

UNPACK THE ARTS

European residency programme for cultural journalists

**HELSINKI RESIDENCY
CIRKO FESTIVAL
08 – 12 MAY 2013**

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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 seventh publication collects the texts of 10 European journalists who attended the residency at Cirko in Helsinki, Finland, 8 to 12 May 2013.

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

KOEN ALLARY

Director, Circuscentrum (project leader)

YOHANN FLOCH

Adviser

The body openly in view

The dedication to and from the audience in Finnish circus and Belgian-Austrian performance.

BRECHT HERMANS

What do a poetic Finnish circus performance and a crude Belgian-Austrian piece of shock theatre have in common? Curiously enough, I found myself watching *Tenho* by Agit-Cirk in a similar mind to that which I had watched *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse* by Vincent Riebeek and Florentina Holzinger with two years earlier. At first sight, however, these performances do not seem to have very much in common. Why, then, did my mind connect the two? An investigation is needed.

The way things used to be

The starting point in the Finnish circus performance *Tenho* is the past. In a sober manner, Agit-Cirk evokes the atmosphere of the golden age of circus. Traditional acts such as the strongman are performed in a somewhat melancholy way. The setting is minimal, there is no ring. The actions are purified and the movements are taut.

As though marking a ceremony, the acts are performed in silence. An acrobat, Jenni Lehtinen, is pulleyed up by strongman Sasu Peistola, who is wearing a belt around the waist. When he crosses the stage, she takes to the air. It demands an enormous effort. We can hear him breathe and groan. We watch how he strains himself while she performs graceful movements in the air.

At the end of the act, he lifts her once again. This time, he holds her weight by clenching a bit between his teeth – just like John Massis, an old-time Flemish popular hero, who could pull literally anything using his teeth: cars, trains, helicopters.

Een vrije blik op het lichaam

De overgave aan en van het publiek in Fins circus en Belgisch-Oostenrijkse performance.

BRECHT HERMANS

Wat hebben een Finse, poëtische circusvoorstelling en een Belgisch-Oostenrijks maagstompemd stuk shocktheater met elkaar gemeen? Tijdens het kijken naar *Tenho* van Agit-Cirk merkte ik tot mijn eigen verbazing dat ik met eenzelfde blik naar deze voorstelling keek als twee jaar eerder naar *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse* van Vincent Riebeek en Florentina Holzinger. Nochtans hebben de twee op het eerste zicht weinig raakvlak. Waarom maakte mijn hoofd dan toch de link? Tijd voor een onderzoek.

Hoe het vroeger was

De Finse circusvoorstelling *Tenho* neemt het verleden als uitgangspunt. Op sobere wijze roept Agit-Cirk de sfeer van de oude hoogdagen van het circus op. Traditionele acts als de sterke man worden hernomen in een licht melancholische sfeer. Geen piste echter, de setting is minimaal. De acties zijn uitgezuiverd, de bewegingslijnen strak.

Als een ritueel worden de handelingen aanvankelijk in stilte uitgevoerd. Een acrobate (Jenni Lehtinen) wordt via een katrolsysteem opgetrokken in de lucht. Aan het andere eind van het systeem staat een stevige man (Sasu Peistola), hij draagt een gordel om zijn middel. Wanneer hij de scène dwars oversteekt, gaat zij de lucht in. Het vergt een zware krachtspanning van hem. We horen zijn adem, zijn kreunen. We kijken toe hoe hij zich inspant, terwijl zij sierlijke figuren maakt in de lucht.

Aan het eind van de act trekt hij haar nogmaals omhoog. Dit keer houdt hij haar niet in de hoogte via zijn middel, maar via een bit in zijn mond. Net John Massis, een vroegere Vlaamse volksheld die



Agit-Cirk – Tenho © Agit-Cirk

Both Massis and *Tenho* provoke a physical reaction from the spectator, partly anxiety for the anticipated physical pain, partly awe for this man's feat, performed right here in front of us.

In later scenes, the muscleman blocks a 25 kilogram weight with his stomach and suffers a chair being smashed to pieces on his back. During all this Lehtinen goes around as a charming assistant, exchanging subtle and ironic glances with the audience. Later on, she herself shows her strong side in a trapeze act and a balancing exercise performed on top of a dozen chairs.

The performance *Kein applaus für scheisse* is of a completely different kind: it is a brash performance filled with nudity, on-stage vomiting and actors urinating on each other to the sounds of bad pop music. Is there any correlation between the two performances? On second thought, the answer is 'yes'.

zowat alles voorttrok met zijn tanden: auto's, treinen, helikopters. Zowel bij Massis als bij *Tenho* roept het een fysieke reactie op bij de kijker. Deels afgrijzen van de mogelijke fysieke pijn, deels verwondering over wat die man presteert hier en nu voor onze ogen.

In achtereenvolgende scènes stopt de krachtpatser een gewicht van vijftientig kilo met zijn buik en krijgt een stoel stukgeslagen op zijn rug. Lehtinen loopt daarbij rond als de bevallige assistente die via subtiele blikken een ironisch onderonsje heeft met het publiek. Later in de voorstelling laat zij haar van haar sterkste kant zien in een trapeze-act en een evenwichts-oefening bovenop een toren van een tiental stoelen.

Kein applaus für scheisse is een voorstelling van een heel ander kaliber: een hondsbrutale performance vol naakt, overgeven op scène en acteurs die elkaar onderplassen op de tonen

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The authors of *Agit-Cirk* revive part of the history of circus and investigate its use in a contemporary performance, an act parallel to that of the authors of *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse*, who turn to their roots in performance arts. Vincent Riebeek and Florentina Holzinger investigated shocking performances – from the 1980s to the present day. In Flanders, these performances have been a rather common sight, with Jan Fabre being one of the most prolific creators. He made dancers pee on the stage at the right moment, put naked bodies on display, and introduced bodily excretions such as blood, shit and sperm to the arts. Holzinger and Riebeek examined his work as well as the work of others, looking at shocking elements in contemporary performance. With regard to shocking acts, they found that an audience is easily accustomed to the initial shock. The first time there is nudity on the stage, people are very aware of it. Later on, it does not bother them any longer. The same rule applies to piss and vomit. Still, an audience keeps longing to be shocked. And in order to comply with this wish, performers are driven to push boundaries. This mechanism is what Holzinger and Riebeek expose. What does it take nowadays to shock an audience? In *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse*, they satirise familiar performances and take their shocking aspects to extremes. They throw up on the scene, but their vomit is blue because of a pigment previously swallowed. Riebeek urinates in Holzinger's mouth, who then, through a sensual kiss, returns to him his own fluid, which he downs with a smile. And then there is an act almost like the one in *Tenho* where Peistola blocks the heavy weight with his abdominal muscles: Vincent Riebeek is human target for a paintball shot from a giant bazooka. Strength and pain united. The physical reaction from the audience to the splashing paintball is similar to the one in *Tenho*.

Watching *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse* requires commitment from the audience. The shocks leave the audience numbed, but those who ride out the show can discover a different story behind it – a story about two performers who strain every nerve in their bodies in order to please the audience. How does that characterise the performers and the sensation-seeking audience? The performer's body and the spectator's eye take on a prominent position in the story.

van foute popmuziek. Kan er sprake zijn van een raakvlak met *Tenho*? Wanneer je er dieper over nadenkt, blijkt het antwoord ja.

Net zoals de makers van *Agit-Cirk* in *Tenho* een stuk circusverleden opgraven en de mogelijkheden ervan voor een hedendaagse voorstelling onderzoeken, zo keren ook de makers van *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse* terug naar hun roots, in dit geval die van de performancekunst. Vincent Riebeek en Florentina Holzinger onderzochten schokkerende performances van de jaren 80 tot nu. Vlaanderen kent er veel van, met Jan Fabre als een van de grote voortrekkers. Hij liet zijn balletdanseressen strak getimed plassen op scène, zette het naakte lichaam open en bloot in de kijker en gaf menselijke voortbrengsels als bloed, stront en sperma een plaats in de kunsten. Holzinger en Riebeek onderzochten zijn werk, maar ook dat van anderen. Op die manier stelden ze het shockerende element van performance in vraag in de hedendaagse praktijk.

Een vaststelling die zij maakten omtrent het shockeren, is dat de kijker snel aan de schok gewend raakt. De eerste keer dat je naakt ziet op scène ben je je daar heel erg van bewust. Later raakt het je koude kleren niet meer. Hetzelfde met pis en kots. Maar toch blijft het publiek ernaar verlangen om zich te laten shockeren. Om aan dat verlangen tegemoet te komen, moet de performer steeds verder gaan. Dit gegeven stellen Holzinger en Riebeek aan de kaak. Wat moeten ze tegenwoordig nog doen om te shockeren? In *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse* persifleren ze bekende voorstellingen en drijven het shockerende aspect ervan nog wat verder. Ze kotsen op scène, maar door vooraf ingenomen kleurstof blijkt die kots blauw. Riebeek plast in de mond van Holzinger, in een sensuele kus geeft zij hem zijn lichaamsvocht terug en met de glimlach slikt hij het door. En dan is er nog de scène die het broertje lijkt van de act in *Tenho* waarin Peistola het zware gewicht stopt met zijn buikspieren: Vincent Riebeek laat zich beschieten met een paintballkogel uit een gigantische bazooka. Kracht en pijn verenigd. De fysieke reactie van het publiek op de uiteenspattende verfbom is vergelijkbaar met die op het gewicht in *Tenho*.

Back to *Tenho*. During the first, quiet scenes, an incredible physical power is displayed, causing the spectator to feel both awe and vicarious pain – a reaction much the same to those experienced by *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse*'s audiences. In *Tenho* too, there is a second story to discover behind the physical acts. The circus acts speak of strength, but in the silence between them we can see hardship and suffering. We can hear Lehtinen and Peistola puff and pant. From effort, that is; it is not acted. In a way, they too are naked on stage: they do not hide behind a character or interlude. Silently, they reveal the hidden side of circus, the physical agony they experience as performers.

The spectator's eye

Tenho and *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse* connect very intimately with the audience. The physical efforts on stage find a physical response in the audience. We sympathise with the performers – not with the compassion one feels with the characters in a classical theatre performance, but through a strong empathy with the persons right in front of us. This brings about a very intense and personal connection between the spectator and the scene. Reactions from the audience, experienced for each individual through instinctive reflex, can take varying shapes.

For some spectators, *Tenho* seems tiresome. The old circus acts shout 'look what I can do!'. Those who only see this flaunting of skill probably won't enjoy the performance very much – just like those who would avert their eyes from a shocking scene in *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse*. There are, however, a number of entirely different connections possible. Whoever allows the physical actions in both performances to enter their own bodies can experience the story behind the show. This is how spectators themselves partly take responsibility for the performance and its personal value to them.

Tenho is not a performance about the past, but one that takes place in the present. Lehtinen and Peistola demonstrate the condition their bodies are in, how they feel in this present time. The spectator is forced to choose: whether to watch or not, to admit the weariness of the performers or not, to attach emotional importance to it or

Het kijken naar *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse* vraagt overgave van het publiek. De shock werkt afstompemd, maar wie de rit uitzit, ontdekt daarachter een ander verhaal. Een verhaal over twee performers die hun eigen lichaam tot het uiterste drijven om het publiek te behagen. Wat zegt dat over de performers en over het sensatiebeluste publiek? Het lichaam van de performer en de blik van de toeschouwer komen centraal te staan in het narratief.

Terug naar *Tenho*. In de eerste, stille scènes wordt een ongelofelijke fysieke kracht in de kijker gezet. Het levert bij de toeschouwer een mengeling van ontzag en plaatsvervangende pijn op, soortgelijk aan wat er bij *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse* gebeurt. En ook in *Tenho* ontdekken we achter de fysieke acts een tweede verhaal. De circusnummers vertellen ons iets over kracht, maar in de stilte ertussen zien we een verhaal van afzien en lijden. We horen Lehtinen en Peistola uithijgen. Puur van de inspanning, niet geacteerd. In zekere zin staan ook zij naakt op scène, zich niet verstoppend achter een personage of tussenspel. In de stilte tonen zij de achterkant van het circus, het fysieke lijden waaraan zij zich als performers blootstellen.

De blik van de toeschouwer

Tenho en *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse* gaan een heel directe band aan met de toeschouwer. De fysieke inspanningen op scène vinden hun fysieke weerklink bij het publiek. We voelen mee met de performers op scène. Dit is geen medelijden zoals met personages in een klassieke theatervoorstelling, maar een doorleefd meevoelen met de mensen die hier en nu voor ons staan. Dit zorgt voor een zeer intense, maar ook zeer persoonlijke band tussen toeschouwer en scène. De reactie van de toeschouwer op zijn eigen gevoelsmatige reflexen kan zeer verschillende vormen aannemen.

Voor sommige kijkers is *Tenho* saai. De oude circusacts hebben een hoog "kijk eens wat ik kan"-gehalte. Wie enkel het pronkerige ziet, vindt er mogelijk weinig aan. Zoals sommige toeschouwers bij *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse* ook de blik zullen afwenden in een vlucht voor het shockerende. Er zijn echter ook heel andere relaties mogelijk. Wie de fysieke handelingen

not. *Tenho* is not a linear story with an outlined narrative thread. The story stands between the scene and the audience, between the bodies on the stage and the bodies in the audience.

The bodies in the audience can be bored, shocked, angry, insulted. As well as thrilled, commiserative, excited. The personal jumble of feelings that emerges during *Tenho* is a story in itself. This story can become the centrepiece of the performance – exactly like in *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse*, where the relationship between the audience and the performers is even more fundamental.

Kein Applaus Für Scheisse calls for an interaction with the event. The performers' dedication to their medium of art and to their audience is questioned, as well as the audience's dedication to the performers. In *Tenho*, a similar dedication is expected. Circus artists endure pain and fatigue to please their audience. In a traditional circus show, these strains will be camouflaged as well as possible: always keep smiling. Agit-Cirk, however, do not cover up their struggle to achieve the outcomes anticipated by the audience.

The spectator who faces these experiences discovers a rather relevant and, in circus, crucial issue. Why do circus performers suffer in order to please the audience? Why would any performer wish to do so? And why don't we, the audience, feel a little less comfortable with it? Those are the exact same questions we asked ourselves during *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse*.

The freedom of the spectator

The spectator has no duties. Neither with Agit-Cirk, nor with Holzinger and Riebeek. There is no specific relationship required with the performance, they are all legitimate. The performers do their show and the audience has a choice, has its own responsibility for digesting the material supplied. You can walk away, you can watch the beautiful movements, you can incorporate the physical exhaustion. This freedom of choice is not always given in every performance. In a classical theatre performance, we usually watch a single, clearly defined interpretation by a single director. Circus is often domineering in a similar way: this is the

van beide voorstellingen in het eigen lichaam laat binnenkomen, kan het tweede verhaal achter het getoonde ontdekken. Zo krijgt de toeschouwer voor een deel zelf de verantwoordelijkheid over de voorstelling en wat hij er voor zichzelf uithaalt.

Tenho is geen voorstelling over het verleden, het is een voorstelling die plaatsvindt in het hier en nu. Lehtinen en Peistola laten ons zien hoe hun lichamen er aan toe zijn, hoe zij zich voelen in dat hier en nu. De toeschouwer wordt gedwongen tot keuzes: kijkt hij ernaar of niet, neemt hij de vermoeidheid van de acrobaten in zich op of niet, hecht hij daar een emotionele waarde aan of niet. *Tenho* brengt geen narratief van A tot Z waarnaar maar op één manier te kijken valt. Het verhaal van *Tenho* ontstaat tussen scène en publiek, tussen spelers en kijkers, tussen lichamen op scène en in de zaal.

Dat lichaam in de zaal kan verveeld zijn, geschokt, boos, beledigd. Maar ook in vervoering, in medelijden, in spanning. Je persoonlijke kluwen aan emoties dat je bij *Tenho* voelt, is een verhaal op zich. En dat verhaal kan centraal komen te staan in de voorstelling. Net als in *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse*, waar de relatie tussen kijker en performer nog resoluter op de spits werd gedreven.

Kein Applaus dwingt je tot een verhouding met het gebeuren. Het stelt de overgave van de performers aan hun kunstvorm en aan hun publiek in vraag, maar ook de overgave van het publiek aan de performers. Bij *Tenho* is er sprake van eenzelfde overgave. Circusartiesten ondergaan pijn en vermoeidheid, allemaal voor hun publiek. Bij een traditionele circusvoorstelling zal men dit zoveel mogelijk camoufleren. Altijd blijven lachen. Agit-Cirk toont net wel de worsteling van de performers om tot het resultaat te komen dat het publiek wenst. Wie als toeschouwer de confrontatie met deze gewaarwording aangaat, ontdekt een relevante en voor het circus cruciale vraag. Waarom ondergaan circusartiesten dit lijden om het publiek te behagen? Waarom doe je dat als performer? En waarom voelen wij ons als publiek daar niet wat ongemakkelijker bij? Precies dezelfde vragen riep *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse* bij ons op.

programme, these are the acts, watch and enjoy. An even more imperative trait in circus is the fact that the form signals when applause is expected from the audience.

In *Tenho*, the spectator is given a choice. Not only is there freedom for him to applaud whenever he wants to, the spectator can also choose his position among the acts performed. He can choose what storyline he embraces and investigates. Personal frames of reference are significant for the way an audience deals with this freedom. Personal backgrounds in circus or theatre audiences, as well as individual contexts, are significant in allowing and establishing a connection with the performance. Some spectators expect an unambiguous unity that makes them laugh and cry, with a pinch of excitement and surprise. Others prefer less directive performances and enjoy being challenged to freely determine their own approach to the performance. Just like in visual arts, an object might not be very valuable as such, but can become valuable when a spectator connects with it. With *Tenho*, Agit-Cirk succeeds in offering both choices: there is entertainment for those looking to be entertained, and there is room for questioning the relationships between the performers and the audience. In this way, circus artists today have the same choice as theatre performers about how to approach their audiences: the choice of how much freedom and responsibility lies with the audience. Are they looking to create an entertaining family performance or one that can prompt an audience to contemplate and reflect? Both angles are valuable and both can result in wonderful or poor performances. However, circus artists should be allowed to make these choices themselves. Circus does not necessarily belong in entertainment; it can also be a show that leaves room for the audience's interpretation. Circus artists today should be aware of those possibilities. Circus as a form of art can leave some questions unanswered and allow the storyline to wander between the ring and the audience, becoming entertainment that is intent on a unique, individual experience rather than on the audience's applause.

De vrijheid van de toeschouwer

De toeschouwer moet niets. Dat is zo bij zowel Agit-Cirk als Holzinger en Riebeek. Er is geen specifieke relatie die hij verplicht zou moeten aangaan met het werk. Iedere mogelijke relatie is legitiem. De spelers doen iets op scène en ieder in de zaal heeft een keuze, heeft zelf de verantwoordelijkheid over wat men met het aangereikte materiaal doet. Je kan uit de zaal weglopen, je kan naar de schoonheid van de bewegingen kijken, je kan de fysieke uitputting incorporeren. Die vrijheid heeft de toeschouwer niet bij elke voorstelling. In een klassieke theateropvoering kijken we (doorgaans) naar één vast omliggende interpretatie van één regisseur. Circus is op eenzelfde manier vaak dominant. Zo is het programma, zo zitten de acts in elkaar, kijk en geniet. En wat circus op dat vlak nog dwingender maakt: zelfs de momenten van applaus zitten voorgebakken in de show.

In *Tenho* wordt de toeschouwer vrijgelaten. Niet alleen op vlak van applaus is het publiek vrij te klappen of niet, maar ook in de omgang met de gepresenteerde acts is men vrij. Welk van de mogelijke verhalen men ziet en onderzoekt, kan de toeschouwer zelf kiezen. In welke mate deze omgaat met zijn vrijheid wordt sterk bepaald door zijn eigen referentiekader. De persoonlijke achtergrond als circus- of theaterkijker, maar ook de zeer individuele, unieke context bepaalt sterk in hoeverre de band met de voorstelling wordt toegelaten en opgebouwd. Sommige kijkers verwachten een eenduidig geheel waarvan ze kunnen lachen en huilen, met wat spanning en verwondering. Andere toeschouwers hebben geen nood aan een werk dat hen domineert, maar worden graag uitgedaagd om in alle vrijheid hun eigen positie ten opzichte van het werk te bepalen. Zoals bij beeldende kunst, waarbij een object soms weinig waarde op zich heeft, maar het belang van het werk ligt in de relatie die de toeschouwer aangaat met het voorwerp.

Agit-Cirk weet met *Tenho* beide opties open te laten: wie entertaind wil worden, kan dat. Wie de relatie tussen performers en publiek wil bevragen, kan dat ook. Op die manier heeft de circusartiest vandaag net als de theaterperformer de keuze over wat hij zijn publiek wil voorleggen. Over

A shared openness in *Tenho* and *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse*

Kein Applaus Für Scheisse leaves many responsibilities to the audience. The spectator is urged to accept the performance's challenge and struggle his way through its harshness in order to discover a story about the dedication of the performers to their audience and vice versa. In a similar way, *Tenho* offers opportunities for the audience to connect with the performers on stage. This kind of freedom allowed me to watch *Tenho* with the same fresh, open eyes as I did *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse* – an experience which at first seemed peculiar, but that after careful consideration became very pleasing. The fact that circus makes me consider myself, and my relationship with the performers, is a promising evolution.

hoeveel vrijheid en verantwoordelijkheid hij aan de toeschouwer overlaat. Wil hij een entertainende familievoorstelling maken of wil hij een werk maken dat het publiek aan het zoeken kan zetten? Beide insteken zijn legitiem en kunnen leiden tot zowel prachtige als slechte voorstellingen. Maar de circusartiest mag wel het recht claimen om deze vraag te stellen. Het circus hoeft niet noodzakelijk in de entertainmenthoek te blijven, het mag ook een show zijn die leegtes laat, ruimtes voor eigen interpretatie van het publiek. Circusartiesten vandaag mogen zich bewust zijn van deze mogelijkheid. Circus als kunstvorm mag vragen onbeantwoord laten en het verhaal laten ontstaan ergens tussen piste en publiek. Entertainment niet voor het applaus, maar voor de unieke, individuele ervaring.

De gedeelde openheid van *Tenho* en *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse*

Kein Applaus Für Scheisse laat veel over aan het publiek. De toeschouwer wordt uitgedaagd de handschoen op te nemen en zich door het shockerende heen te worstelen om een verhaal te ontdekken over de overgave van spelers aan hun publiek en over de overgave van dat publiek aan de spelers. Op eenzelfde manier laat *Tenho* de mogelijkheid open om als toeschouwer een relatie aan te gaan met de circusartiesten op scène. Deze vrijheid deed mij met eenzelfde open blik kijken naar *Tenho* als naar *Kein Applaus Für Scheisse*. Een op het eerste zicht merkwaardige gewaarwording, maar na rijper beraad ben ik er blij om. Dat circus mij vragen doet stellen over mezelf en mijn relatie tot de performers, is een beloftevolle ontwikkeling.

Cirko Festival 2013: From the Helsinki Trapeze

IGOR BURIC

For a theoretician, the highlight of Helsinki's Cirko Festival was definitely a lecture by Dr John-Paul Zaccarini. It was a great pleasure to listen to a man who, after a career in circus, attained a PhD where his thesis was on circus, therapy and psychoanalysis – a combination of elements he called circoanalysis.

"Circus used to have no voice, and now it's trying to speak," was one of the first phrases he uttered in his lecture, which focused on his efforts to explain to us the "journey to the source", the ontological foundation of a skill that is quite abstract. Of course, in order to achieve that goal one must explore the foundations of art in general.

After so much experience crammed into such a short time, it was clear that the group of critics, journalists and theoreticians I joined for our Helsinki residency was in synchronicity, striving towards the same goal: to make circus talk.

Juggling, acrobatics, strength and technique, leaps and somersaults – most people find these things breath-taking. Today, we live in an overwhelming world where mass media, images, ideas and messages are everywhere, and it is no wonder that we find it so easy to go back to circus, to the magic in which objects and living beings, coming together in performance, appear so weightless – feather-like, yet strong as the wind... But revisiting a world that many of us had lost touch with in the long years of our growth, education, and professional and personal formation, quickly revealed that it was not easy to set aside our expectations, nor to map onto circus our own background (our group came from different backgrounds: dance, drama, even film).

„ЦИРКО“ ФЕСТИВАЛ 2013. На хелсиншком трапезу

ИГОР БУРИЋ

За човека који долази из поља теорије, на „Цирко“ фестивалу у Хелсинкију посебно задовољство било је чути предавање др Џона Пола Закаринија, који је након циркуске каријере докторирао на тему циркуса, терапије и психоанализе, што је он у свом раду назвао *циркоанализом*.

– Циркус је био немушт, а сада покушава да проговори! – била је једна од његових првих реченица у предавању које је посветио покушају да нам објасни „пут на извор“, онтолошко утемељење једне прилично апстрактне вештине. Дакако да такво нешто не иде без утемељења уметности уопште.

Након свега што је у кратко време могло да се искуси, било је јасно подударане да се и екипа критичара, новинара и теоретичара којој сам припадао, труди приближити истом циљу – да натера циркус да проговори.

Жонглирање, акробатика, снага и техника, премети и салта, све су то ствари од којих већини људи застаје дах. У данашње време оргазмичности масовних медија, слика, идеја, порука, није ни чудо да се са лакоћом можемо вратити циркусу, чаролији у којој предмети и жива бића, њихова веза, делују лако попут пера, снажно попут ветра... Међутим, поновни сусрет са светом којем многи од нас нису ни примирисали дуги низ година образовног, професионалног и личног формирања, врло брзо је показао да није лако заобићи очекивања, учења произведена властитим бекграундом (неки од нас су долазили из поља плеса, неки из драмског театра, а неки чак из филма).

It was not easy to set aside the strikingly obvious fact that circus has changed so much: it has become much more relaxed and open. What used to be a family-run affair is now open to outsiders; there are schools where one can learn circus skills, as well as schools where one can focus on the production of audience-ready acts and performances. We could say in fact that 'the system' has completely incorporated circus – an activity which used to be to a large extent part of a counterculture.

As part of this transition, the ring was replaced by the stage: a provocative way to describe the shift would be to call it 'squaring the circle'. Small wonder that the circus artists today face a slew of new challenges – exploration, experimentation, self-referencing, hybridisation – in a drive to expand and interact with the disciplines that border on circus (such as the other performing arts).

As I thought of this fusion, I came to realise it would be the topic I would write about. Science has given us ample proof that the direction of observation can determine the final outcome...

The "journey to the source", implied by Dr Zaccarini in his lecture, is in fact Heidegger's notion of the exploration of the origin of the work of art. The fundamental ontological instance is kept safe at the source, and its purpose is to establish and guard the world as a philosophical notion of totality, reality, life, truth. A work of art, and art itself, is a shortcut to the source. A direct, unmediated communication channel which is usually distorted by a veil, a noise, in everyday life.

This is what Zaccarini's subjects cannot answer, or will struggle to answer: not what, but why; not how they do what they do, but for whom and with whom. What do they establish contact with as they bow down under the weights, as they sway on a high wire, as they toss the seventh club into the air?

Another philosopher, Peter Sloterdijk, posited that the establishment of contact in our *ekstasis*,

Није било лако заобићи ни упадљивост чињенице да се циркус веома променио, препустио, отворио. У некада искључиво породични бизнис сад може да се уђе и споља, учење вештине је институционализовано, баш као и производња дела за публику. Може се рећи да је систем потпуно инкорпорисао ову, идеалистички гледано, прилично контракултурну делатност.

Арена је замењена сценом – могло би се провокативно рећи „квadratуром круга“. Није ни чудо што се пред циркуске артисте наметнуо читав нови значај истраживања, експеримента, аутореферентности, хибридизације као проширења, интеракције са суседним, блиским дисциплинама као што су извођачке уметности.

Управо та фузија у мојој глави се почела наметати као тема, а из науке је сада већ добро познато да сам смер посматрања може одредити и коначни ток резултата...

„Пут на извор“, који је имплицитно помињао др Закарини, заправо је Хајдегеров појам истраживања порекла уметничког дела. На извору се чува основна онтолошка инстанца чија је интенција успостављање и чување света као филозофског појма тоталитета, реалитета, стварности, живота, истине. Уметничко дело, уметност, пречица је ка извору. Директна, непосредована веза која иначе, у свакодневном животу има копрену, шум.

То је оно на што Закаринијеви испитаници не могу, или тешко могу да одговоре – не шта или зашто, како раде то што раде, него за кога, са ким или са чим успостављају везу док су под теретом тегова, на жици, док бацају и седми чуњ у ваздух.

Један други филозоф, Петер Слотердијк, сматрао је да се успостављање везе у нашој порођајној из-бачености – егзистенцији - примарно одвија путем језика. Именовање је стицање сигурности. А не говори се сваки језик

or out-thrownness at the moment of our birth, our coming into existence, primarily happens through language. Through naming, we gain security. Languages do not speak through words alone, and here we have our link between muteness and circus, the feeling of security even as we are hanging suspended from a trapeze.

The link between psychoanalysis and philosophy became clear soon after the first insights were made into the deconstructionist strategies of the French structuralists. In the illustrious past, this discipline has availed itself of all the previous, and in particular the new, scientific discoveries; this proved particularly fruitful in the 20th century, when psychoanalysis could roam freely, its vistas unbound, from cosmology to medicine. In a drive to determine the axiomatic truths, Jacques Lacan led the way; he was Zaccarini's psychoanalytical reference as he went about creating circoanalysis.

There is an element of pushing the envelope in this effort. Performers, fragile as they are, superior beings alone in the spotlight, are exposed even further in any direct attempt to analyse them. In the academic sphere, of course, the analysis is done through critical discourse. The artist takes virtually no part in it, except as a passive observer, and does not have much say in the process.

That is why it is terrible, and it is not advisable for those with strong moral scruples (after all philosophy is known as *écartèlement*, 'drawing and quartering') to expose an artist to a cycle of questions about the tenacity and pain brought about by the commitment to master a skill, a trick, a delusion, an illusion. Or to question whether the artist assuming a character, or the role of a character, only to be able to get down to their skill as quickly and slyly as possible, is something akin to pornography.

In the final metaphor, we must marvel at the determination of a circus artist to climb, metaphorically, as high as they can, in order to render those who watch them breathless. 'Those who watch' are necessary because, as the philosophy of nature posits, a phenomenon cannot exist without an observer.

само речима и ето нама везе између *немушности и циркуса*, осећаја сигурности чак и док смо на трапезу.

Веза између психоанализе и филозофије постала је јасна одмах након првих увида у деконструктивистичке стратегије француских структуралиста. У светлој традицији дисциплине која се окористила свим претходним, а поготово новим, у 20. веку бујајућим научним достигнућима, психоанализи је практично био отворен пут и хоризонт од космологије до медицине. Утврђујући непобитно, нарочито се истакао Жак Лакан, који је био Закаринијева психоаналитичка референца у стварању циркоанализе.

Заиста постоји нешто гранично у овом покушају. Ионако фрагилан перформер, као супериорно биће само под рефлекторима, додатно је изложен у сваком директном покушају анализе која се у академским оквирима води путем критичког дискурса. У томе уметник, сем као пасивни посматрач, готово да и не учествује, нема великог утицаја.

Зато делује страшно и није препоручљиво за оне са израженијим моралним скрупулама (уосталом, и филозофија је позната као „черечење“) да уметника излажемо циклусу питања о истрајности у болу који доноси посвећеност увежбавању вештине, преданости трику, обмани, илузији. Питањима да ли је преузимање карактеризације – улоге лика - само зато да би се „неприметније“ прешло на ствар, нешто налик порнографији.

У крајњој метафори, запањујућа је упорност циркуског уметника да се, сликовито говорећи, попне највише што може, а све не би ли они који га гледају престали да дишу. „Ови који гледају“ потребни су јер да, опет као у филозофији природе, без посматрача нема ни појаве.

Оно што за оне са осетљивијим стомаком може бити грубо јесте то да се та врста активности у циркоанализи описује као вид опсесије. Али, нама сада не треба да буде

What might be hard for the faint-hearted to stomach is that this kind of activity is described as a type of obsession in circoanalysis. But we don't need to focus on that, but can hear instead what the 'obsessives' themselves have to say about it (the following is a quote from part of Zaccarini's transcript of an encounter with circus artists at the Pair Acro Convention 2012):

- To understand another body and feel it like my own
- To magically communicate without words
- To control your own ego and your body's energy to provide an open space for the other
- Two people working as one
- To take responsibility, to take care of someone's life, to create a safe practice
- An acceptance of all possible physical states, i.e. strength and fragility can coexist in the same moment/space
- To allow oneself to be scared and use that to dare, risk
- To develop a trust towards oneself, the other and to life – the concentration of fear making one acutely aware of one's limitations
- To understand dialogue and compromise
- The knowledge of a technique to be present in the here and now
- A knowledge about weaknesses, yours, theirs, ours – highlighting the gaps between who you are and who you want to be

At this point, any similarity with the philosophical and psychoanalytical insights of the authors quoted above, even at a risk of reading things into them, becomes more than deliberate, definitely not accidental. And it is only then, on a couch, that I understood the roots of my own obsession with circus and all that I had observed started falling together into a huge jigsaw puzzle whose edges were overgrown with other jigsaw puzzles. Let me try to continue putting together my jigsaw puzzle to the end.

The shows staged at Cirko Festival for the most part consisted of double acts. This is in fact the usual status of most circus companies, or the usual number of performers needed to present an act.

занимљиво то, него то шта су „опсесивни“ имали да кажу о томе (цитат је део Закаринијевог транскрипта са „Pair Acro Convention 2012“ сусрета са новоциркуским уметницима):

- разумем друго тело и осећам га као своје
- магично комуницирам без речи
- контролишем его и енергију тела да обезбедим отворен простор за оног другог
- два човека раде као један
- преузимам одговорност, бринем о нечијем животу, креирам сигурне услове
- прихватање свих могућих физичких стања, то јест, снага и слабост могу да коегзистирају у истом времену/ простору
- допустити себи да будеш уплашен и искористити то да изазиваш, да ризикујеш
- развијати поверење према себи, другом и према животу – концентрација страха у ствари чини да се схвате ограничења
- разумети дијалог и компромис
- освестити знање о техници овде и сада
- знати за слабости, своје, туђе, њихове, наше – потцртавајући поноре између оног шта смо и ко би желели да будемо.

На овом месту, свака сличност са филозофским и психоаналитичким увидима аутора наведених раније, чак и по цену читавања, постала је више него намерна, а не случајна. И тек тада, „на каучу“, схватио сам корене властите опчињености циркусом, а све што сам уочио почело је да се слаже у једној огромној слагалици чије су ивице обрасле другим слагалицама. Покушаћу да наставим до краја са својом.

Представе на „Цирко фестивалу“ углавном су се садржале из наступа парова. То је чак уобичајен статус већине „трупа“ циркуских уметника, односно број актера потребних за тачку.

Програмском вољом, драматургија оног о чему пишем и даље се сама наметала. Прво смо видели „Attached“ трупе Магманус. Затим перформанс „Tenho“ Агит-цирка, а онда и, за мој случај „упаривања“ свега и свачега,



Magmanus – Attached © Alex Hinchcliffe

Through the will of the festival programme, the dramaturgy of what I am writing about continued to impose itself. The first show we saw was *Attached*, by Magmanus, followed by *Tenho*, a performance put on by Agit-Cirk, and finally, to bolster my case about strange pairings, the ultimate performance, *Capilotractées*, by Sanja Kosonen and Elise Abonce Muhonen.

Drawing comparisons with theatre was inevitable for me, although we had been taught that circus artists do not like to be compared with stage shows, acting, direction, stage design, and all those elements that may sully the purity of their vocation and skill.

Of course, those who are involved in theatre would surely not like to be compared with circus, but the two have more in common than they would want to, or would readily, admit.

And here is a film that holds the key, or rather the film heroes from our childhood: they were called *Stanlio* and *Olio* in our parts (originally Laurel and Hardy). In one of their slapstick gags, I don't recall the name of the film, they bumble their way up the scaffolding on a construction site of a high-rise building. As usual, they are extremely

улитимативну изведбу „Capilotractees“ Сање Косонен и Елис Абонс Мухонен.

Дакле, поређење са позориштем било ми је неизбежно, иако су нас учили да циркуски уметници не воле поређења са представама, глумом, режијом, дизајном, и свим оним што на неки начин може да упрља чистоту њиховог позива и вештине.

Добро, сигурно да ни у позоришту не би волели поређење са циркусом али, ипак, и једни и други имају много више тога заједничког него што би желели, или су спремни да признају.

А ево и филма који је кључ, тачније филмских јунака из детињства – код нас су их звали Станлио и Олио (у оригиналу су Лорел и Харди) – који у једној од својих слепстик сцена, не сећам се тачног назива филма, смотани какви јесу, смотавају се на грађевинским скелама монтираним за изградњу вишеспратнице, небодера. Као и увек, они су били врло уверљиви. Сада могу само да мислим како је то заиста изгледало на снимању, јер су тада моћи монтаже биле знатно испод данашњих компјутерски генерисаних ефеката. Мој млади

convincing. Now I can only imagine what it must have been like when the movie was shot because the editing techniques were quite rudimentary and there was no CGI. My young self drank in the scenes as total madness, as stunts that teetered on the verge of disaster.

My body did not come up with this memory by accident. The Magmanus duo is similar to the paradigm of Laurel and Hardy, and, why not say it, slapstick. A large man paired with a small man, both charming in their own way. Their connection is so strong that they call their show *Attached*.

They are a pair of male circus artists combining juggling skills and acrobatics in such a way that the props change hands in every act. This shows that the essential need for the other may bring together two entirely different people. The dynamism that is just as necessary in real life as it is on stage is present as a conceptually understood relationship of friendship – dependence.

Attached expanded this relationship to include the feeling of connectedness with all those who were there. The lights came on and were trained on the audience, and the spectators were drawn onto the stage to take part in the acts, as the performers invited the participants to throw tennis balls at them or to take part in the build-up of an act. Interactivity, creativity, an experience of a town square: the *agora*, not a circus ring or a marketplace.

And then came the fall. One of the performers, the flyer, got hurt. The show was interrupted.

Danger – yet another element connecting people. A real danger, not an imaginary risk, that each of us can assess based on our own sensitivity. The circus ring won, and the vulnerability of the performers brought us out of the relatively protected field of artistic risk-taking. It brought us back to the roots of fascination.

The show *Tenho* was staged by a local Helsinki troupe, Agit-Cirk, which participates in the life of

организам сцене је упијао као потпуно лудило. Вратоломију која је стално на ивици да се заврши трагично.

Није случајно тело избацило баш ово сећање. Дуо Магманус је управо нешто као парадигма Станлиа и Олиа и, зашто да не, слепстика. Један велики, један мали мушкарац, обојица на свој начин шармантни. Повезани толико да су и свој шоу назвали „Attached“.

Пар мушких циркуских уметника који комбинује вештине жонглирања и акробатике тако да у свакој тачки реквизити прелазе из руке у руку. То је показало да суштинска потреба за другим може повезати двоје потпуно различитих људи. Динамика потребна колико на сцени, толико и у животу, као појмовно схваћен однос пријатељства – зависности.

Тај однос „Attached“ је проширивао на осећај међусобне повезаности у свим присутнима. Светла су паљена и усмеравана на публику, гледаоци су увлачени у сценску игру тако што су их извођачи позивали да их гађају тенским лоптицама или да учествују у грађењу тока радње. Интерактивност, креативност, доживљај трга, агоре, не арене или пијаце.

А онда пад. Један од извођача, „флајер“ (летач), се повредио. Представа је прекинута.

Опасност, још један елемент који људе повезује. Реална опасност, не замишљена, препуштена свакоме на властити сензибилитет. Арена побеђује, а изложеност извођача поново нас враћа из релативно заштићеног поља уметничког ризика. Враћа нас коренима фасцинације.

У представи „Tenho“, која је дошла из локалне хелсиншке продукције Agit-Cirk, у животу града орисутне и на нивоу образовне институције, један други и другачији пар – мушко-женски – извео је представу која се тиче носталгије. Извођачи су истраживали традиционалне циркуске вештине и дошли до сцена у којима „снагатор“, „жена на ужету“, „акробатски

the city as an educational institution. They presented another, different pair: male and female. Their show is about nostalgia. The performers explored traditional circus skills and produced familiar acts – the strongman, a woman on a rope, an acrobatic duo, and others – very tenderly, cocooning them in a strange peace, and performing them at a slow pace and without any need for the audience's recognition and applause; it was almost as though they were painting something that was very rough, physical. The performance showed the two sides of male and female nature – seeing them as unemancipated, undivided. As a unity, as a pair.

The dramaturgy shows both sides of the coin at the same time: the strain of mastering a skill and the ease of performance, seasoned with a subtle musical accompaniment and light-show, almost implied that this was a ballet. From a theatrological point of view, the concentration, timing, and commitment to the partner were shown in a rudimentary manner. The playfulness that did not seek affirmation from the audience spoke about the inner need to set aside all views, prejudices and expectations and to open up channels of communication between the genders. From this position, the last scene in *Tenho*, showing the duo packing up their props and hoisting them on their backs, looking for all the world like a lonely caravan crossing the desert, becomes a lyrical signifier of the ontological exile, the dislocation of the search, and why not say it, of escape.

And finally, the strongest motive to drag the link between art and essence, as posited by circoanalysis, out into the light was presented in the show *Capilotractées* by Sanja Kosonen and Elise Abonce Muhonen. Two girls, no less!

In their performance, which comes very close to theatre, they too focus on an ancient circus skill: the hair hang. As performers hang suspended from their hair, they should traditionally perform various tasks such as change their clothes or drink coffee. In other words, they should display their utter lack of concern and imperviousness to pain.

This discipline is unusual and rare, and even more importantly, used to signify a broader spectrum of

двојац“ и другима, врло нежно, у неком чудном миру, спорим ритмом и без потребе за признањем (аплаузом), готово да су сликали нешто што је веома грубо, физичко. Облици су имали мере мушке и женске природе, схваћене нееманциповано, неподељено. Као јединство, као пар.

Драматургија у којој се истовремено приказује и лице и наличје – напор увежбавања и лакоћа изведбе, зачињена суптилном музичком пратњом и дизајном светла, готово да су сугерисале да је реч о балету. Театролошки посматрано, концентрација, тајминг, посвећеност партнеру, у овом облику су приказане рудиментарно. Заиграност која није тражила потврду у публици говорила је о унутрашњој потреби да се мимо свих погледа, предрасуда и очекивања, отворе могућности комуникације међу половима. Из те позиције, последња сцена представе „Тенхо“ која приказује двојац како пакује реквизите и све натовари на леђа, делујући попут усамљеног каравана који прелази пустињу, постаје лирски означитељ онтолошке прогнаности, измештености потраге, зашто да не и – бега.

И коначно, најјачи повод да се на видело ишчупа веза између уметности и суштине како је претпоставља циркоанализа, добили смо у представи „Capilotractées“ Сање Косонен и Елис Абонс Мухонен. Дакле, од две девојке!

У свом перформансу, по наступу изразито блиском театру, у фокусу је поново једна древна циркуска вештина – качење, вешање за косу. Перформер док виси, трбеало би да изводи различите радње, типа пресвлачење или испијање кафе. Другим речима треба да покаже како му није стало и како не боли.

Овај пут и сама необична, ретка, а што је још важније, употребљена у функцији означавања ширег спектра идентитета (извођачки, родни, културолошки), дисциплина је у изведби обрађена да изгледа урнебесно атрактивно, баш колико и драматично. Смешно је гледати бенд који свира косом окачен „за плафон“, или балерину која се труди да остане на прстима, направи пируету, док је сајла вуче на горе.

identity (referencing the performer, gender, culture); in this show, it was presented in such a way that it looks hilariously attractive, and extremely dramatic. It is funny to watch a band playing music suspended by their hair from the ceiling, or a ballerina trying to remain *en pointe*, and to perform a pirouette, even as she is pulled upwards by a wire. The unobtrusively fake smiles on their faces most of the time serve to build an ironic distance, and serve as a very important scenographic mechanism to counter the identification with the content.

Simultaneously (and simultaneity is a quality difficult to achieve or depict in art) *Capilotractées* bursts with joviality, and with the joy of play. The performers welcome the audience outside, and then launch into a welcome song. At first they wear wigs that increase the volume of their hair, a prosthetic underlining their calling in the performance, only to fling them theatrically on the floor as soon as the introductory song is over.

Bizarre and serious, immediate and 'frank', these tones all follow each other quickly, but primarily one must not lose sight of the fact that Sanja Kosonen and Elise Abonce Muhonen juggle their own bodies and their own sexuality, both individual and general. In modern parlance: their gender identity. It is in precisely this difference between their own bodies and the generally determined concepts of sexuality and gender identity that there yawns an abyss which will not yield to any effort to read sense into it.

There would be a deeper link if we could find in the classical notion of female identity a sufficient reason for physicality for its own sake, as we find in the male identity. But this justification does not exist, and the gap is broadened in the performance as we do not see the classical relationship between the flyer and the base, which means that the hierarchy is looser.

All of this would be immaterial were it not for the fact that *Capilotractées* speaks about hair as a female phenomenon, deliberately leaving out one of the best known stories about hair: the Biblical tale of Samson and Delilah. Indicative or not, a story in which hair equals strength for a man, and

Ненападно извештачени осмех који готово све време краси њихова лица, стално креира иронијску дистанцу, веома је важан сценски механизам против поистовећења са садржајем.

Истовремено (истовременост је особина коју је у уметности тешко постићи, „дочарати“), „*Capilotractées*“ је пун жовијалности, обузет је радошћу игре. Извођачице дочекују публику напољу, а затим шоу почињу песмом добродошлице. У почетку носе перике које им максимално увећавају волумен фризуре, гротескно потцртавајући свој позив у представи, да би одмах након уводне песме перике театрално одбациле на под.

Бизарно и озбиљно, непосредно и „искрено“, смењују се великом брзином, али оно што се не сме изгубити из вида на првом месту је чињеница да је оно чиме Сања Косонен и Елис Абонс Мухонен жонглирају, властито тело и властита, тачније појединачна као општа сексуалност. Данашњим речником – родни идентитет. Управо у тој разлици властитог тела и опште одређених појмова сексуалности, родног идентитета, крије се провалија из које се не да ишчупати смисао.

Дубља веза би била да у појму женског идентитета пронађемо довољан разлог у телесности самој, док је у мушкој ситуацији то тело усмерено на додатни обрт, што згодно може и да се означи термином салто.

Друго, у женској поставци нисмо видели класичан однос летач-база, што ће рећи да је хијерархија лабавија.

Све ово не би било важно да „*Capilotractées*“ не говори о коси као женском феномену, намерно изостављајући једну од најпознатијих прича о њој. Ону библијску о Самсону и Далили. Индикативно или не, причу у којој је коса снага на мушкој страни, а слабост на женској. То нису добро и зло. То је оно и због чега се култни мјузикл, који јесте цитиран у представи, зове баш „Коса“.

weakness for a woman. This is not about good and evil. This is why the cult musical, quoted in the performance, is entitled *Hair*.

There is the story of Baron Munchausen's bid to extricate himself from a swamp by his hair. Philosophy is full of such examples. So is theatre. So is contemporary circus, obviously.

Now let me go back, and try somehow to wrap up this weird voyage into the land of circus. The performances, the way I, as a person with a theatre background saw them, were not very good. But it is the wrong way of looking at them. It is a view from the top.

The performances staged at Cirko Festival 2013 in Helsinki show that theatre has yet again been born at the bottom, at the roots, from the imposing, fascinating potential of the body, of the physical involvement in some form of ritual, hypnotic attraction.

The real analogy is to be found, not accidentally, with modern, contemporary dance. Most of the attendees at our workshop come from that background. Dance, at one point fully saturated with the physical, having expended all its potential, started to speak. The body started to think. New biopolitics were born, new performance was born.

I am sure that the dramatic arts came into being in this way, too. What Nietzsche spoke about in *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of the Music* can in a way apply to modern times, and to the rebirth of the mainstream of modern art as it draws its life-force from its tributaries. The mainstream may of course at any moment disappear underground, breaking all principles and taboos, opening up to a new kind of analysis which will need a new couch.

An invaluable corollary to this: it will need a new language, because the existing language is unable to describe the excitement a child feels when it sees the wonders of the world (the theatre) around it. As for the next encounter – I can't wait.

Има она прича како је барон Минхаузен покушао да се извуче из блата чупајући себе за косу. Филозофија је пуна таквих примера. Позориште такође. Нови циркус, очигледно.

И да се вратим, пробам некако да заокружим ово чудно путовање у земљу циркуса. Представе, како сам их ја доживео долазећи из света позоришта, нису биле тако добре. Али, то је погрешан поглед на њих. То је поглед „одозго“.

Све што је изведено на „Цирко“ фестивалу 2013. у Хелсинкију, показивало је како се позориште још једном рађа „одоздо“, из корена, из импонзантног, задивљујућег потенцијала тела, физичког ангажмана у некој форми ритуала, хипнотичке атракције.

Права аналогија није случајно поље савременог, новог плеса. Највише полазника наше радионице долазило је управо одатле. Плес, једном максимално засићен физичким, исцрпивши своје потенцијале, почео је да говори. Тело је почело да мисли. Родиле су се нове биополитике, родио се нови перформанс.

Сигуран сам и да је уметност драме настала управо тако. Оно што је Ниче говорио у „Рођењу трагедије из духа музике“ на неки начин се може поистоветити са данашњим временом и поновним рађањем главног тока савремене уметности који енергију црпи из својих притока. Главног тока који у једном тренутку може да постане и понорница, кршећи све принципе и табуе, отварајући се једној новој врсти анализе којој ће требати нови кауч.

Оно што је непроцењиво вредније – требаће јој нови језик, јер овим постојећим се не да описати узбуђење детета пред чудима света (позорнице) који га окружује. Једва чекам следећи сусрет!

Sex and Death in Helsinki

JELENA JINDRA

"An artist is completely amoral in that he will rob, beg, borrow, or steal from anybody and everybody to get the work done."

WILLIAM FAULKNER

From 8-12 May, the city of Helsinki hosted Cirko Festival, an annual programme of contemporary circus which this year included Unpack the Arts, a residency scheme for cultural journalists and critics that's linked to twelve major festivals and designed to contribute to a Europe-wide effort to bring greater intellectual recognition to circus art.

"This is the whole of the story and we might have left it at that had there not been profit and pleasure in the telling." – Vladimir Nabokov, *Laughter in the Dark*. The story you have in front of you is not about the profit and pleasure of the telling; it's all about the profit and the pleasure of complying with Article 8 of the contract signed by all of us, ten journalists and critics hailing from every corner of Europe (from London to Podgorica) who came together in Helsinki to take part in the Finnish edition of the Unpack the Arts programme. And yet, perhaps we can think that Nabokov's publisher commissioned the manuscript and set the deadlines – after all, most writers and journalists write because someone has commissioned a piece (except if they're a blogger). And I'm not complaining! As the seminar was drawing to a close, I told Yohann Floch, who was leading the residency, that I had just the title of my piece to submit at that time, and that the title was 'Sex and Death in Helsinki'. He opened his Mac and soberly wrote it down; I was dead serious. The first show at Cirko, *Attached* by the male duo Magmanus, was cut short after one of the artists fell on his head. The bloody injury he suffered quite by accident placed the risk of death – an integral part of both traditional and contemporary circus – at the forefront of the performance in a very palpable way. The last show

Seks i smrt u Helsinkiju

JELENA JINDRA

„Umjetnik je potpuno amoralan, utoliko što će pljačkati, posuđivati, prositi ili krasti od svih i svakoga, samo da mu posao uspije.“

WILLIAM FAULKNER

U Helsinkiju je od 8. do 12. svibnja održan Cirko Festival – festival suvremenog cirkusa, a u sklopu njega i rezidencijalni program za novinare kulture i kritičare Unpack the Arts koji u kontekstu dvanaest velikih festivala suvremenog cirkusa još od 2011. godine daje podršku intelektualnom prepoznavanju cirkuske umjetnosti. „To je cijela priča i mogli bi na tome ostati kad u pripovijedanju ne bi bilo probitka i užitka.“ (Vladimir Nabokov, *Smijeh u tami*). U ovoj priči koja je pred vama, međutim, nije stvar u probitku i užitku pripovijedanja nego o probitku i užitku ispunjavanju članka 8. Ugovora što smo ga svi mi – nas desetero novinara/kritičara okupljenih u Helsinkiju od Londona do Podgorice - potpisali da bi sudjelovali u finskom dijelu programa Unpack the Arts. No, moguće je da je i Nabokovu izdavač naručio rukopis i postavio rokove, danas je to uostalom – isključimo li blogove – savim uobičajen i najčešći okidač i književne i novinarske proizvodnje. Tako da se ne žalim! Ipak, kada sam u posljednjim trenucima oproštajnog dijela seminara Yohannu Flochu, našem voditelju, izustila da imam samo naslov „Seks i smrt u Helsinkiju“ za reportažu s rezidencije koju mu prijavljujem, a on je uredno, bez naslova i opisno upisuje u svoj Mac, mislila sam ozbiljno. Prva predstava na Cirko Festu „Attached“ muškog dvojca Magmanus prekinuta je zbog pada umjetnika na glavu i krvave povrede koja je sasvim neplanirano rizik od smrti, kao sastavni dio i tradicionalnog i novog cirkusa, vrlo uvjerljivo stavila u središte te izvedbe cirkuske umjetnosti. Posljednja predstava u programu našeg boravka na Cirko Festu „Capilotractées“ ženskog dvojca Sanja Kosonen i Elice Muhonen iznijela je, pak, seks i žensku seksualnost na scenu, ali i

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we saw at Cirko, Capilotractées by the female duo of Sanja Kosonen and Elice Muhonen, placed sex and female sexuality centre stage, as well as working in an auto-ironic look at women in society and circus. When all was said and done – and here comes a major spoiler – everyone much preferred the sexy show Capilotractées to all the others we saw at Cirko Festival. The sex contained an element of the risk of death, while the quite certain and accidental possibility that one of the performers in Attached could die did not contain any hint of sex. Anyway, the title ‘Sex and Death in Helsinki’ simply has a nice ring to it.

I was quite surprised to see that every time we (the journalists and theatre critics) asked the performers that we interviewed in the course of our residency the questions “Who is your show talking to?” and “Who is your target audience?” – fully expecting these artists to give us a clear answer drawing on the deep thought they had already given the subject – they were instead surprised and nonplussed. When we asked Yohann Floch, as the seminar was drawing to a close, the same questions, but this time from our own point of view, as journalists – “Who will read our texts? Who reads the PDFs produced by the Unpack the Arts programme?” – he was in turn surprised. Yes indeed, it appeared that for the first time he asked himself, “Really, who reads those texts?”, but he skilfully recovered and said, “Well, probably you will, as will the artists we have talked to during the festival.” We can expand the readership to include those who will translate our texts, the organisers of Cirko Festival, the three wonderful employees of the Finnish Circus Information Centre... At best, about a hundred people. The day before I left Zagreb to fly to Helsinki, there was a conference in Croatia (which was to become a member of the EU on 1 July) on the new EU programmes for culture and the creative and audio-visual sectors; this programme, called Creative Europe, will succeed the existing programme, Culture 2007-2103, on 1 January 2014. The conference defined the main goal of the new programme: to develop the audience! And this is a goal that aligns with the goal of the Unpack the Arts residency programme. Contemporary circus in Finland, however, is excellent proof of the maxim that developing an

autoironijsko promatranje žene u društvu i u cirkusu. Svima se, naposljetku, da razotkrijem sve bitno na početku, mnogo više sviđala seksi predstava „Capilotractées“ od svake druge koju smo vidjeli na Cirko Festivalu. U tom seksu, naime, bilo je i rizika od smrti, dok u izvjesnoj, a neplaniranoj mogućnosti smrti jednog člana predstave „Attached“ nije bilo nikakvog seksa. Uostalom, taj naslov „Seks i smrt u Helsinkiju“ jednostavno dobro zvuči. Izenadilo me, naime, kako smo mi, prisutni novinari i kazališni kritičari, svakog umjetnika s kojim bi tijekom rezidencije razgovarali, spremno pitali: „Kome se vaša predstava obraća? Tko je vaša ciljana publika?“ i očekivali od svih tih umjetnika jasan, duboko promišljen odgovor. A kada smo to isto pitanje u tim posljednjim trenucima oproštajnog dijela seminaru postavili našem voditelju Yohannu Flochu u „novinarskoj“ verziji: „A tko će čitati te naše tekstove? Tko čita web časopis Unpack the Arts programa?“ pitanje ga je iznenadilo. Da, da, kao da se i sam u tom trenutku prvi put zapitao „Zaista, tko?“, no vješto je odgovorio: „Pa valjda vi, pa sigurno i umjetnici s kojima smo tijekom festivala razgovarali.“. U sebi možemo proširiti još taj popis čitatelja na prevoditelje naših tekstova, organizatore Cirko Festivala, pa tri sjajne zaposlenice finskog Cirkuskog informativnog centra... U svakom slučaju, u najboljem slučaju, na stotinjak čitatelja. A dan uoči mogeg odlaska iz Zagreba u Helsinki, u Hrvatskoj koja će 1. srpnja postati članica Europske unije, održana je konferencija o novim programima EU za kulturu, kreativni i audiovizualni sektor pod nazivom „Kreativna Europa“ koji će 1.siječnja 2014. naslijediti postojeći program „Kultura 2007-2013.“. Na toj je konferenciji, a poklapa se i s ciljem rezidencijalnog programa „Unpack the Arts“, kao glavni cilj istaknut: razvoj publike! Upravo je novi cirkus u Finskoj odličan primjer za to da je razvoj publike možda najdugotrajniji proces svake kulturne strategije! Usprkos svom ulaganju finske države u cirkusku umjetnost, od one amaterske do profesionalne, od ulaganja Ministarstva obrazovanja do ulaganja Ministarstva kulture, o čemu se sve može pročitati u vrlo korisnoj publikaciji „CasCas“, pregledu cirkuske i ulične umjetnosti u Finskoj, broj gledatelja na izvedbama Cirko Festa nije prelazio skromnu brojku od njih 100 do 150 po

audience is perhaps the longest and hardest part of any cultural strategy. Despite the funds sunk by the Finnish state into circus art, at every level from amateur to professional, and in spite of the investments made by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture (which are recounted and summarised in a very useful publication, CasCas, an overview of circus and street art in Finland), the audiences at the shows staged at Cirko Festival never exceeded 100 to 150 per show. "The festival attracted more than 2500 spectators and was given quite a lot of coverage in the Finnish media," we were told after the end of Cirko Festival by Sara Kuusi, an employee of the Circus Information Centre.

Since I came to the Unpack the Arts residency with almost twenty years of experience as a cultural journalist in the Croatian press and television, yet with very little experience of cross-border cooperation and professional networking, I think it is important to clearly state where I come from when I look at Cirko Festival and our residency. In doing this, I have three points to make.

First of all, I first heard of the term "new circus" in 2005 when journalist Ivan Kralj, who used to work for the same newspaper as I did, launched the New Circus Festival in Zagreb, without any support, financial or technical, from the Croatian Ministry of Culture. After staging eight editions of the festival, Kralj and his associates, having formed an organisation called Mala performerska scena, managed to get symbolic support from the state and the City of Zagreb for their New Circus Festival. This support remains intermittent rather than strategic, and for the organisers the festival is definitely exhausting! And yet this handful of people who have been pushed to the fringes of the Croatian cultural scene have managed to build an audience for new circus which comes close to the standards averaged in Helsinki. Furthermore, this festival – whose excellence builds on the tradition of progressive international performance arts festivals in Zagreb, such as the Modern Dance Week, Eurokaz, and the Music Biennale – has created a platform for the development of home-grown circus groups. The Croatian group Room 100 have already become an important

izvedbi. „Festival je privukao više od 2.500 gledatelja i dobio prilično mnogo prostora u finskim medijima.“, javila nam je nakon završetka Cirko Festa Sara Kuusi, djelatnica finskog Cirkuskog informacijskog centra.

S obzirom da na rezidenciju Unpack the Arts dolazim s gotovo 20-godišnjim novinarskim iskustvom rada u hrvatskim kulturnim redakcijama – što tiskanim što televizijskim – a s vrlo malim iskustvom izvangraničnih suradnjama i profesionalnih ispreplitanja, mislim da je važno objasniti motrište s kojega gledam na tu rezidenciju i na Cirko Fest. Za svaki slučaj, da se nešto ne bi krivo shvatilo...opasnost i rizik nisu, naime, samo dio cirkuskog umijeća. Kao prvo, za pojam „novi cirkus“ sam prvi put čula 2005. godine kada je moj bivši redakcijski kolega novinar Ivan Kralj u Zagrebu, bez ikakve financijske ili tehničke podrške hrvatskog Ministarstva kulture, pokrenuo Festival novog cirkusa. U proteklih osam izdanja tog festivala, Kralj i njegovi suradnici okupljeni u udruzi „Mala performerska scena“ dogurali su tek do simbolične podrške njihovom Festivalu novog cirkusa od strane države i Grada Zagreba. Dakle, do podrške koja je stihijska, a ne strateška, a s obzirom na rezultate za organizatore, svakako, iscrpljujuća! Ipak, ta šačica na hrvatskoj kulturnoj sceni potpuno marginaliziranih ljudi, u Zagrebu je uspjeli stvoriti novocirkusku publiku koja je brojčano sasvim blizu helsinškog prosjeka ili standarda. Pored toga, zahvaljujući upravo tom Festivalu koji svojom iznad prosječnošću nastavlja tradiciju zagrebačkih naprednjačkih izvedbenih međunarodnih festivala – od Tjedna suvremenog plesa do Eurokaza, nekada i Muzičkog bijenala – stvorena je platforma za razvoj domaćih cirkuskih skupina. Ona „Room 100“ iz Splita već je postala važan član obitelji europskog novog cirkusa. Da ne duljim, želim reći, kako je iz moje seoske perspektive koja ne zahvaća širu sliku, a kamoli da ima uvida u budućnost - Zagreb na prvi pogled izjednačen s Helsinkijem, bez obzira na svu cirkusku infrastrukturu koju Finci – od kolijevke pa do groba, odnosno od temelja pa do krova – planski izgrađuju. I zagrebački i helsinški festival su napunili osam godina, pa su i po tome blizanci. Problem je vrlo vjerojatno u tome što će finsko dijete – zahvaljujući prije svega edukaciji – sigurno

new member of the European contemporary circus family. To cut a long story short, what I'm getting at is that from my point of view – out in the boondocks, a point of view that does not provide a broader picture or sense of the future of the artform – Zagreb appears at first sight to be equal to Helsinki, regardless of the circus infrastructure that the Finnish people have been constructing to support artists from cradle to grave, and projects all the way from the foundations to the roof. Both festivals, in Zagreb and in Helsinki, are eight years old, and this makes them twins. The problem is probably that the Finnish child will grow into a healthy adult, thanks primarily to its education, while the Zagreb child is already stunted because of malnutrition. The Cirko Center in Helsinki (at Suvilahti), which was opened two years ago in a former factory on the outskirts of the city and boasts two theatres and numerous offices, brings to mind the Jedinstvo plant at Trnjanski nasip, both in terms of its location and its identity. Part of the Zagreb New Circus Festival programme takes place at Jedinstvo.

