάνεται στην επαφή του Le Guillerm με τις κατασκευές, είναι η προσήλωση του βλέμματός του σε αυτές και η αφοσίωση με την οποία τις χειρίζεται. « Στο *Secret*», εξηγεί ο ίδιος, «οι ισορροπίες είναι πολύ εύθραυστες. Χρειάζεται να είμαι πάντα παρών,

redefinition, until he has conquered what is 'expected'. Nothing stands still, predictable and non-evolving – as Heraclitus said, "all is flux" (everything in the world is in constant motion). Even *Secret* itself is, essentially, a work in progress. By demolishing his constructs during the performance or by altering their initial shape, Le Guillerm is merely proposing a new construct, similar to the one that just dissolved – which, however, is not the same one. The constructs might be considered incomplete, as he can return to them and redefine them. It is as if he is re-establishing his perception of each object and giving birth to something new, while also involving the audience in this process. Let us not forget that the circular space of the circus opens up the prospect of a multi-dimensional, spherical perspective.

One of the most fanciful structures (and moments) of *Secret* comes with the erection of a small architectural edifice (which is particularly reminiscent of a small chapiteau!). After it has been completed, it is destroyed and converted, through just a few moves, into something completely different. From my perspective, the new object seemed like a gigantic plough or a wooden dinosaur! Here there is no reference to a circus prop. But how could anyone interpret the transformation of the original structure into something completely new and different as anything other than a magic trick?

Irrefutable communication

Johann Le Guillerm skilfully incorporates his artistic qualities, both conscious and subconscious, in his dialogue and relationship with constructs. A theatrical motion, slow pacing, a long leather cloak... Le Guillerm is not merely a circus innovator. Well-versed in his art, he is also an excellent handler of the spectacle. Inventive and persistent, he uses small enhancing effects – such as the vocalisation *Khaaaaaaa*, a powerful, husky exhalation he often repeats – which, while not serving technical purposes, are definitely part of the spectacle: certain faint expressions of concern that something may not be going as it should; a small, swift movement to 'avoid' something that supposedly did not work properly.

ώστε να αντιδρώ αν κάτι δεν λειτουργεί σωστά». Το θέμα όμως δε φαίνεται να είναι μόνο πρακτικό. Η προσήλωση και η εγρήγορση του απέναντι στις κατασκευές αποπνέουν μια εσωτερικότητα και ένα φανερό πάθος. Μια διάθεση να ταυτιστεί με το αντικείμενο, να αναμετρηθεί σώμα με σώμα με αυτό και ίσως μια τάση να κυριαρχήσει επάνω του (;). Ο ίδιος έχει πει, ότι τα «αντικείμενα έχουν ικανότητες, ξέρουν να κάνουν πράγματα». Και αυτό που κυριαρχεί στην επαφή του με τα αντικείμενα, είναι ένα «εσωτερικό του άνοιγμα» προς αυτά, ένα «δόσιμο» με στόχο να αφουγκραστεί αυτό που έχουν να διηγηθούν.

Τα πάντα ρει

Ο Johann Le Guillerm εξηγεί, ότι «προσπαθεί να αποκαθιστά την τάξη μέσα στο χάος, να τακτοποιεί το τοπίο, ώστε να μπορεί να σχηματίζει σαφείς εικόνες». Σε αυτή την προσπάθεια του μπαίνει και σε μια αέναη διαδικασία αποδόμησης και ανακατασκευής των αντικειμένων του, σε ένα φαύλο κύκλο κατανόησης και επαναπροσδιορισμού, μέχρι να κατακτήσει το «προσδοκώμενο». Τίποτα δεν είναι στάσιμο, αναμενόμενο και μη εξελίξιμο και όπως έχει πει ο Ηράκλειτος, «τα πάντα ρει» (τα πάντα στον κόσμο είναι σε συνεχή κίνηση). Ακόμη και το ίδιο το *Secret* είναι στην ουσία ένα work in progress. Γκρεμίζοντας τις κατασκευές του κατά τη διάρκεια της παράστασης, ή τροποποιώντας το αρχικό τους σχήμα, ο Le Guillerm δεν επιτυγχάνει τίποτα άλλο, από το να προτείνει μια εκ νέου κατασκευή, που θα μοιάζει με αυτήν που μόλις λύθηκε. Αλλά δεν θα είναι η ίδια. Οι κατασκευές θα μπορούσαν να θεωρηθούν και ημιτελείς, εφόσον είναι εφικτό να επανέλθει σε αυτές και να τις επαναπροσδιορίσει. Είναι σαν ο ίδιος να επανασχεδιάζει την αντίληψη του για το εκάστοτε αντικείμενο και να «γεννά» κάποιο καινούργιο, εμπλέκοντας και το θεατή σε αυτή τη διαδικασία. Και ας μη ξεχνάμε, ότι ο κυκλικός χώρος του Τσίρκου, του προσφέρει διάπλατα τη δυνατότητα μιας πολυδιάστατης και σφαιρικής θέασης.

Μια από τις πιο ευφάνταστες κατασκευές (αλλά και στιγμές...) του *Secret* είναι το χτίσιμο ενός μικρού αρχιτεκτονικού οικοδομήματος (που θυμίζει κατά πολύ ένα μικρό chapiteau !). Αμέσως μετά την ολοκλήρωσή του ακολουθεί η καταστροφή και η μετατροπή του, με λίγες μόνο



Cirque ici – Johann Le Guillerm – Secret © Ph. Cibille

However, the trump card of this imaginative circus performer is his honest, unpretentious attitude towards his work and his audience. He claims that he does not specifically elaborate the character he embodies on stage, but remains himself at all times, the product of his personal growth over the years. There is an honesty that lies even beneath his detachment from the audience. Although this detachment seems to be a theatrical trick, it is nothing more than Le Guillerm's natural tendency to maintain an introverted perspective. At the same time, as the spectacle unfolds, Le Guillerm knows how to maintain excitement, keep adrenaline high and continuously build on the surprise hidden in almost all 'conversations' with his constructs. His qualities are communicated to the audience, who may not speak the language of Le Guillerm, but who fully comprehend it as an ecumenical language, a *lingua franca*.

κινήσεις, σε κάτι άλλο εντελώς διαφορετικό. Από την οπτική γωνία που το παρακολουθούσα, το καινούργιο αντικείμενο θύμιζε τεράστιο άροτρο, ή κάτι σαν ξύλινος δεινόσαυρος! Καμιά αναφορά εδώ σε αντικείμενο τσίρκου. Αλλά πως αλλιώς, εκτός από «κόλπο μαγικό», να ερμηνεύσει κανείς τη μεταμόρφωση της αρχικής κατασκευής σε κάτι εντελώς νέο και διαφορετικό;

Μια αδιάψευστη επικοινωνία

Στο διάλογο και τη σχέση του με τις κατασκευές, ο Johann Le Guillerm ενσωματώνει επιδέξια και τις καλλιτεχνικές του ποιότητες. Τις ενσυνείδητες και τις υποσυνείδητες. Μια θεατρική κίνηση, ένας αργός βηματισμός, ένας μακρύς δερμάτινος μανδύας... Ο Le Guillerm δεν είναι μόνο ένας καινοτόμος του Τσίρκου. Γνωρίζοντας καλά την τέχνη του, είναι παράλληλα και ένας άριστος χειριστής του θεάματος. Επινοητικός και επίμονος, χρησιμοποιεί μικρά ενισχυτικά tips, όπως το *Khaaaaaaa* μια δυνατή και υπόκωφη εκπνοή που επαναλαμβάνει συχνά, tips που αν δεν εξυπηρετούν σε τεχνικά θέματα, τότε σίγουρα είναι μέρος του θεάματος. Κάποιες αμυδρές εκφράσεις ανησυχίας, ότι κάτι μπορεί να μην εξελίσσεται σωστά, μια μικρή σβέλτη μετακίνηση για να «αποφύγει» κάτι που δήθεν δεν λειτούργησε καλά.

Ομως, το μεγάλο ατού του ευφάνταστου circassian performer παραμένει η ειλικρινής και ανεπιτήδευτη στάση του απέναντι στο έργο και στο κοινό του. Ο ίδιος υποστηρίζει ότι δεν επεξεργάζεται με συγκεκριμένο τρόπο το χαρακτήρα που παρουσιάζει επί σκηνής. Αλλά κάθε φορά παραμένει ο εαυτός του, έτσι όπως εξελίσσεται με τα χρόνια. Μια ειλικρίνεια που κρύβεται ακόμη και κάτω από την αποστασιοποίηση που δείχνει προς τους θεατές του. Παρόλο που αυτή φαντάζει ως κόλπο θεατρικό, δεν είναι τίποτα άλλο από μια φυσική του τάση να έχει πάντα ένα βλέμμα εσωστρεφές. Παράλληλα, όσο εξελίσσεται το θέαμά του, ο Le Guillerm γνωρίζει πολύ καλά πως να διατηρεί την αγωνία, να κρατά την αδρεναλίνη στα ύψη και να τροφοδοτεί διαρκώς την έκπληξη που κρύβεται σε όλους σχεδόν τους διαλόγους με τις κατασκευές του. Οι ποιότητες του επικοινωνούνται στο κοινό, που μπορεί να μη μιλά τη γλώσσα του Le Guillerm, την καταλαβαίνει όμως απόλυτα, ως μια γλώσσα οικουμενική.

The genius of Le Guillerm lies in the fact that he does not hail from a scientific field that provides him with the background for the constructs he invents and the performance he presents on stage. Self-taught, a great observer, he operates according to a genuine collective instinct that imbues him with authenticity. Analysing and interpreting his work brings to light concepts and intricate thoughts which, if one were to ask him, would never have even crossed his mind when he was creating his show. What is inherent and implicit for him is an object for deep analysis and comprehension for everyone else.

I believe that artists should bring only the distillate, the essence of their ideas to the stage rather than the entire idea. Though this may sound self-evident, it is not. The conception of an idea and its realisation are two points separated by numerous intermediate stages, which often become traps for artists. The final, clear result requires experience, talent and many other qualities, or a rare instinct, which I believe is the case with Johann Le Guillerm.

Η ιδιοφυΐα του Le Guillerm έγκειται στο γεγονός, ότι ο ίδιος δεν προέρχεται από κάποιον επιστημονικό χώρο που να του προσφέρει το υπόβαθρο για τις κατασκευές που εφευρίσκει και το έργο που παρουσιάζει στη σκηνή. Αυτοδίδακτος και μεγάλος παρατηρητής, λειτουργεί με ένα γνήσιο συλλογικό ένστικτο που του προσδίδει αυθεντικότητα. Οι αναλύσεις και οι ερμηνείες που δίνονται για το έργο του, φέρνουν στο φώς νοήματα και δαιδαλώδεις σκέψεις που αν κανείς τον ρωτήσει, δεν έχουν ούτε καν περάσει από το μυαλό του κατά τα στάδια της δημιουργίας. Αυτό που για εκείνον είναι έμφυτο και αυτονόητο, αποτελεί αντικείμενο προς βαθιά ανάλυση και κατανόηση για τους υπόλοιπους.

Είμαι της άποψης, ότι ο καλλιτέχνης πρέπει να φέρνει στη σκηνή μόνο το απόσταγμα, την ουσία των ιδεών του και όχι ολόκληρη την ιδέα. Οσο και αν αυτό ακούγεται αυτονόητο, τελικά δεν είναι. Η σύλληψη και η υλοποίηση μιας ιδέας χωρίζονται μεταξύ τους από πολλά ενδιάμεσα στάδια, που συχνά κρύβουν παγίδες για τον καλλιτέχνη. Το τελικό διαυγές σκηνικό αποτέλεσμα απαιτεί εμπειρία, ταλέντο και άλλα πολλά, ή ένα σπάνιο ένστικτο που αυτό πιστεύω, πως αφορά και την περίπτωση του Johann Le Guillerm.

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Careful, School Crossing



DOMINIQUE DUTHUIT

*As part of the CIRCÀ festival in Auch, the students of the 23rd graduating class of CNAC presented their graduation performance, *This is the end*, an ambivalent show that is both a collective creation that reflects the character of today's circus, and an opportunity for the students to reveal some unique talents as they enter the professional performing arts market. Here, we'll analyse a school assignment that brings together a number of artistic, cultural, economic and political hopes and dreams.*

The parade

Twelve young circus artists stand tall and proud around the edge of a circular, rotating stage. We gradually get to know them, one by one. They are exposed and neutral, like the twelve immutable numbers on a clock. For just a moment, they are only bodies, pulled on by the inevitable passage of time, with no past and no future. They stand in a kind of absolute zero where anything is possible. Then the show begins. What would they do if they only had five minutes to live? What would be their desire, their action? What would it say about what they've become today, as they start off this new period in their lives? *This is the end* is a show that marks a key moment in the work of these young performers. Just as the title tells us, it recounts the end of one world and, more importantly, the passage into another, a world whose history is yet to be written. Formerly they were students at CNAC, the National Centre for Circus Arts, one of the world's greatest circus schools. Now they are entering the professional world, the circus 'market'. But they are also beginning the difficult quest for an artistic and political identity that must be constructed and affirmed. In the circus ring they are residents of an apartment, a metaphor for the fragile material

Attention sortie d'école

DOMINIQUE DUTHUIT

Dans le cadre du Festival CIRCÀ à Auch, les élèves de la 23^{ème} promotion du CNAC ont présenté « This is the end », leur spectacle de fin d'études, un spectacle ambivalent qui est à la fois une création collective, emblématique du cirque actuel mais aussi l'exposition de nouveaux talents singuliers, propres à entrer dans le marché professionnel du spectacle vivant. Tentative de décryptage d'une œuvre d'école qui cristallise bien des espérances artistiques, culturelles, économiques et politiques.

La parade

Douze jeunes circassiens, postés droits comme des I, occupent la circonférence d'un plateau circulaire rotatif. Lentement, on les découvre les uns après les autres. Exposés, neutres, comme les douze chiffres inamovibles d'une horloge. Le temps d'un instant, ils ne sont que des corps, entraînés par la course inéluctable du temps. Sans véritable avant, sans véritable après, dans une sorte de temps zéro où tout peut être possible. Puis le spectacle commence. Et s'il ne leur restait que cinq minutes à vivre... Quels seraient leurs désirs, leurs actions, que viendraient-ils nous raconter de ce qu'ils sont là, aujourd'hui, à un moment charnière de leur vie? « This is the end » est un spectacle qui signe un moment clé dans le parcours de ces jeunes artistes. Comme son titre l'indique, il conte la fin d'un monde mais aussi et surtout le passage à un autre dont l'histoire reste à écrire. Ils étaient étudiants au CNAC, Centre National des Arts du Cirque, une des plus grandes écoles de cirque du monde, ils entrent désormais dans la vie professionnelle, le « marché » du cirque, mais aussi dans la quête difficile d'une identité artistique et citoyenne à construire et à affirmer. Sur la piste, ils sont les habitants d'un

cocoon in which we live. But this sense of well-being, and its identifying markers, is soon brushed away, leaving behind an empty space. It's a space which the performers then inhabit through the practice of their nine circus disciplines: the Chinese pole, teeterboard, hand-to-hand, aerial silk, tightwire, juggling, aerial silk again, juggling and aerial straps. This story of passage from one world to the next tends to unite us around one essential point, which is that the body, that precious tool of ours that is so fragile, carries traces of our past lives as well as the trajectory of our future.

CIRCa, a symbolic performance space for these future professionals

This is the end was first presented as a graduation performance 'at home', in Châlons-en-Champagne, the city that has hosted the CNAC facilities since 1985. For one year, the production then toured in France and Spain before coming to Auch in November 2012 as part of CIRCa, the contemporary circus festival now celebrating its 25th edition.

Of course, this was no coincidence. CIRCa has been a partner of CNAC since 1989 and hosts the graduation performance each year. Why? Because its first mission has been to participate in the promotion of pedagogical work carried out within national and European circus schools. It was an enthusiast, the Abbot of Lavenère-Lussan, who initiated this adventure by founding, in 1975, an amateur circus school, the Pop Circus. His project was both modest and ambitious: modest because it was carried out by enthusiastic volunteers, and ambitious because it looked to pass on to youth the foundational values of the circus, these being solidarity, respect for others, and personal commitment in a collective spirit. He enabled the population of Auch and its children to unite around the circus, to experience it and develop a certain taste and curiosity for it, as much on the amateur level as in the discovery of new creations. This long-term project contributed to the coming together of people from many different fields (staff at recreation centres, teachers, artists, adults, children, elected officials, etcetera). With the support of local governments, it became a professional project with the creation

appartement, métaphore du fragile cocon matériel dans lequel nous vivons. Ce bien être, ces repères sont balayés pour laisser place au vide, un vide qu'ils viennent habiter à travers la pratique de neuf disciplines circassiennes: le mât chinois, la bascule coréenne, les portés acrobatiques et les voltiges, le tissu, le fil, le tissu, le jonglage et les sangles. Cette histoire de passage d'un monde à un autre tend à nous réunir autour d'un point essentiel, le corps, outil précieux, commun à tous, fragile, porteur des traces de notre vécu et vecteur d'énergie constructive.

CIRCa, un espace de représentation symbolique pour ces futurs professionnels

C'est un peu «à la maison», à Châlons-en-Champagne, ville qui accueille depuis 1985 les locaux du CNAC, qu'ils ont présenté pour la première fois leur spectacle de fin d'études. Pendant une année, ils l'ont tourné en France et en Espagne avant de venir le présenter à Auch en novembre 2012, dans le cadre de CIRCa, festival du cirque actuel qui fête sa 25^{ème} édition.

Aucun hasard dans cette programmation. CIRCa est partenaire du CNAC depuis 1989 et accueille chaque année le spectacle de fin d'études. Pourquoi ? Parce que sa mission originelle est de participer à la mise en valeur du travail pédagogique mené au sein d'écoles de cirque, nationales et européennes. C'est un passionné l'Abbé de Lavenère-Lussan qui a initié cette aventure en fondant en 1975 une école d'amateurs de cirque, le Pop Circus. Son projet était à la fois modeste et ambitieux. Modeste parce qu'il était porté par des bénévoles passionnés. Ambitieux parce qu'il cherchait à transmettre auprès des jeunes les valeurs fondatrices du cirque : la solidarité, le respect de l'autre, l'engagement de l'individu dans un projet collectif. Il a permis à la population de Auch et à leurs enfants de se retrouver autour du cirque, de l'éprouver, d'en avoir le goût et la curiosité, tant au niveau de la pratique amateur que de la découverte des nouvelles créations. Ce projet de longue haleine a contribué au rapprochement entre des personnes d'horizons différents (animateurs de centres de loisirs, enseignants, artistes, adultes, enfants, élus, ...). Avec le soutien

of the Circa association, which, establishing its festival, continued in the same vein by focusing on pedagogy in circus schools and on exposing the local population to circus. Today, Circa (now CIRCa) is a crucial platform for the training of young artists and for the creation and distribution of a wide range of emerging circus forms. It is also a driving factor for the artistic, cultural and economic development of the region.

This is the end, a show meant to meet high expectations

CNAC's graduation performance this year falls at a key moment in CIRCa's history. Not only is the association celebrating its 25th year of existence, but it's also taking root in a new architectural space, the CIRC (Centre for Circus Research and Innovation), which receives municipal, regional, departmental and state support. In today's context of social and economic crisis, where the circus is a way of 'making society', in the words of Auch's mayor, Franck Montauge, the twelve CNAC students carry the burden of having to participate in the dissemination of a circus writing that is intrinsically linked with local cultural and economic life. It's a lot of pressure for these young artists. Think about it. 500 individuals and teachers from the French Federation of Circus Schools (FFEC) and the European Federation of Professional Circus Schools (FEDEC) came to Auch to see them, along with 300 other performance professionals from throughout the world (artistic directors, and directors of festivals, theatres and cultural institutions). Who are they? What has their school taught them? What sensations will they offer us? What will be their place in the history of the circus, an artistic domain in continual evolution, marked by the influence of the performing arts, cinema, painting and the most sophisticated of techniques?

With these students, we're at the circus. But which circus?

For most French people, the circus is still associated with its traditional imagery. This implies family-oriented shows that are flashy, perhaps blindingly so, and performed in a ring, preferably beneath a tent, offering a succession of numbers that are physical, heroic, burlesque and terrifying. And what about the contemporary

des collectivités territoriales, il s'est professionnalisé au moment de la création de l'association Circa, qui a poursuivi dans la même veine, au travers de son festival et du suivi pédagogique des écoles de cirque, cet apprivoisement du monde du cirque par la population. Aujourd'hui, Circa, plate-forme nécessaire à la formation de jeunes artistes, à la création et à la diffusion de la diversité des formes circassiennes émergentes, est un élément moteur du développement artistique, culturel et économique de la région.

« This is the end », un spectacle qui doit répondre à des attentes fortes et plurielles

Le spectacle de fin d'études du CNAC tombe cette année à un moment-clé de l'histoire de CIRCa. L'association fête non seulement ses 25 ans d'existence, mais elle s'implante aussi dans un nouvel espace architectural le CIRC (Centre d'Innovation et de Recherche Circassien) soutenu par la ville, la région, le département et l'état. Dans un contexte de crise social et économique, où le cirque est un « moyen de faire société », comme le dit Franck Montauge, maire de Auch, les douze élèves du CNAC ont sur les épaules la charge de participer au rayonnement des écritures circassiennes, intrinsèquement lié à la vie culturelle et économique du territoire. Lourde pression pour ces jeunes gens. Imaginez, 500 jeunes et enseignants de la Fédération Française des Ecoles de Cirque (FFEC) et de la Fédération Européenne des Ecoles Professionnelles de Cirque (FEDEC) se sont déplacés à Auch pour venir les voir, ainsi que plus de 300 professionnels du spectacle venant du monde entier (directeur de festivals, de théâtre, d'institutions culturelles et artistiques). Qui sont-ils ? Qu'ont-ils appris dans leur école ? Quelles sensations vont-ils nous donner ? Quelle place vont-ils occuper dans l'histoire du cirque, un domaine artistique en évolution constante, traversé par l'apport des arts vivants, du cinéma, de la peinture ou des techniques les plus sophistiquées?

Avec ces élèves, nous allons au cirque, mais quel cirque ?

Pour la majorité des français, le cirque reste encore identifié à une imagerie traditionnelle. Il

circus? To try to define it is almost a fool's errand, since the term covers such widely different notions: circus-theatre, circus-dance, circus play, juggling theatre, etcetera. It is a composite art by definition, refusing all labels. Today, it includes a multitude of artistic forms and active disciplines. The question that matters to us here is why and how these students of the 23rd graduating class practice the circus. Under their belt they have skills developed during their training as well as physical abilities distinct from those one finds in the training of a gymnast or dancer. What do they do with this language that belongs to art as much as it does to the realm of thought? What is the meaning of their circus gesture, long considered superhuman? Is it an end in itself or a means to an end? Are they looking to create a dialogue with us, the spectators? Are they in a relation of proximity or one of distance?

