

# UNPACK THE ARTS

European residency programme for cultural journalists

ZAGREB RESIDENCY  
FESTIVAL NOVOG CIRKUSA  
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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 third publication collects the texts of 10 European journalists who attended the residency at Festival novog cirkusa in Zagreb, Croatia, 8 – 11 November 2012.

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

### **KOEN ALLARY**

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# In Search of the Other Stellato: In Praise of Time Regained

CATHY BLISSON

*In L'Autre, a piece that carefully crafts a confrontation between a large bearded man and his 'other', a red carpet and two pieces of furniture with a mind of their own, Claudio Stellato rips the circuits of the new circus wide open. This genre-defying Italian has been searching for a long time to find just what his 'other' might have to say...*

Every time a festival opportunity comes along, Claudio Stellato dances like a maniac. He does it for fun, of course. But he also does it to give the *other* a chance to rejoice, to come out of the closet and colonise his entire body. The *other* is never far off when one meets Stellato. More or less hidden in the shadows, it could well be his darker side, the one that snickers, or the kid that (sometimes) sleeps within him. It's the (a) social animal we tend to muzzle for the sake of convention or in the name of our superego. Or perhaps it's one of the kind lunatics he observes time and again in the streets of the metropolis. It could have its reasons of which reason knows nothing... *L'Autre* escapes all definitions and that's just how it should be. The first time that its Italian host saw the *other* arrive – well before it became the title of a show that's both disturbing and amusing – was during a dance improvisation (with choreographer Karine Ponties) where Stellato really went berserk. When he took a look at the video afterwards, he knew he had to keep everything. He made an eight-minute solo out of it (240D), an identical copy showing the disengagement of a body as it pumps itself up, tumbles over itself, and becomes inhabited by a palpable and yet ethereal story, as

# À la recherche de l'autre Stellato: éloge du temps retrouve

CATHY BLISSON

*Avec L'Autre, corps à corps millimétré d'un grand type barbu avec lui-même, un tapis rouge et deux meubles dotés d'autonomie, Claudio Stellato s'est ouvert, à force de recherches, une brèche magistrale dans les circuits du nouveau cirque. Depuis, l'inclassable italien laboure le même sillon, à la poursuite de ce que «son autre» peut bien avoir à dire... Éloge d'une démarche au long cours, à la faveur d'une escale à Zagreb.*

Chaque fois qu'une fête se présente, Claudio Stellato danse comme un forcené. Pour le plaisir, certes. Mais aussi pour que *L'autre* exulte, sorte du placard, colonise son corps tout entier. *L'autre* n'est jamais très loin quand on rencontre Stellato. Plus ou moins tapi dans l'ombre, il pourrait être son côté sombre, son double ricanant, le gosse qui (ne) sommeille (pas tout le temps) en lui, l'animal (a)social qu'on tend à museler par convention ou excès de surmoi, ou l'un de ces doux dingues qu'il observe à l'envi dans les rues des métropoles, qui aurait ses raisons que la raison ignore... *L'autre* échappe aux définitions et c'est tout ce qu'on lui souhaite. La première fois que son hôte italien l'a vu apparaître – bien avant qu'il ne devienne le titre d'un spectacle trouble et drôle à la fois -, c'était au cours d'une impro de danse (avec la chorégraphe Karine Ponties). Où Stellato a littéralement péché un câble. Quand il a revu la vidéo il a su qu'il n'y avait rien à jeter. Et en a fait un solo de huit minutes («240D»), copiées à l'identique. Le débrayage d'un corps qui monte en puissance, culbute sur lui même, et se laisse habiter par une histoire palpable et insaisissable à la fois, comme si aucun spectateur n'était là pour le voir, sur *Godspeed You! Black Emperor*.



if no spectator were there to see it, all to the tunes of 'Godspeed You! Black Emperor'.

### The joys of the unconscious

Ever since, Claudio Stellato has been working hard to bring out this *other* (side of himself). He exhausts himself in improvisations that can last up to two hours. "It's like with automatic writing. I figure that it's around the fourth A4 page that the good stuff comes out. In improvisation, the first fifteen minutes you let out everything you know how to do. Then, if you accept the stay on stage, you fall through the void and you climb back out. And at a certain moment, through the act of getting back up, you visit some unbelievable places. It's those places that interest me. The unconscious has you do things that your brain just couldn't come up with. It would freeze up. So you find yourself with your feet behind your head and you don't even know how you got there. It's a muscular freedom that you have when you start to take yourself far off. That's just my opinion. But it's what I like to do. I like to improvise alone, to write for a long time alone and to be drawing constantly."

### The laws of chance

That was how L'Autre was born, through three years of continual workshoping. Every time he managed to put some money together in between his dance performances, Claudio Stellato would find a way to schedule a work session with his body, his unconscious, and the surreal images his unconscious would come up with. These included a red carpet that unrolls itself, or a long closet in which he lays himself down and whose door can open or close on its own. He got the closet for one Euro from the Salvation Army. "I started working with it. I totally destroyed the thing and then I made another one that was exactly the same size." The second piece of furniture with which he does battle in L'Autre is another story entirely. And it's a good one, as Stellato tells us with a chuckle. He never misses a chance to tell a story about his fortunate encounters and does so with a near self-mocking delight. "I was in residency at a site that's dedicated to the circus. I had my daily routine, with one hour of improv. But one Sunday the

### Les joies de l'inconscient

Depuis, Claudio Stellato travaille dur pour faire ressurgir cet *autre* (côté de lui-même). Il s'éreinte en impros, qui peuvent durer deux heures. *« C'est comme pour l'écriture automatique, j'imagine qu'à partir de la quatrième page A4, ça commence à devenir du bon matériel ? En improvisation, les premiers quarts d'heures, tu épuises tout ce que tu sais faire. Après, si t'acceptes de pas lâcher le plateau, tu chutes, tu passes par le vide, et tu remontes. Et à un moment donné, via ces remontées, tu vas dans des lieux incroyables. Voilà, ce sont ces lieux qui m'intéressent. L'inconscient te fait faire des choses que ton cerveau ne pourrait pas penser, ou qu'il bloquerait. Et tu te retrouves avec les pieds derrière la tête sans savoir comment tu as bien pu y arriver. C'est une liberté musculaire que tu as quand tu commences à aller loin avec toi-même. Ce n'est que mon point de vue. Mais j'aime ça. J'aime improviser seul. Ecrire longtemps, seul. Et dessiner sans arrêt ».*

### Les lois du hasard

« L'Autre » est né comme ça, en trois ans de chantier acharné. Chaque fois qu'il réussissait à mettre quelques sous de côté, entre deux prestations chorégraphiques, Claudio Stellato se débrouillait pour caler une session de travail avec son corps et son inconscient. Et les images surréalistes que ce dernier lui dictait. Une carquette rouge qui se déroulerait toute seule. Ou un long placard dans lequel il viendrait loger son corps, et dont la porte s'ouvrirait et se refermerait sans un geste de sa part. Ce placard-là, il l'avait trouvé pour un euro à l'armée du salut. *« J'ai commencé à travailler avec. Je l'ai complètement détruit. Et j'en ai reconstruit un autre exactement de la même taille. »* Le deuxième meuble avec lequel il bataille dans « L'Autre » est aussi toute une histoire. Une bonne histoire, rigole Stellato, qui ne rate pas une occasion de faire le récit de ses trouvailles hasardeuses, avec une truculence teintée d'autodérision. *« J'étais en résidence dans un lieu dédié au cirque. Chaque jour j'avais ma routine, une heure d'impro. Mais on était dimanche, et l'autre compagnie en résidence avait fermé le lieu. Portes fermées. Fallait que j'improvise !!! Alors j'ai improvisé dans ma chambre. J'ai détruit la chambre. Mais j'ai fini*



other company in residency had locked up the site. The doors were shut, and I just had to do my improv! So I improvised in my room, which I destroyed. But I finished my session inside of the tiny space in the closet. I closed it up and thought, 'Wow, I need a tiny closet'. I built six of them before I finally came up with the right size."

### Getting his hands dirty

As he himself admits, Claudio Stellato will never pass for a mysterious artist. But that's not really his style. "In order to come up with one good scene, I have to work for a month. If I don't do every little thing along the way I just can't do it." So he makes no promises; no end-of-residency showing, no automatic creation at the end of the tunnel, and definitely no opening night. He's just experimenting and that's all. He brings in people to watch whenever a bit of material comes up. He brings in ayatollahs of dramaturgy, freaks for movement and merciless critics – or an inexpensive photographer. That's how Martin Firket came into the picture. First he was to take photos. Then he returned to see how things had turned out. He helped build a first installation with the first material and then a second one, when he brought in all the lamps he had in his living room. Then he came to lay cables or to hold up a projector. Soon he was a part of the process, which, little by little, had taken on a spectacular and borderless shape. It was a mixture of circus, dance, theatre (of bodies and of objects) and new magic. "Together, we eventually came up with a way to pull off certain magic tricks to bring this world that I had in my head to life." From then on, Claudio Stellato and Martin Firket worked as a duo to produce *L'Autre*. Transportation, installation, manoeuvring, lighting; they handle it all, doing what needs to be done so that the furniture they've spent days pulling apart and putting back together will come to life on stage. They work to help Claudio's 'other' display its acrobatic gems of the imagination in the form of tragi-comic surrealist rituals, appearances, disappearances and contortions pointing towards an objective that he alone knows. It's all done in the deepest silence, with an extreme slowness and meticulous precision even in the midst of the most insane effort... or at least that's how it appears.

*ma session à l'intérieur d'un tout petit espace dans le placard. Que j'ai refermé. Et je me suis dit, wow, il me faut un petit placard. J'en ai reconstruit six avant de trouver la bonne taille.»*

### Les mains dans le cambouis

De son propre aveu, Claudio Stellato n'arrivera jamais à faire semblant d'être un artiste mystérieux. Mais ce n'est pas franchement son genre, non plus. «*Avant d'arriver à une bonne scène, faut que je travaille pendant un mois. Si je fais pas tous les petits pas qui y mènent, j'y arrive pas.*» Alors, il ne promet rien. Ni sortie de résidence, ni création automatique au bout du tunnel. Surtout, pas de date de première. Il cherche, un point c'est tout. Et fait venir des regards extérieurs dès qu'un bout de matière se précise. Des ayatollahs de la dramaturgie. Des obsédés du mouvement. Des critiques sans pitié. Un photographe pas cher. C'est ainsi que Martin Firket est arrivé. Pour faire des photos. Puis pour jeter un œil sur la suite des événements. Puis pour aider à construire une première installation avec les premiers matériaux. Et une deuxième, en apportant toutes les lampes de son salon. Puis pour tirer quelques câbles et tenir un projecteur. Jusqu'à faire partie d'un processus qui tendra peu à peu vers une forme spectaculaire sans frontières, entre cirque, danse, théâtre (de corps et d'objets) et magie nouvelle. «*Finalement, on a inventé ensemble un moyen de résoudre certains tours de magie. Afin que ce monde que j'avais dans la tête devienne concret*». Désormais Claudio Stellato et Martin Firket se déplacent en duo pour faire tourner «*L'Autre*». Transport, montage, manipulation des éclairages, ils gèrent tout à deux. Se débrouillent pour que sur scène, les meubles qu'ils ont passé des jours à déconstruire et reconstruire prennent vie. Et pour que «*l'autre*» de Claudio déploie à leur contact des trésors d'imagination acrobatique, tout en rituels surréalistes, apparitions et disparitions tragi-comiques, et autres contorsions tournées vers un objectif connu de lui seul. Dans le silence le plus total, avec une extrême lenteur, et une précision au millimètre jusque dans l'effort le plus insensé... en apparence, tout au moins.





Claudio Stellato – *L'Autre* © Martin Firket

### Feet on the dance floor

On 11 November 2012, Claudio Stellato was a bit sore. The last time he had let his *other* out was just the day before in an old abandoned factory, right after performing in a cabaret at Festival Novog Cirkusa in Zagreb. A few hours after performing *L'Autre*, he launched his formidable frame onto the scattered dance floor and let it run wild and in good humour alongside Martin. "Because if there's one thing I love, it's reproducing what I do when I'm drunk at a good party, dancing for a good hour. The quality of the dance in those kinds of moments is incredible. And it's all you, just a state of being, a sense of freedom. At one point, you let the barriers down..." With nearly one hundred performances to their name, the two acolytes of oddly similar stature have visited festivals of all kinds – dance, circus, mime, or theatre of objects. That's to say that they're well placed to know that circus festivals have the best parties, the ones where people actually dance instead of murmuring to each other that so-and-so has performed with Jan Fabre or has just presented a disastrous performance piece. Of course, at the point of *L'Autre's* creation, Stellato had also grown a bit

### Les pieds sur le dance floor

Ce 11 Novembre 2012, Claudio Stellato est un peu courbaturé. La dernière fois qu'il a laissé sortir *son autre*, c'était pas plus tard que la veille, dans une ancienne usine désaffectée, suite à une soirée cabaret du festival Novog Cirkusa, à Zagreb. Quelques heures après y avoir joué «*L'Autre*», il a lancé sa grande silhouette sur le dance floor parsemé et l'a laissée faire des siennes dans la bonne humeur, aux côtés de Martin. «*Parce que s'il y a un truc vraiment bien, c'est d'arriver à reproduire ce que tu fais quand tu es bourré, dans une bonne fête, et que tu dances une bonne heure. La qualité de danse là qu'on a dans ces moments là est incroyable. Et c'est pas un autre que toi, c'est juste un état, une liberté, les barrières qu'on laisse tomber un moment donné...*» Approchant d'une centaine de dates au compteur, les deux acolytes aux grands corps étrangement semblables ont traîné leurs baskets dans des festivals de toutes sortes, danse, cirque, mime ou théâtre d'objets. Autant dire qu'ils sont bien placés pour savoir que les festivals de cirque font les meilleures fêtes. De celles où les gens dansent plutôt que de murmurer entre eux qu'untel a joué avec Jan Fabre ou présenté une performance déplorable. Il faut dire

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tired of the dance world, which he had been in for six years. But that also happened rather by chance.

### The pathways of life

At 13 years of age, Stellato thought he wanted to be a dentist, like his friends. Instead, he somehow wound up in accounting. He was also in a heavy metal band. That's what brought him to the jazz school in Milan (guitar and voice) at the age of 16. "It was just so I could learn a bit of technique. But I wound up really liking jazz. It was great!" Meanwhile, he was already elsewhere. He started to do a bit of circus. He juggled and did balance work in a squat in Milan, eventually joining a street theatre group that travelled along the Adriatic coast with a great big gypsy wedding. Stilt-walker, juggler, fire-breather – he did a bit of everything, including shows in clubs and malls. In Italy he went through an obligatory rite of passage, something he would recommend to almost any artist just starting out. "The street is the best for improv. To hold the attention of people who don't have to come see you, you have to be better than the ice cream they were about to go eat, better than everything else around. It's a nice mission to have. We put up a show that we toured for quite a while. It was your classic Italian street show, with three circus numbers and a volunteer, a kid. You say, okay we're going to do incredible, amazing things. And you keep cracking jokes. And you definitely have to act mean, that always makes them laugh. But you do it nicely." At the end of his Italian period, at 17 years and a half, Claudio deserted in the middle of his military service to go to Greece and never return. After Berlin, South America and Spain, after doing a bit of everything and working a little in text-based theatre, he found himself back in training at the Carampa circus school in Madrid. "When I was there, everyone was getting ready for their Lido audition in Toulouse. I figured I would go as well. I wound up getting cast. So I went to live in Toulouse. I was on the slack wire at the time. That was my speciality. Then I broke my cross ligament falling from the wire. During my recovery, a dance group from Toulouse asked me to take over for a dancer who was leaving. From that point on, I found myself in the dance world and didn't turn back. I left for Brussels and worked for different choreographers..."

aussi qu'au moment de créer L'autre, Stellato se trouvait un peu fatigué de l'univers de la danse, dans lequel il naviguait depuis six ans. Encore une chose arrivée, aussi, un peu par hasard.

### Les chemins de l'existence

A 13 ans, Stellato avait en tête de devenir dentiste, comme ses copains. Pour une raison qui lui échappe, il se retrouve en comptabilité. Mais aussi dans un groupe de heavy métal. Ce qui l'amène, à 16 ans, à l'école de jazz de Milan (guitare et voix). «*Juste pour apprendre un peu de technique. Mais pour finir, j'ai bien aimé le jazz, c'était bien!*». En attendant, il est déjà ailleurs. Il commence à faire un peu de cirque, jonglages, équilibres, dans un squat de Milan, et entre dans un groupe de théâtre de rue qui parade le long de la côte adriatique avec un gros mariage gitan. Echassier, jongleur, cracheur de feu, il fait un peu de tout, y compris les animations en discothèque et centre commercial. Passage obligé en Italie, qu'il serait tenté de préconiser pour tout artiste en devenir. «*La rue c'est le top de l'impro. Pour garder des gens qui sont pas obligés de venir te voir, il faut être plus fort que la glace qu'ils avaient envie d'aller manger et tout ce qu'ils ont autour. C'est une belle mission. On a monté un spectacle qu'on a tourné longtemps. Un classique italien de rue, avec trois numéros de cirque dedans, et un volontaire, un enfant. Tu dis, on va faire des trucs incroyables, impressionnants. Et tu fais des blagues tout le temps. Et surtout faut être très méchant, ça fait toujours rigoler. Mais avec gentillesse, hein.*» Fin de sa période italienne, à 17 ans ½, Claudio déserte le service militaire pour aller en Grèce, et ne rentre plus. Après Berlin, l'Amérique du Sud, l'Espagne, après avoir fait beaucoup de tout et travaillé un peu le théâtre de texte, le voilà qui s'entraîne à l'école de cirque Carampa, de Madrid. «*Là je vois que tout le monde partait faire une audition au Lido, à Toulouse. Je dis, bon, j'y vais aussi. Et bon, ils m'ont pris. Donc je suis allé vivre à Toulouse, je faisais du fil mou à ce moment là, c'était ma spécialité. Et puis je me suis cassé le ligament croisé en tombant du fil, et pendant la récup', un groupe de danse de Toulouse me demande de reprendre le rôle d'un danseur qui partait. A partir de là, je me suis retrouvé dans le monde de la danse, et j'ai plus arrêté. Je suis parti à Bruxelles où j'ai travaillé pour différents chorégraphes...*»



## The sensation breaks out

In short, today, Claudio Stellato's résumé includes the names of the Arcata (theatre) and K.Danse companies, as well as those of Olivier Py, Roberto Olivan, and Fré Werbrouck. But most important is Karine Ponties, with whom he has done quite a bit of work, with three creations including *Fidèle à l'éclair*, a twenty-minute solo taken from his initial improv / freak out. They presented an eight-minute excerpt of the piece for *240D* and won a number of European awards. Then he felt the need to create on the *other* for himself. The choreographer Roberto Olivan, who had officiated with Rosas, told Stellato how he had felt one day on stage performing something he had already performed 400 times before. He began to dance: "You stop moving... and you dance." For Stellato, it all happened with *240D*. "At one point you can feel the dance happening and you're really no longer in a series of movements. They're sensations that follow one after the other. I live with the sensations. In free improvisation, when I have that sensation crawling up behind my neck... I can't quite explain it. But I'm sure that everything is there. Even on the video, you can see it right away. You become remarkable. You take on accents that you couldn't possibly achieve consciously." Thus, *L'Autre*. The title came straight away, from the beginning. "I knew that there was something strange within me that I had to get out. And then there's Lacan, with the idea of the other and working with the 'Grotowskians', or the encounter with traditional magicians... Of course one reads. One observes. But I think I'll have to keep that to myself; it has to come out on stage. And what interests me is above all this beast... beastly... man."

## The body and the excuse

Claudio Stellato had already worked on his own projects before working on *L'Autre*. *The Last Days Project*, for example, was a duet on the last days of a couple. There was also *The Lift*, a highly physical solo piece filmed by a friend in a lift. Stellato had broken his leg, so he was working in a chair. He discovered a corporeality that he would never have found otherwise. The duo then became a live show. They introduced a text and a swinging fabric sequence to go with Stellato's wild gestural movements. "It's just with *L'Autre*

## L'irruption de la sensation

Bref. Aujourd'hui, dans le CV de Claudio Stellato, on trouve les noms des compagnies Arcata (théâtre) et K.Danse, comme d'Olivier Py, Roberto Olivan, ou Fré Werbrouck. Mais surtout de Karine Ponties, avec qui il a fait un bout de chemin : trois créations autour de la figure de l'épouvantail, dont «*Fidèle à l'éclair*», solo de 20 mn dérivé de sa fameuse impro / pétage de plomb originelle. Pour monter «*240D*», lui en a tiré 8 minutes chrono, qui lui ont valu quelques prix lors de concours européens. Et la nécessité de créer pour lui-même, autour de *l'autre*. Le chorégraphe Roberto Olivan, qui avait officié avec Rosas, lui avait raconté comment il avait senti, un jour sur scène, alors qu'il avait déjà joué 400 fois ou assimilé, qu'il commençait à danser : «*Tu ne bouges plus... Tu dances*». Pour lui c'est avec «*240D*» que c'est arrivé. «*A un moment donné, tu sens que ça danse. Et tu n'es plus dans un enchaînement de mouvements, c'est vrai. Mais dans des sensations qui s'enchaînent. Moi, je vis sur les sensations. En free improvisation, quand j'ai cette sensation qui remonte derrière la nuque... Je ne sais pas comment l'expliquer. Mais je suis sûr que tout est là. Rien qu'en vidéo, tu le vois très vite. Tu deviens impressionnant. T'as des accents que tu ne peux pas avoir avec ton raisonnement.*» Alors, «*L'Autre*». Le titre est venu direct, dès le début. «*Je savais qu'à l'intérieur de moi, il y avait une chose bizarre qu'il était bien de faire sortir. Après il y avait Lacan, l'autre comme concept, le travail avec des "grotowskiens", la rencontre avec des magiciens traditionnels... Evidemment, on lit, on observe des choses, mais je crois que je dois garder ça pour moi, ça doit sortir sur le plateau. Et ce qui m'intéressait, c'était surtout cette bête... homme... bête...*»

## Le corps et l'excuse

Avant «*L'autre*», Claudio Stellato avait déjà monté des projets pour lui. «*The Last Days Project*», par exemple, duo évoquant les derniers jours d'un couple. Ou «*The lift*», solo très physique, filmé par une amie, dans un ascenseur. Stellato s'était cassé une jambe. Alors, il avait travaillé assis sur une chaise. Et trouvé une corporalité qu'il n'aurait jamais réveillée autrement. Le duo en a ensuite fait un spectacle *live*, posant un texte, et une séquence de tissu

that I've understood the process. I start with the body and then I find an excuse for what I'm doing. I need to tell myself a story. But once I've understood the excuse I alter the entire show so that it's no longer just an excuse. I throw out scenes that are sometimes great, actually. It can be a hard sacrifice. But if it doesn't make sense, I won't keep it. You could do complete nonsense on stage if you let yourself. But if you want to work on the bizarre, you need some sense of coherence within the bizarreness."

### **The dog and madness**

He doesn't use the word 'crazy', although if you use it then he'll jump right in. Crazy people are his thing. That's why he loves Paris. "It's full of mental cases", and he never tires of observing them. "People who talk to themselves, who are tripping out on something that only they can see. It's true that they're my inspiration. For us it's incomprehensible. But you can see that there's a reason behind it, a coherency in each step they take, one after the other. It's as if there were a denser energetic line. In fact, there is. If you watch them for an hour you see that it's perfect. If you put the same thing on stage it's just incredible. They're just in the wrong place. In the street it doesn't work so well." For Claudio Stellato, that's the magic of the stage. You can observe what no one else sees, resituate it and then reconstruct its image. "If I see a dog on stage it ceases to be a dog. It's a sur-dog, a super dog."

### **Knitting and the raven**

Or should it be a raven that we bring on stage, since Stellato has been observing many of them and drawing them in his sketchbook. It's lucky enough, since he sees plenty of them, crows too, along the edges of highways as he travels to performances of *L'Autre*. He has an image in his head of a lifeless body laid out on stage that a crow comes to pick at. He's seriously considering raising one. He knows that baby crows are born in May, that you have to leave them alone for five days and that you must be absolutely certain to be there when they open their eyes. "Then you're mum, dad." He wonders if this would fit in with the gypsy lifestyle he now leads, with performance dates for *L'Autre* booked from now through February 2014. Meanwhile, he's been

ballant sur la gestuelle débridée de Stellato. *« C'est juste qu'avec « L'autre », j'ai compris le processus. Je pars du corps, et après, je trouve une excuse, j'ai besoin de me raconter une histoire. Mais une fois que je comprend l'excuse, alors, je remodifie tout le spectacle. Pour que ce ne soit plus une excuse. Je jette, même des super scènes. C'est des sacrifices durs parfois, mais si c'est pas logique, je garde rien. Parce que tu peux faire n'importe quoi sur un plateau. Mais si tu veux faire le bizarre, faut une cohérence dans la bizarreté. »*

### **Le chien et la folie**

Il ne prononcera pas le mot « folie », mais si on le lance sur la question, il s'y engouffre avec bonheur. Les fous, c'est son truc. C'est pour ça qu'il adore Paris, *« c'est plein de malades mentaux »*, qu'il ne se lasse pas de regarder. *« Les gens qui parlent tout seuls, qui ont un trip qu'eux seuls voient. C'est vrai qu'eux, c'est mon inspiration. Pour nous c'est incompréhensible, mais tu vois qu'ils raisonnent, cohérents dans tous les pas qu'ils font l'un après l'autre. C'est comme s'il y avait une ligne énergétique plus grosse, qui est juste. Si tu les regardes sur une heure, c'est parfait. Tu mets la même chose sur un plateau et c'est incroyable. C'est juste qu'ils sont déplacés en fait, dans la rue, ça marche un peu moins. »* La magie du plateau selon Claudio Stellato. Observer ce que personne ne voit, le replacer là, reconstruire l'image. *« Si je vois un chien sur un plateau, ce n'est plus un chien. C'est un extra-chien. Un super-chien. »*

### **Le tricot et le corbeau**

En ce moment, ce serait plutôt les corbeaux, que Stellato observe et dessine sur son carnet de croquis. Ça tombe bien, il en croise tout plein, et des corneilles, au bord des autoroutes qu'il sillonne pour tourner *L'Autre*. Il a en tête, cette image d'un corps sans vie, allongé sur scène, sur laquelle un corbeau viendrait picorer. Il envisage sérieusement d'en élever un. Il sait que les petits corbeaux naissent en mai, qu'il faut les laisser tranquilles 5 jours, mais être là, absolument, quand ils ouvrent les yeux. *« Après, t'es maman, papa »*. Il se demande si c'est compatible avec sa vie de gipsy, rapport à *L'Autre* qui aligne des dates jusqu'en février 2014. En attendant, il



trying his hand at knitting to pass the time while on the road. He does it because of another image that he can't get out of his head until he's tried it. He sees himself knitting with a huge string and two metres-long pieces of wood as his needles. Or maybe it's a giant hook. So Claudio Stellato is set for three more years of research based on a simple title, 'Rituals'. The images of the raven and the over-proportioned needlework may not last. But each of these attempts (constructing the needles or the hook, finding the string, working on it for one or two weeks...) will perhaps serve as intermediary steps toward something else that will only have happened because of what came before. "So there you have it. It needs to be done."

### Ritual and life

'Rituals' will more than likely be a show, but perhaps not. Perhaps it will be an installation, a video object, a drawn exhibit, or all of the above. For now, it's a worksite without a deadline, a "moment of life" rather than a project, like *L'Autre* once was. Its broad title leaves room for many possibilities, from sacred ritual to the ritualistic coffee. "Because titles whisk you away before the thing is even created." This one happened when Claudio Stellato felt a ritual form creep up on him, with his *other*, which he will never cease to examine. Today he seeks out his own rituals and does so with a samurai sword, an axe and a wooden block. The axe and the wooden block have already appeared in a video and a live micro-performance where Stellato went at the block with such fury that the axe is still stuck inside it. It's been impossible to get it out, and the bare arm that tries just laughs harder and harder. Then there will be that old tool that Claudio Stellato intends to take out of the closet and put back into his repertoire. He's working on it now. "It's my voice. I don't know how it sounds yet, but it will come."

s'exerce au tricot, au fil des heures de route. La faute à une autre image, qui ne lui sortira pas de la tête tant qu'il ne l'aura pas testée. Il s'y verrait tricoter une énorme corde avec deux morceaux de bois de quelques mètres de long en guise d'aiguilles. Ou un crochet géant. Voilà, Claudio Stellato est reparti pour trois ans de recherche, autour d'un simple titre, «Rituals». Les images du corbeau et du tricot surdimensionné n'y survivront peut-être pas. Mais tous ces passages là (construire les aiguilles ou le crochet, trouver la corde, travailler une semaine, deux semaines...) serviront peut-être de «gradins intermédiaires» vers autre chose, qui n'arrivera que grâce à ça. «*Donc voilà, il faut le faire*».

