

# UNPACK THE ARTS

European residency programme for cultural journalists

LONDON RESIDENCY  
LONDON INTERNATIONAL  
MIME FESTIVAL  
9–11 JANUARY 2014

- p.3 ALEN BISKUPOVIĆ Contemporary Circus – A View from the Outside / *Suvremeni cirkus – impresije jednog outsidersa*
- p.15 ANNA HAKANSSON Freak / *Freak*
- p.22 ANNA KRÓLICA Double Worlds: From the Faun to the Tiny People Made From Plastic Bags / *Podwójne światy: od Fauna do foliowych ludzików z reklamówek*
- p.31 AMÈLIA BAUTISTA BATLLORI Processes of Creation in the Contemporary Circus / *Processos de creació en el circ contemporani*
- p.38 BAUKE LIEVENS The Body as Battlefield – (tentatively) connecting Artistic Research and Dramaturgy in Circus / *Het lichaam als slagveld: een (voorzichtig) verbinden van artistiek onderzoek en dramaturgie in circus*
- p.47 JOOST GOUTZIERS The Circus of Tomorrow Disregards the Future / *Circus van morgen vergeet de toekomst*
- p.55 NATASHA HASSIOTIS Compagnie Non Nova: L'après-midi d'un Foehn and Vortex
- p.59 ÖRJAN ABRAHAMSSON Some Reflections on the Show Fierzabruta at the Roundhouse in London / *Vissa reflektioner kring föreställningen "Fierzabruta" på The Roundhouse i London.*
- p.68 ROBERT ALAGJOZOVSKI The Uncanny in Space / *Нелагодността во просторот*
- p.76 VERONIKA ŠTEFANOVÁ Transformation as an Impetus / *Transformace jako hnací síla*

# 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 11th publication collects the texts of 10 European journalists who attended the residency at London International Mime Festival, London, UK, 9 to 11 January 2014.

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

### **KOEN ALLARY**

*Director, Circuscentrum (project leader)*

### **YOHANN FLOCH**

*Adviser*

# Contemporary Circus – A View from the Outside

ALEN BISKUPOVIĆ

Circus. For me, the first association is always the happy mental image of a huge tent surrounded by wagons, spectacular acrobats swinging on the trapeze, hilarious clowns, jugglers, knife throwers, skilful riders, and the general feeling of euphoria and emotional exultation. Now, *contemporary circus* is something completely different. What is it, then, you may ask. This is what I asked myself when I took part in the London residency organised by Unpack The Arts and Crying Out Loud for cultural journalists. It was a privilege for me to be able to take part. Motivated by a lack of intellectual, institutional, general recognition of contemporary circus as a phenomenon, Unpack the Arts is a two-year project<sup>1</sup> designed to bring together cultural journalists and critics through a series of residencies, creating meetings where they can exchange knowledge and experience, develop critical discourse and bolster the role of the media in contemporary circus. By presenting the discussions we had, as well as the talks with guests and the participants in the performances I saw at the London International Mime Festival, I will try to give a brief overview of circus art and the thoughts and conclusions I have formed from my perspective as a theatre critic who had not had any previous contact with contemporary circus.

1 Unpack the Arts (<http://unpackthearts.eu/>) is a European project organising residencies for cultural journalists and theatre critics in the context of ten major European festivals (twelve residencies in eight countries as part of ten festivals: Ny Cirkus festival in Copenhagen, Denmark; CIRCa festival in Auch, France; Festival novog cirkusa in Zagreb, Croatia; Subcase in Stockholm, Sweden; Hors Pistes Biennale and La Piste aux Espoirs Biennale in Brussels and Tournai, Belgium; Cirko Festival in Helsinki, Finland; Circusstad Festival in Rotterdam, Netherlands; Humorologie, Festival of Emotions in Kortrijk-Marke, Belgium; Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Edinburgh, UK; CIRCa festival in Auch, France; London International Mime Festival in London, UK; Subcase in Stockholm, Sweden).

# Suvremeni cirkus – impresije jednog outsidera

ALEN BISKUPOVIĆ

Cirkus. Prva asocijacija za mene uvijek je rado viđena mentalna slika velikih šatora okruženih kolima, vrhunskih akrobata na trapezima, urnebesnih klaunova, žonglera, bacača noževa, vještih jahača i općenito osjećaj euforije i emocionalne ushićenosti. Međutim, *suvremeni cirkus* je nešto sasvim drugačije. Pitate se što? Upravo to sam se i ja pitao prilikom sudjelovanja na londonskoj rezidenciji u organizaciji Unpack The Artsa i Crying Out Louda za novinare iz kulture koja se održala u siječnju 2014. godine i na kojoj sam imao privilegiju sudjelovati. Potaknuti nedostatkom intelektualnog, institucionalnog i općenitog prepoznavanja pojave *suvremenog cirkusa*, organizatori su osmislili dvogodišnji projekt<sup>1</sup> s ciljem okupljanje novinara iz kulture i kritičara kako bi ostvarili cirkulaciju znanja i iskustva, razvijanje kritičkog diskursa i povećavanje uloge medija u *suvremenom cirkusu*. Kroz diskusije i razgovore koje sam vodio s gostima i sudionicima te predstave koje sam vidio (London International Mime Festival), pokušati ću ukratko dati pregled cirkuske umjetnosti te vlastitih promišljanja i zaključaka iz perspektive kazališnog kritičara koji do sada nije imao nikakvog doticaja sa *suvremenim cirkusom*.

1 Unpack the Arts (<http://unpackthearts.eu/>) je europski projekt koji organizira rezidencije za novinare iz kulture i kazališne kritičare u kontekstu 10 velikih europskih festivala koji se bave suvremenim umjetnostima (12 rezidencija u 8 zemalja u sklopu 10 festivala – Ny Cirkus festival Copenhagen, Denmark; CIRCa festival Auch, France; Festival novog cirkusa Zagreb, Croatia; Subcase Stockholm, Sweden; Hors Pistes Biennale and La Piste aux Espoirs Biennale Brussels and Tournai, Belgium; Cirko Festival Helsinki, Finland; Circusstad Festival Rotterdam, Netherlands; Humorologie, Festival of Emotions Kortrijk-Marke, Belgium; Edinburgh Festival Fringe Edinburgh, UK; CIRCa festival Auch, France; London International Mime Festival London, UK; Subcase Stockholm, Sweden).

## History of contemporary circus, or who are we?

The term 'traditional circus' is generally taken to mean a family-run affair originating in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century,<sup>2</sup> for the most part based on demonstrations of equestrian skills, supplemented as years went by with other acts such as rope-walking, juggling, trained animals... and the introduction of the ringmaster who ran the evening's entertainment, announcing various choreographed acts which all followed the same dramatic arc: presentation, mounting tension, the successfully performed feat...

The first circus performances took place in the open air, but as their popularity grew it became apparent that performing in the open presented technical problems. The crowds also grew in size. The circus moved first into buildings and then, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, as the first travelling circuses appeared, big tops were introduced. This is the venue we still associate most strongly with circus. New elements appeared in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The tents grew in size, the acts were performed simultaneously in several rings, and traditional dressage and equestrian skills gave way to the sensational acrobatic feats that are an integral part of every circus. In fact, the value of a circus was based on the quality of acrobatic acts which thus became an independent discipline.<sup>3</sup>

After the initial wave of enthusiasm in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, circus art saw interest wane (initially, the cause was the two World Wars, followed by competition from the cinema, TV, theme parks and other forms of entertainment). In this context, circus barely managed to survive, stigmatised as mere entertainment without any artistic connotations.

2 Circus historians often disagree on the time when circus came into being, highlighting the similarities with the circus arenas in ancient Rome (horse and chariot races, equestrian spectacles, gladiatorial combat, trained animals...) that continued on in the Middle Ages and Renaissance through the role of the fool, the troubadour and the minstrel, ending with Philip Astley in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century as the father of traditional circus. For more information, see: Croft-Cooke Rupert and Cotes Peter, *Circus: A World History*, Paul Elek, London, 1976.

3 More on this topic in a comprehensive study produced by the European Parliament's Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport, *The Situation of the Circus in the EU Member States*, (ed) Division for Social and Legal Affairs, Luxembourg, European Parliament, 2003.

## Povijest suvremenog cirkusa ili tko smo mi

Pod terminom tradicionalni cirkus generalno se podrazumijeva oblik obiteljskog posla koji je nastao krajem 18. stoljeća<sup>2</sup> i pretežno se temeljio na demonstraciji jahačkih vještina koje su zatim tijekom razvoja u sljedećih pedesetak godina nadopunjavane različitim vještinama poput hodanja po užetu, žongliranja, dresurom životinja... te pojavom *ringmastera* (cirkuskog direktora) koji je upravljao cjelovečernjim spektaklom najavljujući različite koreografrane točke temeljene na jednakoj dramaturgiji (predstavljanje, rast napetosti, podvig...).

Prvotne cirkuske predstave odvijale su se na otvorenom, ali s rastom popularnosti, tehničkim nedostatcima otvorenog prostora i sve većom potražnjom publike cirkusi su prvo prešli u zatvorene prostore da bi sredinom 19. stoljeća i pojavom putujućih cirkuskih družina usvojili koncept vlastitih šatora (*Big Tops*) koje i dan danas najčešće povezujemo s riječju cirkus. Rano 20. stoljeće donijelo je još inovacija. Šatori su postali veći, program se odvijao na nekoliko kružnih scena odjednom, a tradicionalna dresura i jahačke vještine počele su se povlačiti pred akrobacijama koje su postale senzacija i neizbježni dio svakog cirkusa, čak štoviše, vrijednost cirkusa se mjerila prema kvaliteti akrobatskih točki koje su postale zasebna disciplina.<sup>3</sup>

Nakon prvotnog zanosa početkom 20. stoljeća cirkuska umjetnost je doživjela opadanje interesa (prvotno uzrokovano prvim i drugim svjetskim ratom, a zatim i pojavom konkurencije u obliku kinematografije, televizije, tematskih parkova i sličnih oblika zabave). U

2 Povjesničari cirkusa često se ne slažu oko datiranja nastanka cirkusa upozoravajući na sličnosti sa cirkuskim arenama u vrijeme Antičkog Rima (utrke konja i zaprega, jahački spektakli, gladijatorske borbe, dresirane životinje...) koje su se nastavile kroz srednji vijek i renesansu u obliku lude, trubadura i minstrela da bi na kraju došli do kraja 18. stoljeća i Philipa Astleya kao začetnika tradicionalnog cirkusa. Za dodatne informacije vidi: Croft-Cooke Rupert i Cotes Peter, *Circus: A World History*, Paul Elek, London, 1976.

3 Više o temi može se pronaći u opsežnoj studiji europskog odbora za kulturu, mlade, obrazovanje, medije i sport pod naslovom *The Situation of the Circus in the EU Member States*, (ed) Division for Social and Legal Affairs, Luxembourg, European Parliament, 2003.

Societal changes resulted in the changes in the perception of circus art. In the 1970s, a new trend emerged: new circus. It strove to find its place in the sun as an artform. In order to achieve that, the performers introduced changes to the dramaturgy, realistic conventions, and allusions to the social situation, at the same time relinquishing spectacle and entertainment, and getting rid of animal acts, in an effort to convey a message to the audience through their performances. This they achieved by introducing elements from theatre and dance.<sup>4</sup> 'New circus' thus offered the audience an experience more intimate than traditional circus, because it was based on the individual and their emotional journey, foregrounding performance at the expense of spectacle, demonstrating theatricality and the narrative element lacking in traditional circus.<sup>5</sup>

Soon afterwards, in the 1980s, *contemporary circus* emerged as the latest avatar of circus art. Responding to the challenges of the times, contemporary circus trod ever deeper into the modern trend of interdisciplinarity, linking traditional circus skills with postmodern theatre, modern dance and visual arts. At that point, all conventions of traditional circus were abandoned, daring feats and spectacles were replaced by discourse, conceptuality and abstraction in a hybrid mixture that has precious little to do with traditional circus. It is a form that brings together all performance arts. Motivated by the idea of greater intimacy and increased artistic experience, and the blending of these artforms, circus once again moved into buildings.