The show and its specificities

This is the end is a work that is both free and limited. It's free because the students are able to bring their own skills and ideas, but limited because it must comply with the very precise demands of a school. There is much at stake in a graduation performance. It must highlight the wide range of artistic and physical qualities of these acrobat-student-performers, serve as a special event of international interest, and reflect the efficiency of a pedagogical approach that is redefined each year with the naming of a new director. While CNAC is a prestigious school renowned throughout Europe and beyond, it is no longer the only available springboard for new talents. Belgium, England, Scandinavia and Spain, to mention just these, now have their own facilities. Competition among these schools presents an additional challenge. Every year, well aware of what's at stake, a director accompanies and directs the students in the creation of their graduation performance. For this 23rd graduating class, the reins have been passed to the director David Bobee. This artist, who is also an actor and dancer, embarked, in 1999, on an original theatrical quest that has brought together on stage theatre, dance, circus, video, lighting design and the visual arts.

offre à voir un spectacle familial, bariolé, voire pétaradant, qui se donne en piste, de préférence sous chapiteau, sous la forme d'une succession de numéros physiques, héroïques, burlesques, effrayants... Qu'en est-il alors du cirque actuel ? Le définir est un véritable casse-tête un peu vain, tellement ce terme recouvre une extrême polysémie : cirque-théâtre, cirque-danse, pièce de cirque, théâtre jonglé, ... Art composite par définition, qui refuse de laisser circonscrire, il regroupe aujourd'hui une multiplicité de formes artistiques et de disciplines pratiquées. La question qui nous importe ici est de savoir, pourquoi et comment ces élèves de la 23^{ème} promotion du CNAC font du cirque. Dans leur bagage, ils ont acquis au cours de leur formation des compétences physiques particulières distinctes de celles qui entrent dans la formation des gymnastes ou des danseurs. Que font-ils de ce langage qui appartient autant à l'art du faire que du penser ? Que signifie leur geste de cirque, longtemps considéré comme surhumain, est-ce une fin en soi ou un moyen ? Sont-ils dans une recherche de dialogue avec nous autres spectateurs, sont-ils dans la proximité ou la mise à distance ?

Le spectacle et son cahier des charges

« *This is the end* » est une œuvre libre et contrainte à la fois. Libre parce que les élèves peuvent y apporter leurs idées et leur savoir-faire, contrainte parce qu'elle doit répondre aux cahiers des charges très précis d'une école. Les enjeux de ce spectacle de fin d'études sont multiples, il doit mettre en lumière la diversité des qualités artistiques et physiques des acrobate-élèves-interprètes, être un événement médiatique de portée internationale, et refléter l'efficacité d'une pédagogie qui se redéfinit au fil de la nomination de ses différents directeurs. Si le CNAC est une école prestigieuse reconnue à un niveau européen et international, elle n'est plus le seul berceau où naissent les talents. La Belgique, l'Angleterre, la Scandinavie, l'Espagne, pour ne citer que ces pays, ont leur propre pépinière. La concurrence entre ces écoles est un challenge supplémentaire. Chaque année, conscient de tous ces enjeux, un metteur en scène accompagne et dirige les élèves dans la création de leur spectacle de fin d'études.



CNAC – *This is the end* © Ph. Cibille

The creative process

It's difficult to know just how the roles were distributed or how the assemblage of numbers was put together, offering each student, one by one, the chance to shine. This troupe was not chosen as such, but was rather selected by the school. The members come from Cambodia, Palestine, Iceland, Portugal and France. They have different circus ambitions. For three months, David Bobee got to know them through work residencies that took place intermittently in Châlons-en-Champagne and Cherbourg. They

Pour cette 23ème promotion, c'est au metteur en scène David Bobee que la commande a été passée. Cet artiste, qui est aussi comédien et danseur, est engagé depuis 1999 dans une recherche théâtrale originale qui mêle sur le plateau le théâtre, la danse, le cirque, la vidéo, la lumière, les arts plastiques.

Le processus de création

Difficile de savoir exactement comment se sont distribués les rôles et comment s'est monté le collage de numéros qui offrent à tour de rôle un

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THE
ARTS

improvised, proposed and branched out on their own, each in their respective disciplines, obeying their own corporeal sensations, emotions and circus ambitions. David Bobee watched, questioned, recorded, filmed and photographed them. He got an author to put to words some fragments of their life stories, dreams, disillusion, rebellions and fleeting joys. This approach served as a base for the show's composition, which was designed piece by piece, much like a puzzle, with a word to the audience here, a certain kind of light or music there, and all of it chosen for a given purpose. In the end, *This is the end* is a medley of different numbers that each have the same intent: to show a need to express and display oneself from within the language of circus. While the chosen disciplines may be borrowed from tradition, the overall form is an innovative one. Going against a long-respected rule in the circus, the artists link the spoken word to the theatricality of their movement. They can be heard through recordings and texts recited into the microphone, as we read in subtitles their thoughts and fragments of their backgrounds. We see them in video or frozen images. Unfortunately, the abundance of these audio, visual and musical sources creates a saturation effect that prevents us from becoming fully immersed in the expressive language of their bodies and the profound reading of what they are trying to tell us. There are many spectacular effects in this show – placing the body in danger, showing off great virtuosity – but not much intimacy, and little trust in the sheer power of the body in movement, with the exception of two or three numbers, these being Rafaël de Paula Guimaraes on the Chinese pole, Ashtar Muallem's aerial silk and Clément Dazin's juggling. These artists use their discipline to create an expressive language that tends to be bareboned and at the essence of movement, the mysterious and sensitive representation of what we are.

Between the I and the us, between the author and performer

This is the end is a protean show inhabited by assorted individuals in states of solitude. Each student arrives to perform, alone, in a duo, or perhaps in a trio, a bit of his or her own universe, which is then juxtaposed over that of the other,

espace d'expression pour les étudiants. Cette troupe sur la piste ne s'est pas choisie, c'est l'école qui les a réunis. Ils viennent du Cambodge, de Palestine, d'Islande, de Portugal, de France, ils ont des désirs de cirque disparates. Pendant trois mois, de façon discontinue, au fil de résidences de travail à Châlons-en-Champagne et à Cherbourg, David Bobee a appris à les connaître. Ils improvisaient, ils proposaient, ils cherchaient seuls, chacun dans leur discipline, en obéissant à leur propre sensation corporelle, leur émotion, leur désir de cirque. David Bobee les a regardés, questionnés, enregistrés, filmés, photographiés, il a fait appel à un auteur pour traduire en mots quelques fragments de leurs histoires de vie, rêves, désillusions, révoltes, bonheurs fugaces... Cette matière a servi de base à la composition du spectacle qui s'est construit à la manière d'un puzzle, pièce par pièce, avec une adresse au public, une lumière, une musique, spécifiques pour chacune d'elles. Au final, « *This is the end* » est un « show » de numéros qui poursuivent tous le même dessein: l'urgence de se dire et de se montrer avec le langage du cirque. Si les disciplines choisies empruntent à la tradition, la forme globale est novatrice. Contrairement à une règle longtemps respectée au cirque, les artistes allient la parole à la théâtralité de leur mouvement. On les entend au travers d'enregistrements et de textes déclamés au micro, on lit en sur-titrage leurs pensées, les fragments de leur parcours de vie, on les voit en image vidéo ou arrêtée. Malheureusement, la multiplication de ces sources sonores, visuelles et musicales crée une saturation qui empêche d'entrer en empathie avec l'expressivité des corps et la lecture profonde de ce qu'ils cherchent à nous dire. Beaucoup d'effets spectaculaires dans ce spectacle, de mises en danger des corps, de virtuosité, mais peu d'intimité, peu de confiance laissée au seul pouvoir du corps en mouvement. Deux ou trois numéros font exception, celui de Rafaël de Paula Guimaraes au mât chinois, celui d'Ashtar Muallem aux tissus et celui de Clément Dazin au jonglage. Ces artistes créent avec leur discipline un langage expressif qui tend vers l'épure, l'essence du mouvement, la représentation mystérieuse et sensible de ce que nous sommes.

eventually forming a collective portrait of their youth. David Bobee, the director, sought to go beyond the physical skill of the artists and to find a piece of them within themselves. The exercise, in the short, intermittent time allotted, was a difficult one. Modesty seems to take over. Asthar Muallem, a young Palestinian rolled and bound in cloth, poised between flying and falling into the void, recounts in a voiceover how hard it is to live away from her loved ones. This intimate moment was in a way wrested from her by the director. Today, she does not entirely stand behind this moving number of which she is both the author and performer. At the other end of the spectrum, two Cambodian artists tell nothing of their story. Loud and clear, they affirm, one in sign language since he is deaf and mute, the other in just a few words, the desire to give themselves over to their bodies' flight into dizzying acrobatics. Another culture means another relationship with the world. Remaining silent, acting in the moment, living to the extreme of their corporeal capabilities, the totality of their performance, despite its pitfalls, rowdiness and disparity, manages to win us over. In Auch, the audience was delighted, amazed, overwhelmed by the physical strength of these bodies. They were moved by their daring spirit and generosity. The wager of this graduation performance was, in a way, won. It serves as a vehicle for the image of an explosive circus that recounts the turbulence, the emotions, the brilliance of our humanity.

The 23rd graduating class against previous vintage years

Whether we mean to or not, just like in the world of viticulture, one cannot help but compare the vintage of each year, considering the graduates' capacity to innovate and to respond to the audience's new expectations, as well as to those of professional and financial backers. This comparative exercise, which sets up hierarchies among different years, is absurd. Each graduation performance is the fruit of an alchemy that no one can master. In the same pot we have different individuals, life experiences, cultures, directors, successful or less than successful teachings and a whole societal context. The show, which is born of all these parameters, then undergoes throughout its tour many different performances that depend

Entre le je et le nous, entre l'auteur et l'interprète

«This is the end » est un spectacle protéiforme habité par des solitudes hétérogènes. Chaque étudiant vient poser seul, en duo, voire en trio, un peu de son univers qui, juxtaposé à celui de l'autre, forme un portrait collectif de leur jeunesse. David Bobee, maître d'œuvre, a tenté d'aller puiser chez ces artistes, au-delà de leurs compétences physiques, une part de leur intimité. L'exercice, dans le temps court imparti, a été difficile. Pudeur oblige. Ashtar Muallem, jeune palestinienne, enroulée, ligotée dans ses tissus, entre envol et chute dans le vide, raconte, en voix off, sa difficulté à vivre loin des siens. Cette confiance lui a été en quelque sorte arrachée par le metteur en scène. Aujourd'hui, elle ne revendique pas totalement ce numéro bouleversant dont elle est à la fois l'auteur et l'interprète. Totalement à l'opposé, les deux artistes cambodgiens ne lâchent rien de leur histoire. Haut et fort, ils affirment, l'un en langage des signes puisqu'il est sourd-muet, l'autre en quelques mots, le désir de se laisser embarquer dans la voltige de leurs corps, dans le vertige de leurs acrobaties. Autre culture, autre rapport au monde. Se taire, faire dans l'instant, vivre à l'extrême de leurs possibilités corporelles. L'ensemble au final, malgré ses écueils, son tapage, sa disparité, réussit à nous emporter. A Auch, le public était conquis, bluffé, dépassé par la puissance physique des corps, bouleversé par leur audace et leur générosité. Le pari de ce spectacle de fin d'études a été en quelque sorte gagné, il véhicule une image du cirque détonante qui raconte les turbulences, les émotions, les fulgurances de notre humanité.

La 23^{ème} promotion, au regard des crus du passé

Qu'on le veuille ou non, comme dans le monde viticole, on compare les crus de chaque année, dans leur capacité à savoir innover et répondre aux nouvelles attentes du public, des professionnels et des investisseurs financiers. Cet exercice comparatif, qui établit des hiérarchies entre les différentes promotions, est absurde. Chaque spectacle de fin d'études est le fruit d'une alchimie que personne ne peut maîtriser. Dans la même marmite, sont mêlés des individus, des

on the audience, the site, and the state of the artists. So we will not address here the earlier graduating classes of CNAC, of which some have naturally stayed with us, for example, *Le cri du caméléon*, directed by Joseph Nadj in 1995. This end-of-year performance resulted in the formation of the Anomalie company, a physical creation laboratory and now a landmark in the evolution of the contemporary circus. The question is rather to ask about the end goal of this obligatory passage. What's the point? Is it a springboard for students or an obstacle that shuts them into a class photo, an image over which they have no control? *This is the end* was created amid a hodgepodge of different goals, commercial, artistic and cultural, all of which leave the students in a state of disarray. Trained to create artistic numbers, and to become authors or co-authors of shows as well as performers, "agents of possibility in their dealings with a director", they are actually first and foremost artists who are "committed, yet wandering, beautiful and chaotic", in the words of David Bobee. Confronted with the complexity of contemporary circus, reinforced by a physical mastery of their discipline, they have passed the institution's test. That's what they've done! While this obligatory passage may have its detractors, it still has the merit of making them aware of issues inherent in their future profession as artists. Today they are a recognised part of society, unlike the street entertainers of yesteryear, and, as such, they will have to find their rightful place at the edge of marginality and integration, of freedom and submission, all so many choices that will have an impact in the larger development of our societies.

vécus, des cultures, un metteur en scène, des enseignements réussis ou non, un contexte sociétal. Le spectacle, qui naît de tous ces paramètres, connaît ensuite pendant sa tournée des représentations toujours différentes, qui dépendent du public, du lieu et de l'état des artistes. Donc ici, nous ne reviendrons pas sur l'avant des promotions du CNAC, dont certaines évidemment ont marqué les esprits, à commencer par « Le cri du caméléon » mis en scène par Joseph Nadj en 1995. De ce spectacle de fin d'études est née la compagnie Anomalie, laboratoire physique de création référent aujourd'hui dans l'évolution du cirque actuel. La question est plutôt d'interroger la finalité de cet examen de passage. A qui sert-il ? Est-il un tremplin pour les élèves ou un frein qui les enferme dans une photographie dont ils ne maîtrisent pas l'image ? « This is the end » a été créé dans un flou d'objectifs multiples, marchands, artistiques, culturels, qui laissent les élèves dans un certain désarroi. Formés pour devenir des auteurs de numéros, des auteurs ou des co-auteurs de spectacles mais aussi des interprètes, « forces de propositions face à un metteur en scène », ils sont en réalité et avant tout des artistes, « engagés et paumés, beaux et bordéliques », pour citer David Bobee. Confrontés à la complexité des enjeux du cirque d'aujourd'hui, forts d'une maîtrise physique de leur discipline, ils ont passé l'examen de l'institution, voilà qui est fait ! Si cette épreuve obligée est sujette à controverses, elle a le mérite de leur faire prendre conscience des problématiques inhérentes à leur future profession d'artistes. Citoyens reconnus aujourd'hui, contrairement aux saltimbanques d'hier, ils devront apprendre à trouver leur juste place à la lisière de la marginalité et de l'intégration, de la de la liberté et de la soumission, autant de choix de vie qui auront un impact dans l'évolution globale de nos sociétés.

The New Circus' New Spectators

GILLES KERDREUX

What does it mean to be a circus spectator today? Does it mean remaining faithful to the family-style traditional circus, or going to see shows 'like on TV' – large international productions that borrow the codes of traditional circus and push ever further in their death-defying feats? Or does it mean continually seeking out new forms of writing? Is it following a genre that's been renewing itself for thirty years and branching out into other artistic disciplines? Is it following a trend? Or perhaps it's a mix of all these.

To shed some light on the matter, let's head to the 2012 edition of Festival CIRCa in Auch, in the southwest of France, a festival that in its 25 years has become one of the mainstays of the new circus in France and a means of discovering, year by year, a wide spectrum of today's circus.

On Friday, 2 November, under the festival's brand new Dome structure, it was about 10pm when the six artists of the Australian company Circa (coincidentally named after the festival) took a bow, finishing off a performance of their latest show, *Wunderkammer*.

Large portions of the 700 audience members seated on bleachers set up along one side of the ring-stage were on their feet, gleefully cheering. The others applauded the undeniable technical mastery of these young circus artists, without appearing to share their neighbours' enthusiasm.

What took place to elicit these different reactions? Was it a provocative show, with a disturbing narrative, or a penchant for pushing things to the extreme? No, in fact, it was a fast-paced show, structured around acts that

Les nouveaux spectateurs du nouveau cirque

GILLES KERDREUX

Qu'est ce que c'est d'être spectateur de cirque aujourd'hui? C'est rester fidèle au cirque traditionnel qu'on voit en famille? C'est voir des spectacles «comme à la télé», de grosses productions internationales qui reprennent les codes du cirque traditionnel et repoussent toujours plus loin les prouesses techniques? C'est découvrir sans cesse de nouvelles écritures? C'est suivre un genre qui, depuis trente ans, ne cesse de se renouveler et d'irriguer les autres disciplines artistiques? C'est suivre une mode? A moins que ce ne soit un mélange de tout cela.

Pour tenter d'y voir plus clair, partons au festival Circa 2012, à Auch, dans le Sud-Ouest de la France. Un festival qui, en vingt-cinq ans, est devenu l'un des temps forts du nouveau cirque en France, un moyen d'avoir, chaque année, un vaste panorama du cirque qui se fait aujourd'hui.

Vendredi 2 novembre 2012, sous le Dôme flambant neuf du festival, il est à peu près 22 h quand les six artistes de la compagnie australienne Circa (homonyme du festival dû au hasard) saluent au terme de leur représentation de *Wunderkammer*, leur dernier spectacle.

Une bonne partie des 700 spectateurs installés sur des gradins, uniquement en frontal face à la piste-scène, se lèvent pour crier leur plaisir. Les autres applaudissent l'incontestable technique de ces jeunes circassiens mais ne partagent pas, à l'évidence, l'enthousiasme de leur voisins.

Que c'est-il donc passé pour provoquer cette diversité de réactions? Un spectacle provoquant, une narration troublante, un parti pris jusqu'aboutiste? Non, plutôt un spectacle au rythme très enlevé, construit autour de numéros d'une grande

demonstrated great technical skill (especially in acrobatics, hand-to-hand, Chinese pole and hoops). But the dramaturgy was a bit thin, based on a shaky reference to Berlin cabarets and a somewhat flashy use of music and visuals.

The traditional circus as cultural heritage

Looking at the audience a bit more closely, we can make out among the standing audience members, senior citizens, families, residents of the region, occasional circus-goers and a group of students from the circus schools (amateur or professional), all of whom are a regular presence at the festival. Among the less enthused we find other young students of the circus arts and a number of spectators and professionals with a broader familiarity with the circus tent and contemporary circus performances, or with the performing arts in general.

The occasional spectators and families have been building up for this, as we can see at the end. They are impressed with the artists' technical skill: the extravagance, the acts beyond the reach of mere mortals, with feats defying gravity and pushing the limits of what the human body is capable of. They are in awe, imagining the hours of daily work that must have gone into such feats. Feeding into their enjoyment is the fear of falling, of accidents or injury. Some additional emotions include: a dash of disgust (at the sight of a rubber band pushed into a nostril and pulled out of a mouth), and a bit of agitation over a few moments of nudity.

In the end they felt that they were in familiar territory, that they had all the necessary cultural codes to appreciate the show. This fear, this laughter, this pleasure at the sight of beauty, moments of physical prowess or disgust... all of these emotions were elicited in accordance with their cultural heritage, a shifting amalgam created through previous encounters with art that established certain references. For the circus, these include the references of the traditional circus with its breakdown by numbers, its off-kilter world, its physical feats, its nomadism, its flashy costumes, or its focus on young audience members.

technicité (surtout en acrobatie, main à main, portée, mât chinois et cerceau) mais avec une dramaturgie limitée à une référence tenue au cabaret berlinois et une esthétique et une musique plutôt clinquantes.

Le cirque traditionnel en héritage culturel

En regardant d'un peu plus près ce public, on peut distinguer, parmi les spectateurs debout, des gens plus âgés, des familles, des habitants de la région spectateurs plus occasionnels du cirque et une partie des jeunes des écoles de cirque (de loisirs ou professionnalisantes) toujours très présents au festival. Chez les moins convaincus, on peut reconnaître d'autres jeunes circassiens des écoles et beaucoup de spectateurs et de professionnels ayant une pratique beaucoup plus assidue des chapiteaux, des salles du cirque d'aujourd'hui ou de spectacle vivant en général.

Le groupe des spectateurs familiaux et occasionnels a nourri son enthousiasme avec plusieurs émotions dont ils témoignent à la fin. Ils ont été impressionnés par les qualités techniques des artistes. Le côté extraordinaire, hors du commun des mortels, de leurs défis à la gravité et aux possibilités habituelles du corps humain. Ils ont été ébahis en devinant les heures de travail quotidien qu'ont nécessitées ces exploits. Leur plaisir s'est également nourri de la peur de la chute, de l'accident, de la blessure. S'y ajoutent quelques sentiments annexes: une dose de dégoût (face à un jeu d'élastique poussé d'une narine à la bouche par l'intérieur). Une autre dose d'émoi face à quelques corps dénudés.

Enfin, ils ont eu le sentiment d'être en terrain connu, d'avoir tous les codes culturels pour appréhender le spectacle. Cette peur, ce rire, ce plaisir face à la beauté ou l'exploit, le dégoût... Toutes ces émotions sont apparues en tenant compte de leur patrimoine culturel. Une nébuleuse mouvante construite au fil des précédentes confrontations à l'art et qui ont formé des références. Pour le cirque, cela comprend celle du cirque traditionnel avec son découpage en numéros, son monde un peu étrange, ses exploits physiques, son nomadisme, ses habits de lumière, son attention particulière au jeune public...

Of course, the development of the new circus has, over the past 30 years, introduced other aesthetics and narratives, other scenographies or modes of training. But these haven't effaced the old historical references. Why? It is because although it is no longer omnipresent, traditional circus still endures. It is because the television regularly upholds this artistic form, and because there is a clear transmission from generation to generation of the image of the traditional circus. Do children's books not convey to the very young an image of the circus with its clown, animal tamer and star-spangled costumes? For all its reworking of the genre, the new circus has still maintained several traditional elements. Even in the contemporary circus, artists fell back on performance aesthetics or constructions of days gone by. All of this creates an environment that reassures the spectator, as is the case with this particular show, which, in the end, relies more on old-fashioned circus, but with a desire to create an internationally intelligible form that is exportable and therefore profitable. Cirque du Soleil of course comes to mind.