### Le rituel et la vie

«Rituals» sera sans doute un spectacle, mais peut-être pas. Peut-être une installation, un objet vidéo, une expo dessinée, ou tout ça à la fois. Pour l'heure, c'est un chantier, sans date butoir. Un «moment de vie» plutôt qu'un projet, comme «L'Autre» l'a été. Avec un titre ouvert, pour laisser toutes les options à la matière, du rituel sacré au rituel du café. «*Parce que ça fait voyager, les titres, avant même que la chose soit créée.*» Celui-là est arrivé quand Claudio Stellato a senti venir la forme rituelle, avec son *autre*, qu'il ne cessera jamais de sonder. Aujourd'hui, en cherchant ses propres rituels. Avec un sabre de samouraï, une hache et un billot de bois. La hache et le billot ont déjà donné une vidéo, et une micro-performance en live. Où Stellato attaque le billot, avec une ardeur telle que la hache y reste plantée, impossible à dégager, et pousse le bras désarmé à rigoler de plus en plus fort. Et puis il y aura ce vieil outil que Claudio Stellato entend sortir du placard et remettre à son répertoire, il y travaille. «*Ma voix. Je ne la connais pas encore. Mais elle va arriver.*»

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# The 'New Circus' in Search of Syncretism

CLAUDIU GROZA

What would a circus festival look like? And what does the term 'new circus' mean? These were the questions that drove me, a novice given the low representation of either 'old' or 'new' circus in Romania, to apply for a residency with the Unpack the Arts programme in the summer of 2012.

Coming into the residency my experience in the field was limited to old childhood memories from when I last saw a classical circus performance with clowns, trapeze artists, magicians and trained animals. No other horizon related to the circus could be found in my career as a critic and a journalist, apart from a few references within various theatrical performances. So, attending Festival novog cirkusa in Zagreb in the first half of November was a sort of initiation for me, through the content of the residency itself – discussions, conferences, presentations of the 'new circus' – and especially through the four performances seen, each of them – even the first one, *Cirque Invisible*, which was of a rather classical style – proving the syncretic attempts which the contemporary circus and its creators are making in order to reconfigure their aesthetics, in a postmodern manner, without betraying the authenticity of their art.

I understand 'syncretism' in this case as a tendency within contemporary circus artists to assimilate and take over elements of theatre, dance, visual arts (especially multimedia), etcetera, placing an increased emphasis on the performance's dramaturgy. Of course my perspective may be wrong because it is a generalisation, but I cannot help making a comparison with the recent developments in the drama and dance produced in Romania, which make me believe that the trend of syncretism is quasi-general. In Romania, in recent years, the

# "Noul circ" în căutarea sincretismului

CLAUDIU GROZA

Cum o fi un festival de circ? Și ce o fi însemnând "circ nou"? Acestea au fost întrebările care m-au provocat, în vara lui 2012, să aplic pentru o rezidență în cadrul programului european "Unpack the Arts", ca un novice în domeniu, dată fiind slaba reprezentare a circului – "vechi" sau "nou" deopotrivă – în România.

Experiența mea în domeniu se limita la străvechi amintiri din copilărie, când am fost ultima dată la o reprezentație de circ clasic, cu clovni, trapeziști, prestidigitatori și animale dresate. Nici un alt orizont legat de circ nu se regăsea în cariera mea de critic și jurnalist, în afară de câteva "trimiteri" din varii spectacole teatrale. Astfel că participarea la Festival Novog Cirkusa, în Zagreb, în prima parte a lui octombrie, a fost ca un fel de inițiere, prin conținutul însuși al rezidenței – discuții, conferințe, prezentări ale "noului circ" –, dar mai ales prin cele patru spectacole văzute, fiecare din ele – chiar și primul, *Cirque invisible*, de o factură mai degrabă clasică – demonstrându-mi tentativele sincretice pe care circul contemporan și creatorii săi le operează pentru a-și reconfigura – în manieră postmodernă – estetica, fără să trădeze mijloacele autentice ale artei lor.

Înțeleg prin sincretism tendința artiștilor din circul contemporan de a asimila și a-și apropria elemente din teatru, dans, arte vizuale (multimedia) etc., atenția mai mare acordată unei *dramaturgii* a spectacolelor. Firește, perspectiva mea, din rațiuni obiective parțială, poate să fie greșită prin generalizare, însă nu pot să nu fac o comparație cu tendințele recente din teatrul și dansul produse în România, ceea ce mă face să cred că *trendul* e cvasi-general. În România, în anii din urmă, a căpătat o importanță tot mai mare apelul la aptitudinile vocale și coregrafice ale actorilor de dramă, ca și, pe de altă parte,



recourse to the vocal and choreographic skills of dramatic actors, as well as, on the other hand, to the dramatic skills of dancers or even opera singers, has gained an increasing importance. Lighting design and multimedia elements play a more significant role in theatre productions, and stage music is created alongside performances. These are elements I have also found in the circus performances seen in Zagreb, which allows me, therefore, to make a comparison...

### A 'deconstructive' show

Initially, I intended to analyse the interference points between new circus, theatre, dance and the visual arts, applied to only three of the four productions seen in Croatia. Along the way, however, I realised that the one I had intended to leave out, *Le Cirque Invisible*, also had certain elements of cultural synthesis, despite its venerable 'age' (it has already been performed for decades) and its strong connection to circus tradition.

The self-irony and parodic spirit with which the performance is presented, and by which the spectators are given the impression of somehow being accepted into the creators' own home, brings the performance closer to the formulas of postmodern theatre. *Le Cirque Invisible* is performed by Victoria Chaplin and Jean-Baptiste Thiérrée, two legendary artists, with a mischievous air but also great virtuosity, who combine traditional circus techniques and effects – such as rabbits pulled from various unexpected places – but do so in the context of a conscious complicity with the audience, with gags or moments of choreographic interaction which make one think of Benny Hill's TV sketches or of oriental dances. The story of the fish Raoul, for example, performed by Thiérrée with an ingenious pun (playing on 'Merlusconi' or 'Murene Mathieu') is a sequence that is obviously theatrical, and Victoria Chaplin's spectacular metamorphoses, where objects or clothes turn people into butterflies or birds, are in line with the visual arts through their pictorial clearness. Of course, these moments coexist with the traditional ones – the artist's acrobatic virtuosity has been remarkable. I think *Cirque Invisible* was, at the time of its release, an original show in the circus art field.

la aptitudinile dramatice ale dansatorilor sau chiar soliștilor de operă. *Light-designul* și formulele multimedia au o pondere mai însemnată în producțiile de teatru, muzica de scenă e creată în acord cu "anvergura" interpreților. Sunt elemente pe care le-am regăsit și în spectacolele de circ văzute la Zagreb, care mă îndreptățesc să fac o comparație.

### Un spectacol "deconstructiv"

Inițial, mi-am propus să analizez punctele de interferență dintre noul circ, teatru, dans și arte vizuale aplicat pe trei din cele patru producții văzute în Croația; pe parcurs însă, mi-am dat seama că și prima, *Cirque invisible*, are, în ciuda venerabilei sale "vârste" – se joacă deja de câteva decenii – și a profilului său tradițional, elemente certe de sinteză culturală.

Autoironia și spiritul parodic, prin care convenția e exhibată, iar spectatorii sunt acceptați cumva în "bucătăria" creatorilor, apropie spectacolul de formulele teatrului postmodern. *Cirque invisible* e jucat de Victoria Chaplin și Jean-Baptiste Thiérrée, doi artiști legendari, într-o manieră poznașă dar de mare virtuozitate, combinând tehnici de circ clasice – precum iepurii scoși din diverse cotloane –, dar în rama unei complicități conștiente cu publicul, cu *gaguri* sau momente de interacțiune coregrafică ce duc cu gândul la scheciurile TV ale lui Benny Hill ori la dansurile orientale. "Povestea peștelui Raoul", de pildă, redată de Thiérrée, cu jocuri de cuvinte ingenioase (merluciu "Merlusconi" sau "Murene Mathieu") este o secvență evident teatrală, iar metamorfozele spectaculoase al Victoriei Chaplin, în care obiectele sau îmbrăcămintea transformă oameni în fluturi ori păsări, intră în sfera artelor vizuale prin picturalitatea lor manifestă. Firește, aceste momente coexistă cu cele tradiționale – remarcabilă a fost virtuozitatea acrobatică a artei. Cred că *Cirque Invisible* a fost, la momentul apariției sale, un spectacol inedit în peisajul artei circului.

Revenind însă la focusul acestei analize, notez – oarecum pedagogic – că interferențe între artele performative există de mult timp, fie că elemente de circ sunt prezente în spectacole de teatru (la Brook sau Ariane Mnouchkine, s-a

However, going back to the focus of this analysis, I note – somewhat pedagogically – that interconnections between performing arts genres have existed for a long time. Either circus elements have been present in theatre performances (in Brook and Ariane Mnouchkine, as noted during my Zagreb residence), or theatre-makers like Josef Nadj have worked with young circus artists. Moreover, some circus artists consider themselves to be ‘interdisciplinary’, using the ‘happening’ as a theatre scenario or incorporating choreography or street music (hip-hop, for example) into their performances. The directions are very diverse and the search is predominant – a point, in fact, that was underlined in conversations with the creators of the other three performances seen in Zagreb.

### **Between anthropology and technology**

The creators of the show *Vibrations* chose to present only a ten-minute excerpt of their two-hour production at Festival novog cirkusa. Entitled *Gravity*, this short sequence was irrelevant in assessing the artistic ambitions of the planned full performance, being, as Raphael Navarro, one of the directors of Company 14:20, told us, rather a simple sketch, a first bait thrown to the spectator to introduce him to the spiritual ‘magic’ which the show will build. François Chat’s performance corresponded to the theoretically asserted goal – “a magical and dreamlike journey which combines dance, theatre, objects and circus” – but it failed to transmit to the audience the empathy defined by critic Anne Quentin, in Zagreb, as one of the constituent elements of the ‘new magic’ promoted by 14:20.

But beyond this ‘technical’ aspect, I noticed the influence of a type of relatively slow, hieratic dance within the performance. A fluid, undulating choreography which, in the dim light of the stage and with the use of a ‘magic stick’ seemingly floating in space, tried to create a certain spiritual energy. According to my own frame of references, as a theatre critic, the fragment I saw belonged to the theatre-dance zone, this level prevailing on the ‘magic’ that was here just a stage performance adjuvant. I do not deny, however, that, seeing the extract, the viewer cannot enter the semantic

punctat în rezidența zagrebiană), fie că teatratorii, ca Joseph Nadj, au lucrat cu tineri artiști de circ. Mai mult, o parte a artiștilor de circ se consideră “interdisciplinari” ei înșiși, folosind în spectacolele *happeningul*, scenariul ca-și-teatral, coregrafia ori muzica străzii (hip-hop, de exemplu). Direcțiile sunt foarte diverse, iar *căutarea* e dominantă, așa cum, de altfel, au punctat și creatorii celorlalte trei spectacole văzute în Croația, în discuțiile cu noi.

### **Între antropologie și tehnologie**

Creatorii spectacolului *Vibrații* au optat să prezinte la Festival Novog Cirkusa din Zagreb doar un fragment de zece minute din producția lor de două ore. Intitulată *Gravitație*, secvența a fost irelevantă pentru ambitusul artistic al spectacolului, fiind mai degrabă un simplu crochiu, o primă nadă aruncată spectatorului – este chiar momentul de debut al reprezentației –, care să-l introducă pe acesta în “magia” spirituală pe care, ne-a spus unul din directorii Companiei 14:20, Raphael Navarro, o edifică spectacolul. Evoluția lui François Chat a corespuns dezideratului enunțat teoretic: “o călătorie magică și onirică în care se combină dansul, teatrul, obiectele și ciroul”, însă n-a reușit să transmită publicului acea *empatie* definită de criticul Anne Quentin, chiar la Zagreb, ca unul din elementele constitutive ale “noii magii” promovate de Compania 14:20.

Dincolo însă de acest aspect “tehnic”, am remarcat influența unui tip de dans hieratic, relativ lent, în reprezentație. O coregrafie unduitoare, fluidă, care, în lumina scăzută a scenei și cu ajutorul “bățului magic” care plutea aparent în spațiu, încerca să creeze o anumită energie spirituală. Conform grilei mele de analiză, ca critic de teatru, fragmentul văzut se încadrează în zona teatrului-dans, acest palier prevalând asupra “magiei”, care a fost aici doar un adjuvant al performanței scenice. Nu neg însă că, văzând întregul spectacol, privitorul nu poate intra în orizontul semantic propus de creatori, acela al întoarcerii la o metaforă existențială prin această magie a mișcării.

Spectacolul imediat următor – căci a fost o reprezentație-coupé – ne-a dus într-o cu totul altă zonă de cercetare, marcând totodată și un hiat





Victoria Chaplin & Jean-Baptiste Thierrée – *Le Cirque Invisible* © nn

horizon proposed by the creators – that of the return to an existential metaphor through this magic of movement.

The show which followed immediately after – as it was a double-bill performance – took us to a completely different research area, questioning the relationship between theatre / visual art and new circus. *Nopeussokeus*, by the Finnish illusionist Kalle Hakkarainen, is partly a theatre and multimedia performance, and partly a demonstration of circus, but there is a certain break, visible in the staging, between the two elements.

Hakkarainen looped through the moments before a car accident – the different levels of confusion in the driver's mind, the blurring of the senses, the decreased acuity, the crash. Performed entirely

între mijloacele teatrale-vizuale și cele ale noului circ. *Nopeussokeus*, al iluzionistului finlandez Kalle Hakkarainen, este, parțial, un spectacol de teatru și multimedia, și, parțial, o demonstrație de circ, dar între cele două planuri există o anume fractură, vizibilă și spațial.

Hakkarainen a jucat "în buclă" clipele dinaintea producerii unui accident auto, confuzia planurilor din mintea șoferului, încețoșarea simțurilor, scăderea acuității, izbitura. Totul înapoia unui ecran translucid, dar foarte performant tehnologic, care permitea spectatorilor să-l vadă atât pe interpret, cât și "ambianța" – rezolvată aici, foarte ingenios, prin cuvintele "copac", "stâncă" etc. ce se succed de o parte și alta a ecranului. Potențată de o muzică excelentă, special concepută de Samuli Kosminen pentru acest spectacol, cu sunuri electronice, dar difuze,

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behind a translucent screen, the piece was very advanced in terms of technology, allowing the viewers to see both the performer and the environment – created here, very cleverly, by the words ‘tree’, ‘rock’, etcetera, which passed from one side of the screen to the other. Enhanced by excellent music, specially created by Samuli Kosminen for the show, with electronic but diffuse sounds, like a backdrop to emphasise the stage dynamics, the recurrent sequence of the accident was a performance of media theatre in itself. However, the use of a red cable as the image of the primordial navel, as a link between life and death perhaps (the illusion of a rope passing through the body being a traditional circus trick), was diluted through moments of humour. So I rather had the feeling that I participated in a hyper-technical theatre performance that only needed to have a new magic element because the performer himself was presenting in that context.

In fact, in the discussions we had the next day, my feeling was confirmed by Hakkarainen himself: “I consider myself more a visual artist than a magician.” *Nopeusokeus* proved this professional hierarchy: the technological, sophisticated part has been developed with great care; therefore the emphasis was on visual performance, and the actual sequence of the accident relied on the artist’s acting skills – even choreographic skills, at some points. The circus elements have been given attention last, and Hakkarainen failed in the performance to truly incorporate them (as some of my more experienced colleagues on the residency considered).

Both performances mentioned above speak of the search for new forms of expression in the contemporary circus, inspired either by traditional magic – as Navarro revealed – or by new technologies, with a slight neglect (consider the term with caution – it is relative) of the typical methods of circus art. However, I think that both of these areas of research will ultimately discover a way to syncretise their various aesthetic parts, with the new circus element finding its balance.

ca un fundal care accentuează dinamica scenică, secvența recurentă a accidentului a fost în sine o reprezentație de teatru-media. Or, prin alăturare, folosirea unui cablu roșu în ipostaza de ombilic primordial, liant între viață și moarte poate – e vorba de un element tradițional al ciroului, frânghia care trece prin corp –, un cablu ce atârna la marginea scenei, suspendat, și-a diluat semnificația, mai ales prin rizibilul momentului. Astfel că senzația mea a fost mai degrabă că asist la un spectacol teatral hiper-tehnologizat, dar care, pentru că protagonistul e și magician, trebuie să aibă un element de acest tip.

De altfel, senzația mea s-a verificat a doua zi, la discuții, prin declarația lui Hakkarainen: “mă consider mai mult un artist vizual decât un magician”. *Nopeusokeus* a probat această ierarhie profesională: partea tehnologică, sofisticată, a fost elaborată cu mare atenție, accentul căzând așadar pe performanța vizuală, iar secvența propriu-zisă a accidentului a mizat pe calitățile actricești – chiar de coregrafie, la un moment dat – ale artistului. Abia în al treilea plan s-a dat atenție elementelor de circ – la reprezentația văzută de mine Hakkarainen a ratat, după cum au apreciat colegii mai experimentați.

Ambele spectacole comentate mai sus au semnalat *căutarea* unor noi formule de expresie în ciroul contemporan, inspirate fie de dansul magic tradițional – ca în primul caz, după cum a dezvăluit Navarro –, fie de “oferta” noilor tehnologii, cu o ușoară neglijare (priviți cu rezervă termenul, e relativ) a mijloacelor tipice artei ciroului. Tatonările vor duce însă, cred, la o sincretizare a elementelor estetice și la regăsirea echilibrului noului circ.

### Excelență... sincretică

Ultimul spectacol văzut la Festival Novog Cirkusa din Zagreb a confirmat atât un principiu teoretic al criticului Anne Quentin (“artistul de circ își configurează *volumetric* spațiul”), cât și o distincție făcută, dacă nu mă înșel, de criticul croat Nataša Govedić, între *meșteșug* (cu trimitere, punctual, la *Cirque Invisible*) și *design* (apropo de celelalte două montări): *Celălalt* (L’autre) al lui Claudio Stellato a fost cel mai aproape de dezideratul estetic al noului circ.



## Syncretic excellence

The last performance seen at Festival novog cirkusa, L'Autre by Claudio Stellato, confirmed both a theoretical principle of the critic Anne Quentin ("the circus artist configures space in terms of volume"), and a distinction made, if I am not mistaken, by the Croatian critic Nataša Govedić between craft (referring, specifically, to Cirque Invisible) and design (with reference to Nopeusokeus and Gravity). L'Autre, I found, was closest to the aesthetic goals of the new circus, with the Belgian artist Claudio Stellato catalysing his circus technique in a performance that had theatricality in its scenario and 'plot', but also achieved an almost acrobatic choreography. The result was charming, perfect, creating both the desired empathy and the typical magic of the circus world among the audience.

L'Autre can be interpreted as an initiatory journey on which the individual discovers themselves in an ontological sense. But it is not what Stellato says that matters in this show – after all, each spectator can build his own story – but how he says what he has to say. His performance – the word is very appropriate in this context – has a certain degree of abstraction without being hermetic. On the contrary, it spreads a lively energy and frees the senses in a way which contributes to the overall atmosphere.

The way in which the artist has built the production is theatrical. Without a concrete scenario, the show nonetheless contains a story – it has an arc which can be summed up in one sentence. We are not dealing with a line of moments, but with the telescopic deployment of stage sequences, each derived from the previous one. From here arises the remarkable fluency of the show, despite the fact that the interpreter's performance involves considerable physical effort – Stellato using two wardrobes, a small one and the other about two meters high, as stage props. The choreography certifies the artist's virtuosity: the dynamics of his movement are precisely calculated, creating a graceful fluency without stuttering or irregularity. The entry / exit from the wardrobes is similar to gymnastics, with energetic and agile twitches hiding the physical effort, while the dance in the wardrobe – which is sometimes

Artistul belgian a catalizat tehnica cercului într-un spectacol cu dezvoltare teatrală, prin scenariu și evoluția "intriții", dar și cu un pregnant semn scenic coregrafic, aproape acrobatic, de fapt. Rezultatul a fost cuceritor, desăvârșit, creând în public atât cea dorită *empatie* cât și magia tipică lumii cercului. *Celălalt* poate fi descifrat ca un traseu inițiativ prin care individul se descoperă, în sens ontologic, dar nu numai, ci și... fizic, să zicem, iar apoi îl descoperă pe cel de lângă el. Însă nu ce spune Stellato contează în acest spectacol – până la urmă fiecare spectator își poate construi propria poveste –, ci *cum* spune ce are de zis. Performanța lui – cuvântul e foarte potrivit în context – are un anumit grad de abstractizare, fără a fi ermetică. Dimpotrivă, ea degajă o energie tonică și o libertate a sensurilor care contribuie la atmosfera ansamblului.

Teatral este felul în care artistul și-a construit parcursul scenic. Fără a avea un scenariu concret, spectacolul conține un *story*, are o evoluție ce poate fi rezumată într-o frază. Nu avem de-a face cu un șir de momente, ci cu o desfășurare telescopică a secvențelor scenice, fiecare decurgând din cea precedentă. De aici se naște o remarcabilă *cursivitate* a reprezentației, în ciuda faptului că jocul interpretului implică un efort fizic notabil – Stellato folosește două dulapuri, unul mic și altul cam de doi metri înălțime ca "recuzită" scenică. Ajungem așadar la partea de coregrafie care certifică virtuozitatea artistului. Dinamica mișcărilor e calculată precis, de grațioasă fluentă, fără sacadări sau sincope. Intrarea/ieșirea din dulapuri se face ca în gimnastică, cu zvâcniri energice și suple, ascunzând efortul fizic, în timp ce "dansul în dulap" – acesta fiind uneori un soi de cochilie, alteori o cutie ambientală – face să vibreze scena, dar nu sparge echilibrul perfect al reprezentației. Coregrafia lui Stellato e la granița dintre dans și acrobație, căci are câte ceva din ambele. Mi-a amintit de un spectacol de dans jucat într-o cabină de telefon de patru dansatori, însă felul în care manipulează obiectele duce direct spre conceptul cercului, mai ales prin trecerea de la dans acrobatic la magie, la "mersul pe aer" care a constituit, firesc, uimitor și admirabil, punctul de forță al spectacolului său.

a kind of shell, sometimes a feature of the environment – makes the stage vibrate but does not disrupt the perfect balance of the show. Stellato's choreography is on the border between dance and acrobatics, since it has something of both. It reminded me of a dance piece performed by four dancers in a phone booth, but the way in which Stellato handles the objects directly leads us to the concept of circus, especially through the transition from acrobatic dance to magic – to the final walk on thin air which, presented in a natural yet amazing manner, is the strong point of the performance.

L'Autre is, I think, representative of what the new circus intended itself to be – at least in one of its guises. It's remarkable for its coherence, simplicity, virtuosity and technique, but, above all, for creating an irresistible recipe mixed from ingredients taken from several cultural arenas. Whether this show is exceptional or the norm, I do not know.

My residency in Zagreb has revealed to me an art of extreme vitality, whose discoveries I hope will one day be seen in Romania as well. From the new circus to dance or contemporary theatre, the step is small. Maybe magical.

*Celălalt* a fost, cred, spectacolul reprezentativ pentru ce se dorește a fi "noul circ", cel puțin într-una din direcțiile sale. S-a remarcat prin *coerență*, *simplitate*, *virtuozitate* și *tehnică*, dar, înainte de toate, prin "rețeta" sa irezistibilă, care a mixat foarte bine "ingrediente" din mai multe zone culturale. E un accident sau o normă acest spectacol, asta nu știu.

Rezidența mea la Zagreb, datorită programului "Unpack the Arts" și a Festival Novog Cirkusa, mi-a relevat o artă de extremă vitalitate, ale cărei căutări și rezultate vor putea fi, sper, văzute și în România. De la noul circ la dans ori teatrul contemporan pasul e mic. Poate magic.



# Circus as the Time and Space for Thinking

DUŠKA RADOSAVLJEVIĆ

## The Thinking Time

It is a Saturday morning. Thirty-year old Finnish magician Kalle Hakkarainen is sitting at a part baroque/part mdf table covered with fruit and sweets at the office of the New Circus Festival in Zagreb, Croatia, surrounded by an international group of journalists. In a flash of inspiration, they want to know whether he is nostalgic or not?

The night before Hakkarainen had presented a technologically elaborate performance about a tiredness-induced car crash under the title Nopeusokeus (Speed Blindness/Motion Blindness) to a relatively underwhelmed, though sufficiently hypnotized, audience. The hypnotic effect was largely the work of the music and sound designer Samuli Kosminen in combination with Hakkarainen's own visual projections conjuring up the onset of sleep at the wheel of a moving car. In just under thirty minutes, the piece had set out to explore the moment of fatal impact from different points of view, though the moment at times seemed to stretch into infinity or fold back into itself in a dream-like way, leaving the artist's intention generally unclear and the critics generally indifferent.

It all begins to make a lot more sense when in this impromptu press conference Hakkarainen reveals his departure points. Largely disillusioned by contemporary magic, the Finnish wiz kid often resorts to history books for his inspiration. It was the claim that drama and magic cannot be successfully combined, made by the English magician David Devant about a century ago, that prompted Hakkarainen to attempt such a feat. A newspaper article about a woman in a car crash provided a dramaturgical framework for the reinvention of an old trick in which a rope can be seen to penetrate the body of the performer. And

a poem about car 'motion blindness' by Harry Salmenniemi provided additional semantic content for Hakkarainen's projections.

'I like to create a time and space for people to think', Hakkarainen declares. It might have been some sleight of hand that made me miss what he said in response to the question of nostalgia, but it certainly prompted me to think about it too, in more ways than one.

There is the dimension provided by the history and the form of circus itself. Only two nights before we had seen Le Cirque Invisible – the third edition of a repertoire, created (in 1990) by Jean-Baptiste Thierrée and Victoria Chaplin who had in fact been working together since 1969. Threaded through this show is a sense of homeliness and enchantment, which could easily cast any audience member into his or her five-year old self. Whether it's Thierrée's Christmas Day-style close up magic or Chaplin's spells which turn common household items into mythical creatures and elaborate wearable musical instruments – this is the kind of spectacle that thrives on poeticizing the mundane in a simple, child-like way. An inherent emphasis on eccentric playfulness and mesmerizing inventiveness rather than sheer technical prowess, despite the fact that its acts are decades old, results in a show which is timeless rather than dated and therefore nostalgic in its form more so than its content. I felt the way a five year old might feel at any point in time, rather than the way I felt when I was actually five years old watching a dancing elephant in a big top and waiting impatiently for the clowns or the trapeze lady in sequins to come back again.



WHS – Kalle Hakkarainen – Nopeussokeus © Petri Virtanen

So then there is also the personal dimension. I am a domiciled Brit, at this moment in time on a visit to Croatia – a country which was once part of what I considered home. Incidentally, on my flight here I was reading a book which informed me that nostalgia was in fact a term invented by a seventeenth century Swiss doctor to designate a malady of extreme longing (algia) for a return home (nostos). Even though in the twenty-first century the phenomenon of nostalgia, with its intrinsic tendency to sentimentalize the past, has acquired connotations that can be seen as politically problematic, it is nevertheless a condition that must also be somehow validated. Not least because, traditionally, members of the circus – whether personally nostalgic or not – are very often displaced persons themselves, and so are, increasingly, a lot of the rest of us. Rather helpfully though, writer Svetlana Boym attempts to redefine nostalgia not as a conservative longing for a particular place in the past, but as a desire to escape the given time-space continuum ‘sideways’ – as ‘a strategy for [the displaced persons’] survival, a way of making sense of the impossibility of homecoming’ ([http://www.iasc-culture.org/eNews/2007\\_10/9.2CBoym.pdf](http://www.iasc-culture.org/eNews/2007_10/9.2CBoym.pdf),

p.9). This understanding of nostalgia makes it possible to make sense of much more than that. But more of that – later.

### The Thinking Place – context

This time and space for thinking, it is worth noting perhaps, was taking place on day three of the ‘middle part’ of the Zagreb New Circus Festival 2012. Taking the form of the classic circus act of a lady being sawn into three parts, the eighth edition of the international festival which had begun spontaneously thanks to the endeavours and personal savings of the former journalist Ivan Kralj in 2005, was on this occasion programmed in three distinct sections some weeks apart. As in most previous years, there was an element of making virtue out of necessity in coming up with the three part programming concept, as Kralj wished to include a number of artists with availabilities very far apart. Out of this also emerged the theme of ‘new magic’ for this year’s festival, and the festival brochure is suitably arranged to function as a magic trick. Due to limited means and a lack of support, in previous years, the festival has taken the form of a ‘one day festival’, or a mock election campaign in the year



when it coincided with general elections. As a result the festival has acquired a considerable audience following even though it also maintains a certain underground mystique. In the absence of adequate local support, Kralj has struggled to bring it to a close, and has programmed the last festival event for this year to take place on the much publicized doomsday of 21.12.12.

