

UNPACK THE ARTS

European residency programme for cultural journalists

**STOCKHOLM RESIDENCY
SUBCASE
13–16 FEBRUARY 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 fourth publication collects the texts of 10 European journalists who attended the residency at Subcase in Stockholm, Sweden, 13–16 February 2013.

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

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Unpacking the Circus Arts

DONALD HUTERA

'It's a kind of life'

Marcel Escolana of Los Galindos on circus

Introduction

When the invitation arrived to steep myself in 'new circus' in Sweden, well, how could I refuse? In truth, I'd applied for this opportunity offered by Unpack the Arts, a European initiative providing short, intensive residencies during which cultural journalists can bolster their understanding of contemporary circus performance and engage in critical discourse about it. My response upon receiving confirmation – and that I'd also bagged my destination of choice in wintry Stockholm – was a grateful hurrah.

I landed in handsome-as-ever Stockholm in chilly, slushy, overcast mid-February, but, as it turned out, spent most of the next three and half days about a 30 minute coach ride away at Subtopia – a 'Spacious Suburban Paradise', according to its Facebook page. Founded in 2002 in the municipality of Botkyrka, and spread across 14,000 square metres in what is said to be one of the nation's most international but impoverished areas, Subtopia is a complex of buildings housing various companies or organisations (about 50 total) that serve as a creative locus for the facilitation (rather than production per se) of circus, film, radio and more.

The specific reason for my being at Subtopia was the 5th edition of Subcase, a showcase of circus-based performances (seven full-length), works-in-progress (nine of these) and appetite-whetting 'pitches' of upcoming projects (seven again). All of this was aimed at an audience of industry 'insiders': presenters, producers or programmers and – in the case of the group to which I belonged – ten writers and/or broadcasters on the arts. For us the schedule was a daily carousel of

performances and interviews with the (mainly Nordic) artists who made them, supplemented by lectures and discussions. It's worth noting here that Subcase is organised and curated by partners of the New Nordic Circus Network; in keeping with their remit, almost everything on view hailed from northern Europe. But to discover this year's exception, read on...

Day One: Orientation, Context, Body Image

In which we learnt about each other and Subtopia before seeing, in the revamped warehouse venue Hangaren, EAT IT! by Sweden's Ruby Rose Productions.

According to the promotional blurb the cast of the 'transmedia' entertainment *EAT IT!* "will spin your world until you want to puke". The show didn't make me sick; far from it, in fact. It was friendly, free-wheeling, occasionally unabashedly rude or outrageously funny and, basically, full-on. Sure, director Rebecca Westholm and her four fellow female performers occasionally opted for the obvious, and maybe the piece is a little baggily misshapen. Still, I was consistently engaged with this smartly populist, sharply humorous take on body image.

EAT IT! is both a celebration and send-up of modern women's slavish obsession with her own and other's looks and size, and a thought-provoking, broadly comic stab at the culture that engenders this imbalanced condition. Although the theme of the show is sober its delivery is anything but. "There is no better way to prove the absurdity of a social problem than laughing in its face," Westholm has declared. By implication Ruby Rose is encouraging women to flout mainstream commercial culture's brainwashing conventions and instead embrace with gusto their human imperfections. This stance is perhaps most tellingly embodied by Westholm herself

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Cirkus Cirkör – Knitting Peace © Mats Bäcker

running in circles, bare breasts bouncing in the breeze, but it's also present elsewhere: in the equation of make-up with clowning, say, or a frantic catwalk strut in which the jerkily determined models don the frowziest wigs.

Could this cabaret-style performance exist if stripped of its circus content? Not as well, I think. The ensemble, including guitar-strumming Eliisa Erävalo, plays to individual strengths. This includes Chloé Derrouaz's hoop routine in which titular comparisons are made between her splayed poses and food (e.g. a spread crotch described as 'fondue au fromage'), or Anna Lagerkvist's darkly dreamy stint on a swinging pole. The latter ties in neatly with the generally ballsy, extremely Midleresque (as in Bette) Angela Wand's recitations of fragments of totally non-PC jokes – the 'unsayable' uttered in nightmarishly terror-stricken tones. Later she and Westholm hijack events as glossily vulgar, 'thinspirational' fitness queens (with, most amusingly, Wand using bits of tape in lieu of Botox, and much wider swathes of it for a brute DIY tummy tuck; I also enjoyed Westholm's sage advice – 'You can learn from babies – they throw up all the time' –

especially after learning that she created this show post-motherhood). Ruby Rose's self-mocking, liberating efforts to tickle our collective funnybone just about earn the built-in, audience participation standing ovation. I left *EAT IT!* feeling fattened by laughter, my consciousness raised into a state of warm merriment.

Day Two: Lectures, Juggling, Knitting

In which amid lectures on contemporary circus history, current genre labels and education, plus a few revealing artist interviews, we consumed a brace of shows.

Overlooking its somewhat clumsily clever title, *Between Someones* by the dynamic young duo Patrik (Elmnert) & Wes (Peden) was a mesmerisingly inventive treat of what could be deemed acro-juggling – a full-bodied, highly choreographed form of object manipulation that a colleague happily judged as 'juggling for people who don't like juggling'.

With its emphasis on structure, not to mention the precise, entirely transparent yet abstract complexity of the juggling patterns adopted by its

creators, this performance is a fine example of what our shepherd-like circus expert Yohann Floch pegged as 'dry circus'. The small irony is that in performance Patrik & Wes really work up a sweat. How they do that is related to the Cunninghamesque notion of 'dance for dance's sake' only with 'juggling' substituted for 'dance'. The parallel between their 'dry' brand of circus and the classic definition of what is commonly called contemporary dance is that each involve bodies (and again, in the case of Patrik & Wes, objects) in time and space.

Wes, taller and sturdier, and the slightly more mercurial Patrik are, respectively, American and Swedish. Together they educate our eyes as they refine our perceptions. Gratifyingly attuned to each other onstage, their partnership is based upon a rhythmically physical 'listening'. I was sucked into the orbit of their dovetailing skills early on, faced with the realisation that I could choose to either watch them or the pins whizzing back and forth between them – each had equal value. Despite the near-sacred air of concentration in which they work, they never lose awareness of either us or the risk of failure. Failure is an artist's inalienable right. Here it's akin to a metaphor for life: drop a ball, whether conceptual or real, and what else is there to do but smile, pick it – or one's self – up and carry on?

This approach humanises the mechanics of Patrik & Wes' art. At their best they're so dazzlingly good that at one point I unexpectedly found myself moist-eyed with pleasure. The pair's mutual esteem and rapport is palpable. They're versatile, employing balls, pins (a flurry of 14, at one point), rings (maybe just one, for instance, balanced on a forehead), and even water bottles (in homage to the tradition of 'gentleman jugglers' who incorporated everyday items into their act; methods used to close the bottles handily prove Wes' definition of juggling as "taking the longest path to get something done"). It's as if they want to explore, with sexy-cool agility and synchronised elan, what can be done interactively with the surface and shapes of bodies, objects and the spaces in-between. (As one of them later remarked, "This show is exactly our opinion on everything.") The men intertwine, vault over or

cantilever off of each other while juggling or, backing away from each other, weave the air with hurtling things. Thus proximity versus distance becomes a form of serious aesthetic play

Highly polished yet intuitively crafted, at 45 minutes the show possesses a deceptively simple magic and wit. I'll voice a minor cavil about a soundtrack that's sometimes complementary but, at others, soaks their juggling in a mildly distracting disco-pop burble. But how good to see a performance in which meaning is to be found on one's own rather than imposed. It's as if Patrik & Wes are relying on their interest in their own investigations to infect us – like a subtle, indirect invitation to enter their world. During our post-show talk Wes made a valuable distinction between old-school circus being designed to impress versus the need many of today's artists have to express. The latter certainly applies to what he and Patrik are doing.

Do we fail shows or do they fail us? Maybe I was too tired out to be fully open to it, but I found *Knitting Peace* by Sweden's pioneering and still internationally best-known company Cirkus Cirkör rather hard going. A nutshell response would be: "Great set! Uh...where's the show?". There's no gainsaying how good-looking Tilde Björfors' elaborately designed 90-minute production is. White yarn and ropes adorned the stage of the troupe's own theatre space, like cooked spaghetti crossed with spider's webs (most of the material, we were told, is waste product from a t-shirt factory); and perched up in a centrestage aerie was a musician (either Samuel 'LoopTok' Andersson or Olof Göthlin; both share credit for the soundtrack – an often caterwauling aural blur of Nordic folk-gypsy-rock).

Knitting Peace might intentionally resist facile categorisation, but it was difficult for me to get a handle on it either emotionally or intellectually. The next day Björfors spoke about her keen interest in the notion of striving – whether that means a performer taking physical risks to earn the approval of applause, or artists in general using their work to change the world. While I 'get' this last, somewhat pie-in-the-sky concept I can't say that it helps much with what Cirkus Cirkör



Patrik & Wes – Between Someonesons © Petter Hellman

was trying to get at in this performance. (Neither did it help that Björfors invoked the celebrity-based protests of John Lennon and Yoko Ono, a reference that retrospectively prompts me to chant ‘All we are saying / is give *Knitting Peace* a chance’.)

By being so woolly about what the show is (or what I perceive Björfors’ motives to be in making it) I’ve not indicated what actually happens in it. From a circus arts perspective there is use of both slack and taut wires, hand balances, a climbing wall of rope, and silks (or, I now must ask, was it a single rope?) combined with a single Swedish exercise ball. Plus little yarn-like prop balls (battery-operated, presumably) that moved by themselves, and big, hollowed-out ones that individual performers could either tuck themselves up inside, and then walk around snail-style with only the legs showing, or that could be sat in while suspended. Again, I appreciated the attention to design; how lucky Cirkus Cirkör is to have the means for such high quality production values. And yet of the five works I saw at Subcase 2013, *Knitting Peace* is probably the fuzziest not only in memory but also in my reception of it as it

occurred. (So much for the notion of circus as a vehicle for ideas.) Is it pretty? Yes, exceptionally so, but also somehow underdeveloped and possibly even naïve despite the company’s sophisticated financial and aesthetic resources.

In short, I didn’t truly connect with the show except, perhaps, in terms of two of its performers. One was ginger-haired, handstanding Aino Ihanainen, who also knitted set and costumes and whose angelically serene mien drew me in like a gentle magnet. The other – in complete contrast – was wire-walker Alexander Weibel Weibel. Projecting out to us, to me he initially seemed rather smug about his own talent and abilities. Later, however, he acknowledged some not entirely successful or satisfying, to him, trick with a doubtful, even apologetic shake of the head and a look in our direction. This transparency – as opposed to Ihanainen’s mystery – got me thinking anew about how much a circus performer may (or may not) choose to break through the fourth wall. It was, for me, this soft-centred show’s most intriguing and discernible source of creative tension although I’m not at all sure it was intentional.

Day Three: Illusions, Artisans, Animals

In which, in between our final two shows and artist interviews, we considered a more directly critical perspective on circus and performance thanks to a visit from Örjan Abrahamsson. As dance critic at the Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter, this affable gent had us reflect on how the brain perceives imagery and movement and what optical illusions might arise for us no matter how aware we are of them. (Still, such awareness can be usefully cultivated.)

We started the day seeing *Maiurta* by Los Galindos, a Catalan circus and street theatre company invited to Subcase as part of an intercultural exchange with Sweden called Catalan Circus on Tour. This – and other Catalan shows – was the exception (alluded to earlier) to the Nordic-nations-only rule usually in place at Subcase. I'm glad such an exception was made given how much I liked – and even loved – *Maiurta*. Interesting word, love. Nothing to be ashamed of either. I mean, if I didn't love at least some of the performances I see what business would I have making a living as an arts journalist? But I've another reason for using the word as it was the first thing Marcel Escolano, creator and 'star' of *Maiurta*, asked me before we began our talk with him: "Did you love it?" he enquired, referring to the show. I wonder, did he want/need/expect me to say yes? And what if I'd hated it – could he have handled that, and would I have told him so? In any event there was, perhaps, a hint of a desire for reassurance in his voice. After no more than a moment's hesitation (primarily because I was just a little taken aback by the directness of his question) I was able to reply in the affirmative.

So, why did I love Escolano's show? Well, it was a gradual rather than instantaneous feeling – like a sense of welcoming, communal warmth and pleasure stealing over me, as if all of us occupying the few rows of bleacher seats inside the wooden yurt (which was, in turn, tucked inside what looked like a traditional small circus tent) were being given a precious but quite unpretentious gift. What this present consisted of and, indeed, relied upon was Escolano's playful performing presence. Limber, tall, sweaty, balding but with

hirsute brows and an eagle-like beak of a nose, this middle-aged erstwhile trapezist is a master of deliciously small, delicate clowning. ("I'm not a natural acrobat," he later endearingly confessed, having been asked why he most emphatically does not fly through the air in *Maiurta*, "and so for twelve years I was afraid.") Escolano uses props to enhance his occasionally clattering physical comedy: a valise containing a subsequently cradled French horn, for example, and chalk to draw and write on the low, platform-like stage, or metal mugs that double as pointe shoes. And let's not forget flour as face powder or magic dust or, wetted into dough, a mask as well as coquettish sausage ringlets, bull's horns or a horse's pendulous scrotum.

But ultimately it's Escolano himself who is his most expressive instrument (albeit one beautifully supplemented by Marc Vila's live percussion). His innate understanding of the marriage of the sublime and the ridiculous was cherishable enough to leave me damp-eyed (twice in one festival!) by the time *Maiurta* drew to a close. As an encore Escolano held aloft, in one hand, his perfectly poised seven year-old daughter who'd been in the audience with us. Could she be Los Galindos: The Next Generation? I wouldn't be surprised.

For the record, Galindos is a family name although not necessarily that of Escolano's. The son of a baker, he opted out of dad's business ("Bakery was not my passion") in order to indulge in things that "challenge common sense". He means circus, an artform in which "we try to find the absurd and different ways to do the impossible". Hearing such a definition, how could you not be charmed by the philosophical fellow who made it, and, what's more, with such a beguilingly comic, poetic and democratic air? Created out of instinct and experience, *Maiurta* is a self-styled "tribute to artisans and nomads" like Escolano's father, but also to those like himself, and to the kind of dedicated, authentic circus artistry he represents. As he 'explained' the show to us afterwards, "It's a tale without history, a circus without performance. A great experience can arrive out of nearly nothing. The important thing is to be and to feel."

Which leads me, finally, to *Phågel – The best Cat and Bird show ever!* by the young female duo known as Chipmunk Forge. Both it and *EAT IT!* are evidence that women in Nordic circus are making work that most emphatically doesn't buy into gender stereotypes. The piece was directed by Maksim Komaro, of Finland's Circo Aereo, and he it was who suggested that the performers Klara Mossberg and Lisa Angberg use the American graphic novelist James Kochalka's 2004 alt-comic book *Peanutbutter & Jeremy's Best Book Ever* as inspiration for a show.

Angberg and Mossberg were cast, respectively, as Cat and Bird. They're strong performers, adept at balancing on their hands or feet via tightropes and wires. Speaking onstage was maybe the biggest challenge in making this rather heavily scripted show, but they handled the text in a decently declamatory manner. I liked, too, that the two women think of their onstage alter egos as communicating with an audience of like creatures – that is, other felines and birds. I also appreciate their commitment to everything they did; this was no pussyfooting performance. But it was neither as prepossessing, nor as memorable, as other performances I ingested in Sweden.

It's useful to keep its cartoonish source material in mind as I retrospectively evaluate *Phågel*. In terms of critical reaction both it and *Knitting Peace* were the most problematic of the five Subcase shows my group saw. Each of us was asked to come up with three words that captured the essence of our response to each production; one of those for Phågel was 'poo' – both a

reference to the defecation habits of one of the characters, but also a neat summation of what the show was worth to one of my colleagues. I can't or won't dismiss Chipmunk Forge's work quite so easily, not that I was all that smitten by what seemed to be its deliberately wayward and at times downright amateurish style. Humour is a peculiar, particular thing for each of us; I know I didn't find the show as funny as I think it thinks it is. For many of my fellow arts journalists it was the show's riskily crude, rough content and throwaway style that was the challenge. Yet in some ways *Phågel* might've been the most original and daring among the handful of works on our agenda, or so it seemed the next day – or could my critical memory be faulty? Either way, at the time of our discussions I was unable to come down on it as hard and definitively as others did.

Coda

When it comes to Subcase 2013 I don't necessarily mean to have written raves or rhapsodies; it just might've turned out that way as I've tried to reconstruct and articulate as clearly and vividly as possible my responses to what I saw or the people I met. Sometimes, as with Escolano, you couldn't help but fall for the maker of the show as much as for the show itself. The two can be inextricably linked, especially if you're afforded the privilege of having such encounters in the first place; goodwill towards an artist might spill, even retrospectively, onto their work. The trick is to retain critical integrity even in the midst of the most inevitably subjective experience. Ground it in honesty and fairness and, as a writer on circus, you might just fly.

Look at me

Involving the audience in contemporary circus.

ERICA SMITS

A warm look, a blank look, a questioning look, a defiant look, an apologising look. Performers seeking eye contact with the audience, sometimes asking for a response – requesting applause for a successful stunt or requesting someone to pass a bucket of water. But also performers looking only to their own bodies and the material they use. They all performed at Subcase 2013.

The openness between the circus artist and the audience is self-evident in traditional circus. An act often ends with the performer's uplifted arms, signalling: 'you may now applaud'. It may be a tad boastful, but it is transparent, too. There's no character, no scenography, no dramaturgy. There is only the act in which the artist presents himself at the height of his technical skills.

These acts usually follow the same rules and the same patterns of suspense. The suspense has already begun to build before the performance, then is slowly but surely intensified through a series of increasingly challenging acts until a spectacular finale ends with the performers' uplifted arms and relieved applause among the audience. That's circus. And that's the audience's role: we let ourselves be amazed, and approve the performance with applause.

New circus, new audience

However, today's circus is very different from the traditional form. The evolution started in the 70s in France, but the modern circus theatre has since manifested throughout Europe. In this relatively new form of theatre it is not the performance that is crucial, but its artistic content, which brings

Kijk naar mij

Hoe hedendaags circus het publiek betreft bij een voorstelling.

ERICA SMITS

Een warme blik, een gesloten blik, een vragende blik, een uitdagende blik, een verontschuldigende blik. Performers die met hun ogen het contact van het publiek opzoeken, al dan niet vragend om een reactie. Van vragen om applaus voor een geslaagde stunt tot vragen om het aangeven van een emmer water. Maar ook performers die hun blik gericht houden op hun eigen lichaam en de rekwisieten waar ze mee bezig zijn. Ze zijn tijdens Subcase 2013 in Stockholm allemaal voorbij gekomen.

De openheid tussen circusartiest en publiek is een vanzelfsprekend onderdeel van het traditionele circus. Het nummer eindigt meer dan eens in de opgeheven arm van de performer, waarmee hij eigenlijk zegt 'u mag nu applaudisseren'. Het is wat opschepperig misschien, maar het is ook transparant. Er zijn geen personages, geen scenografie, geen dramaturgie. Er is enkel het nummer waarin de artiest zichzelf presenteert op het toppen van zijn technische kunnen.

Dat nummer voltrekt zich doorgaans aan dezelfde regels en dezelfde spanningsboog. De spanning wordt al opgeroepen bij de aankondiging, wordt langzaam maar zeker opgebouwd door de steeds moeilijker wordende figuren naar een spetterend slotstuk. Om ten slotte te eindigen met de opgeheven arm van de performers en een opgelucht applaus van het publiek. Dat is circus. En dat is de rol van het publiek: we laten ons verbazen en met ons applaus erkennen we de prestatie.

Nieuw circus = nieuw publiek

Het circus is echter veranderd de laatste jaren. Begonnen in de jaren zeventig in Frankrijk, is in heel Europa de ontwikkeling van het moderne circustheater zichtbaar aan het worden. In deze

along new dramaturgy and a new kind of suspense. It is no longer about a succession of amazing acts separated by applause. Perhaps Cirque du Soleil is the most famous example of this new development. Their circus acts are embedded within a visual dramaturgy, each performance composing a fabulous world. The circus acts adopt a different, poetic significance among the theatrical touches of music, scenography, image and movement.

This also changes the audience's role. Apart from our applauding hands, we have thinking minds and feeling hearts. The images arouse feelings and appeal to our imagination to put all the elements of the performance together. There is room for imagination and for layered emotions. Not only is there admiration for the technical and physical fireworks, but for emotion, humour and imagination as well.

But there is more. As contemporary circus has developed, the diversity of the field has increased. The audience plays a varying role in the performance's dramaturgy – one which begins when the artists acknowledge or deny the audience's presence. That is, when they observe or break down the so-called fourth wall.

The fourth wall is a dramaturgical term for the proverbial wall between the stage and the audience. It is the fourth wing of the set and separates the fictitious world of the characters from the audience's real one. The actors cannot see the audience – or actually they *pretend* they cannot see the audience, thus keeping their characters' fictitious world intact. The illusion that we are truly watching Nora, Olga or Masja is preserved as well as it can be. In the times of playwrights like Chekhov, Ibsen and Strindberg this was the prevailing style, but then German innovator Bertolt Brecht made quick work of illusion in theatre by levelling that fourth wall (among other things).

Subcase

Back to Subcase 2013. The performances at Subcase 2013 were many-sided: from great, expressive circus theatre to modest juggling; from provoking and bold experimentation to touching

relatief nieuwe theatervorm komt niet zozeer de prestatie centraal te staan, maar de artistieke inhoud. Met een nieuwe dramaturgie en een nieuwe spanningsboog als gevolg. Het gaat niet langer om een opeenvolging van verbazingwekkende nummers afgewisseld met applaus. Misschien is Cirque du Soleil daar wel het meest bekende voorbeeld van. De circusacts zijn in hun voorstellingen opgenomen in een visuele dramaturgie en vormen samen een sprookjesachtige wereld. De afzonderlijke circusnummers krijgen een andere, meer poëtische betekenis in een geheel van theatrale middelen van muziek, scenografie, beeld en beweging.

Daarmee verandert ook de rol van het publiek. Naast applaudiserende handen zijn we associerende hoofden en voelende harten. De beelden roepen emoties op en zetten onze verbeelding aan het werk om alle elementen met elkaar in verband te brengen. Er ontstaat ruimte voor ons verbeelding en een emotie die meerdere lagen kent. Niet alleen de bewondering voor de technische fysieke hoogstandjes, maar ook ontroering, humor en verbeelding.

Maar het gaat verder. Met de ontwikkeling van het hedendaagse circus is ook de veelvormigheid en diversiteit van de discipline toegenomen. Daarmee krijgt ook het publiek een steeds andere rol toegekend binnen de dramaturgie van de voorstelling. Dat begint al met het wel of niet erkennen van onze aanwezigheid. Oftewel, de zogeheten vierde wand.

De vierde wand is een theaterwetenschappelijke term waarmee de spreekwoordelijke muur tussen podium en auditorium. Het vormt als het ware de vierde wand van het decor en scheidt de fictieve wereld van de personages van de wereld van het publiek. Doordat de acteurs de toeschouwers niet zien, of beter gezegd, hardnekkig doen als ze de toeschouwers niet zien, laten ze de fictieve wereld van de personages intact. De illusie dat we écht naar Nora, Olga of Masja kijken, wordt zoveel mogelijk in stand gehouden. In de tijd van Tsjechov, Ibsen en Strindberg was dit de gangbare speelstijl. Tot de Duitse vernieuwer Bertolt Brecht korte metten maakte met de illusie in het theater, onder andere door die vierde wand te slechten.



Los Galindos – *Maiurta* © Petter Hellman

clowning. How do these different performers treat their audiences?

Are we all comfortably seated? asks Bet before the start of *Maiurta* by the Catalan circus company Los Galindos. Yes we're fine, thank you. We sit on wooden benches ringing the centre of a small circus tent. In the ring, Marcel is drawing and writing in chalk on the floor. For some reason, there immediately is an enjoyable atmosphere.

Closely, we watch Marcel tell his story through clowning acts and acrobatics, supported by percussionist Marc Vila. Using water and flour, Marcel moulds the dough into a variety of figures. He works up to a trapeze act that he is too scared to perform (and besides, the tent is too small). Eventually, he dares to jump and performs the full acrobatic routine – safely – on the ground. He turns somersaults and we believe it. In the end, he puts a tiny figure on the trapeze, as if wishing the trapeze artist farewell.

The closeness of the performance space brings intimacy, but it's the thoughtful beginning too: Marcel involving the audience by entrusting his

Subcase

Terug naar Subcase 2013. De voorstellingen in Subcase 2013 laten een breed scala zien aan circusvoorstellingen: van groots beeldend circustheater tot sober jongleren, van prikkelend en gedurfd experiment tot aandoenlijke clownerie. Hoe gaan deze verschillende theatermakers om met hun publiek? Of we echt wel goed zitten, vraagt Beth van de Catalaanse circusgroep Los Galindos voor aanvang van *Maiurta*. Ja hoor, prima. In een kleine circustent zitten we op houten bankjes rondom het centrum. In het midden is Marcel bezig met tekenen en schrijven met krijt op de grond. Op een of andere manier is het er meteen gezellig.

We zitten er met ons neus boven op als Marcel zijn verhaal vertelt in clownsacts en acrobatiek, ondersteund met muziek van percussionist Marc. Met water en meel maakt hij deeg waarmee hij duizend-en-één beelden maakt. Uiteindelijk werkt hij toe naar een trapezeact die hij niet durft uit te voeren. De tent is er ook veel te laag voor. Uiteindelijk springt hij toch en voert hij de complete luchtacrobatiek – veilig – uit op de grond. Je ziet zijn salto's en je gelooft het. Uiteindelijk hangt hij een mannetje van deeg aan de trapeze, alsof hij daarmee afscheid neemt van zijn bestaan als trapeze-artiest.