The second point I would like to highlight is that my viewpoint is one of a journalist who has had no experience with European residencies. In Croatia, any kind of expert critical and theoretical discourse is more or less exiled from the traditional media (the daily and weekly press, radio, TV). As I spoke to colleagues from Slovenia, Montenegro and Serbia who were also taking part in the Unpack the Arts residency, I realised that in their countries any expertise or specialisation is undesirable – especially in the high-circulation media which still, if not always, pays for our work. Other media bodies, such as specialised theatre magazines or not-for-profit websites, give you as many inches as you want but as a rule they don't pay. In the so-called West, it doesn't appear to me that the media situation is much better: in Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands... we journalists had problems putting together the money to pay for a round of drinks at the bar in the Cirko Center. Only the dance critic for the London free daily The Evening Standard seemed to be more comfortable. Not at the bar, but at home! Perhaps it is because in Croatia, as the redoubtable dance critic Ivana Slunjski from

zdravo odrasti, dok ono zagrebačko već kržlja od neuhranjenosti. Pa čak i prije dvije godine otvoren Cirko centar u Helsinkiju (Suvilahti), s dvije dvorane i uredskim prostorima, smješten u bivšu tvornicu izvan središta grada, i lokacijom i idejno podsjeća na ono što bi jednoga dana mogao postati Pogon Jedinstvo (Trnjanski nasip) u kojemu se odvija dio programa zagrebačkog Festivala novog cirkusa. Drugo što bih u ovom uvodu naglasila je motrište novinara koji do sada nije imao iskustva s europskim novinarskim rezidencijama. U Hrvatskoj je svaki stručan, kritičarski i teorijski diskurs više-manje progan iz tradicionalnih (dnevni i tjedni tisak, radio, televizija) medija. U razgovoru s kolegama iz Slovenije, Crne Gore i Srbije koji su također bili sudionici finskog tjedna rezidencije Unpack the Arts shvatila sam da je i kod njih svaka stručnost ili uža specijalizacija nepoželjna, pogotovo u tiražnim medijima koji još uvijek – ali ne i uvijek – plaćaju naš rad. Oni drugi mediji – od specijaliziranih kazališnih časopisa do neprofitnih portala – ti daju prostora koliko hoćeš, ali rad u pravilu ne plaćaju. Niti na tzv. Zapadu mi se ne čini da je medijska slika nešto bolja – Italija, Belgija, Nizozemska...svi mi novinari zajedno jedva „skrpamo“ za turu pića na šanku helsinškog Cirko centra. Jedino mi se pozicija plesne kritičarke londonskog besplatnog dnevnika „Evening standard“ činila ugodnijom. Ne njezina pozicija za šankom, nego kod kuće! Možda zato što je u Hrvatskoj, kako mi je jednom rekla uporna plesna kritičarka Ivana Slunjski iz Zagreba – samo plesna kritika u medijima još nevidljivija od plesa! A vidi ti tu Englesku, gdje u redakciji s uredno potpisanim ugovorom o radu postoji radno mjesto: plesna kritičarka! Želim reći, hrvatski umjetnici su u pravilu mnogo upućeniji i napredniji od hrvatskih novinara koji prate, kreiraju i komentiraju kulturni sektor. Zahvaljujući brojnim rezidencijalnim programima koje potiče Europska komisija, zahvaljujući svakodnevnim kontaktima s kolegama iz cijelog svijeta, međunarodnim koprodukcijama itd. upućeniji su – dakako, ako spadaju u one koje to uopće zanima - u različite europske kulturne politike i prakse od nas koji bi ih trebali stavljati u taj kontekst. I nas koji bi, naposljetku, trebali informirati javnost, sudjelovati u stvaranju nove publike, u razvoju publike, u postavljanju jasnih kriterija u hrvatskoj kulturi. Kao

Zagreb once told me, dance reviews are the only thing even more invisible than dance itself! And look at England, wow! There is a post in a newspaper, with a proper employment contract, for a dance critic! Croatian artists are as a rule much better informed and more progressively minded than the Croatian journalists who cover, create and comment on culture. Thanks to the numerous residency programmes supported by the European Commission, thanks to daily contact with colleagues from all over the world, to international co-productions, etcetera, they know more – of course, assuming they have an interest at all – about various European policies and practices than we do. They know more than us, even though we are the ones who should be informing the public and participating in the effort to create and develop new audiences and set clear criteria within Croatian culture. As a member of the International Federation of Journalists, I can keep up with the seminars and conferences that are organised by the European Journalism Centre, but these cater exclusively to journalists covering politics, economy and agriculture, while cultural topics remain a fringe interest. That is why I think that the Unpack the Arts programme, gathering as it does journalists and critics from all over Europe, is extremely important: it as an education and a way to develop a new world view.

Thirdly, I owe the readers an explanation for the use of a William Faulkner quote as the guiding idea for this text. When, during the residency, we held post-show discussions among our group we often asked, "What is art in circus?". I was happy to see that this issue was not swept under the carpet. And yet in our conversations we seemed to be going in circles. Isn't art, put in the simplest terms, whatever a cultural community decides to label art? In his show *Prototype*, premiered at Cirko Festival, Jay Gilligan juggles for an audience, and everyone can see that this is a skill, a skill that is exhaustingly boring, but it's not art. Yet when Gilligan came to talk to us the next day his own interpretation of his work created an exciting conceptual picture of a circus artist-juggler – a man who came to Europe from the United States, obsessed with a struggle against commercialised juggling props. He criss-crossed Europe (he mentioned Switzerland, Spain, and he has been



Jay Gilligan – *Prototype* © Frida Flodin

član Međunarodne federacije novinara (International Federation of Journalists) imam uvida u seminare i konferencije koje organizira Europske novinarski centar (European Journalist Center), ali oni su isključivo namijenjeni političkim, ekonomskim, poljoprivrednim novinarima, dok su kulturne teme na margini njihovog interesa. Zato mislim da je „Unpack the Arts“ za novinare iz kulture i kritičare iz svih europskih zemalja, obrazovno i svjetonazorski, izuzetno važan rezidencijalni program. Treće, dugujem i malo pojašnjenje citata Williama Faulknera kao neke misli vodilje ovoga teksta. Vrlo često se u našim „rezidencijskim“ diskusijama poslije predstava izgovaralo pitanje - sviđalo mi se što se nije prešutjelo - a što je tu umjetnost? Ipak, ono kao da nas je vrtilo u istom mjestu. Zar nije, najjednostavnije rečeno, umjetnost sve ono za što neka kulturna zajednica odluči da je umjetnost? Jay Gilligan u svojoj predstavi „*Prototype*“ koju je premijerno izveo upravo na Cirko Festu sat vremena žonglira i svi u tome vide vještinu, doduše iscrpljujuće dosadnu vještinu, ali ne i art. No, kada Jay Gilligan sljedeći dan dođe razgovarati s nama, on u interpretaciji svojeg rada stvara uzbudljivu konceptualnu sliku cirkuskog umjetnika-žonglera koji je opsjednut borbom protiv komercijalnih žonglerskih rekvizita iz Amerike došao u Europu i gotovo je cijelu

teaching at the University of Dance and Circus in Stockholm for years) to conduct his work: juggling completely abstract items to the rhythm of a machine – the prototype which gives his show its title. While most jugglers, even those working as artists, take a repertoire of tricks as their starting point, Gilligan takes items as his. He says he really tried to “steal” everything he needed to succeed, and yet, judging by the reactions of the critics on the residency, he failed! Verbally he was able to articulate his artistic concept extremely well, but in his performance it remained completely arcane. This is, in brief, my position as I write my text, ‘Sex and Death in Helsinki’. This is also where Faulkner comes in, because I like to steal from time to time.

Among the many questions asked by my colleagues during our twelve-hour shifts during the Unpack the Arts residency – which ran each day from 9am to 9pm – there were a few that came up frequently, proving themselves the most important and most serious: Why, in most cases, is a circus artist the sole author of his or her show (with no choreographer, no director, no scenographer – the artist doing everything and only having a colleague look at their work as an ‘outside eye’)? Why does contemporary circus reproduce the traditional stereotypes of macho men and glamorous women? Can we journalists make use of the specialist terminology – including such concepts as ‘dry circus’ – that we learned so well thanks to Yohann Floch’s efforts? These questions will surely be answered by my dear colleagues. It was interesting to hear most of the circus artists/authors admit, after we complained about their shows dragging on and having too many dramaturgically logical endings, that in fact they had been blackmailed by the festival organisers to produce shows of a certain length. Here are the names of my colleagues in the residency programme in Helsinki: Lyndsey Winship, Karin van de Wiel, Sara van der Kooi, Sergio Lo Gatto, Nika Arhar, Maja Mrđenović, Brecht Hermans, Igor Burić and Nino Kovačić. As I want to check if they have read my text to the end, here’s a coded message for them: ‘Long live circus!’

proputovao (spominje Švicarsku, pa Španjolsku, a već godinama predaje na Sveučilištu za ples i cirkus u Stockholmu) da bi žonglirao s potpuno apstraktnim predmetima i uz ritam mašine koja je, evo, taj prototip iz naslova njegove predstave. Dok većina žonglera, pa i umjetnika žongliranja kreće od trika, on je krenuo od objekta. Sve je Jay Gilligan probao „ukrasti“ da bi uspio - pod ovim sve ne mislim na ples i video koji je baš namjerno odbacio - a opet, barem sudeći prema reakcijama kritičara prisutnih na rezidenciji, uspio nije! Njegov umjetnički koncept, koji je verbalno tako razumljivo izložio, u izvedbi je bio potpuno nedokučiv. Evo, to je ukratko pozicija s koje pišem tekst „Seks i smrt u Helsinkiju“. Tu je, naravno, Faulkner jer i ja malo kradem.

Među brojnim pitanjima koja su postavljali moji kolege tijekom boravka od devet ujutro do devet navečer na Unpack the Arts rezidenciji, najvažnijim su se pokazala, po učestalosti čak i nametnula, vrlo ozbiljna pitanja: uvođenje dramaturga u rad na predstavi, zašto je cirkuski umjetnik najčešće i jedini autor svoje predstave (nema koreografa, nema redatelja, nema scenografa tj. sve radi on/ona sam/a, a opet jako mu je bitan vanjski pogled kolege), zašto i novi cirkus reproducira tradicionalni stereotip između mačo muškarca i žene, možemo li u svojim budućim tekstovima koristiti terminologiju koju smo zahvaljujući strpljivosti našeg voditelja Yohanna Flocha sigurno svladali – poput pojma „suhi cirkus“ („dry circus“)? Na njih će, sigurno, moji dragi kolege, odgovoriti. Zanimljivo je bilo i priznanje većine cirkuskih umjetnika-autora kojima smo zamjerali vremensko otezanje predstava i višak dramaturški logičnih završetaka, da su zapravo produkcijski ucijenjeni od festivalskih direkcija duljinom trajanja predstave. U nastavku slijede tekstovi mojih kolega s rezidencije u Helsinkiju - Lyndsey Winship, Karin van de Wiel, Sara van der Kooi, Sergio Lo Gatto, Nika Arhar, Maja Mrđenović, Brecht Hermans, Igor Burić i Nino Kovačić - a s obzirom da želim provjeriti jesu li barem oni stigli do kraja teksta, šaljem im jednu šifriranu poruku „Živio cirkus!“

The Value is in Circus Itself

KARIN VAN DE WIEL

A thin trickle of blood makes its way down his forehead. The circus artist holds his head tightly in both hands, as if afraid it will fall off his shoulders. The audience holds its breath. The bloodcurdling music continues to echo in the space, while a technician quickly switches on a work-light. Someone in the audience jumps up, fiddles with the sound computer until it falls silent. My first introduction to 'contemporary circus'.

At the end of a performance from Magmanus Company, the grand finale goes horribly wrong. A leap into a somersault from the teeterboard – an acrobatic apparatus that resembles a teeter-totter in the playground – completely backfires. Manu Tiger lands with his head on the edge of the mat and skids violently along the ground. The acrobat pulls himself up, leaning on his hands for support, tries to stand, and falls back to the ground, motionless.

On this first evening of the Finnish Cirko Festival, Kaarina Gould, director of the festival, reassures us that an hour later the acrobat was already making jokes in the ambulance. The next morning, the Frenchman Tiger, and his Finnish partner Magnus Bjørn, sit before us uncomfortably in their chairs. They seem to have recovered physically, but their discomfort at being obliged to try to answer the questions posed by the ten European journalists sitting across from them is painfully apparent.

No animals or clowns

This article is not a catalogue of the new forms of contemporary circus. Nor is it a summary of the history of the circus or an analysis of contemporary developments within the artform. That would be an impossible task based solely on the seven performances I've seen here in this festival. In these four days I have been intrigued by

The value is in circus itself

KARIN VAN DE WIEL

Een dun straaltje bloed vindt zijn weg over het voorhoofd naar beneden. Met twee handen houdt de circusartiest zijn hoofd vast, alsof hij bang is dat het eraf zal vallen. Het publiek houdt de adem in. Nog steeds galmt de bloedstollende muziek door de zaal, terwijl een technicus inmiddels al razendsnel het werklicht heeft aangedaan. Een bezoeker uit het publiek springt op, rommelt met de geluidscomputer en dan is het doodstil. Mijn eerste officiële kennismaking met 'new circus'.

Tegen het einde van de voorstelling van de Magmanus Company gaat de *grand finale* gigantisch mis. Een sprong met salto vanaf het teeter board – een acrobatisch toestel dat lijkt op een wip in een kinderspeeltuin – mislukt; Manu Tiger landt met zijn hoofd op de rand van de mat en schuift met een vaart door op de grond. De acrobaat krabbelt op, steunt op zijn handen en probeert op de benen te staan, valt weer terug om bewegingsloos te blijven liggen.

Op deze eerste avond van het Finse Cirko Festival stelt directeur Kaarina Gould ons een uur later gerust dat acrobaat al weer grappen aan het maken was in de ambulance. De volgende ochtend zitten de Franse Tiger en zijn Noorse circuspartner Magnus Bjørn wat onwennig te schuiven op de stoelen. Fysiek blijkt er gelukkig weinig aan de hand, maar het beantwoorden van vragen gesteld door tien Europese journalisten doet hen wat ongemakkelijk voelen.

Geen clowns en dieren

Dit is geen inventariserend artikel over nieuwe vormen van new circus. Het is geen historisch overzicht van de geschiedenis van het circus of een analyse van hedendaagse ontwikkelingen binnen deze kunstvorm. Het zou een onmogelijke taak zijn na het zien van slechts zeven voorstellingen binnen dit festival. In deze vier dagen ben ik wel geïntrigeerd geraakt door

what is called 'new circus'. The Cirko festival offers performances which all differ in form, composition, skills and theme. Gould professes to dislike programming based on a particular theme, and that is apparent here in Helsinki. We are treated to new style and old style jugglers, acrobats, trapeze artists, magicians, musicians, a strong man, and artists who hang from their hair, and to performances that talk about attachment, shapes, illusion, nostalgia and waiting. But I would be doing the discipline a disservice were I to formulate conclusions about the artform based solely on the fresh insights and observations of the four days in Finland.

More than anything, the festival poses questions – the same questions I had when in the past I took a closer look at the development of hip-hop culture in the theatre. Why would one try to take an underground movement based on a struggle for freedom and place it within the confines of the theatre? No longer on street corners, no longer challenging one another to battles nor learning new moves on the rough pavement until your hands are covered with blood. To have the freedom to come and go as you will. You don't feel like it? Pack up your stuff and go home. Why leave the underground for the detestable mainstream? Arrive on time, follow the director's indications – that one trick, *on cue* – and make those self-same moves night after night. And if you don't feel like it this evening that's your tough luck, because the audience bought a ticket and they're waiting for you.

On the streets you can do anything

Tiger's eyes begin to shine and he sits up straight when asked what it is like to perform outdoors. He starts to tell of their experiences, travelling and playing in festivals and on the street. Tells us that, as opposed to the theatre, the audience stands in a half-circle. That you have to talk incessantly to keep people's attention. That the tempo with which the tricks follow each other needs to be much faster. "You learn a lot about what is good. If an audience leaves, you know it is not and you leave it out next time".

When the conversation shifts to performing in the street, even the reticent acrobat Sasu Peistola

'new circus'. Het Cirko festival biedt voorstellingen die allemaal, stuk voor stuk, verschillend zijn in vorm, samenstelling, skills en thematiek. Gould verklaart geen voorstander te zijn van programmeren volgens een thema en dat is terug te zien in Helsinki. We maken kennis met *new style* en *old style* jugglers, acrobaten, trapeze-artisten, goochelaars, muzikanten, een sterke man en zelfs hair hangers. Voorstellingen die gaan over attachment, vormen illusie, nostalgie en wachten. Maar ik zou de discipline te kort doen als ik op basis van deze net verworven inzichten en ervaring tot een uitgesproken oordeel zou komen.

Dit festival roept vooral vragen op; dezelfde vragen die ik had toen ik me een tijd terug ging verdiepen in de ontwikkeling van de hiphop cultuur in het theater. Waarom een *underground movement* waarin het vechten voor vrijheid een centrale plek inneemt, binnen de afgebakende kaders van het theater brengen? Niet meer op straathoeken of elkaar uitdagen in een *battle* of nieuwe moves leren op de ruwe straatstenen totdat het bloed je in de handen staat. De vrijheid hebben om te staan en te gaan wanneer je wil. Geen zin meer? Spullen oppakken en naar huis. Waarom van underground naar het verfoeide mainstream? Op tijd aanwezig zijn, aanwijzingen van de regisseur opvolgen, op afgesproken momenten dat ene trucje doen en iedere avond weer dezelfde moves vertonen? Geen zin meer?! Jammer, want het publiek heeft een kaartje gekocht en zit te wachten.

Op straat kun je alles doen

Tigers ogen beginnen te glinsteren en hij gaat rechtop zitten als de vraag wordt gesteld hoe het is om in de buitenlucht op te treden. Hij begint te vertellen dat ze veel rondreizen en outdoor shows doen op festivals en op straat. Dat daar, in tegenstelling tot het theater, het publiek in een halve cirkel staat. Je voortdurend moet blijven praten om de aandacht van mensen vast te houden. Dat het tempo waarin de acts elkaar opvolgen veel hoger is. "Je leert er veel over wat goed is en wat niet. Als het publiek wegloopt, weet je dat het niet werkt en de volgende keer laat je het uit de act".

gets a twinkle in his eye as his mouth curls into a small smile. "In the street shows you can do anything. It is easier in that way. We use more humor and we create more clear moments where the audience knows after a trick 'she is OK'. And then they clap." Together with Jenni Lehtinen, Peistola appears in the performance *Tenho* from the Finnish company Agit-Cirk. Even in a small theatre space the audience hesitates to applaud. The acrobats work in the deepest concentration. A breath-taking trick seems to have succeeded, but you can never be sure. What if the applause makes her fall!? To help the spectators, Peistola takes opportunities throughout the performance to give them a reassuring look.

Tiger and Bjøru go a step further in the dialogue with the audience. They pass out tennis balls that the audience may throw at them. Three spectators are invited up onto the podium. Manu constantly breaks down the fourth wall with comic looks and sighs of relief. By bowing graciously after an act, the acrobats invite applause – not done in traditional theatre, modern dance or classic ballet, yet very common in hip-hop performances in the theatre. B-boys come out of a spectacular headspin or a series of impressive windmills and immediately head toward the audience with defiant gestures, demanding the audience's appreciation and applause.

Contrarily, the disposition of the audience in the contemporary circus performances I saw remained very traditional: the artists stand on the ground and the audience watches from the tribune. In the meantime urban artists have experimented with the different possibilities of bringing the 'raw' street feeling to an audience inside the theatre. I have found myself during a performance standing next to the b-boys and b-girls on stage. By dancing around us as if we were pillars they transformed us from audience to objects. Our role changed once again to participants, when at the end of performance they dared us to dance along.

Out of the ring and into the black box

Leaving the circus ring and going into the theatre raises the artform's prestige and offers the

Ook de verlegen acrobaat Sasu Peistola krijgt een twinkeling in zijn ogen en een kleine glimlach krult zijn mondhoek als het gesprek over optreden in de buitenlucht gaat. "Op straat kun je alles doen, waardoor het makkelijk optreden is. We gebruiken ook meer humor en creëren duidelijkere momenten waarop het publiek kan klappen." Samen met Jenni Lehtinen is Peistola te zien in de voorstelling *Tengo* van het Finse gezelschap Agit-Cirk. Ook in de kleine theaterzaal twijfelt het publiek soms of er geklapt mag worden. De acrobaten werken in opperste concentratie. Een adembenemende truc lijkt tot een goed einde te zijn gebracht, maar je kunt het nooit zeker weten. Wat als ze nu wel ineens valt als er wordt geklapt?! Om de toeschouwers te helpen creëert Peistola ook hier af en toe momenten waarin hij het publiek geruststellend aankijkt.

Tiger en Bjøru gaan nog een stap verder in het aanspreken van het publiek. Er worden tennisballen uitgedeeld, die het publiek naar hen mag gooien. Drie bezoekers worden op het podium gevraagd. Voortdurend werpt Manu het publiek komische of opgeluchte blikken toe om de vierde wand te doorbreken. Door gracieus te buigen na een act vragen de acrobaten om applaus. Niet gebruikelijk tijdens een traditionele theater-, moderne dans of klassieke balletvoorstelling. Wel heel gewoon bij hiphopvoorstellingen in het theater. B-boys lopen na een duizelingwekkende *headspin* of indrukwekkende *windmills* naar het publiek toe en eisen het applaus met uitdagende gebaren op.

De publieksopstelling daarentegen is bij de new circus voorstelling die ik heb gezien nog zeer traditioneel: de artiesten staan op de vlakke vloer en het publiek kijkt toe vanaf de tribune. Inmiddels experimenteert de urban arts met verschillende mogelijkheden om het 'rauwe', authentieke straatgevoel dichterbij de toeschouwer te brengen. Zo bevond ik mij tijdens een voorstelling ineens naast de b-boys en b-girls op het podium. Door ons te gebruiken als pilaren om omheen te dansen veranderden ze ons van toeschouwers tot objecten. Onze rol veranderde uiteindelijk naar participanten toen we aan het eind werden uitgedaagd mee te dansen.

possibility of reaching a larger audience. The number of travelling 'traditional' circuses (large tent and circus ring, elephants, lions and clowns) is in sharp decline. Instead you play in the streets for shoppers passing by and in festivals for a festival audience. In a variety show you get seven minutes to show what you can do. In the theatre you can share the bill with another act, and perform a twenty minute show, or take the space entirely for yourself and give a performance which may last an hour or longer.

The creation of an entire show brings with it the responsibility of making choices that are 'aesthetically justified'. This can be a source of conflict for the circus performer, who above all wants to remain 'himself' or 'herself'. Lifestyle and authenticity are more important than dramaturgy or content. Tiger: "It all starts with an idea. We wanted to do something with a catapult. So we worked it into our theme." Bjørn adds: "We choose to do circus. That is the value in itself. We want to give the audience something to think about in the show, but we focus on nice tricks and moves. We work with one theme and it is about a balance between those two elements. It is not theatre, but there are theatrical elements in the tricks." In their contemporary circus performance the skill is the point of departure and a theme serves to hold together a fragmentary narrative.

This is an important step according to John-Paul Zaccarini, who teaches at the University of Dance and Circus in Stockholm. He points to a positive development with respect to earlier circus acts, but there is still a long way to go. He compares the earlier composition of circus acts with German Porn. You get the impression there is a story, but it's impossible to follow the narrative because you keep getting distracted by the 'tricks'. In a German porno film the story may be nothing more than a plumber who rings at the door, which is opened by a woman in a dressing gown. It makes Zaccarini think of a scene where an exhausted cleaner drags himself through the motions until he just happens to find three balls and begins an energetic juggling number. He continues from there to find a hanging rope, and climbs up to show his acrobatic skills. Taking on a theme is a step forward, but Zaccarini would like

Uit de piste, in de black box

De piste verlaten en de black box in stappen, vergroot het aanzien en de mogelijkheden om de skills te tonen aan een breder publiek. Het aantal rondreizende circussen 'old style' met een grote ronde tent en piste, olifanten, leeuwen en clowns wordt steeds minder. Op straat heb je de winkelende voorbijgangers en op outdoor festivals het publiek. Als onderdeel van een variety show mag je zeven minuten lang laten zien wat je kan. Maar in het theater kun je, als onderdeel van een double bill, een show van twintig minuten verzorgen of een avondvullende voorstelling geven van ongeveer zestig minuten.

Met het in elkaar zetten van een volledige show, komt onvermijdelijk ook de verantwoordelijkheid om 'esthetisch verantwoorde keuzes' te maken. Dat kan wringen, want de circusartiest wil vooral zichzelf zijn. Het idee van lifestyle en authenticiteit is belangrijker dan dramaturgie of inhoud. Tiger: "Het begint met een idee, zoals dat we iets willen doen met een katapult." Bjørn vult aan: "Onze focus ligt op mooie trucs en moves, en deze plaatsen we binnen het thema van de voorstelling. Het gaat om een balans tussen deze twee elementen. We kiezen ervoor om circus te doen en dat is al de waarde in zichzelf. Het is geen theater, maar de trucs bevatten wel theatrale elementen." De *skill* is het uitgangspunt en een thema dient als lijdraad voor een fragmentarisch narratief in new circus voorstellingen.

Een belangrijke stap voorwaarts volgens John-Paul Zaccarini, docent aan de University of Dance and Circus in Stockholm. Hij signaleert een positieve ontwikkelingen ten opzichte van eerdere circusacts, maar er is nog een lange weg te gaan. Hij vergelijkt de opbouw van de eerdere shows met 'German porn'. Je krijgt een idee van een verhaal, maar het narratief is niet te volgen omdat je door de 'tricks' wordt afgeleid. In een Duitse pornofilm is de verhaallijn vaak niet meer dan een loodgieter die aanbelt bij een huis, waar een vrouw in ochtendjas de deur opendoet. Het doet Zaccarini denken aan scènes waarin een schoonmaker vermoeid zijn werk verricht totdat hij 'opeens' drie ballen vindt en energiek begint met jongleren. Daarna gaat hij weer verder totdat hij een touw ziet hangen, erin klimt en zijn

circus performers to take the next step, and ask themselves, "What am I doing, why am I doing this, and who am I doing this for?"

It is worth noting that in several cases the physical buildup of the performance, the rigging and the necessary, functional movement of objects on stage is incorporated in the dramaturgy and final form of the piece. In addition, especially in *Tenho*, the heavy physical effort required is do all this is theatrically highlighted. Peistola gasps for breath and ostentatiously wipes the sweat from his brow. This is a choice made together with the director, he tells us. However, collaborating with an "outsider" is never easy. The fear of loss of authenticity is great. Artistic director of Cirko, Jani Nuutinen, confirms this the second day. "I prefer to do everything myself. From mounting the tent, setting the props, to the actual creation of the performance. Circus is a craft." Still Nuutinen admits that he will ask someone to assist and advise him in the making of his next show. Tiger, Bjoru, Peistola and Lehtinen have already gone that route. One asks a colleague, an actor, a director or a dramaturge to help in the creative process. After much improvisation, collecting of material and the creation of scenes unattached to a narrative, the 'exterior eye' comes in and responds to the material presented. A director who dictates what the artist must do at a given moment doesn't fit into the independent philosophy of New Circus. It remains a collective work-process; unless of course you get a job with Cirque du Soleil.

New Circus has now come to the point where the involvement of a dramaturge or collaborating director is more the rule than the exception. A trend which a few years ago also emerged on the hip-hop scene. It became clear that showing one's skills, presented in "catalogue form" was something quite different from making an interesting performance for public consumption. Traditional text theater is built on repertoire and a creative process which includes a team of directors, dramaturges, assistant directors, composers, scenographers and light designers. The independent hip-hopper, unfamiliar with these conventions, has gone through the painful process of learning to work with them. They have

acrobatische kunsten verricht. Het incorporeren van een thema is een stap voorwaarts, maar Zaccarini zou graag zien dat circusartiesten nog een stap verder gaan en zich afvragen: 'wat ben ik aan het doen, waarom en voor wie doe ik dit?'

Opvallend is dat het bouwen, de *rigging* en het verslepen van objecten in diverse voorstellingen geïntegreerd is in de vormgeving en onderdeel van de dramaturgie is geworden. Daarnaast wordt, vooral in *Tengo*, de geleverde zware fysieke inspanning theateraal benadrukt. Peistola ademt zwaar en veegt met grootse gebaren het zweet van zijn voorhoofd. Deze keuze is samen gemaakt met een regisseur, vertelt hij. Maar een samenwerking met een buitenstaander is niet vanzelfsprekend. Het wantrouwen voor het verliezen van authenticiteit is groot. Artistiek directeur van Cirko Jani Nuutinen bevestigt dit direct al de tweede dag: "Ik doe het liefst alles zelf. Van het bouwen van de tent, de attributen tot het maken van de voorstelling. Circus is een ambacht." Toch geeft ook Nuutinen aan dat een adviseur zal vragen hem te helpen bij zijn komende voorstelling. Tiger, Bjoru, Peistola en Lehtinen zijn hem voorgegaan. Een collega, acteur, regisseur of dramaturg is gevraagd mee te helpen bij het creatieve maakproces. Na veel improviseren, materiaal verzamelen en het creëren van losse scenes geeft de adviseur zijn visie op het gemaakte materiaal. Een regisseur die bepaalt hoe en wat de artiest moet doen, past niet binnen de authenticiteitsfilosofie van new circus. Het blijft een collectief werkproces; tenzij je je natuurlijk aansluit bij Cirque du Soleil.

New Circus staat aan het begin van een periode waarin het betrekken van een dramaturg of meewerkend regisseur meer regel dan uitzondering wordt. Een tendens die enkele jaren geleden ook heeft plaats gevonden binnen de hiphop. Het werd duidelijk dat het tonen van je skills, zoals in een catalogus, iets anders is dan het maken van een interessante voorstellingen voor publiek. Het traditionele teksttheater kan buigen op een repertoire en een traditie van werken in een team van regisseurs, dramaturgen, regie-assistenten, componisten, decor- en lichtontwerpers. De vrijgevochten hiphopper, onbekend met deze conventies, hebben hier met



Gandini Juggling – Smashed © Gandini Juggling

learned how to take advantage of this support system, while always along the way trying to maintain the connection to their roots. Though the incorporation of a support-team, equally in traditional theatre, is no guarantee for success, it has proven itself to be a step in the right direction.

One of the performances programmed in the Cirko festival is the very successful production *Smashed* (2010), from the British company Gandini Juggling. An interesting detail; Zaccarini stepped in as dramaturge for this complex piece of circus theatre. Seven men and two women juggle apples. They turn around each other, making fools of, stealing the apples of, and humiliating one another. The show is inspired by the work of Pina Bausch. If one knows the work of this German choreographer, then *Smashed* is an interesting and entertaining parody of her work. If one has never heard of Bausch, then it is an alienating performance in which nine people juggle eighty apples, oh and yes, at the end, smash the entire tea service, and crush the apples to a pulp.

The dramaturgical choices made and not made in the performances I saw in the Cirko festival, and the success or failure of those choices, is not for me to judge here. I also didn't watch the performances with the eye of a dramaturge, a surefire recipe for superficial and predictable

vallen en opstaan mee leren werken. Selectief lenen de hiphoppers uit deze traditie, terwijl ze hun feeling met hun *roots* proberen te behouden. Waarbij aangetekend moet worden dat het inhuren van een team, ook in het traditionele theater, in het minst een garantie is voor een goed stuk. De ervaring leert wel dat het een stap in de goede richting is.