The delegation of ten international journalists to which I belonged on this visit to Zagreb featured representatives from France, Belgium, Romania, Germany, Finland, Spain and the UK, and we were privileged to also have a programme of talks and discussions framing our experience of the work we saw. Forming part of an EU-funded initiative designed to increase critical understanding of the genre of circus, the scheme named Unpack the Arts, run by Yohann Floch, is a two-year programme of 12 residencies which will have taken place at 12 different circus festivals around Europe. The Zagreb residency is the third in the first series.

Following day one of the residency which created a space for general introductions of the hosts and the guests, and day two which provided a useful overview of the 'traditional', 'new', 'contemporary' and several other proliferating circus trends, much of the day three therefore provided the time and space for thinking.

Unfortunately, Hakkarainen's piece did not do this for me on its own terms without the artist revealing his cards, and therefore it might be seen to have failed in one of its key intentions. But then again, how many people would really expect this kind of a proposition from a circus piece? Thus, what this piece drew attention to was also a deliberate blurring of the boundaries of the genre to which it purportedly belonged. Hakkarainen confessed that he premiered this piece in an art gallery but has also performed it at theatre and dance festivals allowing it to be framed by the inherent viewing conventions of those genres as well.

On the night of its performance Nopeussokeus (Speed Blindness/Motion Blindness) was, interestingly, presented as the second part of

a double bill with a seven-minute extract from a piece called Vibrations by the French 'magie nouvelle' company La Cie 14:20, which, in contrast, claimed 'kinaesthetic empathy' as the desired element of their relationship with the audience. Performed by a former Robert Wilson collaborator François Chat, and costumed by Jean-Paul Gaultier, the extract named Gravitation was a rather anti-climactic etude featuring a gravity-defying stick. The characteristic slowing down of the motion of the piece was intended to change the perception of time and affect the breathing pattern of the audience apparently resorting to some of the principles of traditional magic which seek to manipulate the observer's perception. Whether or not this would have worked for the piece as a whole was hard to tell from this short extract. However, what was clear was that both La Cie and Hakkarainen's areas of motivation were a far cry from the simple childlike enchantment engineered by the likes of Le Cirque Invisible, or the appreciation of human virtuosity that may have marked more traditional circus forms. What do they all have in common then as circus companies, if anything at all?

### **Circus as a Thinking Space**

In the afternoon of the third day of the residency, French critic Anne Quentin proposed that a distinguishing characteristic between circus and other performing arts is its conception of performance space as a three-dimensional quantity. Circus artists, in her view, defy gravity in a different way from dancers for example. In circus, the horizontal plane of the stage is conceptually replaced by the notion of space as 'volume'. This is filtered through the three main aspects of circus: madness, balance and confinement. I wondered to what extent the word 'madness' was a suitable translation in this context of the more broad-ranging French 'folie' (until I subsequently read that Jean-Baptiste Thierrée attributes the origins of his work to his collaboration with Felix Guattari in the Clinique de la Borde). But bearing in mind the notion of 'folie' as a broad psychological malady, it could be argued that these three are the challenges encountered by a displaced person too: the threat of a loss of sanity (as found by the seventeenth century Swiss doctors), the necessity to maintain

a balance between cultures, and the desire to escape the given time-space continuum 'sideways'. In her book, Boym further noted that nostalgia was a diagnosis of the age of a 'poetic science', made at a time when the two disciplines were still intertwined and when the mind and the body were treated together. But as we enter a post-Cartesian age, it is no wonder that nowadays, having displaced itself from the big top into a black box, circus itself aims to be both the realm of the mind and the body – of mental activity and kinaesthetic empathy. That same afternoon, the Croatian critic Nataša Govedić emphasized the inherent ability of circus 'to change the appearance of reality'. Could its current form of authorship be seen as 'a strategy for survival, a way of making sense of the impossibility of homecoming'?

It was the final performance of our residency that effectively brought into focus the potential of circus to integrate the cerebral and the kinaesthetic, the poetic and the philosophical, the ridiculous and the sublime. Performed by the Belgian-based Italian Claudio Stellato, this act with a man, two pieces of furniture and a red carpet, performed in complete silence, managed to achieve much more than some of its more elaborate, flashy, hi tech predecessors in this festival did. Taking another basic trick from the history book, the piece exploits the potential for slapstick humour contained within the relationship between a man and a seemingly self-willed object. At the other end of the scale this show contains a Beckettian suggestion that our whole life is an obsessive rehearsal of an escapism act – initially from the cradle, eventually from the coffin. Following a fifty-minute struggle, the closure arrives as our hero glides – magically – into thin air, elevated above his earthly concerns. The title of the piece, L'Autre, alludes to the dual – conscious and unconscious – nature of our endeavours, but also more literally to its technical dependence on another human behind the scenes, rather than on technology per se. So after all, what makes circus interesting is the wonder of being a human being – now, that's something to think about, over and over again.



# New Magic and the Spectator's Physical Experience: Kinesthetic Empathy at Festival Novog Cirkusa

EVIANNA LEHTIPUU

## Magic and kinetic empathy

New magic was the theme of the eighth edition of Zagreb's contemporary circus festival Festival novog cirkusa. The theme was expressed not only through the performances but also through the realization of the magic-trick-like festival program booklet and public discussions and lectures on the topic. As this circus festival is the only one of its kind in Croatia, it plays an important role in improving the status of contemporary circus in the country. The festival has always concentrated on a specific theme – like women and circus in 2009 – and this year it was all about new magic and disappearance.

The November section of the festival, divided into three separate parts for practical reasons, included a piece by one of the best-known names in new magic, Raphaël Navarro. His group Compagnie 14:20 performed their work *Gravitation*. This solo of ten minutes is one of four parts that make up the larger performance *Vibrations*. According to Navarro this was actually the first time that *Gravitation* was performed alone – and unfortunately so, as, at least judging by the videos, the other parts with video projections looked a lot more interesting visually than the part that was performed at the festival. It seems that *Gravitation* would work better as it is originally planned: as an intro for the whole work instead of a standalone performance.

# Uusi taikuus ja katsojan fyysinen kokemus Kinesteettistä empatiaa taikafestivaalilla Zagrebissa

EVIANNA LEHTIPUU

## Taikuutta ja kinesteettistä empatiaa

Tänä vuonna kahdeksatta kertaa järjestetyn zagrebilaisen nykysirkusfestivaali Festival novog cirkusan teemana oli uusi taikuus. Teema näkyi niin festivaalin ohjelmakirjan taikatempunomaisessa toteutuksessa, keskustelutilaisuuksissa kuin tietysti itse esityksissäkin. Kroatiassa sirkusfestivaali on ainoa laatuaan, joten sillä on ollut merkittävä rooli nykysirkuksen aseman vahvistajana maassa. Festivaalin linjana on aina ollut keskittyä johonkin teemaan, esimerkiksi naiseen ja sirkukseen, ja tänä vuonna oli siis vuorossa uusi taikuus ja katoaminen.

Käytännön syistä kolmeen osaan jaetun festivaalin keskimmäisen eli marraskuisen osuuden festivaaliohjelmistossa nähtiin muun muassa uuden taikuuden tunnetuimpiin nimiin kuuluvan Raphaël Navarron ryhmän Compagnie 14:20:n esitys *Gravitation*. Kymmenminuuttinen *Gravitation* on neljästä osasta koostuvasta *Vibrations*-nimisestä teoksesta irralleen poimittu yhden esiintyjän soolo. Navarron mukaan pätkä esitettiin nyt ensimmäistä kertaa yksinään – harmillista kyllä, sillä ainakin videolta esityksen videoheijasteita hyödyntävät osat näyttivät visuaalisesti paljon kiinnostavammilta kuin nyt nähty osuus teoksesta. *Gravitation* toimineekin paremmin koko teoksen introna kuin näin yksinään.

The subject matter of *Gravitation* is revealed in the name of the act. Magic is used to produce scenarios in which the laws of gravity seem to have been momentarily suspended as the wand spun by performer François Chat rises into the air. There is peaceful spaciousness in the performance but mostly it remained bland and distant.

Valentine Losseau, a 14:20 company member, explained that the idea behind this act was concept of kinesthetic empathy. For this reason they did not want the performer's movement material to be excessively virtuoso but rather something that the spectators could relate to. Through the kinesthetic identification it becomes possible for the spectator to experience impossible things when familiar movement is followed by something exceptional and unfamiliar.

Kinesthetic empathy itself is a neurologically proven phenomenon: watching a particular movement activates the same areas in the brain that are needed to actually perform the movement. The word kinesthesia was coined at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and refers to people's bodily awareness with regards to e.g. positions and movement. Kinesthetic empathy is thus sharing another person's bodily sensations. Dance critic John Martin has summed it up in the 1930s by saying that kinesthetic empathy could help people experience the same sensations as if they were performing the movements themselves.

Kinesthetic empathy has thus been a topic of discussion in the dance field for quite some time already. Sometimes, however, I wonder if dance-makers do overestimate the bodily experience of the spectator. My own hypothesis is that the areas of the cerebral cortex are activated in direct proportion to how familiar a movement is to the viewer. This would mean that movement series performed by dancers do not create equally powerful sensations to someone with no personal experience of dance as they do to a dancer watching a colleague. Perhaps this is the reason why many works that dance-makers talk about in terms of kinaesthetic empathy are so boring: the lit up movement areas in the spectator's brain

*Gravitation* käsitteli nimensä mukaisesti painovoimaa. Taikuuden avulla tuotettiin tilanteita, joissa painovoima näytti ajoittain katoavan François Chat'n pyörittelemän kepin noustessa ilmaan. Esityksessä oli rauhallista ilmavuutta, mutta enimmäkseen se jäi vaisuksi ja etäiseksi.

14:20-ryhmän jäsen Valentine Losseau kertoi kohtauksen taustalla olleen ajatuksen kinesteettisestä empatiasta. Tästä syystä he eivät halunneet esiintyjän liikemateriaalin olevan liian virtuoottista, vaan sellaista, jonka katsoja voi tunnistaa. Katsojan kinesteettisen samaistumisen kautta hänelle tarjotaan mahdollisuus kokea mahdollittomia asioita, kun tuttua liikettä seuraakin jotain tavallisesta elämästä poikkeavaa.

Kinesteettinen empatia itsessään on aivotutkimuksella todeksi havaittu ilmiö: liikettä katsovalla ihmisellä aktivoituvat samat aivoalueet, kuin mitkä liikkeen tuottamiseen tarvitaan. Sanana kinestesia on peräisin 1800-luvun loppupuolelta ja viittaa ihmisen keholliseen tietoisuuteen koskien esimerkiksi kehon asentoja ja liikettä. Kinesteettinen empatia on näin ollen toisen ihmisen kehollisten tuntemusten jakamista. Tanssikriitikko John Martin on tiivistänyt jo 1930-luvulla, että kinesteettisen empatian avulla voidaan voivan saavuttaa samoja assosiaatioita, kuin jos liikkeen suorittaisi itse.

Tanssin puolella kinesteettisestä empatiasta on siis puhuttu jo pidempään. Usein kuitenkin mietin, ylläriivoivatko tanssintekijät katsojan kehollisen kokemuksen. Oma hypoteesini on, että aivokuoren alueet aktivoituvat sitä enemmän, mitä tutumpi liike on katsojalle kyseessä. Näin ollen tanssijan suorittamat liikesarjat eivät herätä tanssia harrastamattomassa katsojassa ollenkaan niin voimakkaita tuntemuksia kuin tanssijassa, joka näkee kollegansa liikkuvan. Ehkä tässä voisi olla syy, miksi monet teokset, joiden tekijät puhuvat kinesteettisestä empatiasta, ovat niin pitkästyttäviä: katsojalle aivojen liikealueiden aktivoituminen ei herätä niin voimakkaita kokemuksia, kuin mitä tekijät kuvittelevat tai tahtoisivat.



do not awaken such strong experiences as the creators think or hope for.

The restrained mundanity of *Gravitation's* movement material is not enough to create big experiences in the spectator. This time small remains small. Not even the costumes by fashion designer Jean Paul Gautier were particularly memorable in this part of the performance.

A much more powerful bodily experience was that produced by Victoria Chaplin's high wire act in the *Le Cirque Invisible* performance. The fragility of the artist in her sixties hanging upside down from her feet on the wire certainly made the spectator aware of the danger of falling. I could feel this sensation in my feet even though I have no personal experience of what it is like to hang by the ankles from a tight wire. Chaplin's age certainly added to her act – seeing a twenty-something performer on the same wire would not have felt as dangerous as it did now.

In the same way, another piece on the festival, Claudio Stellato's performance *L'Autre* included many moments that could be concretely felt in the body. As the performer cramed his body into a small box, I felt squeezed myself. As the performer inside a cupboard tilted at an angle, I found myself leaning to the same direction. As the performer walks forwards along a suspended plank gravity should pull him down but some kind of magic keeps him up in the air – but I knew in my legs what descending would have felt like. Perhaps the kinaesthetic empathy makes a bigger impact when it is not being forced, with the idea of which particular sensation the spectator should be feeling.

### **Bodily and cerebral amazement**

For me personally, the festival was the first time when I heard circus being connected to kinesthetic empathy in speech. However, linking the concept of kinesthetic empathy to circus brings interesting perspectives to both phenomena. If everyday movement really creates a more powerful kinesthetic connection between the spectator and the performer (at least in the way that the same areas of the brain are activated), how does this relate to circus

Myöskään *Gravitationin* liikemateriaalin hillitty arkisuus ei riittänyt luomaan suurta katsojakokemusta. Pieni jäi tällä kertaa pieneksi. Edes muotisuunnittelija Jean Paul Gautierin puvustus ei tässä osassa jäänyt erityisesti mieleen.

Paljon voimakkaamman kehollisen kokemuksen synnytti Victoria Chaplinin nuorallakävelynumero *Le cirque invisible* -esityksessä. Hauraanoloisen kuusissakymmenissään olevan taitelijan roikkuminen nuoralta jaloistaan pää alaspäin sai kyllä tiedostamaan putoamisen vaaran. Tämän tunteen tunsin jaloissani, vaikka minulla ei ole omakohtaista kokemusta siitä, millaista on roikkua kireältä vajerilta pelkästään nilkkojen varassa. Chaplinin nuoranumerossa toki myös esiintyjän ikä loi lisäjännitettä numeroon – sama temppu parikymppisen esiintyjän tekemänä ei olisi tuntunut yhtä hurjalta.

Samoin festivaaliohjelmistoon kuuluneen Claudio Stellaton esityksessä *L'Autre* koin monia hetkiä, jotka tuntuivat konkreettisesti kropassa. Esiintyjän ahtautuessa pieneen laatikkoon tuntui omakin olo ahtaalta. Esiintyjän kallistuessa kaapin mukana kallistin itsekin päätäni. Esiintyjän astellessa kaltevalla lankulla eteenpäin olisi hänen kaiken järjen mukaan pitänyt laskeutua alemmas, mutta taikuutta käyttävän esityksen ollessa kyseessä hän pysyykin samalla korkeudella ilmassa – kuitenkin tunsin jaloissani sen, miltä alaspäin laskeutuminen olisi tuntunut. Ehkä kinesteettinen empatia onkin vaikuttavampaa silloin, kun sitä ei yritetä synnyttää väkisin, kuvitellen miltä joku asia katsojasta tuntuu?

### **Kehollinen ja älyllinen hämmästy**

En ole itse kuullut aiemmin kinesteettisestä empatiasta puhuttavan sirkuksen yhteydessä. Käsitteen yhdistäminen sirkusesitykseen tuo kuitenkin mielenkiintoisia näkökulmia molempiin ilmiöihin. Mikäli arkiliike tosiaan luo voimakkaamman kinesteettisen yhteyden katsojan ja esiintyjän välillä (ainakin aivojen aktiivisten alueiden samankaltaisuuden suhteen), niin miten tämä suhteutuu hämmästyksen ja fyysiseen taitoon pohjautuviin sirkusesityksiin? Sirkusesityksissähän esiintyjän taito tehdä

performances based on amazement and physical skills? As we know, it is still a central part of many circus performances to show a performer displaying skills that the spectator cannot do.

Traditional circus is based on three important factors: amazement, tension created by danger and beauty. Although contemporary circus has a different aesthetic from traditional circus, and danger is not a necessary prerequisite for a performance, virtuosity is still alive and well and a feature of most circus acts: as researcher and critic Anne Quentin claimed in Zagreb, what looks like non-virtuosity can also actually demand virtuosity. As circus art is based on physical skills that usually demand many years of training there is no way that the normal spectator can have the same kind of bodily memory traces. Therefore amazement is very likely to be a more important sensation for the circus spectator than familiarity created by identification. On the other hand, the circus spectator is also expecting to be amazed: for instance, as *Gravitation* was seen on a festival focusing on magic one could feel the spectators waiting for something more than the rather mundane movement language, something miraculous to happen in the next moment – why else would the performance be included in the magic programme if this wasn't going to happen?

However, there are different kinds of amazement with regards to different circus genres, although they are all linked by the question, 'How did they do that?': while the acrobat creates amazement based on physical skills, the amazement created by magic acts is more cerebral. When average spectators are watching acrobatics they are forced to confront their own physical boundaries and need to deal with the fact that the performer can do something that they are not capable of. With magic it is more a question of watching things happen which seem to defy the laws of physics, and this is difficult to accept on any rational level.

A magic performance seems to turn everyday reality on its head, and as the problem needs to be solved there is a demand for an explanation of how the illusion works. According to Claudio Stellato, an artist of Italian origin who works in

sellaista, mitä katsoja ei osaa, on yhä edelleen keskiössä.

Perinteinen sirkus rakentuu kolmelle tärkeälle seikalle: hämmästykselle, vaaran luomalle jännitykselle ja kauneudelle. Vaikka nykysirkus eroaa estetiikaltaan perinteisestä eikä vaara ole välttämätön edellytys nykysirkusesitykselle, on virtuoottisuus edelleen elävä ja tärkeä osa suurinta osaa sirkusesityksistä – kuten tutkija ja esityskriitikko Anne Quentin totesi, myös ei-virtuoottisen näköinen saattaa itse asiassa vaatia virtuoottisuutta. Koska sirkustaide pohjautuu fyysiseen taitoon, joka vaatii useimmiten vuosien harjoittelun, ei tavallisella katsojalla mitenkään voi olla samanlaisia kehollisia muistijälkiä. Hämmästyks nouseekin sirkuskatsojalle tärkeämmäksi tunteeksi kuin tunnistamisen kautta syntyvä tuttuuden kokemus. Toisaalta on niinkin, että sirkuskatsoja myös odottaa tätä hämmästyksiä: esimerkiksi taikusaiheisen festivaalin ohjelmistossa olleen *Gravitationin* melko arkisen liikkeen aikana katsoja odottaa näkevänsä seuraavaksi jotain ihmeteltävää – miksi esitys muuten olisi taikaohjelmistossa, jos näin ei tapahtuisi?

Hämmästyminen on kuitenkin erilaista eri sirkuslajien kohdalla, vaikka "Miten se tuon teki?" onkin yhdistävä kysymys: siinä missä akrobatian luoma hämmästyks kohdistuu fyysisiin taitoihin, on taikuuden aiheuttama hämmennys älyllistä. Akrobatiaa katsellessa keskivertokatsoja joutuu väkisininkin kohtaamaan omat keholliset rajansa ja toteamaan, että esiintyjä pystyy johonkin, mihin hän itse ei pysty. Taikuuden kohdalla taas kysymys on enemmän siitä, että asiat, joiden selvästi näemme tapahtuvan, eivät vastaa käsitystämme normaaleista fysiikan laeista, ja tätä taas on vaikea hyväksyä järjen tasolla.

Taikaesityksen arkijärjen vastainen toiminta vaatii ongelman purkamista, toisin sanoen selityksen keksimistä sille, miten taikatempu on mahdollinen. Claudio Stellato kertoikin, että kaikki katsojat, joiden kanssa hän on jutellut esityksestä, kertovat keksineensä, miten esityksen itsestään avautuva matto on toteutettu. Selitys on kuitenkin jokaisella erilainen. Tulinko muuten jo maininneeksi, että minulla on hyvä teoria siitä,





**Cie 14:20 – Vibrations** © Clément Debailleul

Brussels, all the spectators that he has talked to about the performance said that they had come up with a way that the carpet that unrolls on its own is able to do that. Everybody has a different explanation, however. By the way, did I mention that I happen to have a very good theory myself about how the trick actually works?

In other words, we long for a natural explanation for the trick, but at the same time we want to believe in the illusion – finding out how the trick is done does not actually give the same satisfaction as coming up with one's own explanation. This could be noticed when some of the tricks were accidentally revealed to the audience during the festival. When the secret was revealed we realized that we really wouldn't have wanted to know. But once the illusion is broken, it can never be fixed again.

The Finnish magician Kalle Nio (formerly Hakkarainen) who performed with his work *Nopeusokeus* (*Speed Blindness*) at the festival pointed out that this is an everyday problem for magicians themselves: it is difficult to believe that the trick will work when you know the secret so

miten tuo temppu itse asiassa on toteutettu? Kaipaamme toisin sanoen luonnollista selitystä tempulle, vaikka samaan aikaan haluammekin uskoa illuusion – tempun paljastuminen ei oikeastaan aiheuta samaa tyydytystä kuin oman selityksen keksiminen. Tämän havaitsimme niiden festivaaliesitysten kohdalla, joissa vahingossa osa tempusta paljastui yleisölle. Salaisuuden paljastuttua totesimme, että emme sittenkään olisi halunneet tietää. Illuusion rikkouduttua sitä ei uitenkaan saa enää takaisin.

*Nopeusokeus*-esityksellään festivaalilla esiintynyt suomalaistaikuri Kalle Hakkarainen totesi tämän ongelman olevan taikurille itselleen arkipäivää: on vaikea uskoa siihen, että temppu toimii, kun sen salaisuus on itselle niin selvä. Harjoittelussa voi kuitenkin käyttää peiliä apuna ja ystäviä koekatsojina esityksen ollessa tarpeeksi pitkällä harjoittelun suhteen. Raphaël Navarro vertasikin taikureita treenaamisessaan tanssijoihin, sillä molemmat harjoittelevat peilin edessä, vaikkakin eri syistä. Claudio Stellato kertoi hyödyntävänsä eri näkökulmasta esitystä seuraavien koekatsojen lisäksi videointia apuna: jos esitys näyttää hyvältä videolla, se toimii myös

well yourself. In rehearsals, however, a mirror can be used to help and friends can serve as trial-run spectators once the illusion has been rehearsed well-enough. Raphaël Navarro compared magicians to dancers with regards to their training as both practice in front of a mirror, although for different reasons. Claudio Stellato told that he uses his friends that pay attention to different things as trial-run spectators and that he also uses video: if the performance looks good on video it will also work well live because the performance is anyway always flattened when it is captured on video.

### **New magic approaching total expression**

Danger is a visible element of many circus disciplines, for example trapeze, pair acrobatics, and tight wire. In the field of magicians however, most of the tricks would seem completely free of risk (especially in close-up magic including card and coin tricks); escape acts on the other hand can potentially be extremely dangerous.

In new magic, as in contemporary circus generally, danger has less of an emphasis compared to traditional forms of the art. As for the aesthetics of the performance, it is no longer reduced merely to the pursuing of beauty: some contemporary circus artists might for example prefer a consistent but crude style. Hence astonishment remains the strongest of the "classical circus sensations" evoked by magic. But there has been a tendency to restrain even this traditional emotional response in festival performances of new magic, analogous to the way new circus tries to approach a more holistic mode of expression, diminishing the importance of risk and suspense. Both Raphaël Navarro and Claudio Stellato mentioned this aspiration in their interviews. According to Stellato even if the situations in a performance were exceptional to the spectator, they do not surprise the characters of the performance, because in their universe such occurrences are commonplace. Navarro explained that the effect the authors strive for comes to being precisely due to the way common objects are combined with elements alien to everyday realism. The borders of the performance's realism and the logic of its world can deviate

livenä, sillä esitys latistuu joka tapauksessa paljon videolle kuvattaessa.

### **Uusi taikuus matkalla kohti kokonaisilmaisua**

Monissa sirkuslajeissa, esimerkiksi trapetsin, pariakrobatian ja nuorallakävelyn kohdalla, vaara on näkyvästi läsnä. Taikuuden osalta suurin osa tempuista lienee täysin vaarattomia (etenkin lähitaikuudessa, kuten kortti- ja kolikkotempuissa); toisaalta esimerkiksi kahlekuningasnumerot saattavat olla hyvinkin vaarallisia.

Uudessa taikuudessa, kuten nykysirkuksessa ylipäätään, vaara ei painotu samalla tavalla kuin perinteisessä sirkuksessa. Esityksen estetiikassa taas kauneus ei ole enää määrittävä arvo, vaan esimerkiksi yhtenäinen rujous voi olla enemmän nykysirkustekijöiden mieleen. Näin ollen hämmästyksen osuus jää "klassisista sirkustunteista" vahvimaksi. Toisaalta festivaaleilla nähdyissä uuden taikuuden esityksissä myös hämmästystä on pyritty hillitsemään, samalla tavoin kuin nykysirkusesityksissä on pyritty pois vaaran ja jännityksen korostamisesta kohti kokonaisilmaisua. Niin Raphaël Navarro kuin Claudio Stellato mainitsivat myös haastatteluissaan tästä pyrkimyksestä. Stellato totesi, että vaikka esityksessä tapahtuu katsojalle poikkeuksellisia asioita, ei esityksen hahmo kuitenkaan ole niistä moksiskaan, sillä hänen universumissaan nuo asiat ovat tavallisia. Navarro puolestaan kertoi, että tekijöiden haluama vaikutelma syntyy nimenomaan tavanomaisen materiaalin, liikkeiden ja esineiden yhdistämisestä arkirealismista poikkeaviin elementteihin. Esityksen realismin rajat ja sen maailman logiikka voivat poiketa tavanomaisesta, ja taiteilijan on määriteltävä, mikä on tässä maailmassa normaalia.

Kalle Hakkarainen puolestaan kertoi omassa esityksessään olleen alun perin enemmänkin taikuutta, mutta ison osan siitä jääneen pois, kun se ei sopinut esityksen kokonaisuuteen. Toisaalta hän mainitsi taikuuden olevan esityksessä nimenomaan luomassa hämmästyttä. Myös Brysselissä työskentelevä, italialaislähtöinen



from the familiar, and it is for the artist to define the inner realism of the performance.

According to Kalle Nio, his performance originally had quite a lot of magic, but most of it was left out because it did not fit the whole. On the other hand he did mention that the role of magic in the performance was specifically to arouse astonishment. Also Claudio Stellato noted that with magic, the performance could include surrealistic elements like flying tables and other imaginable things which ordinarily would not exist.

Based on the festival performances, new magic differs from previously seen magic performances due to its aesthetic, which resembles that of modern circus and modern dance. The techniques used have an effect on the visual aspects of the performance: in order to conceal secrets, the stage often has to be rather dark, with dim, precisely directed lights. Technology can also be used in the performances, which according to Kalle Nio is not a new phenomenon among magicians: for example several of the world's first film-makers were magicians.

### **Contemporary magic, a new physical experience**

If a spectator at a magic show is left thinking about the magic tricks mainly on an intellectual level, is the spectator's experience essentially different from watching more physical circus disciplines? Watching aerial acrobatic tricks on the flying trapeze certainly feels different in one's body than a neat card trick. When it comes to the illusion of flying, however, the sensation can be completely different. According to Anne Quentin, who gave a lecture at a festival seminar, new magic still plays with a person's ancient wish to disappear and swap places. Quentin also describes magic as a way to escape rationality. So the magic show spectator does not have to be tied to everyday rationality, however hard it may try to make itself present.

Drawing any far-reaching conclusions about new magic and its comprehensive visual world is not possible on the basis of a few performances only. But it is also notable that the new magic genre is

Claudio Stellato totesi taikuuden mahdollistavan sen, että esityksessä on mukana surrealistisia elementtejä, kuten vaikkapa lentäviä pöytiä ja muita asioita, jotka voi kuvitella mutta joita ei arkielämässä tapahdu.

Nähtyjen esitysten perusteella uusi taikuus poikkeaa aiemmin nähdystä taikaesityksistä estetiikaltaan, joka muistuttaa nykysirkusta ja nykytanssia. Esityksissä käytettävä tekniikka vaikuttaa myös esityksen visuaalisuuteen: salaisuuksien säilyttämiseksi näyttämön on usein oltava melko pimeä ja himmeiden valojen tarkasti kohdistettuja. Myös teknologiaa voidaan hyödyntää esityksissä. Kalle Hakkarainen tarkensi, että tekniikan käyttö sinänsä ei ole mikään uusi ilmiö taikureiden parissa, vaan esimerkiksi ensimmäisten elokuvien tekijöissä oli useita taikureita.