Die nabijheid geeft intimiteit. Maar ook het zorgzame begin, het betrekken van het publiek als bewaarders van zijn rekvisieten, het uitdelen van popcorn en vooral de manier waarop hij ons met zijn blik zijn wereld in trekt, geeft het gevoel dat hij het verhaal ook écht voor ons vertelt.

Hoe anders is dat in *Knitting Peace* van de Zweedse circusgroep Cirkus Cirkör. In deze grootse beeldende voorstelling, bewegen zich twee jongens en drie meisjes in een witte wereld van touw. Ze klimmen in een wand van touw, wandelen over het slappe koord en balanceren op ballen van touw. In die wereld hebben ze allemaal hun eigen nummers en hun eigen ontwikkeling. Zo is een van de spelers aan het begin nog aan het worstelen met balen touw die hij toegeworpen krijgt, maar weet hij op een gegeven moment in handstand een knoop te leggen met zijn voeten en breidt hij uiteindelijk gigantische

props, by handing out popcorn, and above all by inviting us into his world by looking us in the eyes. It all makes us believe that this story was told for us.

How unlike *Knitting Peace*, by Swedish circus company Cirkus Cirkör. In this great visual performance, two boys and three girls move in a white world of rope. They climb a ropey wall, walk the slackrope, and balance on balls of string. They all have their own acts, with their own development. In one moment, a performer struggles with the bales of rope someone tosses at him, but later on he succeeds in tying a knot with his feet while doing a handstand, and knitting enormous scarves that roll into the audience in the end. Another artist performs a number of acts on the slackrope, the development between them primarily being an increasing level of difficulty.

The structure in *Knitting Peace* is a good example of the new dramaturgy in contemporary circus: loose acts, solo, duo or in group, connected by recurring visual elements. But it is also an example of the problems and issues of the new dramaturgy in contemporary circus. With a new focus on visual dramaturgy rather than on performance-oriented acts, many things change. The audience's role is not just to be amazed and to applaud, and the director's role comes to take on new responsibilities as well. In traditional circus, the ringmaster glues the acts together, while in contemporary circus the director is responsible for unity. The open, transparent understanding between performer and audience (with codes like the uplifted arm) and the technical tours de force in the spotlight make room for the theatrical understanding between director and audience, with the performers and their acts, music and scenography used as a means to communicate a story or message.

In *Knitting Peace*, the importance of clarity in dramaturgy becomes achingly clear. While one performer shows a development in subject matter, another structures his acts on the degree of technical difficulty. And while one performer is trapped in his own, white world, another interacts with the audience as in traditional circus. Such inconsistencies make the performance feel disjointed. It starts to build its thematic content,

sjaals die het publiek in rollen. Een van de andere spelers verzorgt een reeks nummers op het slappe koord, waarbij zijn ontwikkeling met name zit in de toenemende moeilijkheidsgraad.

De structuur van *Knitting Peace* met zijn losse nummers in solo, duo of groepen, aaneengeregen voor een terugkerend visueel element is een goed voorbeeld van de nieuwe dramaturgie van het nieuwe circus. En ook meteen welke problemen en vraagstukken daarbij komen kijken. Want met het verschuiven van de focus van prestatie-gerichte nummers naar een visuele dramaturgie, verandert er meer. Niet alleen het publiek krijgt een andere taak die verder reikt dan versteld staan en applaudiseren. Ook de rol van de regisseur krijgt een nieuwe lading. Waar de spreekstalmeester in het traditionele circus degene is die de nummers bij elkaar houdt, is in het nieuwe circus de regisseur verantwoordelijk voor het geheel. De open en transparante verstandhouding tussen performer en publiek (met de opgeheven arm als code) met het technische hoogstandje als middelpunt wordt vervangen door de theatrale verstandhouding tussen regisseur en publiek, waarbij de performers en hun nummers, samen met alle andere theatrale middelen als muziek en scenografie, middelen zijn om een verhaal of boodschap over te brengen.

Knitting Peace maakt het belang van helderheid in die dramaturgie pijnlijk duidelijk. Terwijl de ene performer een ontwikkeling laat zien die te maken heeft met de inhoudelijke thematiek, toont de andere performer een ontwikkeling in de technische moeilijkheidsgraad van zijn nummers. En terwijl de ene performer in zijn eigen, witte wereld opgesloten zit, zoekt de andere performer contact met het publiek zoals in het traditionele circus. Dergelijke inconsequenties maken dat de voorstelling aan voelt als los zand. Er wordt een aanzet gegeven tot een inhoudelijke thematiek, maar deze wordt zo inconsistent uitgewerkt, dat er allemaal vragen ontstaan. Vragen van het verkeerde soort. Waarom rijdt die jongen eigenlijk met een eenwieler op een koord en speelt hij tegelijkertijd viool? Het enige antwoord lijkt te zijn 'omdat het kan'. In het nieuwe circus volstaat dat antwoord niet.

but this is then elaborated in an irregular way that raises many questions. The wrong kind of questions. Why does that performer ride a unicycle on a rope while playing the violin? The answer seems to be 'because he can'. In contemporary circus, that is not enough.

Sincere boys

Jugglers Patrik Elmnert and Wes Peden are crystal clear about their intentions in *Between Someonesons*. They perform a 50 minute show without any theatrical fiddling around. They believe in fact that juggling in itself is strong enough to hold the audience captivated for the full-length of a performance. No need for any unnecessary fuss.

The only object on the stage is a box that stores the balls, clubs and rings. The lighting is sober, and only once in a while are the acts supported by music. Their technique is the central point. And these fellows can juggle! They perform acts in perfect synchronisation, juggling while performing various movements.

Their attitude towards the audience recalls the transparency in traditional circus, be it without the angling for recognition. Certainly they are *aware* of the audience – they perform their acts for us and accept the applause at the end – but they don't use the uplifted arm, don't look for recognition in the audience, and don't hide behind visual poetry. It is pure and simple. They juggle, we enjoy. No more, no less.

This bareness allows unexpected moments to emerge. There is room for association, making the acts not solely about juggling anymore. In one scene, they juggle three balls together, taking different poses. They stand next to, behind, in front of, and even on top of each other, while unfailingly keeping the balls hovering in the air. This image radiates great intimacy, togetherness and care in a way that can move without warning. It transcends the virtuosity of their skills.

To see or not to see

From the transparent and spectacle-oriented relation between performer and audience in traditional circus, past poetic relations full of

Goudeerlijke jongens

Patrik Elmnert en Wes Peden zijn glashelder in hun intenties met *Between Someonesons*. Een voorstelling maken met vijftig minuten jongleren, zonder gedoe er om heen. Gewoon, omdat ze geloven dat jongleren zelf sterk genoeg is om daar langer naar te kijken. Daar heb je geen poespas bij nodig.

Het enige voorwerp op het toneel is dan ook een kist waar de ballen, knotsen en ringen in opgeborgen zijn. Het lichtontwerp is sober en slechts af en toe worden de nummers ondersteund door muziek. De techniek van de jongens staat centraal. En wat kunnen die gasten jongleren. Ze voeren nummers volkomen synchroon uit, jongleren terwijl ze een choreografie uitvoeren of jongleren gezamenlijk.

Hun houding naar het publiek toe doet denken aan de transparantie van het traditionele circus, maar dan zonder het vissen naar erkennen. Ze zien ons, ze voeren hun nummers uit voor ons en nemen het applaus in ontvangst als het nummer is afgelopen. Ze steken daarbij geen armen in de lucht, zoeken niet met hun blik naar erkenning van het publiek en verschuilen zich niet achter een visuele poëzie. Het is puur en simpel. Zij jongleren, wij genieten. Niets meer en niets minder.

In die kaalheid kan er zomaar iets bijzonders gebeuren. Er ontstaat ruimte voor associaties, waardoor de nummers niet meer gaan over het jongleren. In een van de scènes jongleren ze samen met drie ballen en nemen daarbij verschillende poses ten opzichte van elkaar aan. Ze staan naast, achter, voor en zelfs op elkaar waarbij de ballen continu feilloos in de lucht blijven hangen. Van dit beeld gaat een grote vertrouwdheid, gezamenlijkheid en zorgzaamheid uit, die zowaar zomaar kunnen ontroeren. Het overstijgt de virtuositeit van hun kunsten.

Zien of niet zien?

Van de transparante en spektakelgerichte verhouding tussen performer en publiek in het traditionele circus via de poëtische verhouding vol verbeelding tussen regisseur en publiek van het nieuwe circus naar, ja naar wat eigenlijk? Wat

imagination between director and audience in contemporary circus, to... well, to what exactly? What do the performances at Subcase tell us about the way contemporary circus deals with its audience? Are we paid attention to? Are we included? Do we have clapping hands or feeling hearts?

There is no definitive answer. Like theatre, which has not stopped evolving since Brecht broke down that fourth wall, circus is also still changing. The diversity that is therefore created is not exclusive. In contemporary circus, a performance in a small circus tent starring an ageing clown is as sound and acceptable as a performance with 50 minutes of juggling. The choice whether or not to make use of the fourth wall is made for each performance separately.

The transparency in traditional circus is inseparable from the circus arts. It is great to keep an open communication with the audience. At the same time, *Knitting Peace* by Cirkus Cirkör demonstrates the importance of making clear choices about the message that is being communicated to the audience when the production charts a course between the spectacle-oriented traditional circus and the visual dramaturgy of contemporary circus. For now, *Knitting Peace* is stuck between many thematic impulses and messages, from 'human struggle' to 'we should strive for world peace'. The ambition is there, but the performance's execution falls short. Inquisitive minds may give way to wandering thoughts and questioning faces.

Performances like *Maiurta* and *Between Someones* are loyal to the traditions of the circus arts, but also engage with the new possibilities of contemporary circus. Their sincerity and humanity permits the spectator to recognise himself and to be moved. There is still room for imagination, which makes the performances potentially richer than a performance built only from physical skill. The audience is taken into consideration, recognised – as clapping hands, yes, but also as thinking minds and feeling hearts.

vertellen de voorstellingen in Subcase ons over de manier waarop het hedendaagse circus omgaat met het publiek? Worden we gezien? Worden we betrokken? Zijn we klappende handen of voelende harten?

Er is geen sluitend antwoord. Net zoals in het theater de ontwikkeling niet gestopt is na Brecht, is het circus nog volop in verandering. In de diversiteit die aan het ontstaan is, is er geen sprake van 'of-of'. In het hedendaagse cirkel kan een voorstelling in een kleine circustent over een ouderwordende clown net zo goed bestaan als een voorstelling met vijftig minuten jongleren. Keuzes over speelstijl met of zonder vierde wand worden per voorstelling gemaakt.

De transparantie van het traditionele circus is onlosmakelijk verbonden met de circusdiscipline. Het is een groot goed om de communicatie met het publiek zo open te houden. Tegelijkertijd laat *Knitting Peace* van Cirkus Cirkör zien hoe belangrijk het is om op die gulden middenweg tussen het spektakelgerichte van het traditionele circus en de beeldende dramaturgie van het nieuwe circus, heldere keuzes te maken in wat je wilt overbrengen op het publiek. Nu blijft de voorstelling steken op heel veel thematische aanzetten van 'menselijke worsteling' tot 'streven naar wereldvrede'. Er wordt hoog ingezet, maar in de uitwerking valt Cirkus Cirkör door de de mand. Associërende hoofden worden dan vooral dwalende gedachten en vragende gezichten.

Voorstellingen als *Maiurta* en *Between Someones* blijven trouw aan hun circusachtergrond maar tonen ook nieuwe mogelijkheden van transparantie in het hedendaagse circus. Hun oprechtheid en menselijkheid maken dat de toeschouwer zich kan herkennen en kan laten raken. Er blijft ruimte voor verbeelding, waardoor de voorstelling in potentie over meer gaat dan de prestatie van het fysieke kunnen. We worden gezien, maar dan niet alleen als klappende handen, maar ook als associërende hoofden en voelende harten.

Captivating the Impossible

EVA POMARES

"The circus defies common sense in order to create the possibility of impossible things and to give the audience a special experience." This is how Marcel Escolano (Los Galindos) describes the spirit of the circus people that drew us into the travelling tents when I was a girl. At the time, a lorry would drive through the streets of my town advertising the 'magic' of the circus. Under the tightly fastened big top, we were left speechless by the comic absurdity of the clowns, the skill of the jugglers, and the daring of the trapeze artists and animal trainers. Today, almost nothing of that remains. Young circus performers may occasionally idealise the anarchic freedom of those old, nomadic companies, but business costs, administrative difficulties and especially social evolution have led to the emergence of a new generation of artists that have transformed the circus. Since the 1970s, the circus has been evolving constantly. With a firm commitment to updating concepts and techniques, taking from theatre's stage design and language, from dance choreography, from new developments of old circus techniques, etcetera, artists have tried to ensure the circus' survival with shows that continue to defy the common sense of spectators and performers at the same time. Circus companies are faced with audiences that no longer belong to one particular demographic, and that carry expectations which have become as varied and as complex as the enriching new approaches the companies take in creating their shows.

The generational connection

At 45 years of age, Marcel Escolano is a veteran of the world of the circus. Like other artists now rethinking their careers, maturity has led him to no longer attempt the most complicated somersaults. "Performers are growing up and some are attending schools like the one in Montreal to reinvent themselves as directors," says Camilla Damkjaer, a researcher and teacher

La captivació de l'impossible

EVA POMARES

"El circ desafia el sentit comú per tal de crear la possibilitat de fer coses impossibles i viure experiències especials". Marcel Escolano (Los Galindos) descriu així l'esperit amb què, quan jo era una nena, la gent del circ ens atreïa sota les carpes ambulants. Aleshores, una furgoneta ho publicitava pels carrers del meu poble com la "màgia" del circ. Sota una vela ben aferrada, l'absurditat còmica dels pallassos, la destresa dels malabaristes, i la perillositat dels trapezistes i del treball amb animals ens deixaven bocabadats. Quasi res queda de tot allò. Els joves artistes de circ pot ser que, de tant tant, juguin a idealitzar la llibertat anàrquica de les companyies nòmades. Però els costos empresarials, les dificultats administratives i, sobretot, l'evolució social han propiciat el naixement d'una nova generació d'artistes que han renovat el circ. Des dels anys 70, es troba en permanent evolució. Amb la voluntat ferma d'actualitzar conceptes i tècniques, tot agafant d'aquí i d'allà: de l'escenografia i el discurs del teatre, dels moviments de la dansa, de l'aprofundiment de les tècniques del vell circ.... És a dir, d'arreu de les arts escèniques. El desig és garantir la pervivència del circ amb uns espectacles que puguin continuar desafiant el sentit comú de l'espectador i de l'artista alhora. Les companyies tenen davant uns públics que han deixat de ser generals per esdevenir tant variats i complexos en expectatives com ho són la riquesa de propostes dels espectacles.

La connexió generacional

Als seus 45 anys, Marcel Escolano és un veterà al món del circ. Com a d'altres artistes que ara es replantegen la carrera, la maduresa l'ha obligat a allunyar-se de les tombarelles més complicades. "Els artistes es fan grans i, alguns, acudeixen a escoles com la de Montreal a reciclar-se en directors", assenyala Camilla Damkjaer, professora a la Universitat

at the University of Stockholm. Since its foundation in 1991, Escolano has chosen to pour his expertise into his company, Los Galindos, but not just as director, as he is also the heart and soul and main artist of this prestigious Catalan group. Professionals like Escolano demonstrate the vitality of a sector that connects generations of artists and audiences.

Maiurta is Los Galindos' most recent show. "It doesn't mean anything in any language, but it does sound like 'my tent' in a Mongolian dialect," Escolano explained. In this way, it is like Los Galindos, a name which evokes traditional family-based companies, but which isn't a family name at all – and was chosen simply in order to captivate the imagination of those who come into Escolano's creative universe. Unlike some young Europeans coming from circus schools, Escolano's personal and professional background is informed by many different sources, all of which contribute to *Maiurta*. Standing before the audience's curious gaze, dressed as an old clown and moving with strident gestures, his face white with flour, he energetically chops, shakes and kneads bread dough. "I have been a baker, a trapeze artist and a classic clown... all that is *Maiurta*." His skilled hands turn the dough into a doll that ends up swinging on the solitude of the trapeze with a dignified pride.

The support network

For its performances in Sweden the Los Galindos tent has been placed inside a warehouse space at Subtopia, a 'creative cluster' located only 20 minutes from Stockholm which covers 40,000 square metres and hosts 50 companies, organisations, and educational and professional institutions working in circus and film. In contrast to organisations working in the often poorly funded circus sectors of other countries, Subtopia has an enviable yearly budget of €5 million, half of it coming from public subvention. The direct return on investment from local, state and European aid is close to 25%.

An exchange of creativity flows between festivals and artists in the Subtopia network, but the work that happens on-site is also

d'Estocolm. Ell ha optat per abocar l'expertesa a la direcció de Los Galindos. Però no sols en director, perquè també és l'ànima i l'artista principal d'aquesta companyia catalana de prestigi, creada el 1991. De fet, professionals com Escolano evidencien la vitalitat de qualsevol sector, tot connectant generacions d'artistes i públics. Ahora, el mercat amplia la gamma de les propostes escèniques.

Maiurta és el darrer espectacle de Los Galindos. "No significa res en cap llengua, però sona com a la meua tenda en un dialecte mongòlic", explica Escolano. Com Los Galindos, nom que evoca les companyies familiars tradicionals. En realitat, està triat a l'atzar en un exercici destinat a captivar la imaginació dels qui entren al seu univers creatiu. Al contrari que alguns dels joves europeus provinents de les escoles de circ, Escolano espigola en la pròpia trajectòria vital i professional. I la condensa fins a conformar aquest espectacle. Davant les mirades encuriosides, es planta un vell pallaso de gest estrident que, amb la cara blanca de farina, pica, espolsa i recargola enèrgicament una massa de pa. "He estat forner, trapezista i pallaso clàssic... tot això és *Maiurta*". Les hàbils mans convertiran la massa en un ninot. El seu alter ego s'acabarà gronxant en la solitud del trapezi, mentre busca amb orgull digne la complicitat del públic.

La xarxa de suport

La tenda de Los Galindos està encabida en una nau de Subtopia. Aquest clúster creatiu, situat a vint minuts escassos d'Estocolm (al municipi de Botkyrka) abasta 40.000 metres quadrats que allotgen 50 companyies, organitzacions, institucions educatives i professionals del circ i del cinema. Vista la situació del suport al circ a d'altres països europeus, Subtopia compta amb un envejable pressupost anual de 5 milions d'euros, la meitat en ajuts públics. El retorn de la inversió directa dels ajuts locals, estatals i europeus és de prop del 25%.

A la xarxa Subtopia hi flueix l'intercanvi de creativitat entre festivals i artistes i, el què és igualment decisiu, la connecta amb el negoci. "*Maiurta*" és un dels espectacles exhibits al



Los Galindos – Maiurta © Petter Hellman

characterised by a strong connection to business. In the case of *Maiurta*, it is one of the shows featured at Subcase 2013. Created five years ago, Subcase is a professional circus market for Scandinavian companies, organised by Subtopia. This year, 28 companies participated, with around 80 programmers from different European countries taking in seven full shows and nine works in progress. This year three companies from outside Scandinavia – Los Galindos, EIA and the Otradnoie Project – were included in the Subcase programme as part of a transnational cooperation supported by the Institut Ramon Llull, a Catalan institution promoting Catalan culture, and the FiraTàrrrega festival. The aim was to internationalise Catalan circus companies, and the presence of these three companies was the second part of a mutual exchange: last year, Swedish companies were the special guests at FiraTàrrrega. By all accounts the exchange was positive for the Catalans, with promoters and professional

Subcase 2013. Nascut fa cinc anys, és el mercat professional del circ per a les companyies nòrdiques organitzat per Subtopia. A l'edició d'enguany, hi han participat 28 companyies. Uns 80 programadors de diferents països europeus han vist 7 espectacles complets i 9 "work in progress". El Subcase ha proporcionat contactes amb els promotors, intercanvis creatius entre companyies i artistes, i formació als professionals sobre projectes de circ al Regne Unit, França, Suècia i Catalunya. Los Galindos, juntament amb EIA i Projecte Otradnoie són les úniques companyies de fora d'Escandinàvia presents en aquest Subcase. És la cooperació transnacional la que els ha portat a Suècia, impulsada per la institució catalana de promoció de la cultura catalana Institut Ramon Llull i el festival Fira Tàrrrega. L'objectiu és internacionalitzar les companyies de circ catalanes. L'any passat, van ser les companyies sueques les convidades destacades a Fira Tàrrrega, el resultat d'una feina que busca complicitats empresarials i artístiques. El

colleagues enthusiastically applauding the three companies' performances. According to Ingrid Esperanza (the Otradnoie Project): "we have had the chance to learn about another way of working, with a very different sense of humour. Moreover, we have made very good contacts through our show, which we hope will bear fruit over time."

The construction of a European exhibition space that grants more visibility to circus – still a minority sector within the performing arts – is also a priority for platforms like Circus Next. Created last year and coordinated from Paris, this transnational cooperation project grants financial and artistic support to new generations of European circus artists. Each year it selects a dozen projects and awards them €10,000 and production support. Thus, through residencies and laboratories, Circus Next encourages the creation and exchange of artistic experiences. Furthermore, it will offer its laureates a platform to present their projects in Paris in April 2013 for an audience of 250 professionals.

Providing support to young artists is also one of Subcase's objectives – paying special attention, as you would expect, to native ones. "Eighteen circus students graduate from DOCH – The University of Dance and Circus – every second year. We want to keep these artists in Sweden. They were brought up in our system and that costs the state money. The Swedish Arts Council is likely to support these companies since the state has paid for their education," explained Kiki Muukkonen, the artistic programming director for Subtopia's venue Hangaren, a year-round performance space that also hosts Subcase. Kiki gave the example of the company Chipmunk Forge, formed by two students from DOCH, who took to the Subcase stage to perform the debut of their show *Phågel – The best Cat and Bird show ever!*.

And of course there are many other companies based in Scandinavia represented in the Subcase programme. A Swede named Patrik Elmnert, a graduate of the circus school in Uppsala, and an American artist named Wes

balanç per les catalanes ha estat positiu, ja que promotors i col·legues de professió han aplaudit amb ganes les representacions de les tres companyies. En paraules d'Ingrid Esperanza i D2Mau (Projecte Otradnoie), "hem tingut ocasió de conèixer una altra manera de treballar, amb un sentit de l'humor molt diferent. A més, hem fet molts bons contactes pel nostre espectacle, que esperem que amb el temps fructifiquin".

La construcció d'un espai europeu d'exhibició, que atorgui més volum a un sector minoritari dins les arts escèniques és una prioritat també per a plataformes com Circus Next. Aquest projecte de cooperació transnacional, nascut l'any passat i coordinat des de París, atorga suport econòmic i artístic a les noves generacions d'autors de circ europees. Cada any, selecciona una dotzena de projectes, als que dota amb 10.000 euros i altres eines de suport. Així, a través de residències i laboratoris, Circus Next fomenta la creació i l'intercanvi d'experiències artístiques. I els ofereix una plataforma de difusió, mitjançant la presentació dels espectacles a París per a una audiència de 250 professionals.

Atorgar una empenta als joves artistes és també un dels objectius del Subcase. Lògicament, amb especial atenció als autòctons. "Cada dos anys, es graduen 18 estudiants en circ. Volem mantenir els artistes a Suècia, perquè han estat educats en el nostre sistema i això costa diners a l'Estat", ens explica Kiki Muukkonen, la directora artística. Així, la companyia Chipmunk Forge, formada per dues alumnes de l'escola de Subtopia, ha pogut pujar a l'escenari del Subcase per estrenar "Phågel".

El suec Patrik Elmnert, educat a la escola de circ d'Uppsala i el nordamericà Wes Peden, de pare malabarista i amb estudis a la universitat de Subtopia, són dos joves que van començar, fa cinc anys, a treballar plegats. I han aconseguit guanyar-se la vida amb els malabars. El seu "Between Someones" ha estat un dels triomfadors al Subcase. Tres quarts d'hora d'un espectacle sobri des del punt

Peden, a graduate of DOCH, are two young people who began working together five years ago and who have managed to earn a living from their art – juggling. Their show *Between Someonesons* turned out to be one of the biggest hits at Subcase: 45 minutes of sober spectacle (at least from a theatrical point of view) that manages to captivate audiences by creating an ambience in which virtuosity is almost taken for granted, thereby allowing the visual poetry of bodies and juggling in motion to fill the whole stage, echoing that old circus magic but updating it to a more sophisticated form. “We try to do something that’s beautiful to see: art for enjoyment’s sake, while also creating an atmosphere,” said Elmnert and Peden. *Between Someonesons* is an artistic creation that arises from pure technical exhibition and that strives to create a camaraderie with its audiences. “We explore different aesthetics, but the most difficult thing is how to explain this to audiences. They mostly expect tricks, because the modern circus is still not well known in Sweden.”

The eyes and the mind

European audiences now have a world of circus to explore and to choose from. The small tent that allowed Marcel Escolano to “touch the hearts and skins of the people” travels from professional markets to festivals along the roads of Europe. The company searching always for a specific audience: one ready to be a child and an adult at the same time, to “share” the anguishes and joys of life with an old clown. It is an audience that wants to get closer to the spirit of the traditional circus, recreated under the tent. “The clown is not a stereotype,” says Escolano. “Each one is different. The character never ends, because life changes. I hope I die on the stage. That would be marvellous!”