If we watch this group of spectators a bit longer, focusing particularly on the circus school students, we can try to decode their enjoyment. While also trying at times to expose them to new aesthetics, a section of the school's work remains tied to physical exploits and pushing one's limits through regular training. At the sight of the *Wunderkammer* artists' execution, many of these circus apprentices are indeed blown away by their technical virtuosity. And, the next day, in conversations with the artists of *Wunderkammer*, we notice that they talk mostly about their bodies. These bodies, which are, after all, interchangeable since the show has changed casts several times.

In search of unknown shores

Let's now move on to the ambivalent audience members. As we said, they applaud the work and the physical skill, but that's somehow not enough. They're looking for a show that whisks them away to unknown shores, that elicits unexpected emotions, that makes use of a new kind of aesthetic, telling a new story, and they haven't found it here.

Bien sûr, le développement du nouveau cirque, depuis 30 ans, a apporté d'autres esthétiques, d'autres narrations, d'autres scénographies ou d'autres filières de formation. Mais elles n'ont pas effacé ces références historiques. Pourquoi? Parce que le cirque traditionnel, même en ayant perdu son omniprésence, existe encore. Parce que la télévision entretient régulièrement cette forme artistique. Parce qu'il y a une évidente transmission de génération en génération de l'image du cirque traditionnel. Les livres pour enfants n'ancrent-ils pas chez les tout-petits une image du cirque associée au clown, au dompteur et aux habits à étoiles? Parce que dans le nouveau cirque, même en bousculant le genre, on a gardé de nombreux éléments de la tradition. Même au sein du cirque contemporain, des artistes ont fait des retours vers des esthétiques ou des constructions de spectacle un temps oublié. Tout ceci crée un environnement qui permet au spectateur d'être rassuré. C'est le cas avec ce spectacle qui, finalement, tient plus du cirque à l'ancienne mais avec une volonté de créer une forme compréhensible internationalement, dont exportable, donc rentable. On pense évidemment aussi au Cirque du Soleil.

En restant encore quelques instants le regard pointé sur ce groupe de spectateurs enthousiastes, mais en se concentrant sur les élèves des écoles de cirque, on peut essayer de décrypter leur satisfaction. Tout en tentant, parfois, de les ouvrir à de nouvelles esthétiques, une part du terreau des écoles reste liée à l'exploit physique et au dépassement de soi grâce à un entraînement régulier. Face à la performance des artistes de *Wunderkammer*, beaucoup de ces apprentis circassiens sont effectivement emballés par la virtuosité technique. Et, le lendemain, en discutant avec les artistes de *Wunderkammer*, on constate qu'eux-mêmes parlent essentiellement de leurs corps. Corps interchangeables puisque la production de ce spectacle a déjà connu plusieurs distributions.

A la recherche de rivages méconnus

Passons maintenant du côté des spectateurs mitigés. On l'a dit, ils applaudissent le travail et les qualités physiques mais ils restent sur leur faim. Ils attendent d'un spectacle qu'il les emmène

The same thing goes for the circus students of this more critical group. The physical feats are not enough for them. They've already developed a taste for shows that mix genres, that push limits and innovate, borrowing from theatre, dance, music, the visual arts and life in general.

Of course, these are both perfectly respectable reactions. There is no single, correct way to react to an artistic offering. Any show that elicits enjoyment and emotion is a success, a step towards a smarter, more caring world. One cannot be faulted for pleasing the masses. Sharing a sensational moment with a large number of spectators is in itself a source of pleasure. There is strength in being able to share in an enjoyable moment. But can art stop at the reproduction of familiar emotions? Should it not also take us further, along new paths, towards different perspectives? Should today's circus spectator not be exposed to new languages?

Well, just a few hours before *Wunderkammer*, still at CIRCa 2012, another show was being performed – *Secret*, by the French artist Johann Le Guillerm.

Flocking around an artist

There was a considerably smaller audience at this circus tent of approximately two hundred seats, but they were just as diverse as that of the Circa company. For in this festival, one finds a diverse audience filling every performance space. Some appeared to be taken off guard by the pace, thrown off by a kind of lethargy emanating from the artist proposing this unique experience. But they eagerly watched the large, somewhat lanky body of this circus artist as he built sculptures out of wooden planks, tied them together, intertwining them so as to secure them, feel their weight, test them and experience their gravity, finally climbing up them, overcoming them even. All this is done with no visible sign of modernity. One might even find it has a more medieval than contemporary aesthetic. It is a far cry from the stereotypical image of the traditional circus. In fact, is it circus at all? According to Johann Le Guillerm, "It is, because I delve into the natural architecture of flocking around one artist and I

sur des rivages méconnus, qu'il suscite des émotions différentes, qu'il ouvre à des esthétiques nouvelles, qu'il raconte une histoire inédite. Ils ne l'ont pas trouvé ici.

C'est la même chose pour les élèves circassiens de ce groupe plus critique. Les prouesses ne suffisent pas à les contenter. Ils ont déjà pris goût aux spectacles qui mélangent les genres, cherchent, innovent, empruntent au théâtre, à la danse, à la musique, aux arts visuels, à la vie.

Évidemment, les réactions des deux groupes sont respectables. Il n'y a pas une seule bonne façon d'appréhender une proposition artistique. Tout spectacle qui provoque du plaisir et de l'émotion est une réussite, un pas gagné vers un monde plus sensible et plus intelligent. Plaire au plus grand nombre n'est pas une tare. Partager une émotion avec de multiples autres spectateurs est lui-même source de plaisir. C'est la force d'aimer ensemble. Mais l'art peut-il se contenter de reproduire des émotions déjà connues? Ne doit-il pas nous emmener plus loin, sur de nouveaux chemins, vers d'autres façons de voir les choses? Le spectateur du cirque, aujourd'hui, ne doit-il pas être confronté à de nouveaux langages?

Justement, quelques heures avant *Wunderkammer*, toujours à Circa 2012, un autre spectacle a été présenté, *Le Secret du Français* Johann Le Guillerm.

L'attroupelement autour d'un artiste

Les spectateurs étaient beaucoup moins nombreux dans ce chapiteau de quelques deux cents places mais ils étaient aussi diversifiés que pour la compagnie Circa. Car dans ce festival, un public varié remplit toutes les salles. Certains ont, à l'évidence, été surpris par le rythme, déstabilisés par une forme de lenteur face à un artiste qui invite à une expérience singulière. Mais ils ont regardé avidement le grand corps un peu dégingandé de ce circassien construire des sculptures de planches de bois, les nouer, les entrelacer pour les bloquer, les soupeser, les tester, sentir leur gravité, pour finalement les escalader, voire les dompter. Sans aucun élément visible de modernité. On peut même y trouver une esthétique plus médiévale que contemporaine.



Chabatz d'Entrar – Perchés © Edwige Pluchart

offer new points of view for observing minority practices.” Minority practices, you say? So then the circus cannot be the space of majority practices, of those following the trends?

As the show progresses, one notices that there is less applause during the performance. We don't clap systematically after each exploit in an attitude similar to that of the channel-surfer in front of the TV screen. We are carried away by a form of writing, poetry and insight that compels us to concentrate on the totality of the show. At the end of the piece, the enthusiasm is clear and widely shared. We find it in the regular spectators of the new circus as well as in those more attached to the traditional circus. They all find enjoyment in an artistic offering that ventures beyond the beaten path.

So Johann Le Guillerm proves that one can explore, reaching towards new points of view and new languages, and a diverse audience will be there to meet one halfway. Even with cultural references associated with the traditional circus, one can be moved and won over far beyond the realm of majority codes and aesthetics, beyond

Tout en restant très loin de l'image stéréotypée du cirque traditionnel. Est-ce d'ailleurs du cirque ? « Oui, répond Johann Le Guillerm, parce que je reprends l'architecture naturelle de l'attroupement autour d'un artiste et propose de nouveaux points de vue pour observer des pratiques minoritaires. » Des pratiques minoritaires ? Le cirque ne pourrait donc pas être l'espace de pratiques majoritaires, de la mode ?

Au cours de ce spectacle, on constate qu'il y a moins d'applaudissements au cours de la représentation. On ne salue pas systématiquement les exploits de différents numéros dans une attitude renvoyant au zapping constant d'une télé. On est emmené dans une écriture, une réflexion et une poésie qui invitent à rester concentré sur le spectacle dans sa globalité. Au terme du spectacle, l'enthousiasme est pourtant net et largement majoritaire. Qu'il s'agisse de spectateurs assidus du nouveau cirque ou de ceux habituellement attachés au cirque traditionnel, ils partagent un même plaisir face à une proposition hors des sentiers rebattus.

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the mainstream. But how does one cultivate this, the circus' unique ability to allow a diverse audience to share in similar emotions?

A shared responsibility

This is one of the educational responsibilities of show promoters, who should be presenting things other than what simply corresponds to what the masses are looking for. They need to establish a relationship with their audiences which allows them to not always be reaching for the instant gratification of a broader audience, or aiming to please your average, middle-aged housewife, as they say in the land of popular television.

This is also part of the artist's responsibility, since the artist must create and not simply reproduce. It's an age-old debate in the arts: the moderns versus the ancients, conservatism against innovation.

The first established actors of the circus in the 1970s and 80s were clear in their answer to this question. They felt the circus could not be conservative. The company Archaos was clearly looking for a new way when they introduced motorcycles and chainsaws in their shows. Similar things could be found in many other circus companies, but also in the theatre – in short, those following in the footsteps of the Living Theatre. In the aftermath of 1968, with the widespread desire to change the world, it was time for art to listen to life and propose innovative forms. People were continually opening up new doors. But the *aggiornamento* was not radical in relation to older formulas. One can understand why. There were still many things left to explore using the old codes. However, along the way, some artists lost sight of the basic need for newness. This is when companies, in looking to fill their audiences and attract the greatest number of people, wound up coddling their audiences and neglecting to offer new analyses or a new outlook on society. Eventually, in a world that, by the 1990s, had begun to lose hold of its political utopia, and where the future was not necessarily promising to be better and brighter, artists began reassuring their audiences with soothing offerings.

Johann Le Guillerm prouve donc qu'on peut chercher, oser de nouveaux points de vue, de nouveaux langages, et trouver l'adhésion d'un public diversifié. Même en ayant des références culturelles très liées au cirque traditionnel, on peut être ému et conquis loin des esthétiques et des codes majoritaire, du « main stream » pour reprendre l'expression anglaise. Comment faire alors pour cultiver cette richesse particulière du cirque qui permet à des publics diversifiés de partager des émotions communes ?

Une responsabilité partagée

C'est une des responsabilités éducatives des promoteurs de spectacles qui se doivent de présenter d'autres choses que celles correspondant au goût supposé du plus grand nombre. Ils doivent créer une relation avec leurs publics qui leur permet de ne pas chercher systématiquement la satisfaction immédiate du public le plus large, le contentement de la ménagère de plus de cinquante ans, comme diraient les responsables des chaînes de télévisions généralistes.

Cela renvoie aussi à la responsabilité de l'artiste qui doit créer et pas seulement reproduire. Un vieux débat qui a toujours animé les arts : celui des modernes et des anciens, le conservatisme face à l'innovation.

Les premiers acteurs du renouveau du cirque dans les années 1970 et 1980 avaient clairement répondu à cette question. Pour eux, le cirque ne pouvait pas être conservateur. En faisant rentrer des cyclomoteurs et des tronçonneuses sous leur chapiteau, la compagnie Archaos cherchait nettement une autre voie. Des choses similaires se sont passées dans plein d'autres compagnies circassiennes mais aussi avec le théâtre, dans les pas du Living theater pour faire simple. Dans la foulée de 1968, et de l'envie de changer le monde, il fallait que l'art écoute la vie et propose des formes dépoussiérées. Ils n'ont eu cesse d'ouvrir de nouvelles portes. Mais l'*aggiornamento* n'était pas radical vis-à-vis des anciennes recettes. On le comprend. Il y avait encore plein de choses à explorer à partir des codes d'avant. Mais, en route, certains artistes ont oublié l'indispensable nécessité de la

The circus schools also played their part. Since the new circus no longer had its familial networks for passing down its techniques and skills, the appearance of schools in the 1980s and 90s allowed new artists to be trained, thereby feeding into the circus revolution. We can nonetheless ask ourselves today if some of these schools aren't training performers instead of creators, or if, in trying to ensure the professional integration of their students, they're not having great difficulty planting within them the seeds of a new writing style.

To take the example of one of the most prestigious schools, the CNAC (National Circus Arts School in Châlons-en-Champagne), it's interesting to compare two shows by their graduating students: *Le Cri du Caméléon*, directed by Josef Nadj in 1995, and *This is the end*, directed by David Bobee in 2012. In the first case, audience members were faced with new sensations, a certain way of using the circus arts to develop an aesthetic and a message. In the second, we find a fine succession of numbers where, aside from the colour generated by the director, each act expresses the uncertainties of a young artist, but most of all allows the artists to display the skills and know-how they'll soon be marketing.

We can also wonder about the increased importance of physical skills in many schools' admission process. Of course, decisions must be made amongst an increasing number of candidates. But this particular focus has an influence on the rest of the training as well as on the productions that come out of it, inciting directors and companies to look for the artist-technicians they need and to propose shows that at times encourage spectators to be satisfied with physical feats alone.

Complete audience members

Educating tomorrow's audiences is also a task accomplished through family or cultural networks. For this reason it is nice to see that children are rarely told that the theatre is just Molière, that music is Bach, or painting just Rembrandt. However, the circus is often described to them as a reduced form of Pinder and Bouglione.

nouveauté. En cherchant à remplir leur salle et à satisfaire le plus grand nombre, on voit des compagnies caresser les spectateurs dans le sens du poil. Ne plus proposer d'analyses nouvelles, de regards sur la société. En allant plus loin, dans un monde qui, à partir des années 1990, a perdu ses dernières utopies politiques et où l'avenir n'a plus été nécessairement associé à un meilleur, des artistes se sont mis à rassurer leurs spectateurs en leur servant des propositions non dérangeantes.

Les écoles de cirque ont aussi leur responsabilité. Puisque le nouveau cirque ne bénéficiait plus de la transmission familiale des techniques et des savoir, leur apparition dans les années 1980, 1990, ont permis de former de nouveaux artistes et ont largement nourri la révolution circassienne. On peut néanmoins se demander, aujourd'hui, si certaines d'entre elles ne forment pas d'avantage des interprètes que des créateurs et, sous couvert d'assurer l'insertion professionnelle de leur élèves, peinent à développer, chez chacun d'entre eux, les germes de nouvelles écritures.

En prenant l'exemple d'une des plus prestigieuses, le CNAC (Centre national des arts du cirque de Châlons-en-Champagne), il est intéressant de comparer deux spectacles des étudiants en fin de promotion: *Le Cri du Caméléon* mis en scène par Josef Nadj en 1995 et *This is the end* mis en scène par David Bobee en 2012. Dans le premier cas, les spectateurs étaient confrontés à des nouvelles sensations, à une autre utilisation des arts du cirque au service d'une esthétique et d'un parti pris. Dans le deuxième, on a finalement une très belle succession de numéros où, au-delà de la couleur générée par le metteur en scène, chacun exprime ses incertitudes de jeune artiste mais cherche surtout à mettre en lumière ses capacités, son savoir-faire qu'il pourra vendre demain.

On pourrait également questionner le poids grandissant des compétences physiques dans les sélections d'entrée de nombreuses écoles. Bien sûr, il faut bien choisir parmi les candidats de plus en plus nombreux mais le poids de ce critère influe la formation et les productions qui en découlent. Incitant les metteurs en scène et les

In France, the public funding of companies is also paradoxically a factor in the shrinking creative field. In this context of diminished cultural budgets, companies are often urged to account for the number of performances, attendance levels, contribution to training, local presence, or impact throughout the city, region or country. So we incite them to go for quick success instead of long-term goals along deeper, more creative lines.

And, last but not least, what does it mean to be a circus spectator today? Yes, it means having a sense of the traditional circus. This may be based in nostalgia, cultural transmission or the sheer endurance of so many of its codes, such as the circus tent or the apparatuses. However, from the vantage point of the circus revolution that has been taking place for 30 years, being a circus spectator is having the opportunity to discover a broader artistic field. It's being a complete audience member, capable of being moved at the crossover point of all genres. It's delighting in finding circus artists in shows of many different disciplines. For those who are fortunate enough to be avid regulars, it is also sometimes being a critical spectator who won't sit by and watch the 'mainstream' take over. It's wanting to see schools continue to be drivers of innovation and creation, and hoping that artists continue to surprise and move us. The new circus has also generated new spectators.

compagnies à venir y chercher les artistes-techniciens dont ils ont besoin et proposant des spectacles qui invitent parfois les spectateurs à se contenter de prouesses.

Des spectateurs complets

La formation des spectateurs de demain se fait aussi au sein des transmissions familiales et culturelles. A ce titre il est symptomatique de voir qu'on se contente rarement de dire aux enfants que le théâtre c'est Molière, la musique Bach et la peinture Rembrandt alors que, pourtant, on leur décrit souvent le cirque comme un genre réduit à Pinder et Bouglione.

En France, le mode de financement public des compagnies oeuvrent aussi, paradoxalement, à un rétrécissement du champ créatif. Dans un contexte de diminution des budgets de la culture, on soumet de plus en plus l'évaluation des compagnies et de leurs projets à de critères de nombre de représentation, de fréquentation, d'apports en terme de formation, de présence sur un territoire, de rayonnement d'une ville, d'une région ou d'un pays... Donc on incite à favoriser le succès immédiat par rapport au travail dans la durée, à l'approfondissement d'un sillon créatif.

Alors, finalement, c'est quoi être spectateur de cirque aujourd'hui? Oui, c'est avoir en mémoire le cirque traditionnel. Par nostalgie de ce qu'on a connu, par transmission culturelle ou par la permanence de nombre de ses codes, de son chapiteau, de ses agrès. Mais, au regard de la révolution qu'a connue le cirque depuis trente ans, être spectateur de cirque c'est avoir la chance de découvrir un champ artistique beaucoup plus large. C'est être un spectateur complet apte à s'émouvoir au croisement de tous les genres. C'est se réjouir de retrouver des artistes de cirque dans des spectacles de bien d'autres disciplines. Pour ceux qui ont la chance d'en être des adeptes assidus, c'est aussi, parfois, être un spectateur critique refusant que le « main stream » ne submerge tout, souhaitant que les écoles continuent à être des moteurs de l'innovation et de la création, que les artistes continuent à nous surprendre et à nous émouvoir. Le nouveau cirque a aussi généré de nouveaux spectateurs.

The Aesthetics of Humiliation: Circa's Wunderkammer

IVA NERINA SIBILA

There are three elements in the performance *Wunderkammer*, a piece made by the Australian company Circa, directed by Yaron Lifschitz, and programmed within the 2012 edition of Auch's Festival CIRCa, that can situate it within the frame of contemporary performing arts practice. Those three elements are: the outstanding skills of the performers; the choreographic strategy, which treats acrobatic vocabulary as, itself, choreographic material; and the equality of male and female performers. Ironically, these elements, which promise to shift *Wunderkammer* from the status of entertainment to contemporary art, are then deactivated by the aesthetics of humiliation, which emerges within the landscape of the performance from a fusion of acrobatic techniques and burlesque cabaret iconography. I don't mean to suggest that this fusion is problematic, per se. On the contrary, circus with its history of otherness, brutality and risk, as well as its conceptual and theoretical 'innocence', and cabaret with its political and satirical edge, and even burlesque with its potential for redefining eroticism, are great resources for those that wish to challenge the mainstream. What I suggest is that certain stylistic decisions made in the name of 'the audience's entertainment' in *Wunderkammer* configure a communal *stage of humiliation*, in which the audience is involuntary put in the position of legitimising the ideology of objectification while the performers are abstracted from responsibility for the acts they perform. Here at the start I would like to clarify the term 'contemporary', as it is a somewhat exhausted and wobbly notion that shifts constantly from one context to another and causes many frictions along the way. In this text I apply the term to those works, whether in dance, physical theatre, new circus or theatre, that in form, subject and performativity are critical

towards the traditional relationship that exists between the audience and the performance. And if not *radically* critical, then they are at least aware that perpetuating the models of commercial spectacle reinforces (neo-)patriarchal and (neo-)colonial modes of society – ideologies which are not on the artistic, intellectual or theoretical agenda of contemporaneity.

Wunderkammer is a performance by the contemporary circus company Circa, who come from Brisbane, Australia. The group was founded and continues to be led by theatre director Yaron Lifschitz with great success. He took over the small Rock 'n' Roll Circus company in 2004, rebranded it as the more contemporary Circa, and since then has worked with the company to produce numerous performances – among them the self-titled *Circa, by the light of stars that are no longer...*, *The Space Between*, and *61 Circus Acts in 60 Minutes*. In 2012 alone, the company has performed 400 shows in 13 countries, even opening the famous International Circus Arts Festival in Montreal, a place known as 'the circus city' and home to the Québécois giant Cirque du Soleil. Circa also runs a training centre with an impressive workshop programme at their professional studio in Brisbane, and numerous workshops for children, young people and adults in a range of community contexts.

Promoted as "an exquisite cabaret of the senses... [where] control and abandon, skill and humour, lyricism and anarchy all meld into a sinuous fugue of profound beauty", *Wunderkammer* is performed by Nathan Boyle, Jessica Connell, Daniel Crisp, Jarred Dewey, Casey Douglas, Valerie Doucet, Freyja Edney, Darcy Grant, Scott Grove, Todd Kilby, Emma McGovern, Rudi Mineur, Alice Muntz, Brittannie Portelli, and Lewis West – "superhuman acrobats masquerading as mere

mortals". (On a given night *Wunderkammer* is performed by seven of the above performers; the cast varies.) In reality it is an 85 minute tour de force of acrobatics, dance and cabaret style performance. Framed by neon blue light on a bare open stage, seven performers are engaged in non-stop (and extremely demanding) physical action that includes acrobatics, hand-to-hand, contortion, Chinese pole, trapeze, and elements of freak-show and burlesque stripping. Costume-wise, there is a lot of bare skin, black underwear with a touch of red, fetish-like high heels, and a bit of teasing lace and fringe around the hips. The costumes, as well as the heavy make-up, strongly frame this performance as erotic cabaret, although, even with a lot of undressing and dressing, eroticism is not the main quality that this performance communicates.

In its structure *Wunderkammer* is devised in reference to contemporary dance dramaturgy with a continuous flow of non-narrative, choreographed scenes that have a vague common link – this in opposition to the dramaturgy of one short act after another that is intrinsic to the circus. Each scene in *Wunderkammer* has its own inner logic and climax, but the overarching dynamics and the suspense of the piece is built by the montage of all the various parts seen as one aesthetically coherent whole.