### **External problems in contemporary circus, or do they see us at all?**

The swift development, almost an explosion, of circus art in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century put this artform

takvom kontekstu cirkus je jedva preživio i ostao obilježen kao puko sredstvo zabave bez ikakvih umjetničkih konotacija.

Promjene u društvu dovode i do promjena u poimanju cirkuske umjetnosti. Negdje u sedamdesetim godinama 20. stoljeća javlja se trend pod nazivom *novi cirkus* koji pokušava naći svoje mjesto pod suncem i nametnuti se kao umjetnička forma. Kako bi to ostvarili uveli su promjene u dramaturgiji, realističke konvencije, refleksiju na društvene prilike, odustali su od čistog spektakla i zabave, izbacili točke sa životinjama te su pokušavali ugraditi poruke publici u svoje izvedbe što su proveli uvođenjem elemenata kazališta i plesa u svoje izvedbe.<sup>4</sup> „Novi cirkus“ tako je publici nudio intimnije iskustvo od tradicionalnog cirkusa jer se temeljio na individui i njenim emocionalnim putovanjima, stavljao izvedbu ispred spektakla i demonstrirao teatralnost i narativnost koju tradicionalni cirkus nije imao.<sup>5</sup>

Ubrzo nakon toga, već u osamdesetim godinama 20. stoljeća javlja se drugi i zasada posljednji oblik cirkuske umjetnosti pod nazivom *suvremeni cirkus*. Odgovarajući na izazove vremena *suvremeni cirkus* još je dublje zagazio u suvremeni trend interdisciplinarnosti povezujući tradicionalne cirkuske vještine s postmodernističkim kazalištem, suvremenim plesom i vizualnim umjetnostima. U tom trenutku potpuno se odustalo od konvencija tradicionalnog cirkusa, podvizi i spektakli zamijenjeni su diskursom i konceptualnošću, apstrakcijom, hibridnom mješavinom koja više nipošto ne podsjeća na tradicionalni cirkus, već objedinjuje sve izvedbene umjetnosti zajedno. Uvjetovan idejama veće intimnosti i umjetničkog doživljaja, a i miješanjem navedenih umjetnosti, mjesto događanja su ponovo postali zatvoreni prostori.

4 More on the new circus conventions in Croft-Cooke Rupert and Cotes Peter, *Circus: A World History*, Paul Elek, London, 1976. or Skjönberg Andreas and Camilla Damkjaer (eds), *Documentation of CARD: Circus Artistic Research Development*, Katarina Tryck AB Dans – forskning – utveckling, Stockholm, 2012.

5 The differences and changes that occurred between traditional and new circus are discussed comprehensively by John-Paul Zaccarini in his dissertation, Zaccarini John-Paul, *Circoanalysis: Circus, Therapy and Psycho-analysis*, Katarina Tryck AB Dans – forskning – utveckling, Stockholm, 2013.

4 Više o konvencijama *novog cirkusa* dostupno je u: Croft-Cooke Rupert i Cotes Peter, *Circus: A World History*, Paul Elek, London, 1976. ili Skjönberg Andreas i Camilla Damkjaer (red.), *Documentation of CARD: Circus Artistic Research Development*, Katarina Tryck AB Dans – forskning – utveckling, Stockholm, 2012.

5 O razlikama i promjenama između tradicionalnog i *novog cirkusa* opsežno je u svojoj disertaciji pisao Zaccarini John-Paul, *Circoanalysis: Circus, Therapy and Psycho-analysis*, Katarina Tryck AB Dans – forskning – utveckling, Stockholm, 2013.

in an invidious position vis-à-vis the society and the profession. Generally speaking, the awareness of what contemporary circus is has not spread among the public; people still associate it with the meaning of traditional circus. Contemporary circus artists will often insist it is their sole desire to have people approach them with an open mind, without the baggage of "assumptions and prejudice associated with the concept of traditional circus and animals, abandoning the idea that street artists are just fire-eaters and those guys who twist balloons into various shapes..."<sup>6</sup> They likewise encounter problems when they come to cultural centres and theatres that have been more or less closed to them because of a failure to recognise circus as a new artform. As a result, there is a shortage of demand among the producers and organisers of various arts events and a shortage of financial support from the state.

Another problem arises from cultural policies pursued by various EU countries, where circus mostly falls under the bodies that normally deal with theatre and drama. In some countries, such as France and Italy, there are specific departments in the civil service dealing with circus art, but in most countries that is not the case. In other words, there are no laws dealing specifically with circus art. For the most part, the legal framework for circus is implemented at the regional and local level, which results in lack of common standards, for instance in taxes and costs charged on the circuses. Financial subsidies and grants are just as tricky. As there is no legislation, there are no plans for dedicated financial support and grants. In some countries, circus is considered a cultural activity (e.g. in Italy, France and Portugal) while in Germany, Austria and Denmark, circus has the status of a commercial activity and is not eligible for grants.<sup>7</sup> To say nothing of the recent financial crisis and the across the board cuts in the arts.

## Izvanjski problemi suvremenog cirkusa ili vide li nas oni uopće

Brzi i gotovo siloviti razvoj cirkuske umjetnosti krajem 20. stoljeća doveo je to umjetničko područje u nezavidan položaj spram društva i struke. Generalno govoreći, publika nema razvijenu svijest o značenju termina *suvremeni cirkus* već ga povezuje s značenjem tradicionalnog cirkusa. Suvremeni cirkuski umjetnici tako će često isticati kako je njihova jedina želja da im ljudi pristupe otvorenog uma, da ne donose sa sobom *pretpostavke i predrasude povezane s konceptom tradicionalnog cirkusa i životinja, da ne misle da su ulični umjetnici samo gutači vatre i oblikovatelji balona...*<sup>6</sup> Jednako tako, s problemima se susreću u kulturnim centrima i kazalištima koja su im zbog neprepoznavanja nove umjetnosti dosada, manje-više bila zatvorena. Sve zajedno rezultira manjkom potražnje kod producenata i organizatora različitih umjetničkih događaja te dovodi do manjka financijske potpore od strane vlasti. Problem se javlja i u kulturnim politikama različitih zemalja EU gdje cirkuska umjetnost većinom pripada pod tijela koja se bave kazalištem i dramom. U nekim zemljama na primjer Francuskoj i Italiji postoje posebni odjeli državne uprave za cirkuske umjetnosti, ali u većini ne. Drugim riječima, ne postoje posebni zakoni za cirkusku umjetnost. Većina regulativa za cirkus provodi se na regionalnom i lokalnom nivou što rezultira nedostatkom zajedničkih standarda za na primjer troškove koji se naplaćuju cirkusu. Jednako tako, problematično je i područje financijske potpore i dotacija. Kako nema posebnih zakonskih regulativa, nema niti posebnih planova za financiranje i dotacije. U nekim zemljama cirkus se smatra kulturnom aktivnošću (na primjer Italija, Francuska i Portugal) dok se u Njemačkoj, Austriji i Danskoj smatra komercijalnom djelatnošću pa je postojanje dotacija nemoguće,<sup>7</sup> a recentnu financijsku krizu i rezanje troškova koja se očituje

6 Floch Yohann, *Postcards from Street Arts and Circus*, Elanders, Sweden, 2011, p. 7.

7 More details about legislative problems facing circus art in Zaccarini John-Paul, *Circoanalysis: Circus, Therapy and Psychoanalysis*, Katarina Tryck AB Dans – forskning – utveckling, Stockholm, 2013.

6 Floch Yohann, *Postcards from Street Arts and Circus*, Elanders, Sweden, 2011., str. 7.

7 Detaljnije o legislativnim problemima cirkuske umjetnosti pisao je Zaccarini John-Paul, *Circoanalysis: Circus, Therapy and Psychoanalysis*, Katarina Tryck AB Dans – forskning – utveckling, Stockholm, 2013.

In other words, contemporary circus has found itself locked in a vicious circle. The only hope is to persevere in the war of attrition, to the last man, for the affirmation of their art. As an Australian artist who participated in the CasCas (Circus and Street Arts Come and See) project put it so succinctly:<sup>8</sup> "Politics is important – ministers, mayors and other people in positions to decide public policy concerning arts and culture have a huge impact, from larger companies and venues right down to the independent performer and small emerging company. So creating positive one-to-one person-to-person relationships with the people who have decision-making powers is a very big part of being successful in cultural projects."<sup>9</sup>

According to the reports produced by the organisations that deal with circus and various cultural projects financed by the EU, the situation has been improving recently, but it's still got a long way to go.

### **Internal problems in contemporary circus, or what is it that bothers us?**

Contemporary circus art is not facing only problems from the outside. There are major internal problems, too. One of the key problems is indeed the ill-defined sense of its own identity, stemming from several levels: there are no theoretical works to systematise circus art; there is no real wish among the artists to artistically explore creative processes; contemporary circus art uses various performance art forms in its creation, including skills that were originally part of traditional circus, and yet they want to disassociate themselves from traditional circus; the educational system and practice in circus make them feel like objects for sale. Contemporary circus artists thus strongly feel that they do not belong, that they are inferior to

8 The project was implemented in 2010/2011. The main idea was to facilitate the meetings of performers, producers, critics, selection committees, costume designers, etcetera, over a period of six days in four partner countries; they were thus able to explore various national contexts, present their work, and mitigate the lack of intellectual and institutional recognition of circus and street art. For more details, see Floch Yohann, *Postcards from Street Arts and Circus*, Elanders, Sweden, 2011.

9 Floch Yohann, *Postcards from Street Arts and Circus*, Elanders, Sweden, 2011, p. 34.

na svim poljima umjetnosti neću niti spominjati. Drugim riječima, *suvremeni cirkus* nalazi se u začaranom krugu i jedina nada im je borba u rovovima, jedan na jedan za afirmaciju vlastitog područja što je najbolje opisao jedan australski umjetnik, sudionik projekta CasCas (Circus and Street Arts Come and See):<sup>8</sup> *Politika je važna – ministri, gradonačelnici i ostali na položajima koji odlučuju o javnoj politici spram umjetnosti i kulture imaju veliki utjecaj, od velikih družina i kuća sve do nezavisnih izvođača i malih družina u nastajanju. Tako da stvaranje pozitivnog odnosa jedan na jedan, osobe naspram osobe s ljudima koji imaju moć odlučivanja, čini velik dio uspjeha u kulturnim projektima.*<sup>9</sup>

Situacija se prema izvještajima organizacija koje se bave cirkusom i različitim kulturnim projektima financiranim od strane EU u zadnje vrijeme popravlja, ali put je još dalek.

### **Unutarnji problemi suvremenog cirkusa ili što nas sve muči**

Problemi s kojima se susreće suvremena cirkuska umjetnost nisu samo izvanjski. Postoje i veliki problemi unutar same struke. Jedan od najistaknutijih je nedorečeni osjećaj vlastitog identiteta koji proizlazi iz nekoliko razina: nedostaje teorijskih radova koji bi se bavili sistematiziranjem cirkuske umjetnosti, nedostaje želje među samim umjetnicima za formiranje umjetničkog istraživanja kreativnih procesa, suvremena cirkuska umjetnost koristi se različitim izvedbenim umjetnostima u svom stvaranju, u svom stvaranju koriste se vještinama koje izvorno potječu iz tradicionalnog cirkusa, a tradicionalni cirkus je ono od čega se žele razlikovati, cirkuski obrazovni sustav i praksa nameću im osjećaj objekta na prodaju. Suvremeni cirkuski umjetnici tako imaju izražen osjećaj nepripadanja i inferiornosti spram priznatih i

8 Projekt je održan 2010/2011. godine i glavna ideja je bila organizirati susrete izvođača, producenata, kritičara, izbornika, kostimografa... tijekom šest dana u četiri zemlje partnera kako bi otkrili različite nacionalne kontekste, prezentirali svoje radove i umanjili nedostatak intelektualnog i institucionalnog neprepoznavanja za cirkus u uličnu umjetnost. Detaljnije o projektu vidi u: Floch Yohann, *Postcards from Street Arts and Circus*, Elanders, Sweden, 2011.

9 Floch Yohann, *Postcards from Street Arts and Circus*, Elanders, Sweden, 2011., str. 34.

recognised and established forms of art such as theatre and dance. Even as they blend circus skills with skills that belong to theatre, to dance, to visual arts, they create a hybrid, a mix'n'match, and they do not have their clearly delineated place in the sun. The lack of recognition in the society and lack of theoretical articulation of the trend are not helping matters.