Het Cirko festival heeft in de programmering het succesvolle *Smashed* (2010) van het Britse gezelschap Gandini Juggling opgenomen. Interessant detail is dat Zaccarini de dramaturgie voor deze gelaagde voorstelling gedaan. Zeven mannen en twee vrouwen jugglen met appels. Ze draaien om elkaar heen, zetten elkaar voor gek, pakken elkaars appels af en vernederen elkaar. De relatie tussen mannen, vrouwen en mannen en vrouwen wordt hier uitgelicht. De show is geïnspireerd op het werk van Pina Bausch. Ken je het werk van deze Duitse choreografe, dan is *Smashed* een interessante en vermakelijke pastiche van haar werk. Heb je nog nooit van Bausch gehoord? Dan is het vervreemdende voorstelling waarbij negen mensen jongeleren met 80 appels. O ja, op het eind wordt al het theeservies kapot gegooid en de appels tot pulp vermorzeld.

Welke dramaturgische keuzes er wel of niet gemaakt zijn in de voorstellingen op het Cirko

criticism. The subject of dramaturgy would offer more than enough stuff for an entirely new article. I have tried here to look at the path that New Circus artists are taking towards the more traditional structures and conventions of the theatre stage. There are parallels here to be drawn with the hip-hop culture. New Circus has begun an exploration of the possibilities and formalities the theatre has to offer, and a new language for a new context. This path was taken a number of years ago in the urban arts, who in the meantime have found their place in mainstream culture. Hip-hop, rap and breakdance have demanded their own territory, and begun their own collaborations with text, dance, performance, ballet and opera. This development has created a dramatic division in the urban arts movement. For many "mainstream" remains a dirty word, and there are only commercial traitors and fakes to be found in the theatre. However, those hip-hoppers and breakers who have made their way to the theatre, are those who have embraced the mission of bringing their art-form to a wider audience. For them as well, hip-hop, in any form, in any space, remains a lifestyle.

This is an attitude the passionate circus artists in Helsinki share. Traveling from one place to another. Pushing one's physical limits. Perfecting one's skill. The question of where, when and how one does it is of less importance. Theatre demands of its participants the making of esthetically responsible choices. This is easier for one artist than for another; one sees it as a step in their own private development, the other as a limitation. In spite of all the differences which may exist in the world of New Circus, the conviction that there must be a balance between the physical and the artistic is one shared by all. There remains a firm belief that whichever choices are made and whichever directions are taken, the roots and the craft of the circus must always be respected. The foundation of it all is the lifestyle.

Festival, en of deze wel of niet succesvol hebben uitgepakt, wil ik hier niet aan de orde stellen. Daarvoor biedt dit artikel van ongeveer 2000 woorden te weinig ruimte. Ik heb ook niet met het oog van een dramaturg naar deze stukken gekeken, waardoor ik zou verzanden in oppervlakkig en voorspelbaar commentaar. Maar het biedt zeker genoeg stof voor een vervolgartikel. Hier heb ik geprobeerd te duiden hoe new circus artiesten hun weg vinden binnen de kaders en conventies van de podiumkunsten. Er zijn hierbij parallelen tussen de hiphop cultuur en de new circus movement te leggen. New circus is begonnen met een zoektocht naar nieuwe mogelijkheden en vormen binnen het theater, naar een nieuwe taal en context. De urban arts is dit inmiddels al een tijdje aan het uitzoeken en hebben inmiddels ook al hun weg gevonden binnen de mainstream cultuur. Hiphop, rap en breakdance hebben hun plaats opgeëist en zijn een collabortie aangegaan met tekst, dans, performance, ballet en opera. Deze ontwikkelingen hebben een scherpe scheiding opgeleverd binnen de urban arts movement. Mainstream is voor een deel van hen een vies woord. Alleen commerciële *sell outs* en *fakers* staan in het theater. Maar het zijn deze hiphoppers en breakers die als missie hebben een breder publiek kennis te laten maken met hun kunstvorm. Ook voor hen is en blijft hiphop, in welke vorm, via welk platform en waar dan ook, een lifestyle.

Een opvatting die de passievolle circusartiesten in Helsinki delen. Het reizen van de ene naar de andere plek. Het pushen van fysieke mogelijkheden. Je ambacht perfectioneren. Waar, wanneer of hoe is hieraan ondergeschikt. Het theater verlangt van makers dat ze 'esthetisch verantwoorde keuzes' maken. Dit ligt de ene artiest beter dan de andere; de een ziet het als een aanvulling in de eigen ontwikkeling en een ander ervaart het als een beperking. Ondanks deze verschillen wordt de opvatting dat er een balans moet zijn tussen het fysieke en artistieke unaniem gedeeld. Er is een rotsvaste vertrouwen dat welke keuzes er gemaakt worden en welke richtingen worden in geslagen, de roots en het ambacht altijd leidend zullen zijn binnen het circusvak. De basis is de lifestyle.

“Isn’t it enough to do the thing?”: The intrinsic value of the circus skill

Looking at three shows from the 2013 Cirko festival: *Capilotractées*, *Tenho* and *Prototype*

LYNDSEY WINSHIP

All contemporary arts have been through their own existential crises. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, painters began to eschew figurative work for abstraction and explorations of colour and line. In the mid-twentieth century, choreographer Merce Cunningham divorced movement from music, asserting that dance didn’t need to be propped up by a score to have value as an artform. Now it is circus’ turn to do the same soul searching.

“Isn’t it enough to do the thing?” asked circus artist Sanja Kosonen during a discussion at this year’s Cirko festival in Helsinki. “The thing” is the circus act itself: the trapeze, the tightwire, the teeterboard or whatever it may be. Since the development of new circus in the 1970s and 80s, artists have sought out new frameworks for their acts, blending different artforms and borrowing from theatrical convention, but do circus skills need to be dressed up in story and character to have value as performance? Does a show need to address issues? Does it need to be ‘about’ something? Does it need spectacle and adrenaline thrills? Or is there intrinsic value in the skill itself? And what do we mean by value, anyway?

Perhaps the purest way to experience circus is kinaesthetically. We feel a physical reaction to the risky stunts we see – holding our breath, raising our adrenaline – and there’s pleasure in feeling

those sensations in what, for the audience, is a safe environment. It’s a transferred physical thrill – one that’s as real and ‘valuable’ an experience as any other.

Then there’s entertainment value: the show that makes us smile, makes us laugh, distracts us. Traditionally, if circus is about anything it’s about escape, a freedom from rules, gravity, norms, expectations and the pedestrian plod of everyday life.

But what about artistic value? It’s subjective, of course, but what we wish for from art is for it to change us, to change the way we see the world, or to give us a different lens through which to view it. We want art to stimulate our senses and our intellects, to provoke or inspire. We might expect to see a demonstration of composition, technique and mastery of an artistic language, but also, in contemporary art, a questioning of the artform itself. To show us something we haven’t seen before, to constantly reinvent the world around us.

That’s a big ask. But a number of artists at this year’s Cirko festival could be seen to be addressing that question of circus’ role and value, whether consciously or otherwise, trying to work out what 21st century circus is and where it is going.

Sanja Kosonen and Elice Abonce Muhonen are two French-trained Finnish artists who came together to actively try to create something new – a new proposal for circus. However, they did it by seeking out something old. They discovered the act of hair hanging – that is, being suspended from a wire attached only to your hair – and were determined to master it themselves.

The resulting show, *Capilotractées*, is a dance theatre-esque piece that uses character, charm, absurdity and rudimentary electric guitar-playing to frame the hair-hanging act. With a metal ring plaited into the hair that is coiled on top of their heads, they attach themselves to hooks and pulleys. One drags the other along the floor, hair to hair; Muhonen hangs upside down from a trapeze supporting Kosonen’s weight by her hair

alone; and they create a giant set of scales, with the gathering weight on one side slowly raising up the girl on the other.

As a spectacle it's novel, it's surprising, it's innovative and it's visually arresting. And it certainly provokes a squirm-inducing kinaesthetic reaction. There's something of the Pina Bausch about it all, in the monumental effort to achieve... what? And in the eccentricity, the sometimes perplexing dynamics of relationships, and the petty punishments we dish out to ourselves and each other.

Capilotractées is warm and full of personality. These artists are doing much more than just "the thing", as Kosonen put it. They embrace theatricality (in a non-narrative sense), but they resist the attempt to delve for 'meaning'. There's no political intent, there's no agenda.

There is, however, so much symbolism, and so much collected cultural meaning inherent in the tool of the act itself: the hair. Power, shame, virility, fertility, stories of Samson, Medusa and Rapunzel, the societal consensus on a woman's body hair (in Western media, disgust; in Ghana, for example, beauty). In Finland there's a saying: "My hair is well, everything is well." Every culture has its associations.

Thus, two women revealing their considerable physical strength and guts directly via the medium of their hair can't fail to be symbolic, but in *Capilotractées* the artists choose less to investigate this idea, rather to present it, and leave everything else implicit. They didn't want to make a 'feminist' piece, they say. They were more taken by the fact that hair hanging is "crazy and stupid and super funny". But it's hard not to see it as a liberation when the hair they've been strung up by is finally unwound. Or to notice that, alongside the main act of physical endurance, they draw parallels with the minor discomforts that women habitually put themselves through for the sake of beauty, from tottering high heels to the pained brushing of tangled hair.

In this case, the act itself *is* enough to bring a rich experience to the viewer, precisely because of

these intrinsic meanings contained within the hair itself. It feels like a missed opportunity not to explore these themes further, but that's exactly what Kosonen asks to be liberated from – isn't the act enough? Do circus artists need to be activists as well?

While Kosonen and Muhonen say no to story and politics but yes to theatricality, another duo, Agit-Cirk, strip things back much further in *Tenho*. An example of what Yohann Floch calls 'dry circus', this is circus that renounces spectacle, stories and all the trappings of show business.

Tenho does retain subtle but atmospheric use of lighting – a cloud of talc billowing in the spotlight; the shadow of Jenni Lehtinen hanging from a trapeze – but otherwise it comes unadorned. The process of setting up and executing each act *is* the performance.

Like Kosonen and Muhonen, Agit-Cirk look to the past in order to create something new. The title, *Tenho*, refers to an idea of nostalgia about the old days of the circus, echoes of previous generations. But Lehtinen and partner Sasu Peistola pay no tribute to the kind of images that usually evoke nostalgia, the sepia-tinged glamour of the big top, and instead get down to the physical facts.

What *Tenho* shows us, most of all, is effort. As Peistola puts the bit between his teeth and drags the ropes that will raise partner Lehtinen into the air, there is no attempt to hide the sheer force, the extreme effort going into this task. He grunts, he grimaces, he wipes the sweat from his brow.

The effect is that the performer does not present himself as superhuman, with powers beyond the ordinary, but as a human willing to endure an amount of training, pain and exertion beyond the will of most. It's a subtle difference, perhaps, but it asks us to look closer at what he is actually doing, the skill itself, and what it takes to master it, rather than just the result.

In one scene, Peistola takes the guise of a classic strongman in 21st century clothing, an impressive rock of impenetrable muscle. He revives the old trick of taking a cannon ball to the stomach. (Trick

is the wrong word; it's a product of training and endurance.) Replacing the cannon with a heavy ball swinging from a wire, Peistola takes the blow to the gut straight-faced, with no sense of triumph. Stripped of its pomp and ceremony, without the sideshow atmosphere, the main thing that's revealed is how ridiculous this is. Why would you hit a man in the stomach with an iron ball? What's the value in that expression of unyielding obstinacy? Especially in a modern world where it isn't brute force that brings success and admiration, but intelligence, adaptability and ingenuity. Lehtinen smashes a chair across Peistola's back, in deadpan fashion, as if to underline the fact of this mildly absurd unreconstructed masculinity. (Or at least that's one way of looking at it.)

Circus' prime value may be the way it is able to make visible, in a very clear way, some basic but profound and universal ideas about life: fear, challenge, limitations, freedom, invention, and the dynamics of partnerships. One short action can spark a vivid metaphor.

In an act of Chinese chair acrobatics performed by Lehtinen, a whole world of meaning is contained in the process itself. Lehtinen assiduously assembles a tower of chairs, each one placed with care and precision, climbing storey by storey. As the audience asks itself what her next move will be, how high can she go, the tension slowly escalates along with the risk. (When Lehtinen attaches a safety harness to her belt it might undermine the possibility of actual injury, but it also tells us that this is genuinely dangerous.) This is the classic nail-biting circus narrative. But when Lehtinen finally ascends to the top, instead of glorying in conquering the tower, inviting us to applaud, she undermines that narrative climax by simply standing, staring blankly at the audience. It's as if she's telling us that standing on top isn't the trick. Building the tower to support her weight is where the skill lies.

In her actions there's a parallel with our sometimes precarious journeys through life, each judgement setting the stage for our next move. And the point isn't to reach the end of life; the point is to successfully navigate the journey.

That's not what this scene is 'about', but it's rich with ideas if we choose to look for them. On a more surface level, what the performers are showing us is their own journey, their physical story of a lifetime's practice, discipline and mastery. That in itself could be value enough. But it's really in the way each individual's story chimes with a greater idea about the world that this skill becomes art.

Jay Gilligan is a circus artist who is actively trying to find the value in his chosen skill, juggling, beyond the traditional expectation-reward pattern of virtuosic showmanship. For him, modern juggling has become dictated by commercial factors, from what balls or clubs you can buy, to how long your show needs to be to get booked. For Gilligan, the imperative is to start with the technique and let the props and everything else follow.

For his show *Prototype*, Gilligan has developed his own props, a compendium of shapes, to open up the possibilities of manipulation. In turn he explores each object: squares, triangles, rings cut and fixed back together in 3D forms, clubs doctored into new shapes. It's an inward-looking experiment. In a juggler's hands, each shape asks for a different treatment, has a different weight. Changing the very tools the juggler works with may be a small revolution. But for a non-specialist audience, the impact is minimal, boring, even. It is purposefully unspectacular, it doesn't push any of the expected buttons, and that's the point.

What *Prototype* does is skewer assumptions about what juggling is. The popular act that we all know involves a crescendo of tossing and catching in increasingly difficult and elaborate formations, adding more and more props. But that's a juggling 'act', a cultural expectation. What about the 'skill' of juggling, and the intrinsic value in that – is that a different thing?

For Gilligan, juggling is an art. It expresses something words don't, something nothing else does. For him, juggling "reveals some truth about the world I didn't know before". But can it express this to the audience? On the strength of *Prototype*, it's tempting to say no. But as Gilligan



Sanja Kosonen & Elice Abonce Muhonen – *Capilotractées* © Sébastien Armengol

himself says, “There are so many experiments to do. I’m not saying all are good, but all of them are necessary.”

Importantly, Gilligan notes a difference between juggling, and the performance of juggling. For a juggler, each level of mastery and each new invention brings a creative and physical satisfaction, but that’s the act of doing, not showing. Juggling can literally demonstrate pattern, rhythm, order, error. But what about the world beyond the physical object? Can juggling talk about love, war, politics, concepts of time? Gilligan thinks it can. He’s sure of it, he says, but he admits he’s just not exactly sure *how* yet.

In analysing a circus show it is inevitable that we ask what it is ‘about’, what it means. But meaning is a different thing to value. ‘Meaning’ is a slippery term. There’s specific, literal detail, of the kind that can most effectively be conveyed through words. But there’s a sense of meaning that goes beyond that, and that’s often what we turn to the arts for. English essayist Walter Pater talked of music being the consummate artform precisely because it has no subject. It is “the perfect identification of matter and form... the end is not distinct from the means”. In other words, it bypasses explanation and goes straight for the jugular. Or as ballerina

Margot Fonteyn once said when asked to explain a performance, “I explained it when I danced it.”

All these artists are, in their own ways, bringing circus back to the skill itself. So what can we say about its value? Really, there is no such thing as intrinsic value. Whether you’re talking about gold or Shakespeare or caviar or circus, the value is never inherent. We attribute value to these things because they are rare, because they make us feel good, because they are accomplished, because they touch us, because society tells us they are important. Therefore, the question has to be: is this valuable to a contemporary audience?

As Muhonen and Kosonen and Agit-Cirk and Gilligan all show, with inventive treatment the circus skill itself can tell any number of stories, can awaken any number of ideas, can inspire, can provoke. Or it can leave us cold. Circus artists have always been motivated by the desire to do something that has never been done before, it has always been about breaking barriers. Circus is by nature an art of forward motion. Now that applies not only physically and technically, but also artistically and conceptually – a much less clear-cut realm. As Gilligan said, not all those experiments will be successful. But it is the only way to keep moving forward.

“And now what”: Finnish contemporary circus and its place in cultural policy and the arts

MAJA MRĐENović

The eighth edition of Cirko Festival, an annual event conceived as a means to present state-of-the-art contemporary circus, was held 8-12 May in Helsinki. Although the festival is considered international, the impression is that one of its key missions is to showcase Finnish contemporary circus: this year, the audience could watch three performances from Finland alongside four international performances from Sweden, France, the UK and the USA. As a result, the shows presented at Cirko Festival this year cannot be considered a representative sample of the diverse trends in contemporary circus or of the rich diversity of the current aesthetic movements within the form. And yet the shows¹ definitely did provide an insight into this interdisciplinary form of performance art, an art and a practice which is virtually non-existent in Montenegro. The festival also gave us an idea of its position in relation to contemporary aesthetics and to cultural policy in Finland.

Traditional circus has a long history of existing and evolving independent from other forms of performance art – or at least of doing so on their fringes, seen as an inferior and artistically worthless form defined by the pursuit of pure

1 The English term used for contemporary circus performances is ‘show’, only fitting because it underscores their character as entertainment. At the other end of the spectrum, those that are perceived as works of art appear to merit the term ‘performance’ in the sense in which it is used in theatre. At any rate, defining terminology is a step on the road contemporary circus must take as it tries to find its place in contemporary performance art.

„And now what” : kulturno-političko i umjetničko pozicioniranje savremenog cirkusa u Finskoj

MAJA MRĐENović

Cirko festival, koji kao osnovnu programsku odrednicu ima predstavljanje najaktuelnijih ostvarenja savremenog cirkusa, održan je od 8. do 12. maja u Helsinkiju po 8. put. Iako je festival pozicioniran kao internacionalni, utisak je da mu je takođe jedna od bitnih misija da služi kao svojevrsni „showcase” finskom savremenom cirkusu, pa je tako na ovogodišnjem festivalu publika imala priliku da pogleda tri izvedbe iz Finske, i četiri inostrana djela, izvođača iz Švedske, Francuske, Velike Britanije i SAD-a. Radi toga se ostvarenja predstavljena na ovogodišnjem Cirko festivalu ne mogu smatrati reprezentativnim za predstavljanje različitih tokova savremenih cirkuskih kretanja i bogatstva raznovrsnih aktuelnih cirkuskih estetika. Ipak, izvedeni show-ovi¹ izvjesno su ipak omogućili neke uvide u ovaj, u Crnoj Gori nepostojeći i gotovo nepoznati interdisciplinarni izvedbeni žanr, kao i u njegovo kako estetsko, tako i kulturno-političko pozicioniranje u Finskoj.

Tradicionalni cirkus egzistirao je i razvijao se vijekovima nezavisno od ostalih izvođačkih umjetnosti, ili pak na njihovim marginama, kao inferioran i umjetnički bezvrijedan žanr u kojem dominira puka zabava i želja za profitom. Izvedbe

1 Uobičajeno je da se izvedbe savremenog cirkusa ne nazivaju „predstavama”, nego „show”, što je odgovarajuće kada se time podvlači njihov zabavni karakter. Na drugom polu, one koje se percipiraju kao umjetnička ostvarenja, čini se opravdanim imenovati terminom „predstava” u teatarskom smislu. U svakom slučaju, definisanje terminologije dio je puta koji savremeni cirkus još treba da pređe u svom pozicioniranju na savremenoj sceni izvedbenih umjetnosti.

entertainment and driven by profit. Shows in which performers risk their lives have fascinated audiences primarily because of their physical virtuosity, but, according to the contemporary circus theorist Tomi Purovaara, the ecstatic blending of the extreme emotions of joy and sadness, laughter and death, engenders a cathartic element, essential for human nature, which has made circus survive over the millennia, even in the most adverse environments.² The emphasis on acrobatic skill and physical prowess, and the isolation and marginalisation of circus, continued until the 1960s, when, in the context of general tectonic changes in politics, society, culture and art, circus veered away from its origins as a craft and entertainment to become a recognised category of the modern performing arts as 'new circus', *nouveau cirque*. By the mid-1990s, the most innovative forms of new circus were labelled as 'contemporary circus'. New/contemporary circus is strongly underpinned by the traditional form: the basic element of (artistic) expression remains "precise body movements, based on the circus skill and combined with various items and instruments used in circus disciplines".³ However, the emphasis within new/contemporary circus has shifted from the desire to impress the audience with physical skills towards a creative artistic process in which circus techniques serve as an instrument of expression. In the 1960s, the growth of a number of avant-garde forms of stage art was paralleled by the introduction of circus forms into modern theatre and dance; conversely, circus opened up to influences from theatre, dance and other related forms of art.

It is precisely in this postmodernist mix'n'match of genres that Purovaara identifies the requirement that had to be met in order for circus to move from craft to art.⁴ Contemporary circus today is defined by its multi-genre, hybrid works, and by a complex, self-assured and often questioning attitude towards traditional circus. This genre of the modern performing arts is marked by a

u kojima izvođači rizikuju svoje živote fascinirale su gledaoce prvenstveno fizičkom virtuoznošću, međutim, kako smatra teoretičar savremenog cirkusa Tomi Purovaara, upravo u ekstatičnom spoju ekstremnih emocija radosti i tuge, smijeha i smrti, nalazi se neki katarzičan, ljudskoj prirodi nepohodan element, koji je učinio da cirkus opstane milenijumima, ponekad i u krajnje nepovoljnim okolnostima.² Naglasak na akrobatici i fizičkoj umješnosti, te izolacija i marginalizacija cirkusa potrajali su do kraja 60-ih godina prošlog vijeka, kada je u kontekstu sveopštih značajnih političkih, društvenih, kulturalnih i umjetničkih promjena i cirkus počeo da se udaljava od svoje zanatsko-zabavljачke tradicije i da postaje priznati dio savremenih izvođačkih umjetnosti, pod nazivom „novi cirkus“. Sredinom '90-ih godina prošlog vijeka, najinovativnija ostvarenja novog cirkusa počela su da se nazivaju „savremenim cirkusom“. Novi/savremeni cirkus snažno se oslanja na tradicionalni u smislu da je osnovi element (umjetničkog) izražavanja, nekada kao i sada „precizan tjelesni pokret, koji je zasnovan na cirkuskoj vještini i kombinaciji sa različitim objektima i instrumentima iz cirkuskih disciplina.“³ Međutim, naglasak u novom/savremenom cirkusu pomjerio se sa težnje za impresioniranjem publike fizičkim vještinama ka kreativnom umjetničkom procesu, u kojem su cirkuske tehnike instrument izražavanja, ekspresije. 60-ih godina 20. vijeka, u doba razvijanja mnogih avangardnih oblika scenskih umjetnosti, paralelno se dešavalo uvođenje cirkuskih oblika u tada moderno pozorište i ples, ali i se i cirkus otvarao uticajima pozorišta, plesa, i drugih srodnih umjetnosti. Upravo u tom postmodernističkom miješanju žanrova Purovaara vidi neophodnost koja je bila potrebna da bi cirkus prešao put od zanata do umjetnosti.⁴ Savremeni cirkus danas označava upravo multižanrovska, hibridna djela, složena, samosvjesna i često preispitujuća u odnosu na tradicionalni cirkus. Simptomatična za ovo polje savremenih izvođačkih umjetnosti jeste izvjesna nestabilnost, promjenjivost, velika raznovrsnost pravaca u kojima se savremeni

2 Tomi Purovaara, *An Introduction to Contemporary Circus*, New Nordic Circus Network, Stockholm, 2012, 21.

3 *Ibid*, 18.

4 *Ibid*, 148.

2 Tomi Purovaara. „An Introduction to Contemporary Circus“, New Nordic Circus Network, Stockholm, 2012., 21.

3 Isto, 18.

4 *Ibid*, 148.

certain lack of stability / changeability, by highly diverse artistic directions, and by a palpable effort to find ways to co-exist with traditional circus in the process of creating new artistic forms. Because contemporary circus has gained recognition as part of art and culture, it has now been institutionalised. As a result, there has been a rapid increase in the number of circus artists, troupes and shows. During the early development of new circus, training evolved beyond something that was done only in the context of a family or a troupe: in the early 1970s the first college courses were offered in France, Belgium, Canada, the UK and Sweden; anyone could apply. Since then, the funds available to circus have also grown. The networks and models of cooperation between countries have grown apace as well. The first circus act visited Finland in 1802: a French circus stopped in the city of Turku en route from Stockholm to Saint Petersburg. In the two centuries that followed, circus in Finland became a respectable, active and independent artistic discipline, enjoying full support of the state cultural administration, and taking up a vital role as part of Finnish culture.

After Finland gained independence in 1917, circus had a long struggle until it reached the comfortable position it enjoys today. In the early 1920s, circus, dance, film and cabaret were considered light entertainment for the masses, part of low culture; a special tax was levied on each ticket, up to 40 percent. However, the shifts in state cultural policy in the 1970s brought to the forefront the importance of democratising culture. This coincided with the establishment of the first youth circus in Finland. In the decades that followed, as the concern about the use of citizens' leisure time increased at national and local levels, a number of circus schools for children and young people sprang up all over Finland. They quickly gained popularity. The annual youth arts festival established in the early 1980s under the auspices of the Education Ministry provided the first opportunity for circus to enter the stage as an artform. The state stepped up its efforts to establish an efficient cultural administration, and as a result more funds were available to circus artists. In the 1990s, another major step forward was taken when the Ministry

cirkus kreće, i osjetno traženje načina koegzistencije sa tradicionalnim cirkusom u stvaranju novih umjetničkih formi.

Time što je prepoznat kao dio umjetnosti i kulture, savremeni cirkus je i institucionalizovan, što je dovelo do rapidnog porasta broja umjetnika, kompanija i izvedbi. Cirkuski trening nije se više odvijao u okviru porodice ili družine, nego se početkom 1970-ih godina javlja institucionalno, fakultetsko cirkusko obrazovanje (u Francuskoj, Belgiji, Kanadi, Velikoj Britaniji, Švedskoj) dostupno svima. Takođe, od tada neprestano raste i finansiranje cirkusa, kao i razvoj mreža i modela saradnje među različitim zemljama. Prvi zabilježeni dolazak neke cirkuske trupe u Finsku datira iz 1802. godine, kada je jedan francuski cirkus na svome putu iz Stokholma u Petrograd svratio u finski grad Turku. Od tada, kroz dva vijeka, cirkus u Finskoj postao je uvažena, aktivna i nezavisna umjetnička disciplina, koja uživa puno podršku državne kulturne administracije i igra bitnu ulogu kao dio finske kulture.

Nakon što je Finska stekla nezavisnost 1917. godine, cirkus je prešao dug put do lagodne pozicije koju u Finskoj ima danas. Početkom 1920-ih, zajedno sa plesom, filmom i kabareom bio je smatran lakom zabavom za mase, nižom kulturom, i za izvođenje cirkuskih show-ova morao se plaćati poseban porez, koji je išao i do 40% po prodatoj ulaznici. Međutim, promjene u državnoj kulturnoj politici tokom 1970-ih dovele su do naglašavanja bitnosti demokratizacije kulture. Upravo u to vrijeme, u Finskoj je osnovan prvi omladinski cirkus. Narednih decenija, kako se na državnom i gradskim nivoima povećavala briga za kreativno provođenje slobodnog vremena stanovništva, nicali su cirkuske škole za djecu i omladinu koje su sticale sve veću popularnost. Godišnji omladinski umjetnički festival koji je ustanovljen početkom 1980-ih pod pokroviteljstvom Ministarstva prosvjete bio je prva prilika da cirkus stupi na pozornicu kao umjetnost. Takođe, država je počela da ulaže sve veći trud ka utemeljenju efikasne kulturne administracije, što se očitovalo i u povećanim finansijskim fondovima namijenjenim cirkuskim umjetnicima. U 1990-im učinjen je značajan korak dalje, kada je Ministarstvo prosvjete i kulture

of Education and Culture put together a new arts curriculum which included circus. At the beginning of the new millennium, the state acquired a strong interest in developing professional circus art. In 2000, a special department for circus was set up in the Finnish Arts Council. Circus thus became equal with all the other high forms of art; the funds in the budget allocated to circus have since been increasing on a yearly basis.

According to a study conducted by the Finnish Circus Information Centre in 2010,⁵ about 200 artists and teachers were active in the field at the time, in twenty large and a number of small circus troupes. There are three annual festivals presenting the latest in contemporary circus. Every year, about 800 to 900 circus shows are staged in Finland, including about 35 premieres, seen by about 300,000 spectators. There are circus courses offered at an amateur level (about 3500 children and young people attend such circus training), and at the professional level training is provided at the Academy of Arts at the University of Applied Science in Turku. A circus department will be opened at the Theatre Academy in Helsinki soon. There are a number of organisations that support contemporary circus productions in Finland and offer information, residencies, networking and further training. They also lobby for circus, export Finnish circus acts, etcetera. The two most notable institutions are Cirko Center and the Finnish Circus Information Centre.

And yet the visit to Cirko Festival has engendered the impression that the vigorous branding of contemporary circus in Finland may be a bit too aggressive and forced; the feeling is that circus is not developing spontaneously but is being pushed forward by the state cultural policy. The artistic and aesthetic merit of the shows staged at the festival, the ideas they communicate, fail to justify the huge support contemporary circus enjoys in Finland. An outside observer may be justified in asking cautiously whether the desire of the state to get young people off the street and to channel them into any creative and recreational hobby,

5 In the booklet, 'Experience Finnish Circus!', Finnish Circus Information Centre, Helsinki, 2011, 16.

ustanovilo novi kurikulum umjetničkog obrazovanja, u koji je ravnopravno uključen i cirkus. Početkom novog milenijuma, država je postala ekstremno zainteresovana za razvoj profesionalne cirkuske umjetnosti. 2000. godine finški Umjetnički savjet dobio je poseban podsavjet za cirkus, čime je on definitivno izjednačen sa ostalim „visokim“ umjetnostima, a budžetska sredstva namijenjena ovom polju uvećavaju se na godišnjem nivou, kao u državnom tako i gradskim budžetima.

Prema istraživanjima finškog Cirkuskog informativnog centra iz 2010. godine⁵, tada je u polju djelovalo oko 200 umjetnika i pedagoga, u 20 velikih cirkuskih trupa uz mnoštvo manjih. Godišnje se održavaju tri festivala na kojima se predstavljaju ostvarenja savremenog cirkusa. Takođe, godišnje se u Finskoj izvede oko 800-900 cirkuskih show-ova, od čega oko 35 premijera, koje pogleda oko 300 000 gledalaca. Cirkusko obrazovanje postoji na amaterskom (u ovaj vid cirkuskog treninga uključeno je oko 3500 djece i mladih) i profesionalnom nivou, na Umjetničkoj akademiji Univerziteta primjenjenih nauka u Turku. Otvaranje odsjeka za cirkus na Pozorišnoj akademiji u Helsikiju planira se u najskorije vrijeme. Ustanovljene su i mnoge organizacije, od kojih su najznačajnije Cirko centar i Cirkuski informativni centar, koje podržavaju produkciju savremenog cirkusa u Finskoj, nude informacije, rezidencije, umrežavanje, usavršavanje, lobiraju, bave se izvozom finškog cirkusa itd.

Ipak, boravak na Cirko festivalu ostavio je utisak da je aktivno brendiranje savremenog cirkusa u Finskoj možda malo i preagresivno, isforsirano, da se polje više „gura“ od strane državne kulturne politike, nego što se spontano razvija. Prikazani show-ovi nisu umjetničkom, estetskom ni idejnom vrijednošću opravdali ogromnu podršku koja se savremenom cirkusu pruža u Finskoj. Pitanje koje posmatrač sa strane vrlo oprezno može postaviti jeste, da li želja države da se mladi, kolokvijalno rečeno, „sklone sa ulice“ i usmjere na neki kreativno-rekreativni hobi, i prepoznavanje savremenog cirkusa kao nečega što bi moglo biti specifično,

5 Navedeno u brošuri „Experience Finnish Circus!“, Finnish Circus Information Centre, Helsinki, 2011, 16.

and the recognition of contemporary circus as something that might be a specific and distinctive feature of Finnish culture, a likely cultural export, serve to justify the lack of judgement and aesthetic criteria in providing support to groups and projects. Of course, it may simply be the case that the shows staged at the festival are not representative of Finnish and international contemporary circus, as stated at the beginning of the text, but the impression remains that this form of performance art in Finland does not have a strong artistic and aesthetic position, and this lack is compensated for by the strength of its position in cultural policy.

To illustrate the point, this text will present a comparative analysis of three shows from this year's edition of Cirko Festival: Tenho by the Finnish company Agit-Cirk, Light Blue and Orange by another Finnish troupe, Circo Aereo, and Capilotractées by Sanja Kosonen and Elice Muhonen, two artists of Finnish origin who work in France. Tenho and Capilotractées are linked by an emphasis on the issue of the attitude of contemporary circus toward its own tradition, but while Tenho is characterised both by the desire to fascinate the audience through the physical prowess of the performers and by very tenuous ideas, Capilotractées deals with the topic in a thoughtful, witty and subversive way, offering the audience much more than mere circus skills. Such skills are in fact only one of the means used to express the authors' ideas. As for Light Blue & Orange, it can be compared to Capilotractées because both mix genres, but the former does not go beyond light, kitschy entertainment bereft of all ideas, while the latter is a potent performance where tradition and the basic emotions engendered by circus are lifted to a higher symbolic, aesthetic and epistemological ground. The two shows, Tenho and Light Blue & Orange, are linked by a desire to impress at the expense of expression. Capilotractées showcases the potential of contemporary circus and shows why circus becomes art when physical audacity is coupled with artistic courage.

In formal terms, Tenho can be characterised as ascetic and simple: what is sometimes described



Circo Aereo – Light Blue & Orange © Circo Aereo

razlikovno za finsku kulturu, i prema tome pogodno za kulturni izvoz, opravdava manjkavost evaluacije i estetskih kriterijuma pri podržavanju trupa i projekata. Naravno, postoji i mogućnost, navedena na početku teksta, da prikazani show-ovi jednostavno nisu bili reprezentivni niti za finski niti internacionalni savremeni cirkus, ali utisak da ovaj izvedbeni žanr u Finskoj nije dovoljno pozicioniran umjetnički i estetski, nego samo kulturno-politički, veoma je snažan.

Da bi se ilustrovala ova teza, u ovom tekstu biće komparativno analizirane tri izvedbe sa ovogodišnjeg Cirko festivala, „Tenho“ finskog Agit-Cirk-a, „Light blue & orange“ takođe finske grupe Circo Aero i „Capilotractées“ Sanje Kosonen i Elice Muhonen, umjetnica finskog porijekla koje djeluju u Francuskoj. „Tenho“ i „Capilotractées“ povezuje naglašeno bavljenje pitanjima odnosa savremenog cirkusa prema sopstvenoj tradiciji, ali dok u „Tenho“-u dominira težnja ka fascinaciji publike fizičkim vještinama izvođača i idejna tanušnost, „Capilotractées“ temu obrađuje promišljeno, duhovito, subverzivno i gledaocima nudi mnogo više od cirkuskih vještina, koje se koriste samo kao jedno od sredstava za izražavanje ideja. A izvedba „Light blue & orange“ je sa „Capilotractées“ uporediva po miješanju

as 'dry circus'.⁶ This was achieved despite the use of music and lights, because their use was not geared towards producing meaning; the show would have remained essentially the same had they not been used at all. Although the performers explained in the post-show interview that the word 'tenho' denotes echoes from the past – nostalgia – and that it was their intent to share with the audience some old circus elements that are about to become extinct (as circus is evolving rapidly, and in their view it would be good to know how things were in the past) not much was done with this idea in the show itself. When asked by a journalist why it would be good for us to know how things were in the past in circus, what their attitude was towards this past, and what response they wanted to elicit from their audience, the performers did not have any answers to give. The failure to think through what they wanted to communicate from the stage, and the focus of their attention and effort on nothing but acrobatic skills, is reflected in the show itself: in terms of themes and ideas, it is a work in progress, lacking definition. Although it is obvious that some old-fashioned circus props were used in the show, as stressed by the performers in the interview, and that they benevolently caricatured some elements of traditional circus, such as the muscularity and strength of the male performers and the convention requiring that the performance appear effortless (in the show, the performers at times breathe too loud, wipe sweat, etcetera, in an exaggerated manner), nothing was done in essence with these 'echoes from the past'. The heritage was not problematised; the performers did not evince any personal attitude towards it. Paradoxically, although Tenho purports to re-examine the heritage of traditional circus, because it fails to offer a message, a story, a position or a comment, and because it focuses on acrobatics, it ends up having all the hallmarks of traditional circus: circus that does not have any artistic pretensions, circus that just wants to amaze and entertain. The order of the acts serves the same function: they start

6 The term 'dry circus' is used to denote contemporary circus where the artists strive to go back to the roots, creating pure circus acts not contaminated by other artforms. As Yohann Floch noted in his lecture on 9 May 2013 in Cirko Center, this is all about "formal explorations of acrobatic technique".

žanrova, koje pak u prvoj produkciji ne posreduje ništa više od bezidejne, lake, kičaste zabave, dok je u drugoj potentno i dovodi do uzdizanja tradicije i bazičnih emocija koje cirkus proizvodi na viši simbolički, estetski i saznajni nivo. Show-ove „Tenho“ i „Light blue & orange“ povezuje težnja da impresioniraju, nauštrb ekspresije. A „Capilotractèes“ ukazuje na to šta bi bili potencijali savremenog cirkusa, i zašto to, kada se fizičkoj smjelosti pridruži i umjetnička hrabrost, uistinu jeste Umjetnost.

Izvedbu „Tenho“ u formalnom smislu moguće je okarakterisati atributima asketizma i jednostavnosti i označiti kao „dry circus“.⁶ Ovo je moguće uprkos korištenju elemenata muzike i svjetla, jer se oni upotrebljavaju na značenjski nebitan način, odnosno u izvedbi se ništa bitno ne bi izmijenilo i da se uopšte ne upotrebljavaju. Iako su izvođači u razgovoru nakon izvedbe objasnili da riječ „tenho“ označava ehoe iz prošlosti, odnosno nostalgiju, te da im je namjera bila da sa publikom podijele neke stare cirkuske elemente koji nestaju, jer se cirkus brzo mijenja, a oni misle da bi dobro bilo da znamo šta je bilo u prošlosti, sa ovom idejom u izvedbi nije mnogo urađeno. Shodno tome, na pitanje novinara zašto bi bilo dobro da znamo šta je bilo u cirkuskoj prošlosti, te kakav je njihov odnos prema toj prošlosti, i kakve reakcije žele izazvati kod publike, izvođači nisu imali odgovore. Nepromišljanje onoga što se sa scene želi posredovati, i usmjeravanje pažnje i truda isključivo na akrobatske vještine ogleda se i u samoj izvedbi, tematski i idejno nedorečenoj, neodređenoj i nedefinisanoj. Iako je vidno da su korištena neka starinska cirkuska pomagala, a i sami izvođači su na to skrenuli pažnju u razgovoru, te da su dobroćudno karikirani neki elementi tradicionalnog cirkusa, kao što su mišićavost i snaga muških izvođača, te konvencija nepokazivanja napora (u izvedbi izvođači povremeno pretjerano glasno dišu, otiru znoj, i sl.), sa tim „odjecima iz prošlosti“ u izvedbi suštinski nije urađeno ništa. To nasljeđe nije

6 Termin „dry circus“ označava djela savremenog cirkusa čiji tvorci teže da „vraćaju korijenima“, odnosno da stvaraju „čista“ cirkuska djela, bez miješanja sa drugim umjetnostima. Kako je u predavanju održanom 9. maja 2013. u prostorijama Cirko centra naveo Yohann Floch, riječ je o „formalnim istraživanjima o akrobatskoj tehnici“.

with the simpler acts and progress to more demanding and risky acrobatic and gymnastic feats, without any effort to blend them creatively into a coherent and meaningful whole.

The programme notes describe *Light Blue & Orange* as a show that “takes the viewer to the world of cabaret. Double bass, grand piano and marbles create the soundscape while surprising magic, dancing on ropes and clownery fill the stage.”⁷ And yet: while cabaret as a form is characterised by its way of dealing with the hottest topics – the provocative issues that trouble society – in a fun way, this show does not deal with anything in terms of themes or ideas. The artists were not interviewed, unfortunately, but it is obvious that their starting point was not their desire to speak about anything, but was instead to entertain and charm the audience by the intermittent visual poetry that characterised some scenes. The show definitely falls flat when it tries to entertain the audience; banal magic tricks with coins, a few high wire acts, and some live music on the stage engender nothing but irritation, the feeling that one has just wasted one’s time, and has been cheated. The reason why the audience feels cheated is because it expects contemporary circus to be art these days, not a mere gymnastic show or a kitschy quasi-entertainment.

In the interviews with performers and the personnel of Cirko Center, interviewees often talked about the lack of understanding on the part of their audience, their expectation that they would see traditional circus and their limited capacity to understand contemporary circus shows. And yet, after a few days at the festival, the impression was that the audiences were more than receptive towards each and every show – that they were willing and able to understand and respond whenever there was something to understand and feel in the shows, as was the case with *Capilotractées*. It would appear that the purported lack of understanding on the part of the audience is after all the performers’ own fault: as they prepare their shows, they neglect to think

problematizovano, niti su izvođači pokazali bilo kakav lični odnos prema njemu. Paradoksalno, iako „Tenho“ deklarativno teži da promišlja tradicionalno cirkusko nasljeđe, ne nudeći poruku, priču, stav, ili komentar, i koncentrišući se na akrobatiku, izvedba upravo ostavlja utisak tradicionalnog cirkusa, onoga koji i nema nikakve umjetničke pretenzije, nego želi da zadivi i zabavi. U skladu sa time su povezani i aktovi – ide se od jednostavnijih ka sve složenijim i opasnijim akrobatsko-gimnastičkim zahvatima, bez težnje ka nekom kreativnijem povezivanju u koherentnu i smisaonu cjelinu.

„Light blue & orange“, kao je zapisano u programu za ovu izvedbu, „odvodi posmatrača u svijet kabarea. Kontrabas, klavir i klikeri kreiraju zvukovlje, dok iznenađujuća magija, ples po konopcima i klaunerija ispunjavaju scenu.“⁷ Međutim, dok je za kabare karakteristično da se na zabavan način bavi gorućim, provokativnim temama određenog društva u određenom trenutku, ova izvedba se, u tematsko-idejnom smislu ne bavi apsolutno ničim. Intervju sa kreatorima nažalost nije održan, ali izvjesno je da nisu pošli od želje da govore o bilo čemu, nego da publiku zabave i očaraju povremenom poetičnom vizuelnošću pojedinih scena, koja ipak nije dovoljno prisutna da bi nas ozračila autorskom vizijom i atmosferičnošću. Izvedba definitivno ne uspijeva ni u svojim namjerama da zabavi, te banalni mađioničarski trikovi sa novčićem, te malo akrobacija na konopcu i sviranja uživo na sceni izazivaju samo iritiranost, te osjećaj gubljenja vremena i prevarenosti. Osjećaj prevarenosti dolazi od očekivanja da je savremeni cirkus danas umjetnost, a ne puka gimnastička priredba ili kičasta kvazi-zabava.

U razgovorima sa izvođačima viđenih show-ova, ali i sa osobljem Cirko centra, bilo je mnogo riječi o nerazumijevanju publike, njenim očekivanjima tradicionalnog cirkusa i ograničenim mogućnostima da shvati savremenocirkuske izvedbe. Ipak, utisak koji se poslije nekoliko dana na festivalu nametnuo, jeste da je publika i više nego blagonaklona prema svemu prikazanom, i

7 Quoted from the programme notes for *Light Blue & Orange*.

7 Navedeno u programu izvedbe „Light blue & orange“.

about the context in which they create their work, the audience they want to address, and what they want to convey to the audience and elicit from them. They focus mostly on their own bodies and physical skills, as if they were athletes or models. In the final analysis, this is their own concern, which their audience does not share.

In formal terms, *Capilotractées* is a coherent amalgam of circus, post-dramatic theatre and modern dance. The two creators and performers, Sanja Kosonen and Elice Muhonen, use as the foundation the technique of hair hanging, an old circus act, as well as other traditional acrobatic skills (such as rope acrobatics). In this show, the circus skills, coupled with acting, words, songs, music, lighting, props, *mise-en-scène*, etcetera, are used as vehicles of potential meaning, communicating challenging content from the stage. Their interests focus on hair and its many literal (e.g. decorative) and symbolic (e.g. the myth of hair as the receptacle of strength) meanings. The story of hair is used to question, in a manner at once thoughtful, subversive and ludic, the essence of contemporary circus today. The two artists very strikingly delineate its profile, directions, dilemmas, attitude towards traditional circus, etcetera. Importantly, they offer the audience their own vision, their own questions and perspective on the issues, in a very frank and revealing manner. Unlike them, the performers in the two other shows, *Tenho* and *Light Blue & Orange*, do not offer anything of the sort: as a result, they are seen as craftspeople, in effect interchangeable with any other performers with a similar skill set. The huge creative effort put into the show was evident not only from the performance, but from the interview with the artists: it was obvious that they had prepared for the show by extensive research, and that they knew very well what they wanted to say, to whom and in what way. Unlike them, the other performers who were interviewed usually highlighted their physical skills; as for the content, they would usually say they were not sure what they had wanted to say, but that they were happy if their audience had their own story.

The sign the authors of *Capilotractées* set on the stage at one point, saying "And now what", is in

da zaista razumije i reguje, kada u izvedbi ima nešto za razumjeti i osjetiti, kao što je bio slučaj sa „*Capilotractées*“. Čini se da su za tzv. nerazumijevanje publike ipak mahom krivi sami izvođači, koji u toku pripremanja izvedbe preskaču da promise o kontekstu u kojem stvaraju, gledaocu kojem se obraćaju, te o tome šta mu žele poručiti i šta u njemu izazvati, a misle ponajviše sportsko-manekenski o svojim tijelima i vještinama tih tijela. A to se u krajnjem slučaju tiče samo njih, a ne i publike.

Izvedba „*Capilotractées*“ u formalnom smislu koherentna je mješavina cirkusa, postdramskog teatra, i savremenog plesa. Kreatorke i izvođačice predstave Sanja Kosonen i Elice Muhonen kao osnovu koriste staru cirkusku tehniku vješanja za kosu, kao i neke druge tradicionalne akrobatske vještine (akrobacije na konopu), ali u slučaju ove izvedbe, ove cirkuske vještine, uz glumu, riječi, pjevanje, sviranje, muziku, svjetlosne elemente, scenografiju, mizanscen itd. sredstva su koja nose značenjski potencijal i kojima se sa scene posreduje izazovan sadržaj. Teme njihovog interesovanja su kosa i sva njena mnogobrojna bukvalna (npr. ukras) i simbolička značenja (npr. mit o snazi koja se nalazi u kosi), a kroz priču o kosi promišljeno, subverzivno i ludički zaigrano propituje se i šta je savremeni cirkus danas – umjetnice vrlo upečatljivo ocrtavaju njegov profil, lutanja, dileme, odnos prema tradicionalnom cirkusu, itd. Pri tome je vrlo bitno što one publici nude svoju vizuru, svoja pitanja i pogled na stvari, vrlo iskreno i razotkrivajuće ranjivo. Za razliku od njih, izvođači u „*Tenho*“-u i „*Light blue & orange*“ to ne nude, radi čega su percipirani kao zanatlije, suštinski zamjenjivi nekim drugim izvođačima sličnih umijeća. Veliki kreativni rad na predstavi, osim u samoj predstavi, očitovao se i u razgovoru sa umjetnicama, iz kojeg je bilo očigledno da su u pripremanju vršile obimna istraživanja, te da su vrlo osvijestile šta imaju da poruče, kome, i na koji način. Za razliku od njih, ostali izvođači sa kojima su vršeni razgovori, obično bi skretali pažnju na svoje fizičke vještine, dok bi o sadržaju odgovarali da ne znaju baš šta su htjeli da kažu, ali da im je svakako drago ako publika ima neku svoju priču.

Natpis koji kreatorke predstave „*Capilotractées*“ u jednom trenutku postavljaju na scenu, „And now

fact emblematic of the entire contemporary circus, at least based on what could be seen at Cirko Festival. It's a question that definitely needs to be asked, and it is an act of courage to ask it. The considerations presented above render the message written for World Theatre Day by Italian playwright and Nobel Prize winner Dario Fo much clearer; he ended his message on this note: "Thus the only solution to the crisis lies in the hope that a great expulsion is organized against us and especially against young people who wish to learn the art of theatre: a new diaspora of Commedianti, of theatre makers, who would, from such an imposition, doubtlessly draw unimaginable benefits for the sake of a new representation." This sentence, which initially sounded extremely ill-considered, bordering on offensive, becomes much clearer in the context of a country that has an extremely well developed cultural policy such as Finland's. It is a country where artists, including circus artists, live and work in comfort and dignity, and yet comfort should not lull them and result in artistic conformism. The only reason to put on a new circus show should not be, as some of the interviewed artists have said, 'let's put on a new show' (one could be excused for thinking that what they mean is, 'and get hold of some money'). The drive to brand contemporary circus as a specific feature of Finnish culture should not equate works of artistic value with a conception of the form as a hobby for children and youth, or a sport, or sheer entertainment; it would perhaps not be a bad idea to slap a 40 percent tax on every ticket sold for the latter.

what", ustvari je simptomatičan za cijelo polje savremenog cirkusa, bar na osnovu viđenog na Cirko festivalu, i uistinu ga je potrebno i hrabro postaviti. U svjetlu prethodnih razmatranja, mnogo razumljivija postaje ovogodišnja međunarodna poruka povodom Svjetskog dana pozorišta, koju je uputio italijanski pozorišni umjetnik, nobelovac Dario Fo, koja završava ovako: „Zato je jedino rješenje za krizu nadati se da će se protiv nas i protiv mladih koji žele naučiti pozorišno umijeće organizovati velika hajka: nova dijaspora glumaca koja će svakako, iz nametnutih okolnosti, izvući nezamislive prednosti za novo pozorište.“ Rečenica koja je u crnogorskom kontekstu izgledala krajnje neadekvatno i gotovo uvredljivo, postaje mnogo jasnija u kontekstu kulturno-politički ultrarazvijene zemlje, poput Finske, u kojoj umjetnici, pa tako i cirkuski umjetnici, uživaju udobnost i dostojanstvene uslove za život i rad. Ipak, ta udobnost ne bi trebalo da uljulkuje i dovodi do konformizma u umjetničkom smislu. Razlog za pravljenje nove cirkuske predstave ne može biti, kako su istakli neki od umjetnika sa kojima su obavljeni intervjui, tek puko „hajde da napravimo novu predstavu“ (i uzmemo neki novac, moglo bi se pomisliti). U želji da se savremeni cirkus brendira kao nešto specifično za finsku kulturu, ipak bi trebalo praviti razliku između umjetnički vrijednih djela, hobija za djecu i mlade, sporta, te puke zabave, koju možda i ne bi bilo tako loše oporezovati sa 40% po prodatoj ulaznici.

How to break through the confines of one's own tradition and look into the (un)known future?

NIKA ARHAR

An encounter with the term 'circus' usually brings to mind a rather one-dimensional image – one originating within the history of a genre which is nowadays called 'contemporary circus' or 'circus arts'. This is still a young artform, having establishing itself only in the last four decades after breaking away from traditional circus and achieving a fundamental shift in the form's central interests. It has, however, been slow to establish itself in the modern artistic field and within the framework of contemporary performance work. And in those areas where this development *has* begun, it has mostly manifested in places close to training opportunities and other developmental incentives related to cultural politics, production, infrastructure, or social or artistic conditions. When compared to the older performing arts, the professional paths of contemporary circus appear less clearly defined and still unstable, yet for this very same reason also open, excitingly, to numerous possibilities.

Contemporary circus, just like any young, developing profession, needs critical deliberation and reflection in order to help artists as they articulate their place within the development of circus arts, re-examine the preoccupations of the work they undertake, and gain greater awareness of their weaknesses, possibilities, and overall potential. In searching for acceptance within the performing arts field, perhaps circus needs this support even more than other forms, given that it is derived from a non-artistic field – that of the traditional circus – and is based on the

Kako prebiti okvirje lastne tradicije in pogledati v (ne)znano prihodnost?

NIKA ARHAR

Srečanje s pojmom 'cirkus' običajno vzbudi precej enoznačno podobo, ki izhaja iz izvorov in zgodovine žanra, katerega danes imenujemo 'sodobni cirkus' ali 'cirkuške umetnosti'. Gre za mlado umetniško zvrst, ki se je vzpostavila v zadnjih štirih desetletjih in je od preobrata oziroma preloma s tradicionalnim cirkusom izvedla bistvene premike v svojem osrednjem interesu, a se na sodobnem umetniškem polju in v okviru sodobnih uprizoritvenih praks uveljavlja le počasi in predvsem točkovno, v tesni geografski navezavi na možnost izobraževanja in drugih (kulturno-političnih, produkcijskih, infrastrukturnih, družbenih, umetniških) razvojnih spodbud. V primerjavi s starejšimi scenskimi praksami se tako zdi, da so poti sodobnega cirkusa danes manj jasno definirane in še nestabilne, a prav zato tudi vznemirljivo odprte v številne možnosti.

Kot vsaka mlada in razvijajoča se praksa sodobni cirkus – morda še toliko bolj, ker izhaja iz neumetniškega polja tradicionalnega cirkusa in temelji na izvedbi fizičnih akcij s specifično kvaliteto – v svoji transformaciji, ki sega na polje uprizoritvenih umetnosti potrebuje razmislek, ki bi sedanjim praksam pomagal artikulirati mesto znotraj razvoja cirkuških umetnosti, utrditi položaj znotraj polja sodobnih umetnosti, prepričati preokupacije cirkuških praks, njihove šibkosti, možnosti in potenciale. Umetniška praksa se lahko razvija zgolj s samorefleksijo in kontekstualizacijo lastne dejavnosti, zato je misel potrebna ne nujno kot ločeno teoretsko polje, ampak v tesni navezavi na samo prakso.

performance of physical actions with a specific quality. Artistic experience can only develop through self-reflection and the contextualisation of one's own activity; therefore the thinking that needs to take place around circus need not necessarily happen within a separate theoretical field, but can instead be closely connected to the practice itself.

(New) tasks of circus arts

When modern circus broke out of the confines of the traditional 'entertainment' style adopted by spectacular circus acts – responding, during the 1970s, to wider socio-cultural changes that understood the 'performing arts' in a freer and more flexible way, as a multidisciplinary form of stage art transcending the limits of genre – it had to accomplish an important shift from a form that was all about execution to, ideally, one that embraced the idea that form and content needed to be connected to create an artistic whole.

This shift, which has enabled circus technique to find a place within the broader framework of the performing arts, has required the artform to move away from the previous circus formula of "exoticism, gorgeousness, skill, novelty, magnificence, danger, display, beauty, action, spectacle"¹ as well as from the exhibition or presentation of circus acts for the sake of fascination, "sensation, delight, wonder, humour, suspense, astonishment".² It has demanded that the sensational effects of unconnected circus acts be replaced by the development of the circus performance as a complete *event* – one which, in addition to provoking those traditional responses, also enables the presentation of an idea, story, viewpoint, reflection, re-examination of established themes, critical idea, etcetera.

It might be a somewhat simplified view, however, to dismiss the classical circus as showbiz only; the large traditional circuses, as an important part of the modern industrial society of the 19th century, "reflected the speed, danger and virtuosity of an

1 Quotation: Stoddart, H. (2000). *Rings of Desire, Circus History and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press) in Zaccarini, J-P. (2013): *Circoanalysis: Circus, Therapy and Psycho-analysis* (University of Dance and Circus), p. 17.

2 Ibid.

(Nove) naloge cirkuške umetnosti

S tem, ko je sodobni cirkus prebil okvire tradicionalnega "entertainment" spektakularnih cirkuških točk in se v 70-ih letih prejšnjega stoletja odzval družbeno-kulturnim spremembam ter se kot multidisciplinarna oblika scenske umetnosti pridružil novi svobodi in fleksibilnosti uprizoritvenih umetnosti s prehajanjem žanrskih mej, je moral izvesti pomembno premestitev od izvedbene forme k idejnemu zaobjetu celote v povezavi forme in vsebine.

Ta premestitev, ki cirkuški tehniki omogoči umestitev znotraj okvirjev uprizoritvenih umetnosti, zahteva preseganje nekdanje cirkuške formule »eksotičnosti, lepote, spretnosti, novosti, veličastnosti, nevarnosti, razkazovanja, akcije, spektakla«¹ ob razstavljanju oziroma predstavljanju cirkuških točk zaradi fascinacije, »občutja, užitka, čudenja, humorja, suspenza, osuplosti«² s strani gledalcev; zahteva, da senzacionalnost med seboj nepovezanih cirkuških točk zamenjamo z razvojem celovitega dogodka, ki poleg primarnih odzivov omogoča tudi predstavitev ideje, zgodbe, stališča, užitek, razmislek, prevpraševanje vzpostavljenih tem, kritiko ipd.

Morda je nekoliko poenostavljeno odpraviti cirkus kot zgolj šovbiznis; veliki tradicionalni cirkusi so kot pomemben del moderne industrijske družbe 19. stoletja »reflektirali hitrost, nevarnost in virtuoznost pojavljajoče se modernosti«³ in »afirmirali transcenco življenja proti nevarni, razburljivi, frenetični, šokantni in vedno spreminjajoči se modernosti«⁴. V skladu s takratnih duhovnim razvojem so reprezentirali spektakelski princip velikih zgodb in antropocentrični pogled s človeškim zmagoslavjem nad samim seboj in nadvlado človeške rase nad živalsko vrsto ter tlakovali pot prihajajočemu razvoju pop-kulturnim »tehnologijam vida in spektakla«⁵. Prisotnost

1 Kot po: Stoddart, H. (2000). *Rings of Desire, Circus History and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press) navaja: Zaccarini, J-P. (2013): *Circoanalysis: Circus, Therapy and Psycho-analysis* (University of Dance and Circus), str. 17.

2 Prav tam

3 Zaccarini, J-P. (2013), str. 18.

4 Prav tam, stran 17.

5 Kot po: Stoddart, H. (2000), navaja: Zaccarini, J-P. (2013), str. 17.

emerging modernity”³ and “provided a life-affirming transcendence in the face of a dangerous, exciting, frenetic, shocking and ever-changing modernity”.⁴ In accordance with the spiritual development of that time they represented the spectacular principle of greatness/achievement, as well as the anthropocentric view that the human race had triumphed over itself and achieved supremacy over the animal kingdom, and thus paved the way for the upcoming development of pop-cultural “technologies of vision and spectacle”.⁵ The presence of clear, or even excessive, corporeality and physicality traditionally alludes to subversive chaos and disobedience against prescribed discipline, prevailing values, and hegemonic social practices. In spite of the elements inherent within the circus disciplines, the shaping, presentation, and selling of the traditional circus focused more on the development of spectacular entertainment, with the goal of distracting the attention of the spectators from their own problems,⁶ rather than of developing a reflection on the characteristics of modern society, or of critically responding to those characteristics. The transformation of circus in the last four decades therefore encompasses two radical changes: the change of the context of its own existence, and the radically changed conditions of the social system – its logic and vital forms. Therefore it is only so much more important that circus as an artform questions itself concerning its own position and possibilities within the current social environment.

How did circus walk the path to become an authorial work of art – one where the personal narrative, and to a greater extent the intimate experience of the performance, has supplanted spectacular fascination,⁷ and where the artist uses his or her own body, circus technique and skill as a tool with a purpose? How does contemporary circus accede to the artistic entirety of thought and physical action, and how does it face the new

3 Zaccarini, J-P. (2013), p. 18.

4 Ibid., p. 17.

5 Quotation: Stoddart, H. (2000) in Zaccarini, J-P. (2013), p. 17.

6 Ibid.

7 Quotation: Sugarman, A. (2002). *The New Circus. The Next Generation*. In *Journal of American and Comparative Studies*. Volume 25. Issue 3-4 in Zaccarini, J-P. (2013), p. 18.

ekscenčne telesnosti in fizičnosti od nekdanj namiguje na subverzivni kaos in neposlušnost zapovedani disciplini, prevladujočim vrednotam in hegemonskim družbenim praksam. A kljub elementom, inherentnim cirkuškim disciplinam, se je oblikovanje, predstavljanje in prodajanje tradicionalne cirkuške prakse bolj kot na razvoj (zgoraj opisanih možnosti) idejnih navezav na značilnosti moderne družbe ali kritičnega odziva na te usmerilo v spektakelsko zabavljaštvo in odvrnitev občinstva od svojih problemov.⁶ Transformacija cirkusa v zadnjih štirih desetletjih torej obsega dve radikalni spremembi, spremembo konteksta lastnega obstoja in radikalno spremenjene pogoje družbenega sistema, njegove logike in življenjskih oblik. Prav zato je toliko pomembnejše, da si cirkus kot umetniška forma zastavlja vprašanja o lastni poziciji in možnostih znotraj trenutnega družbenega okolja.

Kako je torej cirkus prehodil pot do avtorskega umetniškega dela, pri katerem osebni narativ in v večji meri intimna izkušnja stopita pred spektakelsko fascinacijo⁷, umetnik pa lastno telo, cirkuško tehniko in spretnost uporablja kot orodje z namenom? Kako sodobni cirkus pristopa k umetniški celoti misli in telesne akcije in kako se sooča z novimi dramaturškimi zahtevami ob gradnji uprizoritvene strukture, ki je nadomestila zaporedno nizanje posameznih točk? Na kakšne načine cirkuški umetniki konstruirajo svoj odrski svet in kako formulirajo odnos do lastne ideje, do uporabljenih objektov, do same tehnike in ne nazadnje do družbe, v kateri živimo?

S pomočjo teh vprašanj, ki se mi zdijo bistvena za premislek o dejanskem razvoju cirkuških umetnosti, lahko pogledamo, kaj (glede na prehojeno pot) označuje prakso sodobnega cirkusa danes, na kakšne načine se praksa reflektira, s kakšnimi težavami se sooča in kakšne potencialne lahko poišče za svoj prihodnji razvoj. Ta vprašanja predstavljajo tudi vstopno točko za premislek o nekaterih uprizoritvah, ki so maja 2013 gostovale na festivalu Cirko v Helsinkih.

6 Prav tam.

7 Kot po: Sugarman, A. (2002). *The New Circus. The Next Generation*. In *Journal of American and Comparative Studies*. Volume 25. Issue 3-4 navaja: Zaccarini, J-P. (2013), str. 18.

dramaturgical demands of building a performance structure that replaces the traditional succession of individual acts? In which ways do circus artists construct their stage world and how do they formulate their relations with their own idea, the objects used, the technique itself, and not lastly, with the society we live in?

With the help of these questions, which I find essential for reflection on the real development of circus arts, we can take a look at what (in view of the historical path travelled) marks the practice of contemporary circus today, at how the practice reflects on itself or on other subjects, at what problems it encounters, and at what kind of ideals it could seek out in its future development. These questions also represent the entry point for reflection on some of the performances appearing at the Cirko Festival in Helsinki in May 2013.

Magmanus: Attached

In their performance *Attached*, the French-Norwegian duo Manu Tiger and Magnus Bjøru start from a simple and clearly outlined idea – one indicated by the title itself, and one which seems to be singularly appropriate for circus. Tiger and Bjøru develop the complexity of mutual proximity, connection, excessive attachment and disengagement, of individuality and cooperation, and reflect as well on the realities of cohabitation, on the intertwining of deeds, and on the influence an individual's actions can have on the life of the other, using circus techniques and objects, as well as their own custom-built constructions, to illustrate universal ideas about personal relations in the context of larger social structures.