At the same time, in another part of Subtopia, very close to the Los Galindos tent, metres and metres of yarn, ropes and knots form the set of the show *Knitting Peace*. In the next two years the show’s company, Cirkus Cirkör, will take it on a world tour. This large-scale show is inspired by a global movement that invites people to



Cirkus Cirkör – *Knitting Peace* © Mats Bäcker

de vista escenogràfic. No obstant això, aconseguix atrapar l’audiència amb la creació d’un ambient en què el virtuosisme s’acaba donant quasi per fet i deixa així pas a que la poesia visual dels cossos i els malabars en moviment ompli tot l’escenari. Ecos més sofisticats i totalment actualitzats de la vella màgia del circ. “Intentem fer una cosa bonica de veure. Art per gaudir, tot creant una atmosfera”, assenyalen Elmnert i Peden als periodistes. Una voluntat de creació artística, que s’eleva des de la pura exhibició tècnica i anhela trobar la complicitat del públic. “Explorem diferent estètiques, però el més difícil és explicar-ho als espectadors. Esperen sobretot trucs, perquè el circ modern a Suècia encara no és ben conegut”.

create knitted pieces and then hang them in public places, asserting the value of knitting as an art at the same time as decorating the streets. But *Knitting Peace's* director, Tilde Björfors, aims to go further. She tells us that the show is inspired by such actions as "those of the Israeli women who knit for peace with the Palestinians", adding that "it is not about questions and answers, but about art and life woven together – and about the life of a circus performer". These are ambitious and legitimate aims which the resulting show cannot fulfil: live music that is impossible to listen to washes over a series of leaps, twists and pirouettes that share no line of connection. There are few traces of beauty here; likewise no search for camaraderie directed at the audience, and no capacity to pull the strings of the viewers' minds towards sustained thinking later on. Despite the artistic and conceptual vacuum, the sensational nature of *Knitting Peace* will surely captivate audiences as *Cirque du Soleil* has done, and it may even help to create new companies and products for an industry which, like any other, constantly needs new approaches.

Contemporary circus already forms part of the European cultural scene in terms of creative capacity, but is still far from bringing together all potential audiences. "Slowly, we're building an audience," says Kiki Muukkonen. Training in circus techniques is one of the keystones, but first another audience has to be educated: journalists and critics. The practical non-existence of press specialised in covering circus shows is an obstacle to the promotion and consolidation of the sector. This is why the European Union has launched the *Unpack the Arts* programme, aimed at training cultural journalists through residencies in different circus festivals and events. Through the project, visiting Subcase, I am able to share discoveries of circus companies and shows with nine colleagues from different countries. We exchange training experiences and are given a sweeping overview of the circus, gathering new knowledge so we can better inform public opinion.

Els ulls i la ment

Els espectadors europeus ara ja tenen molt de circ on triar i remenar. Les sogues de la petita carpa que permeten a Marcel Escolano "tocar el cor i la pell de la gent" es mouen per mercats professionals, festivals i carrers del continent a la recerca d'un públic concret. Aquell disposat a posar-se a la pell d'un nen i un adult alhora per "compartir" amb un vell pallasso les angoixes i alegries de la vida. Aquell que vol acostar-se a l'esperit del circ tradicional, recreat sota la carpa, per fitar-ne la passió per l'ofici en la intimitat. "El pallasso no és un estereotipus. Cadascú és diferent. El personatge mai s'acaba, perquè la vida canvia. Jo espero morir a la pista. Seria meravellós!".

En paral·lel, en una altra nau de Subtopia molt propera a la de Los Galindos, metres i metres de fil, sogues i nusos apuntalen l'espectacle "Teixint la pau". Els propers dos anys, la companyia *Cirkus Cirkök* la portarà de gira mundial. Aquest espectacle de gran format està inspirat en el moviment mundial dels afeccionats a teixir peces de ganxet per penjar-les després en accions de carrer, a camí entre la reivindicació del ganxet i la decoració. La seva directora, Tilde Björfors, vol anar més enllà. Assegura que la intencionalitat de l'espectacle es basa en accions "com les de les dones israelianes, que teixeixen per la pau dels palestins...". I hi afegeix: "No és sobre preguntes i respostes, sinó sobre l'art i la vida teixits. També la d'un artista de circ". Ambiciosa i legítima pretensió. Però una altra cosa és el resultat. La música en directe, impossible d'escoltar, envaeix salts, torsions i piruetes, que a més manquen de connexió argumental. Pocs rastres de bellesa, nul·la recerca de complicitat en direcció a les butaques i, encara menys, de capacitat per estirar els fils de la ment de l'espectador envers la reflexió posterior perseguida. Com sí assoleix, des d'una major modèstia, "Maiurta". Malgrat la buidor artística i conceptual, l'efectisme de "Teixint la pau" segurament atraparà audiències. Tal i com ho ha fet *Cirque du Soleil*. I pot ser n'ajudarà a crear de nous per a la resta de propostes d'una indústria que necessita, com qualsevol altra, nodrir-se de diferents productes.

The Swedish dance critic Örjan Abrahamsson gives us valuable hints in this regard: "Humans see in three dimensions. And we do so basically with the brain, and not the eyes." The plasticity of the circus makes it easier for it to be a prominent performing art in a century characterised by the impact of visual communication. The directness of gesture, often combined with an absence of spoken language (and its limitations), make it easier for circus to reach global audiences. It is contemporary because of the complexity granted to it by its mix of artistic languages. Now, with so many different artistic and entertainment approaches, the most difficult part not only lies in masterful juggling, but in captivating audiences that have little knowledge of contemporary circus languages with a story that arouses their emotions and challenges their common sense – audiences that want to be enraptured by the passionate skill, art and beauty of the show just as before. Abrahamsson's formula for writing an article about the circus is probably just as useful for audiences today: "Forget about language and do not try to capture it consciously. Just open your eyes and be honest with yourselves."

El circ contemporani ja forma part del panorama cultural europeu pel que fa a capacitat creativa, però encara està lluny de sumar tots els públics potencials. "Lentament, anem construint una audiència", remarca Kiki Muukkonen. La formació en els llenguatges del circ n'és una de les parets mestres. Però abans cal educar, també, un altra audiència: la dels periodistes i crítics. La pràctica inexistència de premsa especialitzada en cobrir espectacles de circ és una trava a la promoció i consolidació del sector. Per això, la Unió Europea ha engegat el programa Unpack the Arts, destinat a la formació de periodistes culturals, a través de residències en diferents festivals i esdeveniments de circ. Aquests dies, al Subcase comparteixo descobertes de companyies i espectacles de circ amb 9 col·legues de diferents països. Intercanviem experiències formatives en una visió panoràmica del circ que ens permeti acumular nous coneixements per a poder ser més competents a l'hora d'informar l'opinió pública. El crític de dansa suec Örjan Abrahamsson ens dóna valuoses pistes: "Els humans mirem en tres dimensions. I ho fem bàsicament amb el cervell, no amb els ulls". La plasticitat del circ li facilita ser una art escènica destacada en un segle caracteritzat per l'impacte de la comunicació visual. Amb la facilitat del gest, i, sovint, sense les limitacions de l'idioma pot arribar més fàcilment als públics globals. És modern per la complexitat que li atorga la mescla de llenguatges artístics. Ara, enmig de la proliferació ofertes artístiques i d'oci, el més difícil ja no és sols enlairar amb mestratge uns malabars. És seduir també amb una història que sotragui els sentiments i el sentit comú d'uns espectadors poc formats en els llenguatges contemporanis del circ. Però com abans, segurament disposats a que la destresa, la passió per l'art i la bellesa de l'espectacle els atrapin. La recepta d'Abrahamsson per a escriure un article sobre circ segurament serveix també als espectadors corrents. "Oblideu el llenguatge i no tracteu de captar-ho amb la consciència. Sols obriu els ulls i sigueu honestos amb vosaltres mateixos".

Traditional and Modern Circus: Differences and Connections?

IVAN JOVANOVIĆ

What is modern circus today? Clowns, trapeze artists and animals that leave the frightened audience breathless? Entertainers who travel in their wagons from town to town, bringing joy with them? Or is it an art that has yet to be precisely defined? One that hasn't yet been situated within the frameworks of the practices of dance, performance art or theatre?

Modern circus is art – and an art that is in the process of being redefined and reshaped as, with two opposing impulses, it attempts to distance itself from its 'entertainment' roots at the same time as it tries to tap into the best characteristics of that tradition. It is precisely this search for a new meaning and new form within the framework of the existing one that has resulted in the shows staged over the three days of Subcase, a trade fair for programmers and circus professionals. The programme is diverse in terms of style and genre, and indeed the shows reflect the search for a new circus and for a place in the family of stage art.

Before analysing the shows we must revisit the first question in this text: the dilemma over the definition of what modern circus is in relation to our collective memory of circus. But the image of traditional circus is no mere memory. The history of traditional circus is deeply rooted in social liberation: the circus was defined not only by its performances but by the freedom its artists had to spend their entire lives on the road, without any constraints or restraints. Since the late 18th Century, artists from other disciplines and forms have been fascinated by the skill of circus artists – their physical prowess and their willingness to risk their lives as they perform on the stage – but it wasn't until the second half of the 20th Century that this fascination resulted in collaboration, and

Tradicionalni i savremeni cirkus: gde su razlike a gde veze?

IVAN JOVANOVIĆ

Šta je savremeni cirkus danas? Klovnovi, artisti na trapezu i životinje koje oduzmaju dah uplašenoj publici? Zabavljači koji čergarski žive od grada do grada i donose radost? Ili umetnost koja tek treba precizno da se definiše i postavi u okvire izvođačkih praksi plesa, performansa, možda i pozorišta?

Savremeni cirkus sada je umetnost koja se definiše i formira pokušavajući da se, s jedne strane, distancira od „zabavljačkih“ korena, a s druge strane, iskoristi najbolje od tradicije i digne je na nivo cenjene izvođačke umetnosti percipirane kao i sve druge umetnosti. Upravo zbog ovog traganja za novim smislom i novom formom u okviru postojeće show-ovi koji su se mogle videti tokom tri dana Subcase-a, specijalizovanog marketa za bukere i cirkuske profesionalce, su bile stilski, žanrovski, sadržajno potpuno različiti i dočaravali su potragu za novim cirkusom i njegovim mestom u porodici scenskih umetnosti.

Ali pre same analize predstave moramo se opet vratiti na prvo pitanje postavljeno u ovom tekstu, a to je dilema o definiciji onoga što savremeni cirkus jeste i kolektivnog sećanja o istom. Slika o tradicionalnom cirkusu nije samo puko sećanje. Istorija tradicionalnog cirkusa i njegov položaj su duboko usađeni u iskustvo jedne od najslobodnijih scenskih umetnosti koja nije bila samo zasnovana na izvedbama već i na kompletnom načinu životu i slobodi da se ceo život provede na putu bez ikakvih ograničenja i stega kakve su postojale u zvaničnim izvođačkim umetnostima. Fascinacija prvenstveno veštinom cirkuskim umetnika, njihovim telesnim sposobnostima i spremnošću da rizikuju i svoje živote izvedeći scene fascinirala

in the combination of elements of circus with those of modern theatre and dance. In the 1970s circus got rid of animals, focusing instead on narrative and characters, and beginning to work with symbolic and thematic means of representation. And yet this modern circus did not entirely leave behind the traditional elements: even today contemporary circus is still based on the touchstones of the traditional circus, be it the disciplines (such as juggling or trapeze) or the nomadic way of life itself. The relationship between the classical perception of circus and the artform's contemporary reality is crucial in understanding and defining the new circus. The two look quite different, but are essentially the same, both trying to sustain a unique artistic form. An analysis of the shows at Subcase will make all this easier to understand, as the programme presents an interesting look at all kinds of modern, artistic circus as well as illuminating the differences between the modern approach and the traditional heritage, and showcasing the use of skills which today are taught at circus schools in the Nordic countries, in France and Russia and the rest of the world, but which are also still handed down generationally from artist to artist.

The shows staged at Subcase are proof that artists use elements of circus' traditional heritage as a foundation in their work, subsequently building on this by incorporating elements from other performing arts. Each show leads to a different destination, but we can say that most of the Subcase shows start from the traditional circus concept. This approach is successful because, by connecting with the audience's traditional perception of circus, the artists can build something new on the basis of something known, proven and trusted. The work is then combined with other arts to bring a fresh clarity in expression, style and meaning.

Perhaps the best example of a show presenting a 'mash-up' of various genres (least of them circus) is Ruby Rose's *EAT IT!*, a piece that focuses on a satirical critique of the ideas and attitudes forced to women by fashion magazines. By creating the characters of five women who communicate solely through phrases lifted from beauty

je umetnike još od njegovih početaka krajem 18. veka, a ta fascinacija je počela, sredinom dvadesetog veka, da uvodi cirkuske elemente u moderno pozorište i ples. Dakle, cirkus fascinira i uzbuđuje druge umetnosti već desetinama godina i bilo je samo pitanje vremena kada će se cirkus lišiti životinja, više se fokusirati na naraciju i karaktere i približiti se simboličkom i tematskom prikazivanju što je i desilo sedamdesetih godina prošlog veka. Ali savremeni cirkus se nije u potpunosti lišio tradicionalnih elemenata i dalje se zasniva na njima, bilo da su u pitanju žongleri ili umetnici na trapezu ili sam nomadski, čergarski način života. Ključno za definiciju novog cirkusa su upravo ti odnosi između klasične percepcije cirkusa i novog cirkusa koji izgledaju vrlo različito, a toliko isto, dok pokušaju da se ko-egzistencijom održe i stvore novu umetničku formu. Kroz analizu show-ova se lakše dolazi do ovih odgovora, a ono što je bilo na Subtopia Subcase-u nudi jedan interesantan pregled svih vrsta savremenog, umetničkog cirkusa i pokazuje različitosti modernog pristupa i tradicionalnog nasleđa koje se ne samo uči u cirkuskim akademijama u nordijskim zemljama, Francuskoj i Rusiji nego se prirodno prenosi sa umetnika na umetnika.

Prikazane predstave u Švedskoj pokazuju da umetnici koriste elemente tradicionalnog cirkuskog nasleđa da bi na njima sagradili svoju umetničku formu koja obično kombinuje elemente drugih izvođačkih umetnosti. Ovakva lutanja imaju različiti krajnji rezultat, ali se može reći da je najveći broj predstava zasnovan na konceptu tradicionalnog cirkusa. Ovo najbolje funkcioniše ne samo zbog jake veze sa tradicionalnom percepcijom cirkusa već i zato što, sa aspekta već poznatog, uspešnog grade novu formu kombinujući je sa drugim umetnostima i čineći je jasnom u izrazu, stilu i značenju.

Možda najveći „mish-mash“ različitih žanrova, a najmanje cirkusa, je show „Eat it“ produkcije Ruby Rose koja se fokusira na satiričnu kritiku ideja i koncepta života koji nude i forsiraju modni časopisi. Kroz likove 5 žena koje isključivo komuniciraju koristeći fraze iz modnih i časopisa za lepotu autori pokušavaju da prikažu apsurdnost sveta u kome je lepota najbitnija. Ovaj show i nije definisan kao cirkuski već kao

magazines, the artists try to reveal the absurdity of a world in which the way you look is the considered more important than anything. This show does not self-define as circus – it was described as a variety show on slimming – but in some ways it is the best indicator of a new road circus might take. *EAT IT!* combines several genres but principally uses stand-up comedy, and is defined as such in terms of its style, ideas and narrative. A torrent of jokes based on fashion magazines and on the absurdity of cosmetic surgery culminates in the final, almost burlesque, scenes of the show, which feature the characters of Jennifer and Beatrice, the owners of a beauty salon in Florida that touts cut-price cosmetic surgery. Along with a few ribald scenes in which the performers get naked, it all makes for an entertaining show. It could be placed in a theatre, in a circus, or in a bar. Its narrative moves from satire – from laughter and jokes – to the terrible, almost cathartic, truth of the senselessness of beauty as represented by the media. This variety show, as the authors call it, actually has only a few scenes that connect it to the circus: one where the trapeze artists climb on the stage décor and perform acrobatics, and a couple other moments of aerial performance. The rest is stand-up comedy, dance or physical burlesque.

EAT IT! for the most part doesn't contain the classical elements of circus, but it nonetheless very skilfully exploits another fundamental idea of the artform: entertainment. Since the show is entertaining, and is trying to be funny, this is the clearest link with circus art – an art also based on entertainment. Since its beginnings, circus has served as a form of entertainment that wows the audience with displays of skills and virtuosity. Skill is the fundamental basis of modern circus, and is the nexus where the links between the new and the traditional circus can be seen most clearly.

Between someonesons by Patrik & Wes is a show that has built its visual and scenographic language entirely on this argument: it's all a matter of skill. Patrik & Wes are jugglers who spend the 45 minutes of their show juggling as they move about the stage. They perform without any complex narrative structures, and without any sophisticated lighting or stage effects. Instead

varijete o mršavljenju i negde najbolje pokazuje u kakvom drugačijem pravcu cirkus može da ode. „Eat it“ je kombinacija nekoliko žanorva, prvenstveno stand up komedije i tako se stilski, idejno i narativno definiše. Gomila šala koje osnovu vuku iz već pomenutih časopisa, apsurdnih detalja o estetskim operacijama i njihovom značaju i poslednji, gotovom burleskni deo predstave u kome se pojavljuju likovi Dženifer i Beatris, vlasnica salona lepote na Floridi, koje propagiraju estetsku hirurgiju za siromašne kao i nekoliko scena gde se svaka od učesnica razgoliti čine zabavni show. On se može gledati i u pozorištu i u cirkusu i u baru, a njegov narativ vodi od smeha i šale preko užasne, gotovo katarzične istine o besmislu svega što se forsira u medijama a vezano je za lepotu. Ovaj, kako sami autori kažu, varijete ima samo dve scene koje imaju veze sa cirkusom: a to je kada se umetnice na trapezu penju na scensku konstrukciju i izvode kratke akrobacije. Ostalo je stand up komedija ili ples ili fizička burleska.

„Eat it“ nema klasične elemente cirkusa, ali vrlo vešto koristi jednu drugu, idejnu sponu cirkuske umetnosti, a to je zabava. Pošto je show zabavan i pokušava da bude duhovit ovo je najjasnija veza sa cirkuskom umetnošću koja je, takođe, zasnovana na zabavi. Cirkus je na svojim počecima i kasnije služio kao zabava koja bi prikazanom veštinom i grandioznošću iste trebalo da zadivi publiku. Veština je upravo ono što bi moglo biti, a i što jeste, osnova savremenog cirkusa i mesto na kome se najjasnije i najbolje vide veze tradicionalnog poimanja i forme cirkusa i novih tendencija u njima.

Show koji u potpunosti gradi svoj vizuelni i scenski jezik na prethodnoj tezi, to jest na veštini, je „Between someonesons“ Patrika i Wesa, žonglera koji tokom ove 45-to minutne predstave samo žongliraju krećući se u prostoru. Patrik i Ves izvode svoj show bez ikakvih složenih i komplikovanih narativnih tokova, svetlosnih ili scenografskih efekata ili elemenata drugih scenskih umetnosti. Oni su fokusirani isključivo na svoju veštnu koja je i narativ: počinju sa jednostavnim i lakim žonglerskim tačkama, nastavljaju ka složenijim da bi vrhunac njihovog nastupa bile tačke u kojima žongliraju sa 14



Ruby Rose – EAT IT! © Petter Hellman

they focus solely on their skill, which is a narrative in itself: they begin with easy and simple juggling acts and progress to more complex ones. The show culminates with acts that see them juggle 14 clubs between them, moving about the stage as they do so. The simple but astonishing skill, the craft, is what attracts the audience: the spectators watch the juggling without daring to breathe for an hour. The juggling never becomes monotonous, though juggling is a niche circus form without much content. Patrik & Wes have managed to create a strong link between old and new circus, foregrounding a skill everyone is familiar with against a simple stage backdrop. The response of the audience to the performers and the performers to the audience is a pure and clear exchange of energy that works at the levels of emotion *and* spectacle. This exchange is made all the better by its spontaneity and naturalness, as the performers lack any desire to elicit applause or support from the audience. The traditional circus drew people's attention because it was a place where they could see spectacular acts;

palica i simultano se kreću tako da upotrebljavaju i svoja tela u procesu prikazivanja. Jednostavna, ali zadivljujuća zanatska veština je ono što privlači publiku i tera je da bez treptaja gleda sat vremena žongliranja koji nikako ne bivaju monotoni iako je žongliranje kratak i ne toliko sadržajan cirkuski element. Patrik i Ves su na najbolji način napravili jaku vezu između starog i novog cirkusa stavivši u prvi plan svima poznatu veštinu u jednostavno scensko okruženje. Reakcija publike i reakcija izvođača, Patrika i Vesa, žoglerskog dueta, je čista i jasna razmena energije koja funkcioniše na emotivnom i nivou spektakla. Ovakva razmena je utoliko bolja jer je spontana i prirodna bez želje izvođača da provociraju aplauze i podršku od publike. Cirkus je i privukao pažnju jer su se samo tamo mogle videti spektakularne stvari, a Patrik i Ves su veoma jednostavno iskoristili svoje veštine i pozicionirali predstavu samo oko njih sa željom da uživanje u žongliranju prenesu i na publiku. Na ovom primeru se ne može videti nešto od novog cirkusa jer je veština univerzalna, bila ona nova ili stara.

Patrik & Wes put their skills to simple use, positioning the show around themselves alone, with the intent of transferring the joy of juggling to the audience. This example does not showcase any elements of new circus, because the skill is universal, be it new or old.

Knitting Peace – by one of the biggest and best known circuses in Europe, Sweden's Cirkus Cirkör – is a striking example of a piece that adopts a highly aestheticised combination of old and new circus. Amid a set that plays with the symbolism of fabric, artists perform spectacular acrobatic feats such as trapeze work, a high wire unicycle act during which the artist plays musical instruments, and acrobatics using a large ball made of thread... The artists all evince superior skill and enviable physical prowess, serving as a metaphor for the human will to achieve the impossible. This kind of a show combines commercial, spectacular circus, of the style popularised by the Canadian group Cirque du Soleil, with a clear theme and artistic goal, striving to transcend mere visual spectacle. Excellent stage décor and costumes, ambient music, and high production values make *Knitting Peace* an excellent example of modern circus. The link with tradition is clear: spectacular skills that attract the audience, and a theatrical approach to the staging, narrative and symbolism of the show. And yet *Knitting Peace* is a mix 'n' match piece, sufficiently vague in every sense to be called theatre, and not pure enough for classical circus.

So what is the best example of circus tradition meeting the new approach (what we could call the 'stage approach')? The show *Maiurta* by the Catalan circus troupe Los Galindos is founded on an old, almost quixotic conception of street circus and the clown's act. An ageing clown, Marcel Escolano, performs the standard acts of the circus clown: the gag with the suitcase that doesn't open, the gag where the clown topples down from a chair, the travel gag, the going-to-bed gag – but, in light of the clown's age, the show works as a tongue-in-cheek piece where the artist ridicules himself as he travels retrospectively down the road of his life. All the elements of classical circus are present and correct, but they are all ridiculed from the point

Najupečatljiviji primer visoko estetizovane kombinacije starog i novog cirkusa je show „Knitting Piece“ jednog od najvećih i najpoznatijih cirkusa u Evropi, švedskog Cirkus Cirkora. U simboličkom scenskom prikazu tkanja koje je metafora za stremljenja i pokušaje da se postigne nemoguće artisti izvode spektakularne akrobatske zahvate kao što su skakanje na visokim trapezima, vožnja bicikla na žici i sviranje instrumenta u isto vreme, akrobacije na velikoj lopti od tkalčkog konpca pri čemu prikazuju ne samo vrhunsku veštinu već i zavidne fizičke sposobnosti. Ova vrsta show-a je kombinacija komercijalnog, spektakularnog cirkusa, kakav je kanadski Circus de Soleil, sa jasnom temom i umetničkim ciljem koji pokušava da prevaziđe puki spektakl u vizuelnom smislu. Odlična scenografija i kostim, kao i ambijentalna muzika i visoka produkcija čine „Knitting piece“ primerom modernog cirkusa. Veza sa tradicijom je jasna: spektakularna veštine koja privlači publiku i teatarski pristup sceni, naraciji i simbolici show-a. Ipak, i „Knitting piece“ je kombinacija svega i svačega, ali dovoljno nedorečen u svakom smislu da bi se mogao nazvati pozorištem, a nedovoljno čist da bi bio klasičan cirkus.

U kom primeru je onda cirkus spojio najbolje od tradicije i novog, može se reći, scenskog pristupa? Katalonski Cirkus Los Galindos sa show-om „Maiurta“ počiva na starom konceptu, gotovo donkijhotovskom, uličnom cirkusu i klovnovskoj tački. Klovna u godinama, Marcel Escolano, izvodi standardne tačke cirkuskog klovna: geg sa koferom koji se ne otvara, geg sa stolicama sa kojih klovna pada, geg sa putovanjima, geg sa odlaskom na spavanje ali pošto je već u godinama show funkcioniše kao ironijski otklon i ismevanje samog umetnika kroz retrospekcijski put kroz njegov život. Svi elementi klasičnog cirkusa su tu, ali ismevani iz svetonazora jednog klovna. Čak i skok sa trapeza, jedna od najspektakularnijih cirkuskih tačaka, u njegovoj interperetaciji je ismejan jer se i sam Marcel užasno plaši visine i trapeza. Ali klovna Marcel ne ismeva samo cirkusu kao umetnosti ili cirkusu kao svoj životni *credo*. On ismeva i upornu determinisanost pravog cirkuskog umetnika da nikada ne odustaje od svog načina života; baš kao što Marsel živi nomadski, izvodeći svoju predstavu dva puta

of view of the clown. Even the flying trapeze, one of the most spectacular circus acts, is made ridiculous in his interpretation, because Marcel himself is terribly afraid of heights and of the trapeze. And yet Marcel the clown does not laugh at circus as art or at circus as his life *credo*. He ridicules the stubborn determination of a true circus artist who never relinquishes his way of life, just as Marcel lives a nomadic existence, performing his show twice a day in squares and street festivals throughout Europe. *Maiurta* is not only an excellent show with a clear meaning: it is the best indicator of what modern circus can be – it has a foundation in the old, traditional circus but has also a new story to tell, defined in narrative and in symbolic terms, and this serves as the core around which the show is built.