The show opens with several solo acts that are short, odd and gentle in their physicality, employing them as a method for 'sketching out the landscape' in a way that is common in contemporary performance. The first appearance is a minimalistic female hula-hooping act, followed by a cheeky, queer male contortionist and then a group act with plastic bands pushed through the nose and down the throat, which is extremely uncomfortable for the performers. This plastic bands trick is a reoccurring motif in the performance that delivers a repeated shock to the audience.

After these short 'performances' *Wunderkammer* unfolds through a series of abstract choreo-acrobatic action sequences, from which I would pick the male duet on Chinese pole as one of the

highlights of the evening. Choreographed as pure movement, a pure game played between two bodies in space, it demonstrates great understanding of detail and timing. The result is a spectacular, beautiful and elegant 'vertical' dance. As a contrast to these sophisticated skills, there are entertaining but somewhat banal scenes in which the action is devised around the sheer strength of the performers. Predictably, and in a very circus-like way, one man (Scott Grove) lifts four females at once, but then, unexpectedly, the women also lift their much heavier male partners. Further 'wonders' to be found in *Wunderkammer* include a trapeze solo followed by a trapeze duet, various flying acrobatics and contortionist sequences, and a reworked version of an old vaudeville routine called 'toss the girl'. Originally it was done with two men and one woman, but here, with the entire cast taking part, it is actually quite impressive.

On one level *Wunderkammer* is pure abstract choreography pushed to an extreme. The features that distinguish dance from acrobatics (in very general terms) can be found in dance's subtle, transitory movements, in its focus on organic flow of movement, in an awareness of deeper levels of the body, and in the connection of mind and movement that it investigates and develops. Acrobatics uses the extremes of force, balance and flexibility to create the most breathtaking and attractive patterns of movement, focusing only on the peak of the movement. The virtuosity of dance and the skills of acrobatics often complement each other, and in *Wunderkammer* the timing, detail, flow and spatial patterns of contemporary dance provides the frame for the acrobatic material.

The performers are the ones who have to embody this fusion, and in *Circa* all of them are equally proficient in extreme, specialist acts, in general acrobatics, and in burlesque acting. Some of them, as well, are exquisite movers that can sink down into much subtler levels of the body, and hold the spectators attention without doing anything spectacular.

Another part of *Wunderkammer* is the scenes in which the performers evoke cabaret style



Circa – Wunderkammer © Justin Nicholas Atmosphere Photography

performance with short vocal acts, such as a silly male trio of singers, or a solo where a performer creates rhythmic sound / body music by slapping himself to the level of pain. From these scenes I would point out an interesting female solo where performer Valerie Doucet combines whistling, contortionist's choreography, and a game with a microphone to create a loop of sound, body and object.

Clean choreography, exquisite performers, unexpected but still polite freaky acts, and a lot of black underwear never revealing anything indecent; no wonder *Wunderkammer* is a blockbuster.

So far so good, but the problem of this performance is not, as I stated in the beginning, in the choreography itself. The problem hides in the way the choreographed material, the 'matter' of this performance, is mediated, and in the way the game of power and humiliation as pleasure is implanted in the relationship of audience and performers. From the very first entrance (by Freyja Edney) the style of performance is clearly and irreversibly set. Her doll-like expression is totally disconnected from her action, almost mechanical,

blank and infantilised. Even in the moment of an obvious mistake she didn't show any personal engagement to solve the situation or to react to it.

All of the seven performers unanimously and with no variation perform with the same disengagement and child-like expression, continuously looking at, almost offering themselves to, the audience. It is a performance mode that deliberately erases from the expression any *reflection on* or *confrontation with* performed material. An extraordinary tolerance for pain and strain, met with an infantilised expression, brings this performance close to the ideology of pornography, although pornography is not at all addressed in the performed material. The most humiliating thing in this context is that the pain or the risk that the performers undergo is not hidden – it is visible, the sweat, the shake of the muscles, the cramp when they take too much weight – and yet they don't have any personal position or commentary or attitude towards it.

I can trace this style of acting back to the tradition of freak-shows or sideshows, which were, according to Tomi Purovaara in *An Introduction*

to *Contemporary Circus*, "purely commercial performances that exhibited one part of American culture, the 'freaks'. People's different deformities and handicaps, special skills and even skin color were put on display, commodified and sold to working and middle class people. Bearded women, dwarves and exotic wild people were brought before a crowd, where they might also exhibit their special skills, such as acrobatics or magic. Usually, however, it was the shock value of their outwards appearance that sold. Depending on how you look at it, the sideshow phenomenon exhibits signs of American society's diversity and *laissez-faire* nature, but also of human exploitation and subjugation." In the crude and often vulgar style of circus or cabaret, stupidity, absurdity or callowness are present in opposition to the sophisticated styles of expression found in upper-class theatre or entertainment.

However, there is really nothing freaky or lower-class or satirical in *Wunderkammer* or its performers. They are a very mainstream, beautiful and young, all-white cast with a touch of pop queerness (a few piercings and tattoos). As an example of the integration of non-mainstream individuals on a big theatrical stage I would refer to Italian director Pippo Delbono's casts or the many integrated dance companies such as Candoco.

In *Wunderkammer* director Yaron Lifschitz is actually mirroring the ideology of "human exploitation and subjugation" found in freak-shows and the 'callowness' of variety as the base for his aesthetics. This creates a strange contradiction with the breathtaking proficiency and improvisational skill of the cast since it is obvious that most of the material was created from the bottom up. (At CIRC*a*, *Wunderkammer* was not performed by its original cast, and some of the scenes varied from the original. Interviewing the performers we found that the process of making the show was based on the improvisational skills and personal input of the performers.) What we get as spectators, in the final production, is an irritating de-empowerment or de-emancipation of the performers and the process of performing.

Ironically, the female performers in the piece managed to save a bit more of their individuality through the play of striping. Through it they demonstrate, however stereotypically, the potential for pleasure or sensuality. I emphasize this as *potential* and not fulfilment, because stage eroticism is based on the tease, on the vague and mysterious, and with such highly competent, athletic bodies showing all it is impossible to go back to 'allure' and 'feminine mystique'. From among the male cast this kind of potential for autonomy was also shown by Jared Dewey, whose astonishing androgynous beauty, extreme flexibility and feminine softness contrasted with his great strength.

The rest of the male cast (and I repeat I am focusing on a specific way of performing and not on the execution of extremely demanding choreography), Yaron Lifschitz led into the most stereotypical trap. The display of masculinity and strength without practical use (as in sport or in war) traditionally causes anxiety because the patriarchal structure reserves objectification for the female body. When a man's body is objectified and gazed at on stage, a performer is pushed outside of his position of power and becomes an object of pleasure and entertainment. With this position emphasised by the blank, infantile, disconnected expressions, and with no critical intervention to disrupt the stereotype, *Wunderkammer* presents a conservative ideology that separates performers and spectators, and issues a clear message of pleasure and pain, entertainment and money.

When we think of the title, *Wunderkammer*, literally a 'wonder-room' but more precisely a reference to Renaissance Europe's fascination for the 'cabinet of curiosities', there is something odd about this idea of a collection of objects. Skilful, vibrant and competent performers are reduced, in *Wunderkammer*, to these objects of curiosity, to tamed and trained bodies, imposing the aesthetics of humiliation as the essence of the performer-spectator encounter. And this is definitely outside of the contemporary arts debate.

The last five minutes

LAURENCE BERTELS

The fateful day approaches. If we are to believe the dire predictions, the end of the world, previously scheduled for the years 1000, 1914, 1918 and 2000, is set this time for 21 December 2012, the expiration date of the Mayan calendar after five thousand, one hundred and twenty-five years. The grand finale – or the beginning of a new era, as some would have it – could take place in the form of a planetary misalignment, a series of natural catastrophes, or a reversal of the Earth's magnetic field. 21 December. The countdown seems to have already begun. So is it this end-of-everything atmosphere that has inspired the circus artists this year? Not according to them. Nonetheless, it's surprising to notice that several of the programmed shows at the twenty-fifth CIRCa festival talked about some kind of cataclysm, and did so in very different ways. Whether we were watching *This is the end*, by the 23rd graduating class of the National Centre for Circus Arts, or *Popcorn Machine* by My!Laika, there was an overall end-of-the-world atmosphere at CIRCa. And what if the result of the cataclysm were the one proposed by Johann Le Guillerm in his unspeakable *Secret* – that is, a stroll through a circus version of *Into the Wild*?

A Question

First, here's a universal and always revealing question. If you had twenty-four hours, one hour, five minutes to live... what would you do? Coming from young people on the up and up, from acrobats expected to embrace a career in the circus, that is, from Jérôme, Lucas, Clément, Rafael, Kasper, Ahstar, Viivi, Thomas, Sopheak, Sarav, Rémi, Jérôme or Amaïa, who represent the four corners of the globe, the question suddenly becomes unique, personal and rich. So, *This is the end*... "Can one really begin with this?" ask the students of the 23rd graduating class of CNAC,

Les cinq dernières minutes

LAURENCE BERTELS

La date fatidique approche. Si l'on en croit quelques funestes prévisions, la fin du monde, après avoir été programmée en l'an mille, en mille neuf cent quatorze, en mille neuf cent dix-huit et en deux mille, serait cette fois prévue le 21 décembre 2012, date de l'expiration du calendrier maya après cinq mille cent vingt-cinq années. Ce grand final, ou le début d'une nouvelle ère, selon les croyances, se traduirait par un alignement des planètes, une série de catastrophes naturelles ou une inversion du champ magnétique de la terre. 21 décembre... Le compte à rebours semble avoir commencé. Est-ce donc cette ambiance de fin de règne qui a inspiré les circassiens, cette année? Ils répondent par la négative à la question. Il est cependant étonnant de constater que plusieurs spectacles programmés au vingt-cinquième festival Circa nous parlaient avant tout de cataclysme. Et ce, sous des prismes parfois très différents. Qu'il s'agisse de «*This is the end*» par la 23^{ème} promotion du Centre national des arts du cirque ou de «*Pop corn machine*» par My!Laïka. Ambiance fin du monde donc au 25^{ème} festival Circa. Et si l'issue était celle proposée par Johann Le Guillerm et son indicible «*Secret*»? Balade dans l'«*Into the wild*» circassien.

Question

D'abord une question. Universelle, efficace et toujours interpellante. S'il te restait vingt-quatre heures, une heure, cinq minutes à vivre... Que ferais-tu? Posée par une jeunesse en plein essor, par des acrobates appelés à embrasser une carrière circassienne, par Jérôme, Lucas, Clément, Rafael, Kasper, Ahstar, Viivi, Thomas, Sopheak, Sarav, Rémi, Jérôme ou encore Amaïa, venus des quatre coins du monde, elle devient soudain singulière, personnelle, habitée. So, "This is the end" ... "Peut-on réellement commencer par cela?" s'interrogent les élèves sortants de la 23^{ème}

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the National Centre for Circus Arts in Châlons en Champagne. Renowned throughout the world, much like the National circus school in Montreal, or ESAC in Brussels, Châlons is at the heart of France's circus revival. Back in the school's early days, its director Bernard Turin came up with the inspired idea of asking an established director or choreographer to take over the direction of the school's graduating class and present a show to the public at Paris' La Villette. It was a crafty move indeed to associate oneself with a big, tried-and-true name to give the new circus, already known for its ability to mix artistic genres, its much sought after prestige. When, in 1984, Turin confided this mission to the great Hungarian choreographer Josef Nadj, it marked an important day in the history of contemporary circus on this side of the Atlantic. *Le cri du caméléon* resonated throughout Europe and even overseas, achieving a success that has been attempted by many others since yet often with weaker results. Here, for example, the choreographer Philippe Decouflé comes to mind, whose *Cyrk 13* was presented in 2011 at La Villette. It's true though that the exercise of directing a graduating class is, if we dare say it, a dangerous one since it is, on the one hand, a commissioned work, with all the difficulties implied, and on the other, an end-of-the-year exam, which means that each person must, according to the chosen form of expression, have his or her fifteen minutes of fame. They must also be seen having the time of their lives. So this time it's the dear David Bobée, director of stage and screen and 'it' person of the moment in the theatre world who steps up to the plate. He knows, of course, what he's expected to prove, or attempt to prove: that the new circus has its place and can transmit a message or have its own convictions. It is also implicitly expected of the honourable director that he frees the genre from that stubborn label of 'entertainment' or infuses it with the compositional quality that all too often slips through its fingers, cords, wires and various trapezes.

With a theme like 'This is the end', a recurrent one at this 25th Circa festival in Auch, as we'll read later on, David Bobée, an adept at mixing theatre, dance, circus, video and lighting design in his creations, places his work within a written

promotion du Cnac, le Centre national des arts du cirque de Châlons en Champagne. De réputation mondiale, au même titre que l'École nationale de cirque à Montréal ou que l'Esac (Ecole supérieure des arts du cirque) à Bruxelles, Châlons est à l'origine du renouveau du cirque en France. A l'époque, Bernard Turin eut en effet l'idée plutôt ingénieuse de demander à un grand metteur en scène ou chorégraphe, d'assurer la mise en piste de la promotion sortante de l'école et de la présenter en public à la Villette. Belle ficelle, en effet, qu'un grand nom, qu'un label de qualité, pour octroyer au nouveau cirque, dont la particularité est de mêler tous les arts, les lettres de noblesse tant convoitées. Lorsqu'en 1984, Bernard Turin confia cette délicate mission au grand chorégraphe hongrois Joseph Nadj, il marqua d'une pierre blanche l'histoire du cirque contemporain de ce côté-ci de l'Atlantique. "Le cri du caméléon" venait en effet de résonner dans l'Europe entière voire, de l'autre côté de l'océan. D'autres s'y sont essayé ensuite avec parfois moins de succès. Nous pensons, par exemple, au chorégraphe Philippe Decouflé, avec *Cyrk 13* présenté en 2001 à La Villette. L'exercice, il est vrai, s'avère, si l'on ose dire, périlleux, étant donné qu'il s'agit d'une part, d'une commande, avec tous les aléas du genre, de l'autre d'un examen de fin d'études; lequel implique que chacun ait, selon l'expression consacrée, son quart d'heure de célébrité. Et y prenne un plaisir fou. Cette fois, c'est donc ce cher David Bobée, metteur en scène, réalisateur et actuelle coqueluche du milieu théâtral qui s'y colle... Sachant sans doute qu'on attend de lui qu'il prouve, ou aide à prouver, que le nouveau cirque a son mot à dire, peut défendre un propos ou tenir certains engagements. Que l'honoré metteur en scène débarasse également le genre d'une étiquette de divertissement archi-collante ou lui offre aussi cette écriture qui lui glisse trop souvent entre les doigts, cordes, fils de fer et autres trapèzes sont d'autres attentes implicites.

Avec un thème tel que "This is the end", thème récurrent au 25^{ème} festival Circa à Auch, comme on le lira plus loin, David Bobée, habitué à mêler théâtre, danse, cirque, vidéo et lumière dans ses créations, s'inscrit d'emblée dans l'écrit. Il privilégie le théâtre autobiographique puisqu'il a

dramaturgy. He gives a special place to autobiographical theatre, since he's met each artist individually, asking them to speak into the microphone about what these intense, dreadful, terrifying or inevitable final five minutes would be like.

"Catastrophe is not what it's about, but it does reveal things about the current situation. It's a metaphor for a world in crisis. If everything must disappear, then what has disappeared?"

The hypothesis of disappearance leads us to reflect on our existence, on our current reality, the hierarchy of values that dictate our individual and collective actions. This urgency helps us, perhaps, to make out the essential!"

So explains the director, who unfortunately does not avoid certain pitfalls, like that of the clichéd armageddon countdown. Indeed, each student, each number, corresponds with one performance, and as soon as the audience member realises that we are 'only' on number eight, and that there are seven left, meaning more or less one hour before stepping outside, smoking a cigarette, having a cold beer, or going to bed, the audience inevitably starts to feel that things are running a bit long. It's just a human reflex, and while the numbering serves to structure the show, it often also elicits a sense of boredom in a situation that, given the exercise imposed, was already prone to such a reaction. Fortunately, with their powerful acrobatic hand-to-hand number (not just a circus number, but also numbers 3 and 4 in the countdown) the Cambodian brothers Sopheak Houn, the base, and Sarav Roun, the acrobat, manage to pick up the pace. Their humour and energy even make us forget certain long moments. The same goes for the breath-taking aerial tumbling of Rémi Faudel, Jérôme Hugo and Amaia Valle, each of whom is super-talented and audacious, almost reckless.

That said, the writing of *This is the end* is equally imprecise and would certainly make certain choreographers throw the ballerina shoes they no longer wear, even if there is a certain sense of coherence between the message and the form. General chaos is knocking at our doors.



My!Laika – Popcorn Machine © Marco Salzotto

rencontré chaque artiste individuellement et lui a demandé d'exprimer au micro ce que seraient ces intenses, redoutables, effrayantes ou inévitables cinq dernières minutes.

«La catastrophe n'est pas le sujet mais sert de révélateur de la situation actuelle, de métaphore d'un monde en crise. Si tout doit disparaître, qu'est-ce qui a disparu ?

L'hypothèse de la disparition nous conduit à réfléchir sur notre existence, sur notre réalité présente, sur la hiérarchie des valeurs qui régissent nos actes individuels et collectifs. Cette urgence nous aide, peut-être, à discerner l'essentiel" explique le metteur en scène qui n'évite malheureusement pas certains écueils tel que le compte à rebours. Chaque élève, chaque numéro correspond effectivement à une prestation et dès que le spectateur réalise que nous en sommes "seulement" au numéro huit, et qu'il en reste donc encore sept, soit à peu près une heure, avant de sortir, de fumer une cigarette, de boire une bière fraîche ou d'aller se coucher, il commence inévitablement à trouver le temps plutôt long. Il s'agit d'un réflexe humain et si l'énumération a le mérite de structurer un spectacle, elle induit souvent dans la foulée, une véritable notion d'ennui là où le terrain, vu l'exercice imposé, lui était déjà favorable. Heureusement, avec leurs puissants aéro-portés acrobatiques, et leurs numéros, non pas de cirque, mais d'apparition 3 et 4, les frères cambodgiens, Sopheak Houn, le porteur, et Sarav Roun, le voltigeur, viennent booster le rythme d'autant que leur humour et leur énergie pardonne bien des longueurs. Tout

The voice of Ahstar

On a rotating stage in the round we find an open space, a bedroom, a bathroom, a dining room, an office, a kitchen and a salon where everyone crosses paths while going about their business.

Offices, chairs, lamps, armchairs and other accessories are toppled over. A cataclysm has just taken place. There's a busy décor, but it gradually becomes more simplified to make room for the solos, videos and voiceovers. There's an interesting cinematic aspect and a moving kind of sincerity to it all and this in fact saves the day since it's so important to hear what these socially conscious, globally aware youths have to tell us. "Life speaks to me... If everything were to disappear, what would you do? And you, Lucas? Move forward... Lose myself... Move forward... Lose myself again. Eventually, I would fall. Right up to the fateful moment. I know it'll happen, but I don't know when and I don't need to know when..." To fall. It's a familiar idea for the circus. An unharnessed fear, a spectre, a Loch Ness monster... To fall, to drop, to risk, to exult, to finish, to always flirt with danger. The circus has its extremes and it defends them well. Young, unrestrained, enthusiastic, these mad dogs are eager to display their talent. These are the students of CNAC, overflowing with power, skill and audaciousness on the swing or high wire. They fearlessly perform backflip after backflip. They only have, or so they believe, a few minutes left. What? Or more?

In the ring, the juggler Clément Dazin is artfully mobile. He occupies the space, in a way personalising the art. Rare are those in the discipline who make use of width as well as height.

Then Ashtar appears in her aerial silk, with her voice that has come from far away to talk about her native Palestine. This heath of land where the family she so misses still lives, this country yearning to be recognised, this country she will probably not ever see again, that is, if she only has a few minutes to live. Ashtar did not want to talk about herself in the circus ring. David Bobee eventually convinced her, probably suspecting that it would constitute the most poignant

comme l'époustouflante bascule aérienne de Rémi Faudel, Jérôme Hugo et Amaia Valle, hyper doués, audacieux et presque téméraires.

Ceci dit, également imprécise, l'écriture de « This is the end » ferait sans doute avaler à certains chorégraphes les ballerines qu'ils ne portent plus même si l'on peut lire ici une certaine cohérence entre la forme et le propos. Le chaos général frappe à nos portes.

La voix d'Ahstar

Sur un plateau tournant à trois cent soixante degrés, un open space, une chambre à coucher, une salle de bains, une salle à manger, un bureau, une cuisine, un salon où chacun se croise et vaque à ses occupations.

Des bureaux, chaises, lampes, fauteuils et autres accessoires sont renversés. Un cataclysme vient d'avoir lieu, le décor est chargé mais s'épure peu à peu pour laisser place aux solos, vidéos et voix off, avec une dimension cinématographique intéressante et surtout une touchante sincérité. Laquelle sauve la mise tant il est impératif d'entendre ce que cette jeunesse, citoyenne, du monde, veut nous dire. « *La vie, cela me parle... Si tout devait disparaître, tu ferais quoi ? Et toi Lucas ? Avancer... Me perdre... Avancer... Me reperde. Je finirais par tomber. Jusqu'à ce moment fatidique. Je sais qu'il va arriver mais je ne sais pas quand et je n'ai pas besoin de savoir quand...* » Tomber... Un air connu au cirque. Une peur non apprivoisée, un spectre, un monstre de Lochness... Tomber, choir, risquer, exulter, finir, flirter toujours avec la limite. Le cirque a ses extrêmes. Et les défend bien. Jeunes, inconscients, fougueux, chiens fous, désireux de montrer tout leur talent, les voici, ces élèves du Cnac, soufflants de puissance, d'habileté et d'audace à la balance ou au fil de fer, multipliant les saltos arrière sans crainte. Ils n'ont plus, croient-ils, que quelques minutes à perdre. Que ? Ou encore ?

Sur la piste, un jongleur, Clément Dazin, habilement mobile, occupe tout l'espace, personnalisant de la sorte, cet art-là. Rares sont ceux, en effet, qui, dans cette discipline, exploitent autant la hauteur que la largeur.

moment of the performance. He also demonstrates a true skill for directing actors, all the more so if the young lady's future projects will be taking on the same theme.