Initially they establish this idea in a witty scene where the two wear special Velcro covered overalls that enable them to present a playful and strong metaphor of human desire and frustration; in this opening scene they also define two clear character types through their distinctive behaviour and contrasting physical appearances. The emphasis of this contrast has a comical effect, while at the same time the unusual way in which the two complement each other brings feelings of warmth, understanding, connection, cooperation and collectivity, so that even the rough and dangerous physical actions and acts of

Magmanus: Attached

Francosko-norveški duo Manu Tiger in Magnus Bjøru v uprizoritvi *Attached* izhajata iz enostavne in jasno začrtane ideje, kot jo nakažeta že z naslovom, in ki se zdi za cirkus še posebej primerna. Kompleksnost medsebojne bližine, povezanosti, pretirane navezanosti in odvezovanja, individualnosti in sodelovanja ter sobivanja, prepletenost dejanj in vplivanja akcij posameznika na življenje drugega Tiger in Bjøru razvijata skozi raziskovanje možnosti tehnik in objektov ter konstrukcij v smeri ponazarjanja univerzalnih osebnih odnosov znotraj širših družbenih struktur.

Področje zastavljene ideje uvodoma vzpostavita v duhovitem prizoru s posebnimi kombinezoni, polepljenimi z ježki, kar jima omogoča igrivo in močno metaforo človeške želje in frustracije ter hkrati začrta dva tipska karakterja, ki slonita tudi na izraziti specifikki oziroma kontrastu fizičnega videza obeh performerjev. Poudarjanje tega kontrasta in prevzemanje vloge glede na posamezen karakter učinkuje humorno in hkrati v njuni izjemnem dopolnjevanju izpostavlja občutja toplote, razumevanja, povezanosti, možnega sodelovanja in skupnosti, kar tudi grobe in nevarne fizične akcije ter dejanja »zavračanja« potiska v cono prijaznega pogleda na sobivanje ter afirmira pozitivno plat našega soobstoja.

Prav vzpostavljanje akcij na podlagi razvidne določitve karakterjev ter raziskovanje objektov in konstrukcij, ki jima omogočajo izvajanje dejanj, s katerimi ponazarjata komplementarnost ločenosti in povezanosti, je odlika uprizoritve, ki do občinstva pristopa na videz lahko in sproščeno, tudi z odkritim spogledovanjem s publiko, čeprav gre v številnih primerih za izredno težavno izvedbo.

A performerja pri tem ostajata v polju močnega in spretnega telesa brez omejitev, njuna identiteta kljub iskanju stika z občinstvom in poskusu podiranja četrte stene ostaja odrska brez predaha, ki bi gledalcu omogočil vpogled v »tisto zadaj«. Tudi človeška ranljivost, pretirana odvisnost in druge pojavnosti človeške »šibkosti« so odigrane s strani močnega in spretnega performerjevega telesa in igralskega izraza.

'rejection' are contained within an affable picture of the two dwelling together and affirming the positive aspects of coexistence.

It is exactly this establishing context – the clear definition of the characters, as well as the way in which they explore their objects and constructions to illustrate the complementary nature of separateness and connection – that distinguishes this performance.

It is a piece which seemingly approaches the audience in an easy and relaxed manner, as well as with evident flirtation, yet which in its execution is often very difficult. The performers remain within strong, skilled bodies without limitations: their identity, in spite of searching for a connection with the audience, and in spite of attempts to bring down the fourth wall, remains a stage one, without the break that would give the spectator a glimpse into what lies behind it. Even human vulnerability, excessive dependence and other phenomena of human 'weakness' are played from the point of view of a performer's strong and skilled body and an actor's controlled expression.

But as the piece continues, the sequences presented – showing different physical actions in relation to the manipulation of objects and constructions (such as the use of a large bow structure as a sort of swing, or of a large human catapult and some small catapults to fling balls) – lose sight of the leading concept of the piece, or respond to it fleetingly and only on the surface. The development of the central theme, which offers a very strong frame for many of the ideas inherent within circus technique (such as connection, trust, risk, fear, responsibility and cooperation, liberation), gets lost within the piece's evident 'delight' in physical excess. It lacks reflection on the inherent undertones of the techniques being used, and, further, a firmer anchoring of individual actions in the context of the artistic whole in order to unfold the theme of the piece in all of its complexity and ambivalence.

Agit-Cirk: Tenho

In their performance *Tenho* Jenni Lehtinen and Sasu Peistola approach their material from a different viewpoint, uncovering the door that



Circo Aereo – Light Blue & Orange © Heli Sorjonen

Morda tudi zato sekvence, ki jih predstavita v nadaljevanju, v predstavljanju različnih fizičnih akcij v odnosu in možnosti manipulacije z objekti in konstrukcijami (denimo velik lok kot neke vrste gugalnica, veliki človeški katapult in mali katapult za žogice) izgubijo vodilno idejno zasnovo ali se nanjo odzivajo le bežno in na površini. Razdelava začrtane teme, ki ponuja izredno močno polje za prevetritev tem, tako zelo inherentnih cirkuški tehniki (kot so povezanost, zaupanje, tveganje, strah, odgovornost in sodelovanje, osvobajanje), se porazgubi v estetskem pogledu očitnega »užitka« fizične ekscesnosti, umanjka pa premislek glede inherentnih podtekstov uporabljenih tehnik in na podlagi tega trdnejše

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leads to the fundamental – yet in the traditional circus concealed – components without which the circus would not exist: the road, dust, constant pressure and toil in pursuit of perfect skill, fear, and the madness of choosing to venture into the dangers of circus. They accentuate the two faces of one image – the brutal difference between the visible skills and the ‘dirty’ road that must be taken to reach the beautiful image – with a pure, minimalist staging and dramaturgy that is filled only with unconcealed physical and mental effort. They move the artistic form away from presenting solely a ‘final product’ by revealing the *process* (as, for instance, in the exposed action of a man forcefully pulling a rope to lift a woman, who then is able to show her expertise in the air), and by focusing on the spaces between the action, with the performers displaying fear, uncertainty and hope before performing their acts.

In such a way they again lay claim to those real signs withdrawn from the circus, the conditions which are requisite for circus spectacle, but which are usually concealed by a performer’s mask as they strive to present a positive, or at least neutral, sign. Paradoxically, it is exactly by revealing the ‘raw’ reality behind the spectacle that the circus skill in *Tenho* is able to evoke fascination in, and admiration of, the human body, only here such a response is not manipulated by a performer wearing a decorative mask, but is instead the consequence of the frank way in which the performers share their own lives and work.

In spite of the performers drawing back the curtain to show us what’s behind the scenes, they are not re-examining the circus acts themselves – they are just putting them in the context of their creation. The acts remain confined within the hermetic field of their own activity, without focusing on the question of what is truly important in this revelation of the circus artist’s true life; and without a more recognisable emphasis on the importance of such a revelation, or a connection to a broader framework, the spectator is excluded from what’s happening on stage. The aesthetics of the piece do indeed question the ethical dimension of the circus arts, but they do not really

zasidranje posameznih akcij v kontekst celote, ki bi tematiko razgrnil v vsej svoji ambivalentnosti.

Agit-Cirk: Tenho

Jenni Lehtinen in Sasu Peistola v uprizoritvi *Tenho* k svojemu materialu pristopita z drugačnega vidika – odstreta namreč vrata v ozadje očitnih, a v tradicionalnem cirkusu skritih komponent, brez katerih pa cirkusa ni – pot, prah, konstantni pritiski in napor, da bi dosegli popolno izurjenost, strahovi, norost spuščanja v cirkuške nevarnosti. Dvojno stran ene podobe – grobo razliko med videnimi spretnostmi in »umazano« potjo do lepe podobe izurjenega telesa – poudarjata z izčiščenim odrom in dogajanjem, ki ga zapolnjuje zgolj neprekrit telesni in psihični trud. Samo umetniško formo slečeta gole prezentacije »končnega izdelka« z razkritjem procesov (z na primer izpostavljeno akcijo moškega, ki z vso močjo vleče vrv, da dvigne žensko na vrvi, ki tako lahko prikaže svojo spretnost v zraku), potencirata čas med posameznimi akcijami in razkazujeta strah, negotovost in upanje pred izvedbo posamezne točke.

Tako si ponovno prisvojita cirkusu odtegnjene realne znake, ki so nujen pogoj za cirkuški eksces, a so običajno prekriti z igralsko masko v pozitiven ali vsaj nevtralen znak. Paradokсно prav takšno razgaljanje spektakelske prezentacije s »surovostjo« realnosti omogoči, da cirkuška spretnost doseže svoj odziv v fascinaciji in občudovanju zmožnosti človeškega telesa, le da pri tem ta odziv ni zmanipuliran z dekorativno masko, ampak je posledica iskrene delitve svojega življenja in dela.

A čeprav performerja razpreta zaveso za odrom, izvedenih cirkuških točk ne prevprašujeta, ampak jih postavljata zgolj v kontekst njihovega nastanka in ostajata omejena v hermetično polje lastne dejavnosti, brez fokusiranja na vprašanje, kaj je pri tej razgalitvi »ozadja cirkuškega umetnika« zares pomembno, brez razpoznavnejšega poudarka na pomen te razgalitve in navezave na širši okvir, zaradi česar je gledalec iz odrskega dogajanja izključen. Njuna estetika resda zaide v etično naravo cirkuške umetnosti, a te ne problematizira zares in namesto tega ostaja v razdrobljenih

problematise it, and as such the piece remains fractured – a collection of sketches which together lack the feeling of wholeness so that it appears the performance got stuck halfway in a reflection on its own technique and work.

Circo Aereo: Light Blue & Orange

In the performance *Light Blue & Orange* Circo Aereo take us into the world of cabaret and builds its effects mostly by creating atmosphere. The premises depicted on stage, hinting at a night bar somewhere between elegant and tawdry, with a large piano and ropes hanging from the ceiling, as well as a small table for the performance's magician, create a confused feeling of an undefined and scattered space, which is then filled with performance events following the principle of 'a bit of everything'. In this space we witness some kind of detached world which could be reminiscent of the dreamlike and somewhat absurd universe of David Lynch. The piece could propose a poetic invitation into a world of intimate rapture, or else a melancholic move into the world of lost loners, but it seems that it lacks a clear decision about which direction to take the performance in. The confusion is caused right from the start by the magician, who performs tricks that are thrown into the disassociated action on stage; it's not completely clear whether these are offered as some sort of entry into the stage world for the spectator, or merely as one of the elements forming the intangible atmospheric feeling of being absurdly lost. The only two characters who are partially connected in this world are the piano player and the dancer who appears by/on/above the piano in an image characteristic of the cinematographic arts, yet the performance does not in fact enable us to understand this image in the stage context. The performance does not itself engage with dangerous circus practices, and remains in a space of gentler energy, yet still does not take any evident relationship to its own medium, nor enable entry into the stage world for the audience, who thus remains sunken within an undefined atmosphere of foggy incomprehension.

Jay Gilligan: Prototype

Prototype by Jay Gilligan, which received its world premiere at Cirko, presents five years of artistic research into advanced juggling concepts, acting

skicah, katerim umanjka občutek celote, zato se zdi, kot da je uprizoritev obtičala na pol poti refleksije lastne tehnike in lastnega dela.

Circo Aero: Light Blue and Orange

Circo Aero občinstvo v uprizoritvi *Light Blue and Orange* popelje v svet kabareta in učinek gradi predvsem na ustvarjanju atmosfere. Scenski prostor, ki namiguje na nočni bar nekje med elegantnim in cenenim rangom, z velikim pianom in s stropa visečimi vrvmi ter majhno mizico za čarodeja ustvarja konfuzen občutek nedefiniranega in razpršenega prostora, ki ga tudi z dogajanjem napolnjuje po principu »vsakega nekaj«. V tem prostoru smo priča nekakšnem odmaknjenemu svetu, ki bi lahko spominjal na sanjski in nekoliko absurdistični univerzum Davida Lyncha, na poetično povabilo v svet intimne zamaknenosti ali otožni odmik v svetu izgubljenih osamelcev, a zdi se, da umanjka predvsem jasna odločitev, v katero smer bi želeli dogodek sploh peljati. Zbeganost povzroči že čarodej s svojimi triki, navrženimi med disociirano dogajanje, za katerega ni popolnoma jasno, ali je ponujeno kot neke vrste vstop za gledalca v odrski svet ali zgolj kot eden od elementov, ki tvori nezamejeno atmosfersko občutje absurdne izgubljenosti. V tem svetu se delno povežeta zgolj pianist in plesalka ob/na/nad klavirjem kot značilna podoba iz filmske umetnosti, a pravzaprav nam uprizoritev ne omogoči niti razumevanja te podobe v odrskem kontekstu. Uprizoritev se ne ukvarja z nevarnimi cirkušskimi praksami in ostaja v prostoru nežnejše energije, a do teh plati lastnega medija ne zavzame nikakršnega razvidnega odnosa, niti ne omogoči vhoda v odrski svet občinstvu, ki tako ostane potopljeno v nedefinirano atmosfero meglene nerazumevanja.

JayGilligan: Prototype

Svetovna premiera *Prototype* Jaya Gilligana je predstavitev njegove petletne raziskave naprednih žonglerskih konceptov, ki deluje kot katalog inventivnih načinov žongliranja z novo razvitimi objekti. Namera avtorja, sicer enega svetovno najbolj priznanih žonglerjev, je jasna in izčiščena, Gilligan pa svojemu konceptu skozi celotno uprizoritev sledi z odločnim in jasno razvidnim stališčem – za razvoj žonglerske prakse je

as a catalogue of inventive ways to juggle newly developed objects. The intent of the artist, who is one of the world's foremost jugglers, is clear and defined, and Gilligan follows a simple concept, with determination, throughout the entire performance: that for juggling to develop as a practice it is necessary to exceed the boundaries of the canonised techniques of juggling and investigate new objects. This is the idea behind a piece which, among all of the performances mentioned above, displayed the greatest awareness of the necessity of reflecting on circus technique as a tool and on the possibilities for the development of that technique, yet which in spite of this (or precisely because of this) saw the artist caught in the snare of his own desire for formal exploration. The final product is an experiment – one which in its professional hermetics could possibly enthrall professional jugglers, yet as a performance could not convince either professional or lay audiences, since the technical experiment does not fulfil the criteria of a comprehensive performing modus.

In the performance Gilligan sets up a soundscape at the same time as he juggles, performing live DJing using a Reactable device (an electronic musical instrument that appears like a table with a digitised surface). The music is intertwined with barely heard words and sounds which in some places give the impression that they are a commentary on social reality, and in others remind one of sounds from an airport or landing strip (in reality they are a personally motivated, and in view of the performance completely arbitrary, selection of NASA recordings). By moving items along the surface of the Reactable, Gilligan, as well as shaping his soundscape, also creates different – and to the audience visible – structures and patterns on the surface of the device. Combined with the soundscape, the text, the objects and the patterns of the juggling, these images in the beginning prompt guesswork about a potential connection or conceptual stake, but after unsuccessful attempts to read this possible code the spectator could only surrender to the observation of juggling skills, which, without a performance framework, do not offer anything that could move a spectator not themselves part of the juggling trade.

potrebno preseči meje kanoniziranih načinov žongliranja in raziskovanje novih objektov. Gre za idejo, ki je med omenjenimi uprizoritvami v največji meri izkazala zavedanje nujnega premisleka o tehniki kot orodju in o možnostih razvoja tehnike, kljub temu (ali ravno zato) pa se je avtor ujel v zanko svoje želje po formalnem raziskovanju. Končni produkt je tako eksperiment, ki v svoji profesionalni hermetičnosti morda lahko navduši profesionalne žonglerje, a kot uprizoritev ne more prepričati ne profesionalne ne laične publike, saj tehnični eksperiment kriterijem celovitega uprizoritvenega modusa ne zadostuje.

Gilligan v uprizoritvi žongliranja sopostavlja zvočno pokrajino, DJ-ano v živo s pomočjo naprave Reactable. Glasba je prepletena s slabo slišanimi besedami in zvoki, ki mesto dajejo vtis, da gre za komentar družbene realnosti, mestoma pa spominjajo na zvoke z letališča ali pristajalne steze (v resnici gre za osebno motivirano in z vidika uprizoritve arbitrarno izbiro Nasinih posnetkov). S premikanjem predmetov po površini glasbene mašine poleg zvočne pokrajine Gilligan ustvari tudi različne strukture in vzorce na površini Reactable, vidni občinstvu, kar na začetku v kombinaciji z zvočno krajino besedila in objekti ter vzorci žongliranja sproža ugibanja o možni povezavi ali konceptualnem zastavku, a po neuspelem poskusu prebiranja morebitnega koda se gledalec lahko zgolj prepusti opazovanju žonglerskih spretnosti, ki brez uprizoritvenega okvirja ne ponudijo ničesar, kar bi gledalca izven žonglerske stroke lahko premaknilo.

Sanja Kosonen & Elice Muhonen: Capilotractées

Premiselek o možnostih uporabljene tehnike je razviden tudi v uprizoritvi *Capilotractées*. Sanja Kosonen, ki sicer izhaja iz tehnike hoje po vrvi, in Elice Abonce Muhonen, artistka na trapezu, sta z željo po skupnem delu in usvajanju nove forme cirkuške umetnosti iz skorajšnje pozabe potegnili starodavno cirkuško veščino visenja na laseh. Pri tem cirkuške elemente prepletata z gledališkimi in glasbenimi v uprizoritev, ki se na vsebinski ravni igra s podobami in pomeni, izhajajočimi iz tehnike visenja na laseh. Lasje kot simbol ženske lepote, njihova moč, ki se je ne zavedamo, prostovoljno podvrženje trpljenju in bolečini, fetišizem in

Sanja Kosonen and Elice Muhonen: *Capilotractées*

A reflection on the possibilities of circus technique is also evident in the performance *Capilotractées*. Sanja Kosonen, who started in tightrope walking, and Elice Abonce Muhonen, a trapeze artist, fuelled by the desire for cooperation and the discovery of new forms of circus art, pulled the ancient circus skill of hair hanging out of near oblivion. The two intertwine circus elements with theatrical and musical ones to create a performance, which, at a conceptual level, plays with images and meanings arising from the hair hanging technique. The hair as a symbol of female beauty, hair as the source of a strength we are unaware of, voluntary submission to suffering and pain, fetishism, and stereotypes of sexual roles are the clearest of the themes triggered by the hair hanging. All of these ideas can easily be connected with everyday life, and are developed by the artists to create a multi-layered image with the intent of re-examining canonised views of beauty and femininity.

Through concrete, physical actions they respond in passing to the question of what circus offers today, since the associative network they build on the circus technique establishes numerous connections, as well as numerous entry points for questions about universal images, emotions and feelings, and about our own thought processes and prejudices. They liberate stereotypes by creating images which awaken disbelief only due to our own lack of knowledge (since we have trouble believing that hair can have such strength), evoking feelings which might not be pleasant (through the actions of hair hanging itself, or forceful brushing), or exposing the – ordinarily hidden – flipside of certain ideas (beauty and power, masochism and pleasure, weakness and strength, delight and individuality). Using sometimes extremely simple techniques to distort their own images (at one moment the body, seen from behind, 'transforms' into the appearance of its own front), they trigger questions about the fundamental ideas on which we base our beliefs and they merge such ideal stake in a fresh vision of the authors who accept the complementarities of the world – existing reality and the will to overcome them, self

stereotipnost spolnih vlog kot najbolj izpostavljene teme, ki jih sproža dejanje visenja na laseh, a jih zlahka povežemo z vsakdanjim, ne-cirkuškim življenjem, razvijata v večplastni podobi z namero prepričevanja kanoniziranih pogledov in normaliziranja soobstoja raznolikosti.

Mimogrede tako s konkretnimi dejanji odgovarjata na vprašanje, kaj cirkus ponuja danes, saj prav na specifični cirkuški tehniki zgradita mrežo, ki vzpostavlja številne spoje, pa tudi številne vstope za vpraševanja o univerzalnih podobah, čustvih in občutjih, naših lastnih miselnih kalupih in predsodkih. Njuno osvoboditev stereotipov poteka preko ustvarjanja podob, ki vzbujajo nejevero le zaradi našega neznanja (saj težko verjamemo v takšno moč las), vzbujanja občutij, ki morda niso prijetna (samo visenje na laseh ali nasilno krtačenje) ali izpostavljanja tiste plati, ki se običajno skriva za »najbolj očitnim« in sopostavljanja nasprotij (lepota in moč, mazohizem in užitek, šibkost in moč, ugajanje in individualnost). Z včasih izredno preprostim načinom izkrivljanja podobe (telo, ki ga vidimo z zadnje strani, se »transformira« v videz sprednje strani telesa) sprožata vprašanja o temeljih naših prepričanj, takšen idejni zastavek pa združita v sveži viziji avtoric, ki sprejemata komplementarnost sveta – obstoječe danosti in voljo za njihovo preseganje, lastne pogoje nežnih energij in moč stabilnega posameznika, poetično milino in surovo zakulisje sveta ali naših miselnih konceptov, trde kitarske ritme in naravno občutje ranljivosti. Struktura uprizoritve ne ponuja premočrnega fokusa, ampak mrežo, znotraj katere sprejemata in razpirata pojavnosti v raznolikih variantah razumevanja ter vprašanja pripisovanja pomena, občutij ter vrednotenja vzbujata s subtilnim razpiranjem možnosti, brez vsiljevanja njihove nujnosti, kar namiguje tudi na odgovornost, ki je le stvar vsakega posameznika.

Pogled v (ne)znano

Na podlagi vpogleda v le ščepec raznolike prakse sodobnega cirkusa seveda ne moremo posploševati širših zaključkov ali smernic, po katerih pluje cirkuška umetnost danes, vendarle se zdi, da razlika v pristopu do lastne dejavnosti v transformaciji cirkuške prakse predpostavlja kvalitativni preskok, ki ga sodobni cirkus še vedno

conditions of gentle energies and the strength of a stable individual, poetic grace and brutal behind-the-scenes of the world or our mental concepts, hard guitar rhythms and natural feeling of vulnerability. The structure of the performance does not offer a linear focus, but a net within which they accept and expand heterogeneous variants of understanding. The questions about assigning meaning, about gut-feelings and social judgements, are stirred by a subtle expanding of possibilities, one that doesn't impose the artists' own urgency, but hints instead that the responsibility is the individual's concern.

A look into the (un)known

Based on this insight into only a handful of the diverse practices of contemporary circus we certainly cannot generalise broader conclusions or directives concerning where the circus arts are headed today, but it does seem that the difference in an artist's approach to their own circus practice represents a qualitative leap which the contemporary circus still has trouble embracing. With the emergence of a desire for a different circus, which also presumes heightened self-awareness and the need to further question one's practice, a multitude of ideas have emerged which are apart from the traditional image of the circus, and which instead strongly connect circus to life in all of its complexity – body and identity, human vulnerability and fears, will and wish, trust and risk, strength and ability, the act of surrendering to or overcoming limitations, responsibility and communication, dialogue and compromise, connectedness and cooperation. "Pair acrobatics here reads like an ethical programme detailing how one could act in the world with the Other. It conjures a world in which we are irrevocably tied to the Other, whether we like it or not."⁸

It is exactly in the artist's approach, capable of discovering and investigating what is inherent in the form, combined with the foundation of a coherent performance totality, that the contemporary circus could deepen its exploration of its own existence in the world, and create its

stežka zaobjame. Z vznikom želje po drugačnem cirkusu, ki predpostavlja tudi povišano samozavedanje in potrebo po nadaljnjem vpraševanju o lastni praksi, se je iz tradicionalne podobe cirkusa izluščila kopica idej, ki cirkus močno navezujejo na življenje v vsej svoji kompleksnosti – telo in identiteta, človeška ranljivost in strahovi, volja in želja, zaupanje in tveganje, moč in sposobnost, predaja in preseganje omejitev, odgovornost in komunikacija, dialog in kompromis, povezanost in sodelovanje. »Akrobatika v paru se tako bere kot etični program, ki specificira kako naj se vedemo v svetu z Drugim. Pričara svet, v katerem smo nepreklicno zvezani z Drugim, ne glede na to, ali si tega želimo.«⁸

Prav v avtorskem pristopu, ki bi zmožni odkrivanja in raziskovanja inherentnih sedimentacij, nadgrajenem z oblikovanjem koherentne uprizoritvene celote, lahko sodobni cirkus iznajde možnost poglobljenega raziskovanja lastnega obstoja v svetu ter kreiranja lastnega sveta s komunikacijskimi povezavami in vplivi med cirkuško prakso in svetom, v katerem ta biva. Ali drugače: če bi zgoraj omenjene ideje, ki jih reprezentira fizična kvaliteta cirkusa, vnesli v avtorsko vizijo, ki požene stroj uprizoritvenega procesa in ga zaključili z nujno strogostjo (ter disciplino) pri oblikovanju kompaktne celote – konceptualnega okvira, bi cirkuška umetnost lahko iz sebe iztisnila največ. Na nek način mora cirkuški izvajalec na poti k umetnosti po usvojeni virtuoznosti začasno zaobiti tehniko in se vrniti k sebi. Tako lahko ostaja v sebi stabilen, ne da bi izgubil stik s tradicijo, v kateri je zakoreninjen, in sproščen v sedanjem trenutku kot močna avtorska misel, ki z mislečim, čutnim in voljnim telesom sega tako v svet visceralnih odzivov, emocionalnih občutij kot razumskih izzivov in se s tem aktivno, samozavestno in odgovorno vključuje v današnji svet ne le umetniškega miljeja.

8 Zaccarini, J-P. (2013), p. 195, 196.

8 Zaccarini, J-P. (2013), str. 195, 196.

own practice to connect the ideas and influences of circus with the world which it inhabits. Put another way: if the above mentioned ideas, which are represented by the physical quality of the circus, could be entered into the artist's vision to fuel the engine of the performance process and finish it with requisite severity (and discipline) in forming a compact totality, then the circus arts could squeeze the most from themselves. The circus performer on the path to art has to, in some way, temporarily circumvent technique and return to self. Thus he could remain internally stable without losing touch with the tradition he's rooted in, and remain relaxed in the present moment as a strong artist who, with a thinking, sensual, and willing body, reaches both into the world of visceral responses and emotions and into that of intellectual challenge and reflection, and by this actively, self-confidently and responsibly participates in the contemporary world, not only the artistic milieu.

CITATI: (Številka označuje opombo)

- 1: "exoticism, gorgeousness, skill, novelty, magnificence, danger, display, beauty, action, spectacle"
- 2: "sensation, delight, wonder, humour, suspense, astonishment"
- 3: "reflected the speed, danger and virtuosity of an emerging modernity."
- 4: "it provided a life-affirming transcendence in the face of a dangerous, exciting, frenetic, shocking and ever-changing modernity."
- 5: "technologies of vision and spectacle"
- 8: "Pair acrobatics here reads like an ethical programme detailing how one could act in the world with the Other. It conjures a world in which we are irrevocably tied to the Other, whether we like it or not."

Unpack the Arts

NINO KOVAČIĆ

Two little boys stare in awe at a strongman as he balances twelve chairs and, on top of them, a girl; the people in the audience gasp as they watch two female artists move and weigh objects using the strength of their hair; the entire audience looks on in horror as an artist bleeds: he was supposed to leap down onto a mat but instead fell and hit the floor with the back of his head.

The interplay between audience and performer is the basic platform of communication within each circus show. The audience's sense of anticipation as they await moments of excitement or the spectacle of uncommon feats is resolved in moments when they either get what they were looking for or their hopes are dashed – this is the standard way in which the whimsical audience/performer relationship is kept alive. First the preparation, then the gradation of suspense, gasps, relief and applause, and finally it begins all over again. This is how circus acts are structured. It's a form of passive, repetitive interaction that has become the rule for most circus shows. The (re)presentation modes used within the shows are tailored to the expectations of the audience, or to the artists' idea of what is expected of them: reflections and projections of the spectators' desires are structural constants which form a base for the conception of the shows but also for the reactions they provoke once the performance itself is underway. Circus artists are aware that the audience is watching, they are bound by this, and they must feel the response, as it affects their self-confidence as performers, either in its positive or negative intensity. Simply put, it is always about a circus artist trying to woo their audience, and having to always come up with new ways of doing it or of perfecting their art, as the spectators grow more demanding.

Helsinki's Cirko Festival opened with the show *Attached*, the creation of a peculiar French-Swedish duo called Magmanus (an amalgamation of the performers own names: Manu Tiger and

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NINO KOVAČIĆ

Dvoje malih dječaka udivljeno promatraju snagatora koji balansira dvanaest stolica i djevojku; pojedinci u publici uzdišu pri svakom pokretu dviju artistica koje snagom svojih kosa pomiču predmete i međusobno se važu; čitavo gledateljstvo sa stravom promatra kako krvari artist koji je promašio skok na spužvu i udario potiljkom u pod.

Međuigra gledateljstva i performerera osnovna je komunikacijska platforma svake cirkuske predstave. Gledateljsko očekivanje uzbudljivog trenutka ili pak prikaza nesvakidašnje vještine, te dobivanje traženog ili pak iznevjerivanje očekivanja standardan je način održavanja te mušičave veze: izmjenjivanje priprema, gradacije napetosti, uzdaha, olakšanja i pljeska, i opet tako, dijelovi su uobičajenih cirkuskih točaka, a pasivna ponavljajuća interakcija uspostavila se kao pravilo velike većine cirkuskih predstava. Modovi (re)prezentacije u predstavama prekravaju se prema očekivanjima publike tj. onom što artisti smatraju da ta očekivanja jesu – refleksije i projekcije gledateljskih žudnji strukturne su konstante na kojima se osmišljavaju koncepti predstava, ali i reagira tijekom izvedbi. Cirkuski artisti obvezujuće su svjesni pogleda publike i ključno je da osjećaju njihove reakcije koje im, s obzirom na pozitivan ili negativan intenzitet, daju performerskog samopouzdanja. Jednostavno rečeno, stvar je uvijek i ponovo u tome da se cirkuski artist želi i treba svidjeti svojoj publici pa mora smišljati uvijek nove načine kako da to učini ili se stalno usavršavati s obzirom da gledatelji postaju sve zahtjevniji.