The generally held, albeit obviously wrong view proposed by the circus artists is not helping matters either: Efva Lilja articulated it in 2010 for the CARD project<sup>10</sup> (Circus Artist Research Development): "We are artists who want to live their art – we don't want to become scientists".<sup>11</sup> Yohann Floch addressed the issue in his paper that was part of the same project. Floch drew a distinction between the creative process and the process of creation, explaining that both are needed. The creative process requires the artists to watch performances and films, see exhibitions, read theoretical works, discuss issues among themselves and with the critics, journalists and scholars, undertake artistic exploration, while the process of creation pertains to the actual goal of creating a performance. As he explored the topic, Floch concluded that circus artists are not used to this idea: "artistic exploration they considered as luxury: information, expression of curiosity, experimentation and learning from other people's experience and discussion, rather than simply creating a show as the ultimate and only goal".<sup>12</sup>

10 In her lecture, Lilja tries to explain the importance of artistic exploration as a process that will bring about knowledge and understanding, stressing that the methodology of artistic process is a valuable source of knowledge for the profession and the world at large. Through artistic exploration, artists would contribute to a constructive criticism, establishment of linguistic concepts, aesthetics and many other elements, and would help the outside world understand circus artists and their art. See Lilja Efva, 'Tear down the walls', in: Skjönberg Andreas and Damkjaer (eds), *Documentation of CARD: Circus Artistic Research Development*, Katarina Tryck AB. Dans – forskning – utveckling, Stockholm, 2012, p. 8.

11 Lilja Efva, 'Tear down the walls', in: Skjönberg Andreas and Camilla Damkjaer (eds), *Documentation of CARD: Circus Artistic Research Development*, Katarina Tryck AB Dans – forskning – utveckling, Stockholm, 2012, pp. 8-10.

12 Floch Yohann, 'Circus Artist and the Inferiority Complex', in: Skjönberg Andreas and Camilla Damkjaer (eds), *Documentation of CARD: Circus Artistic Research Development*, Katarina Tryck AB Dans – forskning – utveckling, Stockholm, 2012, pp. 109-113.

etabliranih umjetnosti poput kazališta ili plesa. Miješajući cirkuske vještine s onim kazališnim, plesnim, vizualnim oni su zapravo hibrid svega po malo, nemaju svoje jasno mjesto pod suncem, a neprepoznavanje društva i nedostatak teorijske artikulacije o trendu im ne pomaže.

Od pomoći nije niti prevladavajuće i evidentno pogrešno mišljenje cirkuskih umjetnika koji je povodom projekta CARD<sup>10</sup> (Circus Artist Research Development) 2010. godine istaknula Efva Lilja: *Mi smo umjetnici koji žele živjeti svojom umjetnošću – ne želimo postati znanstvenici*,<sup>11</sup> a njime se pozabavio i Yohann Floch u svom radu prilikom istog projekta. Floch je pri tome napravio distinkciju između kreativnog procesa i procesa stvaranja objašnjavajući kako su oba nužna. Kreativni proces pri tome uključuje gledanje predstava, filmova i posjete izložbama, čitanje radova, međusobne diskusije cirkuskih umjetnika, diskusije s kritičarima, novinarima i znanstvenicima, poduzimanje umjetničkih istraživanja, dok se proces kreacije odnosi na konkretni cilj stvaranja predstave. Baveći se tom problematikom Floch je zaključio kako cirkuski umjetnici nisu naviknuti na dio *umjetničkog istraživanja koji smatraju luksuznim: informiranje, izražavanje znatiželje, eksperimentiranje i učenje kroz tuđa iskustva i diskusije, a ne samo jednostavno stvaranje predstave kao ultimativni i jedini cilj*.<sup>12</sup>

Na još jedan zanimljiv problem s kojim se susreće mlada generacija cirkuskih umjetnika

10 Lilja u svom predavanju pokušava objasniti koliko je bitno umjetničko istraživanje kao proces koji će omogućiti znanje i razumijevanje, naglašavajući kako je metodologija umjetničkog procesa vrijedan izvor znanja za struku i vanjski svijet. Umjetničkim istraživanjem, umjetnici bi doprinijeli konstruktivnoj kritici, formiranju lingvističkih koncepata, estetika i mnogim drugim stvarima te bi pomogli vanjskom svijetu pojmiti cirkuske umjetnike i njihovu umjetnost. Vidi: Lilja Efva, 'Tear down the walls', u: Skjönberg Andreas i Camilla Damkjaer (red.), *Documentation of CARD: Circus Artistic Research Development*, Katarina Tryck AB Dans – forskning – utveckling, Stockholm, 2012., str. 8.

11 Lilja Efva, 'Tear down the walls', u: Skjönberg Andreas i Camilla Damkjaer (red.), *Documentation of CARD: Circus Artistic Research Development*, Katarina Tryck AB Dans – forskning – utveckling, Stockholm, 2012., str. 8-10.

12 Floch Yohann, 'Circus Artist and the Inferiority Complex', u: Skjönberg Andreas i Camilla Damkjaer (red.), *Documentation of CARD: Circus Artistic Research Development*, Katarina Tryck AB Dans – forskning – utveckling, Stockholm, 2012., str. 109-113.



John-Paul Zaccarini has highlighted another interesting problem encountered by the young circus artists, the generation that has been trained in circus schools all over the world. As he considered the education system, he concluded that young circus artists, upon completing their three-year coursework, must produce an act/show which they will have to sell in the circus world afterwards in order to survive: this fact generates enormous psychological pressure with all kinds of repercussions. Young artists feel they are objects for sale, and this destroys their feeling of subjectivity or authorship over their act/show, resulting in an internal conflict between the desire to become what they "must become" in order to be bought and the desire to become what they "want to become" in order to realise their art. Another problem is being part of a large troupe such as Cirque de Soleil. He described the work of an artist in such large machinery as extremely frustrating because artists can be replaced at any time: they are mere cogs in the machine. This makes them feel extremely insecure and, at the same time, it reinforces the idea of an artist as an object used for the realisation of someone else's goals.<sup>13</sup>

The two facts highlighted by Zaccarini may be directly linked with some of the conventions of contemporary circus. The fact that traditional circus functioned as large machinery may have been one of the causes for the emergence of new circus and of contemporary circus: a desire to stage smaller, more intimate performances where circus artists are authors who interpret their art, not just objects to be used and discarded. Likewise, there are no repertory acts in contemporary circus, because artists want to be original and they believe only they can validly interpret their own authentic creations. This may be the source of a major problem I saw as I watched the shows and attended discussions at the London International Mime Festival: contemporary circus is in dire need of contemporary circus directors.

13 Zaccarini John-Paul, *Circoanalysis: Circus, Therapy and Psychoanalysis*, Katarina Tryck AB Dans – forskning – utveckling, Stockholm, 2013, pp. 21-23.

školorana na cirkuskim školama širom svijeta upozorio je John-Paul Zaccarini. Promišljajući o obrazovnom sustavu došao je do zaključka kako činjenica da mladi cirkuski umjetnik na kraju svog trogodišnjeg školovanja mora predstaviti točku/predstavu koju će poslije u svijetu cirkusa morati prodati kako bi preživio, stvara enormni psihološki pritisak s različitim posljedicama. Mladi umjetnik tako razvija osjećaj da je jednostavno objekt na prodaju što mu poništava osjećaj subjektivnosti ili autorstva nad točkom/predstavom rezultirajući u unutarnjem konfliktu između želje za postajanjem što mora postati kako bi bio kupljen i želje za postajanjem što želi postati kako bi se umjetnički ostvario. Još jedan primjer je i problematika djelovanja unutar velikog ansambla poput Cirque de Soleila. Djelovanje umjetnika unutar tako velike mašinerije opisao je kao iznimno frustrirajuće zbog činjenice da umjetnici u svakom trenutku mogu biti zamijenjeni, da su samo dijelovi što uzrokuje iznimnu dozu nesigurnosti, a u isto vrijeme budi se osjećaj ponovnog poimanja umjetnika kao objekta koji se koristi u svrhu ostvarivanja nečijeg tuđeg cilja.<sup>13</sup>

Ove dvije činjenice na koje je Zaccarini upozorio mogu se izravno povezati s nekim od konvencija *suvremenog cirkusa*. Djelovanje tradicionalnog cirkusa kao velike mašinerije možda je bilo jedan od elemenata zbog kojeg je došlo do potrebe za nastankom *novog i suvremenog cirkusa*, to jest do želje za manjim, intimnijim predstavama u kojima su cirkuski umjetnici autori i vlastiti interpretatori, a ne samo iskorišteni objekti. Jednako tako *suvremeni cirkus* ne poznaje repertoarne predstave jer umjetnici žele biti originalni i izvorni i smatraju da su samo oni valjani interpretatori svojih autentičnih djela. U navedenom se možda krije i uzrok važnog problema kojem sam svjedočio kroz predstave i razgovore na London International Mime Festival-u. *Suvremeni cirkus* nužno treba suvremene cirkuske redatelje.

13 Zaccarini John-Paul, *Circoanalysis: Circus, Therapy and Psychoanalysis*, Katarina Tryck AB Dans – forskning – utveckling, Stockholm, 2013., str. 21-23.

There has been some progress in recent years, because some performers have now reached the age where they can no longer perform and are turning to directing or to dramaturgical work and theoretical thinking. But those are the people who have been circus performers all their lives and they are hemmed in by their experience in a way. They need a new, fresh look from the outside, from someone who is familiar with their work, with the area, skills, advantages and faults, someone who at the same time has experience in dance and theatre. They need a new generation of directors with appropriate education, to help them shape the ideas and forms they want to present to the audience. And yet there is a smidgen of insecurity there, which we may again link to what Zaccarini has been saying. If there is a director, she becomes an external eye, directing and shaping ideas, and there we have again the parallel with the fear of the loss of authorship, the fear of becoming an object, a tool in the hands of the director, as has happened to the actors in the director's theatre – their fears are not unfounded.

In order to move away from dry theory and history of circus as arguments for the need to have an eye looking at it from the outside, and illustrating other problems, I will now look at the visually spectacular and thematically topical show staged by Compagnie Non Nova from France (the show is not without defects, though), *Vortex*, with dramaturgy by Jean Luc Beaujault, set to Claude Debussy's music reworked by Ivan Roussel, featuring Phia Ménard as the performer, director, choreographer and stage designer.

The show opens with a round stage; an oversized figure with a white mask concealing the performer's identity kneels in the middle. The performer wears a man's suit and hat. The figure slowly cuts plastic bags and glues them together creating an anthropomorphic figure/doll (with arms, legs, body and head). The performer places the figure in the middle of the round stage which is surrounded by fans. The fans blow air at the bag which is slowly blown up and comes to life before the spectators. As

Pomaci se događaju u posljednjim godinama jer je određen dio izvođača dosegnuo godine u kojima se više ne mogu baviti izvođenjem pa se sve više okreću redateljsko – dramaturškim i teorijskim promišljanjima. Međutim, u tim slučajevima radi se o ljudima koji su cijeli život bili cirkuski izvođači i na određen su način time ograničeni. Potrebno im je novo, svježije vanjsko oko koje poznaje njihov rad, koje poznaje područje, vještine i prednosti i mane istih, a koje ima iskustva s plesom i kazalištem. Potrebna im je školovana, nova generacija redatelja koji će im pomoći oblikovati ideje i formu koju žele predstaviti publici. Međutim, i tu postoji određena doza nesigurnosti koja se ponovo može povezati s Zaccarinijevim promišljanjima. U slučaju prisustva redatelja on postaje izvanjsko oko, on usmjerava i oblikuje zamisli i ideje pa se ponovno može povući paralela sa strahom od gubljenja autorstva i postajanja objektom, alatom redatelja – slično se dogodilo i s glumcima u redateljskom kazalištu pa njihov strah nije neopravdan.

Kako ne bi ostao samo na teoretskim promišljanjima i povijesti cirkusa kao primjer za nužnost izvanjskog oka, a i ostale spomenute probleme, upotrijebiti ću vizualno spektakularnu i tematski aktualnu, ali istovremeno i manjkavu izvedbu družine Non Nova iz Francuske i predstavu *Vortex (Vrtlog)* u kojoj dramaturgiju potpisuje Jean Luc Beaujault, glazbenu podlogu Claudea Debussya obradio je Ivan Roussel, a kao izvođač pojavljuje se Phia Ménard koja ujedno potpisuje i režiju, koreografiju i scenografiju.

Izvedba se otvara slikom okrugle scene na kojoj kleči predimenzionirani lik s bijelom maskom koja u potpunosti prekriva izvođačev identitet, obučen u muško odijelo i šešir. Lik polagano reže plastične vrećice te ih lijepi stvarajući figuru/lutku nečega što podsjeća na čovjeka (ima ruke, noge, glavu i tijelo). Nakon toga je postavlja u centar okrugle scene okružene ventilatorima te se vrećica počinje polako napuhivati i oživljava pred očima gledatelja. Kako se struja zraka pojačava vrećica se uzdiže i započinje svoj ples u kojem se ubrzo pridružuje još jedna, a zatim mnoštvo raznobojnih vrećica



Company Non Nova – Vortex © Jean-luc Beaujault

the air stream grows stronger, the bag floats up and begins to dance; another bag joins in, then another, and then we see a multitude of multi-coloured bags which create a fascinating reel, bringing to mind the reckless and free dance of the wood fairies. The light and merry tone soon grows dark and menacing. Ménard undergoes a process of painful transformation, fraught with danger and almost fetishistic. The figure appears oversized because he or she wears many plastic bags and plastic strips wrapped around the body, a symbolic representation of the performer's life transformation and autobiography – Phia Ménard is a transgender artist, born as Phillipe Ménard. As she unwraps layer upon layer of plastic bags from her body, Ménard shows how difficult it is to get rid of the insincere masks, the layers plastered on us by the society and environment. In the intimate struggle stemming from her own psychological motivation set against the societal rules, Ménard encounters plastic bag-shaped demons; she is the model of a man imposed on by society, and the social peeling is about to begin. As transformation follows transformation, she fights the unpeeled layers on the stage (the layers are blown about and

tvoreći vizualno fascinantno kolo koje neodoljivo podsjeća na razuzdani i slobodni ples šumskih vila. Ubrzo se svijetao i veseli ton zamjenjuje mračnim i opasnim te počinje proces bolne i opasne, gotovo fetišističke transformacije koju Ménard prolazi. Ispostavlja se da je lik predimenzioniran jer na sebi nosi velik broj plastičnih vrećica i plastičnih traka koje mu omotavaju tijelo, simbolički predstavljajući izvođačinu životnu transformaciju i autobiografiju – Phia Ménard je naime transrodna umjetnica koja je bila Phillipe Ménard. Odmotavajući slojeve i slojeve plastičnih vrećica sa svog tijela, Ménard pokazuje koliko je teško riješiti se neiskrenih maski, slojeva koje su nam društvo i okolina nametnuli. U toj intimnoj borbi zasnovanoj na osobnoj psihološkoj motivaciji koju suprotstavlja društvenim pravilima, Ménard se susreće s raznim demonima u obliku vrećica, svojim društveno nametnutim likom muškarca i počinje duševni *pillling*. Svaka sljedeća transformacija to jest guljenje plastičnog sloja s kojim se onda sukobljava na pozornici (svim slojevima upravljaju ventilatori i udišu im život) ostavlja ju rodno neutralnijom. Nakon muškarca slijedi nešto što podsjeća na golemu bijelu lutku

UNPACK  
THE  
ARTS

given life by the fans), leaving her increasingly gender neutral. After the man is gone, we see something resembling the giant Michelin figure, then a mummy, and finally she expels from her body a dark demon in the shape of a fifty-metre black plastic strip which whirls about ominously like a typhoon, filling up the entire stage. The final transformation is the removal of a pair of nylon stockings she had on, signifying the revival/rebirth of the primeval, virginal and pure in her, a woman.

*Vortex* is visually an extremely fascinating performance (the set-up of the fans and the strength of the air stream needed to choreograph the plastic objects manipulated by air is technically intriguing); there are no voices, and yet there is a deeply emotional message that need not be related to Ménard's gender issue. I did not know anything about that autobiographical element before I saw the show, and yet I enjoyed it and felt deeply each and every aspect of the tearing off of the masks imposed on us and the struggle: there was a strong cathartic element. In other words, the performance has a universal theme and there is no need for the media to overplay the fact that the author is a transgender person.

Dramaturgically, the show is divided into two parts: the light and merry part based on a demonstration of the skill involved in manipulating objects using air, which sucks us into the story, and the other, dark and menacing part, dominated by an almost perverse focus on the internal psychological struggle of the character. The dramaturgy and direction appear to be working well and in harmony. But a closer look reveals a number of holes plastered over skilfully by the visual spectacle on the stage. The creation of the first bag takes quite a long time, illogically so, and the audience loses focus even before the show proper has started. There is a great disproportion between the 'merry' and 'dark' parts. In the overweening desire to create an improvised yet controlled chaos, the air stream had become the performer and the team of authors often lose their grip on the show. Plastic bags drop lifelessly on the floor and need to be prodded back into the game,

iz Michelinove reklame, pa nešto poput mumije dok na kraju iz sebe ne izbaci mračnog demona u obliku pedesetmetarske crne plastične trake koja se zloslutno vrti poput uragana ispunjavajući cijeli prostor scene. Krajnju transformaciju predstavlja skidanje sloja najlonskih čarapa u koji je obučena i oživljavanje/ponovno rođenje onog iskonskog, nevinog i čistog u njoj, žene.

*Vortex* predstavlja iznimno fascinantnu vizualnu izvedbu (tehnički intrigantno djeluje postav ventilatora i raspodjeljivanje snage svakog pojedinog kako bi se stvorila koreografija plastičnih objekata manipuliranih zračnim strujanjem) bez jednog puštenog glasa s duboko emotivnom porukom u sebi koja ne mora nužno biti vezana uz Ménardin problem roda. Ja osobno prije predstave nisam znao ništa o tom autobiografskom elementu, ali sam svejedno uživao i duboko proživljavao svaki aspekt skidanja slojeva nametnutih maski i borbe koji imaju snažnu katarzičnu funkciju. Drugim riječima, izvedba tematski funkcionira univerzalno i nema potrebu za medijskim naglašavanjem transrodnosti autorice.

Sama dramaturgija djela podijeljena je u dva dijela: prvi svijetli i veseli dio u kojem se izvedba temelji na demonstraciji vještine manipulacije objektima pomoću strujanja zraka koji nas uvodi u priču i drugi, mračni i opasni u kojem prevladava gotovo perverzno prikazivanje unutarnje psihološke borbe lika. Naizgled generalno funkcionirajuća dramaturgija i režija u cjelini djeluju skladno. Međutim, malo bolji pogled otkriva mnogo „rupa“ koje su vješto zamaskirane vizualnim spektaklom koji se odvija pred očima publike. Sam početak stvaranja prve vrećice traje poprilično i nelogično dugo te publika gubi pažnju prije negoli je izvedba i počela, a veliki je nesrazmjer između „veselih“ i „mračnih“ dijelova. Također, i u silnoj želji stvaranja improviziranog, a opet kontroliranog kaosa, jer izvođač je ovdje zapravo zračno strujanje, autorski tim često gubi kontrolu. Vrećice padaju beživotno na tlo pa ih je potrebno podignuti i vratiti u igru, golema traka je toliko velika da svaki tren gubi vrtanju i pada beživotno na ventilatore te se

the huge strip is so big that it keeps losing the momentum, dropping lifelessly on the fans, necessitating the appearance of the stage hands who run around and push the strip back onto the stage. Those details affect the integrity of the performance, interrupting the fantastically conceived image where the audience is to focus on the internal psychological struggle of an individual, standing alone and bare in the centre of a circle. The relationship between Ménard as the character in the story and the plastic bags is often unclear and questionable, especially in the first, 'fun' part, as is the relationship between Ménard and the air stream, which is in effect the performer here most of the time. The end again seriously undermined the whole concept, at least for me, because after a detailed story about the peeling off of the layers and a return to some form of innocence and purity, Ménard stands on the stage in weirdly grey overalls, the impression being that the process has not been completed. Given the concept and the thematic assumption, Ménard should have remained naked on the stage, or at least used skin-coloured overalls which would not be so startlingly different from the rest of her body.

It is interesting to quote Ménard's words: she claims she "has given up on the traditional juggling act which she considers to be nothing but a form of entertainment akin to sport", and has decided instead to pursue this "uncontrolled", evolved form of juggling. This may be symbolic of the desire in contemporary circus to move away from traditional circus. But is this performance really such a huge step away? Not really. Contemporary circus has adopted a form of performance which is similar to theatre, unlike traditional circus. And yet the dramaturgy is still reminiscent of the traditional circus acts, the stage is round, which is characteristic of traditional circus, and Ménard uses juggling which is not all that improvised and free: in fact it is very much controlled, otherwise it would not function. Likewise, the element of spectacle typical of traditional circus is glaringly obvious.

So, where is the problem? There is no problem. Circus artists should simply come to realise

pojavljuje ekipa scenskih tehničara koja trči oko scene i vraća traku nazad. Takvi detalji narušavaju integritet izvedbe, prekidaju fantastično zamišljenu sliku u kojoj je fokus publike na unutrašnjoj psihološkoj borbi individue koja stoji sama ogoljena u centru kruga. Često je upitan i nejasan i odnos između Ménard kao lika priče i vrećica (pogotovo u prvom „zabavnijem“ dijelu) te Ménard sa zračnim strujanjem koje je ovdje zapravo izvođač u većini slučajeva. Sam kraj za mene je ponovo ozbiljno narušio cijeli koncept jer nakon detaljne priče o guljenju slojeva i vraćanju nekoj nevinosti i čistoći, Ménard ostaje u kombinezonu čudne sive boje, ostavljajući dojam da je proces nedovršen. U ovakvom konceptu i tematskoj pretpostavci, Ménard je morala ili ostati gola na sceni ili makar upotrijebiti kombinezon boje kože koji ne bi toliko odudarao od ostatka tijela.

Zanimljivo je nakon svega navesti riječi same Ménard koja tvrdi da je *odustala od tradicionalnog žongliranja koje smatra pukim oblikom zabave na razini sporta* i odlučila se za ovaj „nekontrolirani“, evoluirani oblik žongliranja što se može povezati sa željom za bijegom *suvremenog cirkusa* od tradicionalnog cirkusa. No, predstavlja li ova izvedba zapravo toliko veliki bijeg? Zapravo i ne. *Suvremeni cirkus* je prešao u oblik predstave sličan kazalištu za razliku od tradicionalnog. Međutim, dramaturgija i dalje podsjeća na dramaturgiju točaka tradicionalnog cirkusa, scena je u obliku kruga što je karakteristično za tradicionalni cirkus, Ménard je upotrijebila žongliranje koje nije toliko improvizirano i slobodno, već je iznimno kontrolirano jer inače ne bi funkcioniralo. Jednako tako element spektakla tradicionalnog cirkusa je i više nego očigledan.

U čemu je onda problem. U ničemu. Cirkuski umjetnici trebaju jednostavno shvatiti da im tradicionalni cirkus nije neprijatelj već saveznik na kojem će graditi svoj novi svijet, a borbu trebaju voditi protiv pravih „neprijatelja“, sustava koji ih ne prepoznaje i samih sebe kako bi se fokusirali na formiranje i definiranje vlastitog prostora i školovanih profesionalaca koji će im u tome pomoći. U svom proučavanju

that traditional circus is not their enemy but their ally, there to help them build their new world. They should fight the real enemies: the system that does not recognise them, and themselves, because they need to focus on forming and defining their own space and bringing in professionals with requisite training to help them in that effort. As I studied the topic of circus, I found a conclusion in a presentation about the state of circus by David Hibling which perfectly describes the situation and sends a reasoned and substantial message to contemporary circus: "... the circus is receiving more recognition as a cultural art form within some EU Member States, and the demand for education and vocational training in the circus arts has increased. Some countries in the EU focus on the 'new circus' (France) whilst others try to preserve the 'traditional circus' (Denmark and Belgium), but in most of Member States both forms co-exist. Re-inventing circus should not mean rejecting tradition as we could lose out on a wealth of talent"<sup>14</sup>

cirkusa pronašao sam zaključak s jedne prezentacije o stanju cirkusa Davida Hiblinga koja izvrsno opisuje stanje i šalje utemeljenu i znakovitu poruku *suvremenom cirkusu: ...cirkus ostvaruje sve više prepoznavanja kao oblik kulturne umjetničke forme unutar EU članica i potražnja za edukacijom i treningom u cirkuskim umjetnostima se povećala. Neke zemlje unutar EU se fokusiraju na novom cirkusu (Francuska) dok druge pokušavaju očuvati tradicionalni oblik (Danska i Belgija), ali u većini zemalja obje forme koegzistiraju. Ponovno izumljivanje cirkusa ne smije značiti odbacivanje tradicije jer bi tako mogli izgubiti bogatstvo talenta.*<sup>14</sup>

14 *The Situation of the Circus in the EU Member States*, (ed) Division for Social and Legal Affairs, Luxembourg, European Parliament, 2003, p. 8.

14 *The Situation of the Circus in the EU Member States*, (ed) Division for Social and Legal Affairs, Luxembourg, European Parliament, 2003., str.8.

# Freak

ANNA HAKANSSON

A perusal of one of the mammoth compendiums on the subject, such as Taschen's *The Circus, 1870–1950* (2008), inevitably involves being inundated with images of the female circus artist, a curiosity in the true sense of the word. Tightrope walkers in sequins and feathers, snake-charmers and performers who are so covered in hair it is impossible to tell their gender, as well as images that simply cannot be defined. What I remember most from my own visits to the circus as a child is all that glitter and the incredibly beautiful female bodies in particular. Just think of Pia Degermark in Bo Widerberg's *Elvira Madigan* (1967). In recent years some of Sweden's more prominent traditional circus shows have been entitled 'The Circus Princess', with beauty and skill serving as the basis for a veritable coronation of the female circus artist as both dream image and projection surface. The female body as spectacle.

A research project is currently under way in Sweden into women and the circus under the aegis of DOCH (The University of Dance and Circus in Stockholm). The name of this project is Gynoïdes (a gynoid is anything that resembles or relates to the human female form). The project focuses on the female circus artist and how she experiences and understands her own practice. The goal is to gain a broader understanding of what it means to be a female circus artist in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and the project aims to identify, describe and produce feminist strategies in circus composition. A first consortium was held at the end of December 2013 under the leadership of the project's initiator Marie-Andrée Robitaille. The Canadian Robitaille has been performing as a circus artist since 1998 and has toured in 27 countries. In her case, she has managed to transcend the established gender order by learning to master the Chinese pole, traditionally practiced solely by men. In her view the female circus artist has

# Freak

ANNA HAKANSSON

Att bläddra i ett verk som Taschens mastodontverk "The Circus, 1870–1950" (2008) innebär också att överöas av bilder av den kvinnliga cirkusartisten, en kuriositet i ordets rätta bemärkelse. Lindansare i paljetter och plymer, ormtjusare och så de så övertäckta av hår att könet blir omöjligt att avgöra eller de som helt enkelt inte låter sig definieras. Från min egen barndoms cirkusbesök minns jag just mest detta glitter och de ofattbart vackra kvinnokropparna. Tänk Pia Degermark i Bo Widerbergs "Elvira Madigan" (1967). Några av Sveriges mer prominenta traditionella cirkusföreställningar har under senare år gått under namnet "Cirkusprinsessan", där skönhet och skicklighet legat till grund för en veritabel kröning av den kvinnliga cirkusartisten som drömbild och projektionsyta. Kvinnokroppen som spektakel.

I Sverige pågår för närvarande ett forskningsprojekt kring kvinnor och cirkus knutet till cirkushögskolan Doch under namnet "Gynoïdes" (en Gynoïdes är allt som liknar eller avser den mänskliga kvinnokroppen). Projektet fokuserar på den kvinnliga cirkusartisten och hur hon upplever och förstår sin egen praktik. Målet är att få en bredare förståelse för vad det innebär att vara en kvinnlig cirkusartist i det tjugoförsta århundradet och strävar efter att identifiera, beskriva och producera feministiska strategier i cirkusskapandet. I slutet av december arrangerades ett första konsortium under ledning av projektets initiativtagare Marie-Andrée Robitaille. Kanadensiska Robitaille har varit verksam som cirkusartist sedan 1998 och turnerat i 27 länder. Hon har själv överskridit den etablerade könsordningen genom att lära sig behärska den kinesiska pålen, traditionellt enbart praktiserad av män. Hon menar att den kvinnliga cirkusartisten varit underordnad inte bara i sin praktik, där merparten regissör, producenter, etc är män, men också i genusanalysen av cirkus där

UNPACK  
THE  
ARTS

not only been subordinate in terms of her practice, with the majority of directors, producers, etcetera being men, but also in relation to the gender analysis of circus, a field in which theoreticians have constituted the majority. It is time for change on many fronts.

In contemporary circus or physical theatre in the broader sense, the link between the clichéd image of femaleness and the perfection of the circus body often associated with traditional circus has been dissolving, or has at least become the object of study. This is particularly noticeable in performances staged at the margins of circus, where disciplines and genres are combined in ways that are atypical of circus in the traditional sense. Shows of this kind come close to performance art, happenings, and installations for that matter. Here circus is being used more as a tool for the mediation of a feeling. It is worth highlighting in this regard those practitioners and performances that implement and comment on elements of the traditional freak show. These would include an artist such as Jeanne Mordoj whose show *Eloge du poil* ('In Praise of Hairiness', 2007) could be said to kidnap the archetype of the bearded lady. Mordoj uses hirsuteness, however, as a symbol of inner freedom rather than external freak show. Phia Ménard challenges ideas of control and perfection in the same way. Her own transsexual identity and preoccupation with the body as a battleground creates associations with the freak show and its fascination with sexual ambivalence. But Ménard's show, like that of Jeanne Mordoj, fulfils a different purpose. Her own creativity and her well-attested sense of its necessity are used to tackle issues pertaining to gender identity and transformation in a more profound way than the superficial display of the freak show could ever aspire to. The fact that both artists then play with its connotations is another matter. The personal aspect is also crucial in this context, which serves to strengthen the legacy from the traditional circus where the artist was usually the creator of his or her own number.

teoretikerna utgjort majoritet. Tid alltså för förändring på många fronter.

Relationen mellan den klichébild av kvinnlighet och cirkuskroppens perfektion som traditionell cirkus ofta förknippas med har i samtida cirkus eller, i vidare mening fysisk teater, varit under upplösning, eller åtminstone föremål för undersökning. Det märks inte minst i föreställningar som rör sig i cirkusens marginaler, där discipliner och genrer blandas på ett sätt som är otypiskt cirkus i sin traditionella bemärkelse. Denna typ av föreställningar ligger lika nära performance, happening eller för den delen installation. Här används cirkusen snarast som verktyg för att förmedla en känsla. Bland dessa föreställningar kan nämnas de som implementerar och kommenterar element från den traditionella freakshowen. Hit räknas exempelvis en artist som Jeanne Mordoj som med föreställningen "Hyllning till skägget" kidnappar arketyper den skäggiga damen. Här blir dock hårväxten snarare en symbol för inre frihet än yttre freakshow. På samma utmanar Phia Ménard, idén om kontroll och perfektion. Hennes transsexuella identitet och upptagenhet av kroppen som slagfält för associationerna till freakshowen med dess fascination av det sexuellt ambivalenta. Men hennes föreställning tjänar, liksom i fallet med Jeanne Mordoj, ett annat syfte. Det egna skapandet, och hennes omvittnade nödvändighet av detsamma, fördjupar frågor kring könsidentitet och transformation på ett sätt som freakshowens ytliga uppvisande aldrig haft ambitionen att göra. Att båda artisterna sedan leker med dess konnotationer är en annan sak. Den personliga aspekten blir också central i sammanhanget vilket är också förstärker arvet från cirkusen där cirkusartisten traditionellt fungerat som skapare av sitt eget nummer.

Samtidigt menar Ménard, när vi får tillfälle att möta henne, att cirkus för henne är något reducerat till enbart skönhet där få föreställningar faktiskt kommunicerar känslan av nödvändighet. I sin artistiska utveckling har hon lämnat såväl det traditionellt förknippade jonglerandet som den manliga könsidentiteten bakom sig. Idag betraktar hon jonglerandet som



And yet in Ménard's view, when we get the opportunity to meet her, circus has become reduced to little more than beauty because few shows communicate that sense of necessity. As her artistic career has progressed she has discarded both juggling, with its links to tradition, and her male gender identity. She currently considers juggling to be a distraction, a matter simply of skill. Her current artistic endeavours relate to necessity in particular, as she put it: "We do not choose our own birth and we do not know our own death and in between we search for love. That is it. And love encompasses art as well." Her aim is not, however, to be canonised or placed on a pedestal, which would only lead to isolation in her view. Her stage endeavours are concerned rather with creating a new, common language. An invitation to forget the world as it appears.

Both the shows by Ménard that we were able to see as part of Unpack the Arts, *Vortex* and *L'après-midi d'un Foehn*, are variations on a theme – with the former providing a more playful and more accessible version of the latter. A number of fans surround the round stage (this is the first time Ménard has employed a circular stage, which evokes the traditional circus and its ring) and the drafts they produce bring everything to life – from pastel-shaded plastic-bag figures to gigantic inner demons and cyclones. Plastic and its structure prove to be crucial in that the black shapes could be made out of body bags, and Ménard's duet with them could be a veritable dance of death. As the air element is unreliable and the shapes created always move in different ways, each performance is improvised. In *Vortex* we follow a process of change in which the shapeless male figure we encounter at the beginning of the show is undressed layer by layer until Ménard finally stands revealed having been figuratively stripped bare. A butterfly born from its pupa.

The show dramatises the relationship between the human ego and external reality in such a way that issues to do with the way people play with masks and their true selves are accentuated. Both birth and death are

en distraktion, enbart förbunden med skicklighet. Hennes nuvarande konstnärskap handlar, enligt egen utsago, om just nödvändighet: "Vi väljer inte vår födsel och vi känner inte till vår död och där emellan söker vi efter kärlek. Bara detta. Och i kärleken ryms också konsten." Hennes strävan är dock inte att bli helgonförklarad eller satt på piedestal vilket hon menar enbart leder till ensamhet. Hennes sceniska försök handlar snarare om att skapa ett nytt, gemensamt språk. En inbjudan till att glömma världen som den ser ut.

De av Ménards båda föreställningar vi fick möjlighet att se under Unpack the Arts, "Vortex" och "L'après midi d'un foehn", utgör variationer på ett tema där den ena utgör en lekfullare och tillgängligare version av den senare. Ett antal fläckar omger den runda scenen (det är första gången hon använder sig av just en rund scen, vilket för tankarna till den traditionella cirkusen och dess manege) och deras vinddrag ger liv åt allt från pastellfärgade plastpåfigurer till gigantiska inre demoner och cykloner. Plasten och dess struktur är central där de svarta figurerna kunde vara skapade av liksäckar och Ménards duett med dem en en veritabel dödsdans. Då luftelementet är oberäkneligt och de figurer som skapas alltid rör sig på olika sätt är varje föreställning improviserad. I "Vortex" får vi följa en förändringsprocess där den oformliga manliga gestalt vi möter i föreställningens början kläs av lager efter lager innan Ménard slutligen står där bildligen avskalad. En fjärl född ur sin puppa.

Föreställningen iscensätter relationen mellan människans jag och den yttre verkligheten där frågor om människans maskspel och sanna jag ställs på sin spets. Här gestaltas såväl födelse som död och Ménard använder sin transsexuella identitet som ett vackert sätt att göra dessa frågor allmängiltiga.

I "L'après midi d'un foehn", som av Mimfestivalen marknadsförs som en familjeföreställning, är den existentiella tematiken nedtonad om än även här avgörande. Att föreställningen baseras på en förlaga, Debussys "L'après midi d'un faune",

portrayed here and Ménard makes use of her transsexual identity as a lovely way of making these issues universally applicable.

In *L'après-midi d'un Foehn*, which was marketed by the Mime Festival as a family show, the existential nature of the subject matter has been toned down although it is still of key importance here. The fact that the show is based on an original work, Debussy's *L'après-midi d'un Fauné*, is also more evident than in *Vortex* where the same music is employed. Both shows are also introduced with a hazy figure cutting and taping together a plastic-bag-shape with almost provocative slowness before he/she/it allows it to come to life to the accompaniment of Debussy's music. In *L'après-midi d'un Foehn*, the fairytale element is very much present with a purely imaginary animal such as the dragon figuring prominently. However, the theme of birth and death is common to both pieces. The shape that gives and takes life is dressed in a coat fitted with a hood that covers the face – as a result the shape calls a shaman to mind – a figure without gender but with the capacity to give both life and death.

Mathurin Bolze's *A Bas Bruit* is a less personal although dreamy and Beckett-like show, strongly influenced by the New Wave filmmaker Jean Rouch. The three performers discuss abstract matters to do with time and space on a revolving treadmill and a conveyor belt, while simultaneously abolishing the boundaries between acrobatics and dance. Among the subjects explored is the phenomenon of walking, which is obviously of key importance in relation to the use of the treadmill and the conveyor belt. What is the significance of this gentle motion we scarcely ever reflect on as we do it? What is the significance of strolling as part of the way we take in the world around us?

Unfortunately these more universal questions soon find themselves coming into conflict with an astonishingly antiquated portrayal of womanhood. In relation to notions of the body and sexuality, the character played by Elise Legros is never more than a cliché. The fact that



Company MPTA/Mathurin Bolze – *A Bas Bruit* © Christophe Raynaud de Lage

är också tydligare än i "Vortex" där samma musik förekommer. Båda föreställningarna inleds också med att en svåridentifierbar figur nästan provocerande långsamt klipper och tejpar till en plastpåsfigur innan hen låter den få liv ackompanjerad av just Debussys musik. I "L'après midi d'un foehn" är sagoelementet ytterst närvarande där ett rent fantasidjur som draken tillåts ta mycket plats. Tematiken med födelse och död är dock gemensam. Den skepnad som ger och tar liv är här klädd i en rock försedd med huva som täcker ansiktet, gestalten påminner därmed om en schaman, könlös, men med förmågan att skänka just både liv och död.

Mathurin Bolze "A bas bruit" är en mindre personlig, men drömsk och Beckettsk föreställning, starkt influerad av nya vågen-filmaren Jean Rouch. I ett snurrande ekorrhjul och på ett löpande band avhandlar de tre

the show is explicitly inspired by Rouch's work is an obvious contributory factor in this regard. There are filmic elements not only in the many projections it uses but in the portrayal of Woman with a capital W, which evokes the femme-fatale characters of the film. We encounter her framed by the evocatively flickering light of the film, smoking behind a Venetian blind. The fact that she is dressed in a red silk blouse, shorts and high heels only heightens the image of woman as symbol and projection surface. Two versions of Nina Simone's 'He Needs Me' form part of the music for the show. Quite appropriately the male performers are also saved by this available figure. In a key scene Legros picks one of them up figuratively after the latter's extremely drunk slapstick number and their duet then shifts into a peculiarly gratuitous love scene. While the male actors evoke both the tramps in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, two musing strollers who are sufficient unto themselves, the female performer, despite her apparent raw strength, is never permitted to be anything other than a cardboard figure. A toy in the hands of the male artists.

In the time he spent with us, Mathurin Bolze mentioned how recurring elements in the show are turned into symbols for the universal. He thinks, for instance, that the hat that is worn by the man in the show's projections is one such element because it then recurs on stage and is used by the show's performers. He feels that the three actors symbolise "each and every one of us". Unfortunately the hat referred to is used only by the male actors and is from the outset a traditionally male symbol. Bolze also spoke about the genesis of the show and how, together with the actors, he tries "to capture the moment and tie the narrative together". The dramaturgy is closer to that of the circus than of the theatre as a result. The circus has been of major importance to him in his creative work and he finds it supportive to focus on factual questions such as what it means to find yourself upside down or to put your life in other people's hands. He works closely with the artists and bases much of the content of the show on what they can or cannot do, and yet

medverkande aktörerna abstrakta frågor om tid och rum samtidigt som de upphäver gränserna mellan akrobatik och dans. Bland annat undersöks fenomenet att gå, vilket förstås blir centralt i användandet av hjulet och på löpande bandet. Vad betyder denna mjuka rörelse som vi knappt reflekterar över att vi gör. Vad har flanerandet för betydelse i intagandet av vår omvärld?

Dessvärre hamnar dessa allmängiltiga frågor snart i konflikt med ett förvånansvärt föråldrat kvinnoporträtt. När det kommer till föreställningar kring kropp och sexualitet blir den karaktär som Élise Legros spelar aldrig mer än en kliché. Att föreställningen är uttalat inspirerad av Rouch gör sitt till. Filmiska element förekommer inte bara i dess många projektioner utan även just i gestaltandet av Kvinnan med stort K, som här närmast för tankarna till filmens femme fatale-figurer. Vi finner henne inramad av filmens signifikativt fladdrande ljus, rökandes bakom en jalousi. Att hon sedan är iförd röd silkestopp, kortkort och högklackat förstärker bilden av kvinnan som symbol och projektionsyta. Föreställningens musik består bland annat av två versioner av Nina Simones "He needs me". Helt följdriktigt räddas också de manliga artisterna av denna tillgängliga figur. I en central scen plockar Legros bildligen upp en av dem efter dennes höggradigt berusade slapsticknummer och deras duett övergår i en märkligt omotiverad älskogsscen. Medan de manliga aktörerna för tankarna till de båda luffarna i Becketts "I väntan på Godot", två reflekterande flanerörer som är sig själva nog, tillsåts den kvinnliga artisten, trots sin uppenbara råstyrka, aldrig bli något annat än en pappfigur. En leksak i de manliga artisternas händer.

Under sitt besök hos oss talade Malthurin Bolze om hur återkommande element i föreställningen blir en symbol för det allmängiltiga. Till exempel menar han att hatten, som bärs av mannen i föreställningens projektioner, i och med att den återkommer på scen och används av föreställningens aktörer, är en sådan. För honom symboliserar de tre aktörerna "oss alla och envar". Dessvärre används nämnda hatt enbart

the moment they come on stage they become archetypes, something greater than themselves. In his words, they are "captured by the light of the film and become characters, superheroes stumbling on the wheel of life". He also thinks that there is a form of truth in acrobatic movements, and that they constitute an act in themselves and serve therefore as the opposite of dissemblance. This means that Bolze is placing his trust in a "truth" whereas Ménard is calling it into question.

A show that has no interest in such intellectual quandaries is *Fuerzabruta*. During our discussion with some of the participants, one of them, Mariano Panelo, said bluntly: "We are not trying to be poetic, we are trying to be simple." He thinks that *Fuerzabruta* is meant to be an experience and that the aim of the show is to leave its imprint first on the body, then on the intellect. It would be something of an understatement with regard to this show to say that the female characters are clichéd images. The association between the representation of the body of the female circus artist and the freak show is even more entrenched here. It should, however, be emphasised that in this instance we are dealing with a commercial production that was not included in the programming of the Mime Festival. What serves to link these shows is that, at some point, they all fall within the category of physical theatre. *Fuerzabruta* is, if possible, even more physical in that it involves the bodies of the spectators as well. The wind machines lift not only the plastic roof the artists balance their way across but our hair as well; the water from the pools splashes onto us too while the strobe lights blind us and the loud music batters our ears. The performers in this show think nothing either of walloping styrofoam blocks over the heads of members of the audience. Becoming physically involved in this way in a theatrical world whose premises go so far beyond the acceptable was something I found not only alarming but offensive as well.

In its continual striving to achieve the wow effect, the show comes close in a sense to traditional circus. The female artists in

av de manliga aktörerna och utgör en från början, traditionellt sett, manlig symbol. Bolze talade också om hur föreställningen vuxit fram och att han tillsammans med aktörerna "fångar ögonblicket och försöker binda samman berättelsen". Dramaturgin ligger därmed närmare cirkusens än teaterns. För honom har cirkusen över huvud taget stor betydelse i skapandet och han upprätthåller sig vid faktiska frågor som vad det betyder att befinna sig upp och ned eller att sätta sitt liv i andras händer. Han samarbetar nära artisterna och baserar mycket av innehållet på vad de kan eller inte kan göra, samtidigt är de, så fort de befinner sig på scen, blir något större än sig själva, en arketyper. Enligt honom är de: "fångade i filmens ljus och blir till figurer, superhjältar som stapplar fram i livets hjul". Han menar också att det finns en sanning i de akrobatiska rörelserna, att de i sig inte utgör en akt, att de utgör motsatsen till föreställning. Bolze förlitar sig alltså på en "sanning" medan Ménard ifrågasätter den.

En föreställning som inte intresserar sig för dylika intellektuella bryderier är "Fuerzabruta". Vid vårt samtal med några av de medverkande säger en av dem, Mariano Panelo, oförblommerat: "Vi försöker inte att vara poetiska, vi försöker att vara enkla". Han menar att "Fuerzabruta" handlar om att uppleva och att föreställningen är menad att först ge avtryck i kroppen, sedan i intellektet. Att kvinnogestalterna här utgörs av klichébilder är snarast en underdrift. Här befästs relationen mellan representationen av den kvinnliga cirkusartistens kropp och freakshowen. Det bör dock understrykas att det i detta fall handlar om en kommersiell produkt som låg utanför Mimfestivalens programsättning. Det som förenar föreställningarna är att de alla någonstans faller under kategorin fysisk teater. "Fuerzabruta" är om möjligt än mer fysisk då den även involverar åskådarnas kroppar. Vindmaskiner lyfter inte bara det plasttak som artisterna balanserar fram på, utan även våra hår, vatten från bassängerna skvätter ned oss och stroboskopljuset förblindar oss medan den höga musiken påverkar vår hörsel. Här drar sig artisterna inte ens från att drämma frigidblock i huvudet på publiken. Att på detta sätt bli fysiskt

*Fuerzabruta* are also something of a curiosity. This is illustrated in the key water scene in particular where swimming pools made of transparent plastic are raised high above our heads as female performers execute spectacular water games inside them. While the effect is beautiful and evocative, it is also very exposing. It is not only their bodies that become even more exposed, if that were possible, as a result of their wet and very scanty clothing. As part of the fantasy that they resemble aquatic beings they are even driven to make noises like dolphins. Sirens or dolphins, but definitely not human beings with a right to their own bodies. The pools are lowered over our heads and we are encouraged to raise our hands and touch the bottom of the pool where only a thin membrane of plastic separates us from their undressed bodies.

The only time the audience for *Fuerzabruta* is actually challenged is when the performers dance what they call 'La Murga', a street dance with origins in Buenos Aires that is terrifying in its intensity. At this point, the clichés are suddenly abandoned and both the female and male artists are present in their own right, on equal terms.

The shows we saw during Unpack the Arts provide an interesting cross-section of some of the various forms of contemporary circus. Studying them from a feminist perspective proved to be a far from uplifting experience, even though an artist such as Phia Ménard and her shows were a brilliant exception. Circus, which even in its contemporary forms emphasises the body and its skilfulness, is a rewarding area for research from feminist perspectives. It is a privilege to continue this journey with a project such as Gynoïdes.

Read more about the "Gynoïdes"-project at [www.circusperspektiv.se](http://www.circusperspektiv.se)

involverad i en värld vars premisser ligger vida bortom ens acceptans uppfattade jag inte bara som skrämmande utan också kränkande.

I sin strävan efter ständiga wow-effekter ligger föreställningen på sätt och vis nära den traditionella cirkusen. Här blir också de kvinnliga artisterna en kuriositet i sig. Detta illustreras inte minst i den centrala vattenscen där simbassänger i genomskinlig plast höjs högt över våra huvuden och där de kvinnliga artisterna utför spektakulära vattenlekar. Det är vackert och suggestivt men också utlämnande. Inte bara blir deras kroppar om möjligt än mer exponerade, i våta och inte överdrivet omfattande kläder, dessutom spelas det vattenväsenlika ut så till den grad att de till och med utstöter delfinljud. Siren eller delfin, men definitivt inte människa med rätt till sin egen kropp. Bassängerna sänks ned över våra huvuden och vi uppmanas att lyfta våra händer och röra bassängbotten där bara det tunna plastlagret befinner sig mellan oss och deras avklädda kroppar.

Den enda gång "Fuerzabrutans" publik faktiskt utmanas är när artisterna dansar vad de själva kallar "La Murga", en gatudans med ursprung i Buenos Aires som är skrämmande i sin intensitet. Här bryts plötsligt klichéerna och kvinnliga och manliga artister är närvarande i sin egen rätt, på lika villkor.

De föreställningar vi upplevde under Unpack the Arts utgör ett intressant tvärsnitt av hur olika former av samtida cirkus kan se ut. Att sedan undersöka dem ur ett feministiskt perspektiv var mindre upplyftande, även om en artist som Phia Ménard och hennes föreställningar utgjorde ett lysande undantag. Cirkusen som även i sina samtida former betonar kroppen och dess skicklighet utgör ett utmärkt forskningsområde när det kommer till feministiska perspektiv. Det är ett privilegium att få fortsätta denna resa i sällskap med ett projekt som "Gynoïdes".

Läs mer om Gynoïdes på [www.circusperspektiv.se](http://www.circusperspektiv.se)

# Double Worlds: From the Faun to the Tiny People Made From Plastic Bags

ANNA KRÓLICA

The London International Mime Festival was an encounter with the art of mime, but also, more than this, an encounter with the immense possibilities that contemporary visual and movement theatre can offer to their audiences. The programme was opened by the French group Compagnie Non Nova led by Phia Ménard, an artist who studied dance, mime and juggling at the beginning of the 1990s before establishing her own company at the end of the last decade. During the festival Non Nova presented two shows, *L'après-midi d'un Foehn* and *Vortex* (together 'The Wind Plays'), which enchanted and attracted audiences to their own fabulous world by means of an unusual form of object manipulation: plastic bags moving in an artificial 'wind' (stirred by electric fans). The effect was also empowered by numerous references to the premiere of the ballet *L'après-midi d'un faune* at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a piece with choreography prepared by Vaslav Nijinsky and music composed by Achille-Claude Debussy.

These two productions (*The Wind Plays*) are actually parts of a major cycle by Compagnie Non Nova, to which *L'après-midi d'un Foehn Version 1* also belongs – a quick glance at the company's archives is enough to realise that these shows constitute part of a wider project called I.C.E. that examines various transformations of water and air. The first cycle is related to water, while the second one, which we could witness during the London festival, takes a close look at versatile possibilities of air when its power is applied to the body and to

# Podwójne światy: od Fauna do foliowych ludzików z reklamówek

ANNA KRÓLICA

Międzynarodowy Londyński Festiwal Pantomimy okazał się spotkaniem nie tylko z samą sztuką pantomimy, ile z możliwościami jakie otwiera przed widzom współcześnie rozumiany teatr wizualny, teatr plastyczny. Inauguracja programu przypadła w udziale francuskiemu zespołowi Compagnie Non Nova, który prowadzi Phia Ménard, na początku lat dziewięćdziesiątych studiowała taniec, pantomimę i żonglowanie, a pod koniec tej dekady założyła swój zespół.

Na festiwalu zespół zaprezentował dwa spektakle określane jako *The Wind Plays: L'Après-midi d'un Foehn* i *Vortex* – wciąga on widza w swój niezwykle świat poprzez manipulacje obiektami (plastikowe torby) poruszane powiewem sztucznego „wiatru” (wentylatory), ale także przez błyskotliwe zasygnalizowaną przestrzeń kulturową w licznych odniesieniach do premiery z początku XX wieku *Après-midi d'un faun* w choreografii Niżyńskiego, do muzyki Debussiego.

Te dwie produkcje (*The Wind Plays*) to właściwie część większego cyklu Compagnie Non Nova, do którego należy także spektakl *L'Après-midi d'un Foehn Version 1* – gdyby zajrzeć w archiwum zespołu okazałoby się, że jest to część jeszcze szerszej zakrojonego projektu I.C.E, w którym bada się różnego rodzaju transformacje z wykorzystaniem wody i powietrza. Pierwszy cykl był powiązany z wodą, a drugi – którego byliśmy świadkami na londyńskim festiwalu, bada różne możliwości

UNPACK  
THE  
ARTS

objects. Nonetheless, this formal exploration is only one of the dimensions of the worlds depicted. A second dimension challenges normative assumptions as it reaches deep into the labyrinth of corridors that leads to a person's definition of identity.

The first provocation for the audience comes as soon as they have familiarised themselves with the title. *L'après-midi d'un Foehn* (*Afternoon of the Wind*) sounds almost the same as the famous choreography by Vaslav Nijinsky – *L'après-midi d'un Faune* (*Afternoon of a Faun*). What is the new title supposed to mean? *Afternoon of the Wind*? Choosing to set the performance to music by Debussy, the same composer, can bamboozle the audience even more. It is hard not to feel that this is more than just a coincidence – that it is an intentional choice. But it quickly becomes clear that the show is not yet another interpretation of the masterpiece by Nijinsky. Instead it is about building up a proper context meticulously. Why did the faun suddenly change into a 'Foehn', the name for a particular kind of warm, dry wind? Is this association just a tricky wordplay? Let's search for the answer together.

The shadow of the faun continuously accompanies the cycle of Compagnie Non Nova's *Wind Plays* – we'll move to this issue in a second. For now, let's take a quick glimpse at the archives to look at Vaslav Nijinsky's 1912 show, preserved in the memories of his contemporaries as a social scandal. It's a choreographic picture in one act, depicting a short story: a lonely faun spots a group of nymphs. The faun, attracted by the enchanting view of the nymphs, tries to approach them, yet the nymphs get scared away by the unexpected presence of a man or someone appearing to be a man. The Faun – half man, half animal – does not seem to be marked out by his hybrid nature, as in the context of mythology there are many incredible creatures such as he. In his performance Nijinsky emphasises the psychological distortion of the Faun, his undefined personality, and the rejection that results from alienation, which leads to the Faun's loneliness. The nymphs escape from the

zastosowania siły powietrza wobec ciała i obiektów. Niemniej poszukiwania formalne to tylko jedna strona światów przedstawionych, jest i druga, stawiająca pytania o normy, wchodząca w głąb labiryntu korytarzy prowadzących do prób określenia tożsamości.

Pierwsza prowokacja wobec widzów zaczyna się tuż przy zetknięciu ich z tytułem, *L'Après-midi d'un Foehn* (*Popołudnie wiatru*) brzmi niemal identycznie jak nazwa znanej choreografii Wacława Niżyńskiego – *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* (*Popołudnia fauna*). Cóż miał by oznaczać ten nowy tytuł? *Popołudnie wiatru*? Do „wrabiania widza” może prowadzić też wybór muzyki tego samego kompozytora. Trudno się więc nie zgodzić z myślą, że nie jest to przypadkowy zbieg okoliczności, lecz celowe zagranie. Szybko jednak okazuje się, że zupełnie nie chodzi o kolejną interpretację kanonicznego dzieła mistrza Niżyńskiego, chodzi raczej o misternie budowany kontekst. Dlaczego nagle faun zmienił się w Foehn, czyli wiatr? Czy to skojarzenie jest tylko figlarną grą słów? Poszukajmy razem odpowiedzi.

Cień fauna zdecydowanie towarzyszy cyklowi *The Wind Plays* Compagnie Non Nova i zaraz do niego przejdziemy, lecz najpierw wróćmy na chwilę pamięcią do archiwalnego spektaklu Wacława Niżyńskiego z 1912 roku, który zachował się we wspomnieniach ówczesnych widzów jako skandal towarzyski. To obraz choreograficzny w jednym akcie, przedstawiający krótką historię: odpoczywający samotny faun widzi grupę nimf, zwabiony tym widokiem próbuje się do nich zbliżyć, one jednak spłoszone nieoczekiwaną obecnością mężczyzny (?) czy kogoś na kształt mężczyzny – uciekają. Faun jest pół-zwierzęciem, a pół-mężczyzną – w mitologii nie odróżnia się niczym szczególnym pod względem tej hybrydycznej natury, bowiem wiele tam podobnych stworzeń. W spektaklu Niżyński tematyzuje jednak psychologiczne rozdarcie Fauna, jego nieokreśloną tożsamość i odrzucenie wynikające z inności, prowadzące go do ogromnej samotności. Nimfy uciekają przed nim, zostaje na chwilę tylko jedna z nich, najbardziej ciekawa, a może najbardziej

Faun, only one of them staying for a moment – the most curious one, or perhaps the bravest. She keeps looking at the bizarre visitor only to finally escape as well, losing her scarf. This object, left accidentally behind, becomes a substitute for the partner the Faun passionately desires. The craving for possession and physical closeness is so strong that a piece of material evolves into a fetish and stimulates the Faun's fantasies, leading to his erotic fulfilment.

The devotion with which Nijinsky played the role, with the aim of expressing the power of the Faun's passion, ended up a scandal. During the private view Nijinsky did not hesitate to trespass the norms of conventional performance – he started to masturbate and reached sexual fulfilment within the Faun's projected fantasy, thereby embodying his hybrid nature. This way, Nijinsky transferred the sphere of the Faun's dreams from a symbolic poem by Mallarmé into the real world, attaching full physicality to it.

Suffice to say that such a narrative structure could not meet with the approval of the audience then (as, perhaps, it could not today?) as it openly confronted the taboos of nudity and sexuality. That is why it simply had to end with shouts coming from the outraged audience rallied in the Théâtre du Châtelet.

It is a fact that Nijinsky was the first to expose the body in dance. The body came alive and executed its rights, straightforwardly giving up the symbolic narration of incorporeity. Nijinsky embodied the Faun, he penetrated the creature's needs, and, in return, gave the Faun bodily form. Nijinsky expressed the psychological distortion of the Faun – a hybrid that unites two orders in one body. Nowadays, we would probably like to interpret this existential split as the identity problem of the Stranger – under the Faun's skin two complete opposites are hidden: the human nature and the animal nature. Extreme values intertwine in him: limitations resulting from the social norms necessary to function in the social order, animal unawareness, instinct, and, finally, shameless sexual drive. When excited by the performance of the role and its desire, Nijinsky

odważna. Przygląda się dziwnemu przybyszowi, by ostatecznie również uciec, gubi jednak szal. Ten przypadek zostawiony przedmiot staje dla Fauna namiastką obecności upragnionej partnerki. Pragnienie posiadania i fizycznej bliskości jest tak dominujące, że porzucony skrawek materiału nimfy urasta do roli fetyszu i stymuluje fantazje Fauna prowadząc go do erotycznego spełnienia.

Zapamiętała gra Niżyńskiego w oddaniu siły pożądania Fauna kończy się jednak skandalem. Podczas prapremierowego wykonania Niżyński ucieleśniając hybrydyczną postać nie zawahał się i przekroczył wyznaczone granice gry, ponieważ zaczął masturbować się, by osiągnąć seksualne zgodnie z projektowanymi intencjami Fauna. I tak Niżyński sferę marzeń sennych Fauna z symbolicznego poematu Mallarmé przeniósł do świata rzeczywistego i nadał mu fizyczność.

Oczywiście, takie poprowadzenie narracji nie mogło się spodobać ówczesnej (a może i dzisiejszej?) mieszczańskiej publiczności, uderzało jawnie w obowiązujące tabu dotyczące nagości i seksualności – musiało więc zakończyć się gwizdami oburzonej publiczności zgromadzonej wtedy w Théâtre du Châtelet.

Jest jednak faktem, że Niżyński jako pierwszy odkrył ciało w tańcu. Ciało ożyło i egzekwowało swoje prawa, jednoznacznie zrywając z symboliczną narracją bezcielesności. Niżyński ucieleśnił postać Fauna, wniknął w jego pragnienia i w zamian oddał mu swoje ciało. Zasygnalizował również psychologiczne rozdarcie, którym jest naznaczony Faun, postać hybrydyczna łącząca w jednym ciele dwa porządki. Dziś to egzystencjalne pęknięcie zapewne chcielibyśmy czytać jako problem tożsamościowy Innego/Obcego; i tak w skórze Fauna skrywają się przecież przeciwieństwa, natura ludzka i zwierzęca. W jednym ciele Fauna spotykają się skrajne wartości: ograniczenia, wynikająca ze znajomości norm niezbędnych dla funkcjonowania w porządku społecznym oraz zwierzęcą nieświadomość, instynktowność i w końcu – popęd nieznający



was scolded after the premiere and asked how he could behave so indecently in front of the audience and use such radical means of expression; reportedly he replied that it had not been him who masturbated himself, but the Faun. The desire was explained as the impersonalised drive of animal nature. The animal aspect was on the spot classified as the worst part of the Faun's identity – confirmation of his primitive nature.

In the context of Nijinsky's ballet, the roles performed can serve as a topic for discussion. In contrast to the majority of ballets, where the main, solo part is played by a slim ballerina, *L'après-midi d'un Faune* stars a man who expresses himself with the urges of his body. Ballerinas, women spelled into swans or airy sylphs, did not even have a chance to present their physicality, which has always been hidden underneath the ballet creation. Similarly, their sexuality has never been an issue in these kinds of shows. Ballet has been characterised in terms of its conventionality and incorporeity. Consequently, the creation of the Faun contradicts this tradition twice – it puts the body at the centre of attention by means of the hybrid nature of the Faun, but also places a masculine protagonist in a role traditionally reserved for a female character. Apart from the sexuality, the fact that a real body appears in a play starts a discourse related to cultural interpretation and the normative setting.

Tackling the issue of norms, normality, prescriptive behaviour, and, finally, the formation of identity through physical means of expression is not a novelty in the shows Compagnie Non Nova presented during the Mime Festival. The same can be said about the question of the body's materiality, its form and transformation. The reference to the historical show *L'après-midi d'un Faune* is not simply a superficial and shallow connection; it possesses a deeper meaning. Drawing attention to normativity in the context of Nijinsky's creations activates three spheres simultaneously. The body of the faun is the hybrid of a man and an animal, and such a combination must have an

wstydu. Kiedy uniesionego grą czy też pożądaniem Niżyńskiego strofowano po premierze, pytając jak mógł się tak obscenicznie zachować na oczach widzów i czemu sięgnął po tak radykalne środki, miał odpowiedzieć, że to nie on się onanizował, to Faun i jak zawsze na karby zwierzęcej natury została przesunięta namiętność określana jako niespersonalizowany popęd. Zwierzęcy aspekt był tu więc od razu zaklasyfikowany jako ten gorszy aspekt jego tożsamości, potwierdzający prymitywizm.

Można by jeszcze podnieść kwestie odgrywanych ról w kontekście baletu Niżyńskiego. W *Popołudniu Fauna* w przeciwieństwie do większości baletów główną rolę solistki, wątłej baleriny spełnia męska postać, i to postać która wypowiada się poprzez pragnienia swojego ciała. Baleriny, zakłete kobiety w łabędzie lub zwiewne duchy sylfidy, nie miały nigdy możliwości nawet prezentacji swojej prawdziwej natury cielesnej, zawsze tłamszonej pod inną postacią. Analogicznie ich seksualność również nigdy nie była problematyzowana w tym rodzaju widowisk. W balecie panowała umowność i programowo wspierana bezcielesność. Zatem figura Fauna podwójnie przekreśla tę tradycję – stawiając ciało w centrum, już chociażby przez hybrydyczną naturę Fauna, sytuuje męską postać w miejscu tradycyjnie przeznaczonym dla kobiecej bohaterki. Poza seksualnością pojawienie się realnego ciała wprowadza dyskurs związany z kulturowym jego odczytaniem i ustanawianiem norm.

Podjęcie tematów normy, normalności, normatywności zachowań, aż w końcu kształtowania tożsamości poprzez wypowiedź pisaną na ciele – nie są obce wspomnianym spektaklom Compagnie Non Nova, wystawionym na festiwalu pantomimy. Podobnie jak zagadnienie materialności ciała, jego formy i transformacji. Zatem nawiązanie do historycznego spektaklu *Popołudnia Fauna* nie jest tylko powierzchownym zabiegiem, posiada głębokie uzasadnienie. Zwrócenie uwagi na normy w kontekście prac Niżyńskiego równocześnie aktywizuje trzy obszary: ciała –



**Company Non Nova – L'après-midi d'un Foehn**

influence on the creature's personality, hence the questions: Who is the faun? What defines his identity? To what extent does sexuality define him?

*Vortex* by Compagnie Non Nova can be a modern interpretation of the story of the Faun, a story about existence on the borders and clothing which conceals biological gender. It is definitely a show which poses a question about identity: who are we really? To what extent are we deluded by a disguise, by what the costume hides? The culturally defined genders possess their limited costumes, yet all sorts of cross-dressings are based on the same system of information; not a lot is needed for a costume to express femininity, masculinity or animalism. It is a simple manipulation, a game of codes, which doesn't demand much effort.

Entering the auditorium, the audience gathers round the arena. The empty stage is encircled by electric fans. One figure is present onstage

jego faun jest hybrydą mężczyzny i zwierzęcia – to pomieszanie zewnętrzne nie może nie odbijać się na psychice postaci i powracającym pytaniu: kim jest faun? Co określa jego tożsamość? Na ile seksualność ją określa?

*Vortex* Compagnie Non Nova może być współczesnym odczytaniem opowieści o Faunie, o granicach, o kostiumie, które ukrywa płęć biologiczną; jest na pewno spektaklem, który stawia pytania o tożsamość: kim właściwie jesteśmy? Na ile dajmy się zwieść rojeniom i pozorom, co skrywa kostium? W gruncie rzeczy płęć kulturowa posiada swoje ograniczone kostiumy, jednak wszelkie cross-dressingi oparte są na tych samych chwytach, nie trzeba wiele by kostium określał męskość, kobiecość czy zwierzęcość. To prosta do przeprowadzenia manipulacja, zabawa kodami nie wymagająca wiele wysiłków – ostatnio bardziej umowny znak, symbol.

Wchodząc na widownie siadamy dookoła

– all in black, wearing a suit that barely buttons on a protruding belly. Intentionally distorted qualities create an artificial character, slightly grotesque, slightly scary. The face is neatly covered with a plastic, latex mask; instead of hands and feet plastic or some other artificial material appears. All this adds to the intentional dehumanisation of the character. The figure in black gets strips of a plastic bag and lies them delicately onstage to join them in the shape of a tiny figure. Afterwards more of these figures are drawn into motion in a never-ending mid-air dance. Tiny plastic creatures float in the wind created by the fans; filled with air they resemble small human beings softly waving up and down, interacting with each other. This ethereal and colourful world is under the control of the man in black. At first, he carefully collects those figures which by accident entangle in the fans, only to destroy the precisely created space and little creatures at the end of the sequence.

From this moment a process commences that sees the man shed the plastic from his body– it resembles the removal of skin; the layers of the onion are peeled back to get to the very bottom. The process of reduction is arduous: the suit managed to hide countless layers of plastic which now need to be eradicated. A complete destruction of the character takes place; not only the space but also the main figure in charge of this space is transformed. Finally, a woman wearing a bright costume appears from the heap of tangled plastic. She tears off all the shreds, plastic layers, latex and tight stockings. What is revealed underneath is the body that breathes, sweats and feels. Yet beforehand the protagonist virtually gives birth to the strings of a plastic rope. This long-lasting process of excretion represents the vital power that culminates in the birth of a new creature. Excreting items from oneself bears the properties of delivery; it is as if the new strings of plastic appear from the female genital tract – an impression emphasised by the performer's leotard. A woman hidden underneath a costume reveals her real body in the final scenes of the show. As she moves in a circle her movements are constructivist, sharp and incisive; they are devoid of the plasticity and delicacy that the

areny, scena jest pusta dookoła niej wentylatory i duża postać w czerni, garnitur ledwie dopina się na brzuchu, celowo przerysowane kształty składają się na sztuczną postać, nieco karykaturalną, nieco przerażającą. Jej twarz szczelnie zakrywa plastikowa, lateksowa maska, podobnie w miejscu dłoni i stóp pojawia się folia lub inny sztuczny materiał. Wszystko sprawia wrażenie celowego odczłowieczenia postaci. Figura w czerni wyciąga paski plastikowej torby, delikatnie kładzie je na scenie, by później je uważnie posklejać. Już za chwilę wprawi je w ruch, niekończący się taniec, balansowanie. Małe plastikowe figurki unoszone ruchem z wentylatorów, wypełnione wiatrem przypominają małe ludzki, lekko szybują w górę i spadają w dół, wchodzące ze sobą w interakcje. Nad tym eterycznym, pełnym barw światłem ma panowanie mężczyzna w czerni. Początkowo troskliwie zbiera figurki, które nieopatrznie zaplątały się w kręcące się wentylatory, na koniec jednak tej sekwencji niszczy stworzoną wcześniej z pieczołowitością przestrzeń i małe stworzenia.

Od tego momentu zaczyna się niekończący się proces wydalania z mężczyzny kolejnych foliowych worków, przypomina to odpadanie skóry, odrywanie kolejnych warstw cebuli w poszukiwaniu tej prawdziwej powłoki. Długi proces redukcji jest żmudny, garnitur skrywał niezliczone warstw folii, które trzeba wyrzucić z siebie, wydaje się, że następuje zupełna destrukcja postaci i transformacja nie tylko przestrzeni, ale głównej osoby nią zawiadującej. W finale ze sterty, płątaniny folii wyłania się postać kobieca w jasnym kostiumie, zrywając do końca z siebie narośnięte strzępy, warstwy folii, lateksu, opinające jej ciało pończochy. Pokazuje się w końcu ciało, które oddycha, poci się i odczuwa. Zanim do tego dojdzie, ona również będzie dosłownie rodzić foliowe ciągi sznurów. Jest w tym długotrwałym procesie wydalania ożywcza siła prowadząca do narodzin nowego stworzenia. To wyrzucanie z siebie ma też znamiona porodu, niczym z kobiecego dróg rodnych wylewają się kolejne łańcuchy folii – co bardzo dobitnie podkreśla trykot. Ukryta głęboko w kostiumie kobieta tylko w ostatnim scenach odsłania swoje

plastic bags dancing in the wind bore, or of any softness of feminine gesture.

What is the relationship between the man from the first part and the woman from the second part? They use the same body; only the costume incorrectly suggests in the first act that we observe a man. The corporeality provokes some discussion – in the first act it is denied the right of visibility; the body is hidden, and some kind of imitation or artificial skin is in its place. This may cast some light on the interpretation of fiction in terms of the first picture – understood as the symbol of searching for oneself in various cultural roles and situations, until finally finding a real body, transforming and changing oneself until a new body is created.

The cycle comprises a story of commutativity, which starts with giving life to the plastic creatures, moves on to their destruction, and ends when the negation of the first body leads to new life.

In the second performance by Compagnie Non Nova, *L'après-midi d'un Faun* (not Faun) everything constitutes fiction; the relationship between art and reality is very thin. The show was prepared for the Natural History Museum of Nantes, who wanted the piece to be movement-related. Yet the director, Phia Ménard, spending time among all sorts of museum exhibits, felt like she was in a place where death was on exhibition – remnants of the past world and of creatures long gone (just like the Faun? Maybe he has never existed?). What she experienced walking through the museum was the shortage of air, the shortage of air circulation; this stillness reminded her even more of death. With being short of breath. She decided to give this space new life by the breath of air – a link to life. The coexistence of life and death (just like in *Vortex*) resulted from the use of electric fans and plastic bags, ordinary household objects, which the wind gave a human form.

At the Mime Festival the fans are located close to each other around a small arena, the blades

prawdziwe ciało. Porusza się po kole, jej ruch jest konstruktywistyczny, szarpany i cięty, nie ma w sobie nic z plastyki i finezji tańczących na wietrze plastikowych toreb, ani miękkości kobiecego gestu.

Jaka jest relacja między mężczyzną z pierwszej części a kobietą z drugiej? Posługują się tym samym ciałem, tylko kostium błędnie sugeruje, że w pierwszym akcie obserwujemy mężczyznę, właściwie przesunięcie konwