

# UNPACK THE ARTS

European residency programme for cultural journalists

**EDINBURGH RESIDENCY  
EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE  
13 – 16 AUGUST 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 9th publication collects the texts of 10 European journalists who attended the residency at Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Edinburgh, UK, 13 to 16 August 2013.

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

### **KOEN ALLARY**

*Director, Circuscentrum (project leader)*

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*Adviser*

# This is my Body

ANDREA RÁDAI

Be it traditional or contemporary circus, the central point of the performance is the stretching of the body's boundaries or the amazing performance of the body. From this perspective the bodies of the performers are primarily present on stage or in the circus ring as 'circus bodies', and other aspects of the body, such as sexuality, are not the organising forces of the performance. It seems, however, that (just as in other performance genres) as soon as all the artists in a piece are women, the performers' relationship to their own bodies as female bodies (or even more generally their relationship to their own femininity) becomes emphatic. At least this is the conclusion drawn by the writer from the performances seen on the Unpack the Arts programme.<sup>1</sup>

*La Poème*<sup>2</sup> (Cie Bal) and *Fright or Flight* (3 is a Crowd) are both shows performed by women; however, the performances are otherwise seemingly very far from each other, in both the geographical and the artistic sense. The first was created in Paris, the Capital of Culture, and is the creation of a well-known artist, a mature woman from a family of artists who considers herself an artist rather than specifically a circus performer. The second was born in far away Australia, and is the creation of three young women starting their careers as circus artists. Jeanne Mordoj, creator of *La Poème*, has been working on solo projects for a decade, and her show takes a form she knows well. *Fright or Flight* is the first joint performance for Rocky Stone, Olivia Porter and Bianca Mackail, who founded their careers in such great companies as the Australian group Circa. There is a strict dramaturgy for *La Poème* that results in an intense – almost bursting –

- 1 A programme for cultural journalists financed by the European Union, with the aim of lifting contemporary circus arts into the cultural dialogue. The writer took part in the programme organised by the production company Crying Out Loud around the Edinburgh Festival Fringe
- 2 The Poem. The masculine article *le* is replaced by the feminine article *la* on purpose, referring to *la peau*, that is 'human skin' as well.

# Ez az én testem

ANDREA RÁDAI

Akár hagyományos, akár új cirkuszról van szó, a test határainak feszegetése, a test lenyűgöző teljesítménye központi elem az előadásban. Ilyen értelemben a fellépők teste elsősorban mint cirkuszi test van jelen a színpadon vagy a porondon, s a test nemisége vagy egyéb jellemzői az esetek többségében reflektálatlanul maradnak, vagy legalábbis nem válnak az előadást szervező erővé. Úgy tűnik azonban, hogy – egyéb előadóművészeti műfajokhoz hasonlóan – amint az a helyzet áll elő, hogy egy előadásban kizárólag nők lépnek fel, a szereplők viszonya a saját testükhöz mint női testhez (vagy még általánosabban: a saját nőiségükhöz) hangsúlyossá válik - sokszor éppen a cirkuszi mutatóvonalakon keresztül. Legalábbis ez a következtetés vonható le a cikkíró által, az Unpack the Arts című program<sup>1</sup> keretében látott újcirkuszos előadásokból.

A *La Poème*<sup>2</sup> (Cie Bal) és a *Fright or Flight*<sup>3</sup> (3 is a Crowd) című előadásokban kizárólag nők szerepelnek, ám ezt leszámítva látszólag igencsak távol állnak egymástól – földrajzi és művészi értelemben egyaránt. Az előbbi a kultúra egyik fővárosában, Párizsban jött létre, s egy művészcsaládból származó, önmagát is inkább művészként, mint cirkuszi emberként meghatározó, elismert alkotó, érett nő műve. Az utóbbi a távoli Ausztráliában született, s három fiatal, a pályájának elején járó cirkuszi artista alkotása. Jeanne Mordoj, a *La Poème* létrehozója már csaknem egy évtizede csinál szólókat,

- 1 Az Európai Unió által finanszírozott rezidens program kulturális újságíróknak, melynek célja a kortárs cirkuszművészet beemelése a kulturális diskurzusba. A cikk írója az Edinburgh-i Festival Fringe köré, a Crying Out Loud produkciós iroda segítségével szervezett programon vett részt.
- 2 *La Poème* jelentése 'a vers'. A névelő a hímnemű *le* helyett szándékosan a nőnemű *la*, egyben utalva a *la peau*, azaz emberi bőr jelentésű szóra is.
- 3 *Fright or Flight* jelentése 'félelem vagy repülés', mely egyszerre utal a *fright for flight* ('félelem a replüléstől') és a *fight or flight* (az állatvilágban ismeretes kifejezés, mely arra a fiziológiai reakcióra utal, mely meghatározza, hogy egy fenyegető, veszélyes szituációban az egyedek hogyan reagáljanak) kifejezésekre.

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Jeanne Mordoj/Company Bal – *La Poème* © Camille Sauvage

performance that is very careful with time. On the other hand, the editing principles brought to bear on the scenes of *Fright or Flight* are much lighter, and, in the weaker points of the dramaturgy, it seems to need a little trimming.

Despite these differences the two performances, *La Poème* and *Fright or Flight*, bear a remarkable number of similarities, and the gist of these similarities is that the performances – beyond the circus body – present feminine bodies with which the (non-artist) audience is capable of forming an organic bond, a connection that can even allow them to feel the artist's body as their own. These bodies show themselves through – among other things – their frailty, distortion, clumsiness, etcetera, with an honesty and acceptance that is lovable and liberating. From this perspective both performances celebrate femininity, though in rather different ways and to different extents – since the creators are in a different stages of their careers and lives.

### ***La Poème*: the woman as a beast**

Jeanne Mordoj calls herself a “stubborn feminist”, and she said of *La Poème* that she wants to show the audience what interests and moves her at her

a szóban forgó előadás tehát bejáratott forma a számára, míg Rocky Stone-nak, Olivia Porternek és Bianca Mackailnek ez az első közös alkotása, s idáig többek között olyan nagy társulatokban alapozták meg a karrierjüket, mint például a Circa. A *La Poème* esetében a szigorú dramaturgia egy rendkívül intenzív, az idővel már-már túlságosan is takarékos, ezért szinte szétrobbanó előadást eredményezett, míg a sokkal szertelenebb *Fright or Flight* jeleneteit lazább szerkesztőelv fűzi össze, mely a dramaturgiailag gyengébb pontokon pusztán kőítésnek tűnik.

A különbségek ellenére rendkívül sok a rokon vonás a *La Poème* és a *Fright or Flight* között, s a hasonlóság lényege az, hogy ezek az előadások – a cirkuszi testen túl – olyan fajta női testeket jelenítenek meg, melyekkel a (nem artista) néző is szerves viszonyt alakíthat ki, azaz akár a magáénak is érezheti őket. Hiszen ezek a testek többek között esendőségükben – torzságukban, esetlenségükben, ügyetlenségükben stb. – mutatkoznak meg, aminek az őszintesége és felvállaltsága rendkívül szerethető és felszabadító. Ilyen értelemben mindkét előadás a nőiséget ünnepli, bár nagyon is különböző módon és eltérő

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age (early forties) and within the life she has lived so far. Mordoĵ's feminism probably ends here, yet this does mean a lot: *La Poème* is about a woman possessed not by an outer demon but by her own womanhood or by her own core or substance.

At the beginning of the performance, Mordoĵ is standing at the back of the stage, dressed in an elegant, solid skirt, coat and hat. She is holding a small purse (which later turns out to be an Indian musical instrument, the shruti box), just as if she was waiting for the bus on her way to work, or was on her way home from a formal family event. She is humming quietly and innocently but it gradually becomes more strong-willed. As she steps, finely crushed eggshells fall to the ground from her dress. Eggs appear from all over her body, which she breaks (though these eggs are 'empty'); she hides other eggs back into her dress or even swallows a whole one – and this is the act that can be defined in a stricter sense as a circus routine. In a later scene she dances, or rather transfers her body to something enormously powerful that stems from herself. Maybe the most beautiful scene is when the egg yolk slides down her horizontal arms and shoulder: the tension, relaxation and fluctuation of her muscles guides the trail of the egg yolk. In the meantime, Mordoĵ shows us the thousand faces of a woman: once her body shines on stage, then her eyes are stuck and her face strains just like a beast, then she is beautiful and ugly at once, but she can be cute, mature, girly, womanish, meek, erotic, prolific or even sterile.

The power of Mordoĵ's performance maybe lies in the fact that she visualises a creature who lets happen what is her essence every second, who lives her femininity right here and right now through her stage appearance.

### **Fright or Flight: the woman as a chicken**

The first work of a newly established company, *Fright or Flight* was first performed at the Adelaide Fringe Festival, where the presenting company won a Best Circus & Physical Theatre Award which helped them to attend the Edinburgh Festival Fringe with the support of public funding.

mértékben – hiszen teljesen különböző pálya- és életszakaszt megélő alkotókról van szó.

### ***La Poème*: a nő mint bestia**

Jeanne Mordoĵ „makacs feministának” tartja magát, s itt tárgyalt előadásáról szólva nyilatkozta, hogy azt akarta megmutatni a közönségnek, ami őt ebben az életkorban (negyvenes évei elején), ezzel az életúttal a háta mögött foglalkoztatja és hajtja. Mordoĵ feminizmusa talán ebben ki is merül, ám ez nem keveset, hanem nagyon is sokat jelent: a *La Poème* egy megszállottat jelenít meg, de nem egy külső démon, hanem saját nőisége vagy saját magja, lényege által megszállott nőt. Az előadás elején Mordoĵ elegáns, szolid szoknyában, kabátkában és kalapban álldogal a színpad hátsó részén. Kezében egy kis táskát szorongat (később derül ki, hogy a táska valójában egy indiai hangszer, sruti box): mintha munkába menet a buszra várna, vagy talán egy formálisabb családi eseményről térne haza. Ártatlan és halk dudorászásába egyre több erő és határozottság vegyül. Amikor lép egyet, ruhájából apróra zúzott tojáshéj potyog a földre. Testéből innen-onnan épp tojások bújnak elő, melyeket széttör (ám ezek a tojások üresek), visszarejt a ruhájába vagy éppen egészben lenyel – egyébként ez az a mozzanat, ami szorosabb értelemben vett cirkuszi mutatványnak nevezhető. Egy későbbi jelenetben táncol, pontosabban átadja a testét valami hatalmas, de belőle magából eredő erőnek. A legszebb rész talán az, amikor egy tojás sárgája végigcsúszik vízszintesen kinyújtott karján és vállán: izmai feszülése, ernyedése és hullámozása egyengeti az utat. Mindeközben Mordoĵ a nő ezer arcát mutatja meg: teste olykor tündököl a színpadon, máshol szinte fennakad a szeme és eltorzul az arca, mint valami magából kikelt fenevadnak, olykor egyszerre gyönyörű és csúf, de ezen kívül tud bájos, érett, lányos, asszonyos, szende, erotikus, termékeny, meddő lenni. Mordoĵ előadásának ereje talán abban rejlik, hogy egy olyan lényt jelenít meg, aki mintha minden pillanatban hagyná, hogy az történjen vele, ami a lényege, aki itt és most, a színpadi jelenléte által éli meg a nőiségét.



The informal atmosphere and the happiness of collaboration created an extremely carefree and energetic performance that has the feel of a dormitory with all the shadows of a hard life. The theme of the show is the bird, and this results in some absurd, bizarre scenes that you have to laugh at, but the humour has a darker, more existential meaning as well. This mechanism starts to work from the opening scene: the three girls are playing 'it' blindfolded on stage with a rolled-up newspaper in their hands, hitting each other and the air.

The performance later exploits the bird theme: the artists dance with plastic chicken legs and plastic rowels, they peck at each other, squawk like seagulls, cover themselves in feathers, eat hot chicken wings, and one of them, surprising herself and the audience as well, lays an egg on stage. Their relationships with each other show a variety of shades: sometimes they are helpful, sometimes they are hateful and exclusionist. The artists show their circus abilities between clowning jokes that are on the verge of physical theatre: Stone is a balancing artist (walks on the tops of standing bottles) and an aerialist, Mackail is an aerialist on the ring, and Porter is a juggler. The beauty of their routines is highlighted and enhanced by the characters that have unfolded from earlier scenes – characters that are insecure, clumsy, and constantly experience failure or face the insensitivity of their 'bird peers'.

The whole performance bears an unkempt style as if the results for a Google-search for the word 'bird' were listed without selection, yet the audience tends to forgive this because of the liberating self-irony.

### Eggs

Eggs play a major role in both performances. In *La Poème* they are a central motif: Mordo first breaks up the eggs that come out of her body, which seem to be empty, then she pushes them down through her oesophagus, which seems at once self-explanatory and disgusting (as her whole body is distorted, her face puffs up and her eyes goggle). The sliding egg yolk on her maturely womanish, bare arm, the sight of egg shells, crushed into a million pieces and stuck to

### Fright or Flight: a nő mint csirke

A Fright or Flight egy frissen alapított társulat első darabja, melyet először az Adelaide-i Fringe Fesztiválon mutattak be – rögtön meg is kapta a legjobb cirkuszi és fizikai színházi előadásért járó díjat – majd tömegfinanszírozás segítségével jutott el az Edinburgh-i Festival Fringe-re.

Az informális körülmények és a közös munkából fakadó öröm egy rendkívül felszabadult és energikus előadást hozott létre, mely hangulatában olyan, mint valami hatalmas lánykollégiumi hülyéskedés az élet nehézségének minden árnyával. Az előadás vezérfonala, a madár-téma pedig abszurd, néhol már-már bizarr jeleneteket eredményez, melyeken muszáj nevetni, ám a komikumba mindig belevegyül egy egzisztenciálisabb, sötétebb értelmezési lehetőség is. Ez a mechanizmus már a nyitó jelenetben elkezd működni: a három lány bekötött szemmel kergetőzik a színpadon és egy összetekert újságpapírral csapkod maga körül, a levegőt és egymást csépelve.

Az előadás aztán bőségesen kiaknázza a madár-témát: a szereplők gumicsirkelábakkal és gumitarajjal pipiskedve táncolnak, csipdesik egymást, sirályként vijjognak, tollakba burkolóznak, csípős csirkeszárnyakat ropogtatnak, egyikük – saját magát és a közönséget is meglepve – tojást is tojik a színpadra. Egymással való viszonyuk is sokféle árnyalatot mutat: hol segítőkészek, hol pedig gyűlölködők és kirekesztők. A fizikai színház határán billegő bohóctréfák között pedig cirkuszi képességeiket mutatják be a szereplők: Stone egyensúlyozó művész (felállított palackok során lépked végig) és kötélén légtornász, Mackail karikán légtornász, Porter pedig zsonglőr. Mutatványaik szépségét kiemeli és fokozza a korábbi jelenetekből kibontakozó, önmagukban bizonytalan, esetlen, folyamatosan kudarcélményekkel vagy „madártársaik” érzéketlenségével szembesülő karakterük.

Az egész előadásban van valami a *madár* szóra kijövő Google-találatok fésületlenségéből, ám az ember – a felszabadult öniróniának köszönhetően – ezt hajlamos elnézni.

Mordoj's body, make the show itself an art installation. In the whole performance there is something that one can experience after all that suffering – there is some dignified acceptance and resignation.

The egg is the natural symbol of bird-ness, so important scenes were built on it within *Fright or Flight*. In the above mentioned egg laying scene, Porter even shows us her cloaca in a rather shameless way, and she herself surrounds her feathery product with curiosity and fear, finally breaking it despite all her efforts. In the last, dark-toned scene sand flows on the stage from a broken egg.

The importance of the egg is not so surprising, as it is a symbol with so many layers. It is prosaic or even domestic, but as an enormous ovum it refers to the most difficult problem of womanhood: the question of fertility or infertility, or rather, in the above shows whether it is a central point in a woman's life or not.

### Extremes

It is not important in any of the performances that the female bodies appearing on stage should be 'nice' (at least not in the sense the mass media interprets it). This manifests in the costumes as well, which are far from traditional circus' glittery tutu dresses; if they want to show their feminine side, they wear comically ultra-feminine dresses. Mordoj's dress, as for a mature woman, is moderate (but when she sings, she looks like an Afro-American nanny). Her hat, however, becomes a pair of breast prostheses while she dances, and this has a more funny and bizarre effect than if Mordoj would strip herself naked.

The basic dress for the artists of *Fright or Flight* is a leotard. Because of its patterning it brings forward the shy memories of our PE classes rather than the image of the beautifully developed body. Through the performance all three artists put on some other dresses: Porter seems to be quite uncomfortable in the little girl's dress. Half of Mackail's body, at one point, is covered by a paper bag (the struggling of her limbs looks quite funny). Next she dresses up like Big Bird from Sesame Street, and while she dances she loses

### Tojások

Mindkét előadásban fontos szerepe van a tojásoknak. A La Poème-ben központi motívum: Mordoj eleinte feltöri a testéből kibuggyanó tojásokat, melyek üresnek bizonyulnak, majd egészben erőlteti le őket a nyelőcsövén, ami egyszerre tűnik magától értetődőnek és visszataszítósnak (hiszen az egész teste beletorzul, arca felpuffad, szeme kigúvad). Az éretten asszonyos, meztelen karján végigszánkázó tojássárgája, és a millió darabra zúzódott, Mordoj testére ragadt tojáshéj látványa pedig önmagában felér egy képzőművészeti installációval. Az egészben van valami – a megszenvedettség után átélhető – méltóságteljes elfogadás, beletörődés.

A tojás a madárlét természetes velejárója, így a *Fright or Flight* című előadásban is fontos jelenetek épülnek rá. A már említett tojás jelenetben Porter még a kloákáját is a közönség elé tárja, meglehetősen szemérmetlenül, s maga is kíváncsisággal vegyes félelemmel veszi körül a tollas produktumot, ami minden igyekezete ellenére végül is összetörik. A legutolsó, sötét tónusú jelenetben pedig egy kettétört tojásból homok pereg a színpadra.

A tojás motívumának hangsúlyossága nem annyira meglepő, hiszen rendkívül sokrétű szimbólum: hétköznapi, mi több, domesztikális, de – mint óriási petesejt – utal a nőiség egyik legsúlyosabb problematikájára, a termékenységre – habár a tárgyalt előadásokban nem annyira a termékenység vagy a terméketlenség kérdése, hanem a téma központisége egy nő életében az érdekes.

### Végletek

Egyik előadásban sem elsődleges szempont, hogy a színpadon megjelenő testek (a tömegmédiával értelmezett módon) szépek legyenek. Ez megnyilvánul a jelmezekben is, melyek távol állnak a hagyományos cirkusz csillámos-tüllös dresszeitől vagy legfeljebb túlzóan rájátszanak a nőiességet hangsúlyozó ruhákra. Mordoj öltözete egy érett nőhöz illően szolid (sőt, amikor énekel, az egész alak akkor szinte néger dadusra emlékeztet). Kalapkája viszont egy pár női mell-protézissé változik tánc



enough feathers for a whole barnyard. Stone dresses for the duck dance in her 'bar fairy' costume, with huge false eyelashes, feather tufts, and feather boas to create a hymn to the pathetic – the full picture is totally ridiculous of course.

Because of the costumes and the clowning scenes, the three artists' bodies are shown in a comic light, and it seems – by the way – that they play on their personal and physical capabilities and the relationship between them. The boyish Mackail seems to be the most reserved and the weirdest, as if she identifies herself with the bird role. And above all, just like many women who try to solve their problems with eating, she is a binge eater: she represses her embarrassment and uncertainty with a huge bag of crisps and some chicken wings. Stone – and now I have to use a catachresis – seems to be the cock of the poultry-yard, the most explicit, confident character. The gist of one of her scenes is that she laughs at Porter; and if she is in a bird-like character, she puffs herself and acts like a peacock. On the other hand, Porter is like an inhibited teenage girl, who feels rather uncomfortable with *those*, and she does what they want from her reluctantly, but with not much success. It seems that the three of them have a traumatic relationship with their bodies; their body-concept, the clown scenes, and the bird theme all visualize the left-handedness and weirdness of this situation honestly but very funnily: the three circus birds do not take anything too seriously, not even themselves. Because of this, those scenes where they show us their circus abilities have an ethereal beauty; and the change is marked by the lyrical music as well. So the context, the bird symbolism, interprets the circus tricks (to put it in a bit of a simplified way) as if to say 'yes, we are silly and gawky, but we are capable of this so we are wonderful as well'. Yet this interpretation works the other way round also: 'though we can do this, we are not at all different from the other gormless, slightly silly girls...'

*La Poème* is like an answer to an inner urge, of which the main character is a bystander and experimenter. Compared to the previous performance, the circus and non-circus moments are more difficult to separate, so Mordojs' body

közben, aminek természetesen sokkal bizarrabb és komikusabb hatása van, mintha Mordojs saját magát meztelenítené le.

*A Fright or Flight* szereplőinek alapöltözéke a tornadressz – mely szabása miatt inkább a tornaórák félszepségét, mint gyönyörűen kidolgozott testek képét hívja elő. Az előadás során mindhárom szereplő további jelmezeket ölt magára: Porter láthatóan kellemetlenül érzi magát születésnap, idétlen csákójában és zsákból kihalászott, kinőtt, kislányos ruhácskájában. Mackailre egy ízben fél testét elfedő papírzacskót borítanak – végtagjainak kapálózása természetesen meglehetősen komikus, máshol ő maga öltözik a Szezám utca Nagymadarára emlékeztető jelmezbe, s miközben táncol, egy egész baromfiudvart megszegyenyítő mennyiségű tollat hullat el. Stone a kacsatánra öltözik át bártündéresre szabott jelmezébe – az összehatás – hatalmas műszempillák, tollbóbita és tollboa és az idétlenség himnusza – természetesen itt is nevetséges.

A jelmezeknek és a clownos jeleneteknek köszönhetően a három szereplő teste gyakran kerül komikus megvilágításba, s egyébként is gyakran tűnik úgy, hogy rájátszanak személyiségbeli vagy testi adottságaikra s a hármójuk között levő viszonyrendszerre. A fiúnak tűnő Mackail látszik a leginkább visszahúzódnak és különcnek, s mintha ő azonosulna a legjobban a madár-szereppel. Ráadásul – mint oly sok, a problémáit evéssel kezelni próbáló nő – kényszeres evő: hatalmas zacskó chipsszel majd csirkeszárnyal a kezében fojtja el zavarát és bizonytalanságát. Stone – és most kénytelenek leszünk egy képzavarral élni – tűnik a szűk baromfiudvar kakasának, a leghatározottabb, legmagabiztosabb jellemnek. Egyik jelenetének az a lényege, hogy gonoszul kineveti Portert; ha épp madárszerű, akkor felfújja magát és páváskodik. Porter pedig olyan, mint egy gátlásos kamaszlány, aki nagyon kellemetlenül érzi magát a színpadon, *ezekkel*, és kényszeredetten hajtja végre, amit elvárnak tőle – a legtöbbször sikertelenül. Mintha mindhármuk esetében sérült lenne a testükkel való viszonyuk, a testképük, s a bohóctréfa-szerű jelenetek, a madár-téma ennek a helyzetnek az esetlenségét és idétlenségét





Jeanne Mordoj/Company Bal – *La Poème* © Eoin Carey

bears this duality permanently; the ugliness or beauty of her body is not compared to something, and cannot be defined in the light of something. This, however, does not mean that there are no moments when her body is specifically not ugly or beautiful (as mentioned above, her face, during that thirty minutes of obsession, changes from cute through erotic to demonic).

Yet, as Mordoj's body reacts to a certain inner urge, her 'demonism' comes from inside and this bears the gesture of acceptance. The artist on stage is so herself, as if she knows what she is doing and why in every second (even if there is no verbal explanation for that) and this allows her character to accept whatever happens to her body, even if she suffers or if her reactions are not comprehensible by the mind. One of the most obvious examples of this is when she smears herself with the egg yolk so the egg shells on the ground can stick to her body when she rolls about in them.

The artists of the two performances have different attitudes towards their own 'stage' bodies due to generational differences and differences in fundamental structure (solo vs. trio). The

jelenítik meg őszintén, de nagyon viccesen: ez a három cirkuszi madár szerencsére semmit sem vesz túl komolyan, valószínűleg még önmagát sem. Emiatt szinte éteri szépségűek azok a jelenetek, melyekben cirkuszi képességeiket mutatják be – a váltást egyébként a líraivá váló zeneszámok is jelzik. Tehát a kontextus, a madár-körítés értelmezi a szorosán vett cirkuszi mutatókat (kissé leegyszerűsítve): *igen, idéltlenek és esetlenek vagyunk, de erre is képesek, tehát csodálatosak is vagyunk*, ám ez az értelmezés visszafele is működik: *bár erre is képesek vagyunk, mi sem vagyunk mások, mint a többi idéltlen, kicsit dilis csaj...*

A *La Poème* esetében mintha valami belső készletésre felelne az előadás, melynek egyszerre szemlélője és átélője a főszereplő. Az előbbi előadáshoz képest elválaszthatatlanabbnak tűnnek a cirkuszi és nem cirkuszi pillanatok is, így Mordoj teste sem jelenetenként, nem valaminek a fényében vagy valamihez képest szép vagy csúnya, hanem szinte állandó jelleggel hordozza ezt a kettősséget. Ez persze nem azt jelenti, hogy nincsenek momentumok, melyekben konkrétan és egyértelműen ne lenne valamilyen (hiszen, mint fentebb is említettük, megszállottságának alig harminc perce során ezer arca a bájostól az erotikuson át a démoniig megnyilvánul). Hanem, mivel Mordoj teste valamiféle belső készletésre reagál, még démonisága is belülről jön, ami viszont magában hordozza az elfogadás gesztusát. A színpadon levő alkotó annyira önzonos, minthogyha minden pillanatban pontosan tudná, hogy mit miért csinál (még akkor is, ha erre nincs verbális magyarázat), így az általa megtestesített karakter elfogadja, bármi is történik a testével – még akkor is, ha szenved, vagy ha ésszel felfoghatatlanok reakciói. Ennek egyik legegyszerűbb gesztusa az, amikor összekeni magát a tojás sárgájával – hogy aztán, amikor behempereg, a földre hullott tojáshéj a testére ragadhatson.

A két előadás szereplői tehát különbözőképpen állnak hozzá saját színpadi testükhöz a generációs különbségeknek és alapvető szerkezetnek (szóló-trió) köszönhetően. A *Fright or Flight*-ban egyfajta kamaszos esetlenség és a három nő közötti viszonyrendszer következtében

fundamental structure of *Fright or Flight* is a kind of teenage clumsiness and the alternation of success and failure within the relationship of the three women. What makes this performance likeable is that they take on this duality and accept their fears and uncertainty, not to mention the self-irony with which these ladies treat their own womanhood. This can be detected in the name of the company: the relationship can be as complicated and fragile with three women as with a whole crowd. Don't forget that many languages compare women to some kind of a bird, most of the time in a pejorative sense. *Fright or Flight* plays with the stereotypes of womanhood.

The same honesty shapes *La Poème* too, but here the main character has moved beyond the acceptance of her body image, and is mostly driven by the curiosity of living her womanhood.

Either way: in light of the body's fallibility, these circus performances are reassessed and brought closer to the audience.

létrejövő kudarc-siker váltakozás határozza meg az alapszerkezetet. Önmagában ennek a kettősségnek, s minden félelmüknek és bizonytalanságuknak a felvállalása szerethetővé teszi az előadást, nem beszélve arról az (ön) iróniáról, amivel a szereplők saját nőiségüknek kérdését kezelik. Ez már a társulat nevében is tetten érhető: három nő közötti kapcsolatrendszer olykor már rendkívül bonyolult és törékeny lehet (mint egy tömegben). Azt se felejtjük el, hogy hány nyelvben hasonlítják a nőket különböző fajtájú madarakhoz, szinte mindig pejoratív értelemben. A *Fright or Flight* tehát a nőiségre (kívülről) ráakódott sztereotípiákkal is eljátszik.

Ugyanez az őszinteség és felvállaltság alakítja a *La Poème* című előadást is, ám itt a főszereplő már túl van saját testképének elfogadásán, és leginkább a nőiség megélése iránti kíváncsiság vezérli.

Akárhogy is: a test esendőségének fényében a cirkuszi teljesítmény átértelmeződik, és közelebb kerül a nézőhöz.



# The Biggest and Craziest of Theatre Festivals is in Edinburgh

Edinburgh, what a scene!

CATHERINE MAKEREEL

In the same way that a McDonald's commercial will beat you over the head with images of its latest hamburger, Edinburgh loves to remind us that it hosts 'The world's largest arts festival', and certainly, in terms of fatty content, they've got the stuff that'll stick to your bones! The Fringe section alone includes over 2500 shows performed over the course of just three weeks. It's enough to make Avignon look like small potatoes. Whereas Avignon's Cité des Papes offers a condensed mixture of performances contained, for the most part, within its fortified walls, the Fringe functions more like a tentacular monster, creeping into even the most out-of-the-way corners of the Scottish capital. As the surrounding businesses and local kids on summer holidays carry on with their everyday lives, the smallest unoccupied spaces are converted into theatrical stages, leading to performances in pubs, cathedrals, private bedrooms, even an abandoned animal refuge. What a strange sensation it is to follow, with headphones on, the poetic and cinematic musings of *The Tales of Magic Realism* in a small veterinarian's office, then to continue with an ode to a magic lantern, zigzagging from one animal cage to the next. Each and every space of the Fringe is teeming with activity. In Summerhall alone, one of the most frequented spaces of the festival for those seeking original and surprising artforms, more than 100 performances can take place in just one day. Every fifteen minutes an usher makes the call for latecomers, some arriving to see a comedy show, others catching a

# Le plus grand et le plus fou des festivals de théâtre se poursuit à Edimbourg

Edinburgh, quel cirque !

CATHERINE MAKEREEL

Un peu à la manière dont une pub du MacDo matraque l'indécente pyramide de viande de son hamburger dernier cri, Edimbourg aime rappeler que son festival est « The world's largest arts festival ». Sûr que, en termes de lipides artistiques, le Festival d'Edimbourg a de quoi tenir au corps ! Rien que dans The Fringe – en marge du programme officiel – on trouve plus de 2500 spectacles sur trois semaines. A côté, Avignon fait presque petit joueur. Là où la Cité des Papes donne l'impression d'un concentré, cantonnant principalement ses artistes à l'intérieur de son enceinte fortifiée, The Fringe évoquerait plutôt un monstre tentaculaire, rampant dans tous les recoins, même les plus excentrés, de la capitale écossaise. Alors que les commerces et les écoliers en congé poursuivent leurs activités « as usual », le moindre espace inoccupé se transforme en scène théâtrale. C'est ainsi que l'on peut voir des spectacles dans un pub, une cathédrale, la chambre d'un particulier. On a même vu une pièce dans un refuge animalier déserté. Quelle étrange sensation de suivre, casque audio sur la tête, les divagations poético-cinématographiques de « The Tales Of Magic Realism », dans un petit cabinet vétérinaire avant de poursuivre cette ode à la lanterne magique zigzagant entre des cages d'animaux. Chaque endroit du Fringe est une fourmilière. Rien qu'au Summerhall, l'un des lieux les plus courus du festival pour les friands de formes inclassables et surprenantes, plus de 100 spectacles se succèdent sur une journée. Tous les quarts

circus performance that's the latest buzz. Cabaret, children's theatre, dance, stand-up, concerts, performance art: one can find everything and anything in a festival that's less concerned with selectivity than it is with overkill (hence the Big Mac metaphor above).

On the smallest wall space, on every toilet door, one finds flyers upon flyers. The posters run the gamut, from 'An all female production of Titus Andronicus' to 'Vampire hospital waiting room', or 'The lady boys of Bangkok', with an overwhelming proportion of the performances dedicated to comedy shows. "It's cheaper for everybody: one person on stage, no set, hardly any lights. What's more, it pulls in the lager lads so it sells lots of beer as well," as Summerhall owner Robert McDowell laments. "A number of venues started out completely dedicated to theatre. They would even host poetry readings. Then they were asked to increase their attendance numbers. That's when they starting going for these comedy shows, as if theatre on its own were totally powerless. That soon became 60% of their sales, then 80%. Today they're prisoners of the system of laughs and cheap beer. We've remained a no-comedy zone, faithful to what the festival was at its beginnings and thanks to, or in spite of this direction, we've doubled our sales from last year." So one can still come to take in artistic surprises, original forms and unlikely aesthetics from around the world, because the Fringe is also the most international of all festivals. By going against the grain, one may come across Belgian companies like Abattoir Fermé, or Berlin, lost in the middle of this infernal Tower of Babel.

Mary Brennan is a critic for the Herald Scotland and sees an average of six shows a day, for a total of seventy shows over three months. "The important thing is not to stop in between shows. You have to keep up the momentum, a bit like when you take your exams and then collapse right afterwards as soon as the adrenaline levels drop," says the journalist, who's got rings beneath her eyes. "It's wonderful to blend into the queue before each show, to hear perfect strangers strike up a conversation, open up about what they've seen and felt. They relive the performance a bit like cats licking their whiskers for hours after

d'heures, un ouvrier hurle son « last call » pour rameuter les retardataires, les uns courant voir tel « comedy show », les autres rattrapant cette pièce de cirque dont tout le monde parle. Cabaret, théâtre jeune public, danse, stand-up, concert, performance : on peut y voir tout et n'importe quoi dans un programme qui ne tend pas vers la sélection mais vers l'overdose (d'où la métaphore du Royal Deluxe King Burger susmentionné).

Sur la moindre parcelle de mur, la moindre porte de toilettes, les posters et les flyers s'amoncellent. Depuis « An all female production of Titus Andronicus » jusqu'à « Vampire hospital waiting room » ou « The lady boys of Bangkok », les pancartes annoncent le meilleur ou le pire ! Avec une part écrasante de spectacles dédiés au « comedy show ». « C'est moins cher pour tout le monde : une personne sur la scène, pas de décor, presque pas de lumières, et en plus, ça attire les « lager lads » (buteurs de Lager) alors ça fait vendre la bière, » regrette Robert Dowell, propriétaire du Summerhall. *De nombreux lieux ont commencé en étant entièrement dévoués au théâtre. Ils programmaient même de la poésie. Et puis, on leur a demandé d'élargir leur audience. Ils ont alors fait appel à ces « comedy shows » comme si le théâtre était impuissant en la matière. C'est devenu 60% de leurs ventes, puis 80%. Ils sont aujourd'hui prisonniers de ce système, du rire et de la bière pas chère. Nous, nous sommes restés une zone « no comedy », fidèle à ce que le festival était à ses débuts, et malgré ou grâce à cette ligne directrice, nous avons doublé nos ventes par rapport à l'année dernière.* On peut donc toujours et encore s'abreuver de surprises artistiques, de formes inclassables, d'univers improbables, venus du monde entier, car The Fringe est aussi le plus international de tous les festivals. C'est ainsi qu'au détour du programme, on peut notamment croiser des compagnies belges, comme Abattoir Fermé ou Berlin, noyés dans cette Tour de Babel infernale.

Critique pour le Herald Scotland, Mary Brennan voit en moyenne 6 spectacles par jour, pour un total de 70 sur trois semaines. « Il ne faut surtout pas s'arrêter entre les spectacles, pour garder le momentum, un peu comme quand on passe des



they've eaten to savour the lingering drops of milk. I mean, during the festival you even hear people talk about theatre in the pubs! Remember, the Fringe is also the world's biggest commercial fair and, for the performers, it's not all that romantic. You'd better have thick skin if you come here. Careers are made and unmade." Companies are hosted quite unceremoniously in each location. For example, the Australian company Circa had to cut 25 minutes from its show *Wunderkammer* to make room for other events at the same venue. Shows roll on endlessly. "We had half an hour to install everything. We performed and then we had fifteen minutes to pack up, clean and leave the stage," says the team of *La Poème*, an enchanting solo by Jeanne Mordoj. "It's crazy to see some artists come back year after year," says Robert McDowell. "In the official programme the artists are paid and housed in good conditions. But in the unofficial programme some have had to mortgage their homes to be here. Companies lose about £2,000 per person. For many of them it's a five-year investment, because they know a lot of international buyers will be there." It's a jungle for some, a whirlwind of inspiration for others. Edinburgh is an oddity of a festival, a magnificent bazaar!

### **Jeanne Mordoj, the chicken and the egg**

In Edinburgh, there are thousands of artists who remain practically invisible, relegated to a dingy basement, mustering up the last of their efforts to perform to near empty rooms with six or seven spectators who came across their show randomly or were just filling up gaps in their programmes. Then there are the chosen few who have actually garnered a following for their performance. All it takes is a review in *The Guardian* by Lyn Gardner or an unpredictable but steady word-of-mouth effect and an artist can become the new darling of the Fringe. This summer, Jeanne Mordoj will most certainly be an artist with the favourable winds of rumour in her sails. *La Poème* is the show to see for this 2013 edition. What is it that makes one show take off instead of another? The alchemy remains a mystery even if, in the case of Jeanne Mordoj, the magic takes place without a shadow of a doubt within the indefinable organic

*examens et que, juste après, on s'effondre, en même temps que l'adrénaline retombe, » raconte la journaliste, les yeux creusés de cernes. C'est merveilleux de se fondre dans la file, avant chaque spectacle, et d'entendre de parfaits inconnus se mettre à se parler, ouvrir leur cœur sur ce qu'ils ont vus et ressentis. Ils revivent le spectacle un peu comme les chats se lèchent les moustaches des heures après avoir mangé, en espérant y retrouver un peu de la saveur du lait. Pendant le festival, vous entendez même parler du théâtre dans les pubs, c'est dire ! Attention, The Fringe, c'est aussi la plus grande foire commerciale du monde et pour les artistes, ce n'est pas si romantique que ça. Il faut avoir les reins solides pour venir ici : les carrières se font et se défont. » C'est sans ménagement que les compagnies sont hébergés dans chaque lieu : La compagnie australienne Circa a du par exemple couper son spectacle « Wunderkammer » de 25 minutes pour laisser place à la location d'autres événements. Le roulement des spectacles est implacable : « On a une demi-heure pour s'installer, on joue et puis on a un quart d'heure pour tout ranger, nettoyer et quitter le plateau, » raconte l'équipe de « La Poème », envoûtant solo de Jeanne Mordoj. « C'est dingue de voir que certaines artistes reviennent d'année en année, s'interroge Robert Dowell. Dans le programme officiel, les artistes sont payés, et accueillis dans de confortables conditions, mais dans le off, il y en a qui ont hypothéqué leur maison pour venir. On estime que les compagnies perdent environ 2000 livres par personne. Pour beaucoup, c'est un investissement sur cinq ans car ils savent que de nombreux programmateurs internationaux vont venir. » Jungle pour les uns, tourbillon d'inspiration pour les autres : Edimbourg est un curieux festival, un magnifique bazar !*

### **Jeanne Mordoj, l'œuf et la poule**

A Edimbourg, il y a les milliers d'artistes pratiquement invisibles, relégués dans une cave obscure, rassemblant leur dernière réserve de ténacité pour jouer devant une salle clairsemée, devant six ou sept spectateurs, égarés là par hasard ou bouchant un trou dans leur programme. Et puis, il y a les autres, rares élus, dont le spectacle fait le buzz. Il suffit d'une critique de Lyn Gardner dans *The Guardian* ou, le plus

and corporeal relationship she creates with her audience. Like a shaman hypnotising his followers, the French performer literally enchants spectators with her magnificently bizarre solo show and its volcanic and baroque aesthetic. Since *Éloge du poil* ('In Praise of Hairiness'), in which Jeanne Mordoj is transformed into a bearded lady who juggles with eggs and goat skulls, examining femininity as well as mortality, we have known this circus artist to be capable of creating beautiful, undefinable works. Here we rediscover the bohemian in *La Poème*, a more intimate performance piece where the artist gives of herself to a degree rarely seen elsewhere. She cuts out all the fat and delivers with a rare intensity, once again using the egg, a symbol of fertility, as her main theme. Without giving too much away, let's just say that she juggles with the egg in all of its states – from the shattered shells to the sticky yolk that accompanies the acrobat's metaphors and contortions. It distorts her face, slips into her bra, sculpts her skin, and masks her entire body. She vomits it from her mouth, expels it in a thousand pieces between her legs, or stamps on it like a fakir. Without saying a word, but accompanied by a soundtrack that pulls you into what could be a voodoo ceremony or kind of tribal trance that might include the dance of a female goddess and maternal totem, Jeanne Mordoj appears possessed. With her diabolical presence, she transfixes you for a full half-hour and leaves you dumbfounded.

### **The corporeal curiosities of Circa**

As for the circus, this year audiences are flocking to see the Australians. From Casus to Circa, the acrobats from down under zip through the air in Edinburgh! Their aesthetic worlds celebrate, each in their own way, circus' flaunting physical prowess and the body's virtuosity (and beauty). With *Wunderkammer*, Circa turn things up a notch in their celebration of the body, taking nouveau burlesque as the point of departure for a 'cabinet of curiosities'. And with burlesque comes the more or less artistic striptease acts. So it's no surprise that we find performers strutting about scantily clad. Even the trapeze number finishes with a striptease. Although the director sought to invert gender roles by also dressing the men in luscious panties and garter belts, the whole thing

souvent, d'un imprévisible mais puissant bouche à oreille exponentiel, pour que tel ou telle artiste devienne soudain la coqueluche du Fringe. Cet été, Jeanne Mordoj fait incontestablement partie des artistes qui ont le vent de la rumeur en poupe. «*La Poème*» est le spectacle à voir de cette édition 2013. Qu'est-ce qui fait qu'un spectacle prend plus qu'un autre ? L'alchimie reste mystérieuse même si, dans le cas de Jeanne Mordoj, la magie opère sans nul doute dans cet indéfinissable rapport organique, charnel, qu'elle crée avec le public. Comme un chaman qui hypnotise ses ouailles, l'artiste française envoûte littéralement les spectateurs avec son solo magnifiquement bizarre, d'une poésie baroque et volcanique. Depuis «*Eloge du poil*», dans lequel Jeanne Mordoj se transformait en femme à barbe pour jongler avec des œufs et des crânes de bouc, interrogeant aussi bien la féminité que la finitude, on savait la circassienne capable des plus beaux ovnis. Revoici la bohème avec «*La Poème*», performance plus intimiste, où l'artiste se donne comme on a rarement vu un artiste se donner. Sans esbroufe mais avec une intensité inouïe. Et toujours ce fameux œuf, symbole de fertilité, pour fil rouge. Sans trop en dire pour ne pas gâcher la surprise, disons qu'elle jongle avec l'œuf, dans tous ses états : des miettes de coquille au jaune gluant, il accompagne les métamorphoses et contorsions de l'acrobate. Il distord son visage, se glisse dans son soutien-gorge, sculpte sa peau, ou masque son corps tout entier. Elle le vomit par la bouche, l'expulse en mille morceaux par l'entrejambe, ou le piétine comme un fakir. Sans un mot mais sur une bande-son qui vous entraîne dans ce qui pourrait être un cérémonial vaudou, une espèce de transe tribale, où danseraient déesses de la féminité et totems de la maternité. Jeanne Mordoj est comme possédée. D'une diabolique présence, elle vous aimante une demi-heure durant, et vous relâche abasourdis.

### **Les curiosités charnelles de Circa**

Côté cirque, cette année, c'est l'Australie qui fait courir les foules. De Casus à Circa : Edimbourg fait voltiger nos acrobates down under ! Avec des univers qui, chacun dans leur style, célèbrent un cirque de la prouesse physique, de la virtuosité (et de la beauté) des corps. Avec «*Wunderkammer*», Circa va un cran plus loin dans cette célébration





Circa – *Wunderkammer* © Sean Young Photography

comes across as a tiny bit lurid. Is it really a parody of the Chippendales when the blaring music from *The Full Monty* fills the room at the end of the show to egg on the audience's applause? We get the idea that this is a very corporeal circus, exhibitionist even, performed in *Wunderkammer* through a line-up of numbers that includes human pyramids, aerial carries and hula-hoop numbers. It's a real sight to see: the muscle-man who's more buff than a body-builder and carries four of his companions; or the feminine frame, lighter than a feather, as it spins up toward the ceiling. Then there are the hoops that meld into dizzying spirals in cadence with frenetically twisting hips. In this build-up of technical feats, a handful of more debonaire asides turn down the heat a bit. There's the Chinese pole duet, for example, like a tiny poetic bubble drifting in a sea of physical one-upmanship. The bodies pour into one another, pursue and support each other, or flee from each other as they are accompanied by images evoking a ship lost in the fog whose pirates climb the mast in search of the horizon. Parentheses are also provided by a few moments of humour, such as the contortionist who plays with a sheet of bubble wrap and whose simulations range from an orgasm to a tap number.

des corps puisqu'elle prend le new burlesque comme point de départ de son « cabinet des curiosités ». Qui dit burlesque dit effeuillage plus ou moins artistique. Pas étonnant dès lors de voir gambader les artistes en tenue légère. Même le numéro de trapèze finit en striptease. La mise en scène a beau inverser les rôles et faire porter culottes affriolantes et portes jarretelles à ces messieurs également, la démarche paraît un tantinet racoleuse. Est-on vraiment dans la parodie des chippendales quand la tonitruante musique des Full Monthly envahit la salle, en fin de représentation, pour galvaniser les applaudissements du public ? On l'aura compris, c'est un cirque très charnel, voire exhibitionniste que défend « Wunderkammer » dans une succession de numéros spectaculaires, qui surenchérit dans les pyramides humaines, les portés aériens, les tours de hoola hoop. Il faut voir ce malabar plus musclé qu'un bodybuilder porter quatre de ses compagnons à lui tout seul. Il faut voir ce corps féminin, léger comme une plume, partir en vrille à travers le plateau. Ou encore ces cerceaux se fondre dans de vertigineuses spirales en cadence avec les déhanchements frénétiques. Dans cette escalade de prouesses techniques, quelques parenthèses plus débonnaires viennent

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Circa – *Wunderkammer* © Sean Young Photography

Given the title, one might have expected a bit more strangeness out of this *Wunderkammer*, or at least some unidentifiable objects and curiosities exposed to the voyeuristic eyes of visitors looking for zany trinkets or disturbing phenomena. Alas, there is not much that provokes in these well-oiled bodies or the conventional stripteases performed against a backdrop of smoke and neon. Only the heavy brass of a very commercial music manages to shake the theatre walls. As for the rest, the mind is untouched.

Nevertheless, the sheer renown of the Australian circus might allow us to see hope in the appearance in the ring of Three is a Crowd. With *Fright or Flight*, three zany women transformed into hysterical hens to offer a rocking and absurd performance that was completely off-the-wall, not exactly complete, yet full of promise and excitement. There's a bit of flesh-baring here as well, but with self-deprecating humour and not simply to strut. The costumes are unlikely, the situations surreal, and the music fabulously kitsch. Now all they need is a director, or even just an outside perspective, to tighten the nuts and bolts and give this nutty vision of the female condition an irrefutable wrapping.

apaiser toute cette fureur. A l'image de ce duo au mât chinois, petite bulle de poésie dans cet océan de morgue corporelle : les corps s'enroulent, se pourchassent, s'entraident ou se fuient au fil d'images évoquant un navire dans la brume avec ses pirates courant en haut du mât pour cerner l'horizon. La parenthèse est salutaire aussi dans les moments d'humour comme cette contorsionniste jouant avec un tapis de papier à bulles, y simulant tantôt l'orgasme, tantôt un numéro de claquettes.

Alléchés par le titre, on attendait de « Wunderkammer » bien plus d'étrangeté. On attendait au moins un objet inclassable, comme ces curiosités exposées au regard voyeur de visiteurs avides d'objets insolites, de phénomènes dérangeants. Rien de bien provoquant hélas dans ces corps bien huilés, ses stripteases convenus sur fond de fumigènes et néons. Seules les grosses basses d'une musique ultra commerciale ont fait trembler les murs du théâtre. Pour le reste, l'encéphalogramme est resté plat.

Le renouveau du cirque australien peut par contre fonder de grands espoirs dans l'arrivée de Three is a Crowd sur la piste. Avec *Fright or Flight*, trois drôles de dames transformées en poules hystériques offrent un spectacle rock n'roll et absurde, complètement décalé, pas tout à fait abouti mais absolument plein de passionnantes promesses. On s'y dénude encore ici mais avec une autodérision pleine de décontraction. Jamais dans la frime. Les costumes sont improbables, les situations surréalistes, les musiques fabuleusement kitsch. Ne manque plus qu'un metteur en scène, voire simplement un œil extérieur, pour resserrer quelques boulons et donner à cette vision déjantée de la condition féminine un emballage imparable.



# Quicksands? Guilty Pleasures?

CONSTANÇA CARVALHO HOMEM

It is possible to enjoy shows that greatly differ from our usual or most immediate preferences. Such works can provoke strangely simultaneous feelings – a sense of delight and astonishment, or abandon and censorship. The reflection I offer here starts from these responses, these points of complex reaction, and considers two Australian creations, namely *Fright or Flight*, by the newly formed company 3 is a Crowd, and *Wunderkammer*, by the already well-known collective Circa. Because this, I feel, is part of the critic's work: to reflect upon the relationship between a privileged gaze and its ability to compromise, to acknowledge what proportions of originality and efficacy can deceive one of the most solid pillars of critical avowal, one's self-image of taste.

To start, I believe it is important to recognise what *Fright or Flight* and *Wunderkammer* have in common by looking at where they overlap on the spectrum of contemporary circus' possibilities. Neither of these shows is founded *only* on established formulas and skills, yet, whether because of inexperience or in concession to the market, neither much disrupts them. Still, in their own scale and approach, both productions present a form of circus that is not limited purely to an arena of undoubted prowess. Perhaps it comes as no surprise that both shows depart from the tent and live music model; these elements impose a financial strain and worsen the logistics of touring, but more than this I think of the tent as a connotation, an expectation, that carries with it many artistic limitations. I believe in fact that by the very act of replacing the popular format of the tent – a format which contains little mystery and provides few affordances for lighting or sound design – these productions immediately imply more delicate, unstable and personal areas – even if they dare not enter them fully. In this there is the evidence of a line of thinking that brings together meta-circus and dramaturgy,

# Areias movediças? Pecadilhos?

CONSTANÇA CARVALHO HOMEM

Há espectáculos de que é possível gostar tendo consciência do quanto destoam das nossas preferências mais marcadas ou imediatas. É uma estranha experiência de simultaneidade, a que provocam - de fruição e surpresa, de abandono e censura. A reflexão que tentarei fazer parte desta encruzilhada e aborda duas criações australianas, nomeadamente *Fright or Flight*, do recém-formado colectivo 3 is a Crowd, e *Wunderkammer*, da já reconhecida companhia Circa. Porque o exercício da crítica é também este, julgo eu: reflectir sobre as concessões que um espectador privilegiado vai fazendo, tentar perceber que proporção de originalidade e eficácia consegue evitar um dos grandes pilares da emissão de um juízo, a auto-imagem do gosto.

Mesmo se em perfeito contraste à superfície, julgo que importa reconhecer o que *Fright or Flight* e *Wunderkammer* têm em comum, a começar pela posição intermédia que ocupam no espectro de possibilidades do circo contemporâneo. Estes espectáculos não assentam exclusivamente em fórmulas e aptidões convencionadas, mas também não se permitem rupturas relevantes, seja por inexperience, seja por confronto com o mercado. Ainda assim, e de acordo com as suas respectivas escala e prudência, de ambos emerge uma modalidade de circo que não se resume a uma arena de proezas indiscutíveis, mas pode ser lugar onde o virtuosismo não se separa da singularidade. Talvez não espante que ambos prescindam de tenda e banda ao vivo - e se o refiro não penso tanto no esforço financeiro que estes elementos acarretam nem em constrangimentos à circulação; penso sobretudo na tenda como conotação e expectativa, e penso também nas muitas limitações artísticas que lhe são inerentes. Creio, por isso, que a substituição de um formato de cariz popular, que pouco mistério encerra, bem como a atenção redobrada

and I would like to have seen it explored in more depth.

When considering an artform we are less familiar with, it is perhaps necessary to make a few detours. I will make one here, phrased as a question: what risks and promises are there when circus is pervaded by, or merely lends its codes to, the very flesh and temper of its performers? I would say that one significant risk concerns the historical baggage circus retains from the days when it could be mistaken for a freak show – times in which painful deformities and singular physicalities were the trump card of the businessman. Therefore, in this sense, the more obvious the technical expertise, the greater the safeguard. But what I found remarkable is the fact that some of these promises deal precisely with the removal of this safeguard. In fact, the most promising circus acts I've come across rely on artists we may not know precisely how to define, artists whose practice is perceived as cross-genre or multidisciplinary, made up of research, experimentation, and – why not say so – *their* share of indulgence. Two examples of especially exciting shows that fulfilled this idea of removing safeguards would be *Éloge du Poil* by Jeanne Mordoj and *PPP* by Phia Ménard. And if I mention these shows and not those who came to Edinburgh in 2013, I do so deliberately, for indeed they seem to be the best examples of a *mélange* of inheritance and intimacy, creations that provide a balanced dialogue between a memory of the bizarreness of the old circus and an appreciation of the self as subject matter.

Works like these are only possible as they reflect years of artistic practice, of curiosity for the world and personal growth. Certainly, *Fright or Flight* and *Wunderkammer* cannot compete on such a level. Still, they are mature enough not to explore the freakish or the extraordinary *per se* (even if at times they seem to!), and they are indulgent enough to present the feat as much as the deliberate fiasco, with some degree of subjectivity in gesture. So, maybe I should introduce the notions of visibility and identity, because in their own ways both productions agree on a new reading of extremely specialised bodies. This exposure of the body-taken-for-granted, this

ao desenho de som e ao desenho de luz, concorrem para a produção de sentido; sugerem, se ainda não ousam percorrê-los, territórios mais delicados, instáveis, pessoais. Portanto, há indícios de um pensamento que condensa meta-circo e dramaturgia, e gostaria de o ter visto mais aprofundado.

Pensar uma forma artística que se conhece menos bem obriga a alguns parêntesis. Exporei um, enunciando uma pergunta: que riscos e promessas há para o circo quando se deixa permeiar ou já só empresta os seus códigos à carne e têmpera singular dos seus intérpretes? Diria que há risco significativo associado a um peso histórico, ao facto de podermos ser lembrados dos tempos em que circo e *freak show* eram designações passíveis de confundir-se, tempos em que muito dolorosas singularidades podiam ser a carta alta do empresário. Nesse sentido, quanto mais manifesta uma competência técnica mais o espectáculo se protege. O que é assinalável é ver que as promessas querem prescindir dessa protecção. Na verdade, elas vêm sendo cumpridas muito por força de artistas que talvez não saibamos classificar de forma precisa, cuja prática dilata as fronteiras do que entendemos como disciplinas e se distingue pela pesquisa, pela experimentação e, porque não dizê-lo, por alguma indulgência. Dois casos de promessa cumprida especialmente empolgantes são *Éloge du Poil*, de Jeanne Mordoj, e *PPP*, de Phia Ménard, e se agora menciono estes espectáculos e não os que vieram a Edimburgo em 2013, faço-o de forma deliberada; de facto, parecem-me ser os melhores exemplos de digestão do tempo histórico e de tempos íntimos, criações que proporcionam um justo diálogo entre a memória do bizarro do velho circo e a valorização de um percurso pessoal.

Criações como as que acabo de referir são possíveis na medida em que reflectem anos de labor, de curiosidade sobre o mundo e experiência de vida. Ora, *Fright or Flight* e *Wunderkammer* não podem competir a esse nível e, no entanto, vejamos: têm maturidade bastante para não explorar a contemplação do aberrante ou do extraordinário *per se*, ainda que a espaços



vision of the body beyond its use as a tool, brings a welcome completeness and reveals the many faces of an ensemble of performers who, trained in a form prone to stereotypes and limiting specialisms, are licensed here to cross the line. On the other hand, both shows try to mesh what at first is easily perceived as distinct; by juxtaposing what's deft and what's laughable, they show us a kind of circus aware of its own proclivity for effects, keen on self-sabotage and irony.

Let us move on to a more specific analysis, starting with *Wunderkammer*. The presenting company, Circa, are not new to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and *Wunderkammer*, already three years old, has been received around the world with excitement and enthusiastic critical responses. In theory, it is a composite artwork that merges acrobatics and burlesque, but in practice my first impression was of watching routine acrobatics in fetishistic trappings. *Wunderkammer* exudes the mechanics of a traditional show. From a structural point of view, in the sense that it proposes a sequence of independent numbers, but also in terms of the relationship that it intends to establish with the audience. Even in a theatre as large as McEwan Hall, applause is encouraged by a choreographic strategy that usually ends sequences with a bow and frontal display.

Yaron Lifschitz, the company's artistic director, told the Unpack the Arts group the show began with the musical concept of the fugue and that he was keen on a sort of polyphonic writing rather than on the development of a single idea. Unfortunately, the show gives in to an extremely predictable irreverence and becomes hostage to a lubricious if not distracting game. The version presented at the festival is 20 minutes shorter than the original one, and those who saw the earlier version claim the show has lost some subtlety. However, if we take into account the show's marketing highlights and put aside the ambitions we learned Yaron might have had for it initially, this cut did not determine *Wunderkammer's* commercial course. The problem is rather contained at the outset of the piece and in the somewhat simplistic desire to celebrate the body and sensuality. For the sake

queiram parecer fazê-lo!; e são indulgentes o bastante para apresentar tanto a façanha como o fiasco programado, com espaço para uma execução personalizada. Então talvez deva falar de visibilidade e de identidade: à sua maneira, estas duas propostas concorrem para uma nova leitura de corpos sumamente especializados, protegidos habitualmente porque vistos *em função*. E esse expor do corpo-tomado-por-adquirido, esse ver do corpo para lá do utensílio, produz uma integralidade bem-vinda, dá-nos a face múltipla de um conjunto de intérpretes que, educados numa prática atreita a estereótipos e especialidades, terá licença para transbordar. Por outro lado, ambos os espectáculos procuram baralhar o que à partida é distinto e discernível; quando nivelam o gesto hábil e o gesto perfeitamente risível, o que nos mostram é uma modalidade de circo consciente dos efeitos que provoca, com vontade de eventualmente os desmontar e lançar sobre si uma mão cheia de auto-ironia.

Passemos a uma análise mais concreta, começando por *Wunderkammer*. A companhia Circa é repetente em Edimburgo e o espectáculo que traz, já com três anos de vida e um naipe de críticas entusiásticas, foi recebido com alvoroço. Em teoria, *Wunderkammer* seria um objecto compósito que funde acrobacia e burlesco, mas na prática o que primeiro senti foi que estava perante um esquema acrobático clássico com um invólucro fetichista. O espectáculo transpira a mecânica do evento diurno, tradicional. Do ponto de vista da estrutura, porque propõe um alinhamento de números independentes, mas também do ponto de vista da relação que pretende estabelecer com o público. Mesmo num anfiteatro de grande dimensão como é o McEwan Hall, o aplauso é incentivado por uma disposição coreográfica que habitualmente acaba em plano frontal e vénia.

Yaron Lifschitz, director artístico da companhia, diria em conversa que trabalhou a partir do conceito de fuga, que lhe interessava uma escrita polifónica ao invés da ideia única. Lamentavelmente, é notória a concessão a uma irreverência perfeitamente previsível, o que torna o espectáculo refém de um jogo lúbrico fácil e



3 is a Crowd – *Fright or Flight* © Sean Young Photography

of comparison, I would say *Wunderkammer* has the beat, attitude and looks expected of a Scissor Sisters's video. Given such reservations I did not expect the show to surprise me, but actually there were many moments when I was freed from prejudice. First, the astounding Chinese pole number. The technical competence of the two male performers, the ebb and flow of a piece by Arvo Pärt and the fact that we were not distracted by visible muscle created the semblance of a dialogue so light it barely seemed human, so intimate it felt ambiguous. These performers could've been playing brothers or lovers, we'll never know, and it matters little whether they speak or dance; what comes across is the expression of a very delicate, universally recognised affection.

At times, the piece went into an intelligent, humorous vein and played on stereotypes. The striptease performed on trapeze is an example of one of the show's twists. Here, an extremely wilful male performer embraces the condition of sex symbol: taken by the loving strains of Peter

porventura dispersivo. A versão apresentada no festival tem um corte de 20 minutos em relação ao original e, diz-nos quem viu a versão anterior, terá perdido certa subtilidade. Porém, se tivermos em conta o marketing que acompanha o espectáculo, e a despeito das ambições eruditas que Yaron possa ter tido inicialmente, não é resultado deste corte a deriva comercial de *Wunderkammer*, ela está contida na sua génese e no desejo, até certo ponto simplista, de celebração do corpo e da sensualidade. Concretizando com um termo de comparação, diria que enquanto produto *Wunderkammer* tem a batida, a atitude e a aparência expectáveis de um videoclip das Scissor Sisters. Com estas reservas, não esperava que o espectáculo me surpreendesse, mas efectivamente houve muitos momentos em que cedi sem preconceito. Em primeiro lugar, o espantoso número de mastro chinês. A competência técnica dos dois intérpretes masculinos, o fluxo e refluxo de um tema de Arvo Pärt, e o facto de não sermos distraídos por músculo visível, criam a aparência de um diálogo tão leve que mal parece humano, e

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Gabriel, we watch a nonsensical choreography performed faultlessly and can't help sensing a parodic tone. Is it pathetic, poignant, both? The number in which Alice Muntz presents her dance on bubble wrap issues similar mixed feelings. This lightweight and agile woman – elsewhere confined by her body type to be the flyer in a toss-the-girl routine – has a fully fledged solo sequence in which, after all, she has licence to perform a rather unskilled, clownish ballet. These are the moments where *Wunderkammer* seems most successful, with a smart management of irony and ambiguity, of what it is and what it appears to be. At the end, the show plays a final prank: with few clothes left, standing in line as the chorus repeats 'it's all right', the performers have nothing left to do but wait; there's no way to hide, they are shown as effeminate, masculine and muscular, though not always in accordance with their gender. But just when we think the euphoria has faded, that there will be no more artifice, comes a last grand gesture. There was one skirt left to toss...

From the point of view of circumstance and intention, *Fright or Flight* is a very different case. Only a few weeks old, this is the work an emerging company who've come to Edinburgh after winning an award at the Adelaide Fringe. The simplicity with which I present the show is possibly a proper match for the no-frills approach of 3 is a Crowd. When we chatted with the company, performer Rockie Stone took the lead and told us of three friends who, living between Melbourne and Brisbane, wanted to come together in a project they could call their own. Rockie hinted at the joy and urgency of physical work created by performers who mutually admire one another, but didn't separate this dimension from the need to reveal a shared universe, however goofy, pained or awkward it might be. We could grasp this urge for acknowledgement and authorship when we realised that Rockie, Bianca (Mackail) and Olivia (Porter) had all been through a number of companies, and that – despite their seeming reluctance to admit it – for young Australian circus performers, Circa was and still is a very important employer, if not an *alma mater*. Therefore the boldness of the show has something to do with its modesty; it does not

tão próximo que resulta ambíguo. Não é possível saber-se se o que testemunhamos é uma conversa entre irmãos ou entre amantes, e pouco importa saber se falam ou dançam; o que transparece é a expressão muito delicada de um afecto universalmente reconhecido. Houve outros momentos em que a veia humorística dominou com inteligência, aproveitando estereótipos, e o striptease em trapézio é exemplo de como nos tiram o tapete. Entre o voluntarismo do intérprete masculino, que parece congratular-se com o lugar de desejo a que foi remetido, e a paródia do striptease numa coreografia disparatada, mas executada sem mácula e de olhos nos olhos, somos embalados por um Peter Gabriel em verve amorosa. É patético, comovente, ambas as coisas? O número em que Alice Muntz apresenta o seu bailado em película de bolhas de plástico deixa-nos dúvidas da mesma ordem. A rapariga leve e ágil, confinada pelo seu biótipo ao *toss the girl*, tem um solo de pleno direito em que se mostra, afinal, inábil e clownesca. É nestes interstícios que *Wunderkammer* me parece muito bem conseguido, na gestão da ironia e da ambiguidade, na gestão entre o que é e o que aparenta ser. O final do espectáculo volta a pregar-nos uma partida: despedidos, à espera, ao som de um refrão que repete um "it's alright", os intérpretes aparecem inteiros porque não vigiados, efeminados, másculos e musculados nem sempre de acordo com o seu género; mas justamente quando pensarmos que toda a euforia se esvaiu, que há um refrear do artifício, surge um último grande gesto. Ah, ainda faltava voar uma saia...

Circunstancial e artisticamente, o caso de *Fright or Flight* é de facto bastante diferente - um colectivo emergente traz ao festival um espectáculo com algumas semanas de circulação, premiado pouco antes no Fringe de Adelaide. A simplicidade desta apresentação parece-me em tudo conforme aos propósitos das 3 is a Crowd. Na conversa que tivemos connosco, Rockie Stone tomou a dianteira e falou-nos de três amigas que, a viver entre Melbourne e Brisbane, quiseram juntar-se em torno de um objecto que sentissem como seu. Rockie deixou transparecer a alegria e a urgência de um trabalho físico criado por intérpretes que se

intend to be a smash hit, and wisely so, since it derives from three minds who are moving away from tested formulas and attempting to integrate their own subjectivity. On the other hand, the show takes advantage of the existing bonds between performers to build a stage narrative. One can easily tell the differences in leadership and assertiveness – one almost has the feeling the emphasis lies on character work more than on physical skill – yet for me the main effort of the piece, and the unprecedented thing, is for the artists to be on stage as themselves. Maybe this is why it was natural for them to use something they'd tried at home as an opening scene – a sort of blind man's bluff that quickly distinguishes the different personae.

The show has a common denominator, the bird theme, which is maybe a little facile, certainly not new and can't solve a few rhythmic issues within the piece. But it ends up having a double function: it blurs the transition between acts and carries a sort of storyline. In fact, even though it doesn't feel militant or purposeful, *Fright or Flight* does have a queer discourse and puts across quite a few stances of empowerment through the bird metaphor. The fragility of the bodies on display is measured by a need to accumulate, wear and over-accessorise. When Rockie accessorises to the point of almost cross-dressing, or when Bianca covers herself in feathers, they both communicate a felt need for equipment; when 'Bird Gerhl' by Antony and the Johnsons is heard along an aerial routine, or when 'Blackbird' by the Beatles plays as we see that Olivia is a pretty capable juggler, we feel that these performers have star quality *while* parading what I'd call 'ugly duckling DNA'. There's also no lack of humour to balance such surprisingly moving moments. What can we say about the minor scuffle around a bag of chips, the two on-stage spectators stealing the focus from the main star? How can we not laugh at the inclusion of a tune like 'Chicken Dance', in its German original, a vivid reminder of bad television entertainment or tacky traditional festivities? The almost constant oscillation between talent and ineffectiveness, progression and anti-climax, made the show incredibly refreshing.

admiram mutuamente, mas não separou essa dimensão da necessidade de expor um universo partilhado, no que ele possa conter de patetice, mágoa ou estranheza. Aceitamos este desejo de assunção e de autoria quando nos apercebemos de que Rockie, Bianca e Olivia passaram por inúmeras companhias; percebemos também, apesar da relutância que parecem ter em admitilo, que para os jovens criadores australianos a Circa foi e é um importantíssimo empregador, quando não mesmo *alma mater*. Portanto, o atrevimento deste espectáculo tem algo que ver com a sua modéstia; ele não pretende ser consensual, não poderia sê-lo, quando as cabeças que o urdiram estão a afastar-se de uma fórmula testada e a integrar a(s) sua(s) diferença(s). É, por outro lado, um espectáculo que aproveita laços existentes para lhes dar um nexo de cena. Reconhecemos relações de poder e de protagonismo e temos quase a sensação de que há personagens, mas quanto a mim o esforço maior e algo inaudito é o de mostrar o artista *as himself*. Talvez por isso lhes tenha sido natural usar um jogo caseiro como abertura do espectáculo, essa espécie de cabra-cega que rapidamente distingue as diferentes personas.

O espectáculo tem um denominador comum, o tema dos pássaros. É talvez um pouco pueril e já visto, e não pode resolver certos problemas de ritmo, mas acaba por ter utilidade dupla: esbate a transição entre números e transporta uma espécie de narrativa. De facto, mesmo que de forma não militante ou deliberada, *Fright or Flight* veicula um discurso *queer* e constrói momentos e imagens de *empowerment* fazendo uso dessa metáfora. A fragilidade destes corpos é medida pela necessidade de acumular, vestir e enfeitar por excesso. Quando Rockie se adorna até quase se travestir, quando Bianca se cobre de penas, há um sentido profundo nesta necessidade de equipamento; quando *Bird Gerhl*, de Antony and the Johnsons, acompanha uma suspensão, e *Blackbird*, dos Beatles, mostra que Olivia é uma malabarista bem capaz, sentimos que o lugar destas intérpretes é o de brilhar nos seus respectivos domínios sem esconder um eventual adn de patinho feio. Também não faltam tiradas de humor a equilibrar estes momentos de comoção inesperada. O que dizer das acções



This first piece by 3 is a Crowd is proof of determination and commendable talent, even if the show is perhaps a niche one. However, I have had a glimpse of where these performers might be heading, if they dare it: a further exploration of their own subjectivity, as well as a concern for dramaturgical and rhythmic consistency, could make it all the more interesting.

miniaturais à volta de um pacote de batatas fritas, duas espectadoras em cena a roubar o foco à estrela destacada? O que dizer também da inclusão de um tema como *Passarinhos a bailar* no original alemão, a recordar o mau entretenimento televisivo ou as festas populares? É a oscilação quase permanente entre o talento e a ineficácia, a progressão e o anti-clímax, que torna o espectáculo tão refrescante. Reconhecem-se nesta primeira criação vontade e talento mais que válidos, mesmo se porventura o espectáculo possa ser visto como um espectáculo de nicho. Mas creio ter tido um vislumbre do que possam ser novos voos, altos voos: o exponenciar do tecido original de cada intérprete, bem como uma maior congruência rítmica e dramática, poderão ser a via mais interessante.

# Risqué Humour and the Rhythm of Circus

DARINKA PILÁRI

Just as a sudden wisp of wind, the breath encircles, binds, twists; the pressure in the chest and abdomen alters. The voices of the people sitting around me increase to an irresistible pace; I join in, mime them, curl my mouth up into a smile. This is more than enough to unite us in the present. A performance of the biologically coded somatic rhythms that keep us moving and, given their bodily nature, perhaps even alive.

What we perceive takes over the mind in the present moment and lingers throughout the show; this is instinctive entertainment itself. There are no whys and hows; it is only us, and the absurdity on stage. Tricks adorned with burlesque and vaudeville styles; the persistent feeling that this experience – even after two thousand years – still triggers a kind of ancient togetherness, rivalry and thrill.

The two circus performances are *Wunderkammer* (Circa) and *La Clique* (David Bates) at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2013 – contemporary circus in vaudeville and burlesque styles. The effect of these performances is realised on a physical level: the intensity of movement and sound grabs the audience. The proper rhythm is instrumental for this. A rhythm that on the one hand is familiar from everyday life, yet on the other is excessive, extreme or even lyrical. A rhythm that is alien, absurd, and therefore comic and un-serious is required in order to guide the audience's reactions in this entertainment.

Absurdity is a kind of distortion that helps us to describe what we see: unusually strong, flexible people who can fly. The extremity of humankind and of our known physical features; the various limits of the unknown in everyday life. It is no surprise that throughout the 140 year history of

# Risqué humor és a cirkusz ritmusa

DARINKA PILÁRI

Megváltozik a levegővétel ritmusa, a mellkas és hasüregben uralkodó nyomásviszonyok. Akár egy hirtelen érkező fuvallat körbevesz, összeköt, megcsavar. A mellettünk ülő hangja olyan ütemben fokozódik, hogy mi sem tudunk ellenállni, csatlakozunk hozzá, utánozzuk, mosolyra áll a szánk. Ennyi bőven elég az egyesítéshez a jelenben. Biológiailag kódolt szomatikus ritmusok koncertje egy sátor alatt, ami mozgásban tart, testi eredete okán talán életben is.

A percepció térnyerése a tudat felett a jelen pillanatban, és ennek nyújtása időben, maga az ösztönös szórakozás. Nincsenek „miért”, vagy „hogyan” kezdetű kérdések, csak mi vagyunk és az abszurditás a színpadon. Trükkök burleszk és vaudeville stílusjegyekkel ékesítve, és a nyugtalanító gondolat, hogy az élmény több, mint kétezer év elteltével is valamiféle ősi együvé tartozást vált ki, versengést és izgalmat.

A két cirkuszi előadás: *Wunderkammer* (CIRCA), *La Clique* (David Bates). Edinburgh Fringe Fesztivál 2013. Új cirkusz vaudeville és burleszk stílusban. Az előadások fiziológiai szinten fejtik ki hatásukat, a mozdulatok és hangok intenzitása magával ragadja a közönséget, amihez elengedhetetlen a megfelelő ritmus. A ritmus, amelyet a néző a mindennapokból ismer, és ami ugyanakkor eltűzött, extrém, vagy éppen lírai. A ritmus, amely idegen, abszurd, ezért a komikumra, a komolytalanra van szüksége ahhoz, hogy a szórakozás irányába terelje a közönség reakcióit.

Az abszurd a valótlan egyfajta minősége, amivel a leginkább leírható az, amit látunk: szokatlanul izmos, hajlékony, repülni képes embereket. Saját fajtánk, ismert testi adottságaink extrémítását, a hétköznapi életben ismeretlen legkülönfélébb



trapeze the tricks performed by certain artists have been called 'flying' – feats which the earthbound watch from the ground as though they are godlike acts. There were even times, during the 1870s, when Darwinists followed the development of male acrobats' muscles with scientific interest, hoping to advance the study of the human body.

In circus the rhythm of an ordinary body is unusual, but it appears to be both unreal and believable at the same time – and the experience is carried on the back of comedy. I will reflect on the performances of *Wunderkammer* and *La Clique* from this point of view, and in the context of movement and the rhythm of their music.

### **Wunderkammer – Circa, director Yaron Lifschitz**

Observing the venue from the upper circle of a Catholic church converted into a circus setting at first my attention is caught by the enormous black draperies woven around the stage. The melody of Bach's *Contrapunctus* even helps the eyes scanning the space to notice the legs of saints, half halos, the partial wings sticking out here and there. The melody of instrumental jazz seasoned with mysterious laughter (Barry Adamson – 'Crackula Has Risen From The Grave') strikes me with awe, and as it invites more and more artists to the stage the tricks they perform are diverse yet their rapidity blurs the scene into one.

The prologue, which lines up seven performers in one feat, is only now unfolding as a memory. In it the artists push vividly coloured elastic strings into their noses, stressing the difficulty of the act by slowly feeding them through the pharynx and out the mouth as though to thread their skulls. This childish prank, an experiment to get to know one's own body, escalates into an adult game, a shocking act playing on our biological capabilities. Initial laughter turns into amazed smiles, but only for a second – a blink of the eye. The stage soon starts to move once more and it is again impossible to follow all the action: acrobats spring in somersaults from each other's backs, ropes twist around legs, figures melt into the background. Fitting between these scenes *Wunderkammer* offers a kind of dramaturgical

határait. Nem véletlen, hogy a trapéz 140 éves történetében a légtornászok mutatványát „repülésnek” hívják, amit a halandó istenszerű tettek lát a földről. Sőt, volt, hogy a Darwini evolúció hívei, az 1870-es évektől, a férfi akrobaták izmainak alakulását tudományos érdeklődéssel követték abban a reményben, hogy az emberi test fejlődésében egy következő szintre lépünk.

A cirkuszban a hétköznapi test ritmusa szokatlan, ugyanakkor egyszerre valótlannak és hihetően tűnik, amely élményt annak legfőbb hírnöke a komikum visz a hátán. A *Wunderkammer* és *La Clique* előadásokról ebből a szempontból, illetve a mozdulat és a zene ritmusának összefüggésében gondolkodom.

### **Wunderkammer – CIRCA Ensemble, rendező Yaron Lifschitz.**

A cirkuszi helyszínné átalakított katolikus templom karzati padjáról nézve a helyszínt, a figyelmem eleinte a színpad köré szőtt óriási fekete drapériákra esik. Bach *Contrapunctusa* még kedvezett is a teret pásztázó szemnek, észrevenni a néhol kilógó szentek lábait, fél glóriákat, egy szárnyrészletet. Váratlanul ér az instrumentális jazz gyanús nevetgéssel fűszerezve (Barry Adamson - *Crackula Has Risen From The Grave*), ami egyre több művészt hív be, a mutatványok különbözőek, de gyorsaságuk összemosza a látványt. A prologusnak, amely a társulat hét tagját sorakoztatta fel egy trükkben, most van ideje kibontakozni emlékként. Ebben élénk színű gumi zsinórokat dugtak fel az orrukba, lassan, kiélezve a mozdulat nehézségét, majd a garaton keresztül, szájon át mindkét végét megtartva fűzték át „koponyájukat”. A kezdeti gyerekes csínytet, a testtel való ismerkedő kísérlet fordult át később felnőtt játékba. A biológiai adottság kihasználásával való meghökkentésbe. Így a kezdeti nevetés az arcokon meghökkent mosollyá változott, de csak egy pillanatra. A megtréfált figyelem megragadásának másodpercében. A színpad ugyanis újra mozgásba lendül, és ismét lehetetlen követni minden tettet, az egymás testéről elrugaskodott bukfencet, a kötéltre tekeredő lábakat, a háttérbe olvadó alakokat. Ez a típusú intermezzo, mint dramaturgiai elem élő énekkel,



La Clique – Cabaret © Douglas Robertson

intermezzo – with live singing and a ringmaster (one of the performers) who entertains the audience till the next scene, always sprinkling the interludes with some humour to create motionless, relaxing states before the coming extremity. However, there is no possibility for the self to sink into the details, to explore, or to interpret the moving bodies, and the reason for this is that the emphasis is not on the understanding of the trick, not on the creation of some fundamental association, but on the trick itself. This is further strengthened and helped by the music of the piece and the similarity of the visual experience to a motion picture.

On the one hand the well-known tunes – Bach, Peter Gabriel, the American burlesque music of the 50s (Barney Kessel – ‘Honey Rock’) – are all attached to clearly established moods and feelings. A contemporary cultural identity intermingles with an image of circus which is nostalgic and aesthetically idealised. In a series of stereotypes we see stripteases and dangerous scenes: the throwing of bodies; a sequence where one woman is the femme fatale; Alice Muntz playing with bubble wrap; a sequence emphasising the male muscular strength of Scott

porondmesterrel, aki egy következő szám erejéig szórakoztatja a nézőket, de egyben cirkuszi tornász is, többször visszatér a *Wunderkammer* során, mindenkor humorral fűszerezve a köztes időt. Mintegy pihenésre, illetve felkészítésre szánt nyugalmi állapot az extrémítás eljövetele előtt. Nincs azonban lehetőség arra, hogy az én elmélyüljön a részletekben, önállóan fedezze fel, értelmezze az előtte mozgó testeket, aminek legfőbb oka, hogy a hangsúly nem a mutatvány megértésén, nem valamely immanens asszociáció létrehozásán van, hanem magán a trükkön. Ezt erősíti, segíti a hallás stimulálása a zene által, valamint, hogy a látástapasztalat a mozgókép érzékeléséhez hasonlatos.

Egyfelől a mindenki által ismert dallamok, mint Bach, Peter Gabriel, az '50-es évek amerikai burleszk zenéje (pl. Barney Kessel - *Honey Rock*), mind jól körvonalazható hangulatokhoz, érzésekhez kötődnek. A kortárs kulturális identitás a cirkusz nosztalgiával kezelt, és esztétikailag idealizált korainak képével keveredik. A sztereotípiák megtartásával, van sztriptíz, veszélyes jelenetek – testek dobálása, a női test, mint femme fatale – Alice Muntz buborékfóliával játszva, a férfi izomerő hangsúlyozása – Scott

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Grove, who can hold aloft three of his partners at the same time; and Melissa Knowles squeezing her entire body through a small ring with an excessive thinness that cites the old dime museums. These sorts of feats and tricks attracted crowds even in 19<sup>th</sup> Century vaudeville performances, and the material has barely changed. Vaudeville means 'the sound of the city'. It includes the voices of many – immigrants, workers, the middle-class – and as a genre it is all about us, humans, and the visualisation of our instinctive desires. Because of this there is not much space left for association, catharsis, shock. There is nothing that can confront the audience with themselves, as the point is that the sights on stage should elicit admiration. The performance arrives ready-made, and the healthy, highly qualified gymnasts enacting their extreme situations and feats create a sexy, entertaining, explosive and funny performance.

The book of love is long and boring... Jarrad Dewey, aerialist, starts to undress slowly, way up high, hanging onto the trapeze with his legs to the slow and romantic confessions of Peter Gabriel. To these dreamy melodies, Dewey gets rid of all his clothes, from his red bow-tie to his black tuxedo trousers. As a punchline, he finishes the sketch wearing black, lacy underwear. The scene recalls Barrette's famous striptease from the 1920s, in which a beautiful and elegant woman would slowly remove her clothing and in doing so gradually reveal herself as a man, finishing the undressing with masculine gestures. Dewey's feminine transformation is interesting because it happens not on a bodily level but through emotions created by the music. The last costume that covers his body is just the icing on the cake.

Yet this scene, which works with a variety of stereotypes, does not end here but ends when another artist removes the ultimate 'veil' and Dewey runs scared from the stage.

The gymnastic elements of the production, which seem so slow thanks to the music (even though the undressing is quick), are accelerated by the intensity of the surprises and interactions. The relationship between the boundaries established by the performance and the audience as a group is

Grove, aki akár három másikat is megtartja, vagy épp dime múzeumot idéző túlzott soványság – Melissa Knowles kis karikán préseli át testét. Ezen eszközök, trükkök már a korabeli, 19. századi vaudeville előadásokban is tömegeket vonzottak, amely mediális tulajdonság aligha változott. A vaudeville szó annyit tesz, *a város hangja*. Sokakhoz, bevándorlókhoz, munkásokhoz, a középosztályhoz szól, rólunk emberekről, ösztönös vágyaink vizualizációjáról. Éppen ezért kevés tér marad az egyéni asszociációkra, katarzisa, megrendülésre, nincs, ami a nézőt szembesítené önmagával, hiszen a cél, hogy a látvány csodálatot váltson ki. Ready-made formájában érkezik, amelyben az egészséges, magasan képzett tornászok extrém helyzetei szexi, szórakoztató, explozív, és vicces előadást teremtenek.

The book of love is long and boring... Peter Gabriel lassú, romantikus vallomására a légtornász Jarrad Dewey trapézon egyensúlyozva, fordulva, lábaival kapaszkodva vetkőzni kezd a magasban. Az andalgó dallamok ideje alatt Dewey minden ruhadarabjától megszabadul, a piros csokornyakkendőől kezdve a fekete tuxedo nadrágig. Csattanóként fekete csipkés alsóneműben zárja a számot. A jelenet felidézi Barrette híres 1920-as sztriptízét, aki elegáns öltözetétől megszabadulva fedte fel androgün kinézetét, majd férfias gesztusokkal fejezte be a vetkőzést. Dewey feminin átváltozása azért érdekes, mert nem testi szinten, hanem a zene által keltett érzelmek révén történik meg. Az utolsó testét fedő kosztüm megmutatása már csak hab a tortán.

A többféle sztereotípiát működtető jelenet azonban, akár egyfajta önirónia, végső soron nem itt ér véget, hanem egy másik előadó által, aki lerántja róla a végső „leplet” is, és Dewey ijedten fut ki a színpadról.

A zene miatt lassúnak tapasztalt tornász számot (a vetkőzés valójában gyors) a meglepetés intenzitása, majd a másokkal való interakció gyorsítja fel egészen a kirohanásig. Az előadás által működtetett határok és a közönség, mint tömeg kapcsolata rendkívül érzékeny. A kétoldalúság úgy valósul meg, hogy a néző

extremely sensitive. A two-way relationship can only materialise if the audience consents to artistic freedom on the stage. *Wunderkammer* emerges as a cowardly lion, one who likes safety better than the confrontation that would arise from expressing its own ideas. For example, if it ventures into an area that is not free from strong social stereotypes it immediately retreats. The aesthetic movements on the trapeze have to end up funny; they cannot stay in the serious sphere of sexual identity and hidden desires. The trapeze scene, similar to a later Chinese pole scene (with Lewis West and Todd Kilby) brings the artists closer to the audience, and their tone is more personal, but because of the lack of reflection that stems from the context there is no chance for this closeness to further unfold. Staying on the surface, their performance is not more than its apparent physical activities. The formula of *Wunderkammer's* rhythm plays a huge part in this. The slow-fast-slow-fast alternation in the rhythm leads to a climax (the Chinese pole duet) then continues similarly afterwards. As director Yaron Lifschitz states, the polyphony of the music and tricks is important because they create contrast. Why is contradiction important?

Jumping between absurdity and everyday humour is like switching between different worlds: the circus' fictive and real spheres are the opposite of the one which the audience is sitting in. The circus' reality is the naked body, represented by the artists and the tricks they perform, as opposed to the well-known things – emotions and scenes connected with the everyday body. Underwear, stilettos, bubble wrap, a rope, seduction, friendship, solitude – expressive objects and scenarios delineate figures on stage that are related to fixed, well-known situations in life. Combined with the extremely technical, precise circus scenes this creates a completeness that can be accessed by everybody.

Without this, we could see only the boring presentation of technical knowledge on stage, but this unveiling has its own risks. Juxtaposing two of these realities creates a complex image and an opportunity for the circus to show itself – in the case of *Wunderkammer*, the answer to absurdity should be to laugh at an instinctive entertainment.

mindenkori beleegyezését kell, hogy adja a színpadon történő művészi szabadsághoz. A *Wunderkammer* identitása szerint félénk oroszlánnak hat, aki a biztonságot jobban kedveli az elképzelési kifejtésével járó konfrontációnál. Például, ha olyan területre téved, amely nem mentes az erős társadalmi sztereotípiáktól, akkor meghátrál. A trapézon végzett esztétikus mozdulatok viccben kell, hogy végződjenek, nem maradhatnak a nemi identitás, a rejtett vágyak témakörének komoly szférájában. A trapéz-szám, a későbbi kínai rúd számhoz hasonlóan (Lewis West, Todd Kilby) közelebb engedi az előadó művészeket a közönséghez, hangvételük személyesebb, ugyanakkor a kontextusból fakadó reflexió hiánya miatt, nincs lehetőségük a kibontakozásra. Felszínen maradván, nem mutatnak túl a nyilvánvaló fizikai történésnél. Ebben a *Wunderkammer* ritmusképletének óriási szerepe van, a lassú-gyors-lassú-gyors ütemváltások egy tetőponthoz (kínai rúd, duett) vezetnek el, majd hasonlóképpen folytatódnak. A polifonikusan építkező zeneszámok, és trükkök Yaron Lifschitz rendező szavai szerint azért fontosak, mert kontrasztot teremtenek. Miért van szükség az ellentétekre?

Az ugrások az abszurditás és a vicces hétköznapi világ között, különböző világok közötti váltásoknak tekinthetők. A cirkusz fikatív és a valós szféráit, amelyek épp fordítottak, mint amelyben a néző helyet foglal. A cirkusz valósága ugyanis a tornászok által reprezentált csupaszt és a vele végrehajtott trükkök, szemben a mindennapok testéhez kötődő ismerős dolgokkal, érzelmekkel és jelenetekkel. Egy fehérnemű, a magas sarkú cipő, a buborékfólia, egy kötél, a csábítás, a barátság, a magány, olyan érzelmi szituációk körvonalazódnak a színpadon, amelyhez rögzült, mindenki által ismert életképek tartoznak. A végtelenül technikás, precíz cirkuszi tornász jelenetekkel mindez szokatlan teljességgé áll össze, amelyhez ekképp mindenki kapcsolódni tud.

E nélkül a színpadon csak a technikai tudás unalmas bemutatása zajlana, amely lelepleződésnek így is megvan a kockázata. A két realitás egymás mellé helyezése azonban alapvetően egy komplex képet hoz létre, és a



On the other hand, this contrast makes the performance a narrative, and helps to progress the show.

The polyphonic arrangement of the music helps to distinguish between the extraordinary and the ordinary. For example, you feel a constant throbbing when the artists throw each other (in a routine traditionally called 'toss the girl'); it is the tension of unpredictability, supported by the rhythm of the electronic music (Jon Hopkins – 'Insides/Wires'). Then the sturdiest acrobat stands in the middle, and to the rhythm of a piano and female voice (Susanna and the Magical Orchestra – 'Don't Think Twice, It's All Right'), the cast go to him one by one. Instead of using the space expansively, they take their bows with a more intimate, quieter stunt.

*Wunderkammer's* creation of meaning and contrast, and the pace of the presented scenes, makes the performance movie-like. It uses several tools that are typical of motion pictures (metalepsis, editing, fast scene changes), hence manipulating the perspective of eyes that are accustomed to movies.

Bodies support each other, push, rotate, and throw each other, maintaining continuous contact from one scene to the next. The memory of a female figure standing high on her partner's shoulders merges with the man jumping from head height and landing with a somersault. The vertically or horizontally expanding perspective captures the joint motion of several people, leaving the details in dead space from time to time. The experience for the audience is similar to that of a burlesque silent movie. The music is on, the reels are spinning, and the extraordinary circus production appears.

The pulse of the accelerated life – generated by circus artists and not the camera – does not seem a physical ordeal or liability to the outside observer. One cannot perceive (only know) the energy involved in creating the scenes. The artists smile, play with their eyes, and the audience is having fun. Nowadays the average audience does not marvel at the speed like they did some time ago, or like those who have never 'flown' before.

cirkusz számára teremt lehetőséget önmaga megmutatkozásához – a *Wunderkammer* esetében úgy, hogy az abszurdításra adott válasz a nevetés, az ösztönös szórakozás legyen. Emellett ez a kontraszt az, amely narratívvá teszi az előadást, segíti az „előrehaladásban”.

A zeneszámok polifonikus elrendezése szintén a rendkívüli és szokványos különbségét hivatott alátámasztani. Például, amikor a tornászok dobálják egymást (*toss the girl*) folyamatos pulzálás érzékelhető, a kiszámíthatatlan következő pillanat fokozódó feszültsége, amit az elektronikus zene (Jon Hopkins – *Insides/Wires*) üteme is támogat. Majd a legizmosabb tornász áll a centrumban, akihez lassan zongorabillentyűk, és egy női énekhang ütemére (Susanna and the Magical Orchestra – *Don't Think Twice, It's All Right*) egyenként járulnak oda a társulat tagjai, hogy az expanzív térhasználat helyett, intim közelséget sugározva, csendesebb trükkal búcsúzzanak.

Ez a típusú jelentés-, és kontrasztteremtés, valamint az életre hívott jelenetek tempója az előadást hasonlatossá teszi a film médiumához is. Több olyan eszközt használ, amely a mozgóképre jellemző (metalepszis, vágás, gyors jelenetváltások), így manipulálva a filmhez szokott szem látásmódját.

Egymásra nehezedő testek támogatják, lökik el, forgatják, dobják végtagjaik súlypontjában egymást, a másikkal való folytonos érintkezésben, egyik jelenetből a másikba. A magasban vállakon álló nőalak emléke összemosódik a fejmagasságánál is magasabbról ugró és bukfencsel a földre érkező férfiével. A vertikálisan vagy horizontálisan táguló perspektíva több alak együttes mozgását fogja be, sokszor a holttérben hagyva részleteket. A befogadás élménye egy burleszk némafilmhez hasonlatos. Szól a zene, peregnek az események, majd előtűnik a rendkívüli cirkuszi szám.

A felgyorsított élet lüktetése, amelyet ugyan nem a kamera, hanem a cirkusz művészei generálnak, a külső szem számára nem tűnik fizikai megpróbáltatásnak, tehernek, nem érzékelhető (csak tudható) a látottak létrehozásában rejltő

It is because they drive fast cars, play video games and watch 3D movies. All these cultural experiences play a role in the reception of *Wunderkammer* – a production that is framed by the stage as a 'black box', just like a TV screen, which also helps to strengthen the distancing and the movie-like experience.

Tunes that touch simple emotions, and a performance rhythm that in some way subordinates the bodies of the performing artists. Their own breathing, the duration of the details of the undressing on the trapeze, or the timing of the hula hoop acrobat (Freyja Edney), who catches the hoops thrown at her with her body, is ruled by the time that overrides everything – the time of entertainment. The rhythm of this type of time is opposed to the monotonous rhythm of work; it seduces its audiences with the promise of shaking them out of the everyday rhythm, yet this is just an illusion, as time goes on the same as ever. During recreation, people long to find a different rhythm from that of cumbersome everyday life, or maybe they long to find the experience of the ancient 'saint time' (Eliade, Micrae) from festivities. Because we all know that the time in our routine life is unlike this eternal idea. The material, the body, is temporal, vulnerable, determined by its instincts. The eternal picture of a healthy body that can be challenged by its own ability can only be created under isolated conditions, like those created by *Wunderkammer*. This performance is so in need of worldly components exactly because of its otherworldly distance; however, it fails to untangle the unknown even with these components.

### **La Clique – Edinburgh 2013, producer David Bates**

Clowns in traditional circuses were those who, with the help of humour, pushed the performance to an extreme where the emotional reaction of the audience could be challenged. The clown identified himself as neutral and presented himself, in a way, as a mediator – part of neither the performance nor the audience. In *La Clique*'s show this mediator's role is fulfilled by Scotty, who appears on the round stage of the *Spiegeltent* in a blue, spandex rabbit costume and strip-teaser's high heels. In this neo-vaudeville performance with

energia. Az előadók mosolyognak, játszanak tekintetükkel, a közönség pedig szórakozik. Az átlag néző ma már nem csodálkozik rá ugyan úgy a sebességre, mint a korábbi cirkuszba járók, vagy azok, akik még soha nem „repültek.” Hiszen száguldó autókban ül, videó játékokkal játszik, vagy 3D-s filmeket néz. Mindezen kulturális tapasztalatok szerepet játszanak a *Wunderkammer* befogadásakor, amit szó szerint keretez a „fekete doboz” színpad, mint képernyő, amely szintén az eltávolítást, a filmszerű élményt erősíti.

Az egyszerű érzelmeket mozgató dallamok, az előadás fokozódó ritmusa bizonyos mértékben alárendeli önmagának a fellépő művészek testét. Saját lélegzetvételüket, a trapézon vetkőzés egyes részleteinek idejét, vagy a hullahopp karika akrobatájának (Freyja Edney) időzítését a rá dobált új és új karikák mozgásban tartásához, egy mindezt felülíró idő, a szórakoz(tat)ás ideje uralja. Ennek a típusú időnek a ritmusa a munka egyhangú ütemével szemben áll, kecsgetet a „kiszakadás” lehetőségével, de ez csupán látszat, valójában kontinuitásban folyik tovább. A szórakozásban az ember a terhes hétköznapoktól eltérő időritmusra vágyik, vagy talán az ünnep szent idejének ősi élményét sirja vissza. Mert a mindennapokban megélt időről tudjuk, hogy másképp telik. Az anyag, a test mulandó, kiszolgáltatott, ösztönei szerint determinált. Az egészséges, képességeiben folyton felülmúlható test örök képe csak elszigetelt körülmények között jöhet létre, mint amelyet a *Wunderkammer* teremt. Az előadásnak éppen e másvilági távolság végett van oly nagy szüksége az evilági elemekre, azonban ezekkel együtt sem sikerül felfednie az ismeretlent.

### **La Clique – Edinburgh 2013 formáció, producer David Bates**

Tradicionális cirkuszokban a bohóc volt, aki a humor eszközével élve az előadás olyan határterületén mozgott, ahonnan a közönségben ülők érzelmi reakciói kikezdehetővé váltak. Önmagát semlegesként azonosítva, sem az előadáshoz, sem a közönséghez nem tartozóan, játszott, közvetített. A *La Clique* showjában az erre a szerepre kijelölt médium Scotty, aki kék elasztán nyúl kosztümben, szriptíz táncos magas



roots in the circus arts, this Harlequin, flailing with his stick, talks the audience's head off. His speech is not always comprehensible and does not contain any relevant information. His aim is to poke fun at and provoke the audience just like a pink Playboy bunny, and he does this with such suddenness and confidence that there is honestly no time for any objection. He introduces the band (The Shuffle Club), then right in front of the drummer he performs a handstand. A potato-shaped rabbit tail – that's what catches the eye. His dazzle secures the audience's attention; the show can start!

Just as in *Wunderkammer* the centre of the performance is the execution of circus tricks; however, the stylistic characteristics of variety and neo-burlesque are far more emphasised, and they do much more for the sake of adult entertainment. Sometimes pushing their tricks into the face of the audience quite forcefully, they try to present their danger, extremity, beauty, and the attractiveness of their bodies.

Colourful glass inlays, mirrors and wooden cabins surround a stage which, under a blue-red lined roof, is only just large enough for an acrobat and his horse – if I would measure it the same way as in the old days. The audience is all around, the trapeze lowers, and Adie Delaney arrives in a 1950s dotted bikini to present some tricks with a sweet smile on her face. Jean-Pierre Poissonnet poses imitating Elvis while his partner Wanda Azzario arrives in cabaret dancer costume. The audience enjoys their skate show with wide open mouths, and when Azzario flies up high with a belt around her neck and her body flies above those sitting in the first rows the audience cries out with excitement. The burlesque diva of the night, Sophie Zucchini in a Gainsborough hat, with long, brown, curly hair, gets rid of her black dress. The artist Stephen Williams reaches the rope by climbing on tractor tyres, and performs his show in a 1930s American worker's uniform. Emma Serjeant performs her *handbalancing* stunts in red stilettoes and a lacy mini dress. And we have not yet mentioned Piff the Magic Dragon, who does his magic tricks on stage with his Chihuahua dog. He is an anomaly, closest to Scotty: a kind of clown who steals the audience's heart with his tour de force.

sarkúban lép a híres Spiegeltent körszínpadára. A cirkuszi elemekből építkező neo-vaudville előadásban, Harlequin-pálcájával hadonászva beszél lyukat a lábainál heverő közönség hasába. Beszéde nem mindig érthető, és semmilyen lényeges információt nem tartalmaz. Célja, hogy a rózsaszín playboy nyuszi egy változataként felpiszkálja, provokálja a nézőket, amit olyan hirtelenséggel és határozottsággal tesz, hogy a reakcióra valójában nincs idő. Felkonferálja a zenekart (The Shuffle Club), majd a dobos előtt lendületből kézen áll. Krumpli alakú nyúl farkok. A meghökkenés figyelmet hoz a konyhára, indulhat az előadás.

A *Wunderkammer*hez hasonlóan itt is a cirkuszi trükkök bemutatása van a középpontban, azonban a kabaré, varieté, neo-burleszk stílusjegyek jóval hangsúlyosabbak, és a felnőtt szórakoztatás érdekében sokkal többet megtesznek. Saját trükkjeiket bizonyos értelemben erőszakosan a néző arcába tolvá érzékeltetik azok veszélyességét, extrémítását, szépségét, a testek vonzóságát.

Színes üveg berakások, tükrök, körben fa kabinok, és a kék-piros csíkos tető alatt egy akkora színpad, amelyen egy artista éppen elférne a lovával. Nézők körös-körül, a trapéz leereszkedik és Adie Delaney '50-es évekbeli pöttös fürdőruhában érkeznek, hogy bájos mosolyával bemutasson egy-két trükköt. Jean Pierre Poissonnet Elvist utánozva pózol, amíg párja Wanda Azzario kabaré táncos öltözetben megérkezik. Kettejük görkorsolyaszámát tátott szájjal élvezni a közönség, amikor pedig Azzario a nyakához erősített szíj által a magasba lendül, és teste az első sorban ülők feje felett repül, a hangulat a tetőfokára hág. Az est burleszk dívája Sophie Zucchini Gainsborough-kalapban, hosszú barna loknikkal, fekete ruhájától szabadul meg. Az artista Stephen Williams traktorgumikon éri el a kötelet, és '30-as évek Amerikáját idéző munkásruhában adja elő számát. Emma Serjeant kéztámasz trükkjeit piros túsarkúban és csipkés mini ruhában mutatja be. Akiről még nem esett szó, Piff the Magic Dragon, aki bűvészként lép színpadra chihuahua kutyájával. Ő kivételnek számít, és a leginkább Scottyhoz hasonlatos, mint egyfajta bohóc, aki bűvészmutatványával lopja be magát a szívekbe.

Just like in a variety, the constant maintenance of affection is very important in *La Clique*: the theatrical march into the limelight; the colourful variations of costumes in order to stimulate the audience visually and physically, as well as to bring new and newer games for maintaining the interest. The purpose is to access mankind's elementary senses; to reflect on their own sexual identity, their aesthetic needs and their eternal faith in their divine powers. In this reflection, however, one can see the urban masses, and they are laughing at the absurd emptiness of reality.

The simplicity of the musical harmonies of the 1930s and 40s, the swing, blues and boogie, as well as the high volume of the sound, echoes the liveliness of the imagery. Floating, unsteady rhythms; playful, libertine, happy, fast-paced dance music. All of this is complemented with flashing lights and mysterious colours. The performance pursues harmony in the sense of synchronising the style of movement, music and space to achieve a total aesthetic effect. The peculiar world of *La Clique* does not create contrast within itself, though it does when placed against the world of the audience. It serves a kind of reality on its tray that is abundant with visual enjoyment and where the performers are stars. Its success stems from the fact that this world totally covers and takes in those that are present, and to those who have entered its home it serves the intoxicated happiness of Dionysus.

On the other hand the intensity of the performance is also monotonous, as it keeps its rhythm at the same level for almost two hours, and expects the audience to join in – just as if we were guinea pigs in a resonance experiment conducted by a rather persistent system. Those who are more resistant can be next, as during the *Skating Willers* show, when a member of the audience was invited to the stage and was rolled around a few times; or as in another moment when they made us all sing for the sake of involvement. The humour of *La Clique* is similar to the humour of an old man who tells bad anecdotes while bending his elbow in his favourite pub, but at least he tells them. He does not sell a pig in a poke; too much time has passed over our heads for that.

Ahogy egy varietében, a *La Clique*ben is fontos a hatás állandó fenntartása. A színpadias bevonulás a rivaldafénybe, a kosztümök színes variációi, hogy mind vizuálisan, mind fizikális szinten stimulálja a közönséget, valamint új és új játékkal tartsa fenn érdeklődését. A szándék, hogy az ember elemi érzékeihez férközzön, visszatükrözze nemi identitását, esztétikai igényeit, isteni képességeibe vetett örök hitét. Ebben a tükörképben pedig nagyvárosi tömegek állnak, és a valóság abszurd ürességét nevetik ki.

Az 1930-40-es évekbeli swing, blues, boogie zenei harmóniák egyszerűsége, valamint a magas hangerő a képi világ lendületességét visszhangozza. Lebegő, ingadozó ritmika, játékoság, szabadosság, vidámság, gyors tempójú tánczene. Mindezt még a villódzó fények, sejtelmes színek is kiegészítik. Az előadás harmóniára törekszik abban az értelemben, hogy összehangolja a mozgás, zene, tér stílusát a teljes esztétikai hatás elérése érdekében. A *La Clique* sajátos világa önmagában nem teremt kontrasztot, ellenben a közönség világával igen. Olyan realitást kínál tálcán, amely dúskál a vizuális élvezetekben, amelynek szereplői sztárok. Sikere leginkább abban rejlik, hogy teljességgel betéríti, körbefonja a jelenlevőket, és, aki belépett otthonába annak Dionüszoszi örömei mámorát kínálja.

Ugyanakkor az előadás intenzitása monoton is, hiszen másfél órán keresztül egy színvonalon tartja ritmusát, amelyhez várja, hogy a közönség kapcsolódjon. Mintha rezonancia kísérletnek lennének alanyai egy igen kitartó rendszerrel szemben. Aki ellenállóbb arra sor kerülhet, ahogy a *Skating Willers* szám során a színpadra invitált nézőt fekvő helyzetben megforgatták párszor, vagy a bevonódás érdekében közös éneklést kezdeményeztek. A *La Clique* humora egy öregemberéhez hasonlatos, aki ugyan rossz anekdotákat is mesél kedvenc bárjának pultját támasztva, de mesél. Nem árul zsákmacskát, ahhoz már rég eljárt felettünk az idő.



# The Genre Heterogeneity of Contemporary Circus at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe

HANA STREJČKOVÁ

## Circus as a platform without borders

Edinburgh's circus scene was this year, as any other, heterogeneous in respect both of nationality and genre, with studio productions and spectacular shows equally abundant. It might come as a surprise to some that along with the so-called European circus superpowers many prominent Australian circus companies also gathered in the Scottish capital...

## Thematic heterogeneity

During our residency for cultural journalists and reviewers – organised by Unpack the Arts and Crying out Loud, and focused on the phenomenon of contemporary circus – I had an opportunity to attend ten circus performances. The Welsh NoFit State Circus presented a passionate and wild circus *Bianco*; two Australian companies focused on the beauty of the half-naked body and on astonishing acrobatic pieces in their productions *Wunderkammer* (Circa) and *Knee Deep* (Casus). La Clique provided an atmosphere of zealous enthusiasm in their spiegel tent cabaret. The production *Fright or Flight* by the Australian trio 3 is a Crowd (produced by Cara Hume) wittily and hyperbolically mocked the similarities between women and feathered animals. The topic of femininity was also elaborated on by French artist Jeanne Mordoj in her poetic-ritualistic performance *La Poème*. Extreme energy and joy emanated from the exuberant circus *Flown* (Pirates of Carabina). On the other hand, during the performance of *Noodles* (NoFit State Circus in cooperation with the Finnish director Maksim

# Žánrová různorodost nového cirkusu na Fringe festivalu v Edinburghu

HANA STREJČKOVÁ

## Cirkus jako platforma bez hranic

Edinburská cirkusová scéna byla letos, stejně jako každý rok, žánrově i národnostně rozmanitá a do počtu komorních i velkolepých produkcí bohatá. K velkému překvapení publika se vedle cirkusů z tzv. evropských cirkusových velmocí sešla ve skotském hlavním městě i přední australská cirkusová seskupení.

## Tematická různorodost

Během rezidenčního pobytu pro kulturní novináře a kritiky se zaměřením na nový cirkus, organizovaného Unpack the Arts a Crying Out Loud, jsem měla možnost shlédnout deset cirkusových představení. Vášnivý a divoký cirkus nazvaný **Bianco** přivezl velšský NoFit State Circus, Australané v inscenacích **Wunderkammer** (Circa) či **Knee Deep** (Casus) se zaměřili na krásu poodhaleného těla a dechberoucí akrobatické výkony. V podobném duchu, byť ještě více otevřeně, až bláznivě, se v divácky velmi nadšené atmosféře odvíjel Cabaret **La Clique**. Australské trio (3 is a Crowd & Cara Hume) se ve svém počínu **Fright or Flight** vtipně a s nadsázkou opřelo do žen a jejich podobnosti s opeřenci. Téma ženy a ženskosti se věnovala i Francouzka Jeanne Mordoj ve své poeticko-rituální performanci **La Poème**. Z bujarého cirkusu **Flown** (Pirates of the Carabina) číselo obrovská energie a radost. Naopak z představení **Noodles** (NoFit State Circus ve spolupráci s finským režisérem Maksimem Komaro) diváci znuďeně odcházeli. **Faunovo odpoledne – 1. verze** (Phia Ménard/ Non Nova) zavedlo diváky do světa barev

Komaro) bored spectators were leaving the theatre. *L'Après-midi d'un Foehn* (Phia Ménard / Compagnie Non Nova) invited the audience into a world of colours and magic. Even though, at first sight, the performance was 'only' plastic bag figures dancing to the rhythm of modified Debussy, but the spectators were soon absorbed by the stage action and floated along on the wave of its fantasy. A memorable experience was also provided by the excellent group Gandini Juggling, whose piece *Smashed* was based on the motives underlying Pina Bausch's choreography in her work *Kontakthof*.

### **Circus flexibility in time and space: arena vs. proscenium**

The facilities of the different venues influenced the spatial and, in one case, temporal dimensions of the productions that played there. Most of them had to accommodate a tight schedule that gave short time to preparation (half an hour), the performance (an hour), and the dismantling of the stage (half an hour). The Australian acrobats from the company Circa had the greatest difficulty in fitting into the Underbelly Bristo Square (Venue 300): the original length of their production of *Wunderkammer* was 85 minutes and had to be substantially reduced. Six out of ten productions I attended during the Fringe were situated in proscenium theatres (*Fright or Flight*, *Flown*, *La Poème*, *Noodles*, *Smashed*, *Wunderkammer*), two performances used a raised stage surrounded by spectators (La Clique performed on an oval stage, whereas *Knee Deep* played on a square stage resembling a boxing ring without its ropes). *L'Après-midi d'un Foehn*, played in the round at the venue Summerhall, did not have to dismantle its stage between performances. And the same applied to NoFit State Circus, who erected their own tent at Fountainbridge so that their show could be performed as usual in its 'natural' space. This list demonstrates that the majority of contemporary circus productions are spatially adaptable, provided that there are appropriate facilities for placing and attaching necessary equipment, or for fastening the central load-bearing constructions.

a kouzel. I když na první pohled před diváky, na upraveného Debussyho, tančily „jen“ postavy vyrobené z igelitových sáčků, brzy na vlně fantazie létali i diváci. A opravdu velkým zážitkem bylo představení **Smashed** od vynikající skupiny Gandini Juggling, které vzniklo na motivy světoznámé choreografie Piny Bausch *Kontakthof*.

### **Cirkusová flexibilita v čase a prostoru: aréna versus kukátko**

Podmínky jednotlivých „venue“ ovlivnily prostorové a v jednom případě i časové pojetí jednotlivých produkcí. Většina z nich musela akceptovat vyhrazený čas na stavbu (půl hodina), na představení (hodina) a zbourání scény (půl hodina). Nejsvízelnější situaci řešili australští akrobaté ze skupiny Circa v Underbelly Bristo Square (Venue 300), neboť původní stopáž inscenace *Wunderkammer* je 85 minut. Šest z deseti shlédnutých představení se na Fringe festivalu odehrávalo v tzv. kukátkovém uspořádání (*Fright or Flight*, *Flown*, *La Poème*, *Noodles*, *Smashed*, *Wunderkammer*), dále dvě na vyvýšeném jevišti s diváky kolem dokola (*La Clique* na oválném a *Knee Deep* na čtvercovém jevišti připomínajícím ring bez lanových bariér). *Faunovo odpoledne* (*L'Après-midi d'un Foehn*), hrané v aréně s uspořádaným hledištěm, nemuselo denně vyklízet prostor v Summerhall s přesně rozestavenými ventilátory a stejně tak *Bianco*, neboť NoFit State Circus postavil ve Fountainbridge své šapitó a show se tak jako obvykle mohla živelně odehrávat v „domácím“ prostoru. Tento výčet dokazuje, že valná většina produkcí nového cirkusu je prostorově rychle adaptovatelná, pokud je v prostoru možné umístit a uchytit potřebné nářadí a náčiní či upevnit základní nosnou konstrukci.

### **Dramaturgický mish-mash: příběh versus obraz (story versus image)**

V novém cirkuse, stejně jako v činohře, v pohybovém divadle, tanci, performanci a mnoha dalších oblastech performativního umění, vystupují umělci před publikem a používají své tělo a hlas jako médium. Nový cirkus staví své umění především na lidském těle a přesahování jeho limitů. A zpravidla více než na příběhovou linku sází na tzv. wow efekt, diváka se snaží



## Dramaturgical hotchpotch: story vs. image

In contemporary circus, as well as in dramatic theatre, physical theatre, dance, performance art and many other performing arts disciplines, artists perform in front of an audience and their bodies and voices serve as a key medium of communication. The art of contemporary circus is based on the human body and the transcendence of its limits. Usually it relies on the so-called 'wow-effect' rather than on storyline: its goal is to surprise, overwhelm and shock a spectator. Unlike classical dramatic theatre, contemporary circus gives up psychologically well-developed characters or complex relationships. The circus artists performing at the Edinburgh Fringe proved that at the very centre of the circus genre lies the human body, acrobatic skills, partnership on the stage, the production of images, and the enchantment of an audience. Does this mean that contemporary circus can make do with one principal topic or interesting idea, or that it must elaborate imagery and artistic mastery at the expense of a sophisticated story?

Not always! For instance, Firenza Guidi, the director of the production *Bianco*, worked with José Saramago's novel *The Elephant's Journey*, and in doing so asked herself: "Are there more people in my soul besides myself?" The result, in *Bianco*, is an overwhelming performance in which great acrobatics organically coalesce with verbal monologues. In *L'Après-midi d'un Foehn* Phia Ménard focused on the transformation of a material (in this case plastic), and on wind and its power, in order to create a profound, non-verbal story about ballerinas made from plastic bags. The very personal performance *La Poème*, in which Jeanne Mordoj intimately reflects on her femininity, brought with it three distinct stimulating topics: the journey, the egg, and the female body. Fascination with feathers, birds, eggs and femininity was also expressed, with a bigger dose of humour and irony, by the Australian trio *3 is a Crowd* in the production *Fright or Flight*. Adopting the motives and drives of the legendary Pina Bausch in her piece *Kontakthof*, the juggling show *Smashed*, which was very much in tune with Bausch's choreography, presented its own story of elegance and beauty turning into absurd

překvapovat, uvádět do údivu, až šokovat. Netrápí se vytvářením psychologických charakterů, ani se neutápí ve složitých vztahových konstrukcích, jako je například zvykem v klasické činohře. I edinburská přehlídka „novocirkusáků“ potvrdila, že v popředí zájmu je lidské tělo, akrobatické výkony, souhra na jevišti, vytváření obrazů a okouzlení publika. Vyplývá z toho, že si nový cirkus vystačí s nosným téma či zajímavým nápadem, propracovanou vizualitou a artistickým mistrovstvím více než s hlubokomyslným příběhem?

Ne vždy! Například režisér inscenace *Bianco* Firenza Guidi si za inspirační zdroj vybral příběh Josého Saramagy „*The Elephant Journey*“ a jako výchozí otázku si položil: „Je v mém nitru více lidí než jenom já?“ A režisérovi se podařilo nenásilně propojit dechberoucí akrobatické výkony s monologickými promluvami. Phia Ménard se ve *Faunově* odpoledni zaměřila na transformaci materiálu, vítr a jeho sílu a stvořila hluboký, bezeslovný příběh o prima balerínách z igelitových sáčků. Ve velmi osobní performanci *La Poème*, v níž Jeanne Mordoj velmi důvěrně reflektuje své ženství, se objevily tři velmi výrazná a nosná témata, a to cesta, vejce a ženské tělo. Fascinaci peřím, ptactvem, vejci a ženstvím zpracovalo také, avšak s větší dávkou nadsázky a humoru, australské trio ve *Fright or Flight*. Žonglérská show *Smashed* čerpala motivy z legendární choreografie Piny Bausch *Kontakthof* a svůj příběh, shodně s předlohou, dovedla od elegance a krásy až k absurdní hranici destrukce a chaosu. Finský režisér Maksim Komaro se zhlédl ve špagetách, nudlích a makarónech. Svůj nápad o příbězích v lanoví a na provazech však nedokázal proměnit ani v poutavou inscenaci, ani ve strhující show na lanech a zůstal viset na půl cesty mezi artistickými výkony a pokusy propojit je s rádoby vtipnými scénkami. A celek vyznívá jako zdoluhavý *Wunderkammer* hledal inspiraci u pokleslých divadelních žánrů jako je burleska, vaudeville a kabaret a svůj příběh vystavěl na protikladech síly a křehkosti, nahoty a zahalení, krásy a ošklivosti, něhy a surovosti. Knee Deep zkoumal hranici křehkosti a zranitelnosti materiálu a lidského těla s využitím motivu vejce, které zároveň vytvořilo hlavní dějovou linku. I rozpustilá show *Flown*, která připomínala lepoporelo

destruction and chaos. Finnish director Maksim Komaro fell in love with spaghetti, noodles and macaroni. However, his idea of 'rope stories', or stories among ropes, turned neither into a great performance nor an astonishing show. Instead, *Noodles* remained hanging in-between an exhibition of acrobatic skills and an attempt at combining those acrobatics with would-be funny scenes. The outcome was a tiring cartoon worn in pastel colours. *Wunderkammer* looked for the inspiration in low-brow theatre genres such as burlesque, vaudeville and cabaret, and composed its story around the contrasting opposites of strength and fragility, nudity and the dressed body, beauty and ugliness, tenderness and violence. *Knee Deep* explored the borderline between fragility and vulnerability (of materials, of the human body), while using the motif of an egg, around which the main storyline revolved. Even the flamboyant *Flown*, which resembled a pop-up book of mini-stories and gags, had one constant (comic) character who kept coming back and as such represented a stable point within the production. This presented list underlies the thematic heterogeneity and artistic freedom of contemporary circus. It also refuses any sweeping generalisation that considers circus as a form relying only on imagery and acrobatic skills. Moreover, the shows clearly demonstrated that contemporary circus absorbs theatre practices (and other elements of the wider performing arts), and employs stage directors and dramaturgists. It is also true, in the other direction, that circus techniques are being incorporated by stage directors within their regular theatre productions.

Is it, then, possible to classify contemporary circus in terms of genre? If I look at the performances from artistic, theatrical or dramatic-musical perspectives, I can definitely differentiate certain genres, such as cabaret (*La Clique*, *Flown*, *Noodles*, *Knee Deep*), burlesque with cabaret elements (*Wunderkammer*), slapstick (*Fright or Flight*, *Smashed*), puppetry / object animation (*L'Après-midi d'un Foehn*), performance with ritualistic aspects and melodrama (*La Poème*), or folk theatre with features of mystery and melodrama (*Bianco*).

mini příběhů a gagů, měla jeden pevný (komický) charakter, který se stále vracel a tvořil její pevný bod. Tento výčet podtrhuje tematickou různorodost a uměleckou svobodu. A zároveň nezobecňuje tvrzení, že předností produkcí nového cirkusu je především vizualita a akrobatické výkony. Potvrzuje, že nový cirkus také pracuje s divadelními prvky (a dalšími složkami performativního umění), režiséry a dramaturgy, stejně jako někteří divadelní režiséři zařazují do svých inscenací prvky cirkusové.

Je tedy možné nový cirkus žánrově kategorizovat? Podívám – li se na shlédnutá představení z hlediska uměleckých, úžeji divadelních či divadelně-hudebních žánrů, pak velmi obecně ano: kabaret (*La Clique*, *Flown*, *Noodles*, *Knee Deep*), burleska s prvky kabaretu (*Wunderkammer*), groteska (*Fright or Flight*, *Smashed*), loutkové – předmětové divadlo (*L'après-midi d'un Foehn*), performance s prvky rituálu a melodrama (*La Poème*), lidové divadlo s prvky mystéria, melodrama i kabaretu (*Bianco*).

### Kráska (odhaleného) lidského těla

Žánrová různorodost, se kterou jsem se v rámci programu edinburské přehlídky setkala, nastínila, nejspíš náhodný, ale přesto pozoruhodný rozdíl mezi skupinami z Austrálie a starého kontinentu. Sám režisér skupiny Circa z Brisbane Yaron Lifschitz v rozhovoru zmínil, že australský cirkus je oproti evropskému méně sofistikovaný. Možno dodat, že čím méně je sofistikovaný, tím více je odhalený.

Sleduje divák postupně napínající se svaly akrobata nebo vnímá tělo v jeho celistvosti? Odvádí spoře oděný artista divákovu pozornost od akrobatických výkonů, anebo je tomu naopak a artistické umění více vynikne?

Surrealistický kabaret **Wunderkammer** (Circa), jehož titul by v překladu zněl jako muzejní kabinet kuriozit, vsadil na minimalistické kostýmy inspirované vyzývavými oblečky nočních podniků a erotických kabaretů. Režijním záměrem však nebylo vykreslit intimní atmosféru, ale dráždit, provokovat a svádět, a to sedmi mladými vypracovanými těly třech mužů a čtyřech žen, která vynikala v záři reflektorů a neonů a v doslova





3 is a Crowd – *Fright or Flight* © Sean Young Photography

### Beauty of the (nude) human body

The genre heterogeneity that I encountered during the Edinburgh Fringe suggested a perhaps unintentional but remarkable difference between companies from Australia and those from the European continent. Yaron Lifschitz, the director of the Brisbane-based company Circa, mentioned in our interview that Australian circus is, in comparison with European productions, less sophisticated. Needless to say that the less sophisticated it is, the more nudity it displays.

Does a spectator recognise a gradual tightening of an acrobat's muscles, or does s/he perceive the whole of their body? Does a scantily dressed artist draw the spectator's attention away from the acrobatic performance or, the opposite, does it focus it?

The surrealist cabaret *Wunderkammer* (Circa), whose title can be translated as a cabinet of curiosities or literally a 'wonder-room', used minimalist costumes inspired by the seductive attire of night clubs and erotic cabarets. The director's intention was not to illustrate an intimate atmosphere but rather to provoke, tease and seduce: seven young acrobats – three men

dechberoucích akrobatických sestavách. Yaron Lifschitz v rozhovoru s novináři dodal, že osobně kostýmy nemá rád. Více ho fascinuje lidské tělo, jeho možnosti, krása a posouvání fyzických limitů. Lifschitz ovšem nesměřuje k sexy hrátkám, ale svlékání na jevišti vnímá jako projev velkorysosti. *Wunderkammer*, představitel tzv. dry contemporary circus, balancuje na hranici komičnosti, erotičnosti i krutosti. Na jedné straně vystavuje krásné a svůdné tělo hula hoops artistky Frejji Edney, která precizně roztáčí obruč za obručí, až kolem sebe vytvoří stříbrnou auru a na straně druhé akrobaté používají ženská těla jako živé lano – švihadlo, které roztáčejí a přeskakují. Stejně kontrastní je útlá Melissa Knowles, jež se protahuje kroužkem miniaturního průměru ve srovnání s výkonem Frejji Edney, která je základem lidské pyramidy a na ramenou nese více mužů. A zatímco Alice Muntz, která stepovala na bublinkovém igelitu, se na závěr čísla do plastu zahalila, artista Jarred Dewey pojal své číslo na hrazdě jako regulérní striptýz. Nejvýraznější artistickou předností tohoto kuriózního kabinetu byl duet na čínské tyči. Partnerská práce dvou mladých mužů byla fenomenální. A přestože své číslo Lewis West a Todd Kilby začali v kostýmech, odešli ze scény téměř v rouše Adamově. A velké

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and four women – whose well-built bodies were illuminated and magnified by the glare of neon lights, presented striking acrobatic routines. In the above-mentioned interview, Yaron Lifschitz explained that he personally dislikes costumes. He is fascinated with the human body – its possibilities, its beauty, and the transcendence of its physical limits. Nonetheless, Lifschitz does not flirt with sexual games. For him, nudity on the stage is an expression of generosity. *Wunderkammer*, a representative of so-called 'dry' contemporary circus, balanced on the verge of comedy, eroticism and cruelty. On the one hand, it displayed the beautiful body of hula-hoop artist Freyja Edney, who precisely whirled one hoop after another so that, by the end, the hoops created the image of a silver aura around her body. On the other, it used the female body as a live skipping rope that was spun by a group of acrobats who took turns jumping over it. Another contrasting image was presented by Melissa Knowles, whose slim body squeezed through a ring with a minuscule diameter, and yet another by Freyja Edney, who became the foundation of a human pyramid and carried a group of men on her shoulders. While Alice Muntz, who tap-danced on the bubble wrap, covered herself in this plastic sheet at the end of her performance, Jarred Dewey approached his trapeze piece as an explicit strip show. The most outstanding artistic quality of this cabinet of curiosities was found in a duet on the Chinese pole. Although performers Lewis West and Todd Kilby started their piece dressed in costumes, they left the stage almost naked. And the grand finale, during which the acrobats demonstrated their flexibility and strength, crowned the story of undressing. All seven artists ended up at the front of the stage dressed in black underwear.

In their production *Knee Deep* the Australian company Casus followed the same minimalist path with only one difference: they were revealing their extensive tattoos gradually throughout the show. Even though the audience surrounded the four artists, three male and one female, from three directions, their performance, unlike *Wunderkammer*, did not lack intimacy, unexpressed mystery, fragility, or electrifying excitement. Contrary to this show, La Clique did

finále, při němž akrobaté potvrdovali svou naprostou pružnost, flexibilitu a sílu, završilo také příběh svlékání. Všechna sedm artistů skončilo na forbině oděno pouze v černém prádle.

Další Australané, skupina Casus, se v *Knee Deep* vydali podobně úspornou cestou, jen se svlékali do prádla a obnažovali svá velkorysá tetování postupně. Ačkoliv na tři muže a jednu ženu diváci viděli ze všech stran, jejich vystoupení nepostrádalo oproti *Wunderkammer* intimitu, tajemství nevyřčeného, křehkost i vzrušující napětí. Oproti tomu se v *Cabaretu La Clique* od první chvíle nešetřilo obscénními vtipy a vyzývavostí, erotickou smyslností, to vše ale v propojení s úctyhodnými artistickými výkony. Svlékání a polonahá vytrénovaná těla, vystavující se na odív publiku, se objevila i u velšského cirkusu Bianco (zejména August Dakteris na lanech a Nat Whittingham na trampolíně). V kontrastu s takřka prvoplánovým odhalováním fyzických předností pracovaly s ženským tělem jemněji a s nadsázkou ve *Fright or Flight* a citlivě i v *La Poeme*.

### Divoký cirkus, vášně & chaos

Vlajková loď velšského NoFit State Circusu – **Bianco** je hlučnou a bujarou podívanou, v níž díky neustálému pohybu artistů, techniků, konstrukcí a publika nechybí napětí, vzrušení, humor, vášně a chaos. Diváci jsou spolu s aktéry od počátku do konce přítomni na hrací ploše pod velkým šapitó. Zatímco akrobaté se rozcvičují, diváci jsou šikováni do manipulovatelných skupin, aby pak po celou dobu představení byli přesunováni čelem k dění, a zároveň nepřekáželi vystupujícím. Základem scény jsou čtyři vysoké železné konstrukce na kolečkách, v nichž jsou umístěny trampolíny. V Bianco se však běhá, létá, skáče, balancuje, žongluje, mluví, křičí a gestikuluje po celém prostoru, kam jen dopadne světlo reflektoru. Jde o velkolepou show, v níž se střídají romantické nálady vzdušných čísel s výbušnými emocemi u trampolín a na zemi a kde není nouze o opravdu úchvatné obrazy. Pro příklad se zmíním o artistce Eleně Burani, která na laně stoupala ke špičce šapitó a s ní i její dlouhé šaty sahající až k zemi, na něž se začaly sypat červené okvětní lístky. Dalším úžasným efektem byly v kruzích zavěšené a nadnášené akrobatky s rozevlátými sukněmi, které umocňovaly výkon Freda Rendella



not shy away from obscene jokes, seductiveness, or erotic sensuality. Their provocative approach was, however, backed up with impressive artistic skills. Well-trained and exposed bodies also appeared in the Welsh circus *Bianco* (namely August Dakteris on the ropes and Nat Whittingham on the trampoline). In contrast to the tacky exposing of physical abilities, *Fright or Flight* and *La Poème* employed the female body in a rather sensitive and ironic manner.

### Wild circus, passions and chaos

The flagship production of Welsh company NoFit State Circus, *Bianco* is a noisy and boisterous spectacle in which the continuous movement of artists, technicians, set constructions, and audience enforces tension, excitement, humour, passion and chaos. From the beginning to the end of the show, the performers share the playing area with the spectators. As the acrobats are warming up, spectators are arranged into mobile groups that can be easily manipulated during the show, so that the audience can see all the action without interfering with the performers. The principal stage element consists of four high metal constructions, on wheels, in which trampolines have been installed. During the performance acrobats run, fly, jump, balance, juggle, speak, scream and gesticulate through the whole of the tented area. It is a spectacular show full of astonishing images, in which the romantic tones of aerial pieces rapidly switch to explosive emotional scenes performed on the trampolines or the ground. For example, the poetic image of Elena Burani climbing on a rope to the very top of the tent, her long dress hanging loose and reaching to the ground, and red petals are starting to rain down on her. Among other striking actions there was a piece performed by a group of floating female acrobats. Dressed in flowing skirts, they were attached to suspended hoops. Their action simultaneously amplified Fred Rendell's Cyr wheel act in which he was spinning around the stage. The show ended with an illusion of real snow falling down on all the participants.

### Humour

The chaotic, passionate and romantic atmosphere of *Bianco* was comparable to that found in *Pirates of the Carabina's* production

roztočeného v Cyrově kole či vytvoření iluze opravdového sněhu (nejspíš z mýdlových bublin), který se na závěr snašel na všechny přítomné.

### Humor

V podobném duchu se jako *Bianco* co do chaosu, vášni a romantiky odvíjela produkce *Pirates of the Carabina – Flown* v režii Jamese Williamse, jen na menším prostoru, s trvale usazeným publikem a mnohem větší dávkou humoru. Ale! Oč méně se v prostoru pohybovali diváci, o to více létali vzduchem akrobaté, náčiní jako čínská tyč nebo žehlicí prkno a hudební nástroje včetně bicí soupravy. *Flown* od počátku u diváků vzbuzuje nejen wow efekt, ale zejména probouzí úsměv a umí ho podržet až do konce. *Flown* je, stejně jako mnohé jiné produkce současného cirkusu, o risku a překračování vlastních limitů, ale zároveň a zejména o vtipu, gagu, komických skečích a humorných detailech jako jsou například pády reflektorů, nechtěná ztráta kalhot, která jakoby parodovala mnohé striptýzy ostatních show a o mnoha dalších. Velkou zásluhu na rozesmátém publiku nese Gwen Hales – v podstatě jediná „hraná“ postava, oděná oproti „pirátům“ v bílých princeznovských šatech, blondaté paruce a s vyběleným úsměvem panenky Barbie. Na svůj první zásadní výstup přijela ve vozítku zapřaženém do umělohmotného, podupávajícího koníka. A díky velmi komickému číslu na šále si do jednoho získala všechny diváky. *Flown* nepotřebuje souvislejší příběhovou linku (vystačí si s Gwen Hales), protože je to bláznivě sympatický a divácky velmi kontaktní cirkus. Humoru, nadsázky a ironie se nebáli ani tvůrci groteskní, brilantní žonglérské choreografie *Smashed* (Gandini Juggling), ani australské trio *3 is a Crowd & Cara Hume* ve *Fright or Flight*, kde se to vedle nevšedních akrobatických čísel hemží vejci a kuřátky na klíček, peřím a mnoha vskutku absurdními předměty. Z hlediska humoru je pozoruhodná skupina *Casus*. Na artistech byla po celou dobu vidět radost, vzájemně se provokovali a hecovali k výkonům, jakoby však hráli pro sebe navzájem, a ne pro početné publikum.

### Vaječná líheň

Na první pohled bylo nejčastěji používanou rekvizitou vejce. Z deseti představení hned tři s tímto předmětem a motivem hlouběji pracovaly.

*Flown*. In contrast to *Bianco*, *Flown*, directed by James Williams, was a rather funnier production, situated in a smaller space with the audience seated throughout the performance. Yet the less moved the spectators, the more flew the acrobats – and so too their equipment (a Chinese pole, an ironing board, even musical instruments that included a drum set). From the very beginning, *Flown* brought not only the ‘wow effect’ but also, mostly, made people smile to the very end. *Flown*, like many other contemporary circus productions, is based on the aesthetic of risk and the transcendence of the body’s limits. However, its principle character stems from the jokes, gags, comic sketches and funny details – such as falling spotlights, an inadvertent loss of pants – which seemed to mock the many strip scenes included in the other shows. The greatest part of the audience’s laughter was provoked by Gwen Hales – essentially the only ‘dramatic’ character in the show, who was, unlike the ‘pirates’ (acrobats), dressed in a white princess-like costume, and who wore a blonde wig and smiled like a Barbie doll. She arrived on the stage standing on a cart pulled by a small plastic, stamping horse, and immediately won the audience over with her first comic piece on the silks. *Flown* does not need any coherent storyline (it makes do with Gwen Hales), as it is a crazily pleasant, spectator-friendly and interactive circus. Humour, hyperbole and irony were also at work in the grotesque and brilliant juggling choreography of *Smashed* (Gandini Juggling), as well as in Australian trio 3 is a Crowd’s *Fright or Flight*. The latter presented unconventional acrobatic pieces situated on a stage cluttered with eggs, wind-up chickadees, feathers, and many other absurd objects. In this ‘humorous’ context, the company Casus brought forth their remarkable production *Knee Deep*. One could see that the artists enjoyed their performance: they mutually provoked and cheered each other, as if they were only performing for themselves and not for the large audience.

### Hatchery

At first sight, it seemed that the egg was an omnipresent prop. Three performances out of ten thoroughly elaborated on this object. For the creators of *Fright or Flight*, an egg served as a springboard from which they developed images

Tvůrkyně **Fright or Flight** od vejce odvinuly obrazy kuřat, slepic, ptáků a peří. S míčky ve tvaru vejce žonglovaly, házely je po sobě a dokonce z nich vysypávaly zrní.

Emma Serjeant v **Knee Deep** otevřela show chůzí po tuctu vajec a vejce bylo jediným motivem, který se s železnou pravidelností vracel a varioval. Vaječné pokusy, za zvuku křupajících vajec linoucího se z reproduktorů, korunoval Jesse Scott, který na čtyři hrdla skleněných lahví postavil stoličku, na stoličku kartony s vejci a na ta vejce se postavil. O tom, že vejce jsou pravá – syrová, a ne uvařená či dokonce umělohmotná, přesvědčila diváky sama Emma. Z vrcholu lidské pyramidy, kam doputovala i s vejcem, ho upustila do skleněné mísy. Vejce se rozprsklo.

S vejci došla nejdále Jeanne Mordoj v performanci **La Poeme**, která s vejcem na jeviště přinesla ženství, křehkost, počátek i stopy minulosti. Jeanne nejprve připomínala elegantní dámu s kuffíčkem, jež čeká (na autobus?). Jenomže za chvíli se jí z úst vyklubalo vejce. A za ním další a další a při lehkém zatřesení jí z kostýmu začaly vypadávat skořápky. S vajíčky obratně kouzlila. Mizela a objevovala se, také se trousila ve formě skořápek. I ona diváky utvrdila v pravosti svých vajec, a to během tanečně – pohybové sekvence, při níž přesouvala žlutek po celé délce obou rukou od ramen po konečky prstů z levé strany na pravou, dokud se vejce nerozlilo. Mordoj i díky vejcím proměňovala pohled na lidské tělo, v jednu chvíli jakoby divák viděl tělo unavené a staré ženy a po chvíli krásné a mladé dívky. Jeanne v rozhovoru stvrdila, že *La Poeme* je pro ni rituálem, oslavou bytí a hlubinnou sondou do světa žen.

### Virtuozita, mistrovství & zákon gravitace

Nový cirkus, ať jde o show s příběhem, nebo připomíná leporelo/ mish-mash, experimentální divadlo, konceptuální umění či jiná vizuální odvětví, je výjimečný v zařazování akrobatických čísel, (či od nich odvozené poetiky), za jejichž mistrovstvím jsou roky usilovné práce, tvrdé dřiny. Festivalová přehlídka mi ale opět potvrdila, nakolik je na prostoru delším než jedno číslo důležitá vize, společná energie, touha učit se a naslouchat. Zní



of chickens, hens, and feathers. They juggled with egg-shaped balls, threw them at each other, and even spilled seeds out of them.

In *Knee Deep* Emma Serjeant opened the show by walking across boxes of dozens of eggs. The egg was the only motif which ran through the whole show, constantly returning in various forms. Accompanied by the sound of cracking eggs, Jesse Scott placed a stool on top of four glass bottles, and on top of the stool put cartons of eggs on which he placed himself. That the eggs were real – i.e. natural and not boiled or even made of plastic – was demonstrated by Emma herself, who threw one egg from the top of a human pyramid into a glass bowl. The egg burst.

The motif of the egg was brilliantly examined by Jeanne Mordoj in her production of *La Poème*, in which the egg introduced topics of femininity, fragility, origin, and the traces of the past. At the beginning, Jeanne resembled an elegant lady with a little suitcase, seemingly waiting (perhaps for the bus?). In short measure, an egg popped out of her mouth; others soon followed. When she shuddered slightly, fragments of eggshell started to fall from her costume. Her skilful magic tricks with the eggs were unbelievable. They kept disappearing and reappearing, falling all the while in the form of eggshells. She also proved the natural quality of eggs in a dance sequence during which she guided a yolk across the whole length of both of her arms, from the shoulders to the tips of her fingers, from the left to the right, until finally the yolk spilled. Eggs allowed Mordoj to change people's perception of the human body; it seemed that, at one point, the spectators were watching the body of an old and tired woman, then, suddenly, the body of a young and beautiful girl. In an interview Jeanne gave she testified that the performance is her ritual, a celebration of being and an intense exploration of the female world.

### **Virtuosity, mastery and the law of gravitation**

Contemporary circus – regardless of whether it is a show with a coherent storyline, a hotchpotch of images, a derivation of experimental theatre, or a conceptual or visual art piece – is exceptional in the way it integrates acrobatic pieces, mastery of

to jako klišé, ale nerozepisovala bych se, kdybych neviděla *Noodles*. Režisér Maksim Komaro a produkce *NoFit State Circus* by měly být zárukou zajímavé podívané, a přesto jde po všech stránkách, a to i akrobatických, o velmi rozporuplný, slabý počín. V tomto případě, až na chvilkové balancování na rukách a chůzi po laně, se akrobatkám a kouzelníkovi ani nepodařilo přesvědčit o svých kvalitách „zkušených cirkusáků“. Bianco ve stejné produkci je naopak dokonale propracovanou show na nejvyšší artistické, vizuální úrovni.

Nejčastěji se v produkcích objevovaly tyto disciplíny: párová akrobacie a ekvilibristika, čínská tyč, obruče hula hoop, Cyrovo kolo, hrazda, vertikální lana, šály, žonglování, provazochodectví, trampolína. Z vystoupení na čínské tyči zmíním dvě. Fenomenální byli Lewis West a Todd Kilby ve *Wunderkammer*, jejichž hlavní předností byla dokonalá souhra a vysoká laťka risku a pak Laura Moy a Barny Wreyford ve *Flown*, kteří na tyči navzdory gravitaci rozehráli romantický dialog. Párová akrobacie a ekvilibristika byla doménou *Wunderkammer* a *Knee Deep*. Ve svých výkonech byla velmi výrazná Emma Serjeant z *Casus*, která se se svým ekvilibristickým číslem objevila i v *Cabaretu La Clique*. Žonglér Hugo Oliveira ve svém sólu s bílými míčky zazářil v *Bianco*. A žongléri z *Gandini Juggling* excelovali ve *Smashed* v synchronizovaných číslech a tanečních choreografiích. Akrobatická obruč *Cyrovo kolo* se objevila jak ve *Flown*, tak v *Bianco* a oba výborné artisty – Jaakko Tenhunen a Fred Rendell – jakoby motivovala silná touha zvítězit nad zemskou přitažlivostí.

### **Na okraji cirkusu & otázka genderu**

Je možné inscenace *L'après-midi d'un Foehn – verze 1* a *La Poème* ještě řadit do linie cirkusové tvorby? Na jevišti totiž nelétají vzdušní akrobaté, neroztáčejí se obruče, ani neskáčou salta, a přesto spadají do kategorie „nový cirkus“. Jenomže Phia Ménard i Jeanne Mordoj mají bohatou cirkusovou minulost, bez níž by jejich dvě nejnovější inscenace nejspíš nevznikly. Phia Ménard ve *Faunové* odpoledni díky síle větru roztačila igelitové sáčky. Vytvořila iluzi ovladatelných prima balerín, které do života uvedl i z něj sprovodil „kouzelník“. Celá performance, stejně jako *La Poème*, evokuje svět

which results from years of hard work and strict training. Yet the Edinburgh Fringe proved that the work needs a strong vision, collective energy, and a desire to learn and listen. That sounds like a cliché, but I would not use it if I had not seen the production *Noodles*. The work of director Maksim Komaro and NoFit State Circus, it should be a guaranteed remarkable show. Yet the outcome, viewed from various perspectives (even purely an acrobatic one), was embarrassing and disputable. In this show – with a few exceptions regarding the handbalancing and tightwire – the acrobats, as well as the magician, did not prove themselves as experienced circus performers. The company's other piece, *Bianco*, is, on the contrary, a perfectly elaborated show which meets the highest acrobatic and visual criteria.

The discussed productions frequently used the following disciplines: pair acrobatics and equilibristics, Chinese pole, hula-hoop, Cyr wheel, trapeze, vertical ropes, silks, juggling, tightrope walking, trampoline. I will discuss two Chinese pole pieces. Lewis West and Todd Kilby presented a phenomenal performance in *Wunderkammer*. Their quality lied in the coordination of their movement and the high level of risk. Refusing the law of gravitation, Laura Moy and Barry Wreyford portrayed a romantic dialogue in the production *Flown*. Pair acrobatics and equilibristics were the domain of *Wunderkammer* and *Knee Deep*. The performances of Emma Serjeant, a member of Casus, were very distinctive. Her equilibristic piece was also included in *La Clique*. Hugo Oliveira, the juggler, pulled it off with his juggling solo in *Bianco*. The synchronised pieces and dance choreographies of Gandini Juggling stood out in *Smashed*. Cyr wheel acts appeared in *Flown* and *Bianco*, and in both cases the artists – Jaakko Tenhunen and Fred Rendell – seemed to be motivated by the desire to overcome the law of gravitation.

### On the edge of circus and the issue of gender

Can we still classify the productions of *L'Après-midi d'un Foehn* and *La Poème* as circus shows? There are no flying aerial acrobats on the stage, no wheels or hoops, no jumps or somersaults, and yet they fall under the category of 'new

kouzel, magie a tajemství. Jeanne Mordoj trefně využívá břichomluvecké umění, žonglérské zkušenosti i flexibilitu svého těla. Oba, velmi vizuální a akustické, příběhy nepřesahují třicet minut, a přesto v divákovi dokážou rezonovat mnohem déle.

Gender a nový cirkus? Za čistě genderovou záležitost je možné označit rituálně – lyrickou performanci **La Poème**, v níž se Jeanne Mordoj stává hlasem ryzí ženskosti. Inscenace **Fright or Flight** je vytvořena třemi ženami o jejich pohledu na ženský svět a výrazné podobnosti s opořenci, ale k jejich prospěchu se neberou tak vážně. A zatímco Jeanne Mordoj nebo Rockie Stone, Olivia Porter, Bianca Mackail pracují s přednostmi svých ženských těl, tak Circa nebo Casus zavedli „rovnoprávnost“, tj. tělo ženské srovnává s mužským. Ve *Wunderkammer* nosí muži na ramenou ženy, a stejně tak i ženy muže. Totéž se děje i v *Knee Deep*, kdy Emma Serjeant například tvoří bázi lidské pyramidy.

### Reprodukováná hudba versus živá kapela

Rozpětí hudební dramaturgie bylo doslova bezbřehé, jakoby se obecně tvůrci v oblasti nového cirkusu báli ticha. Velkou předností inscenací *Flown* a *Bianco* byla přítomnost kapely. Živá hudba, (což je prověřeno staletími i u tradičního cirkusu), má vždy své kouzlo, protože v tu chvíli je rovnocenným partnerem aktérů. Dokáže obratně reagovat na změny, podporovat nárůst napětí, překvapovat i uvolnit atmosféru.

Devítičlenní *Pirates of the Carabina* jsou jak akrobaty, herci tak muzikanty. Jejich repertoár se ve *Flown* pohyboval od nespoutaného rocku po folkové písničky a tklivé balady. Umělci se střídali na jevišti, u mikrofonu i hudebních nástrojů, které byly i netradičně umístěny ve výškách na hlavní konstrukci. V závěru show pak saxofonista a bubeník spolu s dalšími artisty doslova létali vzduchem. V *Bianco* měla kapela složená ze čtyř hudebníků (Gareth Jones, Andy Moore, Ashley John Long, Calum McIntyre) své pódium a žánrově se pohybovala na škále mezi baladami a odvázaným rockem. Jeanne Mordoj pracovala se svým hlasem, jímž rozeznávala celé své tělo a tím i prostor. Pro *Faunovo odpoledne* upravili Phia



circus'. The point is that Phia Ménard and Jeanne Mordoj have a rich experience with the circus without which their two new productions could not possibly have come into existence. In *L'Après-midi d'un Foehn*, Phia Ménard made plastic bags dance using the power of wind. She created the illusion of manipulated ballerinas who were brought into and eliminated from the world by the 'magician'. Likewise, in *La Poème*, the whole performance evokes the world of magic tricks, sorcery and mystery. Jeanne Mordoj appropriately employs ventriloquist art, juggling experience, and the flexibility of her body. Both of these visual and acoustic stories do not exceed 30 minutes but have an ability to resonate in the spectator's mind long after the show ends.

What about gender in contemporary circus? Issues of gender were clearly raised in the ritualistic-lyric production *La Poème*, in which Jeanne Mordoj became the voice of pure femininity. *Fright or Flight* was created by three women who looked at the female world and drew parallels to the world of feathered animals. For their own good, they did not take themselves too seriously. While Jeanne Mordoj or Rockie Stone, Olivia Porter and Bianca Mackail examined specific qualities of female bodies, *Circa* or *Casus* represented 'equality' – i.e. they eliminated the differences between the female and the male body. In *Wunderkammer*, men carry women and women carry men. The same happens in *Knee Deep* when Emma Serjeant forms the base of a human pyramid.

### Reproduced music vs. live band

The range of musical dramaturgy was literally boundless, as if the contemporary circus artists were scared of silence. In *Flown* and *Bianco* this manifested positively in the form of live bands. Live music, as its long tradition within circus proves, has its own charm and can play an equal part in a performance. It is able to rapidly react to changes, to support and enhance excitement, and to surprise and ease the atmosphere.

The nine members of *Pirates of Carabina* are composite artists: acrobats, performers and musicians. Their musical repertoire in *Flown* ranged from wild rock to folk songs and touching



*Casus* – *Knee Deep* © nn

Ménard a Ivan Roussel Debussyho *Faunovo odpoledne*. Gandini Juggling se ve *Smashed* velmi zdařile opřeli o svůj inspirační zdroj Kontakthof a jejich „gramofonový“ playlist například obsahuje Bacha a Vivaldiho, Mills Brothers, Louise Armstronga, Little Jack Little.

Australská seskupení vsadila na reprodukovanou hudbu, která téměř nepřetržitě vytvářela hudební podkres. Ve *Wunderkammer* zněl Bach i Peter Gabriel, v *Knee Deep* jakoby na soundtrack vybrali

ballads. The artists constantly swapped roles as they moved between the stage, its microphones, and the musical instruments which were unconventionally placed on top of the stage's central construction. At the end of the show the saxophonist, along with the drummer and the other acrobats, was literally flying up in the air. In *Bianco* the band, which consisted of four musicians (Gareth Jones, Andy Moore, Ashley John Long, Calum McIntyre), had its own stage platform and played music that stretched from ballads to rock melodies. Jeanne Mordoj used her own voice in a way that reverberated through the whole of her body and the space. For *L'Après-midi d'un Foehn* Phia Ménard and Ivan Roussel adapted Debussy's 'Afternoon of a Faun'. In *Smashed*, Gandini Juggling relied on their source of inspiration – Pina Bausch's *Kontakthof* – and their 'gramophone' playlist included compositions of Bach and Vivaldi, the Mills Brothers, Louis Armstrong and Little Jack Little and other.

The Australian companies preferred recorded music used to create an almost continuous soundscape. *Wunderkammer* incorporated Bach and Peter Gabriel, while *Knee Deep*'s soundtrack seemed to contain everything that members of the group liked – the most interesting part was when Natano Fa'anana broke the silence by rhythmically slapping his body, the other performers gradually joining in by clapping, tapping and flapping their arms.

### Finale

Due to its variety of artistic disciplines and the influences it takes from other areas of the performing arts, contemporary circus keeps and will continue to keep its heterogeneity. It is always a question to what extent the circus strives to be an astonishing spectacle or a production with a particular message. It is hard to foresee whether it will follow the path paved by the 'dry' contemporary circus, or whether it will seek to find common strategies with theatre practices, experimental performance, dance or conceptual art.

vše, co se jim osobně líbí a přitom hudebně – zvukově nejzajímavější bylo, když Natano Fa'anana začal do ticha vytleskávat rytmus o vlastní tělo a postupně se k němu tleskáním, pleskáním a plácáním přidávali ostatní.

### Finále

Nový cirkus je a bude zejména díky mnoha artistickým disciplínám a vlivům ostatních oblastí performativního umění stále žánrově různorodý. Je vždy otázkou, nakolik chce být cirkus úchvatnou podívanou či inscenací s přesahem, zda se vydá cestou „dry contemporary circus“, nebo bude hledat společné jmenovatele s divadelními postupy, experimentem, tancem či konceptuálním uměním.



# Of the World Egg and the Magic of Wind

ILKA FRANZMANN

*Any decent general store would be sufficient to outfit two of the most exciting contemporary circus shows. Take 1 suitcase, 1 coat, 1 instrument with a few keys, a dozen plastic bags, 1 pair of scissors, glue, and 6 electric fans. The nearby restaurants provide broken eggshells. And raise curtain.*

*What is so exciting then? It is the unbridled fantasy, the personal courage and the vast life experiences of Jeanne Mordoj and Phia Ménard. Innovative experimentation from the French ambassadors of the genre 'Nouveau Cirque' – artists on the edges of circus, theatre and performance creating true works of art.*

## The Yolk's On Me

She stands alone. A woman wearing a coat, holding a suitcase. She seems uneasy, all dressed up with nowhere to go. What is she waiting for? Nothing and no one appears. Instead an egg wells up out of her mouth. Then another, as she cyclically gives birth to eggs. This wonderfully humorous scene could be clownesque but already in this first sequence La Poème opens a window to a large metaphorical space.

It is the slow-motion consistency of her waiting and the passive upright posture of this female figure that lends depth to the scene. This woman has incredible physical presence, is self-confident, sensually experiencing what is happening to her. She now sheds eggshells with every movement: they crumble from her clothes, her bra and her panties, until she is surrounded by broken eggshells. She juggles moulded breasts and bites into raw eggs with abandon. Almost voluptuous she balances an egg yolk on her body, enjoying it sliding over her skin, melting in her mouth, wandering along her shoulder.

# Vom Welten-Ei und dem Zauber des Windes

ILKA FRANZMANN

*Ein guter Hauswarenladen würde genügen, um zwei der aufregendsten neuen Zirkusshows auszustatten. Man nehme: 1 Koffer, 1 Mantel, 1 Instrument mit sehr wenig Tasten, ein gutes Dutzend Plastiktüten, 1 Schere, Klebstoff, 6 Ventilatoren. Die umliegenden Restaurants steuern aufgeschlagene Eierschalen bei. Und Vorhang auf.*

*Was daran aufregend ist? Es ist die ungebändigte Phantasie, der persönliche Mut und die große Lebenserfahrung von Jeanne Mordoj und Phia Ménard. Innovativ experimentieren die französischen Botschafterinnen des Genres „Nouveau Cirque“ an der Grenze von Artistik, Theater und Performance – und erschaffen wahre Kunstwerke.*

## Das Gelbe vom Ei

Allein steht sie da. Eine Frau im Mantel, in der Hand einen Koffer. Beklommen wirkt sie, wie bestellt und nicht abgeholt. Worauf wartet sie? Nichts und niemand erscheint. Stattdessen quillt ein Ei aus ihrem Mund, und zyklisch gebärt sie nun Eier. Diese herrlich humorvolle Szene könnte clownesk wirken. Doch schon in dieser ersten Sequenz öffnet „La Poème“ ein Fenster in einen großen metaphorischen Raum.

Es ist die zeitlupenartige Langsamkeit, die Beständigkeit ihres Wartens, die aufrechte, duldsame Haltung dieser Frauengestalt, die der Szene Tiefe verleiht. Physisch enorm präsent und sich selbst bewusst wirkt diese Frau, sinnlich erlebt sie, was da mit ihr geschieht. Mit jeder Bewegung verliert sie nun Eierschalen, sie rieseln aus ihrer Kleidung, bröckeln aus ihrem BH, bröseln aus ihrem Slip, bis sie umgeben ist von zerbrochenen Schalen. Sie jongliert mit Hartschalenbrüsten und beisst hingebungsvoll in



Jeanne Mordo/Company Bal – *La Poème* © nm

The French circus performer Jeanne Mordo celebrates her womanhood: poetic, mature and very personal. Uninhibited, she celebrates the exploration of her female body, now beginning to change in its early 40s.

Mordo comes from an artistic family and has performed in circuses since she was thirteen. She always found circus schools uninteresting. After taking time out because of a knee injury, she returned and performed her first solo show. Since then she has explored the subject of femininity in unconventional ways. "Ten years ago," she says, "my image of myself had a lot to do with what other people saw. Today I have another relationship to myself; I feel more vulnerable. That's why I hardly use any décor in my piece, as it is my body that is displayed. That has much more to do with the woman I am today – both tender and also immediate."

In her earlier show *Eloge du Poil* ('In Praise of Hairiness') the Frenchwoman wore a beard and knowingly played with the old circus theme of the freak show. As a bearded woman in monstrous underwear, with hairy armpits and constantly sweating, she satirised the public image of what

rohe Eier. Fast wollüstig balanciert sie ein Eigelb über ihren Körper, genießt, wie es über ihre Haut gleitet, in den Mund schmilzt und über ihre Schulter wandert.

Die französische Zirkus-Performerin Jeanne Mordo zelebriert ihr Frausein, poetisch, reif und sehr persönlich. Hemmungslos feiert sie die Erkundung ihres weiblichen Körpers, der sich nun, mit Anfang 40, verändert.

Mordo stammt aus einer Künstlerfamilie und trat in Zirkussen auf, seit sie 13 war, Zirkusschulen fand sie uninteressant. Auf eine Pause wegen einer Knieverletzung mit 30 folgte ihr erstes Solo – seitdem untersucht sie das Thema Weiblichkeit auf unkonventionelle Weise. „Vor 10 Jahren“ sagt sie, „war mein Bild von mir selber viel mehr mit meiner Wirkung in den Augen anderer verbunden. Heute habe ich eine andere Beziehung zu mir selbst, fühle mich verletzbarer. Deshalb verwende ich in dem Stück kaum Dekor, mein Körper ist wirklich ausgestellt. Das hat viel mehr mit der Frau zu tun, die ich jetzt bin - gleichzeitig zarter und auch unmittelbarer“.

In ihrem früheren Stück „Eloge du poil - Ode an das Barthaar“ trug die Französin Backenbart und

UNPACK  
THE  
ARTS



a woman should be. From the beginning Jeanne Mordoï created a seedy atmosphere – both threatening and fascinating. She threw knives, performed ventriloquism with animal skulls, juggled already with egg yolks, and in the end buried herself in earth beneath the stage. It was quickly evident: this woman fears nothing, she is as free as a bird and does anything she wants. In the end she confronted the audience: “Am I scaring you?”

Few artists give so much of their personal selves – turn their innermost self so willingly outwards – as does Jeanne Mordoï. In *La Poème* she seems almost exposed on the stage, with only a suitcase and an instrument to support her. The showpiece of her performance is her stomach with its unusual movements. She courageously forgoes props and is aware of the risks: “In circus one is nothing without an object,” she says, but she decides nevertheless “to simply be there, that should be enough”. Mordoï’s strength is female courage. She has fought hard to create a name as one of the few French circus women. And over the years she has developed a presence on the stage that brings a theatrical quality to the proceedings.

When in the end it roars out of her, when she sings, groans and rolls around in the egg shells, it seems to create an ancient, universal knowledge of femininity. This female body passes over to another existence in waves, her movements on the floor seem like a ritual while her singing conjures up the heavy rhythmical melodies of ancient African women, of tribal chants and voodoo. The egg as primordial cell of human existence defines her female rhythm. She dances on the shattered egg shells of her life. The now aged-looking face is covered with fragments of shell like a second skin. It tells of powerful fertility and an unfulfilled potential. A tremendous, almost archaic, instinctive energy sings out of her.

In *La Poème* hopes shatter like eggs; it’s a trip along the fine line of female potential, between life and death. That the piece doesn’t seem tragic is down to the enormous energy caused by this feminine transformation. On the stage this woman is not sad but proud, even surprised by what happens to her body. As if a natural force

spielte eigenwillig mit dem alten Zirkusthema der Freak-Show. Als bärtige Frau in monströser Unterhose, mit behaarten Achseln und ständigem Schweißfluss persiflierte sie das öffentliche Bild, wie eine Frau auszusehen hat. Von Anfang an schuf Jeanne Mordoï eine zwielfichtige Atmosphäre - bedrohlich und faszinierend zugleich. Sie warf mit Messern um sich, bauchredete mit Tierschädeln, jonglierte schon hier mit Eigelben und begrub sich am Ende selbst mit unter der Bühne versteckter Erde. Schnell wurde klar: diese Frau fürchtet nichts; sie ist vogelfrei und tut alles, wonach ihr ist. Am Ende konfrontierte sie das Publikum: “Mache ich Ihnen Angst?”

Wenige Künstler geben so viel Persönliches, kehren ihr Innerstes so bereitwillig nach außen wie Jeanne Mordoï. In *„La Poème“* wirkt sie fast entblößt auf der Bühne, nur ein Koffer und ein Instrument stehen ihr bei. Schauplatz der Performance ist ihr Bauch, der sich ungewohnt gebärdet. Mutig verzichtet sie auf Requisiten und ist sich des Risikos bewusst: „Im Zirkus ist man nichts ohne Objekte“ weiß sie und entschloss sich trotzdem „einfach nur da zu sein, das sollte genügen“. Mordoï’s Stärke ist weibliche Courage. Sie hat sich als eine der wenigen französischen Zirkusfrauen einen Namen erkämpft. Und in all den Jahren auf der Bühne eine Präsenz entwickelt, die dem Geschehen eine theatrale Qualität verleiht.

Wenn es dann am Ende aus ihr herausschreit, wenn sie singt, stöhnt und sich in den zerbrochenen Eierschalen wälzt, scheint sich ein uraltes, universelles Wissen um Weiblichkeit Raum zu schaffen. In Wogen geht dieser Frauenkörper in eine andere Existenz über, ihre Bewegungen auf dem Boden wirken wie ein Ritual und ihr Gesang erinnert an die schweren rhythmischen Melodien alter afrikanischer Frauen, an Stammesgesänge, an Voodoo. Das Ei als Urzelle menschlichen Seins bestimmt ihren weiblichen Rhythmus. Sie tanzt auf den zerplatzten Eierschalen ihres Lebens. Das nun alt wirkende Gesicht ist bedeckt von den Splittern der Schalen wie eine zweite Haut. Es erzählt von wuchtiger Fruchtbarkeit und einem nicht eingelösten Potential. Eine ungeheure, fast

has descended upon her, raging in her belly. She isn't inhibited and almost marvels as this new immensity seizes her.

Jeanne Mordoj expertly uses the immediacy of the circus experience, the direct physical encounter, to tell her story's metamorphosis and make it tangible for the audience. Her relentless presence touches the audience and moves something within them.

When *La Poème* suddenly ends, one senses something is missing. "The piece is like a torso for me. Now I'm working on the missing limbs: images and thoughts that I cannot express on the stage," acknowledges Jeanne Mordoj. Now she will work with film, including her own drawings – once again showing that she sees circus as a synthesis of the arts.

### **Juggling with Wind**

The language of her colleague Phia Ménard is distinctly lyrical. In *L'Après-midi d'un Foehn* she creates a microcosm of a world and takes the audience on a surprising, poetic daydream.

Here too it is about the potential of creation, of development and passing away. We watch entranced as life is created. It begins like a game in our childhood, when time was slow and space seemed never-ending. Where worlds were created with the daily things we found.

The stage is round, with a circle formed by fans, and someone on the edge who is absent-mindedly cutting up plastic bags, gluing the pieces back together differently again with an infatuated, concentrated slowness. A magical, airy creature is created before our eyes. The whirlwind of the fans breathes life into this being. It rises up, dancing with breathtaking grace and beauty.

The vitality of the world flows through it, giving it a fluttering energy and carrying it out into the world – and for a brief moment we hold our own breath. This moment is even more surprising than we expected: it is the poster for the show. We believed we knew what was happening and are delighted even more by all these small magical discoveries.

archaische, instinktive Energie singt da aus ihr heraus.

In „*La Poème*“ zerplatzen Eier wie Hoffnungen, ein Trip auf dem schmalen Grat weiblichen Potentials, zwischen Leben und Tod. Dass das Stück nicht tragisch wirkt, liegt an der enormen Energie, die diese Transformation der Weiblichkeit auslöst. Nicht traurig, sondern stolz und eher überrascht wirkt die Frau auf der Bühne über das, was da in ihrem Körper geschieht. Wie ein Naturereignis scheint da etwas über sie zu kommen und in ihrem Bauch zu wüten. Sie sperrt sich nicht, fast staunend erlebt sie, wie dieses Neue, Ungeheure, sich ihrer bemächtigt.

Gekonnt nutzt Jeanne Mordoj die Unmittelbarkeit des Erlebens im Zirkus, diese direkte physische Begegnung, um ihre Geschichte einer Wandlung zu erzählen und für das Publikum erfahrbar zu machen. Ihre schonungslose Präsenz berührt den Zuschauer und bewegt etwas in ihm selber. Wenn „*La Poème*“ dann ganz plötzlich zu Ende geht, spürt man: etwas fehlt noch. „Das Stück ist für mich der Torso. Jetzt arbeite ich an den fehlenden Gliedmassen: Bildern und Gedanken, die ich nicht auf der Bühne ausdrücken kann“, bekennt Jeanne Mordoj. Dafür will sie jetzt mit Film arbeiten und eigene Zeichnungen hinzufügen - und einmal mehr zeigen, dass sie Zirkus als Gesamtkunstwerk begreift.

### **Mit Wind jonglieren**

Ausgesprochen lyrisch ist die Sprache ihrer Kollegin Phia Ménard. Diese kreiert in „*L'après-midi d'un foehn, version 1*“ einen Mikrokosmos und lädt den Zuschauer ein zu einem überraschenden, poetischen Tagtraum.

Auch hier geht es um das Potential von Schöpfung, um Entstehen und Vergehen. Gebannt schauen wir zu, wie Leben entsteht. Es beginnt wie ein Spiel aus Kindertagen, als die Zeit noch langsam war und der Raum unendlich schien. Und man mit alltäglichen Fundstücken ganze Welten erschaffen konnte.

Ein Bühnenrund, der Kreis geformt von Ventilatoren, ein Mensch am Rand. Selbstvergessen zerschneidet er eine einfache Plastiktüte, klebt ihre Teile anders wieder zusammen, in betörend konzentrierter



A whole kindred race of new creations soon float through the room and time seems to stand still. But one thing we are not prepared for: in some mysterious way these bags seem to have feelings, from happy vitality to desperation and sadness – when meeting other kindred bags or spinning alone through the air, the music colours their mood. Steered by the eddies and swirls of the air flow, they dance their ballet to Claude Debussy's most famous work, the timeless 'Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune'.

With these seemingly universal kindred spirits – by now much more than their material of plastic – Phia Ménard creates an enchanting piece about life and death. Despite its dreamlike qualities, it is a deeply physical work. The creation of a new body is Ménard's artistic metaphor for her own personal condition. In 2008 the Frenchwoman undertook a gender change, the juggler Philippe became Phia. "I work on my own transformation and accept that I tried to be a man that I never was. I never felt like a man and never was one. Now it is about taking the right direction. I am a woman now." Phia Ménard's own body was not her home for a long time and has only become so through its change. So the magical world of L'Après-midi d'un Foehn colourfully and poetically tells of her desire for freedom without constraints.

The creator of this world acts as a ballet director. It is no coincidence that a puppeteer is the second player in the piece presented in Edinburgh. Jean-Louis Ouvrard, the only human entity on the stage, is well-experienced in bringing dead materials to life and involving them in a wonderful game of fantasy. He moves slowly and quietly. As 'master of the bags' he lets the plastic bags free and plays with them. They flutter graciously with each other, then collect themselves together again in an umbrella. They move magically, chaotically, but always in a controlled way, around the edge of the stage – a small wind-tested universe. This is surely one of the most poetic juggling transformations: the creator of this world juggles with the wind.

With her company Non Nova, Phia Ménard artistically explores "juggling with the unjuggleable" and experiments with the elements. Her credo: "We invent nothing, we just see things

Langsamkeit. Vor unseren Augen entsteht ein zauberhaftes, luftiges Geschöpf. Der Wirbelwind der Ventilatoren haucht diesem Wesen Leben ein und es erhebt sich zu einem phantasievollen Tanz in atemberaubender Anmut.

Der Odem der Welt durchströmt es jetzt, die Lüfte verleihen ihm eine flatternde Lebensenergie und tragen es hinein in die Welt - und für einen ganz kurzen Moment hält man selbst den Atem an. Dieser Moment ist umso überraschender, als man diese Szenerie erwartet hat: sie ist das Plakat der Show. Man glaubte, das Geschehen zu kennen und erfreut sich um so mehr an all diesen kleinen zauberhaften Entdeckungen.

Ein ganzes Volk neuartiger Geschöpfe schwebt bald durch den Raum und die Zeit scheint still zu stehen. Doch auf eines ist man nicht vorbereitet: Auf mysteriöse Weise scheinen diese Tüten Gefühle zu haben, von fröhlicher Lebensfreude bis zu Verzweiflung und Traurigkeit – wenn sie anderen Tütenwesen begegnen oder alleine durch die Luft trudeln: die Musik färbt ihre Stimmung. Gelenkt von den Wirbeln und Strudeln des Luftstroms tänzeln sie ihr Ballett zu Claude Debussys bekanntestem Werk, dem zeitlosen „Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune“.

Mit diesem universell erscheinenden Volk – längst mehr als ihr Stoff aus Plastiktüten – erschafft Phia Ménard ein zauberhaftes Epos um Leben und Tod. Es ist, so traumverloren es wirken mag, ein zutiefst physisches Stück. Die Erschaffung neuer Körper ist Ménards künstlerische Metapher für ihren eigenen, sehr persönlichen Zustand. Im Jahr 2008 ließ die Französin ihr Geschlecht umwandeln, aus dem Jongleur Philippe wurde Phia. „Ich arbeitete an meiner eigenen Transformation und akzeptierte, dass ich versucht hatte, ein Mann zu sein, was ich nie war. Ich fühlte mich nie als Mann und war es nie. Jetzt hieß es, die richtige Richtung zu nehmen. Ich wurde jetzt zur Frau.“ Phia Ménards eigener Körper war lange keine Heimat für sie und wurde es erst durch seine Veränderung. So fabuliert die Zauberwelt von „L'après-midi d'un foehn, version 1“ bunt und poetisch von ihrem Wunsch nach Freiheit und Zwanglosigkeit.

Den Schöpfer dieser Welt lässt sie agieren wie einen Ballettdirektor. Nicht zufällig ist es ein Puppenspieler, der als Zweitbesetzung das Stück

in a new way." *L'Après-midi d'un Foehn* explores the power of wind and erosion. "Wind erodes stone, it changes the shape of the landscape. Here we create new bodies through the wind."

Ménard is used to breaking norms. Like Jeanne Mordoj she was a student of Jérôme Thomas, who took the art of juggling out of its circus context and brought it to its own independent stage.

"We are born, we age. I want to talk about different stages of existence," says Ménard. Already her previous piece *P.P.P.* impressively conveyed her personal questions about identity, transformation and evolution.

In *P.P.P.* she had 100 balls of ice as her creative plaything. The heavy balls floated above her head and began, during the show, to melt and fall down. She juggled with extremes as the danger of being hit with a ball was always there. "Ice is something that changes. It can break, melt, disappear. That is what I tried to do, it tells of transformation. I yearned to change as much as a block of ice. To see how edges became curves while at the same time experiencing how my own body changed."

The farewell to her existence as a man was also a small death for Ménard. So *L'Après-midi d'un Foehn* also tells of power, giving and taking life. Then just like the character of Golem or the objects in Goethe's 'Sorcerer's Apprentice' the characters acquire their own life. They besiege their creator, press him, assail him, and just in time, before his work slips from his hand and destroys him, he tears and shreds them. They become a heap of plastic, as they were before their creation.

### The Echo of Change

*L'Après-midi d'un Foehn* uses plastic bags to nobly tell a small story of evolution. As in *La Poème* it deals with life itself and the yearning to evolve freely. Both pieces are solos, representing the existential urge to find one's own identity. Exciting and authentic they tell of the struggle against uncontrollable power and the elements that we are repeatedly exposed to.

in Edinburgh präsentiert. Jean Louis Ouvrard, das einzige menschliche Wesen auf der Bühne, ist erfahren darin, tote Materie zum Leben zu erwecken und in ein grandioses Spiel der Fantasie zu verwickeln. Er bewegt sich langsam und still. Als „master of the bags“ lässt er die Plastikgeschöpfe frei und spielt mit ihnen. Mal flattern sie graziös miteinander, dann sammelt er sie in einem Regenschirm wieder ein. Auf magische Weise bewegen sie sich zwar chaotisch, aber immer kontrolliert im Bühnenraum – einem kleinen, winderprobten Universum. Und dies ist sicher eine der poetischsten Transformationen der Jonglage: der Schöpfer dieser Welt jongliert mit dem Wind.

Mit ihrer Compagnie Non Nova erkundet Phia Ménard auf artistische Weise das „Jonglieren mit dem nicht Jonglierbaren“ und experimentiert mit den Elementen. „Wir erfinden nichts, wir sehen es nur auf neue Weise“, ist ihr Credo. „*L'après-midi d'un foehn*“ erforscht die Kraft des Windes und der Erosion. „Wind erodiert Steine, er verändert die Form von Landschaft. Hier erschaffen wir durch den Wind neue Körper.“

Ménard ist es gewohnt, aus Normen auszurechnen. Wie Jeanne Mordoj war sie eine Schülerin von Jérôme Thomas, der die Jonglierkunst aus dem Zirkuskontext gelöst und auf eine eigenständige Bühne gebracht hat. „Wir werden geboren, wir altern. Ich möchte über verschiedene Stadien der Existenz sprechen“, so Ménard. Schon ihr voriges Stück „*P.P.P.*“ transportierte eindrucksvoll ihre persönlichen Fragen nach Identität, Transformation und Evolution.

In „*P.P.P.*“ machte sie rund 100 Eiskugeln zum Spielball ihrer Kreativität. Die schweren Kugeln schwebten über ihrem Kopf und begannen, während der Show zu schmelzen und herunterzufallen. Eine Jonglage mit dem Extremen, denn die Gefahr, von den Kugeln getroffen zu werden, schwang immer mit. „Eis ist ein Stoff, der sich verändert. Eis kann zerbrechen, schmelzen, verschwinden. Genau das suchte ich, es erzählt Transformation. Meine Sehnsucht war, mich so zu verändern wie ein Eisblock. Zu sehen, wie Kanten zu Kurven werden und gleichzeitig zu erleben, wie sich mein Körper verändert“.



Jeanne Mordoj and Phia Ménard intensively explore thresholds and transform universal human themes into strong images. Their credo is 'metamorphosis', the transformation of material, form and figure. Both French women have something to say about life that goes way beyond circus technique. They skilfully blend circus arts, clowning, visual installation, pantomime and music into their own artform.

They imaginatively bring deep human experiences to the stage. Phia Ménard through masterful direction and pure sensual creativity, Jeanne Mordoj with an unbridled, humourous femininity. This new circus replaces the circus ring with a theatre stage, the spectacle with sincerity, the revue with dramaturgy. The intimacy of both shows breaks the distance between performer and audience and so, unexpectedly, one experiences the whole spectrum of emotions.

"Is this still circus?" was the question after both shows. These two visionary circus artists provide an easy answer. They show how artful modern circus can be.

Der Abschied von ihrer Existenz als Mann war auch ein kleiner Tod für Ménard. Und so erzählt „L'après-midi d'un foehn, version 1“ auch von der Macht, Leben zu geben und zu nehmen. Denn ganz wie die Figur des „Golem“ oder Goethes „Zauberlehrling“ erlangen die Wesen ein Eigenleben. Sie bedrängen ihren Schöpfer, setzen ihm zu, greifen ihn an, und gerade rechtzeitig, bevor ihm sein Werk aus den Händen gleitet und ihn selbst zerstört, zerreit und zerfetzt er sie. Sie werden zu dem Haufen Plastik, der sie vor ihrer Erschaffung waren.

### Das Echo der Wandlung

Erhaben inszeniert „L'après-midi d'un foehn, Version 1“ mit Plastiktten eine kleine Geschichte der Evolution. Wie in „La Pome“ geht es um das Leben an sich und die Sehnsucht nach freier Entfaltung. Beide Stcke sind Soli, sie stehen fr den existentiellen Drang, die eigene Identitt zu finden. Aufregend authentisch erzhlen sie von dem Kampf gegen unkontrollierbare Krfte und Elemente, denen wir immer wieder ausgesetzt sind. Jeanne Mordoj und Phia Mnard haben intensiv in Grenzbereichen recherchiert und verwandeln universelle menschliche Themen in starke Bilder. Ihr Credo ist die „Metamorphose“, die Verwandlung von Material, Form und Figur. Die beiden Franzsinnen haben etwas ber das Leben zu sagen, das weit ber Zirkustechniken hinaus geht. Gekonnt verschmelzen sie Artistik, Clownerie, visuelle Installation, Pantomime und Musik zu einer eigenen Kunstgattung. Phantasievoll bringen sie tiefe menschliche Erkenntnisse auf die Bhne. Phia Mnard durch eine meisterliche Regie und pure, lustvolle Kreativitt. Jeanne Mordojs mit einer ungebndigten, humorvollen Weiblichkeit. Dieser Neue Zirkus ersetzt die Manege durch die Theaterbhne, das Spektakel durch Ernsthaftigkeit, die Nummernrevue durch eine Dramaturgie. Die Intimitt beider Shows bricht die Distanz zwischen Performer und Publikum auf und so durchlebt man als Zuschauer berrascht ein ganzes Spektrum von Emotionen.

„Ist das noch Zirkus?“ war nach beiden Shows die Frage. Diese beiden visionren Zirkusartisten machen die Antwort leicht. Sie zeigen, wie kunstvoll zeitgenssischer Zirkus sein kann.

# Men who Dreamt of Flying: A Short Phenomenology of the Circus Performer

LAURA BEVIONE

Jeanne Mordojo's deep and azure eyes cloud with melancholic resignation when talking about the common perception of circus performers as "extraordinary creatures", as somehow almost superhuman. Though obviously the observation comes from a warped perspective, it nonetheless generates a feeling of unease that the French performer openly admits to feeling on a "physical" level. To add to this, Mordojo says that she no longer feels like a circus artist, even though she still resorts to decidedly circus-like tricks, stating instead that she's on a quest to find a "space" where she can position herself. A "place" where her own desire – or necessity rather – to be "poetic" (in other words her need to express her own inner energy) can find an adequate and comfortable abode. A versatile French artist born to a family of sculptors, who displayed a passion for the circus ever since her teenage years and in short order mastered a number of disciplines – juggling, ventriloquism and contortion, to name just a few – and subsequently performed in and directed her own work, Jeanne Mordojo's statement-confessions are indicative of many burning issues related to social status, and particularly to the one linked to the professional/technical status of the circus artist.

In their show *De nos jours [notes on the circus]*<sup>1</sup> the French group Ivan Mosjoukine (whose name is borrowed from a Russian silent film actor famous for his role in an intriguing experiment concerning

1 *De nos jours [Notes on the circus]*, written by and starring Erwan Ha Kyoon Larcher, Vimala Pons, Tsirihaka Harrivel, Maroussia Diaz Verbèke. Scene by Stephan Duve. Costumes by Marion Jouffre. Ivan Mosjoukine Prod.

# Uomini che sognavano di volare: breve fenomenologia dell'artista di circo

LAURA BEVIONE

Gli occhi di Jeanne Mordojo – azzurri e profondissimi – si velano di malinconica rassegnazione quando racconta come spesso il pubblico consideri gli artisti come «esseri straordinari», in qualche modo non umani: una percezione ovviamente distorta che, nondimeno, genera una difficoltà che la performer francese confessa di avvertire «fisicamente». Non solo, Mordojo aggiunge di non sentirsi più semplicemente un'artista di circo, benché ricorra ancora a espedienti prettamente circensi, ma dichiara di essere alla ricerca di uno "spazio" in cui collocarsi. Un "luogo" in cui la propria volontà – o, meglio, necessità - di essere «poetica», ovvero di esprimere la personalissima energia interiore posseduta, trovi adeguata e soddisfacente dimora. Le affermazioni-confessioni di Jeanne Mordojo - poliedrica artista francese, nata in una famiglia di scultori, appassionata fin dall'adolescenza di circo, tanto da diventare in pochi anni una virtuosa nelle arti della giocoleria, della ventriloquia e del contorsionismo, e poi attrice e autrice e regista di se stessa – sono paradigmatiche delle principali questioni legate allo statuto sociale e a quello più squisitamente professionale/tecnico dell'artista di circo.

Nel suo spettacolo *De nos jours [Notes on the circus]*<sup>1</sup> il collettivo francese Ivan Mosjoukine – il nome è quello di un artista circense divenuto celebre negli anni Venti del Novecento in quanto protagonista di un interessante esperimento sulla

1 *De nos jours [Notes on the circus]*, di e con Erwan Ha Kyoon Larcher, Vimala Pons, Tsirihaka Harrivel, Maroussia Diaz Verbèke. Scene di Stephan Duve. Costumi di Marion Jouffre. Prod. Ivan Mosjoukine..



perception) ask themselves what the spectators truly see, the four performers concealing nothing about their art as they operate the lights and various pieces of equipment in full view of the audience, posing questions about the meaning of the actions they stage. At the heart of their show, which is both witty and ingeniously ironic, is the examination of the inevitable gap between the artist's intention and the audience's perception, the latter often being influenced by the desire only to have fun and to 'marvel' – in other words, to observe and admire the extraordinary skills of people who, to put it in the words of Jeanne Mordoï, are anything but ordinary. Then again, one of the most prominent French actors of the 20th Century, Louis Jouvet, branded anyone who chose his profession "a monster who escaped Buffon's attention",<sup>2</sup> accentuating that element of 'monstrosity' – the prodigious exceptionality – that spectators still attribute to those who perform on a stage or in a circus. The idea of the artist as a 'wonder' finds its roots in the social role attributed to the professionals of the show business industry; it is a perception that is as immovable and deep-rooted today as it ever was, and is as old as the entire history of theatre. Jean Duvignaud used to remark that over millennia of human history the appeal of the stage was essentially its ability to offer experiences which were removed from ordinary daily life, and, as an added value though no less important, which were enacted by people who led disrupted or extraordinary lives.<sup>3</sup> Jeanne Mordoï's understandable wish to be recognised for her ordinary humanity can therefore never be fulfilled, and it is the same quality of her being on stage – as well as her declared ambition to generate deep, lasting emotions – that inevitably obliterates the sincere desire, often expressed by the French performer, to have an equal debate with her spectators. In *La Poème*,<sup>4</sup> her most recent show and a solo that she herself created, directed and now performs, Mordoï's stage presence is undoubtedly formidable and poetic, full of meaning

2 L. Jouvet, *Réflexions du comédien*, Éditions de la Nouvelle revue critique, Paris 1945 (1. issue 1938), page. 9.

3 Cfr. J. Duvignaud, *Les ombres collectives. Sociologie du théâtre*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1965.

4 *La Poème*, written, directed and interpreted by Jeanne Mordoï. Lights by Claire Villard. Sound by Isabelle Surel. A Cie Bal / Jeanne Mordoï Production. World premiere: Summerhall, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 2 August 2013.

percezione - si chiede che cosa realmente vedano gli spettatori e, per questo, i quattro performer che lo compongono non nascondono nulla della loro arte, azionando luci e attrezzature varie a vista e domandosi a tratti il senso di quanto stanno realizzando in scena. Il fulcro del loro spettacolo, arguto e genialmente ironico, è proprio l'indagine dell'inevitabile iato fra l'intenzione dell'artista e la percezione del pubblico, quest'ultima sovente condizionata dal desiderio esclusivo di divertirsi e "meravigliarsi", ossia di osservare e ammirare le abilità fuori dal comune di esseri, come dice Jeanne Mordoï, per nulla ordinari. E, d'altronde, uno dei maggiori attori francesi del Novecento, Louis Jouvet, definiva chi sceglieva la sua professione «un mostro sfuggito all'attenzione di Buffon»<sup>2</sup>, accentuando quel carattere di "mostruosità", di prodigiosa eccezionalità che gli spettatori tuttora attribuiscono a chi si esibisce su un palcoscenico oppure sulla pista di un circo. La concezione dell'artista come "portento" è una realtà legata alla percezione e al ruolo sociale attribuito ai lavoratori dello spettacolo ancora oggi ineluttabile e radicata, tanto antica quanto lo è la storia del teatro. Jean Duvignaud sottolineava proprio come nella millenaria vicenda umana l'attrazione esercitata dalla scena fosse da ascrivere essenzialmente alla sua capacità di offrire esperienze lontane dall'ordinaria quotidianità e, come non secondario valore aggiunto, agite da esseri la cui esistenza è contraddistinta dall'irregolarità e dalla straordinarietà<sup>3</sup>. Risulta quindi inasaudibile il pur comprensibile desiderio di Jeanne Mordoï di veder riconosciuta la propria ordinaria umanità e, d'altronde, la medesima qualità del suo stare in scena così come il dichiarato obiettivo di generare emozioni non fugaci inevitabilmente obliterano quella sincera volontà di confronto paritario con i propri spettatori espressa dall'artista francese. Nell'ultimo spettacolo da lei ideato, diretto e interpretato, *La Poème*<sup>4</sup>, la presenza scenica di Mordoï è indubbiamente formidabile e poetica, pregna di significati e di allusioni che abbracciano

2 L. Jouvet, *Réflexions du comédien*, Éditions de la Nouvelle revue critique, Paris 1945 (1. issue 1938), page. 9.

3 Cfr. J. Duvignaud, *Les ombres collectives. Sociologie du théâtre*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1965.

4 *La poème*, scritto, diretto e interpretato da Jeanne Mordoï. Luci di Claire Villard. Suono di Isabelle Surel. Produzione Cie Bal / Jeanne Mordoï. Prima mondiale: Summerhall, Fringe Festival Edinburgh, 2 agosto 2013.

and references encompassing issues, including uncommon ones, relating to femininity: the performer's body is an eloquent and elegant amplifier of the unique biology of women, and at the same time a lively expression of the fears and the painful awareness of her own appearance and more generally of her identity. It is thus evident how, once this medley of thoughts, notes and emotions manages to concentrate in the body of a single artist, that body ceases to be just flesh and takes on an abstract and universal value, becoming a living poem, eloquently meaningful. The performer therefore becomes something more than 'just' a woman, a status that perhaps she will be able to acquire once again only when she is away from the stage, when she ceases to be a representative hypostasis of femininity and becomes once again simply Jeanne. But in *La Poème* the 'wonder' generated in the spectator came from the highly symbolic and allusive nature of the artist's body, in many shows that equally fell into the category of 'contemporary circus' it was born – maybe more prosaically – from the extraordinary physical skills of the performers. Strength and technical skill – honed through intense and constant training – allow the artists to perform acrobatics that seem to challenge and overcome the natural limits of the body, triggering in the audience a feeling of stunned admiration. And so, paradoxically starting from their desire to explore the fragility of their own bodies, in *Knee Deep* the newly formed Australian company Casus offer the youth and energy of their trained and malleable bodies, and exhibit their extraordinary power and flexibility.<sup>5</sup> The concepts of vigour, youth, physical ability, and the free and generous display of extraordinary strength and bodily harmony are at the heart of another show from Australia, *Wunderkammer*, staged by the company Circa, a sort of blood-relative of Casus given that two members of the second company trained professionally in the first. *Wunderkammer*<sup>6</sup> is an exploratory journey into a secret cabinet of

5 *Knee Deep*, created and interpreted by Emma Serjeant, Jesse Scott, Lachlan McAulay, Natano Fa'anana. Lights by Rob Scott. A Casus Contemporary Circus production. Show launched in 2011.

6 *Wunderkammer*, created and directed by Yaron Lifschitz. Starring Freyja Edney, Lewis West, Todd Kilby, Scott Grove, Melissa Knowles, Alice Muntz, Jarred Dewey. A Circa company production. The show opened in Brisbane in 2010.

discorsi anche non usuali legati alla femminilità: il corpo della performer è eloquente ed elegante megafono della peculiare biologia delle donne e, allo stesso tempo, vivace espressione di timori e sofferte consapevolezze riguardo il proprio aspetto e, più in generale, la propria identità di genere. È evidente come, allorché un tale grumo di pensieri, annotazioni ed emozioni riesca a coagularsi nel corpo di una singola artista, esso cessa di essere semplice carne e acquista una valenza astratta e universale, poema vivente e loquacemente pregnante. La performer, di conseguenza, diventa qualcosa di più di una "semplice" donna, condizione quest'ultima che – forse – riuscirà a riconquistare solamente lontano dal palcoscenico, cessando di essere sonora ipostasi del femminile e diventando di nuovo soltanto Jeanne. Ma se in *La Poème* la "meraviglia" generata nello spettatore deriva dalla natura altamente simbolica e allusiva del corpo dell'artista, in molti spettacoli analogamente ascrivibili alla categoria di "circo contemporaneo", essa è germinata – forse più prosaicamente – dalle straordinarie capacità fisiche dei performer. La forza e l'abilità tecnica – frutto di allenamento considerevole e costante – consentono agli artisti in scena acrobazie ed evoluzioni che paiono sfidare i limiti imposti dalla natura al corpo umano, suscitando di conseguenza la stupita ammirazione degli spettatori. Così, partendo paradossalmente proprio dalla volontà di esplorare la fragilità del proprio corpo, la neonata compagnia australiana Casus, nel suo primo spettacolo portato in scena e intitolato *Knee Deep*<sup>5</sup>, offre con generosità la giovinezza e l'energia dei propri fisici addestrati e malleabili, straordinariamente forti e flessibili. E i concetti di vigore, giovinezza, atleticità e gratuita e generosa offerta della forza e dell'armonia non ordinarie dei propri corpi sono alla base di un altro spettacolo proveniente dall'Australia e messo in scena da una compagnia, Circa, legata da un rapporto di filiazione con Casus, poiché due membri della seconda si sono formati professionalmente nella prima. L'allestimento proposto da Circa è, già nel titolo, esemplificativo dell'obiettivo che intende raggiungere:

5 *Knee Deep*, ideato e interpretato da Emma Serjeant, Jesse Scott, Lachlan McAulay, Natano Fa'anana. Luci di Rob Scott. Produzione Casus Contemporary Circus. Spettacolo creato nel 2011.



wonders, reminiscent of those kept by the gentlemen of the Baroque courts, but if, in the 17th Century, wonder and incredulity was provoked by the exotic and the unusual (ostrich eggs, for example, or precious corals), nowadays these emotions are triggered by performances that defy the laws of physics and material resistance. In Circa's performance this sense of wonder is deliberately and consciously sought and – unlike in Jeanne Mordoj's shows – is delivered by artists who stimulate, cajole and pamper the audience by presenting them with the gift of their extraordinary athletic skills and super-trained bodies. The performers then turn into beings from a 'different' dimension, divine creatures who rise above tempers and differences in order to offer themselves to the very human audience as it sits in a state of stunned amazement. It's important to emphasise that the wonder of the audience is not necessarily dictated by the distance between the stage and the audience. One example we can look at on this point is *Bianco*, a bewildering and grand show, staged by the company NoFit State Circus, that is noisy and intricate but also incredibly energetic and exciting.<sup>7</sup> Set inside a tent, *Bianco*'s staging makes the audience stand, and the spectators are constantly forced to readjust in order to follow the motion of the various stage machines that enact the drama's action. The proximity to the performers – who at times talk to the audience, or rather touch and move them – does not detract from the 'beauty and wonder' of the show. On the contrary such qualities are accentuated and amplified by this contact, and it is at the same time a tangible conveyance of vital energy and a generous concession on the part of these extraordinary beings. Generous dispensers of astonishment, these artists embody the fulfilment of a dream that has existed in the restlessness of humankind since the beginning of times – that is to say the desire to conquer the heights, to move

7 *Bianco*, directed by Fiorenza Guidi. Creative producer Tom Rack. Musical director Gareth Jones. Scene by Saz Moir. Costumes by Rhiannon Matthews. Lights by Adam Cobby. Starring Elena Burani, Sage Bachtler Cushman, August Dakteris, Ariele Ebacher, Elle Edwards, Marco Fiera, Kate-Inez Kieran, Anne-fay Johnston, Lyndall Merry, Howard Morley, Hugo Oliveira, Fred Rendell, Blaze Tarsha, Lee Tinnion, Freya Watson, Nat Whittingham. Musicians: Gareth Jones, Andy Moore, Ashley John Long, Calum McIntyre. A NoFit State Circus production. The show opened on 28 July 2012 at the Eden Project in Cornwall (UK).

*Wunderkammer*<sup>6</sup> è il viaggio di esplorazione di un gabinetto segreto delle meraviglie alla maniera dei signori delle corti barocche ma se nel Seicento ciò che suscitava stupore e incredulità era l'esotico e l'insolito (uova di struzzo ovvero preziosi coralli), oggi è la capacità di un corpo umano di vincere le leggi della fisica e della resistenza materiale. La meraviglia è consapevolmente ricercata e – a differenza di quanto avviene per Jeanne Mordoj – stimolata, blandita, vezzeggiata da artisti che offrono in dono al pubblico le straordinarie abilità atletiche dei propri corpi super-allenati. I performer si tramutano così in esseri appartenenti a una dimensione "altra", creature divine che, nondimeno, rifuggono capricci e alterità per offrirsi all'ammirazione a bocca aperta degli umanissimi spettatori seduti in poltrona. E, a questo proposito, è importante evidenziare come l'effetto di meraviglia non dipenda necessariamente dalla distanza che separa palcoscenico e platea, pista e gradinata: un esempio è *Bianco*, uno spettacolo frastornante e grandioso, rumoroso e macchinoso ma incredibilmente energetico ed emozionante, messo in scena dalla compagnia NoFit State Circus.<sup>7</sup> Allestita all'interno di una tenda, la partitura di *Bianco* prevede che il pubblico rimanga in piedi, costretto costantemente a risistemarsi per assecondare i movimenti delle varie macchine sceniche che dislocano l'azione drammatica ognora in punti diversi. La prossimità con i performer – che a tratti dialogano con gli spettatori, ovvero li toccano e li spostano – non ne annulla la natura "meravigliosa" che, anzi, viene accentuata e amplificata da quel contatto, allo stesso tempo concreta trasmissione di vitalissima energia e generosa concessione da parte di esseri straordinari. Prodighi dispensatori di meraviglia, questi artisti incarnano la realizzazione di un sogno che nutre l'inquietudine dell'umanità fin dalla sua

6 *Wunderkammer*, ideato e diretto da Yaron Lifschitz. Interpretato da Freya Edney, Lewis West, Todd Kilby, Scott Grove, Melissa Knowles, Alice Muntz, Jarred Dewey. Produzione Compagnia Circa. Lo spettacolo ha debuttato a Brisbane nel 2010.

7 *Bianco*, diretto da Fiorenza Guidi. Produttore creativo Tom Rack. Direzione musicale di Gareth Jones. Scene di Saz Moir. Costumi di Rhiannon Matthews. Luci di Adam Cobby. Interpretato da Elena Burani, Sage Bachtler Cushman, August Dakteris, Ariele Ebacher, Elle Edwards, Marco Fiera, Kate-Inez Kieran, Anne-fay Johnston, Lyndall Merry, Howard Morley, Hugo Oliveira, Fred Rendell, Blaze Tarsha, Lee Tinnion, Freya Watson, Nat Whittingham. Musicisti: Gareth Jones, Andy Moore, Ashley John Long, Calum McIntyre. Produzione Compagnia NoFit State Circus. Lo spettacolo ha debuttato il 28 luglio 2012 nell'ambito dell'Eden Project in Cornovaglia (UK).



NoFit State – *Noodles* © Sean Purser

upwards, to challenge gravity, and eventually to take to the sky. Circus performers – strict athletes and fearless challengers of the laws of nature – seem fully aware of their sought-after exceptionalism, and in the case of the above-mentioned shows add nothing else – no acting nor written dramaturgy – to their skills, as these alone are enough to trigger intense emotions and deep thoughts within the audience, just as the strong scenic presence of Jeanne Mordoj was enough to fill *La Poème* with meaning. Still, dexterity and an almost rough and ready professionalism – a rich and composite artistic personality<sup>8</sup> – cannot guarantee the success of a show, as is sadly demonstrated by another work by NoFit State Circus, titled *Noodles*.<sup>9</sup> In this piece the acrobatic numbers are interlinked by a red narrative thread, but this is introduced in such an unnatural and mechanical way that it is revealed as a random

alba, vale a dire la possibilità di possedere la verticalità, di muoversi verso l'alto e, sfidando la gravità, spiccare il volo. I performer di circo – atleti rigorosi e temerari sfidanti delle leggi della natura – appaiono ben coscienti della propria ambita straordinarietà e, nel caso degli spettacoli succitati, non aggiungono null'altro – recitazione ovvero dramaturgia scritta – alle proprie abilità, sufficienti da sole a suscitare nello spettatore emozioni intense e pensieri non superficiali, così come la forza della presenza scenica di Jeanne Mordoj bastava a riempire di senso il suo *La Poème*. E, tuttavia, non sempre il possesso di destrezza e quasi artigianale professionalità ovvero di una ricca e composita personalità artistica<sup>8</sup>, sono garanzia di riuscita di uno spettacolo di circo contemporaneo, come dimostra, purtroppo, un altro lavoro creato dalla compagnia NoFit State Circus, ossia *Noodles*.<sup>9</sup>

- 8 With regard to Jeanne Mordoj one must emphasise how the artist, even though she is equipped with uncommon professional abilities and a burning need to express seething inner worlds, does not renounce dramaturgy or the contribution of an 'outside eye' that can help her create her shows by an easier or more effective path.
- 9 *Noodles*, created and directed by Maksim Komaro. Starring Zenaida Alcalde, Lisa Angberg, Cristina Geninazzi, Klara Mossberg, Miguel Muñoz. A NoFit State Circus production. The show opened at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe on 2 August 2013.

- 8 A proposito ancora di Jeanne Mordoj è doveroso sottolineare come l'artista, seppure dotata di non comuni capacità professionali così come di una pressante necessità di espressione di ribollenti mondi interiori, non rinunci né a una dramaturgia né all'apporto di un "occhio esterno" che la aiuti a instradare i propri spettacoli lungo il cammino più agevole ed efficace.
- 9 *Noodles*, ideazione e regia di Maksim Komaro. Interpretato da Zenaida Alcalde, Lisa Angberg, Cristina Geninazzi, Klara Mossberg, Miguel Muñoz. Produzione NoFit State Circus. Lo spettacolo ha debuttato al Fringe Festival di Edimburgo il 2 agosto 2013.

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pretext, and instead of making the scenic action fluid and 'interlinked', it makes it sluggish and fragmented. This is partly the result of the spurious nature of the chosen narrative expedient, and then also of the apparent difficulty the performers find in acting – an embarrassment that at times jeopardises even their circus skills, detracting fluidity and spontaneity from the mostly acrobatic numbers. This latter element emphasises the desirability of basic expressive/acting abilities even for those performers who are fully fledged circus artists. This is not to say that circus artists should necessarily be actors too, though it is undeniable that what makes them complete 'performers' and not simply 'athletes' is exactly the gift of being able to express themselves with their bodies – and to convey not only power and technique but also feelings and emotions. Sure, each of the three good actresses of *Fright or Flight*,<sup>10</sup> by 3 is a Crowd, shape a character for themselves, or rather a well-defined and recognisable type – the dizzy scatterbrained one, the slightly snobbish indifferent one, and the rather authoritarian one – and the dynamics that are triggered when such different personalities meet is what glues the various acts together, but their efficacy is due first and foremost to the athletic professionalism of the young Australian performers. And if the show aims expressly at having an effect on that part of the human brain responsible for perceiving and processing new feelings and emotions, the fulfilment of said goal is solely due to the coexistence of technique and expressiveness. These qualities can also be the subject of a carefree self-irony, as is the case in *Flown*<sup>11</sup> by Pirates of the Carabina, an eclectic and bizarre group of artists who play, sing, act and make breathtaking acrobatics but do so without taking themselves too seriously. In fact, by ridiculing a professionalism that all the performers exhibit firmly, they reveal its peculiarities and indeed limitations. Mere technique can turn into ridicule if the artist waives the generosity mentioned earlier in favour of a sterile self-centredness, just as, on the other hand, the

10 *Fright or Flight*, created, directed and interpreted by Bianca Mackail, Olivia Porter and Rockie Stone. Production company 3 is a Crowd & Cara Hume. The show opened in Australia in October 2012.

11 *Flown*, a Pirates of the Carabina and Crying Out Loud Production. The show was commissioned by Glastonbury Festival in 2011.

In questo allestimento i numeri acrobatici sono legati da un filo rosso narrativo srotolato, però, con artificiosa meccanicità così da rivelare la propria qualità di pretesto posticcio che, anziché rendere fluida e "legata" l'azione scenica, la intorpidisce e frammenta. Un risultato dovuto da una parte alla pretestuosità dell'espedito narrativo prescelto e, dall'altra, all'evidente difficoltà dei performer a recitare e, anzi, questo imbarazzo ne compromette in alcuni frangenti persino le abilità circensi, sottraendo fluidità e naturalità ai numeri più prettamente acrobatici. Un dato quest'ultimo che chiarisce come il possesso di pur basilari capacità espressive e/o interpretative possa essere auspicabile anche qualora si sostenga l'autosufficienza delle qualità specificatamente circensi. Con ciò non si vuole suggerire la necessità che gli artisti del circo siano anche attori eppure è vero che ciò che ne assicura l'identità di "artisti" e non semplici "atleti" è proprio il dono di esprimere con i propri corpi non soltanto forza e tecnica bensì anche sentimenti ed emozioni. Certo le tre brave interpreti di *Fright or Flight*<sup>10</sup> si modellano ciascuna un personaggio o, meglio, un carattere ben definito e riconoscibile – la svampita, l'indifferente un po' snob, l'esuberante piuttosto autoritaria – e le dinamiche, inevitabilmente tutt'altro che pacifiche, originate dall'incontro di tre personalità tanto diverse diventano il collante dei vari numeri ma essi devono la loro efficacia in primo luogo proprio all'atletica professionalità delle giovani artiste australiane. Se il fine dello spettacolo è dichiaratamente quello di agire su quella parte del cervello umano destinata alla percezione e all'elaborazione di sensazioni ed emozioni inedite, esso è raggiunto soltanto grazie alla coesistenza di tecnica ed espressività. Qualità che possono anche essere oggetto di spensierata autoironia, come accade in *Flown*<sup>11</sup>: un'eterogenea e bizzarra compagine di artisti che suonano, cantano, recitano e, ovviamente, compiono acrobazie mozzafiato ma senza prendersi troppo sul serio. E, anzi, proprio mettendo alla berlina una

10 *Fright or Flight*, ideato diretto e interpretato da Bianca Mackail, Olivia Porter e Rockie Stone. Produzione compagnia 3 is a Crowd & Cara Hume. Lo spettacolo ha debuttato in Australia nell'ottobre 2012.

11 *Flown*, Produzione Pirates of the Carabina e Crying Out Loud. Lo spettacolo è stato commissionato alla compagnia nel 2011 dal Glastonbury Festival.

skills of a seasoned comedian turn into a meaningless gag if they are not supported by the physical abilities that carry the performer into that 'other' dimension which the spectator recognises as belonging to themselves. The circus artist is therefore expected to combine those indispensable homemade skills – such as familiarity with heights and an apparent indifference for the physical limitations of their body, making them a true 'wonder' in the eyes of the audience – with an expressiveness that conveys a vibrant and alive interiority. Only by doing so can one combine the wonder conveyed by the almost divine skills of the performer with the electrifying feeling of anarchic freedom that the circus artist, unlike a mere mortal, is able to bring to life and enjoy fully.

professionalità che tutti i performer dimostrano di possedere saldamente, essi ne mostrano le peculiarità e, allo stesso tempo, i limiti: la mera tecnica può tradursi persino in ridicolo qualora l'artista in scena rinunci a quella generosità di cui si parlava per sostituirla con uno sterile egocentrismo così come, d'altro lato, le doti da scafato commediante si traducono in inutile gag se non sono supportate da quelle abilità fisiche che trasportano l'interprete in quella dimensione "altra" che lo spettatore gli riconosce propria. All'artista di circo è richiesto, insomma, di affiancare alle proprie indispensabili competenze artigianali – quella familiarità con la verticalità e quella apparente indifferenza per i limiti fisici del proprio corpo che ne fanno un reale "portento" agli occhi della platea – un'espressività che sia oggettiva esplicitazione di un'interiorità viva e pulsante. Soltanto in questo modo, alla meraviglia suscitata dalle doti quasi divine del performer si può unire quell'elettrizzante sensazione di anarchica libertà che l'artista di circo, a differenza dell'uomo comune, è in grado di realizzare e godere appieno.



# On the Need for Dramaturgy in Contemporary Circus

LENE VAN LANGENHOVE

A woman stands holding a suitcase, pensively. She seems to be waiting for something. Softly, she starts to sing, then louder, roughly even, frenzied. Suddenly, an egg drops from her bosom, and another, and another. The eggs break, she juggles with the yolks and rubs her entire body in the broken eggshells on the ground. It is a terrifying sight at first, but then a new energy comes along. Owing to her calm, confident demeanour she even manages to appear glamorous.

This is a sketch of *La Poème* by Jeanne Mordoj, a strong performer who always gets herself across to the audience. Her personality and individual character stand out in the circus scene, where performers often seem easily replaceable or interchangeable. She sees herself as an artisan, she feels the need to create. Her work is set in-between circus and theatre. The original definition of circus is a compilation of stunning acts by acrobats, equilibrists, jugglers and so on, with an obvious composition that builds to a climax in every act and again through the entire performance. In the 1970s, the dramatic aspect of circus was of significant importance: there were new characters, costumes, and music grew more prominent. In 'modern' circus, the acts were no longer presented by the ringmaster or by clowns, but became part of a story.

Since the establishment of circus schools in the 1980s, artists no longer exclusively hailed from traditional circus families, and started to specialise in specific disciplines. In the ensuing years, theatre directors and choreographers applied their methods to circus performances: they set off from their own perspective, and circus artists steeped themselves in dance and theatre

# Over de nood aan dramaturgie in hedendaags circus

LENE VAN LANGENHOVE

Een vrouw met een koffertje in de hand, in gedachten verzonken. Ze lijkt te wachten op iets. Zachtjes begint ze te zingen, het wordt steeds luider, rauwer, bezeten. Plots valt er een ei uit haar boezem, en nog een, en nog een. De eieren breken, ze jongleert met de dooiers en wrijft haar ganse lichaam over de gebroken schelpen op de grond. Het is een aanvankelijk angstwekkende verschijning, maar ineens zie je daar een nieuwe kracht opborrelen. Dankzij haar kalme, zelfverzekerde uitstraling slaagt ze er zelfs in er glamoereus uit te zien.

Dit is een schets van *La Poème* van Jeanne Mordoj, een hele sterke performer die blijft boeien. Haar persoonlijkheid en eigenheid vallen op in de circuswereld waar performers vaak vervangbaar of inwisselbaar lijken. Zelf zegt ze dat ze zich een ambachtsvrouw voelt, ze is iemand die wil maken. Haar werk situeert zich dan ook op de grens tussen circus en theater. De oorspronkelijke definitie van circus is een verzameling verbazingwekkende acts door acrobaten, evenwichtskunstenaars, jongleurs, enzovoort, met een duidelijke opbouw naar een climax, in elke act en in z'n geheel. In de jaren 70 hechtte men meer belang aan het theatrale aspect: er werden personages gecreëerd, kostuums ontworpen, en muziek werd belangrijker. In 'modern circus' werden de acts niet langer door een presentator of clown aan elkaar gepresenteerd, maar werden ze deel van een verhaal.

Met de oprichting van de eerste circus scholen in de jaren 80 kwamen artiesten niet langer uitsluitend uit de familietraditie en gingen zij zich specialiseren in één discipline. In de daarop-

techniques. This revelatory evolution ushered in the early years of 'contemporary' circus. Naturally, different tendencies coexist. In some performances, circus techniques are used to convey a message, as in other artistic genres. Some blend several disciplines and genres together, and others focus on technique. Some require their acts to be self-reliant and appeal to an audience without the help of costumes, light or decor. In short, the umbrella term 'contemporary circus' covers a great many concepts.

When we asked Jeanne Mordoj whether she would situate her work within contemporary circus, she answered that she has known the circus world but no longer feels part of it, even though many circus elements and techniques are employed in her work. Remarkably, she also notes that a puzzle of detached scenes, which basically is the essence of circus, is not her goal, and that instead it is the composition of a single organic brew. Her approach resembles the ways of theatre-makers. At the onset of a creation, she asks herself, 'How do I feel? Where do I stand as a woman? What needs do I have?' This kind of (self-)reflection should not be exclusive to theatre; many circus artists would benefit from the fundamental question: what is it I want to relate to and why?

For Jeanne Mordoj, this question arose only when she broke her knee when she turned thirty after an extensive career in juggling and contortion that saw her perform through France. In her work, she consistently focuses on femininity, and vents her views on the world. For this creation, she was inspired by singing and dance traditions from all over the world. This accounts for the ritualistic, almost tribal atmosphere. There is enough content for the audience to find a meaning behind the images she creates. We witness the evolution of a young, fertile woman who suffers the loss of her eggs and who, for a moment, grows older, until her strength seems to grow again. She explores positions, details and shifting images. She makes her belly bob and waggle, and presents the body as it is. This shameless physical commitment glorifies the body's boundless possibilities. *La peau aime*. No perfect bodies or spectacular acts in this performance. Jeanne

volgende jaren pasten theaterregisseurs of choreografen hun aanpak toe op circusvoorstellingen: er werd vertrokken van een concept en circusartiesten verdiepten zich in dans- en theatertechnieken. Dat was zo grensverleggend dat men vanaf dan spreekt van hedendaags circus. Daarbinnen zijn er uiteraard verschillende trends. In sommige voorstellingen worden circustechnieken gebruikt als middel om een boodschap over te brengen, net zoals andere artistieke vormen. Er zijn er die disciplines en genres mengen en er zijn er die focussen op techniek. Voor sommigen moeten de acts op zichzelf staan en zonder hulp van kostuum, licht of decor een publiek kunnen aanspreken. Kortom: onder de paraplu 'hedendaags circus' vallen zeer uiteenlopende creaties.

Op de vraag of ze haar werk als hedendaags circus beschouwt, antwoordt Jeanne Mordoj dat ze uit de circuswereld komt maar zich daar geen deel meer van voelt, ook al gebruikt ze elementen en technieken uit het circus. Opvallend is dat ze aangeeft geen puzzel van verschillende scènes te willen maken, wat in wezen de definitie is van circus, maar tracht één organische brij te bekomen. Haar aanpak leunt sterk aan bij die van theatermakers. Bij aanvang van deze creatie stelde zij zich de vraag: hoe voel ik mij, waar sta ik nu, als vrouw? Welke noodzakelijkheid heb ik? Die (zelf)reflectie zou niet exclusief voor theater mogen voorbehouden zijn, veel circusartiesten zouden baat hebben bij die essentiële vraag: wat wil ik vertellen en waarom?

Voor Jeanne Mordoj kwam die vraag pas op haar dertigste, toen ze haar knie brak, nadat ze jaren als jongleur en contortionist door Frankrijk had getoerd. In haar werk focust ze steeds op vrouwelijkheid, en ze moet haar ideeën over de wereld kwijt kunnen. Voor deze creatie liet ze zich inspireren door zang- en danstradities van over de hele wereld. Dat verklaart het ritualistische, bijna tribale sfeertje. Als kijker krijg je genoeg aangereikt om betekenis te geven aan de beelden die ze neerzet. We zien haar evolueren van jonge, vruchtbare vrouw die haar eieren verliest en dan even ouder lijkt, maar toch weer ergens kracht uit weet te putten. Ze speelt met houding en details, met veranderende beelden. Ze laat haar buik op



Mordoj shows what is ugly or foolish, forging an alliance with the audience. There is no straightforward storyline or clear-cut statement, only poetic images appealing to something in the audience. This is, however, quite sufficient, thanks to strong dramaturgy, personal input and a well-balanced harmony of reality and illusion. Many performances at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe lacked these elements, which I think are essential for contemporary circus.

### Outside eye

Proper dramaturgy balances the proportions of the events on the stage, thus embedding them in a clear context and giving meaning to them. In a perfect world, there is a constant interaction between the action on the stage and the makers' ideas. In circus, it is common to work with an 'outside eye', but not with dramaturgs or directors. This is partly because of circus artists' extraordinary position in performing arts: they are, more often than not, both maker and performer. More than actors or dancers, they are used to creating or developing an act themselves, based on their specific skills. However, this resourceful problem-solver mentality might be the reason why they are not so open to feedback. Circus artists are known to have mastered their techniques to perfection and invite an 'outside eye' only at the end of the – not seldom discontinuous – work process. At that point, it can be very hard to try and adapt format, rhythm or performance.

The outside eye's position is much more informal than a dramaturg's or director's: generally, they do not keep a close track of the process and add little to the performance, except for giving advice or working on changeovers. Many performances are missing someone who is involved closely and who keeps track of things, someone who is continuously looking for themes, concepts, meaning, vision, and is willing to make hard choices. When directors or dramaturgs are involved, they often have a background in the theatre or dance worlds. In *Circoanalysis*, John-Paul Zaccarini indicates the need for research within one's own discipline: "My contention is not that new circus cannot have meaning and content, but that it should search for that content

en neergaan en toont het lichaam zoals het is. Dat schaamteloos blootgeven fêteert de grenzeloze mogelijkheden van het lichaam. La peau aime. Geen perfecte lichamen en spectaculaire acts hier, Jeanne Mordoj toont het lelijke, het belachelijke, en maakt zo een connectie met het publiek. De kijker krijgt geen duidelijk verhaal, geen welomlijnd statement, enkel poëtische beelden die aan iets appelleren. Dit volstaat dankzij de goede dramaturgie, een evenwichtige balans tussen realiteit en illusie, en de persoonlijke inbreng. Bij veel van de voorstellingen die we zagen op het Edinburgh Fringe Festival ontbraken deze elementen, die ik essentieel vind om van hedendaags circus te kunnen spreken.

### Outside eye

Een goede dramaturgie kent het gebeuren op scène duidelijke verhoudingen toe waardoor het wordt ingebed in een bepaalde context en betekenis krijgt. Idealiter is er een voortdurende wisselwerking tussen de actie op scène en de ideeën van de makers. In circus is het bijna de gewoonte om met een 'outside eye' te werken, en niet met een dramaturg of regisseur. Dat heeft te maken met de speciale plaats die circusartiesten innemen in het podiumlandschap: zij zijn bijna altijd performer én maker. Veel meer dan acteurs of dansers zijn zij gewend om zelf te creëren of een act te ontwikkelen vanuit hun specifieke skills. De keerzijde van die plantrekkersmentaliteit is dat zij zelden openstaan voor feedback. Zij beheersen hun techniek tot in de puntjes en nodigen pas op het einde van het – overigens vaak gefragmenteerde – werkproces, een outside eye uit. Dan is het vaak te laat om de structuur, het ritme en de uitvoering nog aan te passen.

De functie van outside eye is veel vrijblijvender dan die van een dramaturg of regisseur: meestal volgt die het maakproces niet op de voet en zal die weinig input aandragen, de rol blijft veelal beperkt tot advies geven of werken op overgangen. Het ontbreekt veel creaties aan een persoon die de hele tijd nauw betrokken is en het overzicht houdt, iemand die voortdurend zoekt naar thema's, concepten, betekenis, visie, en dan ook harde keuzes durft maken. Als er al met een regisseur of dramaturg wordt gewerkt, komt die

from within; a meaning that could arise from the base form if properly investigated, rather than a meaning being *applied* as an afterthought.”<sup>1</sup>

Among the few dramaturgs that are specialised in circus is the Dutch practitioner Gerrit Reus. He describes his method of creating a performance: “I consider the ways in which different acts react together, and look for a pattern that makes the acts reinforce one another. For example, two consecutive clowning acts contravenes all circus codes, because clowns are usually mustered after a hefty act like dangerous aerial acrobatics. Still, you can arrange two or three clowning acts in a row successfully. Those acts no longer fulfil the part of ridding the audience of its anxiety, and could have a whole range of significations if you carefully examine the new meanings that can be created. I have, once, concluded a performance with a quiet act instead of the expected grand finale. I enjoy challenging such expectations.”<sup>2</sup>

Experimenting and pushing boundaries: yes please! It just seems that *Noodles* by NoFit State Circus lacks all kinds of cohesion. The performance is, however, a collaboration with the illustrious Finnish circus director Maksim Komaro, and a quite literal thread runs through it: there are Noodles in every scene. Long, white strings to dangle from, big piles of Noodles to take cover in, Noodles for eating, and so on. Its subtlety is lost, and as a result of the overload of circumstances there is hardly any image that lingers. The performance’s development is flat, with few peaks or scenes that are truly able to compel. It’s a bit similar to what an episode of *Teletubbies* should look like. The decor in bright colours, plush wheelbarrows and sparkling refrigerators does take a lot after the children’s television series. Add a talking cat, fart sounds, and an immensely backward clown, and the infantilism meter will soon be maxed out. Everything is shamefully corny. The performers come across so clumsily and amateurish that it is hard to believe that they worked for great companies in the past.

Still, their efforts to invent something new using rope were promising at first. The acts were wild and chaotic because the rope was tied to elastic cord (or noodle?). As such, this was a great idea,

vaak uit de dans- of theaterwereld. John-Paul Zaccarini wijst in *Circoanalysis* op de nood aan research vanuit de eigen discipline: “My contention is not that new circus cannot have meaning and content, but that it should search for that content from within; a meaning that could arise from the base form if properly investigated, rather than a meaning being *applied* as an afterthought.”<sup>1</sup>

Een van de weinige dramaturgen die zich in circus specialiseerden is de Nederlandse Gerrit Reus. Hij legt uit hoe hij een voorstelling in elkaar steekt: “Ik kijk naar de manier waarop acts op elkaar reageren en of er een patroon te vinden is waarin nummers elkaar versterken. Het druist bijvoorbeeld tegen de circuswetten in om twee clownnummers achter elkaar te zetten. Clowns worden toch meestal ingezet na iets heel heftigs, bijvoorbeeld gevaarlijke luchtacrobatiek. Maar je kunt best twee of drie clownnummers achter elkaar zetten. Die nummers dienen dan niet meer om de doorgestane angst van het publiek te relativeren, maar krijgen een andere functie. Dat kan, mits je maar goed kijkt wat er aan nieuwe betekenis kan ontstaan. Ik ben ook wel eens met een rustige act geëindigd, daar waar iedereen een grande finale verwacht. Ik vind het leuk om met die verwachtingen te spelen.”<sup>2</sup>

Experiment mag, grenzen verleggen: graag! Alleen lijkt er bij *Noodles* van NoFit State een totaal gebrek aan samenhang te zijn. Er is nochtans samengewerkt met de gerenommeerde Finse circusregisseur Maksim Komaro, en er is een rode draad, die we vrij letterlijk mogen nemen want in werkelijk elke scène zitten Noodles: lange, witte slierten waaraan je kan bengelen, grote hopen Noodles waarin je je kan verstoppen, Noodles om op te eten en ga zo maar door. De subtiliteit is ver zoek en door de overload blijft geen enkel beeld echt hangen. De hele voorstelling kent een vlak verloop, nergens een uitschieter of een moment dat wat zich afspeelt op scène je beet heeft. Een beetje zoals een aflevering van de *Teletubbies* er moet uitzien. Het decor met de felle kleuren, pluche kruiwagens en twinkelende koelkasten heeft overigens verdacht veel van weg van deze kinderserie. Voeg daarbij nog een pratende kat, geluiden van scheetjes en



but it remained unrefined: it does not exceed a dangling act. The almost synchronous dance sequence in the air and the balancing act will do just fine, although these scenes, too, are long-winded and illogical in composition. The most impressive image by far is one of the girl doing the splits on the tightrope, after which she continues to perform less spectacular movements for a while, ones that no longer captivate the audience, naturally. Moreover, she then immediately changes into Marilyn Monroe, who performs more or less the same balancing act, only this time her skirt gets blown up by a fan. One wonders why.

Another puzzling choice was made when the performers address the audience rather often, though none of them have genuine eloquence. The reason why these addresses are in Spanish and Italian is also unclear. Furthermore, the performers are occupied with operating the lights themselves, an element that can be interesting from a theatrical point of view, but in this case counteracts the performance. On top of this chaos is the music, which is strange to say the least. At the end, the music switches from dreamy track to free jazz back to quiet sounds, without any connection to the actions on the stage.

*Noodles* by NoFit State might be a valiant effort by a purposeful director to cut across the prevailing codes, to offer a small-scale alternative to the company's fantastic and successful creation *Bianco*, and to reach a new, more theatre-minded audience. But the performance suffers from a lack of structure and coherence. The anarchy and nonsense could work, when the performers shared a particular chemistry, when they were having fun. It is a wonderful thing, to create a weird, exotic world, but the director needs to provide an entrance to it. Whether performing in a tent or in a theatre, the audience is always there, with its expectations. When these expectations are purposefully confounded, the audience needs a different motivation: a clever thought, a thoughtful use of space or setting, a competent rhythm, or a well-considered atmosphere. So, a clear storyline is not a must but every type of performing art includes communication, which requires interaction between the artist and the audience.

een immens debiele clown en de infantiliteitsmeter staat al gauw in het rood. Alles is zo flauw dat het beschamend wordt. De performers komen zo klungelig en amateuristisch over, dat je bijna niet kan geloven voor welke grote compagnies zij eerder werkten.

Nochtans is hun poging om eens iets anders te doen met koorden aanvankelijk veelbelovend. Het gaat er wild en chaotisch aan toe doordat zij de koord aan elastieken (of waren het Noodles?) hebben gebonden. Leuk idee, maar het wordt te weinig uitgewerkt, het blijft bij een beetje bengelen. De bijna synchrone danssequentie in de lucht en de act op de slappe koord konden er mee door, maar ook deze scènes zijn langdradig en onlogisch opgebouwd. Het strafste moment is wanneer een van de meisjes in een spagaat valt op de koord, maar daarna gaat ze nog een tijdje door met veel minder spectaculaire bewegingen die natuurlijk niet meer kunnen boeien. Bovendien kleedt zij zich meteen daarna om tot Marilyn Monroe om dan min of meer hetzelfde te doen op de slappe koord, maar dan met ventilators die haar kleedje doen opwaaien. Je vraagt je af waarom.

Een andere onbegrijpelijke keuze is die om de performers vaak aan het woord te laten, terwijl geen van hen echt over welsprekende kwaliteiten beschikt. Waarom dit in het Spaans en Italiaans gebeurt, is evenmin moeilijk te achterhalen. Bovendien moeten de performers ook nog eens zelf het licht bedienen op scène, een keuze die vanuit teatraal oogpunt interessant kan zijn, maar in dit geval tegenwerkt. De saus over deze chaos is de muziek, die op zijn zachtst gezegd vreemd is. Op het einde switcht de muziek van dromerig naar free jazz en weer naar zacht, zonder enig verband met wat op de scène gebeurt.

*Noodles* is misschien een dappere poging van een eigenzinnige regisseur om de gangbare codes te breken, om een kleinschaliger antwoord te bieden op de succesformule die NoFit State zelf toepast op de fantastische creatie *Bianco*, en om een nieuw, meer theater minded publiek aan te boren, maar de voorstelling lijdt te veel onder het gebrek aan structuur en coherentie. De anarchie en de

## Reality versus illusion

The possibilities for interaction with an audience are nowhere more diverse than in circus. Especially in a circular tent, spectators are very aware of the reactions of others. Anyway, circus is much more 'in the present moment' than theatre. If there is a fourth wall, it is passed over continuously, because spectators realise that the artist gliding through the air is taking considerable risks. Although the artist may be in disguise, the audience knows it is real. When we hold our breath it is not because we empathise with his character, it is because something might happen to him. A great performance constantly flirts with those limits of reality and illusion. When an audience forgets that the artists, too, are persons of flesh and blood, or feels involved too little, it severely damages the experience.

In *Knee Deep*, by Casus, the clash between reality and illusion is fierce. The artists claim that they are not presenting a character or a story, but the performance itself does not uphold this claim. Now and again, while expressing their joy at an act well executed, they are just being themselves, though usually they slip into playing characters, such as ones expressing a relationship between a man and a woman. They also choose to wear costumes and even change their outfits several times. That is, surely, a convenient way of indicating the start of a new act.

One can also choose to make these transformations part of the performance. Gerrit Reus explains its significance for the audience's perception of time: "In classical circus, the acts are central so the scene changes are completed as fast as possible in order to keep up the pace of the performance. The rest is noise that has to be kept to a minimum. I consider this 'noise' to be an undeniable part of the performance, and try to make a feature of it: with light, music, stage setting. This runs counter to the circus logic of speed. However, speed is not the essence, perception of time is. And this perception is easily manipulated, which means it can also slow down sometimes."<sup>3</sup> Besides, integrating scene changes in the performance can be a very interesting way of reminding spectators that what they see is real.

nonsens zouden kunnen werken als er een bepaalde chemie is tussen de performers, als ze er zelf plezier in hebben. Het is heerlijk om een gekke, vreemde wereld te creëren, maar als regisseur moet je altijd een toegangspoort bieden. Of je nu in een tent of een theater staat: je speelt nog steeds voor een publiek, dat met bepaalde verwachtingen komt. En als je daar opzettelijk mee speelt, moet de prikkel wel van iets anders komen: van een slim concept, het doordacht gebruik van de ruimte of de setting, of van een uitgekiend ritme of een welbepaalde sfeer. Een duidelijk verhaal is dus geen must, maar elke vorm van podiumkunst is communicatie en de wisselwerking tussen artiest en publiek is daarbij essentieel.

## Realiteit versus illusie

Nergens is de kans op een interactie met het publiek zo groot als in circus. Zeker in een tent met de cirkelvormige basis ben je je als toeschouwer bewust van de reacties van de anderen, maar sowieso is circus veel meer 'hier en nu' dan theater. Als de vierde wand al bestaat, wordt hij voortdurend doorprikt, want als kijker besef je dat de artiest die daar door de lucht zweeft enorme risico's neemt. Hij mag dan al een personage zijn, wat hij doet voelen we aan als realiteit. Als we onze adem inhouden is dat niet omdat we ons inleven in zijn rol, maar omdat we schrik hebben dat hem iets overkomt. Een goede voorstelling speelt voortdurend met die grens tussen realiteit en illusie. Vergeten dat de artiest ook een mens van vlees en bloed is, of net te weinig meegesleept worden, beide zijn nefast voor de beleving.

Bij *Knee Deep* van Casus is de clash tussen realiteit en illusie hard. De artiesten zeggen geen personages of verhaal te willen brengen, maar dat blijkt niet uit de voorstelling. Af en toe delen ze hun blijheid om een act die tot een goed einde werd gebracht en lijken ze gewoon zichzelf te zijn, maar vaak vervallen ze in het spelen van een rolletje, zoals de man-vrouwverhouding. Ze kiezen ook voor kostuums en wisselen zelfs een paar keer van outfit. Dat is natuurlijk een handig middel om duidelijk te maken dat er een nieuwe act begint.





Casus – *Knee Deep* © nn

In *Knee Deep*, the acts are presented in a slightly clumsy way, which is intensified by the crude changes in music. Every act is accompanied by a different piece of music, which makes the rhythm of acts and music run parallel. Casus feel that their acts are separate events; it is a circus show, nothing more or less. Still, some elements do return. Eggs seem to be a leitmotif: they reappear in different forms but without any clear coherence or meaning. The starting point was an exploration of each other's bodies, showing a body's fragility. This is, however, hardly recognisable throughout the performance. It is no coincidence that the moments of sincere relief after a successful act are also the most affecting ones: it shows the artists' humanity and commitment. The alternation of reality (these artists are people of flesh and blood) and illusion (they possess superhuman strength or skill) intensifies the awe felt by the audience. When a routine of purely technical movements by well-muscled bodies is performed time and again, it gets tedious and predictable. After a while, the tours de force that are staged are unable to amaze. The verb 'stage' might as well be a doubtful quality to begin with.

Het kan ook anders: de 'changements' deel maken van de voorstelling. Gerrit Reus legt uit wat dat met de tijdsbeleving doet: "Bij het klassieke circus draait het om de nummers, de changements zijn zo kort mogelijk om de vaart erin te houden. De rest is een soort ruis die men tot een minimum probeert te beperken. Terwijl ik die <ruis> beschouw als onvermijdelijk onderdeel van de voorstelling en probeer daar iets mee te doen: met licht, muziek, mise-en-scène. Dat druipt in tegen de circuslogica van tempo. Maar het gaat niet om tempo, het gaat om een beleving van tijd, en die kan je heel erg manipuleren. Dat betekent dat je soms ook kan vertragen"<sup>3</sup>. De op- en afbouw integreren in de voorstelling is bovendien een interessante manier om de toeschouwer te herinneren aan het feit dat wat hij ziet echt is.

In *Knee Deep* worden de verschillende acts wat onbeholpen geïntroduceerd, en de brute overgangen in de muziek versterken dat gevoel nog. Elke act heeft een ander muzieknummer, waarbij het ritme van de actie en de muziek telkens één op één zijn. Casus meent dat de acts op zichzelf staan, het is immers een circusshow en niets meer. Toch keren bepaalde elementen

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The choice to work without a narrative gives evidence of their ambition to align with contemporary circus. Still, this debut, a showpiece of technique and strength, comes across rather old-fashioned. In the words of Bauke Lievens: "Along with contemporary circus there was an evolution beyond the straightforward display of technical capacity, beyond the loose sequence of acrobatic acts. In today's performances, artists seek a coordinating visual dramaturgy that brings cohesion to the entirety of circus acts. Like in theatre, this dramaturgy may open a window to the world."<sup>4</sup>

### **The human behind the skills and drills**

The contradiction in Casus' own view of performance is striking: they want to bring pure circus techniques, which, in their view, somewhat equals unfolding no narrative. At the same time they wish to evoke images and show fragility. Their proposition that an artist needs to learn a new skill for every show indicates a preference for entertainment rather than for authenticity or being oneself. If it was merely the skills, any other artist could join their company. The few attempts at personalising the performance were, sadly enough, non-committal: one artist of Samoan origin shows his tattooed body and starts beating with his hands and feet on his body and on the ground, rhythmically. It looks rather cheap because it is unrelated to the context; it is more like a circus act. The same young man drags a blackboard onto the stage and looks busy with a piece of chalk for a while, without its purpose ever becoming clear.

The questions that remain are: why did they leave another company in order to create their own work? What was the artistic necessity for it? Or are we looking at circus too much as if it is theatre? Does circus need to offer a window to the world? Is it not a relief that some makers do not let themselves get entangled in far-fetched concepts, but instead follow their gut? Clearly, this largely depends on the maker's maturity. It is unfair to compare a debut with the work of an artist relying on 30 years of expertise.

weer. Eieren lijken een leidmotiv te zijn, en duiken meermaals op in andere vormen, maar zonder een duidelijk verband of betekenis. Hun uitgangspunt was elkaars lichaam verkennen, de fragiliteit van een lichaam laten zien. Maar dat is amper terug te vinden in de voorstelling. Niet toevallig zijn die momenten van oprechte opluchting na het voltooiën van een act de meest interessante: het laat hun menselijkheid en betrokkenheid met elkaar zien. De afwisseling tussen realiteit (deze artiesten zijn mensen van vlees en bloed) en illusie (ze hebben een bovenmenselijke kracht of talent) versterkt het waw-effect. Wanneer puur technische bewegingen door gespierde lichamen elkaar bijna routineus opvolgen, wordt het saai en voorspelbaar. Je bent op de duur niet meer verbaasd door de hoogstandjes die worden opgevoerd. Het woord 'opvoeren' is hierbij al problematisch.

De keuze om het zonder narratief te doen, getuigt van een ambitie om zich bij het hedendaagse circus aan te sluiten, maar als een show off van techniek en kracht komt dit debuut eerder gedateerd over. Zoals Bauke Lievens schrijft: "Met hedendaags circus was er de laatste jaren een evolutie voorbij de simpele demonstratie van technisch kunnen, voorbij de losse aaneenschakeling van acrobatische nummers. In voorstellingen wordt vandaag gezocht naar een overkoepelende visuele dramaturgie, die samenhang verleent aan het geheel van circusacts. Net als in het theater opent die dramaturgie ook een raam op de wereld."<sup>4</sup>

### **De mens achter de skills and drills**

Opmerkelijk is de contradictie in Casus' eigen visie op maken: zij willen puur circustechniek brengen, wat voor hen min of meer gelijk staat aan geen narratief, maar tegelijk willen ze beelden oproepen en fragiliteit tonen. Uit de stelling dat je voor elke show nieuwe skills moet leren, spreekt toch meer zin voor entertainment dan voor echtheid, of zichzelf zijn. Als het enkel om de skills gaat, kunnen ze evengoed met andere artiesten een compagnie oprichten. Pogingen om een eigen smoel te geven aan de voorstelling zijn helaas nietszeggend: een van de artiesten is oorspronkelijk van Samoa; op een bepaald moment laat hij zijn getatoeëerde lichaam zien en slaat hij ritmisch met handen en



However, there are performances by young artists that reach beyond the smaller circus world without losing personality or spontaneity. 3 is a Crowd is such a company, smoothly blending circus techniques with dance and theatre into a story of physical strength and vulnerability, too. Their debut, *Fright or Flight*, is a somewhat chaotic performance that has clearly been put together with little time, charming as it may be. At first, the performance flashes in every direction: there is skilful irony and self-mockery, as well as scenes that coax an easy laugh from the audience. By way of simultaneous acts on the stage – which is rather unusual in circus – the performance runs at full speed. One act succeeds the other smoothly and the whole is connected in an amusing way.

The narrative in *Fright or Flight* is uncomplicated and hardly original, but it works. There are three women on the stage, each with their explicit characters: the feisty one, the timid one, and the eccentric one. Indeed, the timid one performs the least spectacular acts, until she discovers her true talents and flourishes. However, these characters are anything but presented in a narrative way; the company merely attribute a character to each performer. It lends colour and significance to their acts. The clumsy girl takes on the role of the clown in traditional circus: she approaches the audience and presents an interlude after more technical acts. Those are never too spectacular, but they are not artificial either, rather honest and lively. From a dramatic point of view it is highly interesting to watch failure and success alternate, and it is important for drawing the audience into the performance. It is, after all, much easier to connect with a 'normal' person than with a character performing Herculean somersaults.

The girls from 3 is a Crowd have backgrounds in ballet and gymnastics; one has a degree in performance making, another is self-taught. Unmistakably, they are influenced by circus, but this performance is a strong countermove: "In Australia you're not taken seriously as an artist. They want to see muscles. The skills are of course fundamental, but what about laughing about it as well?" Following their association with companies like Circa, they wondered 'what do we want to

voeten op zijn lijf en de grond. Het oogt nogal goedkoop omdat het niet in een context is ingebed, het heeft meer iets van een circusnummertje. Dezelfde jongeman sleept een wit tekenbord op de vloer en is een tijdje in de weer met een stift, maar het wordt niet duidelijk wat daarvan de bedoeling is.

De vraag die rijst is: waarom zijn ze uit een compagnie gestapt om hun eigen werk te maken? Wat was de artistieke noodzaak? Of kijken we met een te theatrale bril naar circus als we deze vragen stellen? Moet circus een raam op de wereld bieden? Is het geen verademing dat er nog makers zijn die zich niet laten lam leggen door vergezochte concepten maar gewoon vanuit hun buikgevoel werken? Veel hangt natuurlijk af van de maturiteit van die maker. Het is oneerlijk een debuut te vergelijken met werk van een artiest die 30 jaar in het vak zit.

En toch zien we ook bij jonge makers voorstellingen die verder reiken dan de eigen kleine circuswereld zonder in te boeten aan persoonlijkheid en spontaneiteit. 3 is a crowd is zo'n jong gezelschap dat circustechnieken vlotjes versmelt met dans en theater tot een vertelling die het lichaam toont in z'n kracht, maar ook in z'n kwetsbaarheid. Hun eersteling *Fright or Flight* is een wat chaotische voorstelling die duidelijk snel in elkaar is gestoken, maar die wel weet te charmeren. Aanvankelijk schiet de voorstelling alle richtingen uit: we zien goedgeмикte ironie en zelfspot, maar ook scènes die een gemakkelijke lach willen ontlokken. De simultaneiteit van handelingen op de scène – vrij ongewoon voor circus - brengt de nodige vaart in de voorstelling. De scènes volgen elkaar smooth op en worden ook op een leuke manier aan elkaar gelinkt.

Het "verhaal" van *Fright or Flight* is simpel en weinig origineel, maar het werkt: drie vrouwen op scène, met elk een uitgesproken karakter: de felle bek, de schuchtere en de prettig gestoorde. Uiteraard is de schuchtere degene met de minst spectaculaire acts die aan het eind van het verhaal haar talent ontdekt en openbloeit. Dit alles wordt echter allesbehalve verhalend in scène gezet, het gaat enkel om het meegeven van karakter aan de drie performers. Het geeft hen kleur en maakt hen

make?'. The answer was: 'something different'. That is what they are doing now. There is less emphasis on extravaganza or skill, and more femininity. They do not profess an intellectual approach (the rule is: "If we like it, we put it on stage."), but rather work instinctively. And they do impress, exactly because they blend their own personalities into the performance.

Contrary to other young makers, these women do have an articulate goal: "We capture images on the stage; we are neither interested in a story, nor in black-and-white contrasts. We work with the techniques we have mastered, without too many metaphors. The main focus is on our mutual relations, our fundamentally human relations. We wish to invite the audience into our world without logic, to stimulate their creativity and stir their imagination. We deliberately did not discuss each other's interpretations or intentions; we defined our own character's development, and in the end it all fits right."

Not all images are equally powerful, the audience's brain does not get overcrowded, but the performance succeeds in connecting with the audience. With the help of a director or dramaturg, the company could have intensified the scenes. When asked if they were willing to work together with someone, they replied that they gladly would, especially for discussing practical or technical issues, such as adapting the performance to different settings and lighting.

It is true that many artists trade the circus tent for a theatre. They lose the huge responsibilities involved in managing a circus tent (in exchange for freedom), and new audiences can be attracted. It is a logical evolution in the theatricalisation of circus arts, along with an unadorned decor, atypical music, and new dramaturgy. Certainly, performing in a theatre requires new resolutions: the distance between audience and artist is considerable and prominent, and the audience is often aware of the fourth wall. Makers need to prevent the audience from comfortably sprawling in their red velvet seats, and prevent the performance from becoming a mere aesthetic experience.

interessanter. Het clumsy meisje neemt de rol van de clown in traditioneel circus over: zij legt contact met het publiek en zorgt voor een rustpunt na meer technische acts. Die zijn nooit ongelooflijk spectaculair, maar ze zijn niet geforceerd, wel eerlijk en fris. Vanuit dramatisch oogpunt is het zoveel boeiender te kijken naar een afwisseling van failure en success, en het is een belangrijke manier om de toeschouwer in de voorstelling te trekken. Als toeschouwer maak je immers veel gemakkelijker een connectie met iemand 'gewoon' dan met iemand die buitenaardse buitelingen maakt.

De meiden van 3 is a crowd hebben een achtergrond in ballet of gymnastiek, eentje heeft een degree in performance making, een ander is autodidact. Ze zijn onmiskenbaar beïnvloed door circus, maar dit is een felle tegenreactie: "In Australia you're not taken seriously as an artist. They want to see muscles. The skills are of course fundamental, but what about laughing about it as well?". Na hun ervaringen bij compagnies als Circa stelden zij zich de vraag: wat willen wij maken? Het antwoord luidde: iets anders. En dat doen ze. Ze focussen minder op spektakel of skills en meer op vrouwelijkheid. Ze pretenderen geen intellectuele aanpak (hun stelregel is: "If we like it, we put it on stage"), maar werken heel intuïtief. Net omdat ze hun eigen persoonlijkheid erin leggen, raakt het je.

In tegenstelling tot sommige jonge makers kunnen deze vrouwen wel goed verwoorden wat ze willen bereiken: "We zetten beelden op scène, we zijn niet geïnteresseerd in een narratief, ook niet in zwart-wit tegenstellingen. De techniek die we hebben, gebruiken we zonder er te veel metaforen aan te koppelen. De grootste focus ligt op de verhouding tussen ons drie, op de fundamenteel menselijke verhoudingen. We willen het publiek meetrekken in onze wereld zonder logica, we willen hun creatieve brein stimuleren, hun verbeelding prikkelen. We hebben bewust niet gepraat over hoe we ons personage invullen en wat het doel is, maar elk personage heeft z'n eigen verloop en finaal valt alles samen".

Niet alle beelden zijn even sterk en ons brein raakte niet overstuurd, maar ze slagen er zeker in een connectie met het publiek te maken. Met de hulp



A director or dramaturg can assist with that, whenever he guards circus' characteristic properties, and whenever the vision for a potential circus performance has flowed from circus itself. For a leading quality for contemporary circus, I would recommend an independent and open view on one's own work. This is the challenge for the current and future generation of circus artists: create performances that offer spectacle on top of surprise, that carry the audience off to a different world. Naturally, the human body is the instrument par excellence, and it becomes even more interesting when strength and technique serve as a basis for something bigger.

- 1 John-Paul Zaccarini: Circoanalysis, PhD-thesis, Dans och Cirkushögskolan, University of Dance and Circus, p. 21 (2013).
- 2 Gerrit Reus in conversation with dramaturg Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink, Theater Dramaturgie. Bank Universiteit Utrecht (2005).
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Bauke Lievens: Circustheater, rekto:verso magazine no. 31, September 2008.

van een regisseur of dramaturg zouden ze de scènes kunnen uitdiepen. Op de vraag of ze met iemand willen werken, antwoorden ze dat ze dat graag zouden doen, vooral om praktische of technische zaken te bespreken, bijvoorbeeld om het stuk te adapteren naar verschillende ruimtes en lichtplannen.

Het is een feit dat steeds meer artiesten de circustent voor het theater ruilen. Je bent verlost van de enorme verantwoordelijkheid die een eigen tent met zich meebrengt (in ruil voor de vrijheid) en je kan nieuwe publieken aanboren. Het is een logische evolutie in de theatralisering van de circuskunsten, waar vaker wordt gekozen voor een strak decor, atypische muziek en een nieuwe dramaturgie. Natuurlijk vergt het spelen in een theaterzaal een andere aanpak: er is een grotere afstand tussen artiest en toeschouwer in zo'n frontale kijkdoos, als toeschouwer ben je je meer bewust van de vierde wand. Als maker moet je zorgen dat de toeschouwer niet comfortabel wegzakt in het rode pluche van het theater, je moet opletten dat het geen louter esthetische beleving wordt.

Een regisseur of dramaturg kan daarbij helpen, als hij maar de eigenheid van circus respecteert, als de visie op wat een circusvoorstelling kan zijn maar vorm krijgt vanuit het circus zelf. Als ultieme handelsmerk van hedendaags circus zou ik een onafhankelijke en open visie op het eigen werk naar voor schuiven. Dit is de uitdaging voor de huidige en toekomstige generatie circusartiesten: voorstellingen maken die niet enkel spektakel maar ook verrassing bieden, voorstellingen die het publiek meevoeren naar een andere wereld. Uiteraard is het lichaam daartoe het instrument bij uitstek, maar het wordt pas interessant wanneer de kracht en de techniek een groter geheel dienen.

- 1 John-Paul Zaccarini: Circoanalysis, eindeverhandeling voor DOCH, Dans och Cirkushögskolan, University of Dance and Circus, p. 21 (2013)
- 2 Gerrit Reus in gesprek met theaterwetenschapper Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink, Theater Dramaturgie. Bank Universiteit Utrecht (2005)
- 3 idem
- 4 Bauke Lievens: Circustheater, rekto:verso magazine nr 31, september 2008.

# Modern Circus and Empathy

MAJA HRGOVIĆ

The stage is round and small, too small – that was my first thought when I entered the small space in Summerhall where I was to watch *L'après-midi d'un foehn*, a show staged by the French modern circus company Cie Non Nova. In the hour that followed I came face to face with my own stereotypical notions of modern circus; I was moved, overwhelmed by emotions, and came to realise that modern circus was much more layered and much broader than I had been wont to think. I realised it could do quite well even without grandiose stages.

As the spectators found their way into the two rows of seats surrounding the stage, a man in a worn black coat, his face a mask of serious concentration, walked around, his hands behind his back. Once all the seats were filled, and the buzz had died down (the silence was not absolute, as there were those in the audience who still entertained a notion of circus based on benign stereotypes – they obviously expected entertainment fit for small children, as they brought their happy infants with them to Summerhall), the man in the black coat knelt on the floor and bent over two carefully aligned plastic bags, scissors in hand. His movements were measured. Moving slowly and purposefully, he snipped away with his scissors, slashing the bags, cutting off geometrical shapes. He then produced a roll of scotch tape and completed his realignment by taping pieces together.

The audience didn't know where this overture would take them. It was impossible to guess what the man, dressed as a sad homeless person, wanted to achieve by cutting and taping the bags. When the fans placed around the stage were ceremoniously turned on, the air flow lifted the remade bags from the floor, and the audience was surprised to see that these were no longer mundane supermarket shopping bags but three-

# Novi cirkus i empatija

MAJA HRGOVIĆ

Pozornica je okrugla i mala, premalena za cirkusku predstavu - to je prvo što pomislim dok ulazim u komornu dvoranu kazališne kuće Summerhall u kojoj se ima održati predstava „L'après-midi d'un foehn“ francuske novocirkuske kompanije Cie Non Nova. U narednih sat vremena, bit ću suočena s vlastitim stereotipima o novom cirkusu; bit ću ganuta, preplavljena emocijama, i uvidjet ću da je novi cirkus puno slojevitiji i puno širi nego što sam dotad bila sklona misliti, i da može sasvim dobro i bez grandioznih pozornica. Dok se publika uglavljivala u dvored stolica koje su uokvirivale pozornicu, muškarac u iznošenom crnom kaputu, lica nabrana u grimasu teške koncentracije, hodao je uokolo s rukama prekrivenima na leđima. Kad su se sve stolice popunile, a žamor stišao (ne do kraja, budući da je u publici bilo još onih koji su na ideju cirkuske predstave gledali kroz prizmu benignih stereotipa, očekujući zabavu za djecu nižeg uzrasta, pa su u Summerhall povelu dobro raspoloženu dojenčad), muškarac u crnom kaputu kleknuo je na pod i sa škarama u rukama nadvio se nad dvije pomno poravnate plastične vrećice. Nije se žurio. Polaganim, ali svrhovitim pokretima škljocao je škarama, praveći rezove, otkidajući geometrijske komade. Zatim je odnekud izvukao selotejp i dovršio prekrajanje zalijepivši dijelove jedne za druge.

Publika nije znala kamo vodi ta uvertira, nije se moglo naslutiti što taj muškarac u kostimu tužnog beskućnika kani postići prekrajanjem vrećica. Tim je veće bilo iznenađenje kad su, nakon što su ceremonijalno upaljeni ventilatori koji su bili postavljeni oko pozornice, struja zraka podigla preoblikovane vrećice s poda uvis – tek se tada vidjelo da to više nisu obične vrećice iz supermarketa, nego trodimenzionalne figure, mali zdepasti ljudi s lelujavim plastičnim udovima i glavama.





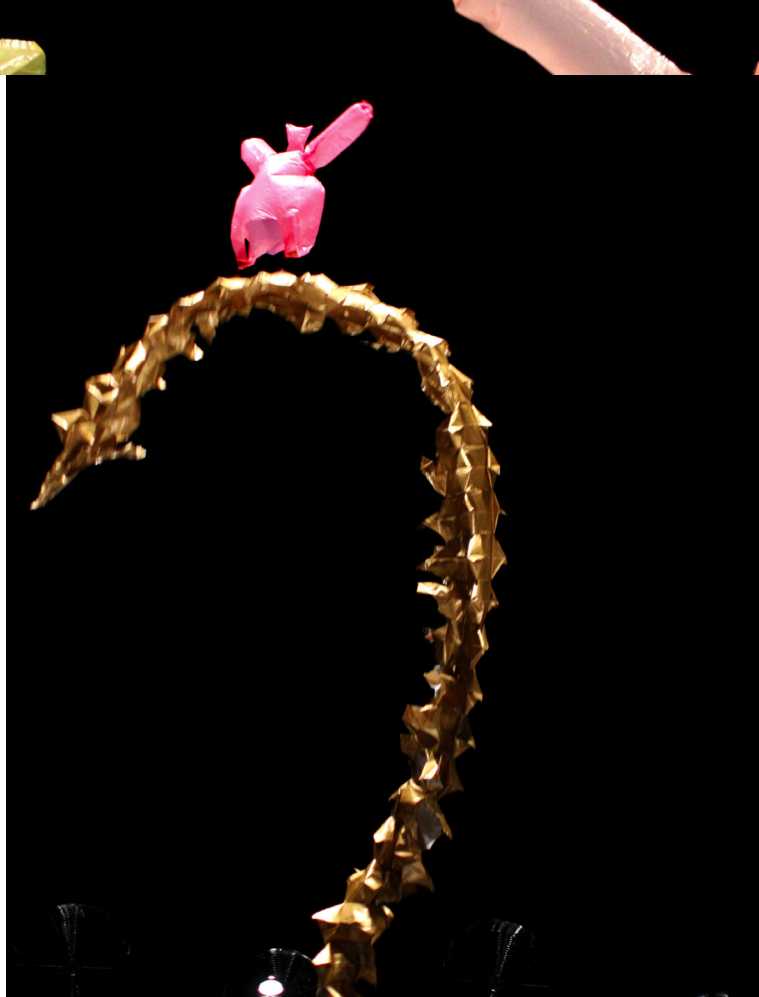
Cie Non Nova – *L'après-midi d'un foehn* © nn

dimensional figures, small squat people with their plastic limbs and heads fluttering in the air.

The children got what their parents had expected: fun. The dance of the bag-people defied gravity and entertained the smallest spectators, who would occasionally yelp with joy. Yet at the same time the scene before our eyes was far from mere run-of-the-mill entertainment. The wave of emotions engendered by this opulently choreographed floating dance of pieces of thin coloured plastic come to life was a real surprise, real magic, giving the catharsis that only the finest art can bring. There was a grace note of melancholy beauty also – the same as was caught so well in the film *American Beauty* in the shot of a plastic bag buffeted by the wind.

The bag-people were manipulated by an experienced juggler using the force of wind alone: he manipulated the strength of the fans as he sat at a small desk with a dashboard of controls.

The first stereotype I had about (modern) circus crumbled when I realised that *L'après-midi d'un foehn* is not about tricks but about magic. Magic that has less to do with entertainment and more



Djeca su dobila ono što su roditelji očekivali: zabavu. Ples ljudi-vrećica prkosio je gravitaciji i zabavljao malene posjetitelje koji bi ovdje-ondje oduševljeno zaječali. Ali, istovremeno, prizor koji smo gledali bio je daleko od puke, obične zabave. Količina emocija koje je evocirao taj raskošno koreografirani lebdeći ples oživjelih komada obojane tanke plastike, bila je istinsko iznenađenje, istinska čarolija, katarza do koje dovodi samo najfinija umjetnost. Bilo je u tome one nujne ljepote koju je u filmu „*American beauty*“ uhvaćena letom vjetrom nošene vrećice.

Ljudima-vrećicama upravljao je iskusni žongler, i to isključivo snagom vjetra, manipulirajući snagom ventilatora dok je sjedio za malim stolom s upravljačkom pločom.

Prvu granicu stereotipa o (novom) cirkusu probila sam shvativši kako ovdje, u „*L' après-midi d'un foehn*“, nije riječ o trikovima, nego o magiji. I to magiji koja nema toliko veze sa zabavom koliko sa duboko promišljenom umjetnošću. Gledala sam nešto za što nisam mogla ni pretpostaviti da je (kinetički) moguće: pokretne plastične figure lebdele su u prelijepom, skladnom dijalogu u kojemu je u podjednakim udjelima bilo i klasičnog

to do with a deeply thought-out art. I saw things I could not imagine being possible (purely in kinetic terms): plastic figures in motion, floating in an exquisite harmonious dialogue which consisted in equal parts of classical waltz, modern dance and softer forms of martial arts, such as capoeira.

Debussy's music in the background contributed substantially to the magic. In fact, the music may have been the key element in engendering the emotions in the performance, providing the subtle undertone to the relationship between the juggler (the man in the black coat) and the bags into which he breathed life. It was obvious that the juggler deliberately avoided lively gestures, not revealing his mood: he seemed to be all but indifferent to the dancing plastic bags; there was no boasting over his ability to bring them to life, as the Creator, so triumphantly. There was no surprise, no elation, no excitement in his face. He appeared to be a passive participant in what is to him day-to-day drudgery.

The audience followed the narrative skein (hidden in the movements, the atmosphere) by following the bag-men: at first they celebrated life with exuberant, ecstatic dance figures, astonishingly harmonised with Debussy's music; they appeared to be almost showing off. And then, as the music grew more sombre, melancholy, the entire atmosphere on the stage changed. The bags responded to the capriciousness like birds before a storm: suddenly, we no longer saw them as floating stocky ballet dancers but as flocks of malignant birds from Hitchcock's movie: as the man at the deck ramped up the fans, they no longer glided calmly through the air. Their movements became wild, frantic, mad. Soon the bag-birds grew belligerent, aggressive. They attacked the man in the coat. He fought them off as one does obsessive, destructive thoughts, covering his ears and head with his hands. An ill-defined menace vibrated within these attacks by the swarms of crazed bags: the maelstrom they created was no longer fun. There was a feeling of impending doom. It struck when the man in the coat, driven mad by the aggressive assaults by the bag-birds that dived on him from on high, grabbed the scissors and attacked them back. He had had enough. Now, emotions were visible on his face:

valcera i suvremenog baleta i mekanih formi borilačkih vještina, poput capoeire.

Čaroliji je u značajnoj mjeri doprinosila i Debussyjeva glazba u pozadini. Što se tiče emocija koje je izvedba evocirala, glazba je možda bila i presudni element: ona je davala onaj suptilni pod-ton odnosu žonglera (muškarca u crnom kaputu) i vrećicama kojima je „udahnuo dušu“. Namjerno se, očito, kloneći življih gestikulacija, žongler nije izravno odavao svoja raspoloženja – bio je, naočigled, ravnodušan plesom vrećica, nije se razmetao time što im je u maniri Stvoritelja tako trijumfalno podario život. S njegovog se lica nije dalo očitati ni iznenađenje ni ushit ni uzbuđenje. Djelovao je kao pasivni sudionik nečega što je bila njegova svakodnevica.

Narativnu nit (skrivenu u pokretima, u atmosferi) publika je slijedila prateći ljude-vrećice koje su, zapanjujuće usklađene s Debussyjevim skladbama, isprva slavile život raskošnim, ekstatičnim, gotovo razmetljivim plesnim figurama. A onda, kad je glazba postala sumornija, nujnija, promijenila se čitava atmosfera na pozornici. Vrećice su na tu čudljivost reagirale kao ptice pred oluju – i zbilja, više ih nismo doživljavali kao lebdeće zdepaste baletane nego kao rojeve zlogukih ptica iz Hitchcockovog filma: kako je muškarac za pultom pojačavao snagu ventilatora, njihovo je umirujuće klizanje zrakom postajalo divlje, unezvijereno, bjesomučno. Uskoro su vrećice-ptice postale nasrtljive, agresivne. Napadale su muškarca u kaputu, koji se od njih branio kao od opsesivnih, destruktivnih misli, pokrivajući rukama uši, glavu. Neka neodređena jeza vibrirala je u napadima rojeva pomahnitih vrećica; njihov uzvrtloženi let više nije bio razbibrižan, predosjećala se nadolazeća katastrofa. Ona je nastupila kad je muškarac u kaputu, izluđen nasrtljivošću ptica-vrećica koje su se iz visine obrušavale na njega, dohvatio opet one škare i bijesno se počeo s njima obračunavati. Pukao mu je film. Sad su mu se na licu vidjele emocije: iritacija, bijes. Debussyjeva glazba funkcionirala je kao dobar „soundtrack“ za smrt ljudi-ptica-vrećica koji su, napadani škarama, padali na pod na hrpu iskrzanih plastičnih komadića.



irritation, rage. Debussy's music was an excellent soundtrack for the death of the bag-people/birds: under the scissors, they fell down, turning into a heap of frayed bits of plastic.

The time had come for us to take sides. Whom did we, the audience, feel for in this fight? The angry man in the coat or the bag-people/birds?

A new surprise: what happened was what we could call a transfer of emotions. I empathised with the inanimate bags, these aerodynamic sculptures made of cheap plastic, resisting degradation, destroying the planet; a black spot on the landscape, killing turtles. (Another parallel with another movie: *Smoke*.) Despite the fact that the show can definitely be read as an allegory for the environmental struggle to save the planet, in the small space in Summerhall I saw the bags as the damned – as lost creatures, undoubtedly human, sensitive and frail, whose fate hit me square in the chest. I felt a strange kinship with them. I thus destroyed yet another boundary of the stereotypes I harboured: I came to realise that there was no need for narrative to engender empathy.

The French philosopher Henri Bergson spoke about the importance of empathy for art in his principle work, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*. Empathy is an ability which, in Bergson's view, is a prerequisite for understanding and experiencing a sense of solidarity with a work of art. As he says, it is impossible to understand the other without becoming the other, and only art can overcome our inability to do so, because a work of art is an expression of an integral personality, whose expression can be clearly seen and marked.

Why was I so preoccupied with the issues of empathy and the intuitive understanding of the Other and Difference after seeing *L'après-midi d'un foehn*? Because the performance showed me for the first time that empathy can be engendered by a theatrical work not based on text, where there are no traces of classical narrative. The spectators can feel emotional closeness with the inanimate 'characters', objects that are nothing but a recycling problem in everyday life. It may be

Došlo je vrijeme da zauzmemo stranu. Koga smo, mi publika, žalili u ovom sukobu? Gnjevnog muškarca u kaputu ili ljude-ptice-vrećice?

Bilo je to novo iznenađenje. Dogodilo se nešto što bi se moglo nazvati transferom emocija; moja je empatija bila na strani neživih vrećica, tih aerodinamičnih skulptura od jeftine plastike koja se opire razgradnji, uništava planet, nagrđuje okoliš, ubija kornjače. (Još jedna paralela s filmom – ovaj put s filmom „Smoke“.) I usprkos tome što se predstava definitivno može „čitati“ kao alegorija o ekološkoj bitci za planet, u maloj dvorani Sumerhalla, za mene osobno, vrećice su bile prokleta, izgubljena bića - neupitno humana, osjetljiva i krhka – čija me sudbina izravno pogađala, s kojima sam osjećala neko čudno pobratimstvo. Probila sam time još jednu granicu svojih stereotipa: uvjerivši se da za empatiju nije potrebna naracija.

O važnosti empatije za umjetnost pisao je francuski filozof Henri Bergson u svom kapitalnom djelu *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*. Empatija je sposobnost koju Bergson smatra uvjetom za razumijevanje i solidarnost prema umjetničkom djelu. On kaže da je nemoguće razumjeti drugog bez da se postane drugi, i da samo umjetnost može nadvladati tu nemogućnost, zato što je umjetničko djelo izraz cjelovite ličnosti, izraz kojeg se može jasno sagledati i provjeriti.

Zašto sam nakon predstave „L'après-midi d'un foehn“ tako zaokupljena pitanjem empatije, intuitivnog razumijevanja Drugih i Dugačijih? Zato jer mi je ona prvi put pokazala da empatiju može izazvati i kazališno djelo koje nije utemeljeno na tekstu, u kojemu nema ni tragova klasične naracije; štoviše, da gledatelj može osjetiti emocionalnu bliskost čak i s neživim „likovima“, s predmetima koje mu u svakodnevnom životu ne predstavljaju ništa više doli reciklažnog problema. Možda je nepopularno zanositi se ovakvim sitnim, i u krajnju ruku privatnim otkrićima, za kakve možda i ne bi trebalo tražiti mjesta u kazališnoj kritici, toj hladnoj stvari koja teži objektivnosti i zazire od zanosa. Ipak, sve predstave koje sam nakon ovog projekta kompanije Cie Non Nova gledala u Edinburghu na Fringeu, gledala sam

unpopular to get carried away with such small, private discoveries, which perhaps should not find their way into theatre criticism, a cold exercise that strives to achieve objectivity and that shuns ecstasy. And yet, as I watched all the shows at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, after I had seen this project staged by Cie Non Nova, I thought about empathy: about what awakens our emotions in modern circus, what moves, excites, saddens us in modern circus, what appeals to our humanity.

The Guardian critic Lyn Gardner gave an enthusiastic five stars to *Knee Deep*, staged by the Australian troupe Casus, saying that this is 'a show about relationships' in her review. Other critics who wrote about the award-winning show also note, at least in passing, the relationship aspect. As this is again a non-verbal show, this is a telling detail; an interview with Emma Serjeant of Casus reveals that there is a sort of scorn for reliance on text, on narration.

*Knee Deep* is one of those polished productions that appears powerful on stage – there is no shabbiness, and the serious, dedicated effort (physical and artistic) of the company is clear to see. The four performers, a girl and three men (Emma Serjeant, Jesse Scott, Lachlan McAulay and Natano Fa'anana) create dynamic sculptures using their own bodies, climbing on top of each other, leaping over each other, reminding us of the best elements of traditional circus – stunts that make the audience gasp in awe. One of the basic features of circus, enshrined in the very definition of the performance art, is extraordinary skill. (In the show *L'après-midi d'un foehn* the extraordinary skill was shown in the meticulous, detailed choreography of the dance of the bags. This gave it the right to be considered a circus show, despite the lack of stunts, tricks or a large ensemble of performers). *Knee Deep* is founded on extraordinary skill and it triumphs through it. The show lasts an hour, and the time is crammed full of demonstrations – veritable celebrations – of extraordinary skill. This is why the critics feted *Knee Deep* as one of the best shows of this year's edition of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

Casus' mission is to show the limits of physical endurance. The limits are edged with uncertainty:

razmišljajući baš o empatiji – o tome što u novom cirkusu budi emocije, što nas kao publiku dira, ushićuje, rastužuje, što apelira na našu humanost.

Pišući o predstavi „Knee Deep“ australske skupine Casus, u recenziji koju je „podebljala“ s oduševljenih pet zvjezdica, kritičarka Guardiana Lyn Gardner spominje kako je posrijedi „predstava o odnosima“. I drugi kritičari koji su pisali o ovoj nagrađivanoj predstavi, zamjećuju, barem usput, tu „priču“ o odnosima. S obzirom na to da je i ovdje riječ o neverbalnoj predstavi – a iz razgovora s Emmom Serjeant iz „Casusa“ da se zaključiti i nekovrsni prezir prema oslanjanju novog cirkusa na tekst, na naraciju – taj je detalj jako zanimljiv.

„Knee Deep“ je jedna od onih produkcijski „uglačanih“ predstava koje na pozornici djeluju moćno, u kojima ništa nema šlampavosti, iz kojih je jasno vidljiv ozbiljan, predan (fizički i umjetnički) rad. Četvero izvođača, djevojka i tri muškarca (Emma Serjeant, Jesse Scott, Lachlan McAulay i Natano Fa'anana) stvaraju dinamične skulpture od svojih tijela, penjući se jedni na druge, preskačući jedni preko drugih, podsjećajući na ono najbolje od tradicionalnog cirkusa – vratolomije koje se iz gledališta prate zapanjenim uzdasima. Jedna od temeljnih odlika cirkusa, usađenih u samu definiciju te izvedbene vrste, je izvanredna vještina. (U predstavi „L'après-midi d'un foehn“, izvanredna vještina odnosila se na minuciozno, pedantno koreografiranje plesa vrećica; time je ona zadržala pravo da se smatra cirkuskom predstavom, usprkos izostanku vratolomnih trikova i velikog izvođačkog ansambla.) „Knee Deep“ na izvanrednoj vještini počiva i njome trijumfira. Tih sat vremena koliko predstava traje, gusto je zasićeno demonstracijama – i pravim malim slavljinama – iznimne vještine. To je ono zbog čega kritičari svrstaju ovu predstavu među vrhunce ovogodišnjeg festivala u Edinburghu.

Casus ima za misiju pokazati dokle seže fizička izdržljivost, a ta je granica omeđena neizvjesnostima: hoće li se zbilja taj visoki momak popeti djevojci na glavu?; je li to fizički izvedivo?; hoće li pasti?; hoće li ona moći balansirati njegovu težinu? Granica je krhka, toga smo stalno svjesni. Empatija proizlazi iz zabrinutosti za izvođače, iz svih tih pitanja koja postavljamo sa zebnjom.



will the tall lad be able to climb onto the girl's head? Is it physically feasible? Will he fall? Will she be able to balance his weight? The limits are frail, we all know that. Empathy is born from our concern for the performers, from all those questions which we ask with trepidation. We are with them, fearing that they might fall. In a strange, fraternal way, we are in this together. This is the second fundamental feature of circus: the spectators feel the adrenaline rush because they identify with the performers, feeling for them, and thus are terrified that they might fall.

A different form of empathy lifts this show to the level of fully-fledged, 'real' art. If *Knee Deep* were nothing but a marathon run of well-rehearsed tricks, we would consider the show nothing but good fun. What elevates it to a work of art are the subtly expressed close relationships among the characters: their frailty laid bare, the exchange of frank, almost child-like signals of support, exhortation, the way in which they build a fortress of friendship without saying a word. In order for Emma to be able to walk on a box of eggs, she needs one of the lads to help her. In order to be able to carry one of her fellow performers on her shoulders, she needs support from the other two. She develops a flirtatious, tender, very subtle non-verbal dialogue with one of them, through snippets of smiles, as their mouths quirk up, as they look at each other from the corner of the eye. Magic is born from tricks, and the audience feels it too; that is why *Knee Deep* was given five star reviews in the leading media.

By recognising emotions and incorporating them into the subtext of the show, *Knee Deep* gave the audience a chance to establish empathy with the show; the possibility of catharsis ran through the relationship. There was no such possibility in *Noodles*, a show staged by an eminent Welsh contemporary circus group, NoFit State Circus. It was performed in New Town Theatre as part of the Festival Fringe. The similarity between *Knee Deep* and *Noodles* is much greater than the one between *Knee Deep* and *L'après-midi d'un foehn*: the first pair both consist of a series of acrobatic acts that remind us just how powerful and fun a human body can be. They can both be considered as more classical forms of circus, while *L'après-*

Zajedno s njima, bojimo se mogućnosti njihova pada. Na neki čudan, bratski način – zajedno smo u ovome. To je druga temeljna odlika cirkusa: gledatelji osjećaju navalu adrenalina jer su poistovijećeni s izvođačima, saživljeni s njima, i zato prestravljeni mogućnošću pada.

Ali jedan drugi oblik empatije uzdiže ovu predstavu na razinu punokrvne, „prave“ umjetnosti. Da se u „Knee Deep“ radi samo o maratonu dobro uvježbanih trikova, predstavu bismo smatrali dobrom zabavom – ali ne i nečim višim od toga. Ono što je čini umjetničkim djelom, to su suptilno izraženi, prisni odnosi među likovima; njihova ogoljena krhkost, razmjena iskrenih, gotovo djetinjih signala podrške, bodrenja, načina na koji bez izgovorene riječi stvaraju tvrđavu prijateljstva. Da bi Emma uspjela hodati po tucetu uredno poslaganih jaja u kutiji, potrebna joj je pomoć jednoga od momaka. Da bi uspjela na ramenima ponijeti kolegu, treba joj podrška druge dvojice. S jednim ulazi u koketan, nježan, vrlo suptilan neverbalni dijalog koji se vodi komadićima osmijeha u kutu usana, pogledima iskosa: to se između trikova rađa čarolija, ona se osjeća i u publici, i zato „Knee Deep“ dobiva pet kazališnokritičkih zvjezdica u recenzijama vodećih medija.

„Knee Deep“ je priznavanjem emocija i njihovim inkorporiranjem u podtekst predstave dao gledateljima priliku da s predstavom uspostave empatičan odnos, kroz koji je strujala mogućnost katarze. Ta mogućnost nije, na primjer, postojala u predstavi „Noodles“ ugledne engleske novocirkuske kompanije „No Fit State“, koja se na Fringeu prikazivala u New Town Theatreu. Sličnosti između ovih dvaju projekata su veći negoli između „Knee Deep“ i „L'après-midi d'un foehn“: obje su predstave sačinjene od niza akrobacija koje nas podsjećaju koliko je ljudsko tijelo moćno i zabavno, obje se mogu smatrati cirkuskima u onom klasičnijem smislu, dok „L'après-midi d'un foehn“ zahtijeva rastezanje te definicije. Ipak, predstavi „Noodles“ nedostaje, čak nasušno, onih emocija na kojima počivaju druge dvije predstave – i u tome je njezin glavni umjetnički podbačaj. Jer, „Noodles“ je tehnički i produkcijski sasvim solidna predstava u kojoj se neobični likovi opsesivno bave rezancima: izvođači

*midi d'un foehn* demands that the definition be stretched. And yet, *Noodles* lacks the emotions the other two shows are built on, and the lack is dire. This is the main cause of its artistic failure. *Noodles* is after all a solid show, in terms of technique and production values. The performers are skilled acrobats, using a variety of hanging elements and devices, and their appearance on-stage cannot be criticised for lack of professionalism or sloppiness; the tricks are well-rehearsed and convincing. And yet there is no magic – because there is no room for it in the relationships between the characters. The people on the stage appear cold towards each other, apathetic, focused only on the mechanical imperatives of their own acts, evincing total lack of interest for what is going on at the other end of the stage. They showcase the acts they have learned in rehearsals, and we applaud them several times, in recognition of their effort, but we leave the theatre unchanged, the same as we were before, perhaps only with a vague feeling of disappointment. The empathetic link with the show, the atmosphere, the characters, the interpersonal relationships, that filled our bodies with emotion in Summerhall and in the tent where we saw *Knee Deep* is totally absent here. The problem is not in the audience: after all it is capable of feeling for the tragedy of the supermarket bags.

su vješti u akrobacijama na raznim visećim elementima i spravama, njihovim se ukazivanjima na pozornici ne može prigovoriti neprofesionalnost ni šlampavost, trikovi su uigrani i uvjerljivi. Ali čarolija izostaje – zato jer joj nije ostavljeno mjesta u odnosima između likova. Ljudi na pozornici doimaju se hladni jedni prema drugima, apatični, fokusirani isključivo na mehaničke imperativne vlastite točke, nezainteresirani za ono što se zbiva na drugom kraju pozornice. Oni nam pokazuju što su naučili na probama, i u nekoliko navrata nagradit ćemo ih pljeskom za trud – ali iz dvorane ćemo izaći nepromijenjeni, isti, možda tek zavijeni u neko mutno razočaranje. Ona empatijska povezanost s predstavom, s atmosferom i likovima, s međuljudskim odnosima, koja nam je punila pluća ganućem u Summerhallu i u šatoru u kojemu se davao „*Knee Deep*“, ovdje potpuno izostaje. Nije problem u publici – ona je sposobna osjećati čak i tragediju vrećica s logom supermarketa.



# Circus and Theatre: What About Art?

MARTIN KUDLÁČ

Shortly after the performance *Noodles*, Tom Rack, the creative director of NoFit State Circus, revealed that one of the catalysts of this non-conventional performance was a desire to transpose the circus into the theatre. Even though he might have meant only the liberation of contemporary circus from the traditional tent, and the use instead of a stage with a proscenium arch, it was an interesting motivation in the context of the circus-theatre relationship. The circus and the theatre have a special relationship even in spite of the fact that in most cases they are presented as autonomous entities; the influence of one on the other cannot be denied, and this symbiotic relationship has always existed, though most of the time it has been in the background. An invisible membrane has allowed elements of circus to pass into theatre, and vice-versa.

Their relationship can be explained also by the fact that circus has a stable position in the history of theatre, dating back to the period of the Roman Empire – ergo a few thousand years before Philip Astley joined the circus. “The essence of the Roman theatre can be perhaps best captured, if we compare it to an American television program: it included acrobatics, animal dressage, athletic games and races, music and dance, dramatic sketches, short farces as well as full-length plays.” (Brockett, 1999, p. 65)

From the historical perspective, the next stream forming the contemporary circus was the Italian *commedia dell'arte*. “Two basic characteristics of *commedia dell'arte* are improvisation and fixed characters. Actors worked with a synoptic plot, based on which they improvised the dialogue and the action, and each actor always played the same character with fixed attributes and costume. Each ensemble had its own set of steady characters with their own names and traits, which distinguished them from similar

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Krátko po predstavení *Noodles*, kreatívny riaditeľ súboru NoFitState, Tom Rack, prezradil, že jedným z katalyzátorov tohto nekonvenčného predstavenia bolo prenesenie cirkusu do divadla. Aj keď mal možno namysli vyslobodenie súčasného cirkusu z tradičného stanu a využitie scény s proscéniovým oblúkom, ide o zaujímavú motiváciu v kontexte cirkusovo-divadelného vzťahu. Cirkus a divadlo sa nachádzajú vo zvláštnom vzťahu aj napriek tomu, že vo väčšine prípadov sú prezentované ako autonómne entity, vplyv jedného na druhé sa nedá poprieť a tento symbiotický vzťah existoval vždy, aj keď možno väčšinu času v úzadí. Neviditeľná membrána prepúšťala prvky cirkusu do divadla a naopak.

K objasneniu ich vzťahu napomáha aj fakt, že cirkus má svoje stabilné miesto v dejinách divadla siahajúci do obdobia Rímskej ríše, teda niekoľko stoviek rokov pred tým, ako do cirkusu vstúpil Philip Astley. „Podstatu rímskeho divadla snád' najlepšie vystihneme ak ho prirovnáme americkému televízному programu: zahrňovalo akrobáciu, drezúru zvierat, atletické zápasy a závody, hudbu a tanec, dramatické skeče, krátke frašky i celovečerné hry.“ (Brockett, 1999, s.65)

Ďalším prúdom formujúcim súčasný cirkus z pohľadu histórie bola talianska *commedia dell'arte*. „Dva základné charakteristiky *commedia dell'arte* sú improvizácia a pevné typy. Herci pracovali so synoptickou zápletkou, na ktorej základe improvizovali dialóg i jednanie a každý aktér vždy hral rovnakú postavu s fixovanými atribútmi a kostýmom. Každá skupina disponovala vlastnou zostavou ustálených postáv, vybavených menom a charakterovými rysmi, ktoré každú odlišovali od podobných postáv v iných súboroch.“ (Brockett, 1999, s.176-177)

characters in other ensembles.” (Brockett, 1999, p. 176-177)

However, the most interesting transformations began in the 20th Century during the heyday of the avant-garde movements. Personalities such as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, a leading figure of Italian Futurism, the Russian writer Vladimir Mayakovsky, the progressive theatre director and author of biomechanics Vsevolod Meyerhold, the Polish revolutionary director Jerzy Grotowski, as well as the distinguished figure of modern theatre Antonin Artaud, all left their mark on the circus.

This short and sketchy excursion into the history of theatre clarifies the connection between theatre and circus, and the latter's gradual rebirth as the new or contemporary circus. Despite the trend of moving away from this tradition and of assimilating with the subgenre of street arts, the umbilical cord connecting circus and theatre has persisted and the reciprocal flow of elements from one to the other has continued. Therefore, from a historical perspective, the allegation of the transposition of the circus into the theatre sounds like an anachronism; however, it finds its legitimacy in the aesthetic discourse.

The circus has usually been referred to as entertainment, while in contemporary circus there is a significant transformation underway: the traditional model of dramaturgy with well-established genres is being replaced by a sophisticated composition that uses the familiar elements more carefully, and not only on the surface level. Even if this change was partly stimulated by external circumstances, economic or political, it is mostly related to costs associated with the maintenance and moving of the iconic circus tent, as well as to laws prohibiting the use of animals during performances... But I consider more relevant the inherently motivated changes; at a time when the genre of circus was suffering from self-exhaustion and was losing its previous attractiveness under the pressure of the new media, it experienced a rebirth along with the inclusion of theatrical elements.

For the purpose of following the passage of circus poetics over to the theatre and the other way

Avšak najzaujímavejšie transformácie sa začali diať v priebehu 20. storočia počas rozkvetu avantgardných prúdov. Svoje odtlačky na cirkuse zanechali osobnosti ako Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, vedúca osobnosť talianskeho futurizmu, ruský autor Vladimír Mayakovsky, progresívny režisér a autor biomechaniky, Vsevolod Meyerhold, poľský revolučný režisér Jerzy Grotowski, ale i neprehliadnuteľná postava moderného divadla, Antonin Artaud.

Krátky a útržkovitý exkurz do histórie divadla objasňuje spojitosť divadla a cirkusu a jeho postupný prerod do podoby známej ako nový, či súčasný cirkus. Aj napriek trendu vzdalovania sa tejto tradícii a začleneniu do podmnožiny pouličných umení, pupočná šnúra cirkusu a divadla zostáva naďalej prepojená a recipročné prúdenie prvkov jedného do druhého stále zachované. Preto z historického pohľadu tvrdenie o prenesení cirkusu do divadla vyznieva ako anachronizmus, avšak svoju legitimitu nachádza v estetickom diskurze.

O cirkuse sa zvyklo hovoriť ako zábave, zatiaľ čo v novom cirkuse dochádza k výraznej premene, dlhodobá a žánrovo zabehnutá dramaturgická šablóna strieďa sofistikovaná kompozícia obozretnjšie a neprvoplánovo narábajúca so známymi prvkami. Aj keď táto zmena bola z časti podmienená vonkajšími okolnosťami, či už ekonomickými alebo politickými, prevažne viazanými na náklady spojené s údržbou a prenosom ikonického cirkusového stanu ako aj zákonmi zakazujúcimi používanie zvierat vo vystúpeniach. Za relevantnejšie považujem inherentne motivované posuny, v dobe, kedy žáner cirkusu trpel sebvycherpaním a pod nátlakom nových médií strácal svoju pôvodnú atraktivnosť, prichádza k prerodu a k inkorporácii teatrologických prvkov.

Pre účely sledovania prelievania cirkusovej poetiky do divadla a naopak nie je nutné vystopovať konkrétny dátum, od ktorého sa tento trend stáva súčasťou nového cirkusu. Časový kontext sa stáva nepodstatným, nakoľko kľúčovú rolu hrá kontext estetický. Nový cirkus nadobudol pozoruhodnú flexibilitu medzi zábavou a umením, ponechávajúc tak dostatok priestoru na experimentovanie



round, it is not necessary to track down a specific date marking the moment that this trend became part of the modern circus. The time-context becomes irrelevant, because the key role is played by the aesthetic context. The contemporary circus has acquired a remarkable flexibility between entertainment and art, thus leaving sufficient space for experimentation and the re-programming of the circus canon. Contemporary circus has become a synonym for physical theatre. The designation 'physical theatre' itself bears the marks of contamination by an artistic intention, which is also passed on to the circus.

One of the many cases when entertainment vanishes under the guise of sophisticated dramaturgy is the solo drama *Sisyphus Ascending* by the Danish GLiMT ensemble. Just as the title becomes decisive for some artistic works (whether as the key to their interpretation or as another element of artistic intent, such as in Malevich's *Black Square on a White Ground* or Duchamp's or Magritte's games with the names of their works), so in this case does the reference to the well-known Greek myth capture the primary attention, perhaps even pointing us toward the manifesto of the 'philosophy of the absurd' laid out in Camus' popular essay. The circumstances of this denomination as such move this performance to a context above entertainment. Yet another element, playing no less important a role, is the scenography. The minimalistic design of a desk and a high bookshelf, along with the sinister illumination of the stage, are used to provoke an atmosphere which cannot be described as anything other than being Kafka-like. The poetics inspired by the works of the key 20th Century literary figure Franz Kafka identify the symptomatic elements of a work by means of intertextuality. There is a thematic as well as stylistic transcription of the original myth to the form of a modern pseudo-myth, as well as a shift from the textual form to the form of movement. The very fact that, through the contemporary circus, a text can be transformed into movement without losing the message encoded in the respective work, or that the message can actually be read from the movement adaptation, proves the potential of the circus to go beyond an interface of consumer

a reprogramovanie cirkusového kánonu. Nový cirkus sa stáva synonymom fyzického divadla. Už samotné označenie fyzické divadlo nesie znaky kontaminácie umeleckým úmyslom, čo sa prenáša aj na cirkus.

Jedným z mnohých prípadov, kedy sa zábava vytráca pod rúškom sofistikovanej dramaturgie je monodráma dánskeho zoskupenia GLiMT, *Sisyphus Ascending*. Podobne ako sa pre niektoré umelecké artefakty stáva smerodajné ich označenie (či už ako kľúč k ich interpretácii alebo ako ďalší prvok umeleckého zámeru, Malevichov Čierny štvorec na bielom poklade alebo duchampovské či magrittovské hry s pomenovaním svojich výtvorov), aj v tomto prípade vstupuje primárne do pozornosti referencia na známy grécky mýtus, navyše spopularizovaným Camusovou esejou a zároveň aj manifestom „filozofie absurdna.“ Už len okolnosti názvu posúvajú toto vystúpenie do kontextu stojaceho nad zábavou. Ďalším elementom zohrávajúcim nemenšiu rolu sa stávajú kulisy. Minimalisticky navrhnuté kulisy písacieho stola a vysokej knižnice ako aj zlovestné nasvietenie scény sú použité k vyprovokovaniu atmosféry, ktorá sa nedá označiť ináč ako kafkovská. Poetika inšpirovaná prácami kľúčovej osobnosti literatúry dvadsiateho storočia, Franza Kafku, využíva k identifikovaniu symptomatické prvky jeho tvorby prostredníctvom intertextuality. Dochádza k tematickému ako aj stylistickému prepisu pôvodného mýtu do podoby moderného pseudo-mýtu, ako aj posunu z podoby textovej do podoby pohybovej. Samotný fakt, že prostredníctvom nového cirkusu môže prísť k transformácii textu na pohyb bez toho, aby sa stratil odkaz v tomto diele zakodifikovaný, respektíve, že tento odkaz je reálne možné odčítať z pohybovej adaptácie svedčí o cirkusovom potenciály presahujúcom rozhranie konzumnej zábavy. Základ vystúpenia spočíva na balansárskej zručnosti protagonistu, ktorého samotná realizácia podlieha určitým dramaturgickým pravidlám. Cyklicky sa opakujúcimi gestami, lyrickým rytmizovaním ich realizácie ako aj celkovej alúzii prichádza k identifikácii protagonistu s postavou gréckeho mýtu. Štruktúra pohybového divadla nesie estetické výrazové prvky totožné s tými, ktoré sa

entertainment. The substance of the performance relies on the balancing skills of the protagonist, the actual implementation of which is subordinated to certain dramaturgical rules. The cyclically recurring gestures, the lyrical rhythm of their execution, as well as the general allusion result in the identification of the protagonist with the character from the Greek myth. The structure of movement theatre carries the aesthetic means of expression in a way identical to that seen in the work *Process* or *Zámok*. The combination of the individual metatextual points, as well as the thematic transcript as such, result in the construction of a philosophical plane, ergo the overarching theme of the work itself. The above-mentioned facts push out the surface level entertainment, which this equilibristic performance might have otherwise seemed to provide, and contribute to the reflection of the contemporary circus in aesthetic terms.

The very inventory of contemporary circus as a genre is subject to strictly defined boundaries. The individual disciplines are easy to enumerate and categorise, including their particular variations. The performing artists and choreographers strive to add new elements to the frequently repeated familiar processes, thus making sure there is a twist in the dramaturgy, but also that the performance is fresh and attractive for the viewers. At this point the quintessence of the circus – physical skills – take centre of attention. In the circus, skills as such do not have an expressive value on the level of art. Therefore the audience-favourite performance *Wunderkammer* by the company *Circa*, composed within the range of contemporary circus, Cabaret and vaudeville using multiple elements of burlesque, remains just a visually lavish craft, a moving Bacchanalia and a celebration of the human body, but not art in the aesthetic sense of the word. The chief choreographer tried to distinguish this show by a different formal frame of presentation. As a structural skeleton, he used an element from musical theory and practice – a fugue.

Although the inherent inventory of the contemporary circus does not have a plethora of elements, the formalistic approach allows it to significantly expand its basic diapason. From the

objavujú v diele *Proces* alebo *Zámok*. Spájaním jednotlivých metatextuálnych bodov ako aj samotnému tematickému prepisu dochádza ku konštrukcii filozofickej roviny, teda presahu samotného diela. Vyššie uvedené vytesňuje prvoplánovú zábavu akou sa balansárske vystúpenie mohlo zdať a taktiež prispieva k reflexii nového cirkusu v estetických intenciách.

Samotný inventár nového cirkusu ako žánru podlieha presne vymedzeným hraniciam. Jednotlivé disciplíny sa dajú ľahko vymenovať a kategorizovať aj so ich jednotlivými variáciami. Časté opakovanie známych postupov sa snažia vystupujúci i choreografi doplniť novým elementom, zabezpečujúc tak zvrat ako súčasť dramaturgie, ale aj sviežosť a zároveň i divácku atraktivnosť vystúpenia. V tomto bode sa dostáva do pozornosti kvintesencia cirkusu, fyzická zručnosť. Samotná zručnosť v cirkuse nedisponuje výpovednou hodnotou na úrovni umenia. Preto aj divácky obľúbené predstavenie súboru *Circa*, *Wunderkammer*, komponované v rozpätí súčasného cirkusu, kabaretu a vaudevillu za použitia viacerých prvkov burlesky, zostáva vizuálne opulentným remeslom, pohybovou bakchanáliou a oslavou ľudského tela, avšak nie umením v estetickom slova zmysle. Hlavný choreograf sa snažil toto vystúpenie odlíšiť iným formálnym rámcom vystúpenia. Ako štruktúrny skelet použil prvok z hudobnej teórie i praxi, fúgu.

Aj keď inherentný inventár nového cirkusu nedisponuje nadmerným množstvom prvkom, formalistický prístup umožňuje základný diapazón výrazne rozšíriť. Úroveň zábavy zostáva zachovalá už z historického pohľadu, no postupné posuny nastávajú v miešaní žánrov a použitej poetiky. *Wunderkammer* funguje ako večerný kabaret, *Sisyphos Ascending* ako sofistikovaná verzia nového cirkusu s presahom zakotveným vo filozofii a socio-ekonomickým komentárom západnej spoločnosti. Pole možností sa rozširuje spolu s formátom, či pribúdaním ďalších divadelných (momentálne i multimediálnych) prvkov.

Už z historického exkurzu vyplýva, že cirkus môžeme ponímať aj ako jednu z podmnožín zastrešených divadlom. Medzi jednotlivými



historical point of view, the level of entertainment remains unchanged, but gradual changes occur in the blending of genres and the applied poetics. *Wunderkammer* acts as an evening Cabaret; *Sisyphus Ascending* functions as a sophisticated version of the contemporary circus with an overarching theme enshrined in its philosophy together with a socio-economic commentary on Western society. The field of possibilities expands along with the format or accession of other theatrical (currently also multimedia) elements.

It has already followed from this historic excursion that the circus can be regarded as one of the subsets found under the umbrella of theatre. There are numerous overlaps between the individual subsets. The contemporary circus can be regarded as genre-pure (the so called 'dry circus'), but also as part of the theatre (fairly acrobats in a modern adaptation of Shakespeare, for example) or as a form contaminated by theatrical elements (the above mentioned *Sisyphus Ascending*). The aesthetic combination of the contemporary circus highlights its broader potential, as well as pointing out the reserves and unexplored corners.

This deficit, as well as the versatility of the contemporary circus form as such, is demonstrated in the 'performance' *L'Après-midi d'un Foehn* by Compagnie Non Nova. A 'performance' from the theatrological point of view – so rather a collision of theatre and performance, than a collision of circus and theatre – *L'Après-midi d'un Foehn* could even be described as a happening, which brings it to the nomenclature of high art. This solo performance is on the borderline between theatre and movement art (body art), at the point when an artistic discourse begins to replace the theatrological one; and both, in a way, displace the circus discourse. In this case, the formal contours get blurred and the overlaps between the three sets/subsets are revealed as well. The key to interpretation is, in this instance, provided by the title itself, referring to the poem by Stéphane Mallarmé, the musical oeuvre of Claude Debussy, drawings by Édouard Manet, but also to Nijinskí's Ballet. The title itself is an intersection of four different artworks. The shift occurs in the spelling

podmnožinami prichádza k viacerým prienikom. Nový cirkus môže byť vnímaný aj ako žánrovo čistý (tzv. „suchý cirkus), ale i ako súčasť divadla (víly-akrobatky v modernej shakespearovskej adaptácii) alebo ako forma kontaminovaná divadelnými prvkami (vyššie spomínaný Sisyphos Ascending). Estetická kombinatorika nového a súčasného cirkusu zdôrazňuje jeho širší potenciál rovnako ako poukazuje na rezervy a neprebádané zákutia.

Na tento deficit ako aj samotnú všestrannosť novocirkusovej formy poukazuje „vystúpenie“ súboru Non Nova, *L'après-midi d'un foehn*. „Vystúpenie,“ z teatrologického pohľadu, kedy väčšmi ako kolíziou cirkusu a divadla, prichádza ku kolízii divadla a performance. Poobedie s Faunom by mohli byť označené aj ako happening, čím sa dostáva k nomenklatúre vysokého umenia. Monodráma s Faunom sa nachádza na hranici divadla a pohybového umenia (body artu), kedy sa teatrologický diskurz začína nahrádzať umeleckým. A oba určitým spôsobom vytesňujú ten cirkusový. V tomto prípade sa dochádza k rozmazaniu formálnych kontúr, ale i odhaleniu prieniku všetkých troch množín/podmnožín. Interpretačný kľúč v tomto prípade poskytuje samotný názov odkazujúci ako k básni Stéphane Mallarmé, tak aj k hudobnému dielu Claude Debussy, kresby Edouarda Manet, ale i zároveň k Nijinskému baletu. Už samotný názov je prienikom štyroch odlišných umeleckých diel. K posunu dochádza v úprave zápisu slova Faun na Foehn, so zachovaním fonetiky pôvodného slova, avšak v písaná podoba neoznačuje mytologickú postavu, ale typ suchého vetra. Fonetická ambivalentnosť spôsobuje premostenie medzi prvo-vzormi a samotnou realizáciou performance. Protagonista oživuje myriádu plastových vreciek prostredníctvom ventilátorov umiestnených do kruhu. Pôvodné dielo pojednáva o prebudenom faunovi, ktorý rozpráva o svojich stretnutiach nymfám v podobe snového monológu. Non Nova preberá tento koncept a pretvaruje ho do pohybovej podoby. Tanec plastových nymf predstavuje spektakulárnu show, avšak iba v prvom pláne. Tanec antropomorfných plastových vreciek disponuje širokým rozsahom konotácií. Vrecká ako ikonický symbol rozkvetu supermarketov môže konštruovať odkaz

of the word Faun as Foehn, maintaining the phonetics of the original word, but in written form referring not to the mythological character, but to a kind of dry wind. The phonetic ambivalence creates a bridge over the primary patterns and the implementation of the performance as such. The protagonist brings to life a myriad of plastic bags by means of fans arranged in a circle. The original work is about an awakened faun telling stories about his encounters to the nymphs in the form of a dreamy monologue. Compagnie Non Nova takes over this concept and reshapes it into a movement form. The dance of plastic nymphs is a spectacular show, but only on the surface level. The dance of anthropomorphic plastic bags has a wide range of connotations. Bags as an iconic symbol of flourishing supermarkets can convey a message about contemporary consumer society. The author of the show revealed other connotations as well, when she admitted her fascination with crude oil and the multitude of petroleum products we use on a daily basis without even knowing where they come from. Moreover, this performance is part of several under the title of ICE (*Complementary Unjuggleability of the Elements*) creating a bridge with the contemporary circus, or with one of its disciplines: the very sophisticated discipline of juggling. Such work comes dangerously close to the characteristics of conceptual art, just as does the performance *La Poème* presented by Jeanne Mordoj, another solo piece – despite the voodoo musical accompaniment – that's tuned to a strong lyricism. Mordoj combines the underdeveloped genre of female clowning with her juggling background to create a movement poem. Femininity becomes the main theme, the leitmotif is eggshells. Through the movement composition, the attention is focused on the female body and its metamorphoses, as well as on the intimate confession of the protagonist. The last two shows mentioned avoid the textbook definition of the contemporary circus and balance on the edge of movement art.

The Czech ensemble Cirk La Putyka, with its debut piece *La Putyka*, a rather narrative performance for a contemporary circus ensemble in our geographical latitudes, works with circus disciplines or genres, but in a theatrical way.

o súdobej konzumnej spoločnosti. Autorka vystúpenia odhalila ďalšie konotácie, kedy priznáva fascináciu ropou a množstvom ropných výrobkov, ktoré denne používame bez toho, aby sme si boli vedomí odkiaľ pochádzajú. Navyše toto predstavenie tvorí súčasť viacerých vystúpení pod názvom ICE (*Complementary Unjuggleability of the Elements*) utvárajúcim premostenie s novým cirkusom, respektíve s jeho disciplínou, veľmi sofistikovaným žonglérstvom. Takýto výtvar sa už dostáva nebezpečne blízko charakteristike konceptuálneho umenia podobne ako performancia *La Poème* v podaní Jeanne Mordoj. Ďalšia monodráma, aj napriek voodoo hudobnému doprovodu, silne lyricky ladená. Mordoj kombinuje nerozvinutý žáner ženského klaunovania a svojho žonglérskeho pozadia k vytvoreniu pohybovej básni. Hlavnou témou sa stáva ženskosť a leitmotívom škrupiny z vajec. Prostredníctvom pohybovej kompozície dochádza k upriamaniu pozornosti na ženského telo a jeho premeny, ako aj k intímnej spovedi protagonistky. Posledné dve menované vystúpenia sa vyhýbajú učebnicovej definícii nového cirkusu a balansujú na hrane pohybového umenia.

Český súbor Cirkus La Putyka svojím debutovým predstavením *La Putyka*, na novocirkusový súbor v týchto geografických šírkach celkom výpravným predstavením, pracuje s cirkusovými disciplínami či žánrami, avšak divadelným spôsobom. La Putyka disponuje ľahko sledovateľnou centrálnou dejovou líniou, no naratívny potenciál zaostáva za faktom, že toto cirkusové predstavenie konštruje pred očami divákov národnú charakteristiku. Prostredníctvom klaunstva, hand to hand, ekvilibristiky, či trampolín spracováva národné behaviorálne stereotypy tematicky prepojené na národnú svätyňu akou je pohostinstvo. Hlavná pozornosť sa neupriamuje na jednotlivé vystúpenia ako na mentálny obraz, ktorý budujú. Opäť k tomu dochádza za pomoci divadelných prvkov. Maksim Komaro, vedúca osobnosť fínskeho nového cirkusu spolupracoval s La Putykou na abstraktnejšom predstavení v porovnaní s La Putykou, *Slapstick Sonata*. Tento javiskový hybrid predstavuje idiosynkratické vystúpenie vymykajúce sa známemu škatuľkovaniu, čo do formy. Podobne ako predchádzajúce predstavenie, či *Sisyphos Ascending* i *Slapstick Sonata* konštruje širší



*La Putyka* has an easy-to-follow central storyline, but the narrative potential lags behind the fact that this circus performance constructs – before the eyes of spectators – a national character. By means of clowning, hand-to-hand, equilibristics or trampolining, it processes national behavioural stereotypes thematically and connects them to sacred national ideas such as that of hospitality. The main attention does not concentrate on the individual performances so much as a mental picture they are building. It once again happens through the use of theatrical elements. Maksim Komaro, the leading figure of the Finnish contemporary circus, collaborated with the company on a more (compared to *La Putyka*) abstract performance – *Slapstick Sonata*. This stage hybrid represents an idiosyncratic performance which, in terms of its form, goes beyond traditional stereotyping. Similar to the company's previous performance or to *Sisyphus Ascending*, *Slapstick Sonata* also constructs a broader aesthetic context. The performance, in a way, goes back to the roots of clowning as indicated by the title 'Slapstick'. The authors and the audience do not get to the point in a straightforward way through open paraphrasing or the citation of genre elements of the commedia dell'arte, but through the known formulas of silent grotesques. The performers cite famous scenes, which results in metatextual references or the development of a more complex semiotic code than might be seen at first glance. The counter to the low entertainment is the musical accompaniment in the form of Mozart's pieces and references to classical opera. At the same time, there is a deepening of the absurdity of the situational comedy along with its negation by the collision of high and low art. From this perspective, *Slapstick Sonata* represents a movement essay on the theme of the artistic and entertainment value of the contemporary circus, and it elegantly deals also with the aspects of the modern circus which have not yet been academically established.

Through the innovative figure of Maksim Komaro we get back to the performance of *Noodles*, which was the catalyst for contemplating contemporary circus, theatre and art. Komaro stands, as an author, behind this performance as



NoFit State – *Noodles* ©Sean Purser

estetický kontext. Predstavenie sa svojím spôsobom vracia ku koreňom klaunstva ako naznačuje názov *Slapstick*. K tomu sa autori a vystupujúci nedostávajú priamočiaru cez otvorené parafrázovanie, či citovanie žánrových prvkov commedie dell'arte, ale známych vzorcov z nemých grotesiek. Vystupujúci cítujú známe scény, čím dochádza k metatextuálnemu odkazovaniu, respektíve budovaniu zložitejšieho semiotického kódu, ako by sa na prvý pohľad mohlo zdať. Protipólom k nízkej zábave sa stáva používanie hudobného doprovodu v podobe Mozartových skladieb ako i odkazom na klasickú operu. V identickom momente dochádza k prehlbovaniu absurdnosti situačnej komiky ako i jej negácie kolíziou vysokého i nízkeho umenia. Z tohto pohľadu predstavuje *Slapstick Sonata* pohybovú esej na tému umeleckej a zábavnej hodnoty nového cirkusu a elegantne sa venuje aj aspektom nového/moderného cirkusu, ktoré doposiaľ neboli akademicky ustálené.

well – a piece in which he handles the genre elements of contemporary circus in a sort of avant-garde way. *Noodles* represents a very idiosyncratic performance, which, compared to others, is very unorthodox precisely because of its subversive way of working with the familiar aspects. The value of this performance does not lie in itself, but in the way it was created and in the invisible ties to and the deconstruction of traditional circus codes. Therefore it may be surprising to fully grasp the efforts to retrieve Brecht's v-effect, or Artaud's endeavour to keep the viewers "critically awakened".

*Noodles* represents the contemporary circus equivalent of Malevich or Duchamp, because the value is not created by the very subject (the performances), but the way in which the piece was created, as well as in the extension of the inventory of the contemporary circus. Just like *Slapstick Sonata*, *Noodles*, too, represents an innovative step and pushes the boundaries of contemporary circus further. In addition to the historic excursion, this article also serves as an aesthetic excursion exploring the gradual wayfaring of the modern circus from consumer entertainment to higher purposes. Considering the limited inventory of the contemporary circus (movement disciplines) it is natural that its creators use theatrical elements overlapping with movement arts. It is still too early to claim the legitimacy of art in the contemporary circus, but the mere fact that in the analysis of the contemporary circus we are applying the artistic-aesthetic discourse indicates a turn in the established paradigm. And the artistic added value is hidden right there.

Cez novátorskú postavu Maksima Komara sa dostávame späť k predstaveniu *Noodles*, ktoré otvorili kontempláciu nad novým cirkusom, divadlom a umení. Komaro stojí autorsky aj z týmto predstavením, kde akými avangardným spôsobom narába s žánrovými prvkami nového cirkusu. *Noodles* predstavujú veľmi idiosynkratické predstavenie, v porovnaní s inými veľmi neortodoxné práve subverzívnym spôsobom práce s jeho známymi aspektmi. Hodnota tohto vystúpenie nespočíva v ňom samotnom, ale v spôsobe, akým vzniklo a v neviditeľných väzbách a dekonštrukcii tradičných cirkusových kódov. Preto môže byť prekvapujúce zachytiť snahu o sprítomnenie brechtovského v-efektu, či až artaudovskej snahy udržať divákov „kriticky prebudených.“

Z toho titulu predstavujú *Noodles* novocirkusového Malevicha alebo Duchampa, pretože hodnotu nevytvára samotný predmet (vystúpenia), ale spôsob, akým sa k nemu dopracovalo ako aj rozšíreniu inventára nového cirkusu. Podobne ako *Slapstick Sonata* aj *Noodles* predstavujú novátorský počín a posúvajú hranice nového cirkusu ďalej. Okrem historického exkurzu slúži článok aj ako estetický exkurz mapujúci postupné putovanie nového cirkusu od konzumnej zábavy k vyšším cieľom. Vzhľadom na obmedzený inventár nového cirkusu (pohybové disciplíny) je prirodzené, že tvorcovia využívajú divadelné prvky s presahom do pohybových umení. Nárokovať legitimitu umenia v novom cirkuse je ešte priskoro, ale samotný fakt, že pri analýze nového cirkusu používame umelecko-estetický diskurz znamená prevrat zaužívaného paradigmy. A umelecká pridaná hodnota sa skrýva práve tu.





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