### **Uusi taikuus, uusi fyysinen kokemus?**

Jos taikaesityksen katsoja jää pohtimaan ennen kaikkea taikatempun älyllisellä tasolla, onko katsojakokemus olennaisesti erilainen kuin fyysisemmissä sirkuslajeissa? Ainakin lentävällä trapetsilla tehdyn hurjan ilma-akrobatiatempun katsominen tuntuu jaloissa eri tavalla kuin sisäsiesti korttitemppu. Lentoillusion kohdalla tilanne voi olla täysin toinen. Anne Quentinin mukaan uusi taikuus pelaakin edelleen ihmisen ikaikaisilla toiveilla kadota ja vaihtaa paikkaa, kuten kuulumme festivaalin uutta taikuutta käsitelleessä seminaaripäivässä. Quentin kuvaa taikuuden olevan myös yksi tapa irrottautua rationaalisuudesta. Siten taikaesityksen katsojan ei ole pakko olla sidoksissa arkijärkeen, vaikka se kovasti esiin puskisikin.

Muutaman esityksen perusteella uudesta taikuudesta kokonaisvaltaisine visuaalisine maailmoineen ei vielä voi tehdä kovin pitkälle meneviä johtopäätöksiä. Toisaalta uuden taikuuden suuntaus on vielä niin pieni, että kovin paljon enempää ryhmiä ei ole tarjollakaan, kuten sekä Navarro että Hakkarainen totesivat. Molemmilla tosin oli toiveena, että suuntaus vahvistuisi.

"En tiedä, voiko uutta taikuutta kutsua liikkeeksi. Mutta olisi hienoa, jos se olisi nousussa, sillä

still so small that there are not very many other groups on offer either, as both Navarro and Nio pointed out. Both were hopeful, though, that the genre would gather momentum.

"I don't know if new magic can be called a movement, but it would be great if it was getting bigger because magic has been so boring for so long. Not all the 'new magic' performances are actually that new. On the other hand the novelty factor is not very important to me; I'm more concerned that it is a good performance," says Nio, who also works as a visual artist and video-maker.

On the basis of the performances at Festival novog cirkusa, new magic's relationship with movement deviates from more traditional magic – *Gravitation*, *Nopeussokeus* and *L'Autre* are all influenced by contemporary dance. In fact, dancers have been involved with each of the works: in parts of *Vibrations*, which will follow on from *Gravitation*, there is a dancer; choreographer Jyrki Karttunen helped in the creation of *Nopeussokeus*; and Claudio Stellato has a dance background himself. In all the works, movement has a role not only as a part of the tricks but also in itself, and it is not necessarily used solely to move from one phase of the trick to another. In this respect many other circus genres may have been ahead of magic for a longer time already.

*Le Cirque Invisible*, which was loaned to the festival from Maribor's programme as the European Capital of Culture, contains a lot of movement material and transformations. Movement sculptures, which create the illusion of e.g. a flower or a butterfly with the use of moving fabrics, were borrowed from the dance field where they have been used by the American modern dance pioneer Loïe Fuller. The many magic acts in the performance were in a traditional style – in some of them Jean-Baptiste Thierrée even has rabbits and birds. On the other hand Victoria Chaplin's movement and use of props creates several transformations which can be regarded as a kind of new circus: although in this case the spectator sees how the transformation happens, the illusory effect and wonder remain intact.

taikuus on ollut niin tylsää niin pitkään. Kaikki 'uuden taikuuden' esitykset eivät tosin ole erityisen uusia. Toisaalta minulle uutuusarvo ei ole niin tärkeä, vaan se, että esitys on hyvä", myös kuva- ja videotaiteilijana toimiva Kalla Hakkarainen valaisee omaa näkökulmaansa asiaan.

Festival novog cirkusassa nähtyjien esitysten perusteella uuden taikuuden suhde liikkeeseen ainakin poikkeaa perinteisemmästä taikuudesta, sillä niin *Gravitationissa*, *Nopeussokeudessa* kuin *L'Autressa* on nähtävissä nykytanssista saatuja vaikutteita. Itse asiassa jokaisen teoksen tekijöissä on myös ollut tanssijoita mukana: *Gravitationia* seuraavissa *Vibrations*-teoksen osissa mukana on tanssija, *Nopeussokeudessa* koreografi Jyrki Karttunen toimi ulkopuolisena silmänä ja Claudio Stellatolla puolestaan on itsellään tanssitaustaa. Kaikissa teoksissa liikkeellä onkin nähtävissä myös tempun ulkopuolinen itseisarvo, eikä se ole vain välttämätön siirtymä tempun osasta toiseen. Tässä suhteessa monet muut sirkuslajit ovat tosin saattaneet olla taikuutta edellä jo pidemmän aikaa.

Myös festivaaliohjelmistoon Mariborin kulttuuripääkaupunkivuoden ohjelmasta lainattu *Le cirque invisible* sisältää paljon liikkeellisiä kehitelmiä ja muodonmuutoksia. Suora lainaus tanssin puolelta ovat amerikkalaisen modernin tanssin pioneeri Loïe Fullerin tyyliin kankaiden liikkeellä toteutetut liikeveistokset, jotka synnyttävät vaikutelman esimerkiksi kukasta tai perhosesta. Esityksen monet taikatempot itsessään ovat perinteiseen tyyliin tehtyjä – osassa niistä Jean-Baptiste Thierréellä on jopa kaneja ja lintuja mukana. Sen sijaan Victoria Chaplinin liikkeiden ja rekvisiitan avulla luomia lukuisia muodonmuutoksia voisi pitää eräänlaisena uutena taikuutena: vaikka tässä tapauksessa katsoja näkeekin, miten muodonmuutos tapahtuu, jää mukaan silti illuusionomainen vaikutelma ja ihmetys.

Sikäli kun uuden taikuuden esityksissä esiintyjien kehonkieli on arkimaailmasta peräisin, toki näyttämölle muokattuna stilisoituna versiona, on kinesteettisellä empatiallakin toisenlainen resonointipohja kuin tempupainotteisissa taika- tai sirkusesityksissä. Zagrebissa parhaiten tässä



Inasmuch as the body language of contemporary circus performers is based on the everyday world, even if it is stylised on the stage, kinesthetic empathy resonates more with the spectator than in magic or circus acts that emphasize the trick itself. The best example of this in Zagreb seemed to be Stellato's *L'Autre*, whose movement concept was most powerfully conveyed from the stage to the audience. I experienced the performer's physical balancing, being present and curiosity bodily in such a way that my experience as a spectator was enhanced by kinesthetic empathy.

The big question remains, however: to what extent can kinesthetic empathy be consciously used to create an experience in the spectator? Is the desired effect realized by planning and directing the spectator's kinaesthetic experience? Or is that experience so personal that even though muscle memory recognises the moves being performed, the associations that they produce have different qualities? To what extent do we have shared kinaesthetic memories? Is it possible for the performer's movements to direct the spectator's experience to the same degree as e.g. the music, which is known to have a strong effect on the listener's emotions?

Kinesthetic empathy is a real phenomenon, but when it comes to the expectations of the spectator it should not be overestimated as it is not something the spectators think of. The spectator places more importance on experiencing something, whether it may be wondering how amazing the performance was, admiring the virtuosity of the performer, getting new ideas inspired by the whole work or getting a comprehensive experience. How this experience is conveyed to them is seldom the spectator's greatest concern. Research into the subject could be interesting for makers, however. As magicians try to manipulate the spectator and their minds, taking a deeper look into kinesthetic empathy could be particularly interesting for them, especially if it can help to affect the quality of the bodily experience of their audience.

tuntui onnistuneen Stellato *L'Autrellaan*, jonka liikkeellinen ajatus välittyi selkeimmin näyttämöltä katsomoon asti. Itse koin esityksen hahmon fyysisen tasapainottelun, oleilun ja uteliaisuuden välittyvän myös kehollisesti, niin että katsomiskokemus vahvistui kinesteettisen empatian kautta.

Suureksi kysymykseksi jää kuitenkin se, missä määrin kinesteettistä empatiaa voi tietoisesti hyödyntää katsojakokemuksen synnyttämisessä. Toteutuuko haluttu vaikutus suunnittelemalla ja ohjaamalla katsojan kinesteettistä kokemusta, vai onko tuo kokemus niin henkilökohtainen, että vaikka lihasmuisti tunnistaisikin tehdyt liikkeet, niistä syntyvät assosiaatiot ovat kuitenkin erilaisia? Missä määrin jaamme kinesteettisiä muistoja? Onko esiintyjän liikkeillä mahdollista ohjata katsojan kokemusta samassa määrin, kuin vaikka esityksen musiikkivalinnoilla, jotka tunnetusti vaikuttavat vastaanottajan tunnekokemukseen vahvasti?

Kinesteettinen empatia on ilmiönä tosi, mutta katsojan odotuksissa sillä ei liene kovin suurta painoarvoa. Katsojalle tärkeämpää on kokea jotain, oli se sitten hämmästyttä, esiintyjän virtuositeetin ihailua, ajatuksia herättävän kokonaisuuden katsomista tai kokonaisvaltaisen taide-elämyksen kokemista. Miten tämä kokemus hänelle välitetään, ei liene useimman katsojan suurin murhe. Tekijöille asian tutkiminen voi kuitenkin olla kiinnostavaa. Eryteisesti katsojaa ja hänen mieltään manipuloiville taikureille kinesteettisen empatian tutkiminen voisi olla kiinnostavaa, mikäli sen avulla voidaan vaikuttaa myös katsojalle syntyvään kehollisen kokemuksen laatuun.

# In Between Child's Play, Visual Arts and Pure Magic

LIV LAVEYNE

## A man and his closet: Claudio Stellato and *L'autre* (The Other)

The man is alone. He struggles his way out of a closet, climbs into an even smaller one. But the items of furniture, and even the carpet, seem to live their own lives. Who, here, is the other? *L'autre*, by Claudio Stellato, is a confounding mixture of circus, dance, (object) theatre and visual art with a touch of illusion. Think out of the box, figuratively as well as literally!

Claudio Stellato, an Italian performer living in Ghent and Brussels, worked as a professional dancer with the choreographer and director Karine Ponties, among other artists, before embarking on the creation of his piece *L'autre*. But when he began to make his own work he decided to change course. "The difficulty I have with contemporary dance is: it's so serious! I want to blend the best of circus, acrobatics, tragicomic clowning and magic with the artistry of dance." *L'autre* is programmed as a circus, a theatre, and as a dance performance. It cannot be sorted into one category, but belongs to them all.

For three years (though the project was conceived even before that), Stellato has been developing this performance. Over this time he has experimented, polished, reconsidered, refined. He hasn't needed all this time to plot a story, but has been engaged instead in acquiring skills, and particularly in finding ways for the human body to act in claustrophobic space. Stellato is intrigued by it: he performed in lavatories, elevators, cubicles – many different limited, narrow spaces – before arriving at the ultimate confinement: a closet. The idea grew from one specific situation. While he was resident at Dommelhof (Neerpelt) in 2009, the doors to his studio were unexpectedly closed over the weekend, so he improvised at

# Tussen kinderspel, beeldende kunst en pure magie

LIV LAVEYNE

## Een man en zijn kast: Claudio Stellato en 'l'autre'

Hij is alleen. Worstelt zich uit een kast. Klimt in een nog kleinere kast. Maar de meubels, ja zelfs het tapijt, lijken ook een eigen leven te leiden. Wie is de ander? 'L'autre' van Claudio Stellato is een bevreemdende mix van circus, dans, (objecten) theater, beeldende kunst en een vleugje illusionisme. Denk out of the box, figuurlijk maar ook letterlijk!

Claudio Stellato, Italiaan maar woonachtig in Gent en Brussel, was voor hij met dit project begon als professioneel performer danser aan de slag bij o.a. Karine Ponties. Maar hij besloot een andere richting uit te gaan. "Het probleem dat ik heb met hedendaagse dans is: het is allemaal zo serieus! Ik wil het beste van circus, de acrobatie, de tragikomische clown, de goochelaar vermengen met de artistieke van dans." 'l'autre' wordt zowel geprogrammeerd als circus-, theater- als dansvoorstelling. Het hoort in geen enkel kastje thuis en tegelijk overal.

Ruim drie jaar lang (de aanzet gebeurde zelfs al veel eerder) werkte Stellato aan deze voorstelling. Hij probeerde, schaafde, herdacht, verfijnde. Stellato wil geen verhaal vertellen, geen dingen zeggen, het gaat hem om het ontwikkelen van technieken: de claustrofobische ruimte en hoe daarin te ageren als menselijk lichaam. Het intrigeert hem: hij deed verschillende performances in toiletten, liften, kleedkamers... allerlei begrensde nauwe ruimtes alvorens bij de ultieme begrenzing, een kast, uit te komen. De omstandigheden noopten hem tot dit idee. Toen tijdens een residentie in productiecentrum Dommelhof in Neerpelt de deuren van zijn repetitieruimte tijdens een weekend onverwacht op slot bleken, begon hij te improviseren door in het kleine nachttafeltje bij



home instead and ended up climbing into his small bedside table. This inspired him to develop *L'autre*.

Creating the piece, Stellato videoed his try-outs and then watched them back after. "Things always look worse on video, so if the recording was all right I knew the live performance would be really good!" He gathered a 'council' of about thirty critics, dramaturgs, directors, choreographers and programmers to help evaluate his work, and this resulted in a performance that harmonises skills and technique, movement and images, dance, theatre, circus, magic and visual arts in an intriguing way. Stellato's is a very intense, lengthy and meticulous process – a working method we would recommend to many other artists. Still, Stellato is aware of the limits of this process: "I don't think I can make more than four performances like this in my life."

### Child's play

In *L'autre*, a red carpet unfolds itself. A closet shudders. This is not your ordinary living room decoration. A man, Claudio, tussles with the closet, lifting it onto his back and balancing it on his neck. He defies the laws of gravity. The physical body folds itself against the lifeless object. They fight each other, dissolve, unite and part again. He is like a curious child thoroughly investigating, toppling and turning every object. Stellato is the playful child, the 'homo ludens' as described by cultural sociologist and historian Johan Huizinga, who asserted that play is an essential condition for creating culture. Or as the digital artist and game designer Stephen Linhart would have it: 'People say one has to choose between playing or living a real life. I believe it is very dangerous to claim that there is a division between the two.' Stellato fully shares this view, and intends to present *L'autre* as a performance for children in the future.

Childlike, naïve, but never lacking commitment, Stellato imposes rules on himself in *L'autre*. He plays hide-and-seek in the closet. He takes a trip around the world without touching the ground. He is a child that is absorbed in its own fantasy, one that attributes animate qualities to objects – a doll made into a baby, a teddy bear seen as a

zijn bed te kruipen. Eenmaal dat idee zuiver ontwikkelde hij sinds 2009 'l'autre'.

Stellato registreerde al zijn try-outs en bekeek de beelden ("op video ziet iets er altijd minder uit dan live, dus als het daar al goed zat, wist ik: dit is echt goed!"). Hij verzamelde rond zich een 'raad van wijzen', een dertigtal personen, elk met hun eigen specificiteit (critici, dramaturgen, regisseurs, choreografen, programmatoren) om naar zijn toonmomenten te komen zien. Het resulteert in een voorstelling waarin ambacht en techniek, beweging en beeld, dans, theater, circus, magie en beeldende kunst op intrigerende wijze versmelten. Zo'n intens, langdurig en secuur werkproces: het is een manier van werken die we menig artiest zouden aanraden. Al is Stellato zich bewust van de limieten van zo'n werkproces: "Ik denk niet dat ik in mijn leven veel meer dan vier voorstellingen ga maken."

### Kinderspel

In 'l'autre' ontrolt een rood tapijt zichzelf. Een kast siddert. Dit is geen gewoon huiskamerinterieur dat we te zien krijgen op scène. Een man, Claudio, worstelt met de kast op zijn rug, laat die balanceren op zijn nek. Hij tart de wetten van de zwaartekracht. Het fysieke lichaam plooit zich naar de dode materie, het object. Ze vechten met elkaar, versmelten, worden één om zich weer te delen. Hij is als een nieuwsgierig kind die het object ten volle onderzoekt, kantelt en keert. Stellato als de speelvogel, de homo ludens zoals cultuursocioloog en historicus Huizinga het zag waarbij het spel een elementaire voorwaarde voor het voortbrengen van cultuur vormt. "Mensen zeggen dat je moet kiezen tussen spelen of het echte leven. Ik denk dat de claim dat er een scheiding tussen die twee is, erg gevaarlijk is," dixit webkunstenaar en game-ontwerper Stephen Linhart. Het is een leus die Stellato volledig ter harte neemt (hij wil overigens in de toekomst 'l'autre' ook graag als kindervoorstelling spelen).

Kinderlijk naïef, maar nooit vrijblijvend legt Stellato zichzelf in 'l'autre' spelregels op. Hij speelt verstoppertje in de kast. Speelt reisje-rond-de-wereld waarbij hij de grond niet mag raken. Hij is het kind dat opgaat in zijn eigen fantasie en aan het object levende eigenschappen toekent: zoals voor

comforter of big and small sorrows. The closet is his playfellow, his imaginary friend, the other. But not without any danger... the closet calls for him. Is it alive or bewitched? Are there dark forces involved? Is there a ghost or a spirit in the closet?

Visual arts L'autre does not only boast an amazing suggestive strength in its play, but also in its pictorial, successive images. Opening with the strange sight of the closet balanced on Stellato's neck, the piece unravels one scene after another. What movement follows naturally from the previous one? What is the perfect continuation? These were vital questions for Stellato during the creative process. It is the natural order of events that has shaped Stellato's performance rather than the other way round, as is the case in many creations.

It is a method of working that is similar to those used by Dadaistic and surrealist writers and visual artists: 'écriture automatique' (automatic writing), writing without predefined ideas or purpose in order to dip into one's subconscious. Or the technique of 'cadavre exquis' (exquisite corpse), where a series of artists contribute in turn to complete a single illustration or piece of writing. It is not surprising that children love to play this game: one starts a drawing, folds the paper and another continues without having seen the first part, and so on. This often results in the most unusual creations.

In L'autre as well, surrealistic images unfold on the stage, such as when the closet grows feet and hands and Stellato puts out his head, creeping like a snail with its shell on its back. Another image of a loose, whirling head in the closet could have been from a work by Magritte or from Dalí's 'raphaelesque head exploding'.

Those are not at all the only associations one can make with visual arts history. Stellato, with his long and tan face, resembles a Christ figure from an icon by Giotto or the early renaissance frescos by Cimabue or Fra Angelico. And L'autre recalls the renaissance by playing with perspective, too. The closet becomes a long wooden beam, seemingly hovering; Stellato sits on it, then walks along it like Christ resurrected from the grave. The

het kind de pop een baby is, een knuffelbeer de trooster van grote en kleine verdrietjes, zo is de kast zijn speelkameraad, zijn ingebeelde vriendje, de ander. Maar niet zonder gevaar... De kast roept hem. Het object wordt beziel of is het behekt? Zijn hier duistere krachten in het spel? Huist er een spook, zit er een geest in de kast?

### Beeldende kunst

'L'autre' boogt niet alleen op een ongelooflijk suggestieve kracht in spel, maar ook in picturaliteit van de opeenvolgende beelden. Van de kast op zijn nek ontrolt zich de ene na de andere scène. Welke beweging vloeit organisch voort uit de voorgaande? Wat is de perfecte continuering van hetgeen daarvoor? Het waren de cruciale vragen die Stellato zich stelde tijdens zijn werkproces. Het is het spontane verloop die bij Stellato de voorstelling gevormd heeft tot wat die is en niet omgekeerd zoals zo vaak het geval is bij een creatie.

Het is een werkwijze die erg gelijkloopt met de methodes die de dadaïstische en surrealistische schrijvers en beeldend kunstenaars hanteerden: de écriture automatique waarbij geschreven wordt zonder vooropgezet idee of doelmatigheid met de bedoeling het onderbewuste aan te spreken, of de techniek van de cadavre exquis waarbij meerdere kunstenaars elkaars afbeelding of schrijfsel verder aanvullen (niet toevallig ook een graag en vaak gespeeld kinderspel: je begint met een tekening op een papiertje, vouwt het papiertje om en een tweede persoon die niet weet wat je getekend hebt, tekent verder. Vandaar gaat het naar een derde, een vierde persoon... Het resulteert vaak in de meest vreemde creaties). Ook bij 'l'autre' ontpoppen zich surrealistische beelden voor onze ogen: de kast krijgt voetjes en handen, Stellato steekt zijn kop eruit, glijdt als een slak met een huisje op zijn rug. Het losse tollende hoofd in de kast had een werk van Magritte of Dalí ('raphaelesque head exploding') kunnen zijn.

En het zijn lang niet de enige associaties naar de beeldende kunstgeschiedenis die je maakt. Stellato met zijn gezicht, lang en getaand, heeft veel weg van een Christusfiguur zo weggelopen uit een icoon van Giotto of de vroeg-renaissancistische fresco's van Cimabue of





**Claudio Stellato – *L'autre*** © Martin Firket

accurate lighting embraces the dramatic baroque effect of *clair-obscur* – another term for which is 'tenebrum', from the Latin 'tenebrae', generally meaning darkness, as well as shadow or shade, a denotation remarkably fitting the concept of *L'autre*.

The red carpet lends the performance a theatrical aspect, like a red carpet welcome for an unknown personage. The lighting variations breathe the mystical aspect of Rothko's paintings like brushstrokes. This Russian-American painter dissociated himself from the figurative and symbolic by painting his 'multiforms', large canvases with intense ranges of colouring (often in red), which, in Rothko's own words, "gives the canvas its own vitality". In this case, it is the scene having its own spirit. Through lighting, the scene's tonalities and gradations are explored. The idea of Rothko's paintings as "surfaces that shine expansively in all directions as well as draw one's gaze inside", can also be read in relation to the scenography in *L'autre*. It converts the theatrical space into a mystical, almost religious place. Incidentally, Rothko himself was, while on a trip through Italy, was moved by the sensitivity, serenity and intensity of the light in Fra Angelico's frescos at the San Marco monastery in Firenze. It would inspire him later on to build his own Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas.

Spectators' reactions to Rothko's canvases vary from tears of intense spiritual experience to other

Fra Angelico. Maar '*l'autre*' omarmt verder de renaissance in een spel met perspectief. De kast wordt een lange balk die in het niets lijkt te zweven, Stellato zit erop, wandelt als een verrezen Christus uit zijn doods-kist opgestaan. Het secure lichtgebruik hanteert het dramatische barokke effect van *clair-obscur* (een andere term hiervoor is 'tenebrum', naar het Latijnse *tenebrae* dat zoveel betekent als duisternis, maar in tweede instantie ook schaduwen of schimmen, een betekenis die wonderwel aansluit bij het gegeven van '*l'autre*').

Het rode tapijt geeft het gebeuren iets theatraals, als een rode loper die wordt uitgerold voor een ongekende identiteit. De lichtveranderingen ademen als borstelstreken de mystiek van Rothko's schilderijen. Deze Russisch-Amerikaanse schilder kwam met zijn 'multiforms', metersgrote doeken met intense kleurschakeringen (vaak van rood), los van het figuratieve en het symbolische waarbij – om het met Rothko's woorden te zeggen – "het doek zelf zijn eigen levenskracht bezit". In het geval van '*l'autre*' is dat doek de ruimte die een eigen levensadem krijgt. Door het licht worden alle tonaliteiten, schakeringen in de ruimte verkent. Zoals Rothko's doeken "oppervlaktes zijn die zowel expansief naar buiten in alle richtingen stralen en tegelijk je blik aanzuigen" zo geldt dat voor de scenografie van '*l'autre*'. Het herschept de theatrale ruimte tot een mystieke, welhaast religieuze plek. (Rothko zelf werd tijdens een trip door Italië enorm gepakt door de sensitiviteit, sereniteit en concentratie van licht in de fresco's

extreme reactions, including the recently sentenced vandal's act perpetrated by Vladimir Umanets. It doesn't come to that in Stellato's performance, but one can balance between contemplation, fear and liberating laughter.

### Pure magic

The mystical. The inexplicable. It intrigues, makes someone curious as well as afraid. It is no coincidence that magic in all its aspects and expressions has received a new impetus over the last few years. Fascination for magic corresponds to a whole movement that, whether we want it to be or not, is also related to religion. As described by Gwen Aduh from Compagnie des Femmes à Barbe: "To me, magic is a continuation of religion. In the end, I am always amazed at people's credulity and eagerness for paranormal phenomena. It is the spectator's wish for it to be real that favours my spectacle." After atheism and fragmented postmodernism, the urge for unity recurs: between earthly nature and the supernatural, even the divine. Or between a wooden closet and 'the other'.

This renewed interest for magic shows itself in popular culture, with the revival of science fiction and fantasy in literature and cinema from *The Lord of the Rings* to *Twilight*. Some see Stellato's *L'autre* as a modern dance performance, others see the plot of a good, old-time horror movie (or a bewitched hotel room, as in *1408* starring John Cusack). Besides, Stellato's next performance will be "something with samurai swords". Maybe something in keeping with *House of Flying Daggers* or *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*?

Within performing arts, there is the movement of new magic, different from magic in film or visual arts. "When painting diverts the real in the physical space of the image, new magic plays with the real within the real," says Raphaël Navarro, who is one of the prominent voices within new magic with his *Compagnie 14:20*.

In new magic, the act is not the objective but a means to artistic creation. Stellato concurs: "I am not a magician, I use this as a medium to perform a contemporary act." The trick itself is not the most important part, nor is belief or disbelief. It is

van Fra Angelico in het klooster van San Marco in Firenze. Het zou hem aanzetten tot de bouw van een eigen Rothko-kapel in Houston, Texas).

De reacties van toeschouwers op Rothko's doeken variëren van tranen door een intense spirituele ervaring tot gans andere extreme reacties waarbij de recent veroordeelde vandenstreek van Vladimir Umanets een uiting was. Niet dat het bij Stellato zo'n vaart loopt, maar toch balanceer je ook bij 'l'autre' tussen contemplatie, angst en bevrijdende lach.

### Pure magie

Het mystieke. Het onverklaarbare. Het intrigeert, maakt nieuwsgierig, maar ook bang. Het is niet toevallig dat het magische in al zijn aspecten en uitingen de afgelopen jaren een nieuwe impuls heeft gekregen. De fascinatie voor het magische correleert met een ganse beweging die – of we dat nu willen of niet – ook samenhangt met religie. Of zoals Gwen Aduh van circusgezelschap Compagnie des Femmes à Barbe stelt: "Magie is voor mij een verlengstuk van religie. Uiteindelijk sta ik altijd versteld van de menselijke lichtgelovigheid en de gretigheid naar paranormale fenomenen. Het is de wens van de toeschouwer dat het écht is die mijn spektakels dient." Na het atheïsme en fragmentarische postmodernisme laat zich terug de drang naar eenheid gevoelen: van aardse natuur en het bovennatuurlijke, het goddelijke zo je wilt. Van de houten kast tot *l'autre*.

De hernieuwde interesse voor magie toont zich in de populaire cultuur met de heropleving van science fiction en fantasy in literatuur en films gaande van 'Lord of the Ring' tot 'Twilight'. Voor de één een moderne dansvoorstelling, heeft Stellato's 'l'autre' voor de ander het plot van een goede ouderwetse spookhuisfilm (of een behekste hotelkamer zoals '1408' met John Cusack). (Stellato's volgende voorstelling wordt overigens "iets met samoeraizwaarden". Misschien in de traditie van 'House of the flying daggers' of 'Crouching tiger, hidden dragon'?).

Binnen de performing arts is er de beweging van de magie nouvelle, die verschilt van de magie van de film of beeldende kunst. 'Als de schilderkunst het reële ombuigt in de ruimte van het beeld, dan



a way of telling his artistic story, of supporting his creation. It is not about oohs and aahs from the audience, but about creating an atmosphere that inspires imagination.

The other L'autre excels at pure and almost naïve, childlike simplicity. With no more than two closets and his body, Stellato builds an intriguing performance that exceeds the range of a single discipline – and even the limits of the intelligible. Suddenly, there is a bump in the carpet. Is this L'autre, the other? Or is it our imagination, or a trick? Does Stellato want to tell us something else? Because those who want to can read into L'autre a social criticism of loneliness and isolation, which can drive people mad until they start talking to a closet... or the closet starts talking to them.

The inner imbalance that makes this man, isolated in his room, struggle through its contents, takes possession of the audience as well. He levitates, is frenetically overpowered and flung, smashed from the darkness to the ground, is lifted up and lands on the carpet again. Both madly funny and with fear persistently lurking around the corner. And right at the moment we believe we have seen through to the machinery behind the illusion, revealing neon lamps flash on. The whole stage is bathed in the merciless light. "Nothing in my pocket, nothing up my sleeve," is what Stellato seems to say. Until he vanishes into thin air again. And then, when we think we've seen it all, there is the exceptional ending. It would be a shame to spill the beans, so instead we promise: it is memorable!

buigt de magie nouvelle het reële om in het reële," aldus Raphaël Navarro, die met zijn Compagnie 14:20 een van de toonaangevende stemmen binnen de magie nouvelle is.

Bij de magie nouvelle is de truc niet het doel is maar het middel tot artistieke creatie. Dat benadrukt ook Stellato: "Ik ben geen goochelaar, ik gebruik dit als middel om iets op scène te brengen dat hedendaags is." Het is hem niet om de truc te doen, noch het geloof of ongeloof erin, de truc is puur een middel om zijn artistieke verhaal mee te vertellen, zijn creatie te ondersteunen. Het gaat hem niet om de oohs en aahs in het publiek, maar om een sfeer te creëren en alzo de verbeelding van het publiek te triggeren.

### De ander

'L'autre' blinkt uit in pure welhaast naïef kinderlijke eenvoud. Maar met twee kastjes en een lichaam maakt Stellato een intrigerende voorstelling die de grenzen van disciplines en het bevattelijke overstijgt. Een plotse bubbel in het tapijt verschijnt. Is dit L'autre, de ander? Of is het allemaal maar inbeelding, een truc? Of wil Stellato meer vertellen? Want wie dat wil, leest in 'L'autre' ook een sociale kritiek op eenzaamheid en isolement waarin vele mensen zich bevinden en langzaam gek worden en tegen kasten gaan spreken ... of de kast tegen hen.

De innerlijke gekte waarmee deze man, geïsoleerd in zijn kamer, op scène worstelt, maakt zich ook van ons meester. Hij leviteert boven de grond, wordt als een bezetene overmant wanneer hij vanuit de donkerte de vloer wordt opgesmeten, gesmakt, terug omhooggetild en terug op het tapijt belandt. Tegelijk waanzinnig grappig, loert steeds die angst om de hoek. Net wanneer je meent het allemaal wel door te hebben, de ganse machinerie die achter dit waanbeeld schuilt, floepen ontluisterende tl-lampen aan. De ganse scène baadt in het ongenadige licht. "Niks in de handen, niks in de mouwen," lijkt Stellato te willen zeggen. Tot hij even plots weer verdwijnt in het niets. En net wanneer je denkt alles gezien te hebben is er het bijzondere slot. Verklappen zou zonde zijn, maar we beloven: het is onvergetelijk!

# The show offstage

MIQUEL VALLS

*How do artists articulate their discourse offstage? Are their thoughts, concerns and creative impulses reflected in the performance piece? Does the way that artists verbalise their work enrich the piece or does it strip it of magic and mystery? These and other questions came up in interviews with three performing artists – Claudio Stellato (Italy), Kalle Hakkarainen (Finland) and Raphaël Navarro (France) – conducted as part of the 8th Festival novog cirkusa in Zagreb.*

After the interviews we held in Zagreb, my fellow circus critics and cultural journalists participating in the Unpack the Arts residency shared a fairly widespread idea: the desire to see shows again after having spoken with the artists. These types of interviews often have a bit of this: they make you want to learn more about the show, to examine some details that might have gone over your head. Listening to the artists' thoughts on their work is stimulating. Furthermore, something else arises in these interviews that is shared by journalists and readers alike: curiosity. We ask why we are curious and why we want to know what lies behind the creative processes. The more we know about this, the more we enjoy it, which shows that knowledge is not separate from excitement.

## Raphaël Navarro and the new magic

The programme for the 8th Festival novog cirkusa has placed special attention on new magic (*magie nouvelle*), a movement initiated by Raphaël Navarro and Clément Debailleul that aims to renew the artistic discipline. The interview we held with Raphaël Navarro was a bit cryptic. The fact that Navarro speaks in halting English may have contributed to this notion. In any case, if we focus on the definition that the artist gives to the movement, we see that it is hard to understand at first: "the new magic is an art whose language is

# L'espectacle fora de l'escenari

MIQUEL VALLS

*Com articulen els artistes el seu discurs fora de l'escenari? Les seves reflexions, neguits i impulsos creatius, es veuen reflectits a la peça escènica? La verbalització que fa l'artista sobre el seu treball, enriqueix la peça o la despulla de la màgia i el misteri? Aquestes i altres qüestions sorgeixen a partir de les entrevistes a tres creadors escènics, Claudio Stellato (Itàlia), Kalle Hakkarainen (Finlàndia) i Raphaël Navarro (França), realitzades en el marc del 8è Festival Novog Cirkusa de Zagreb.*

Arran de les entrevistes que vàrem fer a Zagreb, hi havia una idea bastant estesa entre els companys crítics de circ i periodistes culturals de la residència: les ganes de veure els espectacles una segona vegada després d'haver parlat amb els artistes. Sovint aquest tipus d'entrevistes ja ho tenen això, fan venir ganes de saber més coses sobre l'espectacle, de fixar-se amb alguns detalls que potser se'ns havien passat per alt. Escoltar les reflexions del creador sobre la seva obra és estimulant. Per altra banda, en el fet de l'entrevista hi ha una altra cosa que és compartida entre els mateixos que la fan (els periodistes) i els lectors (el públic): la curiositat. Preguntem perquè som curiosos i perquè ens agrada saber què hi ha darrera els processos creatius. Com més en sabem, més en gaudim, la qual cosa demostra que el coneixement no està renyit amb l'emoció.

## Raphaël Navarro i la nova màgia

La programació de la 8a edició del Festival Novog Cirkusa ha prestat especial atenció a la nova màgia (*magie nouvelle*), un moviment iniciat per Raphaël Navarro i Clément Debailleul que proposa la renovació d'aquesta disciplina artística. L'entrevista que vàrem fer a Raphaël Navarro va ser un pèl encriptada. Probablement, el fet que Navarro s'expressés en un anglès poc fluid, va aguditzar aquesta sensació. De totes maneres, si ens fixem en la definició que dona el



diversion of the real within the real" (*La magie nouvelle c'est un art dont le langage est le détournement du réel dans le réel*). In other words, the images do not correspond to any illusion, but constitute a new order of reality by themselves. Virtuality is no longer interesting. It is symptomatic that his explanations are not at all clear, since the definition of the movement hardly is either.

Raphaël Navarro and Clément Debailleul formed the company 14:20 in 2000 and have worked closely with Valentine Losseau from the start, who was also present in Zagreb. Losseau is an ethnologist, whilst the other two are magicians. This makes for a surprising combination that brings extraordinary richness. Losseau has studied traditional magic techniques in India in depth, especially among street magicians. Her contribution to writing the shows is essential. In this company, research and artistic creation co-exist, and for good or for ill that clearly influences its discourse, full of technical terms and conceptual complexity.

I had never heard of the new magic until I arrived in Zagreb. I was unaware of the movement, its founders and its key representative companies. Navarro and Losseau talked about animism, levitation, disappearance, sleeping, awakening, etcetera. I had no genre in mind, but whilst I listened to them I saw images of shows by the Peeping Tom dance company (Brussels). Artists are increasingly working with different artistic languages and the idea of putting them in boxes (circus, contemporary dance, visual theatre, etcetera) no longer has meaning. The contemporary dance-based worlds that this Belgian company creates share elements that can be as magical as any *magie nouvelle* company.

### **Claudio Stellato, the craftsman**

The most direct impression you get after speaking with Claudio Stellato for a while is the realisation that sometimes stereotypes are true. Stellato is spontaneous, extroverted and has a sense of humour; he speaks loudly and gesticulates a lot... he is the very essence of an Italian. He even showed up for the interview with an *espresso* in

mateix artista al moviment, veurem que costa d'entendre a la primera: "la nova màgia és l'art, el llenguatge del qual, és la desviació del real dins del real" (*La magie nouvelle c'est un art dont le langage est le détournement du réel dans le réel*). És a dir, les imatges no corresponen a cap il·lusió, sinó que elles mateixes constitueixen un nou ordre de la realitat. La virtualitat deixa de tenir interès. No deixa de ser simptomàtic que les seves explicacions no fossin del tot clares, ja que tampoc ho és gaire la definició del moviment.

Raphaël Navarro i Clément Debailleul van formar la companyia 14:20 l'any 2000 i des del principi han treballat estretament amb Valentine Losseau, que també estava present a Zagreb. Losseau és etnòloga, mentre que ells dos són mags. La combinació és sorprenent i els aporta una riquesa extraordinària. Losseau ha estudiat a fons les tècniques de la màgia tradicional a l'Índia, concretament els mags de carrer. La seva aportació a l'escriptura dels espectacles és fonamental. En aquesta companyia la recerca i la creació artística conviuen perfectament, i és evident que això contamina, per bé o per mal, el seu discurs, ple de tecnicismes i complexitat conceptual.

No havia sentit mai a parlar de la nova màgia fins que vaig arribar a Zagreb. Desconeixia el moviment, els seus fundadors i les companyies més representatives. Navarro i Losseau parlaven d'animisme, levitació, desaparició, somni, revetlla... No tenia present cap espectacle del gènere, però mentre els escoltava em venien imatges d'espectacles de la companyia de dansa Peeping Tom (Brussel·les). Cada cop més, els artistes treballen amb diferents llenguatges artístics i la idea d'encaixonar-los (circ, dansa contemporània, teatre visual, etc.) deixa de tenir sentit. Els universos que, per exemple, crea aquesta companyia belga sobre la base de la dansa contemporània, comparteixen elements que poden ser tant màgics com qualsevol companyia pròpia de la *magie nouvelle*.

### **Claudio Stellato, l'artesà.**

La impressió més directa després de conversar una estona amb Claudio Stellato és la de constatar que a vegades els tòpics són veritat.

his hand! Certainly, in his show (*L'Autre*) there is a clear correlation between some aspects of his personality and the final result. Humour is one example of this. Stellato does not want to marginalise this essential part of the circus and is critical of the fact that certain artistic spheres think the darker and more serious a work is, the better. In this sense, he says that the atmosphere at circus festivals is more pleasant and enjoyable than at contemporary dance festivals or shows, where it seems that seriousness is the norm.

Moreover, if we consider the working methodology that Stellato describes, we realise that nothing is left to chance and everything is the result of deep and measured investigation. It took three long years to create *L'Autre*. Like a craftsman, Stellato created the piece bit by bit. The process was so slow because the piece's choreography was developed at the same time that the movements were set chronologically, and it can take months to set a movement. It is interesting to see here that the artist expresses his ideas in a pleasant and very funny way, whilst his work is rigorous and extremely precise. Listening to him speak, one might imagine that he likes to play and improvise on the stage, but in reality everything is thought out and calculated to the last millimetre.

A piece can be made in a thousand and one different ways. Stellato works in solitude, and for two reasons. The first is practical, since to make *L'Autre* he couldn't pay anyone else to work with him on such a long process. The piece was made with no budget and everything was self-made. Second, he says he could not have done it any other way. How could he work with someone on something when he didn't know what it would become and still could not explain it? Stellato's position here is honest and sincere: he doesn't share the work with anyone until he has the framework thought out.

One of the most mysterious and fascinating things about artistic creation is when we ask artists why they chose the theme of their work. Artists don't often have a clear answer to this question. For Stellato, the question was why the 'other'? Why this insistence on the other? It is

Stellato és espontani, extravertit, té sentit de l'humor, parla alt, gesticula molt... essència italiana. Si fins i tot es presenta a l'entrevista amb un *expresso* a la mà! Certament, al seu espectacle (*L'autre*), hi ha una correlació evident d'alguns aspectes de la seva personalitat amb el resultat final de la peça. L'humor n'és un exemple. Stellato no vol marginar aquesta part fonamental del circ i es mostra crític amb el fet que, en determinats ambients artístics, es consideri que les obres, com més serioses i fosques, millor. En aquest sentit, afirma que en els festivals de circ es respira un ambient més amè i agradable que no pas en els festivals o mostres de dansa contemporània, on sembla que la seriositat és la norma.

Tanmateix, si observem la metodologia de treball que el mateix Stellato descriu, ens adonem que no hi ha res a l'atzar, que tot és fruit d'una investigació profunda i mesurada. El procés de creació de *L'autre* es va allargar durant tres anys. Com un artesà, Stellato, va anar creant la peça molt a poc a poc. El procés és molt lent perquè la coreografia de la peça avança a mesura que es van fixant els moviments d'una forma cronològica, i un moviment pot trigar mesos a fixar-se. És interessant veure que en aquest cas, l'artista expressa les idees d'una forma molt amena i divertida, però en canvi el seu treball és rigorós i extremadament precís. Sentint-lo a parlar, un podria pensar que li agrada jugar i improvisar a l'escenari, però en realitat tot està pensat i calculat al mil·límetre.

Els processos de creació d'una peça poden ser de mil i una maneres diferents. Stellato ho fa des de la solitud, per dues raons. La primera per una qüestió material, ja que per fer *L'autre* no podia pagar cap altra persona que l'acompanyés en un procés tan llarg. La peça es va fer sense diners i tot és autoconstruït. I en segon lloc, perquè afirma no poder-ho fer d'una altra manera. Com estar acompanyat en el moment de fer una cosa que un mateix no sap què serà i que encara no pot explicar? En aquest sentit, la posició d'Stellato és honrada i sincera: no comparteix el treball amb ningú fins que no té l'esquelet de l'obra pensat.



very interesting that a person who has been immersed in a creative process for three years cannot adequately explain where the driving force comes from that has pushed him so far. It took Stellato a few seconds to respond to this question. Until then all his answers had been quick and fluid, but he suddenly blurted out: "I don't know. It's as if one day you're walking around Zagreb and you suddenly say: 'I want six birds'. That's it, I've got it. And from then on, you hold to this idea and you don't stop until you achieve it." Claudio Stellato has his own perception of the show but says he doesn't want to share it.

### **Kalle Hakkarainen, visual theatre, technology and magic**

Whilst we interviewed Kalle Hakkarainen, we saw that he wanted to explain many things. He spoke fluidly, in an ordered and convincing way. The piece we saw could be summarised in a few words like new technologies, careful light design, electronic music, art film (Lynch, Cronenberg) and solitude. It captured the essential Nordic image. So here we are with stereotypes again? Hakkarainen recognises that he likes that there is a certain ambiguity in his work: is it comical? Is it serious? His discourse also conveys this duality, but above all he is a person who conveys safety, knowledge and love for his craft.

One of the great discussions that magic has had and continues to have as an artistic discipline centres on the combination of tricks and dramaturgy. Hakkarainen gave a very good explanation of how this question is also one of his main concerns as an artist, which he covers and practices in each of his shows. This artist uses magic tricks because he thinks they are the best resource he has to accompany the story, and because he is convinced that magic is an art that can achieve a level of excitement and spectacularity that is hard for other artistic disciplines to match. Whilst he was preparing the show, Hakkarainen read a story about a car accident in the newspaper. The impact was so strong, the story said, that even the coins that were in the crash victim's jeans pocket shot out through the windshield. The idea of a car accident and of the massive confusion it creates in its

Una de les coses enigmàtiques i fascinants de la creació és quan preguntem als artistes sobre el per què del tema de l'obra. En molts casos, els artistes no tenen una resposta clara sobre aquesta qüestió. En el cas d'Stellato, per què "l'altre"? Per què aquesta obstinació per allò altre? És molt curiós com una persona que ha estat 3 anys immersa en un procés creatiu no sap explicar ben bé d'on li ve la força motriu que l'ha empès fins aquí. Stellato va trigar uns quants segons a respondre aquesta pregunta. Fins llavors, tot havien estat respostes ràpides i àgils, i de cop i volta va etzibar: "No ho sé. És com si un dia vas caminant per Zagreb i de sobte dius: Vull sis ocells. És això, ja ho tinc. I a partir d'aquí, t'agafes en aquesta idea i no pares fins que ho aconseguixes." Claudio Stellato té la seva pròpia percepció de l'espectacle però afirma no voler-la compartir.

### **Kalle Hakkarainen, teatre visual, tecnologia i màgia**

Mentre entrevistàvem a Kalle Hakkarainen es notava que tenia ganes d'explicar moltes coses. El seu discurs és elegant, fluid, convincent i ordenat. La peça que vàrem veure es podria resumir amb paraules com, noves tecnologies, disseny acurat de llums, música electrònica, cinema d'autor (Lynch, Cronenberg), solitud... És la viva imatge d'allò nòrdic. Altre cop els tòpics? Hakkarainen reconeix que li agrada que hi hagi una certa ambigüitat en la seva obra, és còmica? és seriosa? El seu discurs també transmet aquesta dualitat, però sobretot és una persona que transmet seguretat, coneixement i estima per l'ofici.

Un dels grans debats que ha tingut i té la màgia com a disciplina artística és la combinació dels trucs amb la dramaturgia. Hakkarainen va explicar molt bé com aquesta qüestió és també una de les grans preocupacions que té com a creador i que aborda i practica en cada un dels seus espectacles. Aquest artista utilitza els trucs de màgia perquè creu que és el millor dels recursos dels quals disposa per acompanyar la història, i perquè està convençut que la màgia és l'únic art que pot aconseguir una emoció i una espectacularitat, que difícilment poden assolir altres disciplines artístiques. Mentre preparava

victims is very much part of the piece we saw (*Nopeussokeus*). Accounts of serious car accidents share the fact that the victims are so overwhelmed in the moments after the impact that they adopt a peaceful air. Hakkarainen speaks about all that in his show and uses magic because, according to him, it is the best way to express these kinds of emotions. Here, magic is in the service of the story and the work as a whole.

Hakkarainen and Stellato share quite a few things in common. Perhaps the most prominent is the fact that neither considers themselves storytellers, meaning that they basically concentrate all their energy in their shows on creating a certain atmosphere and aesthetic. The Finn said that they don't aim to give any information from the stage, but simply to let the audience think for the time that the show lasts. The story that all three artists develop is simple and uses few stage elements. Stellato's work is only accompanied by a couple of closets onstage; in the fragment of Navarro's work there is a single wooden pole; and in Hakkarainen's piece there is only a screen, cables and a chair. Simplicity is a virtue in all three. There is no room for improvisation, as everything is set to the millimetre. Hakkarainen and Stellato explained the characteristics of their work with a similar language: level and direct. Navarro did so with technical terminology and concepts more properly linked to the humanities. The silences and mysterious way he speaks is also transmitted to the stage.

Throughout the three interviews, the word "specific" came out a few times. Not one of the interviewed artists wants to feel part of any school or of any aesthetic trend. Their contribution is personal, genuine and specific. This was especially evident in Raphaël Navarro's case. The concept of originality doesn't concern them either: what does it mean to do something new today? What they are mostly concerned about is that the show is interesting. In any case, the research takes quite a long time, which means they only work with a few people because to do otherwise would cost too much money. Are the artists the people onstage or do they construct a character? Generally, the idea of "presenting"

l'espectacle, Hakkarainen va llegir al diari una crònica d'un accident de cotxe. L'impacte va ser tan fort, deia la notícia, que fins i tot les monedes que duia l'accidentada a la butxaca dels texans van sortir disparades per la finestra. La idea de l'accident de cotxe, i l'enorme desconcert que provoca entre les víctimes, està molt present a la peça que vàrem veure (*Speed Blindness*). Els relats d'accidents de cotxe greus coincideixen a dir que, les persones estan tan sobrepassades en els moments posteriors de l'impacte, que adopten una posició tranquil·la. Hakkarainen parla de tot això en el seu espectacle i utilitza la màgia perquè li és útil i perquè, segons ell, és la millor manera per expressar aquest tipus d'emocions. La màgia al servei de la història i del conjunt de l'obra.

Hakkarainen i Stellato comparteixen força trets en comú. Potser el més destacat és que cap dels dos es considera un *storyteller*, això vol dir que en els seus espectacles, concentren tota la seva energia bàsicament en crear un atmosfera i una estètica determinada. El finlandès assegura que no pretén donar cap informació des de l'escena, sinó simplement deixar pensar el públic durant l'estona que dura l'espectacle. La història que desenvolupen tots tres artistes és simple i utilitzen molt pocs elements escènics. A Stellato només l'acompanyen un parell d'armaris a escena; en el fragment de la peça de Navarro hi ha una única vara de fusta; i a la peça de Hakkarainen tans sols hi ha una pantalla, cables i una cadira. La simplicitat és un valor pels tres. No hi ha espai per a la improvisació, tot està fixat al mil·límetre. Hakkarainen i Stellato expliquen les característiques del seu treball amb un llenguatge semblant: planer i directe. Navarro ho fa des de la terminologia tècnica i amb conceptes més relacionats amb les ciències humanes. El caràcter enigmàtic i els silencis mentre parla també es transmeten a l'escena.

Al llarg de les tres entrevistes, la paraula "específic" va sortir unes quantes vegades. Cap dels artistes entrevistats vol sentir-se part de cap escola, de cap tendència estètica. La seva aportació és personal, genuïna, específica. En el cas de Raphaël Navarro això es feia especialment evident. El concepte d'originalitat tampoc els



prevails over the idea of “representing”. The relation among the objects that surround the stage is paramount. For them, that is more important than constructing a character.

In general, the three artists’ verbal discourse is reflected in the staged pieces. What drives them to create can be felt from the stage. This is one of the most pleasant experiences that audiences can have, as it recognises the artist’s work and intent. Artists can lose their auras offstage – they’re human beings! But that does not strip their work of its magic. On the contrary, it leads to new questions.

### **How do we ask artists questions?**

Finally, I would like to give thought to the opposite perspective to what we’ve seen so far. How do journalists ask artists questions? How do we express an opinion of a show to them? How do we build a useful and honest dialogue? I recently had the chance to attend a workshop on the critical response process as part of the Baboró Festival (Galway, Ireland), dedicated to child audiences up to six years of age. The workshop was aimed at performing arts professionals (venue heads, programmers, producers, theatre critics) and dealt with studying these issues. The workshop organiser laid out a method based on using questions. According to his approach, expressing an opinion ought to be the final step. Before that would come the view of the show (1), identification of the positive elements of the work (2), formulation of a neutral question (3) and finally, formulation of an opinion (4). The attendees at Galway had a lot of problems getting familiar with this process, especially when formulating a neutral question, meaning a question free of personal prejudice or judgement. In Zagreb however, with its residency for cultural journalists, this methodology was applied automatically. Furthermore, it was demonstrated that formulating a neutral question isn’t a simple matter. We are used to expressing an opinion on something right away, without exploring the subject any further. On the other hand, the Galway workshop offered interesting tools for avoiding defensive strategies and arguments, which are sometimes too common in the artistic community and usually not very productive. In

preocupa, què vol dir fer quelcom nou avui? Els preocupa bàsicament que l’espectacle resulti interessant. En tots els casos, els processos d’investigació són força llargs, la qual cosa comporta que es treballi amb poca gent, d’una altra manera seria inviable econòmicament parlant. Els artistes són ells a l’escenari o construeixen un personatge? En general predomina la idea de “presentar” més que “representar”. La relació amb els objectes que es rodegen a l’escenari és cabdal. Per a ells, és més important això últim, que no pas la construcció d’un personatge.

En general, el discurs verbal dels tres artistes es veu reflectit a la peça escènica. Allò que els empeny a crear es palpa a l’escenari. Aquesta és una de les sensacions més agradables que un té com a espectador, ja que reconeix la feina de l’artista i la seva intencionalitat. Els artistes poden perdre la seva aura fora de l’escenari, són humans! Però això no despulla l’obra de la seva màgia, al contrari, genera nous interrogants.

### **Com preguntar a l’artista?**

Per acabar, voldria exposar una reflexió en el sentit invers del que hem vist fins ara. Com els periodistes interroguen als artistes? Com comunicar-los una opinió sobre un espectacle? Com construir un diàleg útil i honest? Recentment he tingut la oportunitat d’assistir a un taller sobre resposta crítica en el marc del festival Baboró (Galway, Irlanda) dedicat a públics de 0-6 anys. El taller anava adreçat a professionals de les arts escèniques (responsables de sales, programadors, productors, crítics teatrals) i tractava d’analitzar aquestes qüestions. El conductor del taller va exposar un mètode basat en l’ús de la pregunta. En la seva proposta, l’expressió d’una opinió hauria de ser l’últim pas. Abans hi hauria el visionat de l’espectacle (I), la identificació dels elements positius de l’obra (II), la formulació d’una pregunta neutra (III), i finalment, la formulació d’una opinió (IV). Entre els presents a Galway hi va haver grans dificultats per familiaritzar-se amb aquest procés, sobretot alhora de formular una pregunta neutra, és a dir, una pregunta lliure de judicis o valoracions personals. A Zagreb en canvi, al tractar-se d’una residència de periodistes

fact, during Raphaël Navarro's interview, he seemed to put up a defensive wall at certain times. The premise of honesty must govern this process between artists and professionals and the experience in Zagreb was very fruitful in this regard.

As Ramon Simó, the artistic director of the Grec Festival of Barcelona, reminded the audience when presenting last year's festival, a show is an act of communication. Historically, artists haven't been very concerned whether or not their messages were understood by the public. All too often they created shows for themselves, without thinking about how they might be received. If a show cannot reach an audience, that means that something isn't working. Maybe it isn't necessary to know all the reasons why, as even the artists themselves don't know, and this is one of the great lessons we learned during the residency. But it is essential to establish a dialogue between the audience and the stage. The interviews in Zagreb have been useful for continuing to build these crucial bridges between artists and audiences, both onstage and offstage.

culturals, lògicament aquesta metodologia s'aplicava de forma automàtica. Tanmateix, es va demostrar que la formulació d'una pregunta neutra tampoc era una cosa senzilla. Estem molt acostumats a expressar una opinió de bones a primeres, sense abonar abans el terreny. Per altra banda, el taller de Galway ofería eines interessants per evitar estratègies i argumentacions a la defensiva, sovint massa esteses entre la comunitat artística i que acostumen a ser poc constructives. De fet, durant l'entrevista a Raphaël Navarro, el mateix artista semblava que construïa un mur defensiu en determinats moments. La premissa de l'honestedat ha de regir aquest procés entre artistes i professionals i l'experiència de Zagreb va ser molt fructífera en aquest aspecte.

Ramon Simó, el director artístic del Festival Grec de Barcelona, ho recordava a la presentació de la passada edició del festival entre un grup d'espectadors: un espectacle és un acte comunicatiu. Històricament, els artistes no s'han preocupat gaire que els seus missatges fossin compresos entre el públic. Massa vegades han creat espectacles per ells mateixos, sense pensar en la recepció. Si un espectacle no arriba a l'espectador, és que alguna cosa no està funcionant. Potser no cal conèixer tots els perquè, ni els mateixos artistes ho saben, i aquesta és una de les gran lliçons que ens ha deixat la residència. Però és fonamental que s'estableixi un diàleg entre la platea i l'escenari. Les entrevistes de Zagreb han servit per continuar teixint aquests ponts tan necessaris entre creadors i públics, dins i fora de l'escenari.



# The beginning of the end

PAULINE DE LA BOULAYE

*Will Zagreb's Festival novog cirkusa survive into 2013? We only ask because this autumn the eighth edition will close with an evening marking the winter solstice: 21 December 2012. As usual, it will be the longest night of the year. But this time, according to the Mayan calendar and as the programme reminds us, it will also be the end of the world.*

I already regret not being able to attend this send-off party for the festival and for the planet Earth: "While our absolute stock of alcoholic and soft drinks are in charge of the Big Flood (this is an all-you-can drink party considering we do not wish to carry on remainders to the other world), some of the most fruitful performers of the circus and sideshow scene, in charge of the Big Bang, decided to spend their last evening on Earth exactly at *The Last Supper*. Not suitable for underaged and those of sensitive moral opinions and stomachs."<sup>1</sup>

Let's do it! One last night, one last drink, one last circus round!

Do we detect, in the Croatians, something of a taste for melodrama? The announcement of this imminent catastrophe has not seemed to cause much worry in this country of the Balkans. A suspicion of irony and derision belies such a reaction to this tragic deadline, a reaction that is most certainly rooted in the country's bloody and chaotic history.

Then again, it is also a speciality of the circus to regularly announce its inevitable disappearance, with that blend of humour and sadness that one only finds in this special art.

1 <http://www.cirkus.hr>

# Le début de la fin

PAULINE DE LA BOULAYE

*Le festival de nouveau cirque de Zagreb survivra-t-il en 2013? La question se pose, car cet automne, la huitième édition du Novog Cirkusa se termine par une soirée funèbre au solstice d'hiver: le 21 décembre 2012. Comme chaque année, ce sera la nuit la plus longue. Mais cette fois-ci, ce sera aussi la fin du monde, rappelle le programme, invoquant le calendrier Maya.*

Je regrette déjà de ne pas assister à cette soirée de clôture du festival et du monde : « While our absolute stock of alcoholic and soft drinks are in charge of the Big Flood (this is an all-you-can drink party considering we do not wish to carry on remainders to the other world), some of the most fruitful performers of the circus and sideshow scene, in charge of the Big Bang, decided to spend their last evening on Earth exactly at *The Last Supper*. Not suitable for underaged and those of sensitive moral opinions and stomachs<sup>1</sup>. »

Allez ! un dernier soir, un dernier verre, un dernier tour de piste !

Les Croates auraient-ils un goût prononcé pour le mélodrame ? Il semblerait plutôt que l'annonce d'une catastrophe imminente ne provoque pas vraiment l'angoisse dans ce pays des Balkans. Il y a comme une pointe d'ironie et de dérision sous-jacente dans la perspective d'une si tragique deadline. L'histoire sanglante et chaotique de la Croatie y est sans doute pour quelque chose.

Et puis, c'est aussi une spécialité circassienne d'annoncer régulièrement sa toute proche disparition avec cet alliage d'humour et de tristesse dont seul le cirque a le secret.

1 <http://www.cirkus.hr>

Let us recall the 1970s, that strange period when the traditional circus was popular enough to appear on television just before entire families wound up having to close their tents. Hoping to expose the long, slow death of the circus (from which it has also benefited), European cinema has persistently carved out an image of the circus' profound melancholy. In this vein, we have Fellini's 1970 film, *The Clowns*, a circus-ring adventure that shows us what becomes of clowns in the modern world. Then there's the 1974 film, *Parade*, Jacques Tati's attempt to come "to the circus' rescue". Ever since, the traditional circus has been announcing regularly its own impending doom. Meanwhile, an entire generation has propelled this curious world into another dimension: the new circus.

Intimately linked with danger, the circus has always lived right on the edge of history, oscillating between the avant-garde and tradition, between fragility and super-strength. Chased from the hippodromes, replaced by the music halls, then devoured by movies and television, it has always survived, its strength lying in the art of starting all over again, springing up in new territories, constantly redefining itself, holding onto life by a thread.

### **The art of changing dust into gold**

It was certainly on these terms that Ivan Kralj, the creator of Festival novog cirkusa decided to engage with the circus in 2005. Croatia was in a period of transition at the time. Having just got rid of an authoritarian regime, they were already turning toward Europe. More attached to Freedom than Truth, Ivan left behind a prolific and stable career in journalism and television to jump into the unknown of the circus – a language without borders, a world where there is no censure.

The first edition of FNC was organised without public support. The theme, *Gravitation*, attracted some unexpected volunteers. In honour of Newton, an apple came to symbolise the challenge Ivan and his acolytes were extending to the laws of gravity (in both senses of the word). The following edition in 2006 evoked the *Relativity* of constraints, the struggle against

Souvenons-nous des années 1970, étrange période durant laquelle le cirque traditionnel passe de la popularité télévisuelle à la faillite réelle pour des familles entières. Souhaitant dénoncer la mort progressive du cirque (dont il est issu), le cinéma européen va graver une image persistante, de sa profonde mélancolie.

*I clowns* de Fellini en 1970 : un voyage sur la piste pour tenter de voir ce que les clowns sont devenus dans le monde moderne. *Parade* en 1974 : une façon de venir « au secours des cirques » pour Jacques Tati. Depuis, le cirque traditionnel annonce régulièrement ses funérailles tandis qu'une génération entière a propulsé ce monde à part dans une autre dimension : le nouveau cirque.

Intimement lié au danger, le cirque a ainsi vécu sur la brèche de l'histoire, oscillant entre avant-garde et tradition, entre fragilité et surpuissance. Chassé des hippodromes, remplacé par le music-hall, puis dévoré par le cinéma et la télévision, il a survécu. Sa force réside dans l'art de repartir à zéro, de défricher de nouveaux territoires, de se redéfinir sans cesse, sur le fil de la vie.

### **L'art de transformer la poussière en or**

C'est sans doute pour cela, que le cirque et Ivan Kralj, créateur du festival Novog Cirkusa de Zagreb ont pactisé en 2005. La Croatie est alors en pleine transition : à peine sortie d'un régime autoritaire, et déjà tournée vers l'Europe. Attaché à la Liberté plus qu'à la Vérité, Ivan abandonne une carrière bien avancée et confortable dans le journalisme et la télévision pour sauter dans l'inconnu du cirque : cette planète ouverte au langage sans frontières où il n'y a pas de censure.

La première édition se fait sans aucune aide publique. Le thème de la *Gravitation* fédère des énergies bénévoles inattendues. En hommage à Newton, une pomme devient le symbole du défi lancé par Ivan et ses acolytes aux lois de la gravité (dans les deux sens du terme). L'édition suivante en 2006 évoque la *Relativité* des contraintes, la lutte avec les limites, le dépassement de soi. Ironie du sort, un obstacle apparaît : le théâtre national et le théâtre de la ville annulent au



obstacles, pushing oneself to the limit. Ironically, an obstacle would present itself. The national and city theatres withdrew their facilities from the programme at the last minute. "Informed of the scandal, the Minister of Culture decided to make a surprise appearance at the festival's opening. He walked up to the window and bought a ticket. He just wanted to see what could be so controversial about such a festival," Ivan tells us. "We were performing the show *I look up, I look down*, by Moglice-Von Verx in which the voice of the philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch intervenes: 'The attraction of nothingness, the whole game around the peril of death that man so likes to exalt dangerously – that is, that man plays at exalting dangerously. It's the permanent condition of his existence, what makes him passionate about it.'"<sup>2</sup> That night the festival also distributed 'Gloves for Applause' to its audience, wool mittens that had the heads of the directors of each of the reneging theatres printed on the palm. It seems the Minister had a good time since public support tripled the following year.

With its miniscule budget, and even after an augmentation of funding, the festival has always been a 'poor' but vivacious one. Ivan knows how to perform miracles through a perilous exercise that employs the following procedure. It all starts out with a theme: *dysfunctional families* in 2008, *Women and Circus* in 2009. Far from neutral, these topics pique the interest of circus companies throughout the world who almost always agree to be part of the adventure. To my knowledge, there is no other circus festival curated in this way. Ivan then bends over backwards to fit into the mould of the politics of his city in order to create an opportunity, an opening, for the circus. He chooses each location in accordance with the shows and deploys his festival throughout Zagreb each autumn. He then juggles with the constraints, which are huge. He's a tenacious conjurer of possibilities: locations, dates, money and availabilities.

Finally, like a miracle, he materialises a project whose calendar and geography are never the

dernier moment la mise à disposition des salles. « Informé du scandale, le Ministre de la Culture a décidé de venir à l'ouverture du festival sans annoncer sa venue. Il s'est présenté devant la caisse et a acheté son ticket. Ceci dans le but de vérifier par lui-même ce qu'il pouvait bien y avoir de si polémique dans ce festival. » raconte Ivan

On donnait le spectacle *I look up, I look down* de Moglice Von Verx dans lequel la voix du philosophe Vladimir Jankélévitch donnait une piste : « L'attrait du néant, le jeu avec le péril de mort que l'homme s'amuse à exalter dangereusement – c'est-à-dire que l'homme joue à exalter dangereusement, ce qui est la condition permanente de son existence pour la passionner.<sup>2</sup> » Le festival a fourni au public des gants avec sur la paume la tête des directrices de chaque théâtre pour applaudir. Le Ministre a manifestement apprécié puisque les aides ont triplé l'année suivante.

D'un budget infinitésimal, le festival est resté pauvre, oui mais effervescent. Ivan sait faire des miracles dans un exercice périlleux dont voici le procédé. Tout repose au départ sur un thème : *Familles dysfonctionnelles* en 2008, *Femmes et Cirque* en 2009. Loin d'être des sujets anodins, ils attirent l'intérêt des compagnies de cirque du monde entier qui acceptent presque toujours de rejoindre l'aventure. Il n'y a pas à ma connaissance en Europe, d'autre curator de festival de cirque de ce genre.

Ensuite Ivan se contorsionne dans le carcan de la politique et de sa ville pour ouvrir la brèche du cirque. Il choisit chaque lieu en fonction des spectacles et essaime tous les automnes son festival dans Zagreb.

Puis il jongle avec les contraintes qui sont maximales, c'est un acharné de la combinaison des possibles : lieu, date, argent, disponibilités.

Enfin, comme par miracle, il fait apparaître un projet dont le calendrier et la géographie ne sont jamais les mêmes. Chaque format de festival est

2 Cathy Blisson – Télérama n° 2974 -13/01/2007

2 Cathy Blisson – Télérama n° 2974 -13/01/2007

same. Each festival reflects its topic and context. This was the case for the “one day, one conference, one film, one performance, one cabaret, one poster, one half-empty book, one museum of festival relics” festival, organised in 2010 after a retroactive cut in public support. “So young and already in a museum? The Museum of Relics of Festival novog cirkusa, Barnum style, celebrates the extraordinary in the ordinary, and the ordinary in the extraordinary.”<sup>3</sup>

It’s as if Ivan knew, like Jean Genet, that “the reality of the Circus lies in its metamorphosis from dust into powdered gold.”<sup>4</sup> Here more than elsewhere, recognition is not earned through money. It’s something else, something difficult to assess and whose indicators are ethics, mutual trust, commitment and the ability to amaze.

### In search of a passageway between two worlds

This year, the festival is dedicated to new magic. Its title, *Chasing the Rabbit*, is not as light-hearted as it seems. “The rabbit is most certainly not in the top hat anymore, but the grill is wondering whether it is still in the forest or will the departure through the rabbit hole make it completely – disappear.”<sup>5</sup> Because rabbits sleep during the day in the subterranean darkness and hop about at night, forever white beneath the Moon, they are perfect incarnations of the magical notions of appearance and disappearance. They have a knack for popping up where they’re not expected. In all of the world’s belief systems, rabbits know the way to secret passageways, like the famous rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*. This passageway represents the mysterious relationship between life and death. In *The Big White Rabbit* by contemporary Croatian author Ivan Vidic,<sup>6</sup> the rabbit emerges from a bush in the middle of a military parade, symbolising the underground power of revolution in the face of order. So it’s no coincidence if the rabbit has been chosen as the symbol of this 2012 festival, where new magic and new circus have, in theory, decided to leave

3 <http://www.cirkus.hr/>

4 Le Funambule, Jean Genet, édition L’Arbalète, France 1958

5 Introduction, festival programme, Ivan Kralj, Croatia 2012

6 *Une parade de cirque – Anthologie des écritures théâtrales contemporaines de Croatie*, under the direction of Nataša Govedić, Editions l’Espace d’un Instant, France/Croatia 2012

le miroir du sujet et du contexte. Comme ce festival d’ « un jour, une conférence, un film, une performance, un cabaret, un poster, un livre à moitié vide, un musée des reliques du festival » organisé en 2010 en raison d’une baisse rétroactive des aides publiques. « So young and already in a museum? « The Museum of Relics of Festival novog cirkusa, Barnum style, celebrates the extraordinary in ordinary, and the ordinary in extraordinary<sup>3</sup>. »

On dirait qu’Ivan comme Jean Genet sait que « la réalité du Cirque tient dans cette métamorphose de la poussière en poudre d’or »<sup>4</sup>. La reconnaissance ici plus qu’ailleurs ne passe pas par l’argent. Il s’agit d’autre chose. Une chose difficile à évaluer et dont les indicateurs seraient l’éthique, la confiance mutuelle, l’engagement, la capacité d’émerveillement.

### À la recherche du passage entre deux mondes

Cette année, le festival est dédié à la Magie Nouvelle. Son titre *Chasing the Rabbit* est moins léger qu’il n’en a l’air. « The rabbit is most certainly not in the top hat anymore, but the grill is wondering whether it is still in the forest or will the departure through the rabbit hole make it completely – disappear.<sup>5</sup> » Parce que les lapins dorment le jour dans l’obscurité sous la terre et gambadent la nuit éternellement blancs sous la Lune, ils incarnent parfaitement les notions magiques d’apparition et de disparition. Ayant le don d’apparaître là où on ne les attend pas, dans toutes les croyances du monde, les lapins auraient connaissance de passages secrets, comme le célèbre lapin d’*Alice au Pays des Merveilles*. Ce passage incarne le mystère de la relation entre la vie et la mort. Dans la littérature croate contemporaine, le *Grand Lapin blanc* d’Ivan Vidic<sup>6</sup>, surgissant d’un buisson pendant un défilé militaire, symbolise le pouvoir souterrain de la révolution face à l’ordre. Ce n’est donc pas rien d’avoir placé le lapin comme emblème de ce festival 2012 où magie nouvelle et cirque

3 <http://www.cirkus.hr/>

4 Le Funambule, Jean Genet, édition L’Arbalète, France 1958

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Victoria Chaplin & Jean-Baptiste Thierrée – *Le Cirque Invisible* © nn

their animals behind. Ivan speaks of a grill threatening this magical animal and his mysterious, almost archaic power, an animal that could very well disappear forever below ground.

This eighth edition does have something furtive in itself. Its catalogue is a magical book whose pages are emptied or filled with bodily contact. Organised in three separate episodes (October, November, December), agendas appear and disappear. Shuttles transport the public to events in peripheral neighbourhoods: to the Scena Travno, a former puppet theatre in new Zagreb, or to the renovated factories of Pogon (Zagreb Centre for Independent Culture and Youth), a hybrid cultural institution (half public, half private) that was created in 2005 and now proudly defends its independence.

“For the official opening, we’ve decided to pirate the guest appearance of *Le Cirque Invisible* in Murska Sobota, a Slovenian town of 11,679 inhabitants. Zagreb’s millions and Croatia’s millions can afford such a performance only if the minister’s favourite festival purchases the

nouveau se veulent en théorie détachés des animaux. Ivan parle d’un grill menaçant cet animal magique et au pouvoir mystérieux quasi archaïque et qui pourrait bien disparaître à jamais sous terre.

Cette huitième édition a en effet quelque chose de furtif. Son catalogue est un livre magique dont les pages se vident ou se remplissent au contact corporel. Réparti en trois épisodes distincts (octobre, novembre, décembre), il apparaît et disparaît des agendas. Des navettes vous transportent en soirée dans des quartiers excentrés: au Scena Travno, ancien théâtre de marionnettes dans le nouveau Zagreb, ou dans les usines réhabilitées du Pogon (Zagreb Centre for Independent Culture and Youth), institution culturelle hybride (semi-privée, semi-publique), créée en 2005 et fièrement attachée à son indépendance.

«For the official opening we’ve decided to pirate the guest appearance of *Le Cirque Invisible* in Murska Sobota, a Slovenian town of 11.679 inhabitants. Zagreb’s million and Croatia’s millions

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Slovenian auditorium, proclaims the show for its own, rents buses and takes the audience to the art.<sup>7</sup> Three hours one way, three hours back, and two interminable customs checks at the border of Croatia and Slovenia, which is also an entryway into the Schengen area. For Victoria Chaplin and Jean-Baptiste Thierrée, it's worth the trouble. What's more, there's a very large rabbit on hand! Their *Cirque Invisible* is the oldest of the new circuses. This unlikely couple have been rehearsing the same numbers for thirty years, perfecting this, the one show of their lives. To think that these two were in *The Clowns*, by Fellini, which lamented the death of the circus in 1970! We won't find out much about them. They don't give interviews, and have left no trace other than the story of their first encounter. Contortionist, one-woman-band, tightrope walker, acrobat, balance artist and quick-changer, at 61 years of age, Victoria gets a little closer each day to that death she has always teased but never cheated. Behind this glimpse of eternity there is discipline and rehearsal. Here, the magic is in making you believe that we're at the circus when in fact we're at the theatre. Jean-Baptiste can show us failed tricks again and again and openly deceive the eye, but we are nonetheless in awe. Their magic is as old as childhood. Children reproduce the outside world on their own scale with puppets, conjuring up their worries and taking control of these miniature beings. Victoria and Jean-Baptiste are like two big children taking us through their world.

In a similar spirit, the Italian, Belgian and European Claudio Stellato began work on *L'Autre* in 2008 with no other goal than to allow the project to simply unfurl. He says that he has let the story tell itself, let the string unwind, starting out with the vision of a carpet that unfolds itself. He has worked like a craftsman, starting simply with planks of wood and human encounters. He was trained as a dancer, but he doesn't dance in this performance. When one sees him walking along the wood, one can't help but think of the Italian origin of the word *saltimbanque* (entertainer): *saltare in banco* (jumping on a platform).

7 Introduction, festival programme, Ivan Kralj, Croatia 2012

can afford such a performance only if the minister's favourite festival purchases the Slovenian auditorium, proclaims the show for its own, rents buses and takes the audience to the art.<sup>7</sup> Trois heures à l'aller, trois heures au retour, et deux arrêts interminables à la douane de la frontière croato-slovène qui est aussi une porte: celle de l'espace Schengen. Pour Victoria Chaplin et Jean-Baptiste Thierrée, le jeu en vaut la chandelle. De plus, un très gros lapin répond présent! Leur *Cirque Invisible* est le plus ancien des cirques nouveaux. Cela fait plus de trente ans que ce couple improbable répète les mêmes numéros, perfectionne l'unique spectacle de leur vie. Et dire que ces deux-là étaient dans *Les Clowns* de Fellini, qui pleurait la mort du cirque en 1970. On ne saura jamais trop sur eux. Pas d'interview, nulle autre trace que l'histoire de leur rencontre originelle. Contorsionniste, femme-orchestre, funambule, acrobate, équilibriste, transformiste, à 61 ans, Victoria se rapproche chaque jour un peu plus de la mort avec laquelle elle a toujours joué sans tricher. Derrière cet instant d'éternité, la discipline et la répétition. Ici la magie, c'est de faire croire que le cirque est là alors qu'on est au théâtre. Jean-Baptiste a beau nous montrer des tours ratés, nous tromper l'œil ouvertement. On reste émerveillé. Cette magie-là est aussi vieille que la notion d'enfance. Avec les poupées, les enfants reproduisent le monde extérieur à leur échelle pour conjurer leurs angoisses en prenant le contrôle sur ces êtres miniatures. Victoria et Jean-Baptiste sont comme deux vieux enfants qui nous font passer dans leur monde.

Dans un état d'esprit semblable, Claudio Stellato, italien belge européen, a commencé le projet de *L'Autre* en 2008 sans autre motivation que la confiance dans son propre déroulement. Il dit avoir laissé l'histoire se raconter, le fil se dérouler, à partir de la vision originelle d'un tapis qui se déplie tout seul. Il a travaillé comme un artisan, à partir de planches et de rencontres humaines. Au contraire de sa formation de danseur, ici il ne danse pas. Lorsqu'on le voit marcher sur le bois, on ne peut s'empêcher de penser à l'origine italienne du mot *saltimbanque*: *saltare in banco* (sauter sur une estrade).

7 Introduction, programme du festival, Ivan Kralj, Croatie 2012



Officially, there are two types of entertainers. The first kind takes the risk of living an entirely different life, trying to go beyond the human condition, to serve as a sign. Magic is therefore used to evoke something other than magic. This procedure is connected with the ritual aspect of the circus. In ancient Greece, men and divinities lived in the same world but could not communicate. Magical thinking, acrobatics, games, music and dance were all ways to come into contact with invisible things. They were a way to create a passageway, as are the works of Cirque Invisible and Stellato.

The other kind of entertainer exploits people's gullibility with magic tricks. This approach links up with the darker yet equally fascinating side of magic and the circus. Let's remember that Barnum was just as much the inventor of the travelling circus as he was of publicity at the turn of the twentieth century. This charlatan who transformed travelling theatre into a fairground attraction was able to manipulate entire crowds yearning to be enchanted. When manipulation itself becomes the goal, one must admit that it's not the magic at work. In Zagreb there was a representative of the "new magic" movement in France, Rafael Navarro. He is the magician working in the wings of *Vibrations*, the show by his company 14:20. His theories and the video excerpts online are very enticing. And yet, after experiencing a short 7-minute episode executed by François Chat, I was left cold. There was no aura. The artifice caught all of our attention: a fishing line. And here's the impasse.

### Emergency exit

Let's return to this possible end of the world and rather hope for the end of the black-and-white world that opposes merchants of the temple of culture and missionaries of the dignity of art. This dualist vision is like the Big Bang. It's a sure disequilibrium for those who take the risk of living their projects and for those who don't. Next year, will Ivan be able to transform the end of the world into a passageway to a new era? Will we find the way out?

Officiellement, il existe deux sortes de saltimbanques. Une première catégorie prend le risque de vivre une vie totalement autre, pour tenter de dépasser la condition humaine et faire signe. La magie est alors utilisée pour évoquer autre chose que la magie. Cette démarche renoue avec l'aspect rituel du cirque. Dans la Grèce antique, les hommes et les divinités vivaient dans le même monde sans pouvoir communiquer. La pensée magique, les acrobaties, les jeux, la musique et la danse, étaient des moyens d'entrer en contact avec les choses invisibles. Une manière de créer un passage comme le font le Cirque Invisible et Stellato.

L'autre catégorie abuse de la crédulité des gens par des tours de magie. Cette démarche renoue avec la part obscure et tout aussi fascinante de la magie et du cirque. Rappelons que Barnum fut autant l'inventeur du cirque itinérant que de la publicité au tournant du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle. Ce charlatan qui a métamorphosé le théâtre ambulant en attraction foraine a su manipuler des foules entières, avides d'enchantement. Quand l'objectif devient la manipulation elle-même, il faut bien reconnaître que la magie n'opère pas. A Zagreb, il y avait le représentant d'un mouvement de « magie nouvelle » en France, Rafael Navarro. Il est le magicien derrière les coulisses du spectacle *Vibrations* de sa compagnie 14:20. Ses théories et les extraits vidéo sur Internet sont très attractifs. Pourtant, en vivant un court épisode de 7 minutes exécuté par François Chat, je suis tombée des nues. Il n'y avait pas d'aura. L'artifice capturait toute l'attention : un fil de pêche. Impasse.

### Sortie de secours

Revenons à l'éventuelle fin du monde. Souhaitons plutôt la fin d'un monde en noir et blanc qui oppose les marchands du temple de la culture aux missionnaires pour la dignité de l'art. Cette vision dualiste, c'est le Big Bang. C'est le déséquilibre assuré pour ceux qui prennent le risque de vivre leurs projets comme pour ceux qui ne les vivent pas. L'année prochaine Ivan saura-t-il transformer la fin du monde en un passage vers une nouvelle ère ? Et nous : trouverons-nous la sortie de secours ?

# From *Le Cirque Invisible* to today and back

ROLAND VERMEYLEN

Since 2005, Zagreb has hosted the annual contemporary circus festival Festival novog cirkusa, yet there have not been many Croatian circus companies in recent years, and current legislation is not exactly friendly towards travelling circuses. Therefore, I was curious about this 'festival of new circus'.

Along with ten European journalists, I attended the second part of Festival novog cirkusa and compared notes with Ivan Kralj, the Croatian director of the festival, with the presenting artists, and with several circus theorists, mainly from HorsLesMurs and Circostrada (France). It was inspiring and improving to debate the circus scene, and to try and discover the words to express it after we attended and reflected on four circus productions.

Until the 1960s, western circus was almost entirely in the hands of circus families. Children born into such families were predestined from birth. Expectations were clear-cut and narrowly focused; roles and learning processes were well-defined. People lived and learned by observing and then – sooner rather than later – by trying things out themselves to discover which specific talents they should develop. Writing, reading, theoretical education and verbal analysis were bourgeois and absolutely forbidden.

In the early 70s, the first western, independent circus artists started to emerge. The first French circus schools were founded by Pierre Etaix, Annie Fratellini, Silvia Monfort and Alexis Gruss. In Germany, Circus Roncalli was founded (1976), followed by Big Apple Circus in the United States (1977), which would become the instituter and the home of the Clown Doctors (Cliniclowns). In Switzerland, Victoria Chaplin wished to translate

# Van *Le Cirque Invisible* naar nu en terug

ROLAND VERMEYLEN

Sinds 2005 loopt elk jaar in Zagreb het festival "Nieuw circus". Kroatië heeft al een tijdje geen eigen circus meer en ook de recente wetgeving is weinig vriendelijk voor rondtrekkende circussen. We waren dus benieuwd hoe dit "festival van nieuw circus" wel zou kunnen zijn.

Samen met tien Europese journalisten volgden we het tweede deel van dit festival en we wisselden onze beelden en inzichten uit met de Kroatische festivalleider Ivan Kralj, de artiesten en enkele circustheoretici die vooral uit het Franse Hors les Murs en Circostrada kwamen. Het was boeiend om het circusveld scherper te kunnen verwoorden na het gezamenlijk beleven van een viertal circusproducties. Vooral het samen kunnen reflecteren was verrijkend.

Tot in de zestiger jaren is het Westers circus bijna helemaal in handen van circusfamilies. Je wordt als circuskind geboren en je wordt zo van bij de geboorte voorbestemd. De verwachtingen tussen ouders en kinderen zijn heel helder en gefocust. De rollen en de leerprocessen zijn duidelijk. Je leert en leeft door observatie en dan snel – zonder veel uitstellen – het zelf te "doen" en zo te ondervinden waar precies je talenten liggen. Schrijven, lezen, theoretisch leren en reflecteren met woorden zijn uit den boze en horen bij de burgerwereld.

Begin zeventiger jaren komen dan de eerste niet-familie gebonden, Westerse circusartiesten. De eerste Franse circusscholen onder leiding van Pierre Etaix, Annie Fratellini, Sylvia Monfort en Alexis Gruss worden opgericht. In Duitsland ontstaat Circus Roncalli (1976) en in de Verenigde Staten start Big Apple Circus (1977) dat de stichter en ook de bakermat zou worden voor de cliniclowns. In Zwitserland wou Victoria



her father Charlie's love for the Swiss Circus Knie into a circus of her own, while the French theatre-maker Jean-Baptiste Thierrée shared the same passion; they established Cirque Bonjour in 1971. Together with their children Aurélia and James Thierrée, they developed this into Cirque Imaginaire. After the children left home to pursue their own careers (very successfully!) their circus evolved to become Cirque Invisible in 1990.

During the 80s, more and more actors arrived at the international circus scene. Pierre Bidon, with Archaos, and Cirque Plume were French pioneers in theatre-circus. In Switzerland, the Muntwyler family fostered their innovative Circus Monti, and in Canada Cirque du Soleil was founded in 1984. They all wished to breathe new life into circus.

In 2012, at Festival novog cirkusa, Mr and Mrs Thierrée-Chaplin have been programmed with their now over 20 years old Cirque Invisible, a tribute to their historic, successful compulsion to innovate. Cirque Invisible revives the feel of the classic circus – a series of disconnected acts, and a respectful way of working with animals – in a lively spectacle threading a sanguine story through scenes of transformation, magic and clowning. They bring two archetypes: the wise, perspectivist old clown next to a rigorous, excelling, inquisitive woman. Their enduring love story eventually unites all. It is a classic show that meets expectations – in a direct, classic style it brings surprise and optimism. Cirque Invisible is beautifully ageless and therefore fascinating. The audience was clearly and unanimously very satisfied. And one could see how husband and wife have translated their pioneering spirit into an enduring, clever, sustainable and shared form of work and performance. In their artistic process, script and production have grown more important over time.

Ivan Kralj, 33 and director of the festival, looks at me with wide eyes. "I try to offer the audience what I see in the circus world. I choose the festival's theme from inside the scene. This year, new magic is a leitmotif, while another magical production was programmed to conclude our first festival eight years ago. This is how we close the circle. I want to connect many styles and

Chaplin de liefde van vader Charlie voor het Zwitserse Circus Knie zelf vertalen in een heel eigen circus. De Franse toneelmaker Jean Baptiste Thierrée voelt dezelfde passie en zo ontstaat in 1971 hun Cirque Bonheur. Samen met hun kinderen Aurélia en James Thierrée wordt het hun Cirque Imaginaire en toen de kinderen het ouderlijk nest verlaten voor hun eigen, overigens erg succesvolle, carrière, wordt het in 1990 hun Cirque Imaginaire.

In de tachtiger jaren komen daarnaast steeds meer nieuwe spelers op het internationale circusveld. Pierre Bidon met Archaos en Cirque Plume waren Franse pioniers voor meer theatercircus. In Zwitserland bouwt de familie Muntwyler gestaag aan hun vernieuwend circus Monti en in Canada ziet in 1984 Cirque du Soleil het daglicht. Zij willen het circus opnieuw uitvinden.

Het echtpaar Thierrée-Chaplin is dit jaar, ook al is het meer dan twintig jaar trekkend met deze show, geprogrammeerd. Het programmeren van hun Cirque Invisible is dus meer een hommage aan hun historische, succesvolle vernieuwingsdrang. Hun show gaat nog steeds terug naar het klassieke circus: een reeks acts zonder écht verhaal, respectvol samenwerken met dieren, en een vrolijk spektakel waar de vermenging van transformatie, magie en clownerie een optimistisch, eindeloos verhaal aan elkaar rijgt. Je ziet er twee archetypes naast elkaar: de wijze, zichzelf relativerende, oude clown naast de strengere, excellerende, immer zoekende vrouw. Hun duurzaam liefdesverhaal verbindt dan uiteindelijk alles aan elkaar. Het is klassiek circus dat brengt wat je ervan verwacht. Directief en volgens de regels van de kunst. Het geeft verwondering en optimisme. Sterk is het tijdloze van hun Invisible. Dat maakt het ook zo boeiend. Er was een duidelijke consensus bij het heel tevreden publiek. En je ziet ook hoe het echtpaar hun pioniersdynamiek heeft kunnen vertalen in een blijvend, slim en gedragen, alledaags werken en optreden. Hun "emerging-creatief" proces is weer meer script en productiegebonden geworden.

De nu 33 jarige festivalleider Ivan Kralj kijkt me aan met heel open ogen. "Ik probeer te brengen wat ik zie op de circusscène. Zo kies ik elk jaar een

cooperate with the artists in a friendly way. Also, I attempt to get to know the audience. Not their expectations but rather their motivations and the origin of their interest in my singular definition of 'new circus'. Now I know the audience mainly consists of young women who brought their partners along, who don't attend theatre or dance performances. So, it seems like our audience is a very particular group that remains loyal to our festival. This can also apply to the sponsors of our festival, who are, above all, small and many."

Ivan enjoys making statements. "In the whole of Zagreb, there is not a single theatre that can accommodate Cirque Invisible. We had to organise bus rides from Zagreb to the small Slovenian village of Murska Sobota, population 10,000. I have a clear message, and being a young person, I tend to clash with the Establishment. In the end, I try to deliver my message and arrange the programme with the help of humour and creative solutions. Every setback makes me more creative, and the audience follows me."

Apart from the show by two of the pioneers of new circus, we also watched two purely experimental performances exploring 'new magic': *Gravitation* by the French Compagnie 14.20, headed by Raphaël Navarro and Clément Debailleul, and *Nopeussokeus (Speed Blindness)* by the Finnish artist Kalle Hakkarainen. The storyline in these performances focused on one topic repetitiously. In *Gravitation*, the French juggler François Chat dances with a wooden cane, bringing everything to life. In *Speed Blindness*, Kalle unites film projection with live action. We witness his experiences during a car accident, when several foreign objects enter the driver's body. Kalle aimed at expressing the way in which people who fall victim to accidents tend to experience the event as though in a film. Naturally, the use of physical expression and projected imagery was an obvious choice for the staging. Kalle, being both a magician and a video artist, made use of an open space. Comparing the two productions integrating film imagery, Kalle's was the most successful. In a conversation with both companies, it became clear that the shows were quite experimental. Both were still searching for

thema van binnenuit. Dit jaar staat de nieuwe magie op het programma. En op het einde van het eerste festival stond ook een magieproductie. Zo sluiten we dit jaar de cirkel en wil ik met heel open vizier kijken waar we nu staan. Ik wil vele stijlen verbinden. Ook met de artiesten wil ik in een vriendschappelijke relatie samenwerken. Ik probeer ook goed mijn publiek te kennen. Niet zozeer hun verwachtingen maar eerder wie ze zijn en van waar komt nu hun interesse voor mijn eigennijverige definitie van "nieuw circus". Zo weet ik dat het vooral jonge vrouwen zijn die vaak hun partners meebrengen. Ze gaan niet naar theater of dansvoorstellingen. Het is dus een heel bepaalde en vooral kleine niche die naar hier komt en ons festival trouw blijft. Dit geldt ook voor de sponsoring waar het vooral vele, kleine sponsors zijn die ons festival mee maken."

Ivan houdt ook van statements maken. "In heel Zagreb is er geen enkele theaterzaal die deze Cirque Invisible kan huisvesten. We moeten daarvoor naar het kleine Sloveense stadje Murska Sobota met zijn tienduizend inwoners. We hebben dus bussen van het grote Zagreb ingelegd naar dit kleine stadje. Mijn boodschap is duidelijk. Als jongere bots ik vaak met sommige gevestigde structuren. Ik probeer met humor en creatieve oplossingen mijn boodschap én programmering toch rond te maken. Alle obstakels maken me creatiever én mijn publiek volgt me."

Naast een van de "oudste" pioniers van nieuw circus zagen we ook twee puur experimentele performanties die passen in de zoektocht naar nieuwe magie: *Gravitation* van het Franse collectief 14.20 met Raphael Navarro en Clément Debailleul als échte pioniers én daarnaast *Nopeussokeus (Fins voor Speed blindness)* van de Fin Kalle Hakkarainen. Nu krijgen we wel telkens een verhaal dat repetitief op één thema doorgaat. Bij *Gravitation* zie je hoe de Franse jongleur François Chat met zijn houten stok danst en het geheel tot leven brengt. In *Speed blindness* vermengt Kalle filmbeelden met life expressions. We zien zijn belevingswereld wanneer een auto en zijn chauffeur in een ongeval terechtkomen en allerlei vreemde objecten het lichaam van de chauffeur binnendringen. Kalle wou expressie geven van hoe slachtoffers bij een ongeval vaak het gebeuren net





**Claudio Stellato – l'Autre** © Martin Firket

the right techniques and methods, both were experimenting; any underlying emotional motive I must have overlooked. Over the years, these techniques will further evolve, making both productions, oddly enough, already outdated. Anyway, Cirque du Soleil has already further explored the use of magical pictures and special effects in their Las Vegas circus production *Ka* (2004) by Robert Lepage. Still, these are intriguing experiments that can stimulate and bring innovation to the circus arts.

Another production at Festival novog cirkusa was *L'Autre* by the Italian Claudio Stellato and his Belgian collaborator Martin Firket. Claudio embraces the traditional view that circus is a way of life. It is mainly trying, doing, physicality; it is non-verbal and is a personal journey undertaken with an audience.

als op een film meevolgen. De link tussen lichaamsexpressie en filmbeelden lag dus voor de hand. Kalle als magician én videoartiest kon hierbij een heel open ruimte gebruiken. Van de twee producties die videobeelden gebruikten was deze met de Fin Kalle het meest geslaagd. Bij het doorvragen van de twee productiegroepen bleek hoe experimenteel het geheel wel was. Ze waren beiden nog volop aan het uitzoeken wat hun nieuwere technieken nu wel goed kon ondersteunen. Het bleef wel experimenteel en de emotionele boodschap bleef voor mij ondergesneeuwd. De komende jaren zullen deze technieken steeds verder evolueren zodat deze twee producties nu reeds, hoe vreemd ook, écht gedateerd zijn. Overigens is Cirque du Soleil in zijn Las Vegas productie *Ka* (2004) van filmmaker Robert Lepage al veel verder gegaan met het gebruik van magische filmbeelden en effecten in een ruimere circusproductie. Maar het blijven interessante experimenten die op hun beurt vernieuwende impulsen aan de circuskunst kunnen geven.

Naast deze twee experimentele producties kwam *L'Autre* met de Italiaan Claudio Stellato en zijn Belgische partner Martin Firket. Claudio sluit aan bij het eeuwenoud gegeven dat circus een levenswijze is. Circus is vooral doen, uitproberen, lichamelijk-niet verbaal, een groeiproces met publiek. Circus is al heel lang een lerend systeem dat circusmensen reeds toepasten lang voor het wetenschappelijk gedefinieerde begrip lerende organisatie werd uitgevonden.

Claudio: "Ik voel me dichtst bij de circuswereld. Daar is vaak een heel goede ambiance waar we elkaar goed en complexloos kunnen ontmoeten. De danswereld is toch zo droog, serieus en heel apart op zichzelf betrokken. Laat ons toch nederig blijven, het gaat toch maar over een performantie. Ik ben méér een paljazzo, een clown. Ik heb geen techniek op zich. Ik vertrek van mijn eigen research die ik in vele situaties en met verscheiden groepen continu toets. Ik bouw zo gedurende drie jaar mijn verhaal op." Hij is gefascineerd door één thema: het ontmoeten van andere mensen. Drie jaar lang bouwde hij aan zijn expressie van dit wonderlijk levend gebeuren. Hij zoekt het vooral in bijna dansend bewegen met objecten, met en in een

Claudio: "I feel closest to the circus world. Often, there is an excellent atmosphere where we can meet each other without any restraint. Dance is often very dry, serious and concerned with its own world. Let's remain modest; it's just a performance. I am more of a paljazzo, a clown; I don't have techniques as such. I start from my own research, which I reflect upon in many situations and different contexts. After three years, a story is complete."

Claudio is fascinated by one theme: meeting other people. For three years, he has built an expression of this miraculous existence. In *L'Autre* he mainly works with the dancing movement of objects, performing with and inside of two wooden wardrobes – one big, one smaller. His magic is unpredictable, thus encouraging constant amazement. Long after leaving the theatre, the performance keeps glowing in our memories, as does our meeting with Claudio. *L'Autre* is not quite your average circus. It is visual art. Like Kalle, Claudio would not be boxed into one niche. "I investigate things and subjects with my body," Claudio concludes.

The festival in Zagreb was refreshing. We met new forms of magic there.

The festival can be seen as a 'teaser', a taster for the different innovations of the circus scene and magic in particular. By programming Cirque Invisible, the festival offered an anchor for the audience that helps contextualise magic and circus as a whole and makes it more tangible and specific. With its constant renewals the festival in Zagreb continues to appeal to a particular audience of adepts and innovators, making it an enthralling thing to discover and experience with my colleagues.

However, the somewhat arrogant description of the festival as dedicated exclusively to new circus may alert us to pitfalls. In the 1860s, the term 'nouveau cirque' was used as an insignia as well. Now it is being used in an ideology, with the corresponding indoctrinations and even intimidations included. Today, intellectuals wish to define what types of circus are real. Above all, they want to award the highest creativity to their 'cirque contemporain'. They determine who is

kleine én grote kast. Zijn magie is helemaal niet te voorspellen en zorgt zo voor een blijvende verwondering. Lang nadat we de zaal hebben verlaten, zindert de voorstelling nog na. Ook onze ontmoeting met Claudio tijdens het persgesprek laat zo lang zijn sporen na. Ik heb het er moeilijk mee om *L'autre* van Stellato circus te noemen. Het is visuele bewegingskunst. Net als de Fin Kalle wil hij niet precies in een vast kader worden ondergedompeld. "Ik probeer dingen en een thema uit met mijn lichaam", zo besluit Claudio zijn verhaal.

Zagreb bracht ons een verrassend festival. We kwamen in aanraking met nieuwe magievormen. Het festival is een soort "teaser", een soort proeven aan vernieuwingen in het hele circusveld en in de magie in het bijzonder. Door le Cirque Invisible te programmeren reikt het festival de bezoeker een soort anker als meetmoment aan. De vraag waar we veertig jaar later nu staan met magie en breder nog circus, wordt daardoor concreter, specifiek en vooral tastbaarder. Daardoor blijft het Zagreb festival een heel klein publiek aanspreken van ingewijden en zoekers naar vernieuwingen. Op zich helemaal niet erg en vooral boeiend om dat met collegae te ontdekken en te beleven.

Maar de toch arrogante titel van exclusief nieuw hedendaags circus maakt ook de valkuilen bewuster. In de jaren 1860 werd het begrip "nouveau cirque" ook reeds als uitgangsbord gebruikt. Nu wordt het gehanteerd als een soort ideologie met alle indoctrinaties en zelfs intimidaties van dienst erbij. Intellectuelen buiten de circuskunst willen nu bepalen wat écht circus is en wat niet. Ze willen vooral het creatief-bovendrijvende als nieuwe kracht zien voor hun "cirque contemporain". Zij bepalen wie waardig is om binnen hun normen voor vol te worden aanzien. Maar op die manier worden ze weer even dwingend directief en strikt script en regelgebonden als het klassiek circus in de zestiger jaren. Op die manier sluit de cirkel zich weer. De groepen die we in Zagreb aan het werk zagen, waren evenzeer door het nomadisme aan getrokken als de meest fervente circuspatriarch. Het rebelse, het willen deviant zijn, het zorgen voor een heel eigen context, het willen overleven en toch authentiek zichzelf worden zit evenzeer bij deze artiesten.



worthy of appreciation within their standards. This makes them as peremptory, strict and regulated as classic circus in the 60s. The circle is closed.

The companies performing in Zagreb were as drawn to nomadism as the most ardent circus patriarch. The rebellion, defiance, lack of compromise and authenticity found in the classic circus are also common traits among all these artists.

The general public looks for associations and affinities, and, by explicitly untying artists from their past, continuity is broken in some ways and expectations are altered. Also, circus in a broad sense means show business. In contemporary circus the economic imperative is largely reduced, taken care of by sponsors and subsidies provided that a new, considerable audience is mustered. That economic pressure can feed real creativity is ever proven by many contemporary circuses like Monti from Switzerland. The audience expects innovation linked with the past, and needs to be part of this transformation.

'New circus' is too vague a concept. In my eyes, it is a never-ending swing between classic and innovative. In all movements, there is good and plainly bad circus. In Zagreb, we twice saw good circus and twice purely experimental circus. It was not clear whether the audience was prepared for this or not, this year and in the past, and may therefore have been somewhat disappointed or may have left with a number of unfulfilled expectations, or remained absent altogether...

Classic circus usually does successful marketing and attracts big audiences. Since there is no longer a Croatian circus, expectations may have become vague and muddled. For the festival, there now is a pedagogical and marketing challenge ahead of them in selling contemporary circus and winning it a place in the arts market. The festival's habit of introducing yearly themes, 'new magic' for example, is very newsworthy but does not seem to draw a packed audience. All this in spite of the organisers' and artists' efforts. This year's programme deserved a bigger turnout. In order to overcome these shortcomings, one needs to feel open and generous and to consult

Het grote publiek wil deze associaties en verbindingen blijven waarnemen. Door een zeer expliciet stellen van het anders-zijn van deze artiesten wordt de continuïteit deels verbroken. De verwachtingen liggen anders. Daarnaast is circus is ook in de meest ruime zin van het woord "showbusiness". Het economische is hier erg ver uitgewist en ondergesneeuwd. Sponsoring plus subsidies moeten dit opvangen. Maar deze laatsten blijven maar komen als er een nieuw, groot publiek ontstaat. En in die begrenzing door het economische kan ook échte creativiteit tot standkomen. Dat bewijzen andere hedendaagse circussen zoals het Zwitserse Monti elk jaar opnieuw. Het publiek wil bij veranderingen dus ook de link met het vroegere zien naast nieuwe ideeën en veranderingen. Het publiek dient mee betrokken te worden in deze transformatie. Nieuw circus is een te vaag begrip. Eigenlijk is het een dooddoener en een competitie uitlokkend verhaal. Het is voor mij een eeuwige slinger tussen klassiek en vernieuwend. En in alle bewegingen heb je goed en ronduit slecht circus. In Zagreb zagen we twee maal goed circus en tweemaal pure experimenten. Het was voor mij niet duidelijk of het publiek dit op voorhand wist. Of ook niet wist in de voorbije jaren en zo, wellicht wat teleurgesteld en met blijvende, onvervulde honger, niet meer op het jaarlijks appèl komt.....

Klassiek circus is sterk in marketing en in het bewegen van het grote publiek naar de tent. Door het wegvallen van eigen Kroatisch circus zijn waarschijnlijk de verwachtingen in Kroatië rond circus heel vaag en onduidelijk geworden. Wellicht zit er voor het festival en zijn aansluitend circuscentrum nu een pedagogische – en marketingopdracht om hedendaags circus opnieuw te verkopen en zo zijn verdiende plaats op de kunstmarkt te geven....

Het bespelen van een jaarthema, als dit jaar de nieuwe magie, heeft heel wat nieuwsaarde. Maar dit is blijkbaar niet voldoende om voldoende publiek uit zijn zetel te lokken... En daarvoor doen én organisatoren én artiesten toch al deze inspanningen. Het programma verdiende veel meer publiek dan wat er was..... Om die tekorten effectief te kunnen corrigeren, is een open geest en generositeit nodig om bij het klassiek circus ook daarvoor te rade te gaan en

classic circuses for their opinion on contemporary circus. Compare for example the Finnish circus scene, with the very successful and classic Finlandia, coordinated by the young Carl Johan Jernström who programs many young, Finnish circus professionals trained at various European, Canadian, Russian and Ukrainian circus schools. At circus festivals in Finland, you can come across the classic Finlandia as well as more theatrical forms of circus.

In any case, I would have presented a more specific title for the festival so as to announce its pedagogical and artistic nature more clearly. This way, Ivan Kralj might have loosened the bonds with the past French influences, which he has already described as being too dominant and too prevalent.

After seven or eight years, another life cycle is completed. Perhaps at the moment Festival novog cirkusa runs close to the tracks of those wishing to colonise and intellectualise circus culture. From the outside, some try to direct and control the circus world and define tomorrow's circus artists. This causes the increasing diversity in the circus scene to be cut off from its own riches. Appreciate, enjoy, keep an open mind and don't judge too easily. Without this, there would be fragmentation, which is not compatible with emerging creative forms. Let's continue to value the fertility of diversity and leave exclusion and exclusivity aside, and new creative bridges will readily connect classic and more theatrical circus.

This Zagreb festival, led by this young, passionate and open-minded Ivan Kralj can be of further consequence in the international circus scene. With all our hearts, we wish that he may continue to firmly anchor his efforts and be rewarded for them.

onbevooroordeeld te zien hoe hedendaags circus daar wordt ingevuld. Ik denk alleen al aan het Finse circuslandschap waar het klassieke, zeer goed draaiende, Finlandia nu onder leiding van de jonge zoon Carl Johan Jernström de helft van zijn programma vult met jonge, Finse circusprofessionelen die uit diverse Europese, Canadese én Russisch-Oekraïense circus scholen komen. Op circusfestivals in Finland tref je dan ook evenzeer het klassiekere Finlandia aan naast nieuwere, meer theatrale circusvormen.

In elk geval zou ik een preciesere titel van het festival zoeken om zo het nieuwe pedagogisch en artistiek ontmoeten scherper aan te kondigen.... En wellicht kan zo Ivan Kralj zich losser opstellen van de Franse invloed die hij zelf reeds als té dominant en té overheersend aanvoelt. Na zeven à acht jaar is steeds weer een levenscyclus voleindigd. Ivan is nu met zijn vriendenequipe zover. Door samen even een rustpunt in te bouwen, zijn eerste reeks van acht festivals tijdelijk stop te zetten en niet meer zomaar te downloaden wat zij gewoon zijn, kunnen er nieuwe bovendieners komen. Dan is zijn festival weer opnieuw een echte "emerging art form". Nu loopt hij wellicht teveel in het spoor van sommigen die deze circuscultuur willen koloniseren en intellectualiseren. Men wil van buitenaf de circuswereld beheersen en bepalen hoe de circusartiest van morgen moet zijn. Zo wordt de diversiteit die steeds maar groeiend is in het circusveld afgesloten van zijn eigen rijkdom. Waardeer ze, geniet ervan, hou open mind en beoordeel niet zomaar wat goed en slecht is. Anders ontstaat er fragmentatie en dat is zeker ook niet te rijmen met "emerging-creatief". Laat ons de rijkdom van de diversiteit verder waarderend bekijken en dan komen er vanzelf opnieuw creatieve bruggen tussen klassiek en meer theatraal circus. Anders blijft het een gevecht van uitsluiten en verarmende exclusiviteit.

Dit Zagreb-festival met deze, jonge, gedreven leider met zijn heel open mind kan dus nog véél betekenen in het internationale circuslandschap. We wensen het Ivan Kralj dan ook van harte om zo zijn inspanningen terecht verder te verzilveren én duurzaam te verankeren.



# Now you see it... now you don't: Character and Circus

SUSIE WILD

At the eighth year of Festival Novog Cirkusa in Zagreb trickery was at work as new magic met new circus on and off stage. From the disappearing ink of the programme through the surreal spectacle of *Le Cirque Invisible* to the unseen trickster in *L'Autre* nothing was quite what it seemed.

Beginning with a magical mystery tour, a bus drove the audience from Zagreb to Slovenia to enjoy *Le Cirque Invisible* – a two-hour play session of magic, humour and transformations by the enchanting Victoria Chaplin, daughter of Charlie, and her cheery life partner Jean-Baptiste Thiérrée.

Victoria Chaplin and Jean-Baptiste Thiérrée met in 1969. They cut an odd but compelling couple. Chaplin, an elegantly elfin acrobat and beguiling shape-shifting chameleon with long dark locks and ever-widening eyes, and then Thiérrée, a madcap clown-wizard with wild-white hair, twinkling blue eyes and a big grin. Timeless archetypes of nostalgic circus, the eccentric and devoted pair have been performing this, their third show, across the globe for three decades. Jean-Baptiste Thiérrée would have loved “to have produced just one, but work[ed] on its improvement forever”. For him, it never seems tiresome, and his playful *joie de vivre* is contagious; we let him carry us away with *Le Cirque Invisible* and away with the fairies to a land of imaginative make believe.

“Hup!” shouts Jean-Baptiste as each trick is revealed. He is a master of blink-and-you-miss-it visual gags and pimptastic costumes. You’ll have wardrobe envy at least once during the performance as he appears in kitsch suits of tapestry, space-age silver or zebra print, carrying

matching suitcase-tables of tricks. Predictably unpredictable, he tells jokes, juggles, creates loud crashes from teeny tiny objects, turns silk handkerchiefs into doves and, at one point, saws Victoria Chaplin in half. Victoria’s brand of costumery is more performance high art: she sculpts her own strange little worlds out of fabric and furniture, creating a muddled menagerie of surreal fantasy creatures from bulls and dragons to underwater dwellers. Chaplin is a mistress of reinvention. One minute a one-woman band playing a tune with cutlery and glassware, in another she is a flowerpot woman, a hermit crab, or a coffee-drinking lady. A trained dancer and acrobat, at times she moves away from oddness to create real beauty with movement, as with her swirling silk projection dance, of an ilk first pioneered by Loie Fuller, and her surprisingly sprightly grace in the art of contortion, and on the tightrope, where she does the splits.

Between them, they have a top-hat-full of presence (and rabbits). The characters and the love story and the years of experience become the glue that holds the acts together and keeps our attention; even as the repetitive nature of acts and gags starts to grate. We laugh and we allow ourselves to be small children, suspending disbelief even as we see the hands of their assistants, or tricks that fail, because these are masters of their trade. They wink at us and each other, bursting with prowess, pride, self-deprecation and self-irony as the up-closeness of small theatre viewings of their acts deconstructs their circus techniques and the semantics of the magic show whilst still showing a mixed mainstream audience a good time.

Rarely on stage together, their cycling finale is a double act of chrome contraptions – wheels weird and wonderful – before a never-ending curtain call (as if to say, ‘look what else we can do’). A pass-the-parcel of costume changes and bonus acts, with the go-go energy of the Duracell bunnies they finally fill the stage with.

What was not invisible, but was meant to be, led to the two unintended mishaps of Friday evening’s double bill. Raphaël Navarro and Clément Debailleul (*Cie 14:20*)’s career may be



**WHS – Kalle Hakkarainen – Nopeusokeus** © Petri Virtanen

made up of prestigious collaborations with the likes of fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier and the choreographer Philippe Découflé, but in Zagreb their brand of new magic failed to impress. Perhaps it was a mistake, and a brave mistake, to show a short seven-minute unit of a longer composite piece alone at the festival. Gravitation is a solo work that examines the place between the states of sleep and wakefulness, a place free of gravity, through movement. Dressed simply, in a black t-shirt and trousers, French juggler François Chat merges dance with wooden stick manipulation, attempting to be at one with the stick, move as the stick, and levitate, but never quite convincing.

Pioneers of the new magic movement, Cie 14:20's company ethos is to campaign for an art that emancipates our emotions. They want their new magic to question the invisible and awaken our senses to the sublime. Gravitation forms part of their dance-magic-circus show Vibrations, which "offers the discovery of this peculiar language where the diversion of the real is thought of as an artistic state, where the body is not constrained any more by reality. Bodies stir and are supple, freed from the law of gravity. The

movement and the physical reality are overthrown by magic. Actors come in a state of weightlessness, split themselves, and the movement imprints its immaterial trace within the space."

The intent is to make the viewer feel a changeable gravity gives a new nature to objects, creating a weightless world. Unfortunately in this instance Gravitation did not work as a standalone act, marred yet more because the audience could see the stick's puppeteer strings. Eschewing the distraction of sets and costumes, or the charm offensive of a character like Jean-Baptiste, the success of the performance instead relied on the fine execution of movement and circus skills, and those were found to be lacking: the piece did not capture the viewer's trust and imagination as it should have. It did not achieve what it set out to do.

After the interval came one of Helsinki's more experimental circus artists, Kalle Hakkarainen, with Nopeusokeus (Speed Blindness/Motion Blindness). Designed, directed and performed by Hakkarainen, Nopeusokeus is a new magic multimedia solo performance depicting the long seconds when a body and a machine collide in a car crash. The piece references the distorted



perception of speed when in a fast car, as well as the rare neurological disorder akinetopsia where the patient cannot perceive motion, instead seeing the world as a series of frozen pictures, stop frames prior to animation. Interested in the magic of cinema special effects and seeking to blur the boundaries between movie and stage magic, Hakkarainen tried to recreate slow-motion performances from cinema live in a theatre. So we see him driving, trying to stay awake as words are projected on the (wind)screen in front of him. Trees, houses and fields flashing past him, again and again and again, his tired vision tunnelling. Bulbs flare and flash and red cables tangle with his thoughts.

A trained visual artist, Kalle Hakkarainen's intensely repetitive piece is not an easy fit in the circus box. There is very little of the physical in his theatre, and the one trick he does use, an old and classic move, is hampered, as Cie 14:20's piece before his, by the visibility of the harness that makes it possible, and so any small chance of magic is dispelled. It does not work well as avant-garde theatre either, for he gives no expression, no presence, no character, and no drama. The viewer grasps for something that is not offered, and again they are not in awe purely of the skill involved in his work. The glorious soundscapes by Múm's Samuli Kosminen cannot save it, and the audience leaves disappointed.

Saturday brings a lot more joy, and the festival's outstanding highlight – the surreal Kafka-esque dream world of L'Autre. Conceived and choreographed by Claudio Stellato in Brussels in collaboration with Martin Firket, it explores the physical language of a body with "no shape or joints, yet a body that is strong and meticulous".

Claudio is a highly driven performer who undertakes intense periods of research to perfect his art, drawing on mime and acrobatics to create his cleverly choreographed contortions: "This piece is the result of a long investigation (begun in 2008) focusing on movement language and the relationship between body and object. What I have been pursuing (and am still researching) is the possibility of giving life, through movement, to my deepest impulses, hidden desires and every

other part of my unconscious mind that does not usually manifest itself."

The piece begins, in pitch darkness, with the unnerving sound of scratching. A light comes up to reveal Stellato edging across a furred red carpet with a small cabinet supported on his back, his progress forward a struggle. As the show progresses, Stellato turns feline, moving from cabinet to wardrobe, as the red carpet breathes, furniture levitates and doors open and close by themselves. In the end, rather than anthropomorphising the inanimate, all is animated, and Stellato is objectified, becoming one with his surroundings. As he explores his landscape, the wooden containers tilt and fall, and he falls and rises with them with a deft humour that draws us into the magic of his world, and the genius of his simplistic invention. Like Chaplin in *Le Cirque Invisible*, Stellato makes the everyday into the extraordinary, turning the mundane into magic with his movements.

"Through this performance I put on stage the possibility that a hidden part of myself takes a human form, free from constrictions, and comes to disrupt the conscious and rational part of me, along with its sense of reality. I call this inner part my 'Autre'. On stage, I incarnate both: 'me' and my Autre ('other'). They co-exist together in one body that is torn between two different ways of being: the conscious 'me' and the subconscious, imaginary 'me'. L'Autre lives in a world made of living objects (furniture and other warped/reinvented objects) that come to life one after the other. He manipulates them, discovers them."

Watching the piece, it feels like a solo show, but at the end it is revealed to be a duet. In the shadows lurks someone 'invisible' (Martin Firket) who makes the visible illusion possible. Stellato explains: "He is controlling everything the eye can see. A technician, a master of ceremony, a wizard, a puppeteer, or perhaps simply the person that makes the world of L'Autre possible and that defines it. With this piece, I am not trying to convey a clear message or to tell a tightly knit story. I'm looking to stimulate the senses of the audience and to provoke instinctive reactions, as in a dream..."

# Le Cirque Invisible

*"We're all going to die.  
All of us. What a circus!  
That alone should make us  
love each other but it doesn't.  
We are terrorized and  
flattened by trivialities.  
We are eaten up by nothing."*

CHARLES BUKOWSKI

XENIA HELMS

**Roll up, roll up, the circus is coming!  
What is typical of a circus?  
Roll up!**

Dozens of colourful wagons full of daring artists, wild animals, shining sparkling costumes, lights, tents, benches, ropes, bars and chains roam from place to place, arriving at marshy meadows or dusty fields to bring audiences a few days of entertainment, amazement and magic. For what seems like hundreds of years, travelling circus folk have visited locals in their villages and towns, settling down for a short period of time and bringing with them everything they need to live and work.

The Festival *novog cirkusa* in Zagreb turns this idea on its head for one of its performances. It is the audience that travels to the circus. Dozens of festival-goers meet at the main train station and, after a lengthy wait, board a coach with tinted windows. Our ID cards are scrutinised and our tickets are checked off from a list. People create social seating arrangements on the bus and finally we head off.

The festival has existed since 2005, but it cannot draw on existing local circus structures or experiences nor on an audience with circus-specific knowledge, habits or preferences. As those travelling on the bus explain, unlike many other socialist countries, the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia did not have a national circus or any permanent circus buildings like those which can still be found today in cities such as Riga or Moscow. According to them the Italian

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CHARLES BUKOWSKI

XENIA HELMS

**Der Zirkus kommt, der Zirkus kommt!  
Was ist typisch für den Zirkus?  
Er kommt!**

Dutzende bunte Wagen voll waghalsiger Artisten, wilder Tiere, glitzernder Kostüme, Lampen, Zelten, Bänke, Seile, Gitter und Gatter ziehen von Ort zu Ort, kommen zum Publikum auf sumpfige Wiesen und staubige Plätze, um für einige Tage Zauber, Staunen und Freude zu bringen. Seit gefühlten hunderten von Jahren besuchen *Fahrende* die Sesshaften in ihren Dörfern und Städten und bringen alles mit sich, was sie für Arbeit und Alltag brauchen, um sich für kurze Zeit niederzulassen.

Das Festival *novog cirkusa*<sup>1</sup> in Zagreb dreht dieses Prinzip für eine Vorstellung um. Das Publikum reist zum Zirkus. Mehrere dutzend Festivalbesucherinnen treffen sich am Hauptbahnhof und steigen nach längerem Herumstehen in einen bereitstehenden Reisebus mit verdunkelten Scheiben. Unsere Identitätspapiere werden kontrolliert, die Eintrittskarten werden mit Listen verglichen, Sitzgemeinschaften bilden sich – und endlich geht es los.

Das Festival existiert seit 2005 und kann weder auf bereits vorhandene örtliche Strukturen und Erfahrungen zurückgreifen, noch auf zirkusspezifische Kenntnisse, Sehgewohnheiten und Vorlieben des Publikums. Wie die Mitreisenden erzählen, gab es in der ehemaligen Republik Jugoslawien, im Gegensatz zu vielen sozialis-

1 [Http://www.cirkus.hr/](http://www.cirkus.hr/)



circus group Circo Medrano<sup>1</sup> received a permit once a year, to perform and travel through this multi-ethnic state, shaping the Serbian and Croatian image of the circus arts through its monopoly. Contemporary circus has been slow to take hold, and, as has been the case for those starting initiatives in many other European countries, Festival *novog cirkusa* was initially confronted with a void. Apart from some shaky third-party funding and meagre support from sceptical local politicians, it has come into existence only through great energy and the effort of individuals. The organisation running the festival, *Mala Performerska Scena*, is also actively involved in circus research and education.

We travel to Maribor, which is today situated in the EU member state of Slovenia, while Zagreb is located in the non-EU country of Croatia. At the border, memories of a not too distant past are awakened. For many of us it has been quite a while since we last crossed a border checkpoint. The double passport checks seem to take forever. Finally we are allowed to continue our journey and arrive at the theatre shortly before the performance begins. Maribor is currently European Capital of Culture, but in the end of November on this rainy journey along the motorway and through the town there is very little we can see of it. We are here to see *Le Cirque Invisible*, The Invisible Circus, from France – a circus without a tent or a circus ring.

When we arrive at the venue, there is just enough time to dash off to the toilet after the long journey and for some misconceptions with the monolingual staff in the foyer. In the theatre everything is written in Slovenian, causing some unexpected turmoil, but more of it later.

Slovenian differs enormously from Croatian and so there is no similarity whatsoever between the words for *ladies, row, seat* and *no photos permitted*. After a good deal of shuffling back and forth, we eventually find our seats, the curtain

1 Unfortunately the website of a circus by this name, <http://www.medrano.it>, does not contain any information about the tours in Yugoslavia before 26 June 1991 when in a public referendum Croatia and Slovenia decided to end their 73 year-old union in order to gain their independence.

tischen Bruderländern, keinen Nationalzirkus, ebenso wenig wie feste Zirkusbauten, mit denen sich Städte wie Riga und Moskau bis heute schmücken. Einmal im Jahr erhielt wohl eine italienische Truppe, der Circo Medrano<sup>2</sup>, die Auftritts- und Reisegenehmigung durch den Vielvölkerstaat und prägte auf diese Weise monopolistisch das Bild der Serben und Kroaten von der Zirkuskunst. Wie in vielen nordeuropäischen Ländern traf folglich auch dieser internationale Treffpunkt für zeitgenössische Zirkusproduktionen in Kroatien auf eine Leerstelle, die von jenseits wackliger Finanzierung durch Drittmittel und skeptische Lokalpolitiker mit viel Energie und Selbstaubeutung gefüllt wird und über die Veranstaltungen des Festivals hinaus im Bereich der Zirkusforschung und –geschichte aktiv ist.

Wir fahren nach Maribor, das heute in Slowenien, einem EU-Mitgliedsstaat, liegt, während sich Zagreb im Nicht-EU-Land Kroatien befindet. An der Grenze werden Erinnerung an lang vergangenen geglaubte Zeiten wach. Viele von uns sind sehr lange nicht über einen Landgrenzübergang gefahren. Die doppelte Passkontrolle scheint ewig zu dauern. Endlich dürfen wir weiter fahren und kommen kurz vor Beginn im Theater an. Maribor ist Kulturhauptstadt Europas, doch davon können wir auf dieser regnerischen Fahrt Ende November auf der Autobahn und durch den Ort nur sehr wenig erkennen.

Es spielt *Le Cirque Invisible*, Der Unsichtbare Zirkus, aus Frankreich. Ein Zirkus ohne Zelt oder Manege.

Als wir ankommen, reicht die Zeit knapp für einen Toilettengang nach der langen Fahrt, und für einige Missverständnisse mit dem monolingualen Personal im Foyer. Im Theater ist alles auf Slowenisch beschriftet, was zu unerwartetem Aufruhr führt, doch dazu später. Das Slowenische unterscheidet sich vom Kroatischen immens und so gibt es keinerlei

2 Die website eines Zirkus mit diesem Namen, <http://www.medrano.it>, gibt leider keine Auskunft über die Zeit von Tourneen auf jugoslawischen Gebiet vor dem 26.6.1991 als Kroatien und Slowenien nach einem Volksreferendum beschlossen, den Staatenbund nach 73 gemeinsamen Jahren zu verlassen und Souveränität zu erlangen.

rises and the magic begins. A quirky textile creature scurries on stage, circles around, wobbles, falls and transforms into a sea anemone, a shell and then into a giant mouth. A preposterous old man with wild white locks, reminiscent of Harpo from the Marx Brothers, keeps reappearing on stage in different costumes with topically appropriate suitcases. He attempts to do magic tricks, tell jokes, create tableaux vivants and sing songs with varying degrees of success.

The scant staff: a woman, a man. Rabbits. Pigeons. Ducks.

An invisible little helper during the blackouts between scenes.

They appear on stage in alternation, clad in somewhat flimsy and in some cases frequently repaired costumes with daring gadgetry and old fashioned props. They give their best in various small sketches, including circus numbers, miniatures, one-act plays, tricks and athletic feats. The audience's role is passive, just as it has been trained to be for thousands of years. On stage the actors stride, leap, speak and bedazzle, while the members of the audience sit in the hall – quiet, well-behaved, attentive with their eyes directed towards the events on the stage in front of them. Even the children in the hall are noticeably quiet and laugh in the appropriate places. In the course of the two hours of performance on stage, there is a single, very brief moment of interaction. A scene of orange, yellow and green: Jean-Baptiste Thierrée, enters the stage in a colourful suit covered with printed fruit. In a suitcase adorned with printed fruit are a number of oranges. He attempts to juggle and tosses the juicy orange spheres into the enchanted audience. He does not ask for them back, but rather leaves the stage immediately after the act.

During the break, an obviously angry and linguistically challenged stagehand with bulging muscles suddenly appears, reeking of sweat approaches. Using stoic repetition of unintelligible words and menacingly infringing my comfort zone, he resolutely demands strict observance of the Slovenian notice signs, which are stuck on the outer side of the open doors and were thus

Wiedererkennen der Wörter für Damen, Reihe, Platz und Photographieren verboten. Nach einigem Hin und Her ist der richtige Platz gefunden, der Vorhang geht auf, der Zauber beginnt. Ein seltsames, textiles Wesen trippelt auf die Bühne, kreiselt, wackelt, stürzt und verwandelt sich in eine Seeanemone, eine Muschel, einen riesenhaften Mund. Ein verdrehter alter Mann mit wilden weißen Locken, der an Harpo von den Marx Brothers erinnert, kommt in ständig wechselnden Kostümen und mit thematisch dazu passenden Koffern auf die Bühne und versucht sich mal mehr, mal weniger erfolgreich mit Zaubertricks, Witzen, Tableaux vivantes und Liedern.

Übersichtliches Personal: Eine Frau, ein Mann. Kaninchen. Tauben. Enten.

Unsichtbare Helferlein im Blackout zwischen den Szenen.

Abwechselnd kommen sie auf die Bühne, in manchmal etwas fadenscheinigen, vielfach geflickten Kostümen, mit waghalsigen Apparaturen, mit altmodischen Requisiten, und geben kleine Szenen zum Besten. Zirkusnummern. Miniaturen. Einaktige Theaterstücke. Tricks. Sportliche Übungen. Die Rolle des Publikums ist passiv, wie es das seit Jahrtausenden eingeübt hat. Auf der Bühne schreiten, toben, sprechen, verzaubern die Akteure, im Saal sitzen die Zuschauerinnen und Zuschauer. Leise, artig, aufmerksam, den Blick nach oben gerichtet auf das Geschehen vor ihnen. Selbst die Kinder im Saal verhalten sich auffällig ruhig und lachen an den vorgesehenen Stellen. In zwei Stunden Bühnenprogramm gibt es einen einzigen, sehr kurzen Moment der Interaktion. Eine Szene in orange, gelb und grün: Jean-Battiste Thiérée kommt in einem bunten Anzug auf die Bühne, der mit Früchten bedruckt ist. Im mit Obst drucken beklebten Koffer befinden sich Apfelsinen. Er versucht eine Jonglage und wirft die saftigen, orangeroten Kugeln ins entzückte Publikum. Zurück verlangt er sie nicht, sondern verlässt die Bühne gleich nach der Nummer.

In der Pause verlangt ein wenig sprachbegabter, dafür um so muskelbepackter, ärgerlicher und nach Schweiß duftender Bühnenarbeiter durch





**Victoria Chaplin & Jean-Baptiste Thierrée – Le Cirque Invisible**  
© Mario Sabatini

invisible when entering the hall. Under his severe supervision, unauthorised photographs had to be deleted from the digital camera, and only then was I, too, permitted to leave for the intermission. Fortunately the price list featured the Slavic omnilingual word *pivo*. With the trusty Euro and some basic finger counting, I was able to procure a freshly tapped beer, which greatly helped to ease the shock of the experience and paved the way for the second half.

*Le Cirque Invisible* exists unchanged in its current form since 1990, with Victoria Chaplin and Jean-Baptiste Thierrée as the principal performers and supporting actors in all of the roles. The world, at least the political and territorial world of Europe, has changed almost entirely since then. In many regions the public and private spheres alike look nothing like they did in 1989 and before. New

stoische Wiederholung unverständlicher Worte und bedrohliche Überschreitung meiner Komfortzone unnachgiebig die Befolgung der ausschließlich slowenisch beschrifteten Hinweisschilder, die außen an den geöffneten Türen kleben und so während des Einlasses unsichtbar waren. Die unerlaubten Photographien müssen unter seiner Aufsicht von der Digitalkamera gelöscht werden, danach werde auch ich in die Pause entlassen. Glücklicherweise verspricht die Preistafel slawisch omnilingual *pivo* und mit den vertrauten Euro und mit einem einfachen Fingerzeig lässt sich ein frisches Bier erwerben, welches den Schrecken gewaltig erleichtert und die Wogen zum zweiten Teil glättet.

Le Cirque Invisible existiert in seiner heutigen Form unverändert seit 1990, mit Victoria Chaplin und Jean-Baptiste Thierrée als Haupt- und Nebendarstellern in allen Rollen. Die Welt, zumindest die politische und territoriale Welt Europas, hat sich seitdem fast vollständig verändert. Vielerorts sieht im öffentlichen Raum, ebenso wie in vielen privaten Refugien, nichts mehr so aus, wie es 1989 und davor aussah. Es gibt neue Länder, Grenzverschiebungen, EU-Erweiterungen, Schengen-Abkommen. Victoria Chaplin und Jean-Baptiste Thierrée sind eine multinationale Entität, die sich über den Planeten bewegt und ihre Kunst so gut sie es vermag zum Besten gibt, zeitlos, unberührt von solcherlei politischen und territorialen Veränderungen und auch ihrer eigenen persönlichen, körperlichen und familiären Veränderungen.

Victoria Chaplin wurde 1951 im kalifornischen Santa Monica in den USA geboren, doch ihr Vater, der gebürtige Brite Charles Chaplin verließ das Land, in dem er seine größten Erfolge drehte, nach einem widerrufenen Wiedereinreisevisum aufgrund seiner kritischen Haltung gegenüber J. Edgar Hoover, der ihn, wie viele unabhängige Geister und KünstlerInnen, „unamerikanischer Umtriebe“ bezichtigte, und zog mit seiner vielköpfigen Familie im Dezember 1952 endgültig zurück nach Europa. Victoria, das vierte von acht Kindern des Filmstars „Charlie“ Chaplin mit seiner sechszwanzig Jahre jüngeren, vierten und letzten Ehefrau Oona, geborene O’Neill, wuchs in

countries exist, borders have shifted, the EU has expanded, and the Schengen Agreement applies. Victoria Chaplin and Jean-Baptiste Thiéree are a multinational entity that moves around the planet and gives its best at its art. It is timeless, untouched by such political or territorial changes and equally untouched by their own personal, physical and family changes.

Victoria Chaplin was born in Santa Monica, California, in 1951, but her British-born father Charles Chaplin left the USA after filming his most successful movies there. His re-entry visa was revoked because of his criticism of J. Edgar Hoover, who had accused him of 'un-American activities' along with many other free thinkers and artists. In December 1952 he finally moved back to Europe, taking his large family with him. Victoria was the fourth of eight children that film star 'Charlie' Chaplin had with his fourth and last wife Oona, née O'Neill, who was 36 years his junior. Victoria grew up in French-speaking Switzerland and had already acted as an infant in her father's film *Limelight*. Perhaps such an early start in show business was nothing unusual for the world's most popular comedian and was in line of a family tradition, sketched by Chaplin in the film. Featuring biographical elements, the film pays homage to the days of vaudeville and music halls. Charles Chaplin's parents were artists in music hall programmes. As a child, he, too, worked in these shows, which contained many circus elements such as music and acrobatics, and which can be seen as an equivalent to the American vaudeville shows. In 1928 he filmed *The Circus* for United Artists. The film brought him his first Oscar. He received his second Oscar in 1972 for *Limelight*.

Just like the circus folk from centuries past, Victoria and Jean-Baptiste move from the city to the countryside, and from the countryside back to the city, bringing their art to willing audiences, either in person or on the big screen.

*Le Cirque Invisible* is their third production and their third circus since they first met in 1969 and virtually married on the spot. Their meeting is unusual and to some it would appear to be magical. Victoria Chaplin's wish to become a

der französischsprachigen Schweiz auf und hatte bereits als Baby einen Auftritt als Darstellerin in einem Film ihres Vaters, *Rampenlicht*<sup>3</sup>. Der frühe Einstieg in das Unterhaltungsgeschäft im Kindesalter ist für den weltberühmtesten Komiker vermutlich nichts Ungewöhnliches, sondern entspricht einer familiären Tradition, und wird von Chaplin in diesem Film verarbeitet, der biographische Züge trägt und der Zeit des Vaudeville und der Music Hall huldigt. Charles Chaplins Eltern waren Künstler in Music-Hall-Programmen und so arbeitete er bereits als Kind ebenfalls in solchen Unterhaltungsshows, die viele Elemente des Zirkus wie Musik und Akrobatik enthalten und äquivalent zum US-amerikanischen Vaudeville zu sehen sind. 1928 drehte er den Film *The Circus* für United Artists, für den er seinen ersten Oscar erhielt, den zweiten bekam er 1973 für *Limelight*<sup>4</sup>.

Wie Zirkusleute Hunderte von Jahren vor ihnen ziehen sie von Stadt zu Land und von Land zu Stadt und bringen ihre Kunst zum geneigten Publikum. In *Persona* oder auf der Leinwand.

*Le Cirque Invisible* ist ihre dritte Produktion, ihr dritter Zirkus seit sie sich 1969 begegneten und fast auf der Stelle heirateten. Die Begegnung ist ungewöhnlich, manchem mag sie wie Zauberei erscheinen. Victoria Chaplins Wunsch, sie wolle Clown im Zirkus werden, wird in einem Magazinartikel über ihren Vater kolportiert. Der in Paris geborene Arbeitersohn Jean-Baptiste Thiéree, der mit 25 Jahren nach etlichen Aushilfsjobs in allerlei Gewerken eine eigene Compagnie gründete und fünf Shows in drei Jahren produziert, liest den Artikel und suchte daraufhin den Kontakt zu ihr. Sie verlieben sich und laufen gemeinsam davon. Sie ist kaum erwachsen, 18 Jahre alt, er siebzehn Jahre älter. Eine weitere Familientradition mag manche

3 Im Original: *Limelight*, USA 1952. Regie, Buch, Produktion, Musik: Charles Chaplin.

4 Aufgrund einer inzwischen geänderten Regel der Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences war *Rampenlicht* für die Oscars im Jahr 1972 wählbar. Gemäß dieser Regel konnte ein Film nominiert werden, wenn er im fraglichen Auswahljahr erstmals im Stadtgebiet von Los Angeles einem zahlenden Publikum gezeigt wurde. Dies war bei *Rampenlicht* der Fall. In der Kategorie Beste Filmmusik wurde das Werk nominiert und gewann 1973. Quelle: [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rampenlicht\\_%28Film%29#Auszeichnungen](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rampenlicht_%28Film%29#Auszeichnungen)



clown in a circus, as was reported in a magazine article about her father. Jean-Baptiste Thiérrée was born into a Parisian working-class family and at 25, after many odd jobs in a variety of trades, he founded his own company. He produced five shows over the course of three years and after reading the article he tried to make contact with Victoria. They fell in love and eloped. At the tender age of 18, she was barely an adult and he was 17 years her senior. Another family tradition some might think, but her father Charles, having Victoria perform in his last film *A Countess from Hong Kong*, was not amused.

The story of their meeting, how they became a couple and had a family, sounds so dream-like and wonderful that it is like a fairytale set in the circus and the world of show business. In 1970 they performed in Federico Fellini's *The Clowns*. In this film, Fellini erects a memorial to his lifelong fascination with the circus. He sought out the greatest European clowns of his time and carried out research in a museum for circus history. Together, Victoria and Jean-Baptiste dreamed of a great, romantic, never-ending love, which was repeatedly manifested in the press, reviews and reports of the time, but above all they dreamed of a new and different circus.

In 1971 their *Cirque Bonjour* premiered at the festival in Avignon, but after three years they wanted to continue their quest for a new circus and parted company with the animals, the 40 artists, the old big top and the orchestra.

They founded *Le Cirque Imaginaire* and performed with their two children, James and Aurélia Thiérrée, who came on stage with 'walk-on numbers' dressed as suitcases. Over the years, the children became more independent and finally left the family company *Cirque Imaginaire*. They tried their hand at many different disciplines, but in the end they returned to the stage and created their own shows using their circus knowledge and the help of their parents, for example in designing and making costumes and props. Aurélia once commented on working with her mother Victoria for her production *Aurélia's Oratorium*:

denken, doch Victorias Vater Charles, in dessen letztem Film, *Die Gräfin von Hongkong*<sup>5</sup>, sie einen Auftritt als Schauspielerin hat, ist not amused. Die Geschichte ihrer Begegnung, ihres Zusammenkommens und der Gründung einer Familie klingt so traumhaft, so wunderbar, so märchenhaft wie man sie sich nicht schöner für eine Erzählung über den Zirkus und die Welt der Bühne ausdenken könnte. 1970 spielen sie sich schließlich selbst in Federico Fellinis *Die Clowns*<sup>6</sup>, der mit diesem Film seiner lebenslangen Faszination für den Zirkus ein Denkmal setzt und die größten noch lebenden europäischen Clowns seiner Zeit aufsucht und in einem Museum Zirkusgeschichte erforscht. Gemeinsam erträumen sie sich eine große, romantische, nicht endende, immer wieder durch Presstexte, Rezensionen und Berichte manifestierte Liebe – und einen anderen, einen neuen Zirkus.

Im Jahr 1971 erlebt ihr *Cirque Bonjour* beim Circusfestival in Avignon Premiere, doch nach drei Jahren wollen sie weiter hinaus in ihrem Bestreben nach dem Neuen und trennen sich von den Tieren, den 40 ArtistInnen, dem großen alten Chapiteau und einem Orchester.

Sie gründen *Le Cirque Imaginaire* und treten mit ihren beiden Kindern James und Aurélia Thiérrée auf, die Walk-On-Nummern auf die Bühne bringen – als Gepäckstücke verkleidet. Im Laufe der Jahre beginnen sie jedoch nach Selbständigkeit zu streben und verlassen mit zunehmendem Alter das Familienunternehmen *Cirque Imaginaire*. Sie probieren sich in vielen verschiedenen Disziplinen aus, inzwischen sind sie jedoch beide auf die Bühne zurückgekehrt und kreieren ihre eigenen Shows, für die sie das circensische Wissen und die Hilfe ihrer Eltern, beispielsweise bei der Gestaltung und Herstellung der Kostüme und Requisiten, gerne beanspruchen. Aurélia über die Zusammenarbeit mit ihrer Mutter Victoria für ihre Produktion *Aurélias Oratorium*:

To me working on a new show is like arriving to a new town or a new country: I start to study the

5 Im Original: *A Countess from Hong Kong*, GB 1967. Regie, Buch, Musik: Charles Chaplin

6 Im Original: *I clowns*, I 1970. Regie: Federico Fellini, TV-Film für RAI, der auch in die Kinos kam.

To me working on a new show is like arriving to a new town or a new country: I start to study the language, I familiarise myself with the names of the streets until I find my own place then I can focus on exploring where and who I am. This is how I enter Vicky's world: a world built with wood, cardboard and images, the world of her imagination, her subconscious; once I'm there I try to interpret it according to who I am, I try to make it my own. Vicky creates almost everything by herself: costumes, set design, visual effects. When performing in *Aurélia's Oratorio* I used to say: she has created everything, including myself!"<sup>2</sup>

Her parents are less talkative and keep a low profile when it comes to their work. The loud and sensational style that is usually associated with the circus world is not what they are interested in. For decades they have ceased to give interviews, but a few statements make the rounds. It is said that Jean-Baptiste Thiérrée would have preferred to produce a single show, a single circus, and worked on improving it until the end of time. Maintaining the quality of all of the numbers in the two-hour performance of *Le Cirque Invisible* could come quite close to this dream, given that the two sole protagonists, Victoria Chaplin (61) and Jean-Baptiste Thiérrée (79), have grown old with their circus. The confident and elegant performance of some scenes, for example requiring contortion or the tightrope, is certainly more demanding for them compared to 20 years ago. The *New Circus* of these two old people uses the ancient vocabulary of metamorphosis and illusion: nothing is as it appears and everything can be transformed into something completely different. Its aesthetic is reminiscent of the silent film era, with feathers, suitcases, fans, lace and Japanese umbrellas made from painted paper – accessories of a worldly lady from the Victorian period, when riding a bicycle was still daring and wearing trousers was unthinkable. The animals that appear on stage are used as demonstration

2 Valentina Bonelli, 'Aurélia Thiérrée – Chaplin's granddaughter brings on stage the "enchanted" spirit of her legendary performing dynasty'. Interview: Vogue Italia, published 7 June 2011. <http://www.vogue.it/en/people-are-talking-about/music-theatre-cinema/2011/07/aurelia-thierree>

language, I familiarize myself with the names of the streets until I find my own place then I can focus on exploring where and who I am. This is how I enter Vicky's world: a world built with wood, cardboard and images, the world of her imagination, her subconscious; once I'm there I try to interpret it according to who I am, I try to make it my own. Vicky creates almost everything by herself: costumes, set design, visual effects. When performing in *Aurélia's Oratorio* I used to say: she has created everything, including myself!"<sup>7</sup>

Ihre Eltern sind weniger redselig und halten sich über ihr Schaffen bedeckt. Das Marktschreierische was als Allgemeinplatz so gerne mit dem Zirkus in Verbindung gebracht wird, ist nicht ihre Sache. Seit Jahrzehnten geben sie keine Interviews mehr, doch es kursieren einige Zitate. So hätte Jean-Baptiste Thiérrée am liebsten nur eine einzige Show, einen einzigen Zirkus, produziert, diesen jedoch bis in alle Ewigkeit verbessert. Die Qualität aller Nummern der zweistündigen Vorstellung des *Cirque Invisible* aufrecht zu erhalten, könnte diesem Traum sehr nahe kommen, denn seine beiden einzigen Protagonistinnen Victoria Chaplin (61) und Jean-Baptiste Thiérrée (79) sind mit ihrem Zirkus alt geworden. Die sichere, elegante Ausführung mancher Szenen, die zum Beispiel Kontorsionistik<sup>8</sup> oder Seillauf erfordern, dürfte ihnen sehr viel mehr abverlangen als noch vor 20 Jahren. Der neue Zirkus dieser alten Leute bedient sich eines uralten Vokabulars von Metamorphose und Illusion: nichts erscheint wie es ist und alles kann sich in etwas völlig anderes verwandeln. Seine Ästhetik lässt an die Stummfilmära zurückdenken: Federn, Handkoffer, Fächer, Spitze, japanische Schirme aus bemaltem Papier – Accessoires einer weltgewandten Dame im viktorianischen Zeitalter als das Fahrradfahren noch ein Wagnis war und an Hosen nicht zu denken gewagt wurde. Die auftretenden Tiere

7 Valentina Bonelli: Aurélia Thiérrée – Chaplin's grand-daughter brings on stage the "enchanted" spirit of her legendary performing dynasty. Interview in: Vogue Italia, VÖ 7.6.2011. <http://www.vogue.it/en/people-are-talking-about/music-theatre-cinema/2011/07/aurelia-thierree>

8 die akrobatische Kunst des Sichverbiegens, von lat. contortio ‚Drehung, Windung‘



objects in the long-standing tradition of the magic show. However, they bravely bear their role as living clichés and ensure hilarity through brief moments of unpredictability for which there is otherwise no room in the clockwork programme. The references in many jokes and creations will not be well known to younger generations; once exotic beauties and the fascination of distant places will not be very understandable in their globalised world. The moments of criticism and the desire to improve the world might also seem outdated and old-fashioned.

Nevertheless, on this evening in Maribor no one leaves before the performance has ended. Young and old applaud alike and are thrilled with each curtain call in which the two performers reappear in new costumes and create third part of the evening's performance. We climb back onto the coach and travel back to Zagreb.

stehen in einer langen Tradition als Demonstrationsobjekte in der Zauberkunst, doch sie ertragen tapfer ihre Rolle als lebendige Klischees und sorgen für witzige, weil winzige Momente der Unberechenbarkeit für die im uhrwerkartigen Ablauf ansonsten kein Raum ist. Die Referenzen vieler Scherze und Kreaturen werden jüngeren Generationen weniger vertraut sein, einstige exotische Schönheit und die Faszination des Fernen mag ihnen wenig verständlich erscheinen in einer globalisierten Welt, die Augenblicke von Kritik und Weltverbesserung überholt und altmodisch.

Und doch verlässt niemand vorzeitig den Saal an diesem Abend in Maribor. Jung und alt applaudieren und freuen sich über jeden einzelnen Vorhang, der die beiden in immer neuen Kostümen auf die Bühne kommen lässt und wie ein dritter Teil der Vorstellung ist. Wir steigen wieder in den Reisebus und fahren zurück nach Zagreb.

# UNPACK THE ARTS



Culture

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