Punkish, baroque and apocalyptic

Writing and direction are certainly two missing elements in *Popcorn Machine*, the performance by the company My!Laika. This wild and crazy show was a laureate at the 2010 Jeunes Talent Cirque Europe. Appearing as a domestic apocalypse set, almost, against a backdrop of Dadaism, *Popcorn Machine*, much like the unpredictable metamorphosis of the small grain of popping corn, jubilantly explores chaos in an end-of-the-world ambiance that dares to get rough and tumble, with bloody heads and cut-off hands, shifting from Rachmaninov to hard rock and showing the dangerously aesthetic transformation from the Trevi fountain to the atomic mushroom. The circus artists are great at saying, "if all this chaos is beyond us, then let's pretend we started it". It's a true continuum of indeterminate casualties and improbable consequences that winds up putting three girls and a man in extreme and absurd situations wherein the man is continually dying. A stuffed tiger falls from the sky. A Barbie doll starts dancing and we find the rough cord of the trapeze artist on the body of Elvira in an act employing shadows and poetry. The show is baroque, energetic, punkish and wild. It mixes genres, always pushing further toward the absurd, accompanied by an electric guitar, piano, cello, flute and sewing machine. There's live music, which further grabs our attention and adds to the overall quality of the show. There are also some truly surreal images, like the cut-off hands coming out of the body of the piano to press the keys. Sadism, masochism and turbulence all invade the circus ring. To say what, exactly? The goal is to be absurd, nothing more, and sometimes without taking responsibility for the exacerbated violence. Not the violence of pulling hair. One finds that in any kind of playground antics, which are much less dangerous, in any case, than the gunshots we see on TV every day. No, here we're thinking of the almost glossy violence of that notorious mushroom. With Philine Dahlmann, Salvatore Frasca, Elske van Gelder or Eva Ordoñez-

Puis apparaît Ashtar dans son tissu aérien et cette voix venue de loin qui nous parle de sa Palestine, cette lande de terre où vit sa famille, cette famille qui lui manque dans un pays en mal de reconnaissance qu'elle ne rejoindra sans doute pas. En tout cas pas s'il ne lui reste que quelques minutes. Ashtar ne voulait pas parler d'elle en piste. David Bobée a fini par la convaincre. Devinant sans doute qu'il s'agirait de l'instant le plus poignant de la représentation. Et révélant ici un vrai sens de la direction d'acteur. D'autant que les projets futurs de la jeune fille aborderont la même thématique.

Punk, baroque et apocalyptique

Écriture et direction d'acteur, les deux grands absents, sans doute, de "Popcorn machine" du cirque « My!Laïka », spectacle déjanté et lauréat Jeune Talent Cirque Europe en 2010. Présenté tel une apocalypse domestique, sur fond, en quelque sorte, de dadaïsme, "Popcorn machine", à l'instar de l'imprévisible métamorphose du petit grain de maïs soufflé, explore le chaos avec jubilation dans une ambiance fin du monde qui ose à la fois le crêpage, au sens propre, de chignon, les têtes ensanglantées et main coupées, le passage de Rachmaninov au Hardrock et la transformation, dangereusement esthétique, de la fontaine de Trévi en champignon atomique. Dans le genre "Si se chaos nous dpasse, feignons d'en être les organisateurs", les circassiens sont forts. Un vrai continuum aux causalités indéterminées et aux conséquences improbables qui entraîne trois filles et un homme dans des situations limites et absurdes où l'homme meurt continuellement. Un tigre en peluche tombe du ciel, une Barbie se met à danser et l'on aperçoit la corde rugueuse du trapèze sur le corps d'Elvira dans un numéro d'ombre et de poésie. A la fois baroque, énergique, punk et déjanté, leur spectacle brasse les genres en prônant toujours l'absurde sur fond de guitare électrique, piano, violoncelle, flûte et machine à coudre. Une musique « live » qui accroît l'intérêt et les qualités du spectacle ainsi que certaines images réellement surréalistes comme ces mains coupées qui sortent du corps du piano pour activer les touches. Sadisme, masochisme, turbulences envahissent la piste. Pour dire quoi? L'absurde, sans plus. Et sans toujours assumer la responsabilité de la violence exacerbée. Pas

Benedetto, this polyglot show, which has been in continual construction over time and through several performances, is the sum of corporeal expressions and personal writings scarcely contained by the director Florent Bergal in an explosive form that falls into the trappings of its strong points.

The outcome in *Secret*

Far from any baroque disorder, standing at the crossroads of a working sketch and a minimalistic approach, with an immense economy of means but certainly not of talent, Johann Le Guillerm seems to have moved beyond chaos long ago. He has overcome the end of the world to reconnect with its beginning in a wild, scientific quest of extreme precision – one based around a single, obsessional balancing point that tries to understand what is hidden behind the visible. Carefully designed, written, structured and measured, his vision of the circus leaves little room for approximation, even if the themes of falling, failure and collapse are all very present. He shows us to what point turbulence can be mastered and unstable disequilibrium carefully arranged. In the ring, we realise to what extent science and poetry are sometimes the two sides of the same human quest, a quest that, by inspecting the universe, continually questions its reality, enigmas, mysteries and follies. Is it the end of the world of Johann Le Guillerm? Under the patient and transfixed gaze of the spectator, he builds wooden structures, gradually modifies their points of tension and balance, carefully tests each movement and then lets his edifice collapse, all against an electro-acoustic soundtrack. He agitates the vapours of earth into the sky, suggesting spaces, elsewhere, deserts or oceans, with a poetic simplicity based in the world's essence, that which is awakened or exterminated with life. Everything is always a re-beginning, like an eternal circular movement.

celle des cheveux tirés, l'abc il est vrai des jeux de récré bien moins dangereux que la banalisation des balles tirées à tout bout de champ à la télé, mais celle presque lisse du fameux champignon. Avec Philine Dahlmann, Salvatore Frasca, Elske van Gelder ou Eva Oonez Benedetto, ce spectacle polyglotte qui n'a cessé de se construire au fil des rencontres et du temps est une somme d'expressions corporelles, d'écritures personnelles à peine contenue par le metteur en scène Florent Bergal dans une forme explosive qui a sans doute les défauts de ses qualités.

L'issue dans le «*Secret*»

Loin de ce désordre baroque, au point d'intersection de l'épure et du minimalisme, avec une immense économie de moyens mais certes pas de talent, Johann Le Guillerm semble avoir dépassé le chaos depuis longtemps, traversé la fin du monde pour renouer avec son commencement en une quête scientifiquement sauvage d'une extrême précision. Autour d'un point d'équilibre, unique et obsessionnel en vue de comprendre toujours ce que cache le visible. Archi construite, écrite, structurée, millimétrée, sa vision du cirque laisse peu de place à l'approximation même si le thème de la chute, de l'échec, de l'effondrement y est bel et bien présent. Il nous montre à quel point les turbulences se domptent et que les équilibres instables peuvent s'agencer. Sur la piste, on réalise à quel point science et poésie sont parfois les deux faces d'une même quête de l'homme qui, en inspectant, l'univers, ne cesse d'interroger sa réalité, ses énigmes, ses inconnues, ses folies. La fin du monde de Johann Le Guillerm ? Sous le regard patient et suspendu du spectateur, il élabore sa structure en bois, en modifie peu à peu les points de tension et d'équilibre, teste avec prudence chaque déplacement puis laisse choir son édifice sur fond de musique électro-acoustique, fait tourbillonner la vapeur de la terre au ciel, suggère des espaces, des ailleurs, déserts ou océans avec une poésie de la simplicité qui renvoie à l'essence du monde, qu'il s'éveille ou s'éteigne à la vie. Tout est toujours recommencement, tel un éternel circulaire mouvement.

Directors and performers: who does what? Looking for answers at the circus

MARIE PAINON

"In circus, it's the artists who create the writing style." Coming from Florent Bergal, this may be a surprising statement. Because when he says "artists", this thirty-something circus professional is clearly talking about circus *performers*, those who present a show to an audience using their own unique skills. Still Florent Bergal has good reasons to know that these performers, the acrobats and flyers who are the emblematic figures of the circus, are far from the only ones to contribute to the performance. Without actually appearing on stage, he did himself participate in the staging of *Popcorn Machine*, the show that the company My!Laïka is presenting at this year's CIRCa festival. By the way, he is happy to explain how his "outside perspective" integrated with the work of the four performers throughout their creative process. And at a big, iconic festival like CIRCa, should one only expect to find shows without a *metteur en scène* (stage director), or, as some prefer to be called, a *metteur en piste* (circus director)?

A handful of shows discovered or rediscovered at this 25th edition reply with a resounding no. However, one cannot deny that notions of what a director actually *does* vary widely in the circus, where mise en scene was introduced thanks to developments that began no more than three or four decades ago. Perhaps, then, we may make an observation that corresponds with Florent Bergal's point of view by saying that as indispensable as they have become, 'circus directors' nonetheless place each performer at

Metteurs en jeu et metteurs en piste: quels rôles? Le cirque actuel en plein jeu de piste

MARIE PAINON

«Au cirque, ce sont les artistes qui font l'écriture.» Dans la bouche de Florent Bergal, cette manière de répartir les rôles a de quoi surprendre. Car par «artistes», ce circassien trentenaire désigne clairement les seuls *interprètes* du cirque: ceux qui portent un spectacle au-devant du public en fonction de ce que leurs «techniques singulières» leur permettent d'offrir. Les figures emblématiques du cirque, ce sont eux. Mais Florent Bergal est bien placé pour savoir qu'ils sont loin d'être seuls en jeu. Sans pour autant apparaître sur scène, il a lui-même participé à la mise en scène de *Popcorn Machine*, le spectacle que la compagnie My!Laïka présentait cette année au festival CIRCa. Et il explique volontiers comment son «*regard extérieur*» a accompagné ses quatre camarades interprètes tout au long de leur processus de création. D'ailleurs, est-il seulement envisageable de présenter au grand rassemblement emblématique de CIRCa un spectacle dépourvu de metteur en scène – ou «metteur en piste», comme préfèrent se définir certains?

Au détour de quelques-uns des spectacles découverts ou redécouverts à cette 25^{ème} édition, la réponse s'impose: non. En revanche, que les conceptions de la mise en scène restent particulièrement variées dans le cirque – où elle s'est introduite à la faveur d'évolutions vieilles de trois ou quatre décennies à peine – c'est indéniable. D'où peut-être ce constat qui rejoint un peu celui de Florent Bergal: aussi incontournables qu'ils soient devenus, les «metteurs en scène de

the centre of their writing in one way or another. This centrality is sometimes a myth that exists only on the surface, yet we find it in all testimonials. At each encounter with CIRCa artists we find a different approach with, in all cases, one point in common. Some claim to base their work on the techniques of the performer, and others even say that their starting point lies in the ambitions of the performer(s) to contribute to the growth of the circus in general. Last option: those directors who say that it is the personality, the very identity of the stage performers, that becomes the creative material.

First, let's discuss the centrality of circus techniques. Several of the artists of *Wunderkammer* confirm that the show was modified when they joined the ranks of Yaron Lifschitz's company Circa a few months ago. Indeed, none of the artists presenting this Australian super-production in Auch participated in the creation of the original show in 2010. The troupe had to recruit new artists to meet its touring needs, and the content, as the tour director Diane Stern explains, naturally had to be adapted to the specificities of "these new bodies and techniques".

So this gives us the performer who experiments and improvises, and the director who, in keeping with his or her vision, intervenes at various phases of the research process to orient, observe and develop an overall form. In the case of Johann Le Guillerm, however, the creator of *Secret*, the interaction that takes place between these two parties is both simple and complex: "It's between me and me. I work directly with the matter." In other words, the founder of Cirque Ici is his own director and the (sole) performer of his world-within-a-show that has been in continual evolution for nearly ten years now. And in which everything continues to fall into place with a surprising coherence – the pieces and machinery of wood, metal and cord that he uses to nearly break the laws of physics – offering all in all a semi-organic, semi-mechanical demonstration of everything that matter is able to express. Sound at times structures the dramaturgy and, at other times, bends and distorts like a material in its own right. And then there is the space created by the ring

cirque » placent tous l'interprète au cœur de leur écriture d'une manière ou d'une autre. Cette centralité n'est parfois qu'un leurre, une simple apparence. Mais on la retrouve dans tous les discours. À chaque rencontre avec des artistes de CIRCa apparaissent autant de démarches différentes, avec pourtant ce point commun : certaines revendiquent simplement d'être basées sur les techniques de l'interprète, d'autres se disent même issues des ambitions de ce (ou ces) derniers pour l'évolution du cirque en général. Jusqu'à ces metteurs en scène pour qui c'est la personnalité, l'identité-même des artistes de plateau qui devient matière à création.

La centralité des techniques de cirque, d'abord. Elle a quelque chose d'évident. Plusieurs interprètes de *Wunderkammer* confirment ainsi que ce spectacle a évolué lorsqu'ils sont venus compléter les rangs de la compagnie Circa de Yaron Lifschitz, il y a quelques mois. Personne en effet, parmi ceux qui sont venus présenter cette superproduction australienne devant le public d'Auch, n'avait participé à la création du spectacle d'origine en 2010. C'est pour les besoins des tournées que la troupe a dû recruter de nouveaux artistes. Et le contenu, explique la directrice de tournée Diane Stern, a naturellement dû s'adapter aux spécificités de « ces nouveaux corps, ces nouvelles techniques ».

Voici donc l'interprète qui expérimente, qui improvise. Et le metteur en scène qui, en fonction de ses intentions, intervient à diverses phases de cette recherche pour orienter, observer, développer une mise en forme. Dans le cas de Johann Le Guillerm, l'auteur de *Secret*, l'interaction qui s'établit alors entre les deux parties est simple et complexe à la fois : « C'est entre moi et moi, je travaille directement avec la matière. » Autrement dit, le fondateur de la compagnie Cirque Ici est son propre metteur en scène et interprète (solitaire) pour ce spectacle-monde. Il en présente des versions en évolution permanente depuis bientôt dix ans. Et tout continue d'y trouver sa place avec une cohérence étonnante : les pièces et machines de bois, de métal, de corde qu'il manipule aux limites des lois de la physique, offrant ainsi une démonstration mi-organique mi-mécanique de ce que tout ce

and the circus tent, this circular space that “makes the circus” according to Johann Le Guillerm, a space “where nothing is hidden, and spectators simultaneously have different point of views, and, combined, all points of view”.

This complete mastery of the artist over the work gives an autonomous feel to the show. In previous versions, when certain constructions were particularly difficult to hold in place, Johann Le Guillerm says that he gave himself the freedom to start over as many times as he needed. “And this unbearable experience of failure could create some tension.” But as long as the tension remained between “him and him”, as he says, it naturally fell within the exploration and transmission of his universe. Where the direction falters, however, is when Johann Le Guillerm neglects to take interest in the three people he introduces, in the version presented in Auch, to help him execute certain sequences. Are they performers alongside him, or are they mere assistants whose grey one-piece uniforms are meant to make them fade into the ambient shadow? Neither one nor the other, in fact. “It just so happens that I need them today. I can’t hide them, so I show them,” says Le Guillerm. Except that in a show like *Secret*, which leaves nothing up to chance, even unintentional effects add to the meaning. The standbys look like little soldiers, well trained and awaiting their orders, and with whom Johann Le Guillerm’s character has had some kind of falling out. The artist has managed to slip into the role of an intermediary between the audience and mysterious knowledge. It’s a shame that due to an unintended effect we should suddenly wonder if he doesn’t take himself for an all-powerful demiurge looking to dominate the circus tent instead of making it the “democratic space” to which he aspires.

So the power of mise en scene (or the lack thereof) is a real one, in the circus as elsewhere. It’s even a particularly important aspect of two other shows at CIRC 2012: *Wunderkammer*, by Circa, under the artistic direction of Yaron Lifschitz, and *This is the end*, the end-of-the-year performance of the 23rd graduating class of the National Circus Arts Centre (CNAC), for which the renowned school reached out, as it usually does,

que peut exprimer la matière; le son qui parfois structure la dramaturgie et parfois se plie et se distord entre ses mains comme un matériau à part entière; et puis l’espace défini par la piste et le chapiteau, cet espace circulaire qui «fait cirque» selon Johann Le Guillerm, «où rien n’est caché, où *tout le monde a à la fois un point de vue différent et, ensemble, tous les points de vue.*»

Cette maîtrise absolue de l’artiste sur son œuvre donne au spectacle une respiration autonome. Lors de précédentes versions, où certaines constructions étaient particulièrement délicates à faire tenir en équilibre, Johann Le Guillerm raconte qu’il s’accordait la liberté de recommencer aussi longtemps que nécessaire. «Et ça pouvait créer une tension, ce raté insupportable...» Mais tant que cette tension reste entre «lui et lui» comme il le dit, elle trouve naturellement sa place dans l’exploration et la transmission de son univers. Là où la mise en scène flanche, en revanche, c’est quand Johann Le Guillerm néglige de s’intéresser aux trois personnes qu’il a introduites dans la version présentée à Auch pour l’aider à réaliser certaines séquences. Sont-elles des interprètes à ses côtés? Ou bien de simples assistants, dont les combinaisons grises uniformes seraient censées se fondre dans la pénombre ambiante? Un peu de tout et rien à la fois: «il se trouve qu’aujourd’hui, j’ai besoin d’eux. Je ne peux pas les cacher. Donc je les montre», dit Johann Le Guillerm. Sauf que dans un spectacle comme *Secret* qui ne laisse rien au hasard, même ce qui n’a pas été pensé fait sens. Les impétrants prennent des airs de petits soldats aux ordres et bien dressés. À côté desquels le personnage de Johann Le Guillerm, lui, se brouille. L’artiste avait su se mettre dans la peau d’un intermédiaire inspiré entre le public et des savoirs mystérieux. Dommage qu’à cause d’un effet parasite, on se mette soudain à se demander s’il ne se prend pas plutôt pour un demiurge tout puissant, tenté de dominer le chapiteau au lieu d’en faire «l’espace démocratique» qu’il revendique...

Le pouvoir de la mise en scène (ou de la non-mise en scène) reste donc une réalité, au cirque comme ailleurs. Et même une réalité particulièrement forte pour ce qui concerne deux



My!Laika – Popcorn Machine © MONALe clou dans la planche

to an outside director – this year David Bobee. These two examples are both rather paradoxical. Both works are presented as a succession of acts, and in this regard both can seem quite close to the so-called ‘traditional’ circus, where the question of mise en scene is not addressed in so many words. We have already said that *Wunderkammer* was reworked to accommodate the arrival of new recruits. In the CNAC performance, this sequencing by performer is almost mandatory, since *This is the end* is (also) intended to serve as a “springboard to employment” for its new graduates. However, elsewhere, the approaches of David Bobee and Yaron Lifschitz leave such different traces that it would be almost wrong to compare them. And yet, it is telling that their two shows use exactly the same image at the same moment. At the very end of the performance – as an ‘ouverture’, on stage all of the artists strip themselves down. They remove their clothes and stand exposed for a good while in front of the audience, in their undergarments.

In doing this, David Bobee and Yaron Lifschitz are revealing themselves. For them, directing is not

autres spectacles du festival 2012: *Wunderkammer* de Circa, sous la direction artistique de Yaron Lifschitz ; et *This is the end*, le spectacle de la 23^{ème} promotion du Centre national des arts du cirque (CNAC) pour lequel la célèbre école a fait appel comme d’habitude à un metteur en scène extérieur, David Bobée. Il s’agit d’exemples assez paradoxaux : ces deux œuvres se présentant sous la forme d’une succession de numéros, elles peuvent sembler proches du cirque dit « traditionnel » où la question de la mise en scène ne se pose pas du tout dans les mêmes termes. On a déjà dit que *Wunderkammer* avait été remanié pour s’adapter à l’arrivée de nouvelles recrues. Dans le spectacle du CNAC, ce séquençage par interprète est carrément un passage obligé puisque *This is the end* a (aussi) vocation à servir de « tremplin pour l’emploi » à ses artistes fraîchement diplômés. Mais par ailleurs, les démarches de David Bobée et Yaron Lifschitz laissent des traces tellement différentes qu’il est presque incongru de les rapprocher. Et pourtant. Pourtant il est emblématique que leurs deux spectacles utilisent exactement la même image au même moment, c’est-à-dire à la toute fin de la représentation – en « ouverture » : sur le plateau, tous les artistes se mettent à nu. Ils se dépouillent de leurs vêtements et restent exposés quelques longs instants face au public, en sous-vêtements.

Ce faisant, David Bobée comme Yaron Lifschitz se dévoilent eux-mêmes. La mise en scène ne consiste pas seulement, pour eux, à s’approprier l’impressionnant éventail de techniques de leurs partenaires. La personne-même de leurs interprètes devient matière à création. Ainsi Ashtar Muallem, spécialiste de tissus aériens, se souvient de l’époque où David Bobée a fait venir individuellement tous les jeunes artistes du CNAC pour enregistrer un témoignage vidéo sur leur vie. Jusqu’à ce qu’elle découvre que son récit allait être intégré tel quel à l’écriture du spectacle. C’est sa propre voix qui sert de bande son et de fil conducteur au numéro qu’elle présente à chaque représentation de *This is this end*: une séquence très belle qui dit les doutes, les espoirs et les angoisses d’une Palestinienne en exil, prises entre les nœuds de l’Histoire et les aspirations de tout un peuple à la libération. Revendiquée par David

only about appropriating their artists' impressive array of techniques. The very person of the performers becomes the creative matter. Thus Ashtar Muallem, the aerial silk specialist, remembers when David Bobee individually worked with all the young artists of CNAC to record video testimonials of their lives, and when she discovered that her story in its entirety would be integrated into the show's writing. It's her own voice that provides the soundtrack and through-line for the number she presents within *This is the end* – a very beautiful sequence that tells of the doubts, hopes and fears of a Palestinian in exile, trapped between the tides of history and a people's aspiration to be free. An important part of Bobee's work ("There is always a step toward the personalities of those with whom he works", according to his assistant Sophie Colleu), this immersion into the private lives of the artists on stage allows him to develop an original message that speaks of the metamorphoses of youth. But this is still a lot to ask from Ashtar Muallem and certainly from a number of her fellow students. While the CNAC graduates have certainly done 'the writing' of this show, as Florent Bergal might put it, to such a point that the audience might *feel* that it is discovering them, body and soul, in the end the deciding voice is the director's. So whose voice is really being expressed? Who is creating?

Well, what if it were... the rules of marketing in some cases? That's right – the formulas of success designed to serve audiences with goods for consumption! Because that's what the audience seems to like. "You came to see us do difficult things, and that's what we'll do for you! That's what the audience pays to see..." According to Diana Stern, the touring director of *Wunderkammer*, that's a good summary for much of Yaron Lifshitz's work. And judging from *Wunderkammer*, one would tend to agree with her. On stage, the performer is the one who does "difficult things", and nothing else. At the show's first performance in Auch, one could even see the pain felt by certain acrobats or contortionists. In fact, the direction seemed to feed off of this alone: throwing meat to the lions, or to the alleged voyeurism of the audience. So the seven men and women diligently follow one another on stage, stringing together the numbers. The

Bobée – « il y a toujours un travail sur la personnalité de ceux avec qui il travaille », dit Sophie Colleu, son assistante – cette immersion dans l'intimité des artistes de plateau lui permet de développer un discours original et touchant sur les métamorphoses de la jeunesse. Mais elle reste parfois difficile à assumer, pour Ashtar Muallem comme sans doute pour un certain nombre de ses partenaires. Car si les diplômés du CNAC ont bel et bien « fait l'écriture » de ce spectacle selon l'expression Florent Bergal, au point que le public pourrait croire les y découvrir corps et âme, c'est au final la voix du metteur en scène qui l'emporte. Alors, qui s'exprime en réalité ? Qui crée ?

Et pourquoi pas... les lois du marketing ? Oui, ces recettes conçues pour faire avaler au public du prêt à consommer ! Car il paraît qu'il aime ça, le public : « Vous êtes venus nous voir faire des choses difficiles, et on va le faire pour vous ! Le public paie pour voir ça... » C'est direct. C'est cru. D'après Diane Stern, directrice de tournée de *Wunderkammer*, c'est ainsi que Yaron Lifshitz pourrait résumer les grandes lignes de son travail. Et à voir le résultat, on n'en doute pas vraiment. Sur le plateau, l'interprète est celui qui fait « des choses difficiles » et rien d'autre. Lors de la première représentation à Auch, la souffrance de tels voltigeurs ou telles contorsionnistes était même visible. En fait, la mise en scène ne semble se nourrir que de cela : l'exposition d'une chair jetée en pâture au supposé voyeurisme du public. Alors les sept hommes et femmes se succèdent sur le plateau au pas de charge pour enchaîner les performances. Les interactions entre eux se limitent à une succession de gestes techniques. Pas d'émotions apparentes. Mais en revanche, comme l'a remarqué la journaliste croate Iva Nerina, une manière dérangeante de tourner en permanence leurs regards vers les spectateurs comme pour dire : « je n'ai rien à cacher ». Pour le reste, la mise en scène du « directeur artistique et PDG de Circa » Yaron Lifshitz repose sur une suite de trucs bien réglés. Les séquences les plus violentes doivent alterner mécaniquement avec des numéros moins insoutenables, pour que le spectateur puisse décentement se sentir autorisé à rester. Musique, éclairage et costumes jouent la carte du rétro-décalé pour faciliter cette mise à distance. Le pendant de ces artifices de (fausse)

interactions they exchange are limited to a series of technical gestures, with no apparent emotion. However, as the Croatian journalist Iva Nerina has noted, they have a disturbing way of looking continually out to the audience as if to say, "I have nothing to hide". For the rest, artistic director and Circa CEO Yaron Lifschitz's direction relies on a series of well executed effects, the most overwhelming sequences mechanically alternating with lighter numbers so the spectator doesn't find it too obscene to keep sitting and watching. Music, lighting and costumes all go for an offbeat retro effect to facilitate a certain distance, but the result of these (falsely) breezy artifices is that clichés slip into the performance throughout.

This is an extreme case: a piece that exploits the performer and his or her techniques, all to the benefit of a show that almost ends up working *against* them. This did not prevent CIRCa's 2012 season from also showing that there is the risk of another extreme: that for fear of cases of 'directorial abuse', one might fall into a case of directorial neglect. The company Chabatz d'Entrar learned this lesson the hard way at the first showing of *Perchés*, a show that fell victim to both the ambition of its performers and the lack of ambition of the director meant to accompany them. What was the original idea? To stage an art, stilt-walking, traditionally associated with street performers, and to "give it a certain nobility". Olivier Léger, one of the show's two stilt-walkers, with his partner Anne-Karine Keller, affirms that the experience was at least instructive in terms of technique. "We offer plenty of postures and balancing acts that have nothing to do with the classical use of stilts." Without a doubt. As for the non-initiated audience member, he or she might be won over at first by the very simple concept of the show. It's a change at least from the old, well-trodden terrain. There are no spectacular costumes to cover the stilt joints, so people concentrate on the couple's movements – movements that aren't designed to be impressive, being inspired, according to the performers, by the "everyday life of a couple" (that spend their days pawing at each other two metres above the ground!).

légèreté étant que les clichés et la laideur se faufilent dans le moindre numéro, quasiment sans répétition.

Le vrai cas-limite, il est là. Non pas dans les formes hors-normes d'un Johann Le Guillerm, chez qui les notions de « jeu » et de « mise en scène » deviennent floues à force de se confondre. Mais dans cette tendance à instrumentaliser l'interprète et ses techniques... au profit d'un spectacle qui finit presque par exister *contre* eux. Ce qui n'a pas empêché la programmation 2012 de CIRCa de montrer que le risque inverse existe aussi : face à « l'abus de direction », gare aux ravages que peut provoquer une mise en scène défailante. La compagnie Chabatz d'Entrar l'a appris à ses dépens lors de la première chahutée de *Perchés*, un spectacle victime à la fois de l'ambition de ses interprètes et du manque d'ambition du metteur en scène censé les accompagner. L'idée de départ ? Apporter sur scène un art traditionnellement associé aux performances de rue, les échasses, pour « lui donner ses lettres de noblesse ». Olivier Léger, l'un des deux échassistes du spectacle avec sa compagne Anne-Karine Keller, affirme que l'expérience aura au moins été enrichissante du point de vue technique : « nous apportons plein de postures, de points d'équilibres qui sont à l'opposé de l'utilisation classique des échasses ». Sans doute. Quant au spectateur non-spécialiste, il peut se laisser porter au départ par le parti pris très simple du spectacle. Ça le sort des sentiers battus. Il n'y a pas de costume spectaculaire pour recouvrir les attaches des échasses. Les regards se concentrent donc sur la gestuelle du couple. Une gestuelle qui impressionne volontairement assez peu car inspirée, disent les artistes, du « quotidien d'un couple » qui passeraient ses journées à tricoter des pattes à deux mètres du sol...

Et c'est là que les échassistes perdent pied. Toujours selon Olivier Léger, l'intérêt de passer de la rue à la scène était de « pouvoir écrire une dramaturgie ». Sauf que le spectacle ne développe rien d'autre que des associations d'idées et de formes relativement décousues. Anne-Karine Keller et Olivier Léger voulaient parler de la fragilité du couple ? Traduction scénique : leur

And this is where the stilt-walkers lose their footing. Again according to Olivier Léger, the whole point of going from street to stage was “to perform a dramaturgical narrative”, but in reality the show was nothing more than an association of ideas and relatively disjointed forms. If Anne-Karine Keller and Olivier Léger wanted to talk about the fragility of the couple, on stage this translates into a prop list consisting mainly of porcelain tea sets endlessly scattered across the performance space. If they wanted to address the theme of difference, the result was Olivier Léger’s character removing his stilts and cutting himself off from his companion, who does not hesitate a short while after to put on even higher stilts. But why do they do all this? There’s no answer to this question in the show, with nothing more coming from the director, who wasn’t able to take part in the interview granted by Anne-Karine Keller and Olivier Léger. The performers are left definitively alone with a piece that doesn’t have more to say than it does to show.

Yet not much is needed to transform a succession of feats into a mise en scene, as such. My!Laïka’s philosophy and provocative trademark has been to adopt a very relaxed writing style. This young company’s project is also based on the association between, on the one hand, a dramatic through-line – ‘death’, which strikes again and again in a series of absurd situations – and, on the other, the skills of these four performers – a trapeze artist, an acrobat, a base and a juggler. The whole show is then structured, according to its performers, around searching for “coherence among these different elements”. Nothing more. Especially not “having to justify why we do what we do!”. The authors of *Perchés* lost themselves in trying to develop a linear story based on their stilt-walking. However, My!Laïka reminds us that drama does not come from the transitions between perfectly executed sequences, but from focusing on the quality of the main points themselves. Thus, in *Popcorn Machine* (and the same goes for *This is the end, Wunderkammer, Secret...*) the transitions from number to number are efficient and well executed, but entirely unhidden. From this viewpoint, today’s circus has no problem with following in the vein of cabaret or the traditional circus. And it works. My!Laïka’s

principal accessoire scénique est un vaste service de tasses et soucoupes en porcelaine qui s’éparpillera à l’infini sur le plateau. Ils voulaient traiter du thème de la différence ? Alors le personnage d’Olivier Léger retire ses échasses et se retrouve ainsi coupé du monde de sa compagne, qui de son côté ne tarde pas à se jucher sur une paire d’échasses encore plus hautes. Mais pourquoi tout ça ? Pas de réponse dans le spectacle. Et rien de plus ne viendra du metteur en scène : il n’a pu participer à l’entretien accordé par Anne-Karine Keller et Olivier Léger. Ces derniers restent définitivement seuls, avec un spectacle qui n’a pas trouvé davantage de choses à raconter qu’à montrer.

Il n’y a pourtant pas forcément besoin d’aller loin pour transformer une succession de performances en mise en scène digne de ce nom. Chez My!Laïka, l’adoption d’une écriture très décontractée est comme un mot d’ordre, une revendication provocatrice. Le projet de cette jeune compagnie se base lui aussi sur l’association entre un fil conducteur d’un côté – « *la mort* » qui frappe encore et encore, en autant de situations absurdes – et de l’autre les techniques des quatre interprètes – trapéziste, voltigeuse, porteuse, jongleur. Le tout s’est ensuite agencé en recherchant « *la cohérence entre ces différents éléments* », disent les artistes... Mais sans plus : surtout, « ne pas avoir à justifier pourquoi on fait ça ! », s’exclament-ils. Les auteurs de *Perchés* se sont perdus à vouloir développer une histoire linéaire autour de leur jeu d’échasses ; My!Laïka rappelle, à l’inverse, qu’une dramaturgie ne s’invente pas en peaufinant des enchaînements de séquences parfaits mais en soignant la qualité d’exécution des temps forts eux-mêmes. Ainsi dans *Popcorn Machine* – et de même pour *This is the end, Wunderkammer, Secret...* – les transitions entre numéros sont efficaces, soignées et néanmoins tout à fait apparentes. De ce point de vue, le cirque actuel n’a aucun complexe à s’inscrire dans la veine du cabaret ou du cirque traditionnel. Et ça fonctionne : la mise en scène collective de My!Laïka parvient à créer une *atmosphère*. Rien de tel pour conquérir l’adhésion du public, donner une unité d’ensemble aux éléments les plus disparates...

collective mise en scene manages to create an *atmosphere*. There's nothing like it for winning over an audience, or giving an overall coherence to the most varied of elements.

One might even find that this alone resolves certain reservations about the show's overall message. Without being as revolting as *Wunderkammer*, the smugness with which *Popcorn Machine* imposes its gratuitous harshness on us to supposedly hold a mirror to the contemporary world is... questionable. Nonetheless, artistically, the show accepts its responsibilities. Thanks to a patient co-authoring, we see that it was able to find a true sense of interaction between the two poles that the contemporary stage has made nearly indivisible (in today's circus as well as in dance or theatre) and which are continually rediscovering their equilibrium at every level of the creative process: the performers and the director.

In this circus couple, whether it is virtual or real, one is at times more of an 'author' than the other. And perhaps here a renewal is needed even more than in the other disciplines to prove that the circus has an imagination as unique as its skills – one of the more striking examples being the recognition that Johann Le Guillerm manages to garner among the wider audience with his most curious experiments. But there is, above all, one question that will always come up. Within this performer/director relationship, how does the circus artist define himself today? This year, in the form of some very different shows, the Auch festival has offered another panoply of possible answers. And it started by asking us to abandon a certain stubborn prejudice, stating that in today's circus the artist is not 'only' the performer of such and such a number. The circus artist is at the same time the one in the ring *and* those who contribute from the outside. In short, he or she is by definition looking to question borders. And since it was precisely to grant exposure to this kind of innovative approach that CIRCa was created in 1987... the results are in: twenty-four years later, the project of the Auch festival remains as current as ever.

Voire faire passer au second plan quelques réserves de fond sur le message du spectacle. Sans être aussi détestable que dans *Wunderkammer*, la complaisance avec laquelle *Popcorn Machine* nous inflige sa violence gratuite sous prétexte de tendre un miroir au monde contemporain est... contestable. Mais toujours est-il qu'artistiquement, le spectacle assume ses responsabilités. Grâce à un patient travail de co-écriture, on voit qu'il a su trouver une véritable interaction entre ces deux pôles que la scène contemporaine a rendu quasi-indissociables (dans le cirque actuel comme en danse ou au théâtre) et qui pourtant n'en finissent pas de réinventer leur équilibre à chaque nouveau processus de création : interprètes et metteur en scène.

Dans ce couple de cirque, qu'il soit virtuel ou réel, l'un est parfois plus « auteur » que l'autre. Et peut-être faut-il se réinventer encore plus que dans d'autres disciplines pour prouver que le cirque est porteur d'un imaginaire aussi singulier que ses techniques – l'un des exemples les plus frappants étant la reconnaissance que Johann Le Guillerm réussit à obtenir auprès du grand public avec des expérimentations on ne peut plus déroutantes. Mais il y a surtout une question qui n'en finit toujours pas de se poser. Dans ce couple interprète/metteur en scène, comment l'artiste de cirque se définit-il aujourd'hui? En quelques spectacles très différents, le festival d'Auch offrirait cette année encore une infinité de réponses possibles. Et il invitait d'abord à renoncer à ce préjugé persistant : dans le cirque actuel, l'artiste n'est pas « que » l'interprète de tel ou tel numéro. Il est sur la piste et il est *aussi* tous ceux qui nourrissent la piste d'expériences extérieures de toutes natures, de tous horizons. Bref, il cherche par définition à bousculer les frontières. Sachant que c'est précisément pour donner une visibilité à ce genre de démarches innovantes que CIRCa a vu le jour en 1987... le bilan est vite fait : vingt-quatre ans après, le projet du festival d'Auch reste plus « actuel » que jamais.

Some Titbits from Auch

MASENJKA BACIC

A Naive Look at Modern Circus

CIRCa is a contemporary circus festival that has been held every year in Auch, a small town in south-western France, since 1988; its tradition there goes back more than forty years, and it's the best chance you'll get of learning about circus as an emerging artform. Firmly positioned in cultural environments such as France, where it has been incorporated into everyday life, both in education and leisure, circus remains something of an enigma in the geographical areas that do not have the same kind of tradition and where people haven't had many chances to encounter the artform. Croatia is a case in point, with the exception of the renowned New Circus Festival held in Zagreb. This is why this essay will assume that the reader possesses only the most basic knowledge of the practices and theoretical underpinnings of this artistic discipline, and will try to look into the works it analyses as representative samples of modern trends in art and position their significance in light of generally recognised social values.

Of the twenty-two performances presented in this year's edition of the CIRCa festival, this essay will deal with two quite different artistic projects – the postmodern *Popcorn Machine* by the international group Cie My!Laika, and *Wunderkammer* by the Australian company Circa, which is more spectacle-oriented. The two performances start from diametrically opposed points, both in terms of the ideological background underpinning their presentation, and in the way that they understand and make use of the very functions of the art they are engaged in. Consequently, their different aesthetic styles and the different receptions they receive (from professionals and general public alike) reveal tendencies akin to the dichotomy that at one point in time existed between high art and popular culture. Let us then take things in turn.

Par crtica iz Aucha

MASENJKA BACIC

Naivni pogled na suvremeni cirkus

Festival suvremenog cirkusa *Circa*, koji se dvadeset i petu godinu za redom održava u malom gradiću Auchu na jugozapadu Francuske, a u tamošnjem mjestu ima tradiciju od preko četrdeset godina, prava je prilika za upoznavanje ove umjetničke discipline. Čvrsto pozicioniran unutar kulturnih sredina kao što je Francuska gdje je inkorporiran i u svakodnevni život u obrazovnom i dokoličarskom polju, suvremeni cirkus još uvijek ostaje svojevrsna nepoznanica i atrakcija na onim geografskim područjima koji nemaju tradiciju ni česte susrete s ovom vrstom umjetnosti kao što je slučaj s Hrvatskom (osim poznatog Festivala novog cirkusa koji se održava u Zagrebu). Stoga esej koji slijedi polazi sa pozicije tek bazičnog poznavanja praksi i teorijskih postavki ove umjetničke discipline, a analizirana djela pokušat će promatrati kao reprezentativne primjerke suvremenih kretanja u umjetnosti i pozicionirati njihov značaj s obzirom na općepriznate društvene vrijednosti. Od dvadeset i dvije različite izvedbe prikazane na ovogodišnjem izdanju festivala *Circa* ovdje će biti riječ o dva poprilično različita umjetnička projekta – postmodernistički prezentirane *Popcron Machine* internacionalne grupe Cie My!Laika te spektaklu orijentirane *Wunderkammer* australskog *Circa*. Navedene izvedbe kreću sa oprečnih polazišta bilo da je riječ o ideološkoj pozadini koja se skriva iza prezentacijskog ruha ili o samom poimanju funkcija umjetnosti kojom se bave. Slijedom toga, njihove estetske poetike kao i sama recepcija (stručna i opća) otkrivaju tendencije bliske opreci koja se nekoć svodila na visoku i popularnu kulturu. Pa krenimo redom.

Postmodernistički „Anythings goes“ *Popcorn Machinea*

U svom prezentacijskom tekstu Cie My!Laika svoju izvedbu karakterizira kao djelo prožeto elementima dadaizma i humora apsurdna unutar

UNPACK
THE
ARTS

Popcorn Machine's Postmodern 'Anything goes'

In their presentation text, Cie My!Laika describe their performance as a work steeped in elements of Dadaism and the humour of the absurd: four international artists (Philine Dahlmann, Salvatore Frasca, Elske van Gelder, Eva Ordoñez-Benedetto) come together in a universal post-apocalyptic mise-en-scene. Four young people from four different countries – Argentina, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy – use popcorn as a metaphor to express the sense of an explosive metamorphosis.

Combining the elements of theatrical expression with the techniques used in new circus, such as juggling and trapeze, this group positions itself clearly within a contemporary manifestation of circus art combined with other disciplines and artforms. Thus, even before the show starts, the audience is given the impression of a tendentious kind of art which aspires to cover various aspects of poetic creation by mixing and matching genres. The question remains: what do the young artists actually manage to achieve on stage, and to what extent do they manage to communicate to the audience over these imposed expectations?

Popcorn Machine, performed in Auch's Théâtre Municipal, creates a chaotic atmosphere assisted by the scattered elements of its mise-en-scene and a soundtrack which includes guitars, piano and a sewing machine. The artists themselves go beyond merely showcasing their skills, trying to use their abilities as actors to create a performance whose content transcends mere circus. Some of the acts in the show, such as an acrobatic portrayal of violence involving two girls and a piece of solo trapeze, manage to create a sense of theatrical playfulness. But the performance does lack the coherence that might justify the playful tampering with theatrical form.

And yet, both the artists and the director, Florent Bergal, insisted as they met the press that they were not overly concerned with the ideological and structural elements of their project. As far as the young artists are concerned, what matters to them is control over what goes on on-stage and the presentation of the circus skills they want to showcase; as for the director, his role is to provide guidance and a sort of reconciliation within a premise that aims to present the beauty of violence. Thus, even when the artists perform

kojeg se četiri internacionalna umjetnika (**Philine Dahlmann, Salvatore Frasca, Elske van Gelder, Eva Ordoñez Benedetto**) ujediniju u jednoj univerzalnoj postapokaliptičnoj scenografiji. Četvoro mladih ljudi koji dolaze iz različitih zemalja od Argentine, Njemačke i Nizozemske do Italije koriste metaforu kokica kako bi izrazili smisao eksplozivne metamorfoze. Kombinirajući elemente teatarskog izričaja sa različitim novocirkuskim tehnikama od žongliranja do trapeza, ova skupina se jasno pozicionira unutar suvremenih tendencija u širokoj oblasti cirkuskog umjetničkog djelovanja. Dakle, i prije same izvedbe, gledatelju se ukazuje na jednu tendencioznu umjetnost koja pretendira da obuhvati različite vidove poetskih ostvarenja iz jednog žanrovski pomiješanog polazišta. No pitanje je što od svega mladi umjetnici uspijevaju ostvariti na sceni i u kojoj mjeri gledatelju uspijevaju prenijeti nametnuta očekivanja. *Popcorn Machine*, izvedena u gradskom kazalištu Auch, uistinu stvara jednu kaotičnu atmosferu zahvaljujući raštrkanoj scenografiji, pratećim zvukovima gitare, piana i šivače mašine. Sami umjetnici ne zadržavaju se tek na prikazu vještina koje znaju, već i nastoje svojim glumačkim vještinama pridonijeti stvaranju nečeg što je sadržajno više od samog cirkusa. Pojedine točke unutar same izvedbe kao što je akrobatski prikaz nasilja između dvije djevojke i osamljena trapezistica uspijevaju u stvaranju teatarske zaigranosti. No, ono što samoj predstavi nedostaje jest koherentnost koja bi opravdala poigravanje sa teatarskom formom. Ipak, sami umjetnici, kao ni režiser **Florent Bergal**, u razgovoru s novinarima, jasno su istaknuli kako se ne zamaraju previše sa ideološkim i strukturalnim elementima svog projekta. Što se mladih umjetnika tiče, njima je bitna kontrola nad onim što se događa na sceni i reprezentacija cirkuskih vještina koje žele pokazati, dok se redateljeva uloga svodi na usmjeravanje i svojevrsno pomirenje unutar pretpostavke koja želi pokazati ljepotu nasilja. Stoga, i nasilne scene koje umjetnici izvode, prati smiješak na licu i svojevrsna interna zaigranost. Provocirajući s iskazima o ljepoti nasilja, koja je na sceni praćena vizualnim elementima, a u razgovoru izjavama o černobilskoj estetskoj vrijednosti i odbijanju povezivanja etike i estetike,

violent scenes, they do it with a smile on their faces and a sort of internal playfulness. The attempts to provoke with statements about the beauty of violence – supported on stage by visual elements and interviews speaking of the aesthetic quality of the Chernobyl disaster, and placed alongside a refusal to link ethics and aesthetics – result in an even stronger impression of vagueness.

At any rate, *Popcorn Machine* is an interesting performance that manages to hold the audience's attention, showcases the fascinating skills of the performers, manages to create an atmosphere, and thus in part justifies the amalgamation of circus and theatre. And yet, the art-for-art's-sake argument used to justify the piece's dramaturgical deficiencies may have been an intriguing intellectual line in the 19th Century, but not in the present. As already indicated above, the lingering impression is that the show is vague and part-done, lacking the finishing touch that would structure and complete it, turning it into an artistically integrated whole. In this respect, the performance itself contains a kernel of huge potential: it could create something that might be characterised as a successful artistic creation. As a project, *My!Laika* appears to be a typical offshoot of the postmodern cultural heritage evincing multicultural tendencies, a superficial approach to various aspects of reality, and an ideological footing best described by the phrase 'anything goes'. This is what probably makes this company a true reflection of modern society: it makes no effort to achieve fundamental insights into the conceptual make-up of the genres that are played with, to say nothing of the general lack of engagement. Although their style of presentation is aimed at positioning them as a sort of avant-garde, in the sense that they are discovering something new, they are easy to place on the map of contemporary performance, closest to various forms of visual art where the meaning of the art itself slowly leeches away. But, as a perfect paradigmatic presentation of modern trends, their performance appears to me to say more about the society which engendered it than about modern circus art; the prestigious *Jeunes Talents Cirque* award received by the company in 2010 corroborates this from an institutional point of view.

dojam nedorečenosti postaje snažniji.

U svakom slučaju, *Popcorn Machine* zanimljiva je izvedba koja zadržava pažnju gledatelja, fascinira vještinama samih umjetnika, uspijeva u stvaranju atmosfere te stoga dijelom opravdava kombiniranje cirkusa i teatra. Ipak, larpurlatistička tendencija kojom se opravdavaju dramaturške manjkavosti mogla bi biti zanimljiva u 19. stoljeću, ali ne i danas. Kao što je već rečeno, ostaje dojam nedorečenosti i neizgrađenosti koji bi cijelu ideju strukturirao i zaokružio na način da ostvari umjetničku cjelovitost. U tom smislu sama izvedba krije u sebi ogroman potencijal za stvaranje nečeg što bi se moglo okarakterizirati kao uspjele umjetničko ostvarenje.

Kao projekt pak, *Cie My!Laika* se doima kao tipičan odvojak postmodernističke kulturne baštine koja iskazuje multikulturalne tendencije, površan pristup različitim vidovima stvarnosti i ideološku pozadinu koja se otkriva u sintagmi anything goes. Upravo zato, ova skupina je vjerojatno vjeran odraz današnjeg društva unutar kojeg nema temeljnog promišljanja konceptualnih postavki žanrovskih određenja s kojima se poigravaju, a da ne govorimo o angažiranom djelovanju umjetnosti koju izvode. I iako svojom prezentacijom pretendiraju biti svojevrsnom avangardom, u smislu da otkrivaju nešto novo, ostaju tek mapirani unutar različitih suvremenih tendencija, kojima su najbliže različite forme vizualnih umjetnosti, gdje smisao umjetnosti polako iščezava. No, kao savršeni paradigmatički prikaz suvremenih kretanja, njihova izvedba, čini mi se, više govori o društvu unutar kojeg nastaju, negoli suvremenoj cirkuskoj umjetnosti, o čemu institucionalno svjedoči i nagrada *Jeunes Talents Cirque 2010*.

„Populistički“ *Wunderkammer C!rce*

Za razliku od mladenačke zaigranosti gore analiziranog projekta, *Wunderkammer* predstavlja organizacijski i financijski pomno osmišljen projekt gdje sedam izvođača izvode svoje točke kojima je primarni cilj zabaviti publiku zabaviti. Njihova prezentacija svodi se na atribucije intimno, zabavno, senzualno, sexy i ekstravagantno u kabaretskoj atmosferi. U tom smislu oni publiku ne zavaravaju, nego im pružaju očekivano.

Kabaretsko ovdje predstavlja svojevrsnu

'Populist' Wunderkammer by Circa

Unlike the youthful playfulness of *Popcorn Machine*, *Wunderkammer* is a carefully designed project – both in organisational and financial terms – where seven performers execute acts with the primary goal of entertaining the audience. Their presentation can be described using the epithets intimate, fun, sensual, sexy and extravagant, with the piece playing out within a cabaret atmosphere. In this respect, they do not deceive their audience, but serve the expected fare.

Cabaret is the common denominator of all the *Wunderkammer* acts, which feature acrobatics, hula-hoop, trapeze, ropes and other props. The cabaret style is, however, expressed solely through the sexy, scant costumes of the performers, which have the simple function of pandering to the taste of the masses. Much attention is garnered by flirting with eroticism which at times spills over and crosses into pornography, culminating in a final scene where the performers strip to their underwear. Critics with a feminist slant would probably slate this excess and the entire costume design in no uncertain terms.

A bare stage, precise choreography and a lack of dramaturgy (critics claim that the director Yaron Lifschitz lacks the ability to tell a story) make it possible for the audience to focus on the skills shown by the performers. Thus, instead of dramatic structure, all the audience can see on the stage is spectacular circus. The young artists are interchangeable within the show and their artistic stamp is not in evidence, although their interviews with the press indicate that they themselves do not think this is true. They deny strenuously any suggestions that their artistic potential cannot come to the fore in a performance where the propositions are so precisely defined; they believe that this Circa project makes it possible for them to showcase their skills and to show themselves in front of a broader audience. In this respect, they emphasise the individual pain they feel during the performance, the impact of the training on their bodies, but it remains doubtful to what extent they really manage to communicate that within the performance.

Bereft of artistic pretensions and burdened by

poveznicu svih točaka akrobacija, hula-hoopa, trapeza, užeta i drugih, koja se doduše ogleda tek u sexy oskudnoj kostimografiji čija se funkcija svodi na podilaženje ukusu masovne publike. Mnogo pažnje privlači koketiranje s erotizmom koje se na trenutke prelijeva i prelazi granice pornografije i ostaje nejasno zbog čega, uza sve atraktivnosti i izuzetne vještine mladih izvođača, korištenje tih elemenata koje svoj vrhunac imaju u završno razodijevanju. Taj svojevrsan višak kao i cjelokupnu kostimografiju pomnija feministička kritika vjerojatno bi oštro osudila.

Ogoljena scena, precizna koreografija i lišenost dramaturgije (za redatelja **Yaron Lifschitz** kritičari kažu da mu nedostaje sposobnosti pričanja priče) omogućavaju fokusiranje publike na vještine koje izvođači pokazuju. Tako umjesto dramske strukturiranosti, na sceni gledateljima se pruža uvid u samo i jedino cirkus u svojoj spektakularnosti. Mladi umjetnici u okviru cijelog projekta su zamjenjivi, a njihov umjetnički pečat ne dolazi do izražaja, iako u razgovoru novinara s mladim glumcima, čini se kako oni ipak ne razmišljaju tako. Pretpostavke o tome kako njihov umjetnički potencijal unutar takve predstave, gdje postoje točno određene propozicije, ne može doći do izražaja, oštro demantiraju jer smatraju kako im *Circin* projekt omogućava upravo pokazivanje svojih vještina i fokusiranost na njih same pred širim spektrom gledatelja. U tom smislu oni naglašavaju bolnost njihove izvedbe, posljedice koje vježbanje ima za njihova tijela. Koliko u tome uspijevaju, dijelom je dvojbeno.

Lišen umjetnički pretenzija i preopterećen masovnom podilaženju prezentiranja cirkuske umjetnosti široj publici, *Wunderkammer* uspijeva u svom cilju. Kombinacijom izuzetno vještih umjetnika, golišavom kostimografijom i koketiranjem sa erotikom ova predstava osamdesetak minuta vrhunski zabavlja publiku i izaziva oduševljenje praćeno gromoglasnim pljeskom, ali i negodovanje sofisticirane kritičarske ekspertize, koja može izgledati licemjernom bilo da se radi o moralizatorskom prigovoru eksploatacije vlastite seksualnosti ili nedostatku umjetničkog izričaja.

Dva suprotna pola

Navedene predstave odaju se tako kao primjeri dviju različitih tendencija: jednog mladenačkog

the need to pander to the masses in the presentation of circus art, *Wunderkammer* achieves its goal. By combining extremely skilled artists, minimal costumes and a flirtation with eroticism, this show keeps the audience well entertained for some 80 minutes, ending amid enthusiastic and tumultuous applause from the general audience and protests from the sophisticated professional critics. Amid such a strong popular reaction some will find these protests hypocritical or unfounded, whether they are voicing moralising complaints about the exploitation of the performers' sexuality or bemoaning the lack of artistic expression.

Two opposite poles

The two performances thus reveal themselves as examples of two opposite tendencies: a youthful collusion aspiring at lofty artistic achievement, and a performance designed to attract as large an audience as possible. Each of them builds a diametrically opposed aesthetic, meaning and skill set and thus attracts diametrically opposed audiences. Both are legitimate, both speak of contemporary circus as a diverse field where everyone can find something for themselves, and as an artform trying to establish itself as an artistically valuable and worthy peer of its fully recognised 'cousin' theatre at the same time as it tries to remain or become a style of popular entertainment built from countless hours of arduous work.

The two performances must thus be seen from different viewpoints; measuring or reading *Wunderkammer* through theatrical glasses would be not just inappropriate, but unnecessary. Regardless of artistic preferences, this show meets all expectations as a spectacle, unlike *Popcorn Machine*, which fails at this task, because it may after all be unable to meet the expectations of the more knowledgeable members of the audience it addresses. Of course, this does not mean that circus is unable to go one step further in the realisation of its artistic potential: what it means is that we must find the right performance, a performance that will show it.



CNAC – *This is the end* © Ph. Cibille

komplota koji pretendira na visoka umjetnička ostvarenja i druge koja je primarni cilj privući što više publike. Svaka od njih gradi svoje potpuno oprečne poetike, smisao i vještine, i samim time privlači oprečne tipove publike. Obje legitimne, govore o suvremenom cirkusu kao o raznovrsnom polju unutar kojeg svatko može pronaći nešto za sebe, tj. o umjetnosti koja se nastoji etablirati kao umjetnički vrijedna i dostojna svog priznatog „rođaka“ teatra, ali i ostati i postati narodna zabava čijem ostvarenju prethodi mukotrpan rad. Način gledanja jedne i druge stoga polazi od drugačijih pretpostavki i mjerenje, odnosno, primjerice, čitanje *Wunderkammera*, teatarskom optikom, ne samo što je neprimjerno, već i bespotrebno. Stoga, neovisno o umjetničkim preferencijama, gore spomenuta predstava kao spektakl ispunja očekivanja, za razliku od *Popcorn Machinea* kojem to ne polazi za rukom jer možda ipak ne uspijeva zadovoljiti očekivanja onog educiranijeg dijela publike kojem se obraća. Dakako, to ne znači da cirkus ne može napraviti pomak u ostvarenju svog umjetničkog potencijala, već je potrebno pronaći pravu predstavu koja to pokazuje.

Faces from the Manège

TAMÁS JÁSZAY

Today's circus is no longer yesterday's circus – if we are to accept this premise, then this in itself brings us closer to understanding the genre, theatrical mechanisms and dramaturgy of the contemporary circus. As with all lesser-known performing or artistic genres evoking suspicion and disbelief, in the case of the contemporary circus it is easier to say what it is not than what it is.

One reason for this is that, although the concept has existed since the 1970s, it would appear that even in the genre's homeland of France there is no full consensus as to circus' real nature. All the less so because, although the genre, if only thanks to the passage of time, indisputably has a tradition to look back on, it has to this day not fitted into an academic mould, either in a theoretical or in a practical sense (in part because the circus of our childhood still exists, i.e. that which we will not be looking at here). The theory of the contemporary circus is not subject to mainstream teaching or research, or even, as yet, to much study by individual scholars: circus artists, are, of course, more interested in the creation of new works, while theoretical professionals arrive from different directions, most of course from the theatre, from (contemporary) dance, and from physical theatre, and thus their terminology is by necessity tied to one or other of these. (The demand that theatre artists occasionally place on their critics, namely that aesthetic theorists should also participate in the rehearsal process, and only comment on the final outcome in the light of this practical experience, would present a rather bizarre perspective in the circus instance.) Another reason for choosing the *via negativa* as our method of approach is that in the case of the contemporary circus we are by no means talking about rules written in stone, more of identifiable directions and recognisable trends, which appear to hold true for the majority of performances. And

Arcok a manézsből

TAMÁS JÁSZAY

Ez a cirkusz már nem az a cirkusz – ha ezt az alapvetést elfogadjuk, az önmagában felér egy megvilágosodással az újcirkusz műfaját, hatásmechanizmusát, dramaturgiáját illetően.

Mint minden kevésbé ismert, ezért aztán gyanakvásra, értetlenkedésre okot adó előadó-művészeti műfajnál, az újcirkusz esetében is könnyebbnek tűnik elmondani, hogy mi nem, mint azt, hogy micsoda valójában.

Egyfelől azért, mert bár a hetvenes évek óta létezik a fogalom, úgy tűnik, hogy még a műfaj szülőföldjén, Franciaországban sincs igazán konszenzus valódi mibenlétét illetően. Már csak azért sem, mert bár pusztán az időfaktor révén tagadhatatlanul hagyományokkal rendelkező zsánerről van szó, de akadémiakussá merevedése a mai napig nem következett be, sem teoretikus, sem praktikus értelemben (azért sem, mert vele párhuzamosan tovább létezik gyermekkorunk cirkusza, vagyis az, amiről most nem lesz szó). Az újcirkusz elméletét nem oktatják és nem kutatják tömegek, de még egyének is alig: a cirkuszművészek természetesen inkább új előadások létrehozásában érdekeltek, az elméleti szakemberek pedig rendre más irányból érkeznek, természetesen legtöbbször a színház, a (kortárs) tánc, a fizikai színház felől, így terminológiájuk is szükségszerűen oda köti őket. (A színházi alkotók kritikusaikkal szemben időről időre felbukkanó követelése-óhaja, miszerint az esztétának is részt kellene vennie a próbafolyamatban, s csakis ennek a gyakorlati tudásnak a birtokában nyilatkozhatna a végeredményről, bizarr perspektívát kínálna a cirkuszművészet esetében.) Másfelől azért is választhatjuk a *via negativát* mint megközelítési módot, mert az újcirkusz esetében korántsem kőbe véssett szabályokról van szó, inkább csak azonosítható irányokról, felismerhető trendekről, melyek az előadások többségére igaznak tűnnek. És eközben nem tudom kiverni a fejből azt sem,

meanwhile neither can I get out of my head the fact that this is a perceptibly and distinctly free, still developing, genre, and so I back-pedal a little: *perhaps this is what the contemporary circus is like*, but no one should be surprised if, in the everyday swing of things, they are confronted with its other face (or rather, many other faces) as well.

Our conclusions cannot be of entirely universal application, if only because they are born of the analysis of the five productions seen in the course of four days in late October and early November, in the small southern French town of Auch, and because the present author is not a (contemporary) circus critic (if such a thing exists) but 'merely' a theatre critic. My perspective is thus by necessity coming from the direction of theatre (and theatrical effect), and this is not so much an apology as a shaky attempt to move towards a definition, as the essential element of the contemporary circus is the rejection of the previous principle of (programme) acts (*numéros*) that are independent of one another, and its replacement with the theatricalization of the whole show. Thus it is not rare for the contemporary circus to tell a story; if we compare this to avant-garde theatre, which bid farewell to narrative at about the same time, during the 1960s and 1970s, so that instead it might produce fragmented, mosaic-like scenes on the stage, this has some exciting implications. In the contemporary circus, musicality and poetry come to the fore, even at the expense of the seemingly crucial, but, as we will see, in fact dispensable, attraction of spectacle (cf. Johann Le Guillerm's performance *Secret*).

We are witness to the meta-discussion of the genre: on the one hand, it becomes possible to present perfect bodies in open struggle on stage, making the viewer aware that virtuoso productions are often tantamount to genuine human torture (as, for example, in the Circa performance entitled *Wunderkammer*); on the other hand, (self-)irony is also present on the stage, at odds with the succession of strictly momentary numbers, which spring up in front of our eyes and last for seven or eight minutes at most, and, by extension, at odds with the

hogy – részben a már jelzett okok miatt – jól érzékelhetően és feltűnően szabad, még ma is forrásban lévő műfajról van szó, ezért aztán visszakozom is kicsit: *lehet, hogy ilyen az újcirkusz*, de senki se lepődjön meg, ha jártábankeltében egy (vagy inkább sok-sok) más arcával szembesül.

Következtetéseink már csak azért sem lehetnek túlságosan általános érvényűek, mert a dél-francia kisvárosban, Auch-ban október végén és november elején négy nap alatt látott öt előadás elemzése során születtek, s azért sem, mert a jelen sorok szerzője nem (új)cirkuszkritikus (van ilyen egyáltalán?), „csak” egy színikritikus. Nézőpontom tehát szükségképpen a színház(i hatáskeltés) felől lesz értelmezhető, és ez most itt nem annyira mentegetőzés, hanem már a definiálás felé tett tétova kísérlet, hiszen az újcirkusz lényegi eleme a korábbi, egymástól független (műsor)számok (*numéros*) elvének a feladása, s ehelyett a műsor teatralizálása. Az újcirkusz így aztán nem ritkán történetet mesél – ha mindezt összevetjük azzal, hogy az avantgárd színház nagyjából ugyanekkor, a hatvanas-hetvenes évek folyamán int búcsút a történetmondásnak, hogy helyette fragmentált, mozaikszerű játékokat kezdjen úzni a színpadon, izgalmas tanulságok adódnak. A zeneiség, a költészet előtérbe kerül az újcirkuszban a látszólag kötelező, de mint látni fogjuk, akár el is hagyható attrakció rovására is (ez utóbbira ld. Johann Le Guillerm *Secret* című előadását).

Megjelenik a műfajról való metabeszéd: egyfelől megmutathatóvá válik a hibátlan testek nyílt színi szenvedése, annak tudatosítása a nézőben, hogy a virtuóz produkciók sokszor valóságos emberkínzással érnek fel (mint pl. a C!RCA *Wunderkammer* című előadásában), másfelől megjelenik az (ön)íronia is a színen, ami a szigorúan jelen idejű, a szemünk előtt keletkező és legfeljebb hét-nyolc percig tartó számok egymásutánjával, ezáltal pedig közvetve a bevett időhasználattal is konfliktusba kerül (ld. a My!Laïka *Popcorn Machine* című előadását). A „színháziasítás” felé mutat az a tény is, hogy az újcirkuszi csoportok többnyire egyéni, más csapatokkal össze nem téveszthető arculatot választanak, amikor pl. kizárólag zsonglőröket,

customary use of time (cf. My!Laika's production *Popcorn Machine*). Also pointing in the direction of 'theatricalization' is the fact that contemporary circus groups mostly choose an individual profile that cannot be confused with other groups, when, for example, they put on stage nothing but jugglers, acrobats, people on stilts (as in the Chabatz d'entrer production *Perchés...*), etcetera, while on occasion a particular circus artist appears in various different numbers, not just in their own 'specialism' (in the traditional circus individual numbers have almost always been performed by the relevant specialised professionals). Related to the above points, if not following directly from them, is the fact that on the stage of the contemporary circus – not always an arena, and not always to be found in a circus tent – we only rarely encounter animals and clowns, while in their place on the list of cast and crew we even find characters with (dramatic) dialogue, and a director coordinating their efforts (as for example in CNAC's production, *This is the end*, made with graduating students). This long list of changes does of course have an effect on viewers' expectations, whether we like it or not – here I am referring to the young viewers of Johann Le Guillerm's production, which with perfunctory elegance rewrites the concept of the attraction, who loudly expressed their dissatisfaction at the fact that the flourishes were (quite deliberately) either delayed *ad nauseam* or left out altogether.

The subject of this article, namely CIRCA, is celebrating its 25th anniversary, and its subtitle (*festival du cirque actuel*), we should note, in addition to being an evident trademark, as this adjectival combination is hardly found elsewhere in French, contains a subtle distinction: what is in focus is not the contemporary, the new, or the modern, but quite explicitly the actual, the circus of the present moment, that is, what is happening *right now*. This can be read as a cautious apology, as far as the composition of the programme is concerned, as the objective here is not necessarily the presentation of the best French and international contemporary circus performances of the season, but rather the creation of a living, breathing contemporary circus yearbook, a sketch of the contemporary circus panorama that yearns

légtornászokat, gólyalábasokat (mint pl. a Chabatz d'entrer *Perchés...* című produkciója), stb. léptetnek fel, esetenként pedig egy-egy cirkuszművész több, különböző számban is jeleskedik, nem csak saját „szakterületén” (míg a hagyományos cirkuszban az egyes számokat kizárólag arra specializálódott szakemberek mutatják be). A fentiekkel összefügg, még ha nem is következik belőlük egyenesen, hogy az újcirkusz – nem mindig porond alakú, nem kizárólag cirkuszsátorban megtalálható – színpadán a legritkábban találkozunk állatokkal és bohócokkal, „helyettük” viszont akár (dramatikus) szöveggel rendelkező karaktereket, s az ő munkájukat koordináló rendezőt is találunk az alkotók listáján (mint pl. a CNAC „fősikolásainak” *This is the end* című előadásában). A változások hosszú sora természetesen a nézői elvárásokra is hatással van, ha tetszik, ha nem – itt csak az attrakció fogalmát hanyag eleganciával újraíró Johann Le Guillerm előadásának kiskorú nézőire utalok, akik hangosan nyilvánították ki elégedetlenségüket a (szándékosan a) végtelenségig késleltetett csúcspontok és azok elmaradása miatt.

Cikkünk tárgya, vagyis az idén negyedszázados évfordulóját ünneplő CIRCA, melynek alcíme (*festival du cirque actuel*) – vegyük észre – amellet, hogy egyértelműen védjegy, hiszen a franciában másutt nemigen találni meg ezt a jelzős összetételt, finom distinkciót tartalmaz, amikor nem kortárs, nem új, nem modern, hanem bevallottan az aktuális, hogy úgy mondjam, a jelen idejű cirkusz áll a fókuszában, vagyis az, *ami éppen most van*. Ez akár óvatos apológiaként is olvasható, már ami a program összeállítását illeti, hiszen itt nem mindenáron az évad legjobb francia és nemzetközi újcirkuszi előadásainak a bemutatása a cél, hanem egy lélegző újcirkuszi évkönyv létrehozása, egy a teljességet áhító újcirkuszi panorámakép felskiccelése. Ezt a törekvést a fesztivál maximálisan teljesíti, indoklasként pedig itt legyen elég annyi, hogy a 23 ezres lakosságú Auch-ban egy olyan fesztivál működik két és fél évtizede, aminek idén közel 29 ezer fizető nézője volt, akik úgy egy tucatnyi helyszínen több mint húsz különböző cirkuszi előadást összesen közel ötven alkalommal nézhettek meg a fesztivál tíz napja alatt.

for completeness. This objective is very much satisfied by the festival, and were any justification needed, it is enough to say that the event has been operating for two and a half decades in Auch, with its 23,000 inhabitants, and that in this year had 29,000 paying visitors, who, during the ten days of the festival, could see more than twenty different circus productions at a dozen locations and on almost fifty occasions.

This is the end

The Centre national des arts du cirque (CNAC) is a well-respected centre for advanced circus studies, whose graduates receive a special sending-off: the public and the profession alike can acquaint themselves with their talents through their graduation performance, which is toured not just in French-speaking territories, and for which the students undertake all of the practical tasks associated with this – including the erection of the circus tent – themselves. Thus they organise a proper tour for the new production, which is directed by an outsider, not uncommonly a theatre director; from a Hungarian perspective, it is a particular pleasure that Josef Nadj's *Le cri du caméleon* from 1995 and Árpád Schilling's *Urban Rabbits* from 2009 are talked about to this day.

This is the end is the work of the young and successful French director David Bobee. The title alludes of course to the expiration of the protective shield one has while one is still a student, to the act of entering the real world, and yet this overly long performance, almost two hours in length, also reflects on the question that presents its conceptual starting point: during rehearsals, the members of the team sought an answer to what they would do if they knew that the world would be destroyed in five minutes. A banal question which does not necessarily demand a commonplace answer (I am reminded of Ariane Mnouchkine's gigantic *Les Éphémères*, where much the same question was the point of departure). On the one hand, the quest to create more than 'just' circus, and for a single idea to connect the scenes, all theatrified to different degrees, is abundantly clear. On the other hand, the performance has something much more prosaic at stake: the objective of the production is to showcase the talent of those taking part in it. The two goals seem hard for the director and the



CNAC – *This is the end* © Ph. Cibille

This is the end

A Centre national des arts du cirque (CNAC) a felsőfokú cirkuszképzés elismert központja, melynek végzett diákjai kivételes útravalót kapnak: a közönség és a szakma is megismerheti képességeiket „diplomaelőadásuk” nem csak francia nyelvterületen történő forgalmazásával, mellyel kapcsolatban az összes praktikus teendő – beleértve pl. a cirkuszszátor felállítását – a hallgatók végzik. Szabályos turnét rendeznek tehát az új bemutatónak, melyet külsős, nem ritkán színházi rendező jegyez – külön öröm, hogy Nagy József 1995-ös *Le cri du caméleon*-ját és Schilling Árpád 2009-es *URBAN RABBITS*-át máig emlegetik. A *This is the end*-et a fiatal és sikeres francia rendező, David Bobee jegyzi. A cím utal természetesen az iskolai védőburok megszűnésére, a nagybetűs életbe való kilépésre, ugyanakkor a túl hosszú, mert közel kétórás est gondolati kiindulópontját jelentő kérdésre is reflektál: a próbákon arra keresték a választ a csapat tagjai, hogy ki mit tenne, ha tudná, hogy öt

enthusiastic team to reconcile, as it is little use us seeing virtuoso numbers if after a time we cannot take our eyes off a screen showing a countdown from 9 to 0. The main danger of performances constructed of episodes is that not all scenes will be uniformly effective, and indeed few are able creatively to 'reformulate', that is to rephrase in the language of the circus and/or the theatre, the initial question. Thus we see the two extremes: at one end is the affectingly beautiful number in which a Palestinian girl (Ashtar Muallem) almost strangles herself with tissu while high up in the tent, while her monologue telling of being squeezed between cultures is played from a recording. The penultimate number, on the other hand, which from the rather predictable dramaturgy is clearly intended to be a high point, and in which a (to all intents and purposes) naked man (Jérôme Galan) with a sculpted body performs breathtaking acts both in a bath tub and pulling himself above it, remains almost entirely ineffective: this world-famous act remains but an imitation, which we can at most admire for its technique, but we do not yet discover the personality which 'operates' it.

Perchés...

We can quite quickly deal with *Perchés...*, a rather confused Chabat d'entrar production created for one woman and a man, and also for stilts, plates and saucers. The title is a reference to people who live high up in the trees, but the term is also used of those who prefer to be up in the clouds than down in our earthly reality. We see a series of slowly drifting images, intended to be poetic, and put alongside one another in random fashion: Anne-Karine Keller and Olivier Léger appear almost as civilians, with only the enormous stilts attached to their legs distinguishing them from our world. For everything else they do, whether it is loving or hating each other, whether in rivalry or at peace, is every bit as dull on the stage as on the page. Furthermore, there are significant technical uncertainties, and a good proportion of the festival's informed and sensitive audience can justifiably be outraged at what it sees. A role is played in this indisputable failure by the change in the profile of the audience, and the change in the viewer's perspective: if we were watching the street version of this performance, we would

perc múlva elpusztul a világ? Banális kérdés, amire nem kell feltétlenül közhelyes válaszokat adni (beugrik Ariane Mnouchkine gigantikus *Les Ephémères*-je, ahol lényegében ugyanez a kérdés volt az origó).

Jól kivehető egyfelől a törekvés, hogy ne „csak” cirkusz szülessen, hanem egyetlen gondolat kösse össze a többé-kevésbé teatralizált jeleneteket. Másrészt az előadásnak jóval prózaibb tétje is van: a produkció célja a benne közreműködők talentumának a megmutatása. A két cél nehezen tűnik összeegyeztethetőnek a rendező és lelkes csapata számára, hiszen hiába látunk virtuóz számokat, ha idővel csak a kilenctől nulláig tartó visszaszámlálást mutató kivetítőre tudok koncentrálni. Az etűdökből építkező előadások fő veszélye, hogy nem mindegyik jelenet egyforma erejű, és valóban, a kiinduló kérdést kevesen tudják kreatívan „újrahasznosítani”, vagyis a cirkusz és/vagy a színház nyelvén újrafogalmazni. Íme a két véglet: a tissue-val a cirkuszsátor magasában önmagát szinte megfojtó, felvételtől bejátszott monológjában eközben a kultúrák közé szorítottságáról mesélő palesztin lány (Ashtar Muallem) száma megrendítően szép. Az utolsó előtti, s a kiszámítható dramaturgiából következően afféle csúcspontnak gondolt szám viszont, melyben egy (lényegében) meztelen, szobortestű férfi (Jérôme Galan) egy kádban és fölél felhúzva mutat be lélegzetelállító kunsztokat, szinte teljesen hatástalan marad: a világhírű mutatvány puszta utánzat marad, melyben legfeljebb a technikát csodáljuk, de az azt „működtető” egyéniséget egyelőre nem leljük sehol.

Perchés...

Röviden elintézhető a Chabat d'entrar *Perchés...* című, egy nőre és egy férfira, továbbá gólyalábakra, tányérokra és csészékre komponált konfúz műsora. A francia cím utal a fák magasában élő emberekre, de azokat is e fogalommal nevezik meg, akik földhözragadt valóságunk helyett szívesebben járnak a fellegekben. Lírainak szánt, lassan csordogáló, s a véletlen által egymás mellé sodort képek sorozatát látjuk: Anne-Karine Keller és Olivier Léger szinte civil módon van jelen, csupán a

stand all around the players, see them from below, rather than trying to work out the possible meaning of their confused actions while sitting in a traditional tiered auditorium.

Popcorn Machine

The French group My!Laika's performance *Popcorn Machine*, with its subtitle or label of "domestic apocalypse", had its fair share of confusion, too. The production, in which three women and a man present an acrobatic and musical platform that appears entirely chaotic and which they claim has no order or meaning, is rather of the 'now you see it, now you don't' variety. We shouldn't believe them, as there is much order to be found in their crazed speech, for example in the way they consistently parody traditional circus forms and programme numbers, thereby cocking a snook not just at the genre but also at the predictable audience responses. What are we thinking of? At the start of the performance a tiger appears, albeit a fluffy toy one, but at least we finally see a number involving an animal; in fact, we also have a clown, even if we laugh at the improbably thin Salvatore Frasca, bicycling in his underpants, more because of his appearance than because of what he does. With their very appearance, the four participants evoke the freak shows that had originally represented a circus' main attraction, and we gain access to the everyday life of a family made up of gnomes and monsters, one in which the tone is set by reversed gender roles, mimed brutality and theatrical violence, and a gruesome black humour. Despite the slightly scruffy final outcome – the direction of which is attributed to the four players as well as to Florent Bergal – the team plays with the audience's expectations in an extremely clever manner. For one thing, they continually make us unsure of our interpretation of what we see; for another, in addition to the many deliberately botched and unfinished scenes, they almost imperceptibly include an almost traditional circus programme with a trapeze number, juggling, and other scenes usually associated with the circus; third, they involve us in the 'making' of the attraction, that is how it is created, when they occasionally cast a glance out at the audience as if to say that what we are seeing is only a show.

lábukra erősített hatalmas gólyalábak választják el őket a mi világunktól. Mert amit amúgy tesznek, vagyis hogy hol szeretik, hol gyűlölik egymást, hol versengenek, hol megnyugszanak, az éppen olyan unalmas nézve, mint leírva. Ráadásul itt komoly technikai bizonytalanságok is adódnak, s a fesztivál értő és érzékeny közönségének egy jelentékeny része joggal kéri ki magának a látottakat. A kétségtelen kudarcban nyilvánvalóan szerepe van a „közvegáltásnak” és a nézői perspektíva megváltozásának: ha az előadás utcai változatát látnánk, ott körbeállnánk a játzókat, alulról néznénk őket, nem pedig a kürtőszerű, hagyományos nézőtérre ülve próbálnánk felfogni zavaros cselekedeteik értelmét.

Popcorn machine

Zavarból bőségesen kijutott a francia My!Laika csoport *Popcorn machine* című, „házi/as/apokalipszis” alcímmel vagy műfajmegjelöléssel ellátott előadásán is. „Hoztam is ajándékot meg nem is” jellegű a produkció, melyben három nő és egy férfi egy látszólag teljesen kaotikus, állításuk szerint rendszer és jelentés nélküli akrobatikus és zenés esztrádot mutat be. Ne higgyünk nekik, az örült beszédben igenis találni rendszert, például azzal, ahogyan következetesen kifigurázzák a hagyományos cirkuszi formákat és műsorszámokat, ezáltal pedig fityiszt mutatnak nemcsak a műfajnak, de a kiszámítható nézői reakcióknak is.

Mire gondolunk? Az előadás elején feltűnik egy tigris, igaz, hogy plüssből, de végre látunk egy állatszámot; sőt bohócunk is van, még akkor is, ha a valószínűtlenül vékony, alsógyatyában bicikliző Salvatore Frascán inkább azért nevetünk, ahogy kinéz, s nem annyira amiatt, amit csinál. A négy szereplő a hajdanán a cirkuszok fő vonzerejét jelentő „freak show”-kat is felidézi pusztá megjelenésével: egy gnómokból és szörnyekből álló család hétköznapijaiba leshetünk be, ahol a kifordított nemi szerepek, a mímelt brutalitás és a színpadias erőszak, a borzongató feketehumor adják meg az alaphangot. A kissé kócos végeredmény – melyet rendezőként a négy játzó és Florent Bergal közösen jegyez – ellenére a csapat rendkívül ügyesen játszik a nézői elvárásokkal. Egyrészt folyamatosan

Wunderkammer

What we see in the production *Wunderkammer* by the Australian group Circa is a far, far more merciless show than this. A few years ago they came to Budapest, too, to the Trafó – House of Contemporary Arts, and then, too, the reviews emphasised the spine-chilling professionalism in it being (or appearing) death-defying, while noting the absence of real depth behind this. My problem with *Wunderkammer* is similar: the programme, which precisely follows the genre rules of variety, cabaret and revue, and as a result directly includes the erotic in the show as a tool to impress viewers, which is made up of independent numbers, and which is genuinely compelling because it often presents superhuman physical capacities, is as if it had been directly jetted over to Auch from a Las Vegas casino. Yet for all these efforts, we can only be observers of and not participants in this pitch-black 'cabinet of wonders'.

Bodies exercised to the point of perfection enact with dry precision the chilling displays entrusted to them by director Yaron Lifschitz, at the end of which the participants turn towards us with larva-like, emotionless faces. There is rightful pride and a touch of threat in their expressions: 'we are suffering here, ruining our bodies, so you can have a good time for your money' – I should note that for my part I would be happy to forego the pleasure thus purchased, but from the stunned shrieks coming from here and there in the crammed audience of some seven hundred (!) I can conclude that not everyone would agree. The favoured methods and numbers of the traditional circus emerge: the Chinese pole or the trapeze; and we see women as if boneless and made out of rubber, and quickly constructed human pyramids. What is most surprising in all this, and which is of course connected to the elements already mentioned evoking the powers of superheroes, is the natural way in which the evidently specialised performers take part in numbers very different from their own 'specialism'. Perfect bodies, perfect costumes, perfect attractions, perfect choice of music and light – so what is it that is wrong, after all?

elbizonytalanítanak a látottak értelmezését illetően, másrészt a sok szándékosan elrontott és be nem fejezett jelenet mellett „észrevétlenül” egy majdhogynem szabályos cirkuszi műsort is bemutatnak trapézszámmal, zsonglörködéssel és más, tradicionálisan a cirkuszhoz kapcsolható jelenetekkel, harmadrészt pedig az attrakció „csinálásába”, vagyis a készítés mikéntjébe is beavatnak, amikor a nézőtérre időnként kikacsintva jelzik, hogy csupán játék, amit látunk.

Wunderkammer

Ennél sokkal, de sokkal kegyetlenebb játék az, amit az ausztrál C!RCA csapatának *Wunderkammer* című előadásában láthatunk. Ők néhány éve Budapesten is jártak, a Trafóban, s a kritikák akkor is a hátborzongató, mert életveszélyes(nek látszó) professzionalizmust emelték ki, hiányolva mögüle a valódi mélységet. A *Wunderkammer*rel valami hasonló a gondom: a varieté, a kabaré, a revü műfaji szabályait precízen követő, ebből következően pedig az erotikát mint hatáskeltő eszközt is szándékosan játékba hozó, független számokból építkező, valóban lenyűgöző, mert nem ritkán emberfeletti testi képességeket prezentáló műsort mintha egyenesen egy Las Vegas-i kaszinóból röpitették volna Auch-ba. Hiába azonban minden fáradság, kizárólag a szemléltető lehetünk, nem pedig a részesei ennek az éjfékete „csodák kamrájának”. A tökéletességig kimunkált testek rideg precizitással hajtják végre a Yaron Lifschitz rendező által rájuk bízott dermesztő mutatványokat, melyek végén lárvaszerű, érzelmek nélküli arccal fordulnak felénk a szereplők. Tekintetükben jogos büszkeség és csipetnyi fenyegetés: „mi itt azért szenvedünk, azért tesszük tönkre a testünket, hogy te jól érezd magad a pénzedért” – meg kell jegyezni: én a magam részéről szívesen lemondok az így kiváltott kéjről, de a zsúfolásig megtelt hétszáz fős (!) nézőtérre innen is, onnan is felhangzó alélt sikolyokból arra következtetek, hogy nem mindenki gondolkodik így. Előkerülnek a hagyományos cirkusz kedvelt eszközei és számai, a kínai rúd vagy a trapéz, látunk csontok nélküli gumint és gyorsan épülő emberi gúlát is. Ami a leginkább meglepő az egészben, s persze összefügg a már említett, superhősök képességeit idéző elemekkel, az az a fajta

Secret

A great personality – this is what I had been missing, and if I had not previously admitted this to myself, I became quite sure of it as soon as I saw Johann Le Guillerm, one of the living legends of the contemporary circus, on the stage. Le Guillerm is much more than a performing artist: academic thinker, fine artist, performer, and a dozen other labels could be applied to his wide-ranging activities, while his attitude on stage evokes the unrestricted power of the magi of pre-historic times. *Secret*, his constantly changing one-man show that has been playing for almost a decade, is one of the cleverest stage constructions I have ever seen. In many commentaries, the circus and the notion of magic are often juxtaposed, but here the latter well nigh makes the former disappear. Le Guillerm meanwhile deliberately dispenses with the traditional notion of the attraction: the series of scenes, made up of a dozen episodes and lasting a total of an hour and a half, is rather like a demonstration of the same experiment in different languages, with different tools. He does not have a single stunt where the outcome would be the most important thing, and where it would be the element offering catharsis to the viewer: in every case, the path which we follow to the finale is much more exciting and stirring. This is a kind of mental inner circus, in which, in addition to expecting an active, cooperative participation from the curious and open-minded viewer, risk and danger come to mean very different things from, say, in the case of trapeze numbers performed in the heights of a circus tent.

Le Guillerm stays on the ground throughout, and even if he rises above the safety of the floor, this is only for two or three metres, and done by overpowering and riding the beings or tools of his creation. He builds bridges from wooden beams, which are held up by his own weight, only for him to destroy the whole construction with a single motion, and in minutes to use the rubble to build a hut that extends over the whole arena. In the long finale, he uses planks and ropes: he ties the rough pieces of wood to one another, and from them, slowly, a winding path rises up towards the roof of the tent. Le Guillerm climbs higher and higher, and when the planks run out, he slowly

természetesség, amivel a nyilvánvalóan specializálódott előadók részt vesznek más, a „szakterületükön” kívül eső számokban is. Hibátlan testek, hibátlan jelmezek, hibátlan attrakciók, hibátlan zene- és fényválasztás – akkor mégis mi hibádzik?

Secret

A nagy személyiség – ezt hiányoltam eddig, s ha így nem is vallottam be magamnak, teljesen biztos lettem benne abban a pillanatban, amikor Johann Le Guillerm-et, az újcirkusz egyik élő legendáját megláttam a színpadon. Le Guillerm jóval több mint előadó-művész: tudós gondolkodó, képzőművész, performer és még vagy tucatnyi jelzöt lehetne találni szerteágazó tevékenységére, miközben színpadi habitusa a történelem előtti korok korlátlan hatalommal bíró mágusait idézi. *Secret* című, közel egy évtizede játszott, folyamatosan változó, átalakuló egyszemélyes műsora az egyik legokosabb színpadi konstrukció, amit valaha láttam. A cirkusz és a varázslat fogalma gyakran egymás mellé sodródik különböző beszámolóokban, ám itt az utóbbi majdhogynem eltünteti az előbbit. Le Guillerm pedig közben tudatosan felszámolja a hagyományos attrakció fogalmát: tucatnyi önálló epizódból álló, összesen másfél órás jelenetsora mintha ugyanazon kísérlet eltérő nyelveken, más eszközökkel történő demonstrációja lenne. Nincs egyetlen olyan mutatványa sem, aminek a végeredménye volna a leglényegesebb, ezáltal pedig a nézőnek katarzist okozó eleme: minden esetben sokkal izgalmasabb és felkavaróbb az út, amin eljut a végpontig. Amolyan mentális, belső cirkusz ez, amiben amellet, hogy a kíváncsi és nyitott nézőre aktív, partneri részvétel vár, a veszély, a kockázat is egészen mást jelent, mint, mondjuk, a cirkuszsátor magasában előadott trapézszámok esetében.

Le Guillerm végig a földön marad, s ha el is emelkedik a biztonságot nyújtó közegtől, akkor is csak két-három méternyire, még hozzá a maga gyártotta lényeket vagy eszközöket leigázva, meglovagolva. Gerendákból épít hidat, amit önnön súlya tart meg, hogy aztán egy mozdulattal romba döntse az impozáns építményt, s hogy a törmelékből percek alatt hatalmas, az egész porondon terpeszkedő kunyhót húzzon fel. A

starts to sway atop the bizarre edifice, then jumps down to the ground with cat-like softness. Some of the audience is perhaps still waiting for the attraction, as this is what we are all conditioned to expect, while Le Guillerm's exclusive masterclass teaches us precisely that, in our world so short on magic, we have to look for the magic within ourselves, not within the cheap (or indeed highly expensive) mass-produced goods of the entertainment industry.

We see a brilliant construction which could not be followed by others: Le Guillerm does not have students or followers, because he cannot have any. What he does in the special circus tent he takes everywhere with him is a unique world patent. Nothing glistens; there is no fake charm, just a familiar and well-travelled personality, and the simple materials which unconditionally obey him. Paper and wood, metal and water – he deliberately chooses only innocent and dull materials, in order to show that the opportunities that lie within them are endless. He has expert knowledge of them, loves them, and pours his soul into them for a certain amount of time, and on occasion this process even allows for a touch of humour. In short, the dramaturgy is perfect: he does not let a single effect go on for a second longer than it should, and half a dozen faceless assistants work as a dark shadow under him in the creation of this organic magic with striking humility. Johann Le Guillerm is an extraordinary creature, connecting different ages and different worlds; he is the trustee of long-forgotten ancient knowledge.

hosszú fináléban deszkákat és köteleket használ: egymáshoz köti a durva fákat, amikből lassan egy, a sátor teteje felé kígyózó ösvény bontakozik ki. Le Guillerm egyre magasabbra hág, s amikor elfognak a deszkák, ő lassan himbálózni kezd a bizarr építmény csúcsán, majd macskaszerű puhasággal ugrik le a földre. A közönség egy részén talán még mindig az attrakciót várja, hiszen mind erre vagyunk kondicionálva, pedig Le Guillerm exkluzív mesterkurzusa épp arra tanít, hogy varázslathiányos világunkban a csodát magunkban kell keresni, nem pedig az olcsó (vagy éppenséggel méregdrága) szórakoztatóipar tömeggyártott termékeiben.

Olyan briliáns konstrukciót látunk, ami nem folytatható mások által: Le Guillerm-nek nincsenek tanítványai, se követői, mert nem is lehetnek. Amit ő csinál a mindenhová magával vitt, speciális cirkuszsátorban, az egyedülálló világszabadalom. Semmi csillogás, semmi bűbáj, csak egy sokat látott személyiség és a neki feltétel nélkül engedelmessé, egyszerű anyagok. Papírt és fát, fémet és vizet – szándékosan csupa ártatlan és unalmas anyagot választ, hogy aztán megmutassa: végtelen a bennük rejlő lehetőségek száma. Kiválóan ismeri és szereti is őket, hosszabb-rövidebb időre lélekkel ajándékozza meg őket, s ebbe a folyamatba nagyritkán még a humor is belefér. Röviden szólva tökéletes a dramaturgia: másodperccel sem hagy tovább hatni egyetlen effektet sem, s féltucatnyi, arctalan segítője sötét árnyékként, megkapó alázattal dolgozik keze alá az organikus varázslat létrehozásában. Johann Le Guillerm korok és világok között közvetítő különleges lény, egy mára elfelejtett ősi tudás letéteményese.

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