The most successful performances based on traditional circus are those that use the audience's familiarity with traditional circus as a foundation, and then upon that build the superstructure of an artistic message – be it a personal, introspective voyage through life, as is the case with the Los Galindos show, or a pure, almost childlike enchantment with the skill itself, as is the case with Patrik & Wes. The differences between the shows we saw are both big and small: from humorous stand-up that has very little of circus in it (*EAT IT!*), to a conceptual approach to high art in which circus is a tool used to tell a symbolic, theatrical tale (*Knitting Peace*), to pure and emotional stage skill (*Maiurta*). All this defines circus as a form of art which is paradoxically trying to escape the traditional image of the clowns, jugglers and animals, at the same time as it relies on tradition to bring audiences to the circus in the first place. That is why the shows where the parallel between the old and the new is clear are the best. Differences are what make the modern circus an art: the ability to raise the tradition and the basic emotion engendered by circus to a higher cognitive and symbolic level. Such shows are much more effective than those that present a new form or add other forms of stage art to the mix, attempting to create a work of art but in fact forgetting the the fundamentals of the art itself.

Having seen the shows at Subcase, we can conclude that circus is still searching for its

dnevno na trgovima i uličnim festivalima širom Evrope. Ne samo da je kvalitetan i značenjski jasan, show „Maiurta“ najbolje pokazuje šta moderni cirkus može biti: osnova u starom, tradicionalnom cirkusu sa novom, narativno i simbolički, definisanom pričom oko koje se gradi show.

Izvedbe zasnovane na tradicionalnom cirkusu su najbolje i najjasnije uspele da sagrađe svoj izraz na predznanju publike o cirkusu koji je nadograđen umetničkom porukom bilo da je to lični, introspekcijiski put kroz život, kao u predstavi trupe Los Galindos ili čista, gotovo dečija, tehnika i čar same veštine kao što je slučaj u primeru Patrika i Vesa. Razlike između svih pogledanih predstava su velike i male; humoristički stand up koji ima jako malo cirkusa u sebi (*Eat it*), konceptualni pristup visokoj umetnosti u kojoj je cirkus u najboljem smislu oruđe da se ispriča teatarska priča sa simbolikom istog (*Knitting piece*) ili čista i emotivna veština na sceni koja je pomenuta u prethodnom pasusu. Sve ovo definiše cirkus kao umetnost koja, paradoksalno, pokušava da pobegne od tradicionalne slike o klovnovima, artistima, žonglerima i životinjama koje stoje na jednoj nozi, ali iz tradicije jedino može da opravda svoje postojanje i smisao pošto publika zna šta je cirkus i vođena svojim iskustvom to i očekuje da vidi. Zato najbolje i funkcionišu show-ovi u kojima je paralela između starog i novog jasna. A razlike su ono što savremeni cirkus čini umetnošću: sposobnost da se tradicija i bazična emocija koju cirkus proizvodi digne na viši, saznajni i simbolički, nivo. I takvi show-ovi su daleko upečatljiviji od onih koji novom formom ili mešanjem drugih scenskih umetnosti pokušavaju da naprave umetničko delo zapostavljajući osnovu same umetnosti.

Nakon pogledanih show-ova na Subcase-u u okviru „Unpack the arts“ projekta može se zaključiti da cirkus i dalje traga za svojim mesto na umetničkoj sceni. Dovoljno je zaključiti i preko leksike da se sve tek definiše; cirkuske predstave se ne nazivaju „predstavama“ u teatarskom smislu već „show“ što jasno govori da umetnička pozadina i karakter cirkusa tek treba da budu jasno definisani u umetničkom smislu jer sama reč „show“ implicira zabavu. Dosta je lutanja u

rightful place within the art scene. The language itself shows that nothing has been defined yet. Circus performances are not called 'performances' as they would be in a theatre, but 'shows': this is a clear indication that circus has yet to be recognised as an artform, as the word 'show' implies it is entertainment. There is a lot of divergence in terms of form, style and meaning, but the future of circus will certainly depend on the indelible emotion engendered when an audience watches honest play and skill. These two elements are already present in the collective memory, and the audience will always respond to them if performed with commitment, passion and sincere desire. This has been the fundamental basis of circus since antiquity, and the form will continue to exist as long as human civilisation survives. Indeed, this is why the link between modern and traditional circus is so crucial. One cannot exist without the other, and together they create art – art that can, thanks to its spectacular nature and lively stage presence, representing everything and transcending mere tricks and trapeze leaps. Circus provides us with a comprehensive way of understanding reality and life as a game. The game itself produces pure art, be it spectacularly commercial or symbolically strong and progressive in style.

Only one thing is true of modern circus today: it has the makings of one of the most exciting forms of stage art. Only in one condition: if it remains circus.

smislu forme, stila, značenja, ali ono što će cirkus sigurno ostaviti živim je neizbrisiva emocija koja se stvara pri posmatranju iskrene igre i veštine. Ova dva elementa su u kolektivnom sećanju i publika na njih mora reagovati ukoliko su izvedeni sa posvećenošću, strašću i iskrenom željom. Na tim osnovama cirkus postoji još od antičkih vremena i postojaće dokle god bude bilo ljudske civilizacije i zato je veza modernog cirkusa i tradicionalnog poimanja ključna. Jedno bez drugog ne mogu da postoje, a jedno sa drugim čine umetnost. Umetnost koja zahvaljujući svojoj spektakularnosti i scenskoj živosti može da prikaže sve što poželi i pokaže kako cirkuska umetnost nisu samo trikovi i skokovi na trapezu već kompletan način poimanja stvarnosti i života kao procesa igre i spoznaje kroz tu igru. A sama igra proizvodi čistu umetnost, bila ona spektakularno komercijalna ili simbolički jaka i napredna u izrazu.

Za moderan cirkus danas se može reći samo jedno: ima priliku da postane jedna od najuzbudljivijih scenskih umetnosti. Ukoliko i dalje ostane cirkus.

Girls shake off constipation

MATTI LINNAVUORI

I was the only critic in our group who liked Chipmunk Forge's performance *Phågel – The best Cat and Bird show ever!*. I like it when an artwork feels like a fresh discovery – when something is so new that I can still see it assuming its artistic form. Other people might think that this kind of openness is incompleteness, but I feel that the work can be complemented by my own experiences, feelings and ideas. On the other hand, finished works are not to my taste: often they're so highly polished that they have to be accepted in their entirety, swallowed like medicine or spat out.

I am not so naive that I really regard works as being incomplete. On the contrary, a feeling of openness requires that the director finds the same wavelength as the performers. In the circus – in making it as well as watching it – it is forgivable to assume that the strenuous physicality of the genre will automatically bring the spectator into the moment as they feel its danger, but in *Phågel* the performers are not just present physically but also in an intellectual and playful way.

These kinds of fine moments carry the feeling that one could, somehow, completely express onstage what life is all about, yet every time this feat is attempted, when a firmly set intention takes over, the revelation declines into an explanation. The point comes clearly across, but at the same time that point is something the audience already knew and it serves only to strengthen their enlightened attitude. Here I am referring to another performance from Subcase, *EAT IT!*, which also displayed and studied female energies.

Who are they?

'Phågel' is a funny spelling of the Swedish word for 'bird'. The performers are the Swedish women Klara Mossberg and Lisa Angberg, who also created the work together with the Finnish

Tytöt karistavat ummetuksen

MATTI LINNAVUORI

Ainoana kriitikkojen ryhmästämme pidin Chipmunk Forgen esityksestä *Phågel*. Pidän siitä, kun taideteoksessa on tuore löytämisen tuntu. Jotain on havaittu niin vastikään, että voin yhä nähdä, kuinka se on saamassa taiteellisen muotonsa. Toisten mielestä tällainen avoimuus ehkä on keskeneräisyyttä. Minut se saa täydentämään teosta omilla kokemuksillani, tunteillani ja älylläni. Sitä vastoin viimeistellyt esitykset eivät niinkään ole minun makuuni. Ne ovat usein siinä määrin hiottuja, että ne on hyväksyttävä kaikkineen, kuin lääke nielaistava tai sylkäistävä pois.

En sentään ole niin naiivi, että pitäisin teoksia oikeasti keskeneräisinä. Päinvastoin, avoimuuden tuntu edellyttää sitä, että ohjaaja löytää yhteisen vireen esiintyjien kanssa. Sirkuksessa – niin tehdessä kuin katsoessa – on anteeksiannettavaa luulla, että lajin ankara fyysisyys tuo automaattisesti mukanaan ainutkertaisen tämänhetkisyden, vaaran tunnun, mutta *Phågel*issa esiintyjät ovat läsnä fyysisyyden lisäksi myös älyssä ja kujeellisuudessa.

Tuollaisina hienoina hetkinä tuntuu, että näyttämöltä voisi tyhjentävästi ilmoittaa, mistä maailmassa on kyse. Aina kun sitä sitten yritetään, siis kun määrätietoisuus ylioittaa teosta, niin ilmoitus pienenee selittämiseksi. Pointti tulee selväksi, mutta samalla pointista tulee sellainen, jonka äärellä yleisön on helppo vahvistaa valveutunutta käsitystä, jota se osasi helliä jo ennestään. Subcasen ohjelmistosta tarkoitan nyt esitystä *Eat It*, joka *Phågel*in tavoin näytti ja pohti tyttöenergiaa.

Keitä he ovat

Phågel on hassusti kirjoitettua ruotsia ja tarkoittaa lintua. Esiintyjät ovat ruotsalaiset Klara Mossberg ja Lisa Angberg. He myös kirjoittivat esityksen yhdessä suomalaisen ohjaajansa Maksim Komaron kanssa. Käsikirjoitus sai

director Maksim Komaro. The script was inspired by the American James Kochalka's adult comic *Peanutbutter & Jeremy's Best Book Ever* (2004).

Tightrope acrobat Mossberg and floor acrobat Angberg graduated from Stockholm's circus university DOCH in 2010 and founded a group called Chipmunk Forge – whatever that may mean. Perhaps it means their voices are forced into a high pitch, but then again perhaps not, as the group's logo has a stylized map of Sweden and Finland side by side.

The group's first work, the hour-long *Phågel – the Best Cat and Bird Show Ever*, received its premiere in Helsinki in April 2012. It is not a children's performance, like a live version of Sylvester and Tweetie Pie; it is intended for over-12s.

Mossberg is the bird and Angberg the cat. When, in the beginning, they enter from behind a white, see-through curtain, Mossberg has a yellowish brown removable beak and Angberg a furry headdress with cat's ears. They present themselves to the audience by saying "I am a cat" and "I am a bird". It is so foolishly simple that it is absurd. Angberg says that she told the director in the first rehearsal that there is no way she would speak on stage, yet the performance begins with a stand-up sketch. The makers wanted to experiment doing things that were out of their comfort zone. Perhaps *Phågel's* effect of a fragile balance was not achieved through an enormous amount of fine-tuning after all – perhaps it is true.

Poo calling

The following scene suits every taste, it is the great common denominator: poo. It is perhaps a parody of the kind of scene which intends to win the whole audience over to a performance. It is a parody because, despite its familiarity, poo brings up feelings of rejection, especially as *Phågel* plays with the subject for an exaggeratedly long length of time. The cat's stomach is aching with constipation. An animal perspective on defecation is surprising and refreshing.

The performance does not parallel humans with animals. It doesn't teach us to live more decently

alkuinnoituksensa yhdysvaltalaisen James Kochalkan aikuisten sarjakuvakirjasta *Peanutbutter & Jeremy's Best Book Ever* (2004).

Nuora-akrobaatti Mossberg ja lattia-akrobaatti Angberg valmistuivat Tukholman DOCH-sirkusyliopistosta 2010 ja loivat ryhmänsä nimeltä Chipmunk Forge ("maaorava-ahjo", mitä se sitten tarkoittaneekin, ehkä äänenkäsittelyä kimitykseksi; ehkei, sillä ryhmän logossa on vierekkäin tyylitelty Ruotsin ja Suomen kartat).

Ryhmän ensimmäinen teos, tunninkestoinen *Phågel – the Best Cat and Bird Show Ever* sai ensi-iltansa Helsingissä huhtikuussa 2012. Se ei ole lastenesitys, jonkinlainen Tipi ja Sylvesteri livenä, vaan tarkoitettu yli 12-vuotiaille.

Mossberg on lintu ja Angberg kissa. Kun he alussa tulevat valkoisen, läpikuultavan harsoesiripun takaa, Mossbergilla on kellanruskea irtonokka ja Angbergilla pörröinen, kissankorvainen päähine. He esittäytyvät katsomolle sanomalla, minä olen kissa, minä olen lintu. Se on niin typeryttävän yksinkertaista, että se on absurdia. Angberg kertoo sanoneensa ohjaajalle ensimmäisessä harjoituksessa, ettei missään tapauksessa puhu näyttämöllä, mutta niin vain esitys käynnistyy standup-sketsillä. Tekijät halusivat kokeilla sitä, mitä eivät oikopäätä osaa. Ehkä *Phågelin* hapuileva vaikutelma ei siis olekaan valtavan hienosäädön tuomaa täpärää balanssia, vaan ehkä se on totta.

Kakka kutsuu

Seuraava kohtaaminen sopii sitten jokaiseen makuun, se on yhteinen nimittäjä, sillä aiheena on kakka. Kohtaaminen lienee parodia sellaisesta kohtauksesta, jonka on tarkoitus voittaa kaikki katsojat esityksen puolelle. Parodia siksi, että tunnustettavuudestaan huolimatta kakka aiheuttaa myös torjuntaa, etenkin kun *Phågel* viihtyy kakka-aiheessa liioitellun pitkään. Kissan vatsa parahtelee ummetustaan. Eläimellinen näkökulma kakkaamiseen on virkistävän yllättävä.

Esitys ei rinnasta eläimiä ja ihmisiä. Se ei siis opeta meitä elämään ihmisiksi niin, että näyttäisi, millaisia me ihmiset olisimme eläiminä, tai että millä tavoin ja missä asioissa eläimet olisivat

by showing us what we would be like if we were animals, or in what ways and contexts animals could be seen as 'better' than humans. Comparing animals' and peoples' roles is not logical or systematic; in the case of *Phågel* we are only animals because it produces unpredictability. The performance proceeds from an unexpected twist to a surprising turn without needing to ground itself in, for instance, the logic of dreams (which is always a little pompous as an explanation) and far too self-conscious of its artistic merit: being animal-like makes one relaxed with regards to cultural expectations.

Sometimes the bird and cat have genders. The women said to us critics that in the circus world it is rare to find women doing their own work. The woman's task is to be good looking, to be in the biggest act, and to complete their act so assuredly that it cannot fail. I interpret this as that the spectators can't easily see the difference between when a woman fails and when she makes fun of her failure, because women are seen as failures to begin with.

I quickly remind myself that self-irony was also a part of Catalanian circus group Los Galindos' performance *Maiurta*, in which Marcel Escolano made a face-mask out of dough. He sets up the trapeze's safety net in the usual fashion, except not in the air: it is on the floor of his yurt, and then he wraps the net around himself because his character, an old clown, doesn't have the courage to climb to the trapeze. The key word here is old. Even though it is not of course my opinion, I ask if the self-irony of the old man is less dignified and less funny as that of the young women. The ageing man's physically weakening body forces him to use irony, but the young women's self-irony is a choice. They choose a stereotype that society has foisted upon them: the self-irony is that they vanquish society's expectations.

Idle partner

After a few dance routines Mossberg walks the wire. I suppose she is escaping the cat to a place high up where she can't be followed. Mossberg is fantastic, but when it comes to circus *Phågel*'s most engaging aspect is the silent partner.

"parempia" kuin ihmiset. Eläimen ja ihmisen roolien vertailu ei ole johdonmukaista eikä ohjelmallista, vaan tässä ollaan eläimiä arvaamattomuuden tähden. Esitys etenee odottamattomasta käänteestä aina uuteen yllätykseen ilman, että sitä tarvitsee perustella esimerkiksi unen logiikalla, mikä aina onkin hieman mahtipontinen, omasta taiteellisuudesta liian tietoinen selitys. Eläimellisyys tekee kulttuurisesti rennoksi.

Välillä linnulla ja kissalla on sukupuoli. Naiset sanoivat meille kriitikoille, ettei sirkuksen maailmassa useinkaan kohtaa tyttöjen omaa teosta. Naisten tehtävä on olla hyvännäköisiä, ja olla numero isomman esityksen sisällä, ja toteuttaa numeronsa niin varmasti, etteivät epäonnistu. Tulkitsen niin, etteivät katsomot hevin näe eroa, milloin nainen epäonnistuu, ja milloin nainen tekee pilaa epäonnistumisestaan, koska nainen on jotenkin lähtökohtaisesti epäonnistunut.

Väitän heti itselleni vastaan, että itseironiaa oli myös katalonialaisen Los Galindos -sirkuksen esityksessä *Maiurta*, jossa Marcel Escolano teki taikinasta kasvonaamion. Hän viritti oikeaoppisesti trapetsin turvaverkon, muttei ilmaan vaan jurttansa lattialle, ja sitten kietoutui verkkoon, koska hänen roolihahmonsa, vanha kloveni ei uskaltanut kiivetä trapetsille. Avainsana on vanha. En tietenkään ole tätä mieltä, mutta kysynpähän kuitenkin, onko vanhan miehen itseironia vähemmän arvokasta ja vähemmän hauskaa kuin nuorten naisten itseironia. Vanhenevan miehen pakottaa itseironiaan fyysisen suorituskyvyn heikkeneminen, kun taas nuorten naisten itseironia on valinta. He valitsevat stereotypian, jota kulttuuri heille muutenkin tyrkyttää; sepä vasta itseironiaa, jolla he päihittävät kulttuurin odotukset.

Joutilas kumppani

Muutaman tanssikuvion jälkeen Mossberg kävelee nuoralla. Hän kai pakenee kissaa korkealle tavoittamattomiin. Mossbergin suoritus on mainio, mutta ei siitä sen enempää, sillä *Phågel*in varsinaisessa sirkusosuudessa minua kiehtoo hiljaisen yhtiömiehen osuus. Mitä kahden ihmisen



Chipmunk Forge – Phågel © Petter Hellman

What can the extra person do in a two-person performance when one of the performers is performing her best tricks? Should one withdraw from the stage, and if so would there need to be a dramaturgical reason to justify that? Or should one point with one's hand at the act just like the scantily-clad woman in the traditional circus, to make sure that the audience is paying attention? Not in *Phågel!* The quiet cat rests at the base of the wire's support structure. The cat doesn't try to hide its idleness or uselessness, but puts it on public display! If not earlier, now I am convinced that *Phågel* blows apart circus' cultural expectations. The performance is not just a performance; it is the deconstruction of a performance too.

There is also some shadow theatre in the scene where the cat and the bird are joined by a fish. The cat eats the fish, which then phones for help from the cat's stomach. The bird tries to help the fish by putting some things in the cat's mouth like a large funnel and a fishing rod. It is clowning, but surprisingly it is not particularly funny. The theatre

esityksessä voi tehdä se ylimääräinen, kun toisella on tähtihetkensä? Mennäkö kulissien kätköön, ja jos niin, pitäisikö vetäytymiseen ensin keksiä dramaturginen syy? Tai ojennellako kättä niin kuin klassisen sirkuksen vähäpukeinen nainen, jotta yleisö varmasti kiinnittää huomionsa numeroon? Ei *Phågel*issa! Hiljainen kissa retkottaa nuoranpylväiden tukirakenteissa. Kissa ei yritäkään peittää joutilaisuuttaan eikä tarpeettomuuttaan, vaan näyttää ne julkeasti! Viimeistään nyt olen sitä mieltä, että *Phågel* purkaa sirkuksen kulttuurisia odotuksia. Että esitys on paitsi esitys myös esityksen dekonstruktio.

Vähän varjoteatteriakin on kohtauksessa, jossa kissalla ja linnulla on keskustelukumppanina kala. Kissa syö kalan, joka sitten soittaa puhelimella apua kissan vatsasta. Katsomo ei kuule näkymättömän kalan puhetta. Lintu ryhtyy auttamaan kalaa laittamalla kissan suuhun mm. ison suppilon ja pilkkiongen. Se on kloveriaa, mutta yllättäen se ei ole järin hauskaa. Konkreettisten esineiden teatteri kuuluu kissan ja

of concrete objects does not belong so naturally to the cat and bird show as abstractions and acrobatics. Although Angberg and Mossberg had removed their beak and cat's ears some time ago, and looked like normal people, as a spectator I couldn't accept them skilfully mastering physical objects.

An object, a gun, brings *Phågel's* weakest and most unacceptable moment. The bird draws a target on the cat's stomach. The bird hangs a number of small guns along the stage in such a way that when she shoots the first it fires into the second, which sends a bullet, or more precisely the sound effect of a bullet, into the third, and so on. Dramaturgically this is reasonable, because it is the bird not the cat who gets hit and lies down on the ground, as useless as the cat was earlier. It is then the turn of the cat to do an acrobatic solo. Even after the *Terminator* movies there is still something radical about a girl with a gun, but this is above all cheap. The power of patriarchy will not be abolished by a clichéd gesture from mainstream movies, and the gun is too powerful an object to be parodied. Of course the gun is a part of the circus tradition, but this kind of foolery is directed at history (and beyond) and fails to open up new ideas in new directions, as *Phågel's* other japes do.

Physical objects are good in the world of *Phågel* when the object enables the acrobatics. The cat and the bird chase each other behind a spinning, carousel-like wall. This happens in the corner at the front of the stage. In other words the scene is hidden in the same way that the characters try to hide. It is again a carefully thought through deconstruction of performance.

Under music

The cat makes a long speech before the bird's act. The cat speaks, but the words cannot be heard over the music. The work's sound designers are Tuomas Norvio and the director Komaro. As a theatre critic I overvalue the word so I get irritated before I realise that this is on purpose, and I am able to laugh at the pompous gestures of the preaching cat. No doubt not only theatre critics will naturally try to frame the performance as a story, especially when it lies outside the

linnun show'hun vähemmän luontevasti kuin abstraktiot ja akrobatiat. Vaikka Angberg ja Mossberg ovat jo aikaa sitten riisuneet linnunnokkansa ja kissanmyssynsä ja ovat siis ihmisen näköisiä, minä katsoja en soisi heille kykyä hallita esineitä.

Esine, ase, on Phågelin heikoin hetki, ja arveluttavin. Lintu piirtää maalitalulun kissan vatsaan ja ripustaa useita pieniä pyssyjä pitkin näyttämöä niin, että kun lintu ampuu ensimmäistä, se laukeaa osuakseen toiseen, joka puolestaan lähettää luodin, tai tarkemmin sanottuna luodin äänitehosteen kolmanteen kimmokkeeseen jne. Dramaturgisesti tämä on perusteltua sikäli, että osuman saakin lintu, joka nyt retkottaa yhtä tarpeettomana kuin kissa nuorallakävelyn aikana. On kissan akrobatiasoolon vuoro. Ja tietysti on vielä Terminator-elokuvien jälkekin rajua, että aseella uhkaa tyttö, mutta ennen muuta se on halpamaista. Ei patriarkaatin valtaa kumota siten, että tehdään valtavirran elokuvien kliseinen ele. Ase on niin latautunut, ettei se alistukaan noin vain parodioitavaksi. Totta kai ase on sirkuksen perinnettä ja Wilhelm Telliiä, mutta sen kujeellisuus suuntautuu vain historiaan ja taakse eikä se avaa ajatusta uusiin suuntiin, niin kuin Phågelin muut jekut.

Esine ja Phågel ovat hyvä yhdistelmä silloin, kun esine mahdollistaa akrobatian. Kissa ja lintu ajavat toisiaan takaa karusellinkaltaisen pyörivän seinän avulla. Se tapahtuu etunäyttämön nurkassa. Toisin sanoen kohtausta piiloutuu samalla tavalla kuin henkilöt yrittävät kätkeytyä. Se on jälleen huolellisesti ajateltua esittämisen dekonstruktioita.

Musiikin alla

Kissalla on pitkä juonto linnun numeroon. Kissa puhuu, mutta sanoja ei kuulu musiikin alta. Teoksen äänisuunnittelijat ovat Tuomas Norvio ja ohjaaja Komaro. Koska teatterikriitikkona yliarvostan sanaa, ehdin ärsyntyä, ennen kuin tajuan, että tämä on tarkoituksellista, ja osaan naureskella sille, kuinka tärkeillä eleillä kissa julistaa sanaa.

Varmaan muillekin ihmisille kuin teatterikritikoille on luonteenomaista yrittää hahmottaa esitys

conventions of their own genre, or when it is watched in a foreign language. Then one looks for and plucks words from the performance. English-language pop music can be disproportionately delightful only because it is recognisable, and immediately on the heels of this recognition comes a slight shame that one is not more spiritual.

In the other Subcase works the music is the weakest link. It feels like the makers tried to use the easiest-to-understand and most sentimental music to minimise the spectator's own efforts to understand the performance. The music bows to the spectator so deeply that instead of an invitation one quickly gets fed up with it and it is alienating. I was especially sorry about the music in the juggling show *Between Someones*. Patrik Elmnert and Wes Peden use juggling clubs to draw moving constructivist paintings in the air. These kinds of skirts and haystacks were painted by Kazimir Malevich in the 1930s. I would have been enraptured if the cheap disco rhythm had not been reminding me all the time that this was not art but rather the art of pleasing.

Milk revitalises

The cat tries to bring the bird back to life in many ways, for instance by sinking its head in a bucket. One would think that this would be more likely to drown the bird than cure it of the stray bullet of the preceding scene. The bird is lifted onto the table, where the cat twists the bird's limbs while the bird is lying on its stomach. It looks like resuscitation before mouth-to-mouth breathing was invented, and it looks like learning to swim on dry land, just as high society were advised to do in the 19th century, a time when only Lord Byron was reckless enough to get into real water. The scene ends with the cat spilling a bucket of milk over the bird. Milk is of course a natural liquid to both animals, but circus and theatre have not exactly embraced it.

The limitations of the critic

I am the only one of our group to like *Phågel*, and I am a little scared to think why. Is a critic able to learn something new, after all, and is Unpack the Arts able to open up our understanding? Or do we react to a performance on the basis of the kind of

tarinana, etenkin kun on oman taidelajinsa konventioiden ulkopuolella, tai kun katsoo vieraalla kielellä. Silloin esityksestä etsii ja poimii sanoja. Englanninkielinen pop-musiikki voi ilahduttaa ihan suhteettomasti vain siksi, että sen tunnistaa, ja heti perään tällainen tunnistus hiukan hävettää, että eikö minusta ole johonkin henkisempään.

Muissa Subcasen teoksissa musiikki oli esityksen heikoin lenkki. Tuntui siltä, että tekijät yrittivät mahdollisimman helpotajuisella ja tunteita ohjailevalla musiikilla minimoida katsojan oman vaivannäön esityksen ymmärtämiseksi. Musiikki kumarsi katsojan suuntaan niin syvään, että kutsun sijaan siitä tulikin tympäännyttävä tai vieraannuttava elementti. Erytisen pahoillani olen jonglööri-show'n *Between Someones* musiikista. Patrik Elmnert ja Wes Peden piirsivät keiloilla ilmaan liikkuvia konstruktivistisia maalauksia. Tällaisia hameita ja viljakuhilaita maalasi Kazimir Malevitsh 1930-luvulla. Olisin hurmaantunut, ellei halvan diskon rytmi olisi koko ajan muistuttanut, ettei tämä ole taidetta vaan sitäkin enemmän miellyttämisen taidetta.

Maito elvyttää

Kissa elvyttää lintua monin tempuin. mm. upottamalla tämän pään ämpäriin. Luulenpa, että siinä lintu hukkuu enemmän kuin se kärsi äskeisestä harhaluodista. Siispä nostetaan lintu pöydälle. Pöydällä kissa tempoo vatsallaan makaavan linnun raajoja. Se näyttää elvytykseltä ennen tekohengityksen keksimistä, ja se näyttää uimaopetukselta kuivalla maalla, juuri niin kuin seurapiirejä neuvottiin tekemään 1800-luvulla, aikana jolloin ainoastaan lordi Byron oli kyllin huimapää tehdäkseen tuttavuutta oikean veden kanssa.

Kohtaus päättyy siihen, että kissa kaataa ämpärillisen maitoa linnun päälle. Maito on tietenkin luonteva neste kummallekin eläimelle, mutta sirkus ja teatteri ovat vierastaneet maitoa.

Kriitikon rajoitukset

Ainoana ryhmästämme pidin *Phågelista*, ja hiukan hirvittää pohtia, miksi juuri minä. Kykeneekö kriitikko sittenkään oppimaan uutta, pystyykö edes Unpack the Arts avaamaan meidän

cultural background we have? Do I not have one rational reason to like *Phågel*? Perhaps it just struck a chord with a sensitive part of my personality. Or an even more horrible thought – is *Phågel*'s humour so Finnish that I am nationally-genetically predisposed to like it? It is a small comfort that the fault for this affection is probably not predetermined by my gender – a man might have directed it, but it is much more of a women's thing.

ymmärrystämme? Vai reagoimmeko näkemiimme esityksiin sen pohjalta, millainen kulttuurista meissä on jo vanhastaan? Toisin sanoen eikö minulla ole yhtään järkevää syytä pitää Phågelista, vaan se vain osui herkkään kohtaan persoonallisuudessani? Tai mikä vielä kamalampi ajatus, onko Phågelin huumori niin suomalaista, että minä olen jotenkin kansallisuudeltaan tykkäämään siitä? Vähän tietysti lohduttaa, ettei tämä mieltymykseni liene sukupuoleni vika – joo kyllä mies ohjasi, mutta on se kumminkin naisten juttu.

Opposites Attract

NATHALIE ALLARD

Subtopia... it sounds like the name of an imaginary country, perhaps even one from another, far-flung galaxy. It sounds like a world where the utopian dream has become a reality. Impossible? Perhaps not...

Because Subtopia is not really a newly discovered nation, in this world or any other. The word was first coined in 1955 by the British topographer Ian Nairn, who used it to denote a city's marginal spaces – those which, neglected by urban planning, had lost their souls. You could call them the 'degraded suburbs', where every street and every apartment block looks the same: grey, dull and cheerless. Not exactly the associations the word Subtopia calls to my mind, but luckily there's another place that uses the name, one that does match my fantasy...

Art Factory

Alby, Botkyrka is the scene. It is a small town south of Stockholm, Sweden where the main impressions are of concrete and vacancy. There's high unemployment and the level of education is poor. In other words, the place is marginal. To be avoided. A degraded suburb: a subtopia. Or that's how it was until some 15 years ago, when another Subtopia was born. This new Subtopia revived a 14000m² plot that formerly belonged to the telecommunications company Ericsson, doing so with the aim of creating a sort of art factory – a place where creative persons, film producers and, above all, circus artists could create their own universe. And it did so successfully, because today there are around 50 organisations and 300 people at work on-site. Cross-fertilisations proliferate. The grounds are often used for film shoots, and have even made it into the Hollywood adaptation of Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy. Thanks to Subtopia, the dull suburb has become the biggest creative hub in Sweden. It also hosts Subcase, a circus fair that attracts programmers from all over Europe to discover contemporary

Opposites Attract

NATHALIE ALLARD

Subtopia... het lijkt de naam van een onbestaand land, al dan niet in een ander sterrenstelsel. Of een plek waar utopie werkelijkheid wordt. Onmogelijk? Niet echt.

Subtopia is geen net uitgevonden woord voor een net ontdekt land. Dit verhaal is net iets realistischer dan dat. Het was de Britse topograaf Ian Nairn die in 1955 met de term op de proppen kwam. Hij doelde daarmee op de plekken rond een stad die door de mazen van de stadsplanning waren geglipt en daardoor hun ziel waren kwijt geraakt. De verloederde voorsteden dus, waar elke straat en elk appartementsgebouw er hetzelfde uitzag: grijs en ongezellig. Niet meteen de associatie die het woord bij mij oproept. Maar goed. Gelukkig er is nog een ander Subtopia, eentje dat wel meer aansluit bij mijn fantasiewereld.

Kunstfabriek

Zo'n plek is Alby, Botkyrka. Een stadje ten zuiden van Stockholm in Zweden waar beton en leegstand de hoofdton voeren. Waar er heel veel werkloosheid en een lage opleidingsgraad heerst. Marginaal dus. En te mijden. Een verloederde voorstad: een subtopia. Tot zo'n 15 jaar geleden. Toen werd een ander Subtopia geboren. Een gebied van 14000m² dat vroeger in handen was van gsm-fabrikant Ericsson, werd heropgevaardeerd. Het moest een soort van kunstfabriek worden. Een plek waar creatievelingen, filmproducers en vooral circusartiesten hun eigen wereld konden scheppen. Met succes want ondertussen doen 50 organisaties er hun ding en werken er 300 mensen. Kruisbestuivingen tieren er welig en heel wat filmscènes worden er ingeblikt, daar komen ze zelfs voor vanuit Hollywood: The Millennium Trilogie is hier gedraaid, om een voorbeeld te noemen. Het grauwe voorstadje heeft met Subtopia de grootste creatieve plek in Zweden gekregen. Het is ook de plaats waar Subcase doorgaat: een circusbeurs waar programmatoeren van

Scandinavian circus (and, this year, a small number of guesting Catalan works).

I can almost hear you think, 'Contemporary circus... what's *that*?'. In Swedish it's Nycirkus. New circus. The 'new' means a circus without animal participation, one with acting, dancing, singing... Shows become performances with stories behind them, and artists transform into characters. Because those artists don't just seek to impress their audiences, they also move and inspire them. Circuses in France were the first to move away from the well-known big top in the late 1960s. Other countries, including Spain, The Netherlands and Belgium, soon joined this evolution, as did the Nordic countries.

Naturally, there are numerous ways to move an audience, so at Subcase I looked for extremes. Opposites. And I found them. The Catalan company Los Galindos' *Maiurta* was a very intimate and personal performance, while Swedish giant Cirkus Cirkör presented its grand *Knitting Peace*. There could be no opposites more beautiful: one from the High North, the other from the exotic south; one big and bombastic, the other small and intimate.

Cirkus Cirkör: Impress to Express

It's the year 1995. On a trip to Paris, 25 year-old Tilde Björfors loses her heart to contemporary circus. She decides to found her own company. A suitable name was not hard to find either: Cirkör, a portmanteau word combining 'cirque' and 'cœur' ('heart' in French). Her mission: "Dream big and live big!"

Almost 20 years later Cirkus Cirkör has grown into Europe's own Cirque du Soleil, albeit one with a slightly rough edge to it. The company has already visited over 30 countries, and more than one million people have seen a show and become acquainted with this modern circus from the North. Cirkör currently tours with three different performances, and in their homebase at Subtopia they train new talent at Cirkuspiloterna, the company's very own professional circus school. Cirkör in fact value education as highly as performance – and not just professional training. Over 20,000 children and adults learn the circus

over heel Europa op af komen om Scandinavisch hedendaags circus te ontdekken. Overgoten met een Catalaans sausje dit jaar, want die regio was te gast.

"Hedendaags circus..." hoor ik u denken. "Wat is dat...?" Nycirkus in het Zweeds. Nieuw circus dus. Nieuw in de zin dat er geen dieren meedoen, en dat er ook geacteerd, gedanst, gezongen,... mag worden. Dat shows meer voorstellingen worden mét een verhaal en dat artiesten transformeren naar personages. Want die artiesten, die willen meer dan imponeren, ze willen ontroeren, begeistere! Frankrijk breekt als eerste met de oude vertrouwde chapiteau, dat gebeurt zo eind jaren '60. Andere landen waaronder Spanje, Nederland en België volgen en ook het Hoge Noorden loopt er al snel warm voor. Maar ontroeren, dat kan natuurlijk op 1001 manieren dus ging ik op die theaterbeurs op zoek naar extremen. Naar tegenpolen. En gevonden heb ik ze. De Catalaanse compagnie Los Galindos bracht met *Maiurta* een heel intieme en persoonlijke voorstelling, Zweedse reus Cirkus Cirkör pakte het met *Knitting Peace* veel grootser aan. Twee mooiere tegenpolen konden er niet zijn: de ene uit het Hoge Noorden, de andere uit het exotische zuiden, de ene groot en bombastisch, de andere klein en intiem.

Cirkus Cirkör: Impress to express

We schrijven 1995: op reis in Parijs verliest de 25-jarige Tilde Björfors haar hart aan het hedendaags circus. Ze beslist om haar eigen gezelschap op te richten. Een naam vinden was ook niet moeilijk: Cirkör: een samenvoegsel van cirque en cœur, maar dan op z'n Zweeds. Haar missie: "Groot dromen en groot leven!"

Ondertussen zijn we bijna 20 jaar verder en is Cirkus Cirkör uitgegroeid tot het Cirque du Soleil van Europa, met een iets rauwer kantje. De karavaan streek al in meer dan 30 landen neer en meer dan 1 miljoen mensen hebben een show gezien en kennis gemaakt met het modern circus uit het Noorden. Cirkus Cirkör toert momenteel met 3 verschillende voorstellingen en in thuisbasis Subtopia -hier is het weer- stoomt nieuw talent zich klaar in Cirkuspiloterna, Cirkörs eigen professionele circusschool. Want voor dit

trade each year from a fleet of international trainers. This is how Cirkus Cirkör makes new, contemporary circus accessible to a broad audience, as well as to those who dream of being a professional circus artist. In former times, it was uncommon to join a circus company when you hadn't grown up in a circus family. Initiatives like these lower this barrier. At the same time Cirkör's sold-out performances introduce many audiences to this new form of art. Cirkör is also a very productive circus, showing a new creation each year, the 2014 performance already being rehearsed in early 2013.

The 2013 production has just premiered, not in Stockholm but Marseille. It is called *Knitting Peace*. It's a dual name and a dual performance, with a breathtaking set in which the colour white predominates alongside ropes, strings and other materials evoking knitting. It instantly puts me on the wrong track: as romantic as the setting may look, it isn't. The trapeze artist becomes entangled in the ropery web; tensely climbing a rope ladder that falls apart step by step, she is stuck at the top and left with no choice but to embrace the inevitable. Throughout, the performance is complemented with intoxicating music by multi-instrumentalist Samuel 'LoopTok' Andersson. A man of fame, in Sweden at least.

Such famous artists like to work together with Cirkör. It is the oldest, biggest and most popular circus in Sweden and in all Scandinavia. Tilde Björfors has delegated the management work to others, but still firmly heads the artistic division. "I wondered why somebody would devote his entire life to walking on a rope," she explains when talking about *Knitting Peace*. "It won't make you rich or famous and there's a high risk of injuries. So, why do it?" She asked psychologists, philosophers and even brain surgeons the very same question. "It is about pursuance," she explains. "The worst that can happen in someone's life is that he achieves his goals without there being anything left to pursue. A circus artist tries to make the impossible possible. Again and again."

However, it is like balancing on a tightrope. Cirkus Cirkör occasionally is criticised for not being as innovative as they should, for playing safe and for

gezelschap is educatie een even belangrijke pijler als optreden. Niet enkel voor professionelen, elk jaar leren meer dan 20.000 kinderen en volwassenen de kneepjes van het vak van een legertje internationale lesgevers. Zo maakt Cirkus Cirkör het nieuwe, hedendaagse circus toegankelijk voor een breed publiek. Ook voor zij die dromen van een bestaan als circusartiest. Vroeger kon je moeilijk toetreden tot een circusgezelschap als je niet in een circusfamilie geboren was, met initiatieven zoals dit is de drempel veel minder hoog. Plus: Cirkörs uitverkochte voorstellingen zorgen ervoor dat meer mensen in contact komen met deze nieuwe kunstvorm. Het is een zeer productief circus ook, nu al wordt naarstig aan een nieuwe voorstelling gewerkt voor 2014, want elk jaar pakt het gezelschap uit met een nieuwe creatie.

Die van 2013 is net in première gegaan. Niet in Stockholm, wel in Marseille. *Knitting Peace* heet ze. Tweeledige naam en dat geldt ook voor de voorstelling. Met een adembenemend decor waar de kleur wit, touwen, koorden en ander breiwerk overheersen, word ik meteen op het verkeerde been gezet: want hoe romantisch de setting er ook uitziet, ze is het niet. De trapeziste raakt verstrikt in dat web van koorden, nagelbijtend zie je haar een touwladder opklauteren waarvan de tredes een na een naar beneden vallen tot ze in de nok van het dak geen andere keuze heeft dan zich over te geven aan het lot. Ondertussen klinkt de hele voorstelling lang bezwerende muziek van multi-instrumentalist Samuel 'LoopTok' Andersson. Een man met een naam, in Zweden toch.

Die grote namen werken graag samen met Cirkör: het is het oudste, grootste en meest populaire circus in Zweden en bij uitbreiding Scandinavië. Tilde Björfors laat het managen van haar circus ondertussen aan een ander over, het artistieke roer heeft ze nog steeds stevig in handen. "Ik vroeg me af waarom iemand zijn hele leven wijdt aan het lopen op een koord." zegt ze over *Knitting Peace*. "Je wordt er niet echt rijk of beroemd van en de kans op blessures is groot. Dus waarom doet iemand dat?" Ze stelde de vraag ook aan psychologen, filosofen en zelfs aan hersenchirurgen. "Het gaat om het streven." zegt ze.



Cirkus Cirkör – Knitting Peace © MattiasEdwall

being too commercially oriented. Yet at times the setting and acts are cutting edge: take Alexander Weibel, the Spanish equilibrist who doesn't just walk the slackrope but simultaneously plays a fluent, flawless tune on the violin. In succeeding, he makes the impossible possible. I sat on the edge of my seat the whole performance through. I did find though that Alex's act got a little much after a while, so Cirkus Cirkör did play safe. The other artists, also, were a little outplayed by the set, becoming almost literally entangled in the ropes, strings and wires that are so essential to the scenography.

The setting is a visual masterpiece, constructed by set designer Fanny Enocq with the help of others. It took her four months. "We have been knitting a lot at Cirkör. Especially the Finnish Aino Ihanainen, a handstand artist and gifted knitter," Fanny remarks. "We used residual products of cotton t-shirts for knitting, and the organisation 'Warm Stockholm' suited trees, fences and even the mirrors in bathrooms with a knitted skin."

"Het ergste dat kan gebeuren in iemands leven is dat je je doel bereikt en dat je niks nieuws vindt om voor te gaan. Een circusartiest probeert het onmogelijke mogelijk te maken. Telkens opnieuw."

Maar het is balanceren op een slappe koord. Cirkus Cirkör krijgt wel eens de kritiek niet vernieuwend genoeg te zijn, op veilig te spelen en té commercieel te werken. Ja, het decor en de acts zijn ongezien: denk maar aan Alexander Weibel, de koorddanser die –o ironie- op een slappe koord ook nog even zijn viool ter hand neemt en foutloos, zonder enige hapering, een nummer begint te spelen. De Spanjaard doet het en maakt zo het onmogelijke mogelijk. Het puntje van mijn stoel was de hele voorstelling mijn beste vriend. Alleen: het wordt wel wat veel Alex op den duur en op die manier speelt Cirkör inderdaad op veilig. De andere artiesten vallen daardoor jammer genoeg een beetje in het niet en raken bijna letterlijk verstrikt in de draden, koorden en touwen die zo centraal staan op scene.

Maar toch: Cirkus Cirkör laat je verdrinken in een burleske circuswereld. Het decor is een visueel hoogstandje, onder andere ontsproten uit het brein van set designer Fanny Enocq. Ze is er vier maanden mee bezig geweest. "Er is wat afgebreid bij Cirkör. Vooral dan door de Finse Aino Ihanainen. Handstand-artieste en begenadigd breister." weet Fanny. "We gebruikten het restproduct van katoenen T-shirts voor het breiwerk en de organisatie Warm Stockholm voorzag bomen, hekken en zelfs de spiegels in onze toiletten van een gebreid jasje."

Maar of breien ook effectief wereldvrede kan bevorderen, zoals Tilde probeert aan te geven met deze show, da's nog maar de vraag. "Dat is het nu juist" repliceert ze. "De meest onmogelijke vorm van streven is wat de beweging Breien voor Vrede doet. Maar ik geloof dat elke verandering begint bij een individu. Trouwens, deze show geeft geen antwoorden, ze stelt enkel vragen."

Los Galindos: Express to Impress

Heel anders gaat het er aan toe daar in het zuiden, bij Los Galindos. Marcel Escolano zou eigenlijk in de voetsporen van zijn vader treden en bakker worden, maar toen hij op zijn zestiende

Whether knitting can promote world peace or not (as Tilde indicates it does through the brochure) is the real question. "That's the point of it all," Tilde says. "The most impossible form of pursuance is what the Knitting for Peace organisation does. However, I believe that all changes start within individuals. Besides, this show does not provide answers; it only poses questions."

Los Galindos: Express to Impress

Things are very different in the south, at Los Galindos. Marcel Escolano would have followed in his father's footsteps and become a baker, but changed his mind after meeting a group of circus artists when he was sixteen. He wanted to travel and circus was the perfect way to do it. He did not only lose his heart to circus, but to Bet Garrell as well, a trapeze artist with whom Marcel performed the first trapeze act to appear on the street. Later, toward the end of 1991, they founded Los Galindos together. Four years after that the whole world, especially Europe, had been introduced to Los Galindos. It sounds like a surname, but it isn't. "It just sounds good," Marcel (45) laughs. "If everyone did what they really liked to do, I think the world could change, because no one would impose anything on anybody. Therefore, this company has only one goal: do what you love to do. Always." However, there comes a time when the body can't go on, when the trapeze days are over. "Bet found it very difficult and I did too, but I am more of a clown than a trapeze artist. And you are never too old to be a clown; on the contrary. I wanted to create a very personal performance: about life, my life."

Marcel contacted musician Marc Vila to see if he would like to help create and improvise the show. He agreed, and rehearsals started around a story that needed to grow organically. Because Marcel did not have a script; in fact he had nothing – not even a venue until he and a carpenter built the yurt that would host the performance. "While smoothing the wooden beams for the roof, I was catapulted back to my childhood. I saw myself playing in my father's bakery with flour and dough and I realised: this is what I want to pass on. I want to pay tribute to artisanal skills, to trades!"

kennismaakte met een paar circusartiesten, hield hij dat plan voor bekeken. Hij wilde reizen en in circus had hij daarvoor de perfecte partner gevonden. Hij verloor zijn hart niet enkel aan het circus, ook aan Bet Garrell. Bet was trapeziste, net zoals Marcel en met z'n tweetjes brachten ze de eerste trapeze-act op straat. Later richtten ze samen Los Galindos op, dat was in de herfst van 1991. Vier jaar later maakte de hele wereld – nuja, vooral Europa – kennis met hen. Los Galindos: het klinkt als een familienaam, maar dat is het niet. "Het bekt gewoon wel lekker" lacht Marcel, ondertussen 45 jaar. "Als iedereen zou doen wat ie graag doet, dan denk ik dat de wereld kan veranderen, want dan kan niemand je nog iets opleggen. Dus: dit gezelschap heeft maar één doel: doen wat je graag doet. Altijd." Maar je kan niet eeuwig trapezist blijven natuurlijk, op een bepaald moment wil het lijf niet meer mee. "Bet had het daar heel erg moeilijk mee en ik ook, maar meer nog dan trapezist ben ik een clown. En daar ben je nooit te oud voor, integendeel. Ik wilde een heel persoonlijke voorstelling maken: over het leven, mijn leven."

Dus belde hij muzikant Marc Vila, om te vragen of hij zin had om mee na te denken, wat te improviseren. Die stemde in en zo begonnen de repetities van een verhaal dat organisch moest groeien. Want Marcel had geen vaststaand script. Eigenlijk had hij helemaal niks, dat is er gekomen toen hij samen met een schrijver de yurt aan het bouwen was waar de voorstelling in zou doorgaan. "Terwijl ik het hout aan het schaven was voor de balken van het dak werd ik terug gekatapulteerd naar mijn kindertijd. Ik zag mezelf in de bakkerij van mijn vader, spelend met bloem en deeg en toen wist ik: daarover wil ik vertellen. Ik wil een ode brengen aan het artisanale, aan het *métier!*" Met deze nieuwe voorstelling, Maiurta, trekt het gezelschap al 3 jaar door Europa. "Toch noem ik ze nog nieuw. Een voorstelling heeft tijd nodig om te rijpen, te groeien en te gisten. Net zoals het brood in de bakkerij van mijn vader." En dus is circus, net zoals een bakker: een *métier*, zijn *métier*. Al doende geleerd, maar slecht in het aanleren aan anderen. "Ik heb ooit een circusschool opgericht" vertelt hij. In Barcelona. En hoewel hij vindt dat delen het allerbelangrijkste is in het leven hield hij het na 5 jaar voor bekeken.



Los Galindos – Maiurta © Petter Hellman

The company has been travelling through Europe with this new performance, *Maiurta*, for the last three years. "I still call it 'new'. A performance matures through time, brews and grows. Exactly like the bread in my father's bakery."

So circus is a trade, and like a baker Marcel has his *métier*. He learned through doing, but seems poor at teaching others. "I once started a circus school," Marcel recalls. In spite of his belief that sharing is the most important thing in life, he quit teaching after five years. "It wasn't our life's project," he smiles.

And this is no surprise. Marcel has always loved the small things, and never dreamed of growing into a bigger company. This is also part of his style: at Los Galindos there is no big circus tent – the yurt's audience capacity is 80 – and no big tricks either. "I want to show the *métier*, and for that I don't need to show off with spectacular stunts." This spirit is clear in the performance. Not a single trick is performed: there's juggling, but with three cones at the most, and the trapeze act is a memory of past times. Therefore, it takes

"Dat was niet ons levensproject" glimlacht hij. En ook dat is niet verwonderlijk eigenlijk. Marcel hield altijd al meer van het kleine, had nooit zin om uit te groeien tot een groot gezelschap. En ook dat trekt hij in alles door: bij Los Galindos geen grote circustent, -er is plaats voor 100 man in de yurt- én ook geen grote trucs. "Ik wil het metier laten zien, maar daarom hoef ik niet de meest spectaculaire stunt te tonen." Dat was duidelijk ook de drijfveer in deze voorstelling. Hier komt geen enkele truc aan te pas: hoogstens gejongleer met 3 bekers en een zucht naar een trapezenummer, een herinnering aan vervlogen tijden. Daardoor duurt het even voor je meegezogen wordt in de voorstelling. Maar Marcel kneedt en deelt: emoties, herinneringen, ja ook popcorn, en hij is er goed in. Het is aandoenlijk hoe hij met knikkende knieën in een retro-circuspakje de wereld aan zijn voeten heeft liggen, een trapeze die rakelings over de hoofden van het publiek scheert. Dat publiek dat wacht. Op die éne truc: springt hij of springt hij niet... "Ik ben 12 jaar trapezist geweest" mijmert Marcel. "Maar ik was elke keer opnieuw bang als ik de trapeze moest los laten en door de lucht vloog. Het is dat gevoel

a while before the audience is carried along by the performance. But Marcel conjures and shares emotions, memories, yes even popcorn; and he is good at it. There is something touching about the way he has the world at his feet (below knocking knees and a retro circus suit). As the trapeze buzzes right over the audience they sit waiting for this one trick: will he jump or not... "I have been a trapeze artist for 12 years," Marcel muses. "Still, every time I had to let go of the trapeze and fly, I was a little scared. That is the feeling I try to evoke." It is also moving to witness how Marcel creates a poetic world with just flour and his fingers. Small, sensitive, intimate. "I like the audience close to me: so that I can feel them, hear them, yes, even smell them." The thing he wants more than anything? "To die in the circus ring, because when you are a clown, you are a clown for life."

I swallow. There it is again. Affection. Emotion. I wipe some flour off my sleeve and notice that I am sitting on the edge of my seat again. Not due to suspense, but endearment. Both companies may seem worlds apart, but they have many things in common, too. Inspiration, enthusiasm, passion. And above all: a dreamy circus heart. A Utopia? Not really.

dat ik probeer op te roepen." Ontroerend ook hoe hij een poëtische wereld creëert met bloem en vingerstapjes. Klein, gevoelig, intiem. "Ik heb het publiek graag dicht bij mij: ik moet hen kunnen voelen, horen en zien. Ja, zelfs kunnen ruiken." Wat hij het allerliefste wil? "Sterven in de ring, want een clown ben je voor het leven."

Ik slik. En daar is het weer. Ontroering. Emotie. Ik veeg de bloem van mijn mouw en merk dat ik alweer op het puntje van mijn stoel zit. Ditmaal niet van spanning, maar van vertedering. Want hoe verschillend beide gezelschappen ook zijn: ze hebben ook heel wat gemeen. Begeesting. Bevlogenheid. Passie. En vooral: een dromerig circus hart. Een utopie? Niet echt.

Special effects of the body – contemporary circus from trying to impress to trying to express

NELA LAZAREVIC

Contemporary circus is a performing arts form that fully operates in the spirit of the age we live in: it is at the same time old and new. New circus performances evoke the nostalgia of traditional circus while providing a pleasant view to those of us who are not comfortable with animals being forced into human-like behavior for fun.

It is more “light” and more mobile than the traditional circus, while the nomad-like lifestyle of performing artists is something we can all relate to as inhabitants of the ever more globalized workforce. Animal-free, it goes in line with ever more popular animal protection movements, making contemporary circus additionally desirable and in line with the global trend of heightened responsibility towards the Earth.

Finally, in the era of multimedia technology obsessions, it is refreshing (and I would say even necessary), to go back to the basics of performance in flesh and blood, in which the main special effect machine is the human body (perhaps, a useful reminder there is more to us than our eyes fixed on flat screens and our fingers glued to keyboards).

There is a certain feel related to contemporary circus that can be related to various vintage trends spreading all over as sort of a counter-tendency to the fast-paced technology advancements we have been living over the past few decades.

Even if some of the circus artists themselves could argue that this was not at all their voluntary

intention, the fact persists: just like with the rise of digital photography there has been a parallel trend of going back to plain analogue cameras, just like the old-fashioned typewriters have become a popular home decoration item as hard copy books and newspapers begun loosing the battle to digital editions, just as vintage fashion trend is larger than ever today while fashion multinationals gain momentum worldwide – so does contemporary circus set in as an emerging performing art form focused on the potentials of (the only tool we truly own), the human body, in the era overwhelmed with high-tech special effects. Perhaps contemporary circus reminds us there is no better 3D performance than the one performed directly before our eyes, without a technological intermedium.

Some might argue against these affirmations by saying that contemporary circus is not at all such a recent phenomenon: its beginnings can be traced back to the late sixties. So how to defend the impression that the growing popularity of contemporary circus could be partially related to the fact that it can be perceived as a refreshing counter-fashion to the hyper-technological world we have (voluntarily or less so) been immersed into?

I will not go out of topic by elucidating how Internet too is almost five decades old. For the purpose of this text it could be more useful to point out to the fact that contemporary circus today is more popular than ever, while opera, dance, theater, (and even cinema) have been



Chipmunk Forge – Phâgel © Petter Hellman

struggling due to audiences' change of focus to the newest technology advancements.

"In Europe, contemporary circus is a growing sector in terms of the number of artists involved in this field, the amount of collaboration with dance, music, theatre, opera, etc. You have more and more circus schools and circus productions every year, the amount of money generated, employment, but also public funding allocated to contemporary circus is growing bigger. You can see a public success, and a political success of contemporary circus", Johan Floch from the European platform for the street arts and circus Circostrada claims.

Of course, this growth is not evenly distributed in all European countries, nevertheless throughout the world.

"A spacious suburban paradise" like Subtopia, with 14.000 square meters of carefully adapted industrial spaces at the disposition of

contemporary circus (and film), and millions of euros of public funding per year can only be dreamt of in Eastern Europe, and in many other EU countries for that matter. However, there is a generally perceived trend of popularization of new circus all over Europe and further. Schools dedicated to contemporary circus, and circus groups in Scandinavia, France, Belgium, and other places are gaining momentum.

Another factor that goes well in hand with the growth of popularity of contemporary circus, is that it easily connects with the audience, regardless of age, gender or nationality. Restricted use of language in most cases contributes to its internationality, while the use of humor and body expression are techniques universally understood – both these factors go hand in hand with the globalizing world.

So what is it about the fascination with the contemporary circus that makes it so different than the traditional one (animals apart)?

One of the quotes I heard during the days spent at Subtopia that left most impression on me in terms of understanding the difference between the traditional and contemporary circus was: “The traditional circus was about trying to impress, while contemporary circus is about trying to express”.

I always tended to conceptually divide traditional and contemporary circus in terms of the lack of animal acts in the latter. The above quoted phrase, pronounced by US born juggle artist Wes Peden from Patrick and Wes juggling duo, made me reflect on some other crucial differences between the two, and allowed me to better interpret some of the visceral impressions I had about the shows we saw at Subcase: of all the 5 shows I saw, the negative impressions I had could mainly be categorized under “trying to impress”, while the positive ones were about “trying to express”.

Patrick and Wes, in the context of expressing something through their art, mastered the non narrative aesthetics. Much more minimal, unpretentious, simple (AND much less expensive in terms of production), than some other shows we saw, this juggling duo performance appeared complete both in terms of technical skills and in terms of expression. The fact that they managed to keep the audience alert throughout the 40 minutes of something as repetitive and simple as juggling, speaks for itself.

The complete opposite in this sense was the Circus Circor’s Knitting Piece. A rather expensive production, complex stage design, numerous performing artists including live music, left me with an impression that the pomposity of the project was not justified in terms of artistic expression. A talk with the director Tilde Bjorfors revealed that she did attempt to convey a message, but I left the show with a feeling that this message was not conveyed, or at the very best that it was weak and inconsistent. The show seemed incomplete. Technically nicely executed, the acrobatic acts seemed incoherent and at times logically disconnected. Many distinct the traditional from contemporary circus in terms that the first one is all about presenting a series of

mutually disconnected acts – in this sense, Knitting Piece was traditional.

The viewer could have left the show filled with positive impressions about the aesthetics of the stage filled with huge knits, or amused by the live music act. Even thrilled with the great technical performance of the artists performing acrobatics. But I hardly believe they could have left the show reflecting about the message the director later told us she wanted to convey – be it to muse about the possibility to obtain World piece or about the essence of circus artists’ continuous struggle for perfection – not more than one would reflect about these things after seeing a simple act of acrobatics without all the special effects attached.

All in all, my overall impression after Subcase is that contemporary circus establishes a more direct message with the public (and is thus more effective in terms of expressing vs. trying to impress) when it is minimalistic and genuine.

A great example in this sense is Los Galindos’ show Maiurta.

Former clown in a traditional circus, and husband of a former trapeze artist, Catalan Maurcel Escolano created a unique autobiographical act in which the connection with the public and the life of the artist are at the core of the show.

In a miniature version of a traditional circus tent, in which 100 people can fit closely to one another and to the stage in which Marcel performs the story of his life with an ironic twist. Feeling Marcel’s sweat drops flying through the tent, sniffing the flour flying through the room, sensing the stage tremble with the strike of his footsteps.

Like Harlequin, Pulcinella and other artists of the 16th century Commedia dell’arte, clowns tend to interpret a single role throughout their lives, perfecting it over time by making it so that parts of their real characters merge with the role they interpret, and the other way around: the role they interpret becomes strongly colored by their personal temperament and real life story.

For clowns, life truly is circus and circus truly is life. Marcel shows this magnificently, and likely the secret of his success lays in the fact that he is genuine. His character IS himself. His act IS his life. His act tells the viewers a personally painted story of what circus once was and what it is today.

The lifestyle of circus artists has always been one of the most fascinating things related to circus, be it traditional or contemporary one (perhaps even more than the limits of human body explored by the acrobats). Marcel's show touches on this tendency of the audience.

The overall impression that overwhelmed me upon returning from Subtopia, was that, when contemporary circus acts are complex rather than minimalistic – they tend to struggle with a crisis of identity – either reminding too much of traditional circus, or they tending to blend in too much with other performing art genres – theatre, dance, stand up comedy etc. Not that there is anything essentially wrong with merging with any of these genres – it is just that, when mixed with other genres (for example – theatre) the techniques “borrowed” from those genres tend to overwhelm the scene making it seem more like a theatre show with sporadic acrobatics, rather than circus borrowing acting and narrative techniques from theatre.

This does not have to present a problem (on the contrary), as long as circus performers and directors do not let this identity crisis prevail in their choices, subjecting the artistic expression, to the attempts to impress with special effects of

the acrobat's body. Be it through verbal narrative or through the aesthetics of abstract movement, the purpose of any performing art form should be that to express.

In this sense, Ruby Rose “Eat It” show was more a stand-up comedy slash theatre act spiced up with acrobatics, rather than prevailingly a contemporary circus show. This is not so crucial in terms of assessing the success of the show in conveying a message, as long as the director did not force the number of acrobatic acts within the show with the aim of making it more circus and less theatre.

However, Eat It better conveyed the message about struggling (be it artist struggling or human struggling for perfection), than Knitting Piece did. Why? Because the focus seemed to be on conveying a message. Acrobatics in Eat It were at the service of the narrative of the show. Finally, human body was at the centre of the show, just as it is at the centre of contemporary circus. Eat It successfully blended the acrobatic acts into the thematic of female obsession with obtaining a perfect body. In this struggle for perfection dictated by the commercial industry, in Eat it – life was circus, and circus was life. While performing to the audience about something as banal as the everlasting attempt to impress others, Eat It (despite at times I found it a bit too crowd pleasing) managed to put the acrobatics at the service of what the main purpose should be – expressing a message.

In the end, this is what art is all about.

Talking about circus

NINA JÄÄSKELÄINEN

Stockholm's Unpack the Arts residency offered interesting perspectives on the discourse surrounding circus performance.

I am not going to go thoroughly into an analysis of this discourse, nor am I going to fire off any radical statements – never mind trying to create faultless theories on the basis of a four-day residency course. Rather I'm going to highlight some observations about how artists and other circus professionals talk about the field, about how the field is talked about by others, and about how the field should be talked about. And, also, what should we be talking about more?

Talking about how circus is talked about

The starting point of Unpack the Arts is to offer a contemporary circus experience to journalists who don't know much about the artform. This is how the participants in the residency came to meet a series of artists and lecturers at Subcase, and it was thanks to this starting point that the artists and lecturers addressed the journalists, at times, in an unintentionally condescending or comically simple manner: "How splendid that you want to learn to write about circus!"

All the residency participants already had a certain amount of experience of watching and writing about contemporary circus. Nowadays in Europe contemporary circus is impossible to avoid, and no special preparation is required to appreciate the performance. As an artistic genre, circus performances are easy to watch and analyse compared to many other performances, pieces of post-dramatic theatre, and dance works.

The circus field would hope that the professional spectator is able to understand the genre and performance as an entity in its own right. The desire is understandable and springs from the fact that journalists who write about circus tend to

Puhutaan sirkuksesta

NINA JÄÄSKELÄINEN

Tukholman Unpack the Arts-residenssi tarjosi kiinnostavia näkökulmia sirkuspuheeseen. En paneudu perinpohjaisesti diskurssianalyyysiin, lauo ehdottomia totuuksia saati yritä luoda aukottomia teorioita neljän päivän residenssikokemuksen pohjalta. Tuon esiin muutamia havaintoja siitä miten taiteilijat ja muut sirkuksen ammattilaiset puhuvat alasta, puhuvat siitä miten alasta puhutaan ja siitä miten alasta pitäisi puhua. Entä mistä meidän oikeastaan pitäisi enemmän puhua?

Puhutaan siitä miten puhutaan sirkuksesta

Unpack the Artsin lähtökohtana on tarjota nykysirkuskokemusta toimittajille, joilla sitä ei runsaasti ole. Sellaisina residenssin osanottajat esiteltiin Subcase-festivaalin taiteilijoille ja luentoalustajille. Tämän ennako-olettaman perusteella osanottajille suunnattu puhe oli välillä tahattoman alentuvaa tai koomisen yksinkertaistavaa: "Miten hauskaa että haluatte opetella kirjoittamaan sirkuksesta!"

Kaikilla residenssiläisillä kuitenkin jo oli kokemusta nykysirkuksen katsomisesta tai siitä kirjoittamisesta. Nykysirkusesityksiltä ei voi välttyä nykypäivän Euroopassa. Eikä niiden vastaanotto vaadi erityisvalmiuksia. Taiteenlajina sirkusesitykset ovat helposti katsottavia ja analysoitavia verrattuna moniin performansseihin, draaman jälkeiseen teatteriin tai tanssiesityksiin.

Sirkuskenttä toivoo ammattikatsojilta lajin ja esityksen ymmärtämistä omanlaisenaan kokonaisuutena. Toive on ymmärrettävä, ja kumpuaa tosiseikasta, että sirkuksesta kirjoittavat toimittajien taustalta löytyy enemmän muiden esittävien taiteiden tuntemusta. Sirkus ei halua että sitä katsotaan ja arvotetaan teatterin

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have a background that is dominated by the other performing arts. Circus does not want to be reviewed according to the same criteria as dance or theatre. The hope is that there would be no attempt to read things into contemporary circus that have not been intended, such as concepts that are traditionally linked with theatre-like story, drama or character.

An invaluable approach that the circus field recommends is to understand the history of the genre, and to grasp the current subgenres and the special features of each group. "This way you learn what it is about." On the other hand the hope is to engender an open, unprejudiced mind in the spectator: "Just watch, you don't have to try to understand." The subtext of this is "You'd better make sure you get us right!"

Anybody who criticises the shortcomings of the work is regarded as misunderstanding it. A critique that is not sufficiently complimentary is dismissed by saying "the critic failed to understand what we wanted our work to say". The same argument is used by representatives of other performing arts too.

The fear of misunderstanding is linked to the need to underline the special qualities of the field for decision-makers and financial backers. The circus field emphasises its freshness, topicality, marginalisation and special technical demands to stop all the public funding flowing to genres of the performing arts that have been institutionalised. Dividing things into 'us' and 'them' as a way to define an identity is not, however, without danger. It can prevent the free flowing movement of creative thought and lead to the rejection of good practices and forms of expression if they come from the wrong camp. In the competition for limited resources, borders are also drawn inside the field. "They aren't professional", or "the company makes commercial entertainment".

Talking about an artist talking about their art

The meetings with the artists that were arranged after their performances as part of the residency programme meant that it was possible to take a seat to watch the performance without doing any

tai tanssin kriteerein. Tekijöiden toiveena on, että nykysirkusesityksissä ei yritettäisi nähdä sellaista mitä niissä ei ole tarkoituskaan olla. Tällä tekijät tarkoittavat perinteiseen teatteriin liitettyjä käsitteitä kuten tarina, kaari tai rooli.

Katsomisen aputyökaluiksi sirkuskenttä suosittelee perehtymistä lajin historiaan, alalajeihin ja kunkin ryhmän erityispiirteisiin: "Näin ymmärrät mistä on kyse." Toisaalta toiveena on saapua katsomoon avoimin, ennakkoluulottomin mielin: "Katsot vain, ei tarvitse erityisesti yrittää ymmärtää." Puheen alatekstinä onkin: "Autu armias jos ymmärrät väärin!"

Väärinymmärtäjänä pidetään henkilöä joka arvostelee esityksen puutteita. Vähemmän ylistävä kritiikkiteksti jätetään omaan arvoonsa toteamuksella "kriitikko ei ymmärtänyt mitä halusimme työllämme sanoa". Samaa argumentointia harjoittavat muidenkin esittävien taiteiden edustajat.

Väärinymmärtämisen pelkoon liittyy tarve korostaa alan erityislaatuisuutta päättäjien ja rahoittajien suuntaan. Sirkusala korostaa lajin uutuutta, nykyaikaisuutta, marginaalisuutta ja teknisiä erityisvaatimuksia, jotta kaikki julkinen tuki ei valuisi institutionalisoituneille esittävien taiteiden lajeille. Identiteetin määrittelyn apuvälineenä käytetty jako "meihin" ja "muihin" ei ole vaaratonta. Se saattaa estää vapaasti liikkuvan luovan ajattelun, ja pistää tekijän hylkimään hyviäkin käytäntöjä ja ilmaisumuotoja, jos ne tulevat väärästä leiristä. Rajallisista resursseista kamppailtaessa rajoja vedetään myös alan sisällä. "He eivät ole ammattilaisia", tai "se ryhmä edustaa kaupallista viihdettä".

Puhutaan siitä miten taiteilija puhuu taiteestaan

Residenssiohjelmaan kuuluvien sirkustenesitysten jälkeen järjestetyt tekijätapaamiset merkitsivät sitä, että katsomoon saattoi marssia ilman ennakkoperehtymistä. Itse tosin katson esitykset aina ilman käsiohjelmasulkeisia. Jos tiedollinen ymmärtäminen olisi tarpeen, kysymyksiin löytyisivät vastaukset myöhemmin.



Ruby Rose – EAT IT! © Petter Hellman

work beforehand. Personally I always watch performances without the aid of the programme. If I need some knowledge to understand something I get the answers later.

The Swedish company Ruby Rose's production *EAT IT!* was an entertaining, courageous piece that drew upon many performing arts and was filled with sensible female energy. In the programme and Subtopia magazine, however, the director Rebecca Westholm emphasised the idea that the work was based on and that gives it its serious undercurrent – namely the way media warps women's perceptions of their bodies. This was the theme of the discussion in the meet-the-artist gathering after the show.

The performance was what the director was trying to achieve: an entertaining narrative show about important matters. The director still felt, however, that *EAT IT!* had to be justified and

Ruotsalaisen Ruby Rose -tuotannon *Eat it!* oli viihdyttävä, rohkea, eri esittävien taiteiden keinoja yhdistävä, tervejärkistä naisenergiaa pursuava kokonaisuus. Käsiohjelmassa ja Subtopia-lehdessä ohjaaja Rebecca Westholm kuitenkin painotti esityksen alkuideaa ja vakavaa pohjavirettä, naisten ruumiillisen omakuvan vääristymiä. Taiteilijatapaamisessakin ohjaajan puhe pyöri tämän teeman ympärillä.

Esitys oli sitä, mihin ohjaaja sanoi pyrkineensä: tärkeistä asioista viihdyttävästi puhuva show. Ohjaaja tuntui silti kokevan, että *Eat it!* -esitystä on perusteltava ja selitettävä sukupuolisosiologisella puheella. Johtuuko se etenkin Pohjoismaissa parina viime vuosikymmenenä kaikille yhteiskunnan sektoreille levinneestä välinearvopuheesta? Taidetta ei enää puolusteta sen itseisarvon vuoksi, vaan julkisen rahoituksen turvaamiseksi taidetta perustellaan hyvinvointiargumentein. Taideteokseen on

explained through a sociological discourse on gender. Is this a consequence of the spread of an instrumentalising discourse in all societal sectors in the Nordic countries in recent decades? Art is no longer defended according to its inherent value, but is rather, in order to secure funding for it, justified by whether it promotes well-being. An artwork now needs to be linked to the promotion of public participation, collaboration with the audience, and the prevention of illness and marginalisation. A mere artwork does not suffice to express what the artist wants to say. The themes and reasons for concern have to be very carefully explained to the viewers in the programme for the work.

At least the *EAT IT!* performance, the programme and the director's introduction all spoke about the same performance. Circus Cirkör's *Knitting Peace* on the other hand bore no resemblance to the programme nor to what the director Tilde Björfors said afterwards. The spectator who yields to a performance of *Knitting Peace* without any expectations will see a beautiful, gentle work which is pleasant yet impressive and explores the fundamental questions of life and existence. That was all, and it was enough.

The text in the programme on the other hand talked about striving for the impossible and world peace. In talking to the Unpack the Arts residents, the director threw some more things into the soup, such as Israeli women knitting for Palestinians, risk as a central element of circus, and John Lennon and Yoko Ono, as if she was defending herself against real or imagined accusations of being too commercial. Paradoxically the information that was intended to open up the themes of the performance unintentionally flattened what the performance had given.

The Dagens Nyheter newspaper's dance and literature critic Örjan Abrahamsson's lecture put into words an approach that many people who write about art have instinctively chosen in their relationship to experiencing the work: one should not listen too much to what the artist has to say. Not even in the case that the artist's speech genuinely supports the performance, as was the

kytkettävä osallistamista, yleisötyötä sekä sairautta ja syrjäytymistä ehkäiseviä projekteja. Pelkkä taideteos ei riitä taiteilijan sanoman ilmentäjäksi. Teemat ja huolenaiheet on väännettävä rautalangasta teoksen oheisesittelyissä.

Eat it! -esitys, sen käsiohjelma ja ohjaajan alustus sentään puhuivat samasta esityksestä. Cirkus Cirkörin *Knitting Peace* sen sijaan oli jotakin aivan muuta kuin esittelytekstit ja ohjaaja Tilde Björfors antoivat jälkikäteen ymmärtää. Vailla ennako-odotuksia *Knitting Peace* -esitykselle antautuva katsoja sai nähdä kauniin, lempeän, näyttävyydessäänkin sympaattisen esityksen joka tuntui tavoittavan jotain elämän ja olemassaolon peruskysymyksistä. Siinä kaikki, ja se riitti.

Esittelytekstissä sen sijaan puhutaan ponnistelusta, mahdottoman tavoittelusta ja maailmanrauhasta. Ohjaaja liitti residenssiläisille puhuessaan soppaan vielä israelilaisnaiset kutomassa palestiinalaisille, riskinoton sirkuksen ydinelementtinä sekä Yoko Onon ja John Lennonin, kuin puolustuspuheena todellisia tai kuviteltuja kaupallisuusväitteitä vastaan. Paradoksaalisesti esityksen teemoja avaavaksi tarkoitetut tiedot tahattomasti latistivat esityksen ansiot.

Dagens Nyheter -sanomalehden tanssi- ja kirjallisuuskriitikko Örjan Abrahamsson puki omassa alustuksessaan sanoiksi lähestymistavan, jonka monet taideteoksista kirjoittavat ovat vaistomaisesti valinneet suhteessaan teoksen kokemiseen: tekijöiden puhetta ei pidä liiaksi kuunnella. Ei edes siinä tapauksessa että tekijän puhe aidosti tukee esitystä, kuten kävi katalonialaisen Los Galindos -ryhmän Maiurta -esityksen kohdalla.

Klovneriaa, esineteatteria ja perinteisen sirkuksen konventioita yhdistävä Maiurta oli runsas ja energinen yhdistelmä maanläheisyyttä ja lyyrisyyttä. Muusikon kanssa näyttämön jakava, esityksen itse koostanut Marcel Escolano kertoi jälkepäin esityksen taustalla olleista ajatuksistaan ja teemoistaan teeskentelemättömästi. Se mihin hän oli esityksessä pyrkinyt, näkyi lopputuloksessa.

case with the Catalan group Los Galindos' piece *Maiurta*.

Clowning, object theatre and traditional circus conventions were combined in *Maiurta* – a fruitful and energetic combination that was both down to earth and poetic. The stage was shared by performer Marcel Escolano and a musician. Escolano created the performance himself and talked afterwards genuinely about the thoughts and themes that the work was built on. His aims were clearly seen in the work. The symbols he used, the development of the themes, and the subconscious associations were lucid and understandable. Escolano's performance and the talk he gave afterwards reminded us that the expression of stage intelligence is clarity. Escolano knew what he was doing when he created *Maiurta*. With respect to several other Subcase performances, fuzzy speech raised suspicions of fuzzy thought in relation to the performance.

Talking about what's not talked about

As the Subcase showcase progressed, what came to the fore was the relationship between circus and performing. In *Knitting Peace* each performer had to work out the best way to relate to the audience for themselves, and their palette reached from reserve to exhibitionism, depending on each performer's personal temperament. *EAT IT!* was uniformly directed with regards to style, stressing speech and making use of the performers' acting talents, while *Maiurta*'s main character was a clown. A skilful two-man juggling performance, *Between Someones* focused on displaying the control of the objects juggled. In the two-woman performance *Phågel*, which combined stand-up comedy, physical theatre and acts based on the use of equipment, the director had consciously striven to tear down stage conventions.

Being on the stage, acting in a way that differs greatly from everyday movement and energy, and being closely watched are all important parts of circus and performing and should be talked about more. In the circus university in Stockholm (DOCH) clowning is not taught, even though

Käytetyt symbolit, teemojen kehittelyt ja alitajuiset assosiaatiot olivat kirkkaita ja ymmärrettäviä. Escolanon esitys ja sen jälkeinen puhe muistuttivat että näyttämöilyn ilmentymä on selkeys. Escolano tiesi mitä oli tekemässä *Maiurtaa* kasatessaan. Muutamien muiden Subcase-esitysten kohdalla sumea puhe herätti epäilyksiä sumeasta ajattelusta itse esitysten suhteen.

Puhutaan siitä mistä ei puhuta

Subcase-katselmuksen edetessä esille alkoi nousta alan suhde esittämiseen. *Knitting Peacessa* kukin esiintyjä oli itse saanut selvitätä miten parhaiten taisi suhteessaan yleisöön, ja paletti ulottui pidättyvyydestä ekshibitionismiin, kunkin esiintyjän henkilökohtaisesta temperamentista riippuen. *Eat it!* oli tyyliä jiltään yhtenäiseksi ohjattu, puhepainotteinen ja näyttelijäntyötä hyödyntävä kokonaisuus, *Maiurtan* päähenkilö oli klovni. Kahden miehen jongleeriesitys *Between Someones* oli välineen hallintaan keskittyvä taitojen esittely. Kahden naisen stand up -komiikkaa, fyysistä teatteria ja välinenumeroita yhdistävässä *Phågel*-esityksessä ohjaaja oli tietoisesti pyrkinyt esittämisen konventioita purkavan näyttämötyöskentelyyn.

Esillä oleminen, arkienergiasta poikkeavassa roolissa toimiminen ja katseen alle joutuminen ovat tärkeä osa sirkusta, ja esittämisestä tulisi puhua enemmän. Alan tukholmalaisessa yliopistossa DOCH:ssa ei opeteta klovneriaa, vaikka sen hallinta hyödyttäisi minkä hyvänsä esittävän taiteenlajin opiskelijaa. Läsnaolon ja yleisökontaktin opettelu auttaa esiintyjää selkiyttämään oman suhteensa lavalla olemiseen, riippumatta millaiseen esilläolon tapaan hän tai ohjaaja lopulta päätyvät. Silloin esiintyjän ei tarvitsisi pelätä yleisöä näyttämöllä tai juosta sen kysymyksiä karkuun esityksen jälkeen, kuten kuulimme joidenkin tekävän.

Suhde esittämiseen liittyy toiseen liian vähälle huomiolle jääneeseen aiheeseen, ikääntyvän sirkustaiteilijan asemaan. Los Galindosin Marcel Escolano on ratkaissut ongelman keskittymällä tekemään esityksiä joiden pääpaino on klovneriassa ja näyttelemisessä. Hän on jättänyt

mastering its skills would benefit any student from any of the performing arts. Teaching presence and contact with the audience helps the performer clarify their own relationship with stage presence, no matter what style of performance they or the director decide upon. In that case the performer doesn't need to be scared of the audience on the stage or to run away from questions after the performance, as we heard some people do.

One's relationship with performing is connected with another subject that has received too little attention: the position of the ageing circus artist. Marcel Escolano in Los Galindos has solved the problem by concentrating on making performances that have the primary focus on clowning and acting. He has left the trapeze behind him with great relief. It was a painful process for Escolano's acrobat wife to give it up, however, and it meant the end of her stage career.

Speech does not just express reality, it creates it. If the emphasis in circus discourse is on talking about technical mastery and physical expression, the other possibilities offered by this artform are put on the back burner. If there was a stronger discourse on the connections between performance and expression, and thoughts and feelings, there would be enough room in the circus for those performers who have lost their waistlines, hurt their backs, become mothers, or simply aged. On the basis of the diverse range of genres on view at Subcase, this delightful development has already begun.

trapetsit taakseen helpotusta tuntien. Escolanon akrobaattivaimolle välineestä luopuminen oli tuskallinen prosessi, se merkitsi koko näyttämöuran loppua.

Puhe ei pelkästään ilmennä todellisuutta, se luo sitä. Jos sirkuspuheen painopiste on teknisessä taituruudessa ja fyysisessä ilmiömäisyydessä, taiteenlajin muut mahdollisuudet jäävät takalalle. Kun puhetta viedään enemmän esittämisen ja ilmaisun, ajatusten ja tunteiden välityksen suuntaan, sirkuksessa riittää tilaa vyötärönsä kadottaneille, selkensä loukanneille, äidiksi tulleille tai ikääntyville esiintyjille. Subcase-esitysten monipuolisen genrevalikoiman perusteella tämä ilahduttava kehitys on jo käynnissä.

Dare to be Imperfect

ORSOLYA BÁLINT

“Have no fear of perfection – you’ll never reach it.”

Salvador Dalí

Ruby Rose’s *EAT IT!* is not only brilliantly grotesque, blushing absurd, poignantly ironic and delightfully entertaining – it deals with an important issue as well.

The aim of the multilingual company of female artists who performed this production was nothing less than to release the female body from the fetters of self-deception, credulity and dissatisfaction, and to peel back the absurd and fake expectations of society and our culture. *EAT IT!* was created with the aim of rediscovering the female body – and of making it loveable and acceptable – in the circus as well as in real life.

This performance is a perfect example of how a contemporary circus show can move a severely and tragically growing social problem – in this case the anxiety and the mental and physical symptoms caused by the desire for a perfect appearance – closer to the audience. It is particularly interesting to observe how entertainment can help in transmitting the message by combining and refreshing diverse genres, and how entertainment becomes thought-provoking through the conscious amalgamation of these different styles.

The Enchantment of Perfection

The performers chose a subject that concerns them deeply. This did not only bring credibility to the performance; treating a problem close to their own lives, the artists’ inner fire and enthusiasm lighted up the whole piece. *EAT IT!* is mostly built on the performers’ own experiences – the struggle with their own body and feelings of dissatisfaction. Any member of the audience

Merjünk tökéletlenek lenni

ORSOLYA BÁLINT

„Ne félj a tökéletességtől! Úgysem éred el sohasem.”

Salvador Dalí

Briliánsan groteszk, arcpirítóan abszurd, csípősen ironikus és pompásan szórakoztató, miközben egy fontos témával foglalkozik a Ruby Rose társulat *Eat it!* című produkciója, melyet az Unpack The Arts program keretében nézhettünk meg a Subcase kortárs cirkuszfesztiválon.

A több nemzetiségű (köztük svéd, amerikai és francia) művésznőkből álló társulat produkciójának nem kisebb feladatot választott, mint hogy lefejtse a női testről az önámítás, a hiszékenység, az elégedetlenség béklyóit, és lehámozzák róla a társadalom és a környezet abszurd és hamis elvárásait. Azzal a céllal, hogy újra felfedezzék – és szerethetővé, elfogadhatóvá tegyék – a női testet, a cirkuszban és az életben egyaránt.

Az alkotás kiváló példa arra, hogyan tud a kortárs cirkusz egy súlyos és tragikus méreteket öltő társadalmi problémát – ez esetben a tökéletes külső iránti vágy keltette szorongást és az emiatt kialakuló mentális és fizikális kórtüneteket –, közelebb hozni a nézőkhöz. Különösen érdekes általa megfigyelni, hogyan segíti a változatos műfajok ötvözése és felfrissítése az üzenátvitelt, és hogyan válik gondolatébresztővé a szórakoztatás ezek tudatos kompozíciójában.

A tökéletesség bűvölete

A művészek olyan témát választottak, ami őket is mélyen érinti, ami nem csak hitelességet adott nekik, de az egész előadáson átütött az a belső tűz és lelkesedés, ahogy a számukra is fontos témához álltak. Az előadás nagy részben épül az ő saját élményeikre, a testükkel vívott küzdelmeikre, elégedetlenségükre. Vállalták, hogy

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could identify with the performers – whether they be men or women, young or old – as most of us find something unattractive in our own appearance. Or, let's put it this way: something that should be accepted.

As the writer-director of the piece and one of its performers, Rebecca Westholm later revealed in an interview that the spark of inspiration for the show was the fact that she could not find any women, among those close to her or in wider society, who were perfectly satisfied with their own body. The question occurred to her: "when did we start to hate ourselves?". While searching for an answer, she interviewed several patients with anorexia nervosa only to realise that this mental illness is "just like a religion".

Her interesting observation made me think. On the one hand we all know that we are affected even unconsciously by biological conditions, sociocultural effects, and, most of all, the ideals of beauty hammered into us by the media. And yet faith – religion – is nourished from inner conviction, and we cannot blame our dissatisfaction only on external influences. Probably the inner craving and the external expectations – whether imaginary or real – strengthen and nourish each other.

Staying with the religion analogy, every ethically advanced religion (from Christianity to Buddhism) issues guidelines for reaching the highest level of perfection (being skinny, for those suffering from anorexia). Craving for perfection can stem from noble motives – to become a better person through learning and self-development – or it can come from mere vanity or *fear of imperfection*. "We believe that if we live a perfect life, look perfect and act perfect, we can minimize or avoid the pain of blame, judgment, and shame," states the American psychologist Brené Brown.¹

The most irrational (outer and inner) expectations of today's world affect our appearance. We are

1 Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (Hazelden, 2010)

szembenéznék saját tökéletlenségükkel, amivel nem csak többször zavarba hozták a nézőket, de önreflexióra is készítették őket. Bárki magára ismerhetett a szereplőkben a közönség soraiból, férfiak és nők, fiatalok és idősek egyaránt, hiszen a legtöbb ember kisebb vagy nagyobb mértékben, de talál a külsejében kifogásolnivalót. Vagy mondjuk inkább úgy, elfogadnivalót.

Az ötletadó szikra is az volt – ahogy az író-rendező és művésznő Rebecca Westholm később az interjú során elmesélte –, hogy szűkebb és tágabb környezetében nem talált egy olyan nőt sem, aki maradéktalanul elégedett lett volna a testével. Ezért merült fel benne a kérdés, hogy „mikor kezdtük el utálni magunkat?” A választ keresve számos anorexiás beteggel készített interjút, és arra jutott, hogy az anorexia „olyan, mint egy vallás”.

Érdekes észrevétele elgondolkodtatott. Egyrésztől mindannyian tudjuk, hogy a biológiai, szociokulturális hatások, legmarkánsabban pedig a média által sulykolt szépségideál tudat alatt is hat ránk. De a hitnek nincs szüksége szubsztanciális alapokra, belső meggyőződésből táplálkozik. Tehát nem okolhatjuk csakis a külső hatásokat elégedetlenségünkért. Valószínűleg a belső hiányérzet és a kívülről érkező, vélt vagy valós elvárások kölcsönösen erősítik, táplálják egymást.

A vallás analógiánál maradva, minden etikailag fejlett vallás (a kereszténységtől a buddhizmusig) iránymutatást fogalmaz meg arra, hogyan jussunk el a tökéletesség legmagasabb fokára (az anorexiásoknál ez a tökély a soványság). A tökéletességre való törekvés fakadhat nemes indíttatásból, hogy a tanulás és a fejlődés által egyre jobb emberekké váljunk, vagy pusztán hiúságból, de akár a tökéletlenségtől való félelmünkéből is: „Az hisszük, ha tökéletesen élünk, tökéletesen nézünk ki és tökéletesen viselkedünk, azáltal minimalizálhatjuk az esélyét, vagy elkerülhetjük, hogy hibáztassanak, ítélkezzenek fölöttünk, vagy megszégyenüljünk” – állítja Brené Brown¹ amerikai pszichológusnő.

1 Brené Brown: *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (Hazelden, 2010)

more apologetic with those making mistakes or violating rules of politeness than with those that have an unpleasant appearance. Our culture is obsessed with the perfection of the body, though the definition of what is ideal differs from country to country, culture to culture. The global model of beauty is a skinny, muscular body, with wrinkleless, tight skin, and, for women, an emphasis on the primary sexual characteristics (lips, breasts, bottom).

Ruby Rose's *EAT IT!* begins from the idea that the compulsion to conform is affecting people's lives to such an extent that they subordinate their happiness and well-being to it. They lose self-confidence and harmony with their body, and become angry with themselves just because they cannot live up to the ideal. The dissatisfaction with weight and figure can lead to fanatical exercising, diets and eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia and orthorexia.

Reality Show

The subject of the piece lies in front of us, there is no need to go in search of it: we are told it at the beginning of the show, when the ladies sit next to each other reading beauty magazines. They quote headlines and advertisements, and though not all of us understand Swedish we have no doubt that these are real quotes.

By taking advantage of the dissatisfaction we feel with our own appearance, the media, with weight loss tips in magazines and reality TV makeovers, forces an ideal of beauty on us, which may be an irrational dream but which can certainly be brought closer with money. Women in advertisements are 20% skinnier and 10 years younger than the target audience, yet this, and the constant Photoshopping of these ads, is not known to everyone who sees them. These messages pour on us so tremendously and monotonously that most of us accept them as perfection, without any second thoughts.

A common way to influence consumers is to make them feel empty, and to make them feel guilty for not being slim and fit enough, for their skin and muscles not being tight enough, their noses not attractive enough, their lips not thick enough, and

Mai világunkban a legirracionalisabb (külső és belső) elvárások a megjelenésre vonatkoznak. Könnyebben elfogadjuk, ha valaki hibázik, vagy megszeg egy udvariassági szabályt, mint azt, ha nem nyújt esztétikailag kellemes látványt. Kultúránk a tökéletes test megszállottja, és bár az ideál meghatározása országonként, kultúrkörönként is eltérhet, a globális szépségminta a sovány, izmos test, a ráncatlan, feszes bőr, a nőknél pedig az elsődleges nemi jellegek (ajak, mell, fenék) hangsúlyossága.

A Ruby Rose Eat it! című alkotásában már a kiinduló helyzet, mikor a megfelelési kényszer olyannyira elhatalmasodik az emberen, hogy ennek rendeli alá boldogságát és jóérzését. Elveszíti az önbizalmát, diszharmóniába kerül a testével, haragszik önmagára, amiért nem tud megfelelni az ideálnak. A testsúllyal, alkattal kapcsolatos elégedetlenség már megszállott sportoláshoz, fogyókúrázáshoz, evési zavarokhoz (anorexiához, bulimiához, orthorexiához) vezet.

Valóságshow?

A téma itt van előttünk, nem kell messzire mennünk érte – halljuk az előadás elején, mialatt a művésznők egymás mellett ülve színes női magazinokat lapozgatnak. Idéznek is belőlük, szalagcímeket és reklámokat. Bár a svéd nyelvű szöveget nem mindenki értette, nem lehetett kétségünk afelől, hogy valódi idézeteket hallunk.

A média – a fogyókúra tippekkel teli divatlapoktól az átváltoztató tévéműsorokig – önmagunkkal szembeni elégedetlenségünket kihasználva olyan szépségideált sulykol belénk, amely irracionális ugyan, de pénzzel közelebb lehet jutni hozzá. A reklámokban szereplő nők 20%-kal vékonyabbak és tíz évvel fiatalabbak, mint a célközönségük, de ez nem tűnik fel mindenkinek, még a reklámfotók retusálása sem. Olyan mértéktelenül és egyhangúan ömlik ránk mindez, hogy sokan kritika nélkül elfogadják magának a tökéletességnek.

A fogyasztók befolyásolásának jellegzetes módja, hogy hiányérzetet és büntudatot keltenek bennünk – hogy nem vagyunk elég soványak, nem elég feszes az izmunk, a bőrünk, nem elég pisze az orrunk, dús az ajkunk vagy a mellünk. Aztán



Ruby Rose – EAT IT! © Petter Hellman

their breasts not big enough. A product or service is offered as a redemption – something that can ease their anxiety and guilt. Of course many Hollywood films can be brought up as examples of media negatively affecting our body image and ideals,² and not just because the main female characters, like supermodels, are usually skinny women. In these films, the ‘ugly girls’ can only expect their miseries to end in happiness if they transform from ugly ducklings to beautiful swans.

In *EAT IT!* we moved from the magazines’ simplistic, ridiculous or degrading generalisations to a more personal dimension as we arrived at a more self-reflective perspective – one where we felt that we heard the personal voices of the artists. Even if they did not express their feelings through their own words but through a script written by somebody else, we still felt that they were not only playing a role. It was like a reality show, where in the Diary room the players were

² Emily Fox-Kales, *Body Shots: Hollywood and the Culture of Eating Disorders* (State University of New York Press, 2011)

felajánlanak egy terméket vagy szolgáltatást, amellyel szorongásunkat, bűntudatunkat enyhíthetjük. De ide sorolhatjuk a hollywoodi filmeket is, melyek szintén negatív hatást gyakorolhatnak a testkép és a testideál alakulására², nem csupán amiatt, mert ezekben többnyire a címlaplányokhoz hasonlóan rendkívül sovány nők szerepeknek. Ezekben a filmekben a „csúnya lányokra” is legfeljebb úgy várhat happy end, ha előtte rút kiskacsából hattyúvá változnak.

A magazinok leegyszerűsítő, nevetséges vagy kimondottan megalázó általánosításaitól haladunk a személyes dimenzió felé, ahogy egyszerre belső perspektívába kerülünk, és úgy érezzük, a művészek személyes hangját halljuk. Ha nem is a saját szavakat, érzéseiket mondták, hanem más által írt forgatókönyvet, akkor is úgy tűnt, mintha nem csupán szerepet játszanának. Mintha csak egy valóságshow-t néznénk, ahol a titokszobában a játékosok legerősebb érzéseikről vallanak,

² Emily Fox-Kales: *Body Shots: Hollywood and the Culture of Eating Disorders* (State University of New York Press, 2011)

talking about their most personal feelings. The performers were shockingly honest about their feelings towards their big bums, too thick thighs, and so on.

We would think that artists, dancers and acrobats working with their bodies do not have the urge to be perfect as much as the hoi polloi, since their figures are the closest to perfection. They feel and know their body much better than we feel and know ours. But this does not mean that they accept it as well, or that they feel contented with themselves. They have a strong control over their body, so it may be easier for them to change it – change the weight of it and the form of its muscles. Still, they cannot change the shape of their noses, nor make the wrinkles under their eyes vanish.

The performance showed that the burden is in fact twice as heavy on them: firstly, they have to meet the professional expectations of the ideal body (as being overweight would make an acrobat's job much harder), and secondly, they are influenced by social patterns as well. The life of an acrobat is full of renouncement, and not just because they devote a significant part of their lives to practice. They renounce the attainment of today's ideal for a female body: through intensive physical training their muscles become stronger, their backs broaden, their thighs thicken, and they edge away from the idealised slim, fragile, so-called 'feminine' figure.

When the artists of Ruby Rose walked on stage just before the beginning of the performance they wore dresses that seemed several sizes too small on purpose, and one could notice right away that they were built stronger. Or, rather, at a second glance you saw that they were strong, but a superficial observer would think they were chubby. In everyday life, when people don't know their occupations as circus performers, this could lead to preconceptions and frustration. And the fact that their appearance is a result of their own decisions may not necessarily make the situation easier for them. They made us smile, however, as we listened to their disappointed, sometimes self-accusatory, yet ultimately ironic or even sarcastic monologues.

a művésznők meglepően szókimondóan beszéltek arról, hogy túl nagynak érzik a feneküket, túl vastagnak a combjukat, és így tovább.

Azt gondolnánk, a testükkel dolgozó művészek, táncosok, artisták nem szenvednek a megfelelési kényszertől annyira, mint az átlagemberek, hiszen a testük a lehető legközelebb áll a tökéleteshez. Jobban belakják és jobban is ismerik a testüket, mint mi. Csakhogy ez korántsem egyenlő azzal, hogy el is fogadják ezeket vagy elégedettek önmagukkal. De erős testkontrollal is rendelkeznek, tehát talán változtatniuk is könnyebb magukon – a testsúlyukon és az izomzatukon igen, de nem az orruk állásán vagy a szem környéki ráncokon.

Az előadásból kiderült, rajtuk kétszeres a nyomás: elsősorban szakmailag megfelelni az ideális testalkatnak (hiszen egy artista munkáját is megnehezítené az aránytalan túlsúly), másrésztől rájuk is hatnak a társadalmi minták. Az artista élete lemondásokkal teli, de nem csak azt tekintve, hogy a gyakorlásnak szentelik életük jelentős részét. Lemondanak arról is, hogy a testük megközelítse a mai nőideált. Az intenzív fizikai igénybevétel során izmaik megerősödnek, hátuk kiszélesedik, combjuk megvastagodik, eltávolodnak az idealizált sovány, törekeny testalkattól, vagyis a nőiesként jellemzett külsőtől.

Mikor a Ruby Rose művészei megjelentek a színpadon az előadás kezdete előtt, mintha szándékosan néhány mérettel kisebb ruhát viseltek volna, és rögtön feltűnt, hogy erősebb testalkatúak. Jobban megfigyelve őket már látszott, hogy valójában rendkívül izmosak, de a felületes szemlélő talán azt gondolta róluk, hogy dundik. A hétköznapi életben, ha nem is tudják róluk, mivel foglalkoznak, ez valóban előítéleteket kelthet, vagy őket is feszélyezheti. És nem biztos, hogy könnyíti a helyzetüket, hogy ők tudatos választásuk miatt néznek ki így. De ironikus, olykor szarkasztikus humorral megmosolyogtattak bennünket aközben is, hogy csalódottságról árulkodó, sokszor önostorozó vallomásaikat hallgattuk.

Circus

The acrobatic stunts that were built into the performance provided an opportunity for the ladies to evolve their characters. Just as in the confessional monologues, we could feel that each performer played herself – or at least a role nourished mostly by her own personality. The sharp, self-accusatory voices used throughout the piece were perhaps only absent during the acrobatic stunts. In those sophisticated, complex movements the ladies looked beautiful, graceful, and very feminine. Still, some dramatic turning points were inserted into these acrobatic stunts as well. They showed us that in the contemporary circus an acrobat is not only a pretty tease, a cute attraction, but that they can also use their talent and personal charisma in a versatile manner. They have humour, a message to tell, and deserve to play a more important and complex role in a production.

During one acrobatic routine the artist kept on talking about the food she likes to eat, or would like to eat if she did not have to count the calories and watch her weight. While performing the routine she recited a whole menu, from starters to desserts, as every move and frozen pose gave emphasis or some kind of rhythm to the text, making it ever more dramatic. It was an impressive performance, and the absurdity of the combination of speech and movement made us smile.

The artists' drive to push the physical boundaries of their bodies is their own form of perfection ideal is very similar to the diet mania or fitness addiction of other women, as it is all about self defeat, the triumph of willpower over the physical body. Still, if acrobats could not dominate and control their body and movements perfectly, it could cost their lives. How could they be bravely imperfect if it is life threatening? It is a rare occasion when they can, as in this production, show and live their imperfection on stage.

Urban Variety

Using elements of variety must have made perfect sense for a show dealing with female aesthetics and the dark side of beauty. A synchronised makeup routine is followed by a

Cirkusz

Az előadásba épített artistaszámok lehetőséget adtak a művésznőknek arra, hogy jobban kibontakoztathassák karakterüket. Akárcsak a vallomásos monológoknál, itt is olyan érzésünk lehetett, hogy a művész saját magát adja, vagy legalább is a szerep jelentős részben táplálkozik az ő személyiségéből. Talán csak az artista számoknál nem éreztük azokat a kemény önostorozó hangokat, amelyeket mindvégig használtak. Ezekben valóban megjelent az esztétikum, a mozdulatok kifinomultságában, összetettségében, és szépnek, kecsesnek, légiességnek és nagyon nőiesnek láttuk a művésznőket. De ezekbe az artistaszámokba is tettek drámai csavarokat. Megmutatták, hogy a kortárs cirkuszban az artistanő már nem csupán esztétikai látványelem, csinos kis attrakció lehet, hanem bátran használhatja sokoldalú tehetségét, személyes kisugárzását. Lehet mondanivalója, humora, és a korábbinál nagyobb teret, fontosabb, összetettebb szerepet érdemelhet a produkcióban.

Az egyik artistaszám alatt a művésznő mindvégig arról beszélt, milyen ételeket szeret, vagyis csak szeretne enni, ha nem kellene odafigyelni a kalóriákra és a kilókra. Úgy végezte a gyakorlatokat, hogy felsorolt egy teljes étlapot az előételetől a desszertig, és közben minden egyes fordulattal és kimerevített pózzal hangsúlyt, ritmust, ezáltal drámaiságot adott a szövegnek. Egyszerre volt lenyűgöző a mutatvány, és mosolyra fakasztó a szöveg és a mozdulatok párosításának abszurditása.

A test fizikai korlátainak kitolása, azaz az ő tökéletesség-ideájuk, sokban hasonlít más nők fogyókúrás vagy fitness-szenvedélyéhez is, mivel ugyanúgy önmagunk legyőzéséről szól, az akarat diadaláról a test fölött. De ha az artisták nem tudnák tökéletesen irányítani és uralni a testüket és a mozdulataikat, az akár az életükbe is kerülhetne. Hogyan lehetnének épp ők bátran tökéletlenek, ha ez életveszélyes? Ritka az olyan alkalom, hogy a színpadon megmutathassák, megélhessék saját tökéletlenségüket, például egy ilyen produkcióban.

catwalk scene – both sequences grotesquely caricaturing simplistic ideas of beauty, and both strong scenes that could work independently within a variety production.

Psychological research has proven that the appearance of the face influences our perception of feminine or masculine appearance.³ The female face is usually more emphasised, more colourful than a man's, especially around the eyes and lips, the areas we pay the most attention to during non-verbal communication. That is why women have applied make-up to their eyes and lipstick to their lips for thousands of years, wanting always to emphasise their feminine side and to cover small wrinkles or blemishes or, let's just say, imperfections. We know that in terms of make-up less is more; however we see countless women overdoing it. This is what the artists did on stage: they applied make-up to their faces in a grotesque manner, put more and more lipstick on their lips and blusher on their cheeks, making their faces, in the end, look like a clown's face. They held a crooked mirror to the ritual of make-up and the women who had become 'victims' of it.

While the audience had a great laugh at the scene, the precise caricature showed us the fine line between the beautifying process and the garish, vulgar, fake, disgraceful or even ridiculous appearance make-up can result in. The ideal is not to be blamed in this case, but the compulsive or desperate attempt to look more beautiful or different from the persons we really are.

This dichotomy appeared in the catwalk scene as well: on the surface the beauty and the feminine aesthetics, but behind the scenes the pain and asceticism that are connected to it. The ladies put everything on themselves that their hands could reach so they could walk out like zombies, casting blank looks on the catwalk. They did not care if they hurt themselves or bumped into one another as they crossed the catwalk, grotesquely fast forwarding their moves so they could, just like the models, pose in a twisted and rather unnatural way. Many little girls and young women aspire to

3 Richard Russel, 'Illusion of Sex'. In Scientific American (January 2012).

Urbánus varieté

A varieté műfai elemeinek alkalmazása szinte adta magát a női esztétikummal (és annak árnyoldalaival) foglalkozó témához. A szépítkezést groteszk módon kifigurázó szinkronsminkelés és az ezt követő kifutó (catwalk) jelenet olyan revüszámok, amelyek akár önállóan is megállnák helyüket egy varieté produkcióban. Pszichológiai kutatások igazolják, hogy az arc kontrasztjai befolyásolják azt, hogy valakit nőiesnek vagy férfiasnak érzékelünk³. A nők arca természetesen hangsúlyosabb, színesebb, mint a férfiaké, különösen a szem és az ajak, melyekre a nonverbális kommunikációban leginkább figyelünk. Ezért festik a nők immár évezredek óta ösztönösen a szemüket és az ajkukat, ha szeretnék hangsúlyozni nőiességüket, és elfedni az apró ráncokat, bőrhibákat, vagyis a tökéletlenségeket. Gyakran halljuk a sminkeléssel kapcsolatban, hogy „a kevesebb több”, mégis számtalanszor látunk nőket, akik túlzásba viszik. Ezt teszik a művésznők is a színpadon: egyre groteszkebb módon és egyre több púdert, rúzszt és arcpirosítót kennek és szórnak magukra, míg végül szinte már bohóc-arcuk lesz. Így mutatnak görbe tükröt a sminkelés rituáléjának és az ennek „áldozatul esett” nőnek.

Miközben a közönség remekül szórakozott a jeleneten, pontosan a karikírozás miatt érezhetővé vált az a finom határ, amiktől a smink és a szépítkezés már nem kifinomult gesztus, hanem rikító, vulgáris, hamis, visszatetsző, vagy egyenesen nevetségessé teszi viselőjét. Itt sem feltétlenül az ideál a hibás, sokkal inkább a kényszeres, vagy kétségbeesett próbálkozás arra, hogy szebbnek, vagy egyszerűen másnak látsszunk, mint akik valójában vagyunk.

A kifutó-jelenetben is megjelenik a kettősség: a felszínen a szépség és a női esztétikum, és mögötte az ehhez társuló szenvedés, önsanyargatás. A művésznők bármit magukra aggattak, ami a kezük ügyébe került, még a kempingszéket is, hogy aztán üres tekintettel, szinte zombiként vonuljanak a kifutón. Az sem

3 Richard Russel: *Illusion of Sex*. In Scientific American (January 2012)

become models – the perfect dream for a girl, at least on the surface.

A dramatic effect was then made by slim figures painted on black bodysuits: a funny gag and an amazing illusion, as the lighting made the performers look like stick figures with disproportionately large heads – just like Barbie dolls. Another beauty myth made funny and harmless.

Rap segments and solo and group dance scenes rooted in hip-hop and breakdance had an important role in the performance. These fitted more to the theme of this fresh, young performance than chansons or revue dances, and this redefined, urban style of variety can reach out to more of today's audience.

Stand-up Comedy

During the interview with the artists, and in later conversations, it came up that punchlines and jokes can soften the serious messages of a performance. As we laugh we might miss the message between the lines and fail to reflect on the core ideas which the artists have debunked and made ridiculous.

But in *EAT IT!* I think the jokes were appropriate because the humour resolved the tension within the audience and made them feel connected with and interested in the performance. Moreover, the company did not only address the female audience; the male audience could also find something in its humorous elements. The show may have helped them to sympathise with their partners or female acquaintances, as they had the chance to peek into women's everyday struggle for the desired appearance. Some of these men may think about their own responsibilities, the expectations they have for women, and the lack of commitment they give to their partners to make them feel that they are accepted the way they are.

Burlesque Duet

The dramatic climax of the performance was the burlesque duet of Jenifur and Beatrix (Angela Wand and Rebecca Westholm), two fitness gurus from Florida. Dressed in white, velour sweatpants

érdekelte őket, ha megütötték magukat, vagy nekimentek a másoknak, miközben groteszk módon felgyorsítva rohantak végig a rögtönzött kifutón, csak hogy a végén a divatmodellekre jellemző, kitekert, természetellenes pózba vágassák magukat. Sok kislány és fiatal nő álmodik a modellkarrierről – ez a tökéletes lányálom, legalább is a felszínen.

Drámai hatást értek el a fekete alapon sovány idomokat ábrázoló elasztikus ruhákban (bodysuits) is, ami egyszerre volt jópofa gag és meghökkentő illúzió, mivel a megvilágításnak köszönhetően úgy tűnt, mintha egy pálcikaemberhez hasonló vékonyságú testtel rendelkeznének, hozzá pedig normális méretű, de így aránytalanul nagynak tűnő fejjel – akárcsak a Barbie-babák. Ezzel egy újabb szépségmítoszt tettek nevetségessé és ártalmatlanná.

Az előadásban fontos szerepet kaptak a rapdalbetétek, valamint a hip-hop és a break dance elemeiből építkező szóló és csoportos táncjelenetek. Ezek a témához és az előadás friss, fiatalos jellegéhez már jobban illenek, mint a sanzon vagy a revütánc, és ez az urbánus kultúra stílusában újraértelmezett varieté bizonyosan jobban meg is szólítja a mai közönséget.

Stand-up comedy

Felmerült az interjú alatt és a későbbi beszélgetésekben, hogy a stand-up comedy műfajra jellemző egysoros poénok (punchlines), gagek és viccek beépítése az előadásba elveheti a komoly üzenet élet. Hiszen jókat nevetünk, de nem feltétlenül jutunk túl a poén szintjén, hogy reflektáljunk is arra, amit nevetségessé tesznek.

Szerintem helyénvaló volt ezek alkalmazása, mert a primer humor oldotta a közönséget, ezáltal befogadóbbá, érdeklődőbbé tette a nézőket, és talán csökkentette a téma iránti ellenállást, hátrítást is. Ráadásul nem csak a mélyebben érintett női közönséget szólították meg így, a humor szintjén a férfi nézők is bekapcsolódhattak, és talán nőtt bennük az együttérzés is partnerük és nőismerőseik iránt, miután egy kicsit jobban beleláttak abba, hogy a nők milyen mindennapos küzdelmet vívnak az áhított külső eléréséért. Néhányan talán elgondolkodtak saját

and jackets, wearing jewellery, sunglasses and long, blond hair extensions, this twosome – “firsts in the world to have gymclasses with three-months old babies” – were caricatures of the fitness and health gurus familiar from TV. They screamed out well-known slogans like “down with carbohydrates!” or “let’s burn some fat!” or “tighter the diet, tighter the body!”.

We can meet these people not only in America, but even in Hungary – the mother who proudly announces that she worked out so much during pregnancy that her weight was even less after giving birth than it was before she became pregnant. Maybe these kind of role models are the most poisonous to female self-assessment because they contribute to the illusion that it is not impossible to reach perfection: they are the living examples that it can be reached by everyone. Yet, for those who have no similar physique nor standard of living (most people find it hard to pay for gym membership, and don’t have unlimited time to attend classes), this could lead to an even more serious self-accusation and feeling of failure.

As Jenifur and Beatrix won’t accept any excuses, they demonstrated their “low-budget beauty tips for the poor”. For example, they put toilet paper under their upper lips as a home-made lip enhancement (and moreover one does not even have to buy toilet paper: one can just take some from public toilets). For ‘Cheap Botox’ a person should pull up their eyelids and forehead, then fix them with duct tape, and instead of buying expensive body-shaping underwear they should use duct tape to make their waist and hips slimmer.

The audience not only laughed at the black humour of the sketch; most of them even took part in the interactive sequence and performed these grotesque, body-shaping exercises under the guidance of the two fitness gurus. Most of the audience mimed along, even as they were tricked into making drinking and smoking movements exposing the hypocritical nature of the fitness craze.

felelőségükön is, hogy milyen elvárásokat sugároznak a nők felé, vagy talán nem dicsérik partnerüket eleget, hogy megerősítsék abban, hogy elfogadják olyannak, amilyen.

Burleszk duett

Az előadás drámai csúcspontja Jenifur és Beatrix (Angela Wand és Rebecca Westholm), a két floridai fitnessguru burleszk duettje volt. A fehér plüssmelegítőbe öltözött, felékszerezett, hosszú szőke póthajjas, napszemüveget viselő páros – akik „a világon elsőként edzettek 3 hónapos bébiket” – a tévéből is ismerős fitness- és egészséges életmód guruk karikatúrája. Harsányan kiáltozták a jól ismert lelkesítő szlogeneket, mint a „le a szénhidráttal!”, „égjen a zsír!”, és „minél szigorúbb a diéta, annál feszesebb a test!”

Ma már nem csak Amerikában találkozhatnánk velük, valamennyi országban, még Magyarországon is akad hasonló karakter – aki például büszkén hirdeti, hogy terhessége alatt is annyit edzett, hogy szülés után kisebb volt a súlya, mint várandóssága előtt. Talán ezek a szerepmoделlek a legkártékonyabbak a női önértékelésre nézve, hiszen azt az illúziót keltik, hogy a tökéletességet megközelíteni nem lehetetlen, ők az élő példák arra, hogy bárkinek sikerülhet. Csakhogy aki nem rendelkezik hasonló adottságokkal vagy életszínvonallal (sokaknak egy fitness-bérlet is nagy kiadás, ráadásul nincs is mindenkinek korlátlan szabadideje az edzésre), abban leginkább elmélyítik az önvádat és a kudarc-érzést.

Mivel Jenifur és Beatrix sem fogad el kifogást, megmutatták „kis költségvetésű szépség-tippjeiket a szegényeknek”. Például a felső ajkak alá dugott vécépapír galacsint, ha ajakfeltöltést szeretnénk házilag (ráadásul a vécépapírt sem kell megvenni, csak a nyilvános vécéből hazavinni), az „olcsó botoxot” (húzzuk a fejtető felé szemhéjunkat és homlokunkat, majd rögzítsük szigetelő szalaggal), és a drága alakformáló alsónemű helyett a szintén szigetelőszalaggal kivitelezett derék- és csípőbandázst.

A közönség nem csak végig nevette a fekete humorú burleszk szkeccset, de az interaktív részben valamennyien be is kapcsolódtak, és

Dare to be Imperfect

Films, TV shows and advertising campaigns that focus on inner qualities and question the all-importance of our outer appearance sometimes have the opposite effect. They make their audience believe that 'minor' changes are enough to increase their self-confidence, to make them see themselves as more beautiful, and to make others see them as more beautiful. They can make a beautiful woman out of everybody with some new clothes, a new hairstyle, professional make-up, and some image retouching. Still, these measures only strengthen our belief that beauty is all about external appearance and can be purchased. Moreover, these paid injections of self-confidence only last for a limited time, as inner problems with self-esteem can quickly rout these false illusions. Maybe that is the reason why no 'where are they now' follow-ups are made with makeover shows.

There was an advertising campaign for Dove three years ago, with 'real women' who showed their wrinkles, small breasts, freckles – women who were not super model clones – but it later turned out that even these photos were retouched, which was even more disappointing; or just another proof of the shrewd routines of marketing and media

As the artists of *EAT IT!* work with their own bodies, they cannot trick us in the usual ways. They showed an example to the audience by daring to be 'ugly'. We could not feel that they made themselves naked, sometimes literally, just to gain sympathy from the audience. Nudity had its own function in every scene it was used. Their performance had credibility and dramatic power and sometimes situational comedy to ease the tension.

While it made the audience laugh a lot, the performance worked on a deeper level as well: it shed light on the inner and outer facts that can lead to problems of self-acceptance, dealt with several hypocritical myths of femininity, and showed that self-conscious, multi-talented women with an intelligent sense of humour are worth and capable of more than just to perform a beautiful show and be admired for their aesthetic

együtt csinálták a groteszk alakformáló tornát a két floridai fitnessguruval. A többség akkor is ismételte utánuk a gyakorlatokat, mikor behúzták a közönséget a csőbe, és már nem is komikus tornamozdulatokat mutattak, hanem cigarettázást és ivást imitáló gesztusokat.

Merjünk tökéletlenek lenni

A belső fontosságát hirdető, a külső mindenhatóságát megkérdőjelező filmek, tévéműsorok és reklámkampányok sokszor épp ellentétes hatást érnek el. Elhítetik a közönségükkel, hogy néhány „apró” külső változás is elég, hogy valakinek megnőjön az önbizalma annyira, hogy szépnek lássa magát és mások is szépnek lássák őt. Bárkiből tudnak csinos nőt varázsolni pár új ruha, egy új frizura, profi smink és néhány retusált fotó segítségével. Ezzel azonban csak megerősíti bennük, hogy a szépség külsőségeken múlik, és pénzzel megvásárolható. Ráadásul ezek az önbizalom-injekciók csak ideig-óráig hatnak, a mélyben meghúzódó önértékelési problémák gyorsan felmorzsolják ezeket. Talán ezért nincs is utánkövetés az átváltoztató műsoroknál.

Három éve Dove reklámkampányáról (melyben „igazi nőket”, ráncosakat, alacsonyakat, kismellűeket, szeplőseket és nem tipikus fotómodell klónokat szerepeltettek) utóbb kiderült, hogy mégis retusálták a képeket, ami különösen lelombozó.

Mivel az Eat it! művészei saját testükkel dolgoznak, nem csaphatnak be bennünket úgy, hogy a színpalak mögött leteszik ezt. Példátnak mutattak a közönségnek abban, hogy bátran mertek „csúnyák” lenni. Nem érezhettük azt sem, hogy a közönség szimpátiájának megnyeréséért meztelenítenék le magukat, olykor szó szerint. A meztelenségnek is volt funkciója minden egyes alkalommal. Hitelességet, drámaiságot adott alakításuknak, olykor pedig helyzetkomikumként oldotta a közönség feszültségét.

Miközben sokszor megnevettették a közönséget, az előadás mélyebb szinteken is működött: rávilágított az önértékelési problémák kialakulásában szerepet játszó külső és belső tényezőkre, leszámolt több álszent nőiessé-

features— in life and in the circus as well.

EAT IT! can help many of us to face not our imperfect body, but our imperfect body image. The performance inspires us all not only to reflect on our bodily imperfections – real or perceived – but also to recognise our strengths and redefine ourselves according to these realisations. If there is no template that fits us, we can create our own space in the world. Just like these five women, five different individuals – and female ideals in their own right – who possessed the stage that night.

mítosszal, és megmutatta, hogy a puszta dekorációs értéknél komolyabb szerepre érdemesek és hivatottak az öntudatos, önazonos, intelligens humorral, sokoldalú tehetséggel rendelkező nők, a cirkuszban és az életben egyaránt.

Az Eat it! sokaknak segíthet abban, hogy szembenézzenek nem a testük, hanem a testképük tökéletlenségével. De az előadás arra inspirál, hogy ne csak saját vélt vagy valós testi hibáinkon gondolkodjunk, hanem ismerjük fel erősségeinket, és ezek tudatában definiáljuk újra önmagunkat. Ha nincs ránk illő sablon, magunk teremtjük meg a helyünket a világban. Úgy, ahogy ez az öt nő, az öt különböző egyéniség – és saját jogán nőideál – ezen az estén birtokolta a színpadot.

Prophets with Red Noses

SALLY STOTT

Pretty much everyone has, at some point, gone to the circus. However, I imagine relatively few people from the UK have gone to the circus in Sweden. In Britain, Scandinavia has become increasingly known for crime dramas such as *Borgen*, *The Killing* and *The Bridge*. The city of Stockholm has been redefined by Stieg Larsson's Millennium trilogy. You can visit the 7-Eleven convenience store where Lisbeth Salander buys Billy's Pan Pizzas. However, if you're looking to programme a Nordic circus show, you can also go to Subcase – one of the few performing arts festivals open solely to industry professionals and producers.

It takes place in Alby, an industrial looking out-of-town area in Botkyrka, half an hour's bus ride from Stockholm. It's one of the poorest parts of Sweden. Subcase's Artistic Programming Director Kiki Muukkonen describes it as "the ghetto". This is where Subtopia, the organisation hosting the festival, has its home and provides year-round performance and rehearsal spaces for artists, filmmakers, musicians, and circus companies including Sweden's popular Cirkus Cirkör.

I'm here with a group of European journalists to find out what contemporary circus is all about. One thing it isn't about, apparently, is Cirque Du Soleil. Whenever the multi-million pound phenomenon is mentioned it's by someone who seems to hate it. It quickly becomes clear the majority of the performers at the festival want to do more than simply dazzle us with visual extravagance and money they don't have. They want to challenge our expectations and show us something other than red nosed clowns and acrobats 'flying through the air with the greatest of ease'. They want to make us laugh, gasp and cheer – but also think.

For anyone who's seen large amounts of political theatre, this might be a chilling prospect. Monologues about why we should never have gone to war in Iraq and endless court case

transcripts read out verbatim style aren't the best advert for performances with 'things to say'. But circus has something that many small-scale fringe theatre shows don't – the ability to attract an audience far bigger than a few liberal minded friends who already believe whatever right-on message is being peddled.

"All art is quite useless," Oscar Wilde once said. But many artists seem to disagree. Pop band Pulp asked us to 'Help the Aged', Bob Geldof to 'Feed the World' and the cast of 1980s children's TV series Grange Hill to 'Just Say No' to drugs. Last year's Festival of the World, at London's Southbank Centre, even had the tagline 'Art Will Change the World'. If this is possible, what better way of doing it than through circus – a style of performance that can be seen and understood by audiences all around the globe?

At Subcase, Ruby Rose's *EAT IT!* is the show most obviously trying to question the way we think and behave – for me, a bit too obviously. In it, the all-female cast use clowning and other circus disciplines to satirise the way women are encouraged to dislike their bodies. A talk show host does a DIY facelift with gaffer tape, an aerial hoop artist deadpans seductive poses described as the 'pain au chocolat' and 'pomme frite', and a woman runs around the stage topless in an attempt to break free of it all.

The idea that you can achieve empowerment by stripping off feels about as feminist as a *Carry On* film – particularly as it's only one of two options given for escaping the nightmarish universe presented. The other comes via a performer who shakes her body in order to emphasise its fat. Only she isn't really fat. She's thin and fit like the rest of the cast.

While the company are fun and likeable, at times they can feel quite judgemental – like they see us,



Patrik & Wes – Between Someonesons © Petter Hellman

the audience, as empty vessels in need of educating and politicising. Who doesn't know that magazines put pressure on women to be thin? Or that trying to live up to other people's expectations of 'hotness' is less important than, say, becoming prime minister or going hang gliding?

The majority of the women depicted in the show are victims of the media or defined purely by their reactions against it. Rarely does anyone appear unaffected by the pressure. When we meet creator/ performer Rebecca Westholm, it becomes clear why.

Rebecca explains how she interviewed 150 women and girls and couldn't find anyone who liked their body. She also tells me that she read

somewhere that one third of Swedish women have had Botox. I question this, but she is adamant the same is also true in London. It isn't. But for the last two and a half years Rebecca seems to have immersed herself in a world of women who have image and/or eating problems. As a result, this is the perspective she wants to depict on stage.

I ask her what the solution is. "There is no solution," she replies, raising the question why create a show about the problem at all? Why not just do some clever tightrope tricks and juggling instead? "You as a woman should not hit other women," she says. I presume she means metaphorically rather than literally – and people generally, rather than me specifically.

The camaraderie between *EAT IT!*'s performers is ultimately stronger than the hotchpotch of familiar messages that comprise the show. But the company's ambition to depict women in circus as something other than spangly, featherweight, smiley things in leotards being tossed about by big, strong men is admirable and refreshing.

In the 1970s and 80s, circus began tackling social and political issues. While traditional acts involved sad looking lions jumping through hoops of fire or men with oiled moustaches being shot from cannons, contemporary groups such as Cirque Plume, Cirque Invisible and Archaos challenged audiences and their expectations. Many of the artists at Subcase want to do the same.

Chipmunk Forge's *Phågel* is another all-female show at the festival which wants to redefine how women are portrayed in circus. Unfortunately, the way it does this is so obscure it's difficult to understand. Dressed in furry cat and bird costumes, performers Klara Mossberg and Lisa Angberg take part in an absurdist cartoon-like caper. There is the odd bit of tightrope walking, mysterious references to "hiding the animal within" and a whole scene that revolves around litter trays. Cirque Du Soleil this certainly isn't. Quite who is going to buy it at a circus trade fair is unclear. After some painful attempts at stand-up and about ten false endings, I'm intrigued to find out what was going on.

"As female performers it's often all about being beautiful and doing things you are good at," Klara explains. "We wanted to break away from this kind of thing." Sometimes, it seems, by being deliberately bad – not that this makes it any easier to watch. There are some nice moments, such as when the cat and bird swap fighting for friendship, but mostly it's a disparate and confusing piece.

"I would love a normal audience to enjoy our show – something more experimental," Klara says, "but that's not easy." It's not, as the infuriated reactions of the majority of our group proves when we discuss it later on over dinner. However, despite *Phågel*'s problems, it does feel a shame that ideas

which sound compelling in a post-show discussion are so difficult to enjoy on stage. Does circus with 'something to say' have to be anti-mainstream? If so, it seems unlikely that anyone other than those visiting a trade fair will ever see it.

Cirkus Cirkör's *Knitting Peace* is one of the biggest shows at the festival. War is one of its themes – along with the struggle of the artist, the meaning of life, and pretty much anything else you happen to think of. It's a sumptuous, epic production that includes a terrific musical score, spectacular set, and numerous circus disciplines – often performed simultaneously. It's a real spectacle and very evocative, but in trying to tackle so many issues it ends up exploring none.

It's only through talking to director Tilde Björfors afterwards that what we're supposed to take from it all becomes clear – and even then this is a mixture of abstract, intangible ideas. It's a beautiful production, but one that can't change or even highlight the topics it sets out to explore since it's not sufficiently clear, purely from watching it, what these are.

Slick double act Patrik & Wes aren't trying to take on politicians, make you boycott Israel, or wear a badge saying 'I'm a feminist'. The only thing they want to subvert is your preconceptions of throwing clubs in the air. Their show, *Between Someones*, is a stripped back, deceptively simple piece in which they create their own unique rhythm through juggling and dance. Their work is artistic but accessible. They are one of the few acts at the festival that doesn't rely upon funding to get by and they can make extra money by selling how-to DVDs to their fans.

'Commercial' can seem like a dirty word when it's used by artists doing more thematically driven or political work. But for Patrik & Wes it's a way of making more shows that more people can see – which is surely desirable whatever they're about. Art certainly can't change the world if it's being performed to rows of empty seats.

In order to get round the problem that audiences tend to like safe stuff they're already familiar with, filmmakers sometimes create genre movies that

challenge the status quo. *Thelma & Louise* is a road trip, but also a critique of a male dominated world. *Team America: World Police* is a musical that makes fun of musicals. Both are entertaining and have plenty to say. Both are very successful. There is no reason why circus can't also be challenging and commercial.

Maiurta is the one performance we see at Subcase that is quietly subversive, polished, entertaining and non-patronising. The company's name, Los Galindos, and the trapeze that hangs from the centre of the little wooden tent where it all takes place leads you to expect some kind of death defying flying act. Instead, solo performer Marcel Escolano delivers a wonderfully lo-fi clown show which involves elaborate leaps, jumps and tumbles from the safety of the floor.

He tells us afterwards that the piece was part-inspired by his time as a trapeze artist when he was younger, which he hated. "I was afraid, always, for twelve years," he says. "I'm not a natural acrobat." While the show's not the most provocative thing in the world, it does depict an older clown parodying the high-risk acts of the young in a way that is playfully satirical and not at all preachy.

"I don't want to be more important than you because I'm in the spotlight," Marcel says. It's easier to listen to someone who treats you as an equal, particularly when they're so talented. It's the ultimate flattery – and I imagine could lead you to buy into whatever their show had to say, however radical it might otherwise seem.

"The revolution is going to be the day when everyone does what they love," he concludes. This, he explains, will mean that no one will have any power over anyone else. It's an appealing thought – one that you can't help thinking would make a great idea for his next production.

As we leave Subcase for the last time, and wade through the blue white snow back to the bus, life in 'the ghetto' goes on as normal. Has anything changed? The lively, enthusiastic crowd coming out of *Maiurta* are certainly different to the sleepy, subdued bunch that went in. Maybe they'll join Marcel's revolution, quit the mind-numbing office jobs we might like to imagine they have, and set up high wires in their living rooms? Who knows whether art can change the world, but at its best it makes us believe it can.



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This project has been funded with support of the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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