Helsinški *Cirko* festival otvoren je predstavom *Attached*, neobičnog francusko-švedskog dvojca koji se nazivaju *Magmanus*, kombinirajući u imenu grupe vlastita imena Manu Tiger i Magnus Bjørn. Svojom početnom pojavom na sceni, tj. međusobnom razlikom, dvoje artista osigurava trenutačnu humornu reakciju publike: Manu je za glavu i pol manji Magnusa. To što se uspostavlja

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Magnus Bjøru). When they first step out onto the stage, their appearance, and the difference between the two artists, immediately raises a laugh from the audience: Manu is a head and a half shorter than Magnus. This is something that they build on as the show progresses: now that the audience has decided to like them, on account of their comical difference, they continue their play on the expectations of the comic interaction. They have a classical circus structure: Manu is a flyer, and Magnus is the base. But, since these two roles are strictly divided by gender in classical circus (the flyer must be a woman, and the base must be a man), their relationship continues to engender comedic moments. The audience responds positively to the way they subvert the rules, as the spectators recognise traditional elements, such as slapstick comedy or variety show gags. *Magmanus* offer a positive approach in their depiction of their relationship on stage, based on friendship and solidarity. Combining the elements of physical connection (at the beginning they both wear Velcro suits, and keep sticking together, as it is difficult to come apart), and the concept of friendship as the Velcro that binds people together, *Magmanus* present themes that are close to their audience's own experience. Their ideal relationship, with feigned squabbles, is attractive to the audience as a fantasy projection of the desired day-to-day reality of human interaction. One of the key moments in the show, presented very subtly, is the segment where Manu, the flyer, does not touch the ground and all the while Magnus is there for him, helping him for all he is worth. The emphasis in the show is thus on the strong relationship and interdependence of the two performers. Each new act seems to put their friendship to the test. They build the obstacles to their friendship, yet their mutual understanding and trust is what their performance is built on. The audience feels their communication and appears to be ready to accept everything the duo presents on stage. When they make a mistake Manu alleviates the tension by smiling from time to time to the audience. As a result, a fluffed trick is easily transformed into a gag. They permit themselves to be laughable, and juggling, where they make mistakes most often, is a form of distraction as the stage is readied for the next act. The more

od početka, nastavlja biti njihova prezentacijska baza; pridobivši simpatije publike na komičnoj razlici, oni nastavljaju igrati na tom očekivanju komične interakcije. Pritom su klasično cirkuski ustrojani: Manu je letač, a Magnus baza. No, s obzirom da su te dvije uloge u klasičnom cirkusu striktno spolno podijeljene (letač je obavezno žena, a muškarac baza), njihov odnos izaziva daljnje komične momente na čiju perversiju pravila publika pozitivno reagira u okvirima prepoznavanja tradicije, naprimjer *slapstick* komedije ili varijete gegova. *Magmanus* nude pozitivan pristup u prikazu svojeg scenskog odnosa, temeljen na prijateljstvu i solidarnosti. Kombinirajući koncept fizičke spojenosti, tako što oboje na početku nose odijela od čička, međusobno se sljepljuju i teško se razdvajaju, te prijateljstva kao 'čičkolikog' odnosa među ljudima, *Magmanus* su tematski bliski svakodnevnim iskustvima publike. Njihov idealan odnos, uz fingirane čarke, privlačan je gledateljima kao fantazijska projekcija željene svakodnevice međuljudskih odnosa. Jedan od bitnih, a zapravo suptilnijih momenata u izvedbi jest dio u kojem letač Manu ne dodiruje tlo, a Magnus mu svesrdno pomaže, i time je naglasak izvedbe postavljen na snažnoj povezanosti i međuovisnosti dvoje performerera. Svaka nova točka kao da testira njihovo prijateljstvo, prepreke njihovog prijateljstva grade oni sami, a da je pritom je njihovo međusobno razmijevanje i povjerenje ono što gradi njihovu izvedbu. Publika dobro osjaća njihovu komunikaciju i kao da je pritom spremna primiti sve što dvojac na sceni prezentira. Greške su dopuštene, te se, kao i tenzije, olakšavaju Manuovim periodičnim osmjesima prema publici, tako da se poneki neprecizno izveden trik lako transformira u geg. Dopuštaju si da ispadnu smiješni, a žongljanje, u kojem najčešće pogriješe, koriste kao oblik distrakcije od priprema scene za sljedeću točku. Ono što zasigurno privlači iskusniju cirkusku publiku jest njihov smisao za ironiju: kao da se rugaju fizikalnosti dok im scena služi kao anti-gravitacijsko igralište na kojem poput djece isprobavaju koliko joj vješto mogu prkositi. Slažući sekvencu za sekvencom i balansirajući različitim tehnikama unutar nastupa, *Magmanus* vrlo otvoreno reagiraju na neartikulirani *feedback* iz publike. Služeći se različitim polugama, slažu

experienced spectators are definitely attracted by their sense of irony: they appear to be mocking physicality as they use the stage as their anti-gravitational playground where they test, like children, how far they can go in defying the force. As the two performers build their sequences, and as they balance various techniques in their acts, Magmanus respond very openly to unvoiced feedback from the audience. They use various levers to build compositions that become gradually more dangerous as the show progresses. With each new sequence, the question is, will they make it? The music serves to underscore the danger. Switching from excitement to humour and back again is the key conceptual trick they use; it is difficult, however, to maintain the interest at peak level throughout the show.

While *Attached* seduced the audience with a combination of skill, humour, danger, and, in part, with the play on gender roles in traditional circus, artists Sanja Kosonen and Elice Abonce Muhonen in their performance *Capilotractées* spiced up the seduction with a reversal of gender roles. Sanja and Elice staged a show based on a traditional circus skill that is rarely seen today: the hair hang. The initial discomfort is almost banal but is crucial for the relationship between the artists and the audience – based on sympathy because of the possible pain caused by the hair being pulled. Watching this technique, which appears very painful at first sight, the audience feels an almost organic sense of bonding with the duo, fed by their fear that the artists' hair might break or be pulled out. Just how much can Sanja and Elice bear? Their courage and tenacity is the performance quality defined by this unusual technique. As the technique itself does not lend itself to much variation in form (it boils down to them pulling and weighing objects using their hair), the artists decided to organise the concept of the performance in an almost post-dramatic manner, around hair as their main physical tool. It is post-dramatic in the (theatrical) sense of a conscious performance of self-presentation and referentiality to the familiar loci in the institutionalised and traditional circus, i.e. the classical expectations of the audience. By hyperbolising the elements of the show such as

kompozicije koje s vremenom gradiraju u inscenaciji opasnosti: hoće li im uspjeti, pitanje je kod svake nove sekvence koju poprati muzika koja dodatno sugerira opasnosti. Igranje izmjenama uzbuđenja i humora njihov je glavni konceptualni trik čiji intenzitet je ipak prilično teško održavati na višim razinama zanimanja tijekom cijele predstave.

Dok se u *Attached* publiku zavodilo kombinacijom vještine, humora, opasnosti, kao i djelomičnom igrom spolnim ulogama u tradicionalnom cirkusu, artistice Sanja Kosonen i Elice Abonce Muhonen u predstavi *Capilotractées* začinile su to zavodjenje i povremenim rodnim izvrtanjima. Sanja i Alice napravile su predstavu baziranu na danas vrlo rijetko viđanoj tehnici tradicionalnog cirkusa – visenju na kosi. Početna, gotovo banalna, ali zato ključna nelagoda koja se uspostavlja između artistica i publike jest suosjećanje zbog moguće boli kod zatezanja i čupanja kose. Samim odabirom ove na prvi pogled vrlo bolne tehnike, dvojac dobija gotovo organski osjećaj privrženosti od strane publike, koji je zapravo hranjen strahom od pucanja ili čupanja kose. Koliko i što sve mogu podnijeti Sanja i Elice? Njihova hrabrost i izdržljivost performerski je kapital definiran ovom neobičnom tehnikom. Kako sama tehnika ne nudi puno varijacija u formi, te se ona svodi na različite stupnjeve povlačenja i vaganja kosom, artistice su odlučile gotovo postdramski organizirati koncept izvedbe oko kose kao njihova glavnog tjelesnog oruđa. Postdramski u (kazališnom) smislu svjesnog izvođenja samoprezentacije i referencijalnosti na opća mjesta institucionaliziranog i tradicionalnog cirkusa, tj. klasičnih očekivanja publike. Hiperbolizacijom elemenata predstave poput pripreme i završnog aplauza artistice ogoljuju društveni odnos između izvedbe i gledališta, a, za razliku od Manua iz *Attached* koji poglede i osmjehe prema publici koristi kao sredstvo otpuštanja napetosti, Elice kao da dugim znakovitim pogledima prema gledalištu ironično komentira njihovu prisutnost i zahtjeve. Pritom u sat vremena izvedbe uspijevaju ugrurati zaista mnoštvo kazališnih znakova, koje koriste možda i nesvjesno, tako da se sama predstava čini pomalo zagušenom onome tko je promatra iz domene iskustva kazališnog jezika, a ne samo kao entuzijast cirkuskih vještina. Ono što



Gandini Juggling – Smashed © Joke Schot

the preparations and the taking of a bow, the artists strip bare the social relationship between the performance and the audience; unlike Manu in *Attached*, who glances and smiles at the audience as a way to defuse tensions, the long significant looks Elice casts at the audience appear to be an ironic commentary on their presence and demands. In the single hour of their show the two performers manage to cram in a large number of theatrical signs and they may be using some of them unconsciously. As a result, the show itself may seem a bit overcrowded to those who see it in the light of their experience in the language of theatre, not merely as circus skill enthusiasts. What the audience mostly gains from the energy of the show is the impression of relaxed playfulness evinced by the artists, which allows them some conceptual leeway and inconsistency. The show staged by Sanja and Elice is thus full of musical commentary, where they sing and play several instruments, unusual dance elements, and the effort to find diverse comical solutions in practically every act. Again, as with *Magmanus*, friendship and trust are key for the on-stage relationship. Mocking the stereotypical role of the woman as the weaker sex (in circus) and the traditional emphasis on the eroticism of female

publika najviše crpi iz energije predstave jest dojam opuštene zaigranosti koji odaju artistice, a koja im dopušta određene konceptualne nedosljednosti. Nastup Sanje i Elice tako je ispunjen muzičkim komentarima gdje one same pjevaju i sviraju nekoliko različitih instrumenata, zatim neobičnim plesnim momentima, kao i trudom da se pronađu raznovrsna komična rješenja u gotovo svakoj od postavljenih točaka. Kao i kod *Magmanusa*, prijateljstvo i povjerenje su ključni za odnos na sceni, a ruganje rodnom stereotipu žena kao slabijeg (cirkuskog) spola i tradicionalno forsiranom erotizmu ženskih cirkuskih artista čini *Capilotractees* istovremeno, što zbog forme, tradicionalnom izvedbom i, što zbog sadržaja, nekonvencionalnom predstavom. No koliko god da znaju biti ironične u formiranju pojedinih točaka, kao i njihovih međučinova, dojam je da Sanja i Elice prvenstveno žele zabaviti publiku te to i uspijevaju. *Capilotractees* je, uz predstavu *Smashed* grupe *Gandini Juggling*, zasigurno bila najvedrija i nazabavnija predstava na *Cirko* festivalu.

Predstava *Tenho* ponudila pak je prilično drukčije gledateljsko iskustvo nego *Attached* i *Capilotractees*. U klasičnoj muško-ženskoj podjeli

circus artists makes *Capilotractees* a traditional show, because of the form, and an unconventional show, because of its content. No matter how well they pull off irony in some acts, and between the acts, the impression is that Sanja and Elice primarily want to entertain their audience, and they manage to do it.

Capilotractées joined *Smashed* by the group Gandini Juggling as the cheeriest and funniest show of the Cirko Festival.

Tenho offered a different experience for the audience than either *Attached* or *Capilotractées*. In the classical male-female division of roles between Jenni Lehtinen and Sasu Peistola, the show was an attempt to present the very roots of circus performance and traditional techniques. Right from the start, *Tenho* demanded the audience help to create an atmosphere of complicity in delving into circus past – or, to be more precise, into individual or collective perceptions of the past. A simple stage with nothing but props, and no scenery, offered a bare space that could be transported, by the spectators' imagination, to a 19th Century square, or a small dusty circus ring anywhere in the world, where similar circus acts were once performed. Conceived as a trip back to the roots of circus, in some ways close to freak show-style street performances, *Tenho* encourages its spectators to play with their perceptions of circus' past and evokes a sort of nostalgia for the heyday of this imagined history. This past is presented in the simplicity of the acts, where the main emphasis is on the artists' bodies, without any concomitant multimedia content. The *re-enactment* of the acts that demanded above-average strength, suppleness and dexterity appeared to demand a degree of naiveté from the audience (in the sense of letting go of their expectations) and a focus on physical and controlled, continuous movements. The absence of music and elaborated lighting makes it possible for spectators to feel the organic foundations of the show: the heavy breathing and straining of the bodies and the scrape of props. The reduction of the superfluous delusion of the senses that clamour to be stimulated makes the show a success with those viewers who are primarily not impatient and easily seduced. Likewise, when Jenni and Sasu play the

koju čine Jenni Lehtinen and Sasu Peistola, izvedba je bila pokušaj predstavljanja samih izvora cirkuskog performansa i tradicionalnih tehnika. *Tenho* je otpočeka svojim pristupom od publike zahtijevao određenu atmosferu zajedničkog uživanja u cirkusku prošlost, odnosno točnije, u pojedinačne ili grupne predodžbe o toj prošlosti. Jednostavna scena na kojoj su se nalazili samo rekviziti, bez dekoracija, nudila je potencijal transfera svog golog prostora, kroz gledateljevu imaginaciju, na neki devetnaestostoljetni trg ili malu prašnjavu cirkusku arenu bilogdje na svijetu gdje su se nekad mogle gledati slične cirkuske točke. Zamišljen kao povratak korijenima cirkusa i priznanje starim performerima i njihovim trikovima, te ponešto blizak *freak show* tipu ulične izvedbe, *Tenho* potiče poigravanje gledateljskih predodžbi o prošlosti cirkusa, kao i svojevrsnu nostalgiju za jekom te zamišljene prošlosti. Takva se prošlost predstavlja u jednostavnosti izvedbenih točaka u kojima je glavni naglasak na tijelima artista, bez ikakve popratne multimedije. *Re-enactment* točaka koje su zahtijevale nadprosječnu snagu, gipkost i motoriku, kao da traže određenu dozu naivnosti gledatelja (u smislu otpuštanja dosad stečenih očekivanja) i fokus pažnje na fizičke pojedinosti poput odmjeravanja snage artista, njihove umiješnosti u održavanju ravnoteže i kontrole kontinuiranih pokreta. Odsutnost glazbenih i svjetlosnih efekata omogućuje gledatelju da osjeti organske temelje izvedbe poput zvukova teškog disanja i naprezanja tijela te škripe rekvizita. Redukcijom suvišnog obmanjivanja osjetila gladnih podražaja u toj mjeri predstava uspijeva kod gledatelja koji prvenstveno nisu nestrpljivi i lako zavodljivi. Također, uživanjem Jenni i Sasua u uloge starih artista dobiva se dojam da su i oni sami svjesniji sebe na pozornici. Njihov odnos temelji se na potpunom povjerenju i međusobnoj odgovornosti kao i pojedinačnoj uvježbanoj preciznosti kretanja u prostoru, jer same točke predstavljaju priličan izazov fokusa i snage. No, prema publici ostaju prilično rezervirani, pomalo otpojeni od gledateljstva kojem se nijemo obraćaju tek na kraju točaka kad uslijedi standardni pljesak, a elementi humora, autoreferencijalnosti i ironije u potpunosti izostaju. Publika ih zato vjerojatno doživljava manje bliskima sebi, a više kao predodžbe

parts of old artists, the impression is that they are more conscious of themselves on the stage. Their relationship is based on total trust, mutual responsibility, and their individual skill, the trained precision of their movement in space, because the acts are quite demanding in terms of focus and strength. But they remain somewhat reserved vis-à-vis the audience, addressing them mutely at the end of the acts, when they receive the standard applause. The elements of humour, self-referentiality and irony are almost completely absent. The audience probably does not perceive the artists as being close to them, but rather as ethereal artists divorced from the daily reality, people whose lives are devoted to circus skills. As such, they project a stronger impression of themselves as exceptional persons, people set apart from the everyday lives of the audience. And this is where a lot of their attractiveness on the stage is derived from.

A controlled rhythm and well-honed skill, intermittent interaction and integral humour, the challenges set by striving to maintain balance and perfect timing, necessary physical contact and above-average strength – these are some of the common features and elements whose combinations continue to create the concepts of modern circus shows, and which can be found in all the shows presented at Cirko Festival. In essence, these elements are simply a recipe that circus art has been using since its inception. But what is it that the spectators find the most attractive: what is it that every circus artist is very much aware of? The answer is in these words:

‘No one wants me to die, but everyone would like to be there when it happens.’

That was Harry Houdini’s *credo* as a performer, a succinct summary of the viewers’ interest and expectations in circus performances: passive observation as other people play with danger. Truth be told, the circus audience today is probably more sophisticated, because some of the shows are definitely more sophisticated, when they strive to be more than mere presentations of skills. But the skill itself and the inherent risks are reciprocal to the viewers’ interest, and the relationship does not appear to

eteričnih artista koji imaju malo veze sa svakodnevicom i čiji su životi posvećeni cirkuskim vještinama. Kao takvi projiciraju potencirani dojam sebe kao izvanrednih osobnosti, odnosno ljudi odvojenih od uobičajenih života gledatelja. U tome zasigurno leži i velik dio njihove scenske privlačnosti.

Kontrolirani ritam i izbrušena vještina, povremena interakcija i integralni humor, izazovi održavanja ravnoteže i perfektnih tajminga, nužan kontakt i nadprosječna snaga, čijim se kombinacijama i dalje stvaraju koncepti modernih cirkuskih predstava, neke su od zajedničkih odlika i elemenata predstava na *Cirko* festivalu. U biti, ti pobrojani elementi zajedno ne zvuče drugačije nego kao recept koji je cirkuska umjetnost koristila od samih svojih začetaka. No, što je zapravo naprivlačnije gledatelju, tj. ono čega je svaki cirkuski umjetnik vrlo svjestan? Odgovor se krije u sljedećoj izjavi:

Nitko ne želi da poginem, ali svi bi htjeli biti tamo kad se to desi. Tako je nekako glasio performerski *credo* Harrya Hudinija koji je vrlo jezgrovito sažeo osnovu gledateljskog interesa i očekivanja u cirkuskim izvedbama: pasivno promatranje tuđih poigravanja s opasnostima. Iako je današnja cirkuska publika vjerojatno sofisticiranija, jer takve su i neke od predstava koje pokušavaju biti više od pukih prezentacija vještina. No, sama vještina i rizici koje ona nosi recipročna je gledateljskom interesu i izgleda da taj odnos s vremenom ne jenjava. Cirkus je jedno od rijetkih mjesta gdje gledatelji gladni promatračkog adrenalina mogu dobiti svoju dozu kontrolirane strepnje odnosno zadovoljstva koje se dobiva nakon uspješno prevladane opasnosti. Iako su sve tri spomenute izvedbe imali potencijalne momente ozljeđivanja artista, publika je naviknuta na određeni komfor, gotovo kazališnog gledanja, gdje realno ništa ne polazi po zlu pa je tim više bilo šokantnije ozljeđivanje artista pri kraju predstave *Attached*. Kako mi je rečeno, to je “iznenađenje krvi”, koje je srećom završilo bez ikakvih posljedica po performeru, bio prvi slučaj ozljeđivanja od početka postojanja *Cirko* festivala.

Nadalje, izravno dijeljeno iskustvo fizičkog prostora jedan je od glavnih aduta današnjeg

be waning as time goes by. Circus is one of the few places where viewers hungry to experience an adrenaline rush as passive observers can get their high from controlled trepidation and satisfaction after the danger is overcome. Although all three shows had points where artists could get hurt, the audience is used to a certain degree of comfort, almost as if they were in a theatre, where realistically nothing ever goes wrong, and it was thus doubly shocking to see an artist get hurt at the end of *Attached*. As I was told it, this 'bloody surprise', which fortunately did not have any negative consequences for the performer, was the first such incident in the existence of Cirko Festival.

Furthermore, the immediate sharing of the experience of physical space is one of the main selling points of circus today, even more so than theatre, because circus continues to offer a more concrete, immediate answer to the viewers' expectations: to see something new and exciting, something that can be retold from the point of view of a participant who was there as an eyewitness. This is, probably without any exceptions, the trigger for every seasoned viewer with more finely honed demands, such as an interest in watching how skills are refined and varied, and an interest in hybrid circus forms close to performance art and theatre. In light of such expectations, artists will probably have to continue to provoke their audience with ever more elaborate performances or standard dangers. One thing is for sure: everyone wants to hear the standing ovation at the end.

cirkusa, čak više od kazališta, jer cirkus i dalje nudi konkretniji, neposredniji odgovor na gledateljska očekivanja: vidjeti nešto novo i uzbudljivo, nešto što se može prepričavati s pozicije aktera koji je tome uživo nazočio. To je, vjerojatno bez iznimke, okidač i za svakog iskusnijeg gledatelja s profiliranim zahtjevima poput interesa za promatranje brušenja i varijacija pojedinih vještina, ali i interesa za hibridnim cirkusim formama koje su bliske performansu i kazalištu. S obzirom na ta i takva očekivanja, očekivano je da će artisti morati sve više nastavljati provocirati gledatelje ili elaboriranim izvedbama ili pak standardnim opasnostima, no jedno je opet sigurno: svi žele čuti završne ovacije.

Circus Theatre and the Art of Failure

SARA VAN DER KOOI

A circus scene: two men and a couple of crates with one open side. The smaller man jumps from one crate to another while the taller man moves the crates, quickly shifting them into different positions. The trick is to aim his jumps well and not to slip, fall or touch the ground.

It is a skilful and exciting choreography that almost fails when the taller man turns one open side upwards. Ow, looks like the smaller man might take a nasty fall. Luckily, he is just in time to land his feet on the sides of the crate and jump towards the next one. The audience heaves a sigh of relief. The acrobats keep on playing for a while, blending daredevilry together with careful precision. Until, in the end, another open crate is put facing upwards. This time, the smaller man cannot manage it and he falls right in. The audience is startled, realises that nothing really went wrong, and applauds. This concludes the act, and the acrobats prepare for the next part.

Virtuosity

The scene described partly illustrates the ways of contemporary circus theatre. It is part of the performance *Attached* by the Swedish-French duo Magmanus, performed on a theatre stage for the first time after a number of outdoor performances. In *Attached*, the acrobats put the focus on their interdependence in a series of acts that involve unusual objects such as Velcro suits and a semicircular type of swing. Acrobatics and virtuosity are essential in this play of constantly imminent failure. For the most part, nothing goes wrong: the performers are in control and it is mainly the surprise at the act performed and relief at its fulfilment that enthral the audience and makes them laugh and applaud. At the few moments something does go wrong (a bad step, a ball falling down, or worse: an awkward landing

Circustheater en de kunst van het mislukken

SARA VAN DER KOOI

Een circus scène: twee mannen en een paar kisten. De kisten zijn aan een kant open. De kleine man springt van kist naar kist en ondertussen verplaatst de grote man de kisten razendsnel, draait ze in steeds andere posities. Het is de kunst voor de kleine man om niet ernaast te springen, niet te vallen en niet met zijn voeten op de grond te komen.

Het is een knappe en spannende choreografie, die dreigt mis te lopen wanneer de grote man de open kant van een kist naar boven draait. Ai, daar zal zijn kleine collega akelig in vallen. Maar nee, hij ziet het op tijd en landt met zijn voeten op de randen van de kist en springt weer verder naar een andere kist. Het publiek haalt opgelucht adem. Zo spelen de twee nog een tijdje door, een mix van waaghalzerij en zorgvuldig bepalen van plaats. Tot het laatste uitgekiende moment: weer staat een kist met de open kant naar boven. Maar dit keer weet de kleine man zich niet te redden en springt hij er vol in. Het publiek schrikt, ziet dat er niets ernstigs is gebeurd en klapt. Hiermee is de scène is afgelopen en de acrobaten gaan over op het volgende onderdeel.

Virtuositeit

Deze scène illustreert enigszins hoe het er in het hedendaagse circustheater aan toe gaat. Hij is afkomstig uit de voorstelling *Attached* van het Zweeds-Franse duo Magmanus, dat na een aantal buitenvoorstellingen hiermee voor het eerst een circusvoorstelling voor de theaterzaal heeft gemaakt. *Attached* stelt de onderlinge afhankelijkheid van de twee acrobaten centraal in een aantal acts met bijzondere objecten zoals klittenbandpakken en een halfronde boog, gebruikt als een soort enorme schommel. Acrobatiek en virtuositeit staan centraal in dit spel met de constant dreigende mislukking. Meestal



Agit-Cirk – Tenho © Joonas Martikainen

after a high jump) the audience is genuinely startled, and moved, and almost feels personally motivated to come to the rescue. That, however, is not the goal in circus theatre. The circus performance is about perfection – about playing with a hint of danger and eventually avoiding any failure.

One can wonder whether this is a missed chance in circus theatre or not. What's the gain when the audience is truly committed or involved due to the actual feasibility of failure, the actual presence of vulnerability? Or is this kind of commitment in circus and in theatre simply appreciated differently?

Physical perfection

Another scene from a circus performance: a strong man and a cannonball on a wire. The cannonball swings back and forth, the man tries to dodge it in time. Gracefully, he moves left, right, dives and dances with the ball. It is very clear that a blow from this cannonball would be very painful. Still, the next moment he just keeps still and the cannonball thumps his stomach heavily. At the obviously well-considered moment, the man was prepared for the blow. The shock and awe felt by

mislukt er niets, houden de mannen alles onder controle en is alleen de verrassing van de gekozen truc en de opluchting dat de truc lukt voldoende om het publiek te boeien en tot lachen en applaus te bewegen. Op de schaarse momenten dat het wel echt misgaat (een kleine misstap, een balletje dat op de grond valt of erger: verkeerd neerkomen na een hoge sprong) schrikt het publiek pas echt op, wordt geraakt, voelt zich bijna persoonlijk gemotiveerd om te hulp te schieten. Maar dat is niet het doel van de makers van circustheater; het circusspel draait om perfectie, om het spel met de kans op gevaar en uiteindelijk altijd het ontwijken van eventuele mislukkingen.

Men kan zich afvragen of dit een gemiste kans is in het circustheater. Wat valt er nog te halen als het publiek werkelijk geëngageerd of betrokken is, vanuit de reële mogelijkheid tot mislukking en dus daadwerkelijke kwetsbaarheid? Of wordt dit soort engagement in het circus simpelweg anders gewaardeerd dan in het theater?

Fysieke perfectie

Nog een scène uit een circusvoorstelling. Een sterke man en een zware kogel aan een touw. De kogel slingert heen en weer, de man probeert deze steeds op een haar na te ontwijken. Sierlijk draait hij links, rechts, hij duikt en danst met de kogel. Dat een klap van die kogel erg pijnlijk zal zijn, is duidelijk. Toch, op een gegeven moment, duikt de man niet weg en knalt de kogel hard op zijn buik. Het moment is duidelijk gekozen, de man voorbereid op de harde klap. De schrik en bewondering van het publiek bestaat vooral uit meeleven met de pijn die de klap van de kogel moet geven en de bewondering voor de manier waarop de man ermee omgaat: de klap was duidelijk pijnlijk maar niet ondraaglijk, hij moet dus wel heel sterke buikspieren of een hoge pijngrens hebben.

Deze scène uit de voorstelling *Tenho* (wat zoveel betekent als glitter en glamour) van het Finse duo Agit-Cirk speelt in mindere mate dan *Attached* met het risico van mislukken. Vanaf het begin is duidelijk dat de sterke man en de sierlijke vrouw precies weten wat ze doen, erg ervaren zijn en daarin geen onverantwoorde risico's nemen. Hun fysieke perfectie, hun kracht en

the audience chiefly consists of empathy for the pain such a blow is sure to cause and admiration for this man who obviously could feel the pain and bear it: he must have very powerful muscles, or an above average pain barrier.

In this scene from *Tenho* (which roughly translates to 'glitter and glamour') by the Finnish duo Agit-Cirk, the risk of failure is less emphasised than in *Attached*. Right from the start, it is clear that the strong man and the graceful woman know exactly what they are doing – they are experienced and do not take foolish risks. Their physical perfection, strength and stamina are awe-inspiring for the spectator. They don't seem to evoke emotion or personal involvement from the audience.

Above entertainment

I attended the performances mentioned above during the Cirko Festival in Helsinki last May, an engagingly small but internationally oriented festival for circus in theatres, or circus theatre. Circus theatre not only features performances indoors rather than in the street or a circus tent, so I have been told, but distinguishes itself conceptually by its composition, course, or content. In contrast to traditional circus, which consists of a sequence of varied acts, circus theatre attempts to construct a coherent performance by means of a reduced number of circus disciplines, preferably just a single one, which keeps the audience captivated better than a classic ten-minute act. It also stimulates emotions and thoughts, reflections or passion, rather than solely entertains by means of astonishment, suspense or humour through virtuosity and skill. This is a commendable ambition, but one which, following one possible conclusion drawn from my experience in Helsinki, does not always result in a successful performance. Not once was I moved, emotionally confounded or committed to the subject. If it was the creators' objective that I should be, then something did not go quite right. In circus, the parameters for failure are very clear: an act succeeds or it doesn't. The suspense behind the success/failure is the underlying motive within circus. I can imagine that this traditional perfectionism in circus is precisely the quality that obstructs circus theatre makers in their artistic development.

uithoudingsvermogen is wat ontzag en bewondering bij de toeschouwer oproept. Van ontroering of persoonlijke betrokkenheid lijkt bij het publiek echter vrijwel geen sprake te zijn.

Meer dan vermaak

Bovenbeschreven voorstellingen zag ik mei jongleden in Helsinki tijdens het Cirko Festival, een innemend klein maar internationaal georiënteerd festival voor circus in theaterzalen, beter gezegd circustheater. Circustheater heeft niet alleen als praktisch kenmerk dat het niet op straat of in een tent maar in het theater speelt, zo werd mij daar verteld, maar kenmerkt zich conceptueel vooral door een opbouw, een lijn, een inhoud. Waar het traditionele circus uit een opeenvolging van uiteenlopende acts bestaat, doet het circustheater een poging om met behulp van een beperkt aantal circusdisciplines (bij voorkeur slechts een enkele) een samenhangende voorstelling te maken, iets wat langer boeit dan een standaard act van tien minuten of korter. En het liefst ook nog iets wat meer doet dan alleen vermaak bieden op basis van verbazing, spanning of humor (door middel van virtuositeit en ambachtelijkheid). Maar iets wat emoties en gedachten prikkelt, aan het denken zet of ontroering opwekt. Een prijzenswaardig streven wat echter niet altijd leidt tot geslaagde voorstellingen, zo zou ik op basis van mijn ervaringen in Helsinki kunnen concluderen. Niet eenmaal was ik ontroerd, emotioneel verrast of inhoudelijk geëngageerd. Als dat echter wel de doelstelling van de makers is, dan gaat er blijkbaar iets niet helemaal goed. In circus zijn de parameters van mislukking namelijk heel helder: een truc lukt of niet. De spanning van het wel/niet lukken is de spanning waarop het circus drijft. Ik kan me voorstellen dat juist het traditionele perfectionisme van het circus een obstakel vormt voor circustheatermakers om verder te komen in hun artistieke ontwikkeling.

Feilbare personages

Wat maakt dat je door een kunstuiting ontroering ervaart, of woede, ergernis, wat maakt dat kunst je engageert? Ik denk dat dit hem in herkenning zit, in kunst als spiegel van jezelf en je eigen menselijkheid. En wat is er menselijker en herkenbaarder, kwetsbaarder ook dan twijfel?

Fallible characters

What is it in an artistic product that moves us or brings on anger and frustration? What about art challenges us? In my opinion, it is recognition. Art as a mirror for our own human nature. And what is more human and more recognisable, more vulnerable even, than uncertainty? For centuries, the seeking, failing, struggling, moving up again, eternally wanting human being has been a significant source of inspiration for artists and theatre-makers in particular, cf. the characters in ancient Greece, in Shakespeare or Chekhov. However, in non-repertory theatre as well, fallible characters with great dreams and similarly unsparing flaws are preferred. Let it be hopeless love or unattainable goals, it is the struggle in itself that draws an audience to the theatre. This is, therefore, a different motivation altogether than the one in (traditional) circus, where imminent danger and the certainty of a happy ending are key figures. The perfection in circus hinders substantial affection and human recognition.

Strength

Does this substantial difference mean that any attempt to dramatise new circus theatre is destined to fail? My first impression of the new performance *Prototype* by master juggler Jay Gilligan that premiered in Helsinki, confirms this notion to some degree. In this performance, Gilligan strives for perfection in his juggling acts, creating unusual geometrical shapes. Squares, triangles, double circles, every juggling object is examined for its qualities and then masterfully elaborated on. The juggling acts are connected with a futuristic console on which he composes (or manipulates?) electronic music, and the sound, mixing speech fragments from NASA recordings, triggers associations with space travel. The juggling objects move within the scene like celestial bodies. Gilligan has remarkable skills and an apparent passion for discovering every single property of every object. There is, however, hardly any theatrical aspect to *Prototype*; no effort is made to entertain the audience besides through the exploration of objects. Then, one hour can feel like a very long time. There are, still, some moments in *Prototype* that are more human, thrilling, touching even: when a trick goes wrong,

De zoekende, falende, worstelende, steeds weer opklimmende en toch niet slagende mens is al eeuwenlang een grote inspiratiebron voor kunstenaars en voor theatermakers in het bijzonder, denk alleen maar aan de personages van de oude Grieken, van Shakespeare of Tsjechov. Maar ook het niet-repertoiregebonden theater maakt het liefst gebruik van feilbare personages met grote dromen en al even grote onvermogens. Of het nu gaat om onbereikbare liefdes of onbereikbare idealen, juist de worsteling daarmee maakt dat mensen graag naar het theater gaan. Dat is dus een volkomen andere motivatie dan de reden om naar (traditioneel) circus te gaan, waarin de dreiging van gevaar en de zekere goede afloop de spil vormen. De perfectie van circus zit wezenlijke ontroering en menselijke herkenning in de weg.

Potentie

Betekent dit wezenlijke verschil dan dat de poging tot dramatiseren het nieuwe circustheater per definitie gedoemd is te mislukken? De eerste indruk van de nieuwe voorstelling van meesterjongleur Jay Gilligan, *Prototype*, die in Helsinki in première ging, zou dat idee bevestigen. In deze voorstelling betracht Gilligan perfectie in de uitvoering van het jongleren met ongebruikelijke geometrische vormen. Vierkanten, driehoeken, aan elkaar gekoppelde ringen, van elk jongleerobject onderzoekt hij de bewegingsmogelijkheden en werkt deze zo virtuoos mogelijk uit. De verbinding met een futuristisch uitziende console waarmee hij zelf elektronische muziek kan componeren (of is het manipuleren?) en een geluidsdecor met Nasa fragmenten van de eerste maanlanding, wekt associaties met ruimtevaart. De jongleerobjecten bewegen als hemellichamen door deze ruimte. Gilligans vaardigheid is bewonderenswaardig en zijn passie voor het ontdekken van de bewegingsmogelijkheden van ieder object spat er vanaf. Er gebeurt echter in *Prototype* bijna niets op theateraal vlak: hij doet geen moeite om het publiek op een andere manier te boeien dan door het werken met de objecten. En dan is een voorstelling van een uur lang, heel lang. Toch zijn er momenten in *Prototype* waarop er iets menselijks gebeurt, waarop het spannend wordt, ontroerend bijna. Dit zijn de momenten waarop

when Gilligan loses control over the objects and tries again. His expression shows disappointment, fear and doggedness for performing the act, even after four successive tries. This is no acting, this is real. It was specifically those mistakes, with their corresponding expressions, that made *Prototype* alive and exciting now and again. It is the failing, seeking, grappling human being that is the ultimate moving and affecting character. The intriguing thing is that it is exactly this performance, aiming at perfection and virtuosity, which should demonstrate where the strength in new circus theatre lies.

Childhood memories

The female Finnish duo of Sanja Kosonen and Elice Abonce Muhonen seem to have further implemented this concept. In their performance *Capilotractées* they play with silly characters on the one hand and with perfection on the other. On the whole, this makes their rather bizarre performance feel clownish and theatrical. Bizarre because they revive an almost forgotten circus act: the art of hair hanging. In their knotted hair (one black, the other red) is a large ring, fastened to a wire, by which they swing back and forth like acrobats. It is a dazzling sight, this presumably rather painful exercise, about which the ladies afterwards commented that it is the neck muscles and scalp in particular that suffer. This act needs to be performed with careful precision, obviously. Still, there are more vulnerable moments, too. Like the scene in which one brushes the other one's hair in a hurtful way. For many women, this is a painful childhood memory: mother heavy-handedly brushing daughter's hair while grumbling at her. This scene's recognisability and fragility elegantly contrasts with the otherwise tough women, cold-bloodedly swinging by their hair only moments ago. Pain is relative, and emotional hurt can ache more than physical pain, is what they teach us. However, this well-rehearsed fragility might not be the kind that really moves us, although there are some moments that do: when they are visibly having difficulties with completing an act or almost fail. In such an act, one acrobat hangs from a bar, riveted to the other by the rings in their hair, swinging. The performance might not be too spectacular, but this act does inspire awe in the

een truc misgaat, waarop Gilligan de controle over de objecten verliest en het opnieuw moet proberen. In zijn gezicht zijn de teleurstelling, schrik en verbetenheid om een act goed te krijgen, zelfs al lukt het viermaal achter elkaar niet, zichtbaar. Dit speelt hij niet, dit is 'echt'. Maar juist die vergissingen, met bijbehorende expressie in zijn gezicht, maakten *Prototype* bij vlagen levend en spannend. De falende, zoekende, worstelende mens als ultiem ontroerend en tot meeleven bewegend personage. Het is boeiend hoe juist deze voorstelling waarin perfectie en virtuositeit het doel waren toont waar de potentie van het nieuwe circustheater ligt.

Jeugdherinnering

Het vrouwenduo Kosonen & Muhonen lijkt dit gegeven al wat beter te hebben begrepen. In hun voorstelling *Capilotractées* spelen ze met sullige personages enerzijds en perfectie van hun act anderzijds. Dat het geheel daardoor wat clownesq aandoet, versterkt de theatraliteit van hun nogal bizarre voorstelling. Bizar, omdat de dames een vrijwel vergeten circuskunst nieuw leven inblazen: de kunst van het haarhangen. In hun in een knot gebonden haar (de ene zwart, de ander rood) hebben ze beiden een grote metalen ring vastgemaakt, waaraan ze vervolgens als acrobaten door de lucht slingeren. Het is een verbijsterend gezicht, deze waarschijnlijk vrij pijnlijke exercitie (achteraf vertellen de dames dat vooral de nekspieren en de hoofdhuid het zwaar te verduren hebben). Deze act kan niet anders dan met de grootste precisie worden uitgevoerd, zoveel is wel duidelijk. Maar het duo heeft ook momenten van kwetsbaarheid ingebouwd. Een mooi voorbeeld hiervan is de scène waarin de een op pijnlijke wijze de haren van de ander borstelt. Voor veel vrouwen een akelige jeugdherinnering: moeder die hardhandig het haar van dochter kamt en ondertussen op haar foetert. De herkenbaarheid en de kwetsbaarheid in deze scène contrasteert mooi met de manier waarop de twee stoere vrouwen eerder schijnbaar onaangedaan aan hun haar door de lucht zwerden. Pijn is relatief en emotionele pijn is vaak groter dan fysieke pijn, laten zij hiermee zien. Maar deze ingestudeerde kwetsbaarheid is misschien niet het soort kwetsbaarheid dat echt raakt. Die zit gelukkig echter wel in de

audience because of the obvious pains they suffer in order to successfully complete it. There could have been more moments like these, which would have made *Capilotractées* a remarkably convincing performance. Now, it remained stuck at great skills and humorous reflections on the concept of women's hair in a variety of cultural contexts.

Inquisitive attitude

I trust my argument is clear: art that does not include uncertainty, searching and failure, also lacks fragility, fantasy and emotion. New circus theatre would benefit from acquiring this matter, in order to create truly magical scenes. This reminds me of an act by the Dutch collective 't Barre Land I saw some years ago. Their performances are characterised by an inquisitive attitude and are never finalised, always in progress. Their act came in-between two one-act plays and might have been perfect circus theatre. The setting was simple: two men, a ladder and a lamp that needed replacing. At the risk of their own lives the actors swung, climbed, (almost) fell from the ladder, as if it was the first time this happened, with humour, unpredictable turns and the tragedy of trying to succeed at something that is doomed to fail. Always keep on trying. It is not the end result that is most important, but the road that leads you there, bumpy and obstructed. That is how circus theatre can truly affect.

voorstelling: op het moment dat de acts zichtbaar moeite kosten of bijna niet goed gaan. De act waarbij de ene ondersteboven aan een rekstok hangt en de ander zich aan haar knot vastklinkt waarna beiden aan de rekstok slingeren, kost beiden zichtbaar moeite. Hoewel in uitvoering niet erg spectaculair, boezemt deze act toch ontzag in door de zichtbare moeite die de vrouwen moeten doen om hem te laten slagen. Hadden ze dit soort momenten meer uitgebuit dan was *Capilotractees* een echt indringende voorstelling geworden, waar ze nu toch vaak bleef hangen op knappe kunsten en humorvolle reflectie op het gegeven vrouwenhaar in allerlei culturele contexten.

Zoekende basishouding

Mijn betoog moge helder zijn: in kunst waarin geen ruimte is voor twijfel, zoeken, fouten maken, is geen ruimte voor kwetsbaarheid, fantasie, ontroering. Het nieuwe circustheater zou er baat bij hebben zich dit inzicht meer eigen te maken want dan kunnen er magische scènes ontstaan. Zo zag ik enkele jaren geleden een act van het Nederlandse collectief 't Barre Land, dat zich kenmerkt door haar zoekende basishouding en nooit afgeronde, altijd in ontwikkeling zijnde voorstellingen. Deze act was een kort tussendoortje tussen een paar eenakters en was misschien wel een perfecte circustheateract. Het gegeven was eenvoudig: twee mannen, een ladder en een kapotte lamp die moet worden vervangen. Met gevaar voor eigen leven zwierden de acteurs de ladder rond, klommen er in en vielen er – bijna – uit, alles alsof het niet eerder gerepeteerd was en op dat moment ontstond, vol humor, onvoorspelbaarheid en de tragiek van het tegen beter weten in proberen en mislukken. Aldoor maar proberen tot je erbij neerval. Niet het eindresultaat maar de weg ernaar toe, vol hobbels en obstakels, daarmee maak je theater dat werkelijk weet te raken.

From Totem to Taboo: The Body in the Contemporary Circus

SERGIO LO GATTO

When first encountering the contemporary circus and attempting to examine it with a critical eye, one detail stands out clearly very early on: in spite of the variety of techniques and styles employed, a strong common theme emerges in the execution of the performance. Forced to tackle the dangers of acrobatics, pushed and tested to the limit of physical endurance, called to challenge the laws of physics, the human body is totally and unequivocally a constant element, the primary medium of this artform, the basic prism through which every technical, stylistic, conceptual and scenic assumption runs.

The aim of this article is to draw a horizontal line through the programme of Helsinki's Cirko Festivaali 2013, seen during the Unpack the Arts residency, using three impulses as markers: *nudity*, the issue of *sex*, and the consideration of *risk*, which are the obvious signs – all effectively imprinted on the performer's body – of a slow and epic evolution through which the circus as a language has broken its ties with tradition, thus making its entry into contemporary aesthetics. This is why the three strands are not being examined as topics, but rather in isolation – as the originators of sense, as a constant presence, both taboo and totem, whose critical essence continues to be the driving force of the issues (of sense or shape) brought to the stage.

Admittedly the totality of the performing arts has to reckon with the indispensable presence of the body, but never to the same extent as in the circus – or at least in this specific form of circus where performer and spectator are held together by the visual mechanism of a theatrical box – where the body is *exposed*. Such exposure challenges a

Dal Totem Al Tabù. Il Corpo Nel Circo contemporaneo

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Affacciandosi per la prima volta al mondo del circo contemporaneo e provando su di esso a condurre un approfondimento critico, si rende presto evidente un particolare: pur nella grande varietà delle tecniche e degli stili usati emerge un forte elemento comune nella messa in campo della materia scenica. Ora costretto a fronteggiare il pericolo di evoluzioni acrobatiche, ora sottoposto a sforzi enormi, ora invitato a sfidare le leggi della fisica, il corpo è sempre e comunque presente e rappresenta il medium principale di quest'arte, il prisma elementare contro cui rimbalza ogni presupposto tecnico, stilistico, concettuale e di resa scenica.

Il tentativo di queste righe è di tracciare una linea orizzontale alla programmazione visionata al Cirko Festivaali di Helsinki 2013 durante la residenza Unpack the Arts usando come marcatori tre impulsi: la nudità, la questione del genere e la considerazione del rischio sono segni evidenti – impressi in effetti tutti sul corpo del performer – di una lenta e quasi epica evoluzione nella quale il circo come linguaggio ha operato il proprio distacco dalla tradizione, facendo il suo ingresso dentro le estetiche contemporanee. Per questo motivo i tre nodi non vogliono essere esaminati come tematiche, ma piuttosto isolati come produttori di senso, come presenze costanti, al tempo tabù e totem, la cui essenza critica continua a farsi motrice dei ragionamenti (di senso o di figura) portati sul palco.

Di certo la totalità delle arti performative fa i conti con la presenza irrinunciabile del corpo, ma mai come nel caso del circo – quantomeno di questa specifica forma di circo, in cui performer e

custom universally accepted by the audience of a live performance, namely that the body is in the here and now and performs in real time, effectively sharing the same dimension as the people watching it. A body constantly tested to the limit, showcased as an entity in itself. The reason why, even before the spoken word, each circus performance needs this level of abstraction is because in the exposure of this body one seizes the opportunity to use it to 'write' in the present: it is the opportunity to move through the present with one's body, the most human thing to do and therefore the most radical by far. In a way some contemporary dance has already attempted to chart these territories, but perhaps *nouveau cirque* – particularly in its 'rawest' form, the one that does not try to impress with special effects of light and space – can explore them even more fully. And that's because – once all the adornments of the performance have been stripped out – the naked line that remains is once again represented by the three totems.

That of nudity first and foremost. It goes without saying that when it comes to exposing a body, one also comes into contact with both its social and cultural dimensions. Incidentally the use of nudity on stage – which is too conventional a technique today, and one that is already open to the crossfire of irony – was for decades one of most obvious instruments of fierce denunciation. Paradoxically the fact that the spectator can see himself mirrored in a body that moves without the limitations of clothing makes him/her feel safe: for on stage there is someone who is more involved than (s)he is. By sharing time and space, stage and audience, they also share the implicit agreement on a convention that separates them as two entities of the same nature: therefore a naked sequence of Butoh dance could never be perceived as provocative, distasteful or lyrical, not even as sensual, in truth, as the perception is that on those bodies a rhythmic grammar is reconstructed, a choreography of the senses which aims to merge with space and becomes a raw force drawing on the gaze of the spectator. In a circus act this balance shifts as the exposed body is instrumental to the staging of a masterful technique. The graceful shapes executed by Sanna Silvennoinen in the final sequence of *Light*

spettatore sono tenuti insieme dal sistema visivo di una scatola teatrale – il corpo viene esposto. Tale esposizione mette in crisi una convenzione universalmente accettata dal pubblico dello spettacolo dal vivo e cioè che il corpo sia lì in quel momento e che agisca in tempo reale, di fatto condividendo la stessa dimensione di chi lo osserva. Un corpo spinto continuamente oltre i propri limiti, presentato come materia a sé. Il motivo per cui, ancora prima di aver bisogno della parola, ciascuna performance circense ha bisogno di una simile astrazione è perché nei termini di quella sua esposizione si gioca direttamente l'opportunità di usare il corpo per "scrivere" sul presente, l'opportunità di attraversare il presente con il corpo, ché è la cosa più umana e dunque radicale in assoluto. In un certo senso si tratta di orizzonti che già certa danza contemporanea aveva tentato di percorrere, ma che forse il *nouveau cirque*, soprattutto quello più "crudo", che non punta a meravigliare l'occhio con effetti speciali di luce o spazio, può esplorare ancora più a fondo. Proprio perché – se si strappano via tutti gli orpelli della spettacolarità – la linea nuda che resta è rappresentata ancora una volta dai tre totem.

Quello della nudità innanzitutto. Va da sé che quando si tratta di esporre un corpo si entri a contatto con la sua dimensione anche sociale, culturale. Non a caso l'uso del nudo in scena – ora una pratica fin troppo convenzionale e già aperta al fuoco incrociato dell'ironia – è stato per decenni uno degli strumenti più chiari di denuncia frontale. Vedersi rispecchiato in un corpo che agisce senza i limiti di un abito da indossare mette lo spettatore paradossalmente al sicuro: in scena c'è qualcuno più coinvolto di lui. Condividendo tempo e spazio, scena e platea condividono anche l'implicito accordo su una convenzione che li separa come due gradi della stessa natura: allora un nudo di danza butoh non potrebbe mai riuscire provocatorio, volgare o lirico, ma in verità neppure sensuale, perché su quei corpi viene ricostruita un'intera grammatica ritmica, una coreografia dei sensi che mira a integrarsi nello spazio, a farsi forza cruda e funzionale alla partecipazione dello sguardo. Con il circo questa asticella cambia posizione perché quel corpo esposto ha a che fare con la messa in opera di una



Sanja Kosonen & Elice Abonce Muhonen – Capilotractées © Sébastien Armengol

Blue & Orange – where she dances on ropes suspended in mid-air over a piano that plays hypnotic notes – are only partially connected to the body whose perfect shapes are highlighted by the cords. Between the performer and the eye of the spectator observing their motion, there is first and foremost the acknowledgement of a technical element which comes before the physical one, and somehow is able to make that body immune to any suggestive nod. The fact that bodies in circus performances are rarely fully naked seems to be somewhat connected to the same paradox of classical ballet: a persistent dichotomy between a 'perfect body' – and the ever growing ability to drag it away from the terrestrial force of gravity – and a relationship which is anything but comfortable with its appearance. From a distance the bodies of the ballerinas with their identical dresses, hair styles and make-up, are physical entities which have already taken on a new form, and represent a tiny cluster of movements accompanying music and rhythm; in circus art the to-ing and fro-ing between the exposed body and its negation seems to emerge in an ever latent fashion, as a corpus of signals which one is quick to dismiss.

tecnica sopraffina. Le leggiadre figure disegnate da Sanna Silvennoinen nella sequenza finale di *Light Blue & Orange* – in cui danza sulle corde sospesa a mezz'aria sopra un pianoforte che suona note ipnotiche – hanno solo in parte a che fare con il suo corpo, del quale i nastri evidenziano le forme perfette: perché tra la performer e l'occhio di chi ne considera il movimento si inserisce il riconoscimento di un fatto tecnico ancor prima che fisico, che in qualche modo è in grado di rendere quel corpo immune da ogni ammiccamento. Il fatto che i corpi nel circo raramente mostrino realmente un nudo integrale sembra avere in qualche modo a che fare con lo stesso paradosso vissuto dal balletto classico: una tenace dicotomia tra la ricerca di un "corpo perfetto" – che con sempre maggiore perizia si vorrebbe strappare alla gravità terrena – e una relazione tutt'altro che pacificata con la sua apparenza. Visti da lontano, vestiti, pettinati e truccati identici, i corpi delle ballerine sono individualità fisiche già passate di stato, rappresentano un grumo di movimenti funzionali alla musica e alla ritmica; nel circo quell'oscillare tra corpo esposto e sua negazione sembra emergere in maniera più latente, come un corpus di segnali che ci si affretta a non notare.

Amongst the shows scheduled at the festival, a fairly iconic case of just how complex and stratified this relationship is, was the bizarre experiment titled *Capilotractées* by Sanja Kosonen and Elice Abonce Muhonen, a show attempting to mix the age-old technique of hair hanging with a research that is also conceptually based on the symbolism of hair in its broadest sense, from normal hair to wispy hair. The fixed iron structure from which they hang by their hair is impressive and imposing, yet it's not always used and is often bypassed by other objects here and there, in order to compose movements which explore other dramaturgical possibilities: in actual fact the two performers work *around* the chosen technique. Here nudity is a concept conveyed from the very beginning, and on various occasions the costume change forces the performers to expose themselves. This exposure of the body however is somehow diluted in a dramaturgical construct which allegedly dissolves any trace of the direct relationship with bones and muscles, thus crashing more violently with the second taboo/totem, notably the one related to the issue of sex.

Even those techniques which are openly masculine or feminine still have to reckon with a tradition where the physical form almost automatically assigned a role to the performer in the dynamics of representation. This is once again due to the fact that – particularly in a context where the circus was a wandering artform – the immediate marvel of appearance was needed above all else. The obvious difference between the sexes, and therefore the roles, acts in a way rather similar to the make-up on clowns' faces, in that it conveys to the spectator a first impression which facilitates access to all the ones that follow.

The fact that in *Capilotractées* the hair hanging technique – which is traditionally male – is executed by two female artists and is surrounded by a dramaturgical structure which insists (or would like to insist) on the issue of the sexes in contemporary society is in itself an indication of sense. In an interview given to the Unpack the Arts group, the performers admitted that they had no real or direct interest in the social topic of the difference between the sexes, in the

Tra quelli programmati al festival, un caso piuttosto emblematico di quanto complicato e stratificato sia tale rapporto è stato il bizzarro esperimento *Capilotractées*, di Sanja Kosonen ed Elice Abonce Muhonen, uno spettacolo che vorrebbe mescolare l'antica tecnica dell'hair hanging a una ricerca anche concettuale sulla simbologia del hair in senso più lato, dal capello alla peluria. L'impalcatura di ferro che permette loro di appendersi per i capelli è imponente e posta in posizione dominante; eppure viene spesso scavalcata dall'uso di altri oggetti e, qua e là, messa da parte per comporre azioni che vanno a indagare altre possibilità dramaturgiche: le due performer di fatto lavorano intorno alla tecnica scelta. Qui la nudità è un concetto suggerito fin dall'inizio e in più punti il cambio di costume le obbliga a mostrarsi, ma in qualche modo l'esposizione del corpo viene diluita dentro una struttura dramaturgica che fa apparentemente perdere le tracce del rapporto diretto con ossa e muscoli, andando a scontrarsi in maniera più frontale con il secondo tabù/totem, quello della questione del genere.

Anche quelle tecniche che non sono "dichiaratamente maschili" o "dichiaratamente femminili" fanno comunque i conti con una tradizione in cui la corporatura (quella innata di nani e giganti o quella costruita di donne-cannone o acrobati) assegnava quasi automaticamente un ruolo al performer nell'economia della rappresentazione. Questo sempre perché – soprattutto in un contesto in cui il circo era un'arte di giro – innanzitutto era necessaria la meraviglia immediata dell'apparenza. La differenza evidente dei generi e dunque dei ruoli funziona in qualche modo come il trucco sui volti dei clown, trasmette allo spettatore una prima impressione che aiuta ad accedere in maniera più agevole a tutte quelle successive.

Il fatto che in *Capilotractées* la tecnica – tradizionalmente maschile – dell'hair hanging venga eseguita da una coppia di donne e circondata da un impianto dramaturgico che insiste (o vorrebbe insistere) sulla questione dei generi nella società contemporanea rappresenta già di per sé una indicazione di senso. Nell'intervista rilasciata al gruppo di Unpack the Arts, le performer rispondevano di non essere in

discrimination present inside or outside the artistic circle; but that it was more urgent for them to experiment with a new technique, set in motion through a series of performances jointly considered, in a dual structure.

This very structure typifies two other shows seen at the festival: *Tenho*, by the local group Agit-Cirk, and *Attached*, by the French-Swedish duo Magmanus. If we are still dealing with the issues of the sexes and their roles (in connection to the body), these examples are almost diametrically opposed. In the first show – whose title evokes “echoes from the past” – the couple Jenni Lehtinen and Sasu Peistola look at the traditional equation of roles in the circus (woman = a harmonious and volatile being; man = a domineering brute force) with irony whilst letting a masterful technique do the talking and whilst paying almost no attention to the setting, were it not for a shaft of light which segments the ropes and gives shape to the puffs of chalk in the preparation of the various acts of pair acrobatics. In the second show, the same role structure is articulated on a rhythmical plane which is more glamorous and closer to clowning; the irony comes from the two male performers, one imposing, the other tiny. Magnus Bjøru and Manu Tiger turn the issue of sex on its head in a rather original way, almost immediately and perhaps not even fully deliberately, by building an amusing discourse on various heights and on the possibility or impossibility of some actions. What happens a little later however, when the show shifts its focus to acrobatics, is that it sabotages this interpretation on a different level, submerging it with the evidence of the third taboo/totem, maybe the most crucial one and the one that no doubt is responsible for the peculiarity of the whole circus language: the risk.

What we said about the exposure of the body and the short-circuit in the audience perception is more obvious when the exposed body is constantly exposed to danger, be it fatal (as in the case of extreme acrobatic jumps) or symbolic (the equilibrium transposed into juggling techniques). In following the complex evolutions of the juggler Jay Gilligan in *Prototype* – whether he is exhibiting the best of his unconventional juggling

effetti interessate direttamente al tema sociale della differenza dei sessi, della discriminazione dentro o fuori l'ambiente artistico; più urgente era la sperimentazione di una tecnica nuova, messa in atto in una serie di atti pensati insieme, in una struttura duale.

La stessa che caratterizza anche altri due spettacoli visti al festival: *Tenho* del gruppo locale Agit-Cirk e *Attached*, del duo franco-svedese Magmanus. Se è ancora di generi e ruoli (sempre in rapporto al corpo) che stiamo parlando, questi altri esempi occupano due poli quasi opposti del discorso. Nel primo – il cui titolo suona come “echi dal passato” – la coppia composta da Jenni Lehtinen e Sasu Peistola guarda alla tradizionale equazione dei ruoli nel circo (donna = essere armonioso e volatile; uomo = dominante forza bruta) con un occhio ironico ma lasciando parlare soprattutto una tecnica sopraffina, senza prendersi quasi per nulla cura della confezione se non per qualche taglio di luce che segmenta le corde o dà corpo agli sbuffi di gesso nella preparazione dei vari numeri di para-acrobatica. Nel secondo la stessa struttura dei ruoli viene declinata su un impianto ritmico più glamour e vicino alla clownerie e l'ironia gioca su due presenze maschili, una imponente, l'altra minuta: Magnus Bjøru e Manu Tiger in effetti rovesciano da subito la questione del genere in un modo originale e forse neppure totalmente consapevole, costruendo un divertente discorso sulle stature e sulle possibilità o le impossibilità di certe azioni. Ma quel che accade poco dopo, quando lo show sposta il proprio fuoco sulla componente acrobatica, fa scivolare anche questa interpretazione su un piano ulteriore, la sommerge con l'evidenza del terzo tabù/totem, forse il più cruciale e che di certo rende peculiare l'intero linguaggio del circo: il rischio.

Ciò che abbiamo detto a proposito dell'esposizione del corpo e del cortocircuito che si crea nella percezione del pubblico risulta ancora più evidente quando il corpo esposto viene costantemente messo di fronte al pericolo, sia esso un pericolo mortale (come nel caso di salti eccezionalmente acrobatici) o simbolico (l'equilibrio traslato dentro la tecnica della giocoleria). Nel seguire le complesse evoluzioni

inventions or producing electronic patterns on the performance's Reactable table – the thrill of apprehension and anxiety comes into play and is associated to the ever present risk that the acrobatics might fail. And every time a club or a ring falls on the floor, we get the feeling that our heart is about to jump out of our chest. As with nudity – where the spectator has the feeling that he is safer than the performer – in presenting the risk, the same dynamics, but more powerful, are further repressed under one convention: the duality between the success and the failure of a performance.

The degree of audience participation is dictated by the degree of radicalism with which a process is presented on stage. When the acceptance of the risk taken by the performing bodies dissolves the sense of true fear, the exposed process is no longer cerebral: the medium in actual fact is no longer simply a body but rather a body 'used', a body-tool lying down on the operating table. This uprooting process, the enucleation of the primeval nature of the 'body able to perform' merges with this spectacular component, i.e. the 'trick', in actual fact, with the essential patina of marvel and the idea of the spectacular which must necessarily reach the spectator.

So then, when watching the acrobatics of *Attached*, the unexpected accident (luckily not too serious, though serious enough to bring the show to an abrupt halt) has exposed the public to the ever present possibility, compressed however in a convention and therefore removed: the dimension of risk which for the entire duration of the show (made up of several acts) underpinned the use of the body. The pounding of the heart at the moment of the fall has abruptly reawakened in the audience the dimension of a general perception, transforming once again the totem into a taboo.

And this is where the reasoning on the three themes analysed comes together: the emergence of these themes is determined for the best part by the intensity of the relationship between the performer and the spectator, in which the time-component also comes into the play. The 'act' is almost of a standard duration and feeds on

del giocoliere Jay Gilligan con i bislacchi oggetti di sua stessa invenzione o la produzione di pattern elettronici alla reactable tab nel suo Prototype interviene quel fremito di apprensione e di ansia connesso al rischio continuo che l'acrobazia possa non riuscire. E ogni volta che una clava o un anello cadono in terra, avvertiamo una sorta di crudele tuffo al cuore. Come per la nudità – in cui lo spettatore ha la sensazione di essere più al sicuro del performer – nella presentazione del rischio la stessa dinamica, più potente, viene ulteriormente repressa sotto una convenzione: la dualità tra successo e fallimento di un numero.

Il grado di coinvolgimento del pubblico deriva di fatto dal grado di radicalità con cui sul palco si presenta un processo. Nel momento in cui l'accettazione del rischio corso dai corpi in scena fa scomparire la paura reale, il processo esposto non è più un processo cerebrale: il medium di fatto ha smesso di essere semplicemente il corpo ma un corpo "impiegato", un corpo-strumento che si sdraia su un tavolo di anestesia. Questo processo di sradicamento, questa enucleazione della natura primordiale del "corpo come abilità" si fonde con la componente spettacolare, con il "trucco", appunto, con la patina irrinunciabile di meraviglia e di spettacolarità che necessariamente deve arrivare allo spettatore. Allora, guardando le acrobazie di *Attached*, il caso inaspettato di un incidente (fortunatamente non grave ma che è costato la brusca interruzione dello spettacolo) ha messo il pubblico di fronte a un'entità costantemente presente e però compressa in una convenzione e dunque rimossa: quella dimensione del rischio che per l'intera durata dello spettacolo (composto di più numeri) sottendeva l'uso del corpo. Il tuffo al cuore negli istanti della caduta ha di colpo restaurato nel pubblico una dimensione di percezione comune, trasformando di nuovo il totem in un tabù.

È forse qui che si riunisce il ragionamento sulle tre tematiche analizzate: il loro emergere è determinato in gran parte dall'intensità della relazione tra performer e spettatore, sulla quale interviene di certo anche la struttura-tempo. Il "numero" ha una durata quasi canonizzata e soprattutto vive di logiche antiche che sembrano portare all'esposizione del corpo come oggetto

ancient logic which seems to lead to the exposure of the body as a material object, the object of itself, even before serving a dramaturgic or meaningful purpose. The 'act' in the circus is in itself a movement towards the audience, an invitation to take an ever closer look, so that it is clear that the trick is no magical feat but rather the exceptional perfecting of a skill, a movement of subtraction creating smoke around expectations, obscuring them and compressing them until they are relegated to oblivion. The fact that one is playing with one's body concerns everyone – because we all have a body regardless of what we do with it – and at the same time it alienates everyone because in a non-dramatic theatre where the narration is confined to the 'doing' and the 'acting', the modes of the interventions on the body take on a different specific weight, one that is unique compared to any other format of show. And they become elements in the production of sense.

materico, oggetto di se stesso, ancor prima che funzione drammaturgica o di significato. L'"atto" nel circo è di per sé un movimento verso il pubblico, un invito a portare lo sguardo sempre più vicino, perché sia certo che quel trucco in fondo non è niente di magico ma solo il perfezionamento eccezionale di una abilità, movimento di sottrazione che va a produrre fumo intorno alle aspettative stesse, le oscura e le comprime fino a farle dimenticare. Il fatto che si stia giocando con il corpo è qualcosa che riguarda tutti – proprio perché tutti abbiamo un corpo, indipendentemente dall'uso che ne facciamo – e allo stesso tempo tutti allontana, proprio perché, in un teatro non drammatico in cui la narrazione resta stretta nel "fare" e nell'"agire", le modalità di intervento sul corpo assumono di fatto un peso specifico differente, unico rispetto a qualsiasi altro modello spettacolare. E si fanno elementi nella produzione di senso.



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