

The bended logics of an underworld

Sunniva Fliflet

This article is part of the "Inter-magazine Circus Festival 2026" project that is a collaboration between the UP- Circus & Performing Arts Festival, the Université Libre de Bruxelles and six international circus magazines: Juggling Magazine, Stage Lync, Zirkólíka, DYNAMO Magazine, Sztuka Cyrku, CIRQUEON, all part of the INCAm network. Students at Université Libre de Bruxelles share their thoughts on current stage and circus performances. Their diverse backgrounds ranging from literature and journalism, to acting and cultural studies bring unique perspectives, whether already familiar with the art form or newcomers. They are united by a curiosity about performing arts, which led them to the MA Arts du spectacle program, offering exposure to various art forms, including the circus. As part of the interdisciplinary and international project Circus | Studies led by Dr. Franziska Trapp, theatre students explore circus, collaborate with emerging artists, and engage in performance analysis and critique. Their experiences culminate in MA theses or articles like the one that follows.

Entering the black dome of *Symbiosis*, is like crawling deep down under the surface of the earth. Down here a thick strange feeling of time is emerging, as the logics of the world above slowly slip away.

In a dark cave-like space, two characters with headlamps and uniformed costumes are busy, one upside down, his upper body buried in a hole with only his feet left visible, the other scuffling around with a wheelbarrow. One of them climbs up into the dark vaulted roof of the space like a spider, to then hang silently and bat-like from the ceiling. Meanwhile the other begins a gentle listening game with vinyl records. He lets a little toy Volkswagen drive around on the vinyls, somehow magically amplifying their archived sound. These objects from the past, with their grained sound quality, emphasizes the liminal notion of the underground; a place where the gap between the past and present gets blurred. Lacking the human markers of time (here there are no seasons, no night and day, no shifts in temperature, sounds, or smells), it is as if the space almost revolts against the time markers of the surface, releasing the objects from their attachment to a certain time.

Of course, this notion of a silent and dark timelessness is just that, a notion, because the performance is in fact filled with the constant trickling soundscape by F.S.Blumm, and an ongoing light game by the headlights and the fluorescent tubes appearing

from the ground. Nothing is quite as it seems, and a feeling of uncertainty creeps up on me as the toy car disappears and Kolja Huneck begins a juggling game with the vinyls. As Huneck's vinyls are bending, cracking, melting, Luuk Brantjes keeps on climbing, making us forget him in moments, before suddenly descending with a rope and sacks of sand. But the sand behaves impossibly light (shredded cork apparently), the sandbags start acting on their own, and as the materiality of the vinyls changes into a black asphalt-like mass, Huneck begins devouring them as an animal. What is going on?

Instead of searching for answers in the performers' acts, I am occupied with trying to understand the logics of the space we are in. Light is disappearing and appearing from the ground, the earth is vibrating, the sound is moving, all as if there is an electromagnetic tension in the space. When Brantjes begins a game of weight and counterweight with bags of «sand» on his spinning board, it is as if it's not him that is challenging gravity, but that the gravity of the room itself has shifted. In contrast to a traditional teeterboard, this board has no ground to bounce back from but is conditioned by the weight or weightlessness it meets in space. Who or what begins each movement is impossible to say as it spins around itself, constantly changing direction, with or without Brantje and the bags of sand.

As the feeling of gravity is altered, so is my feeling of time, and I'm asking myself, *haven't we been here before?*, as images and movements reappear. The few traces of a chronological timeline seem to have been replaced by a dream-like logic, with images appearing without logical coherence. The two characters are never really interacting; they are rather co-existing side by side. One with a cold light, one with a warm, one on the ground, one in the heights: two solos happening alongside each other, both relating to the nature of this strange place. The lack of linearity highlights a vacuous and dense feeling of the space, where things just might as well be looping or not happening at all.

Symbiosis is no virtuosic circus show that impresses us with human acts, but rather an atmospheric space filled with a soft, mysterious wonder and unease. Leaving the logics of the surface is an invitation into a different way of being-in-space. When the room delves into an instability of space and time, it brings with it a feeling of fragility and sensibility to elements our human perception usually sees as stable and constant. *Symbiosis* is stretching my perceptions, as if moving them beyond my human scale, allowing me to enter into the time logic of rocks, mountain and deep time, observing the restless movements and tensions of the earth. But in this surrealist colourless and dense atmosphere, there is also humour and recognizable life. How it warms my heart when one character keeps finding small worms, first teasingly a dry little wooden one, and then suddenly a fresh pink seemingly alive one. With these absurd and tender qualities *Symbiosis* embraces both the deep time and otherworldly logics, as well as the living beings of happy fresh soil, be it humans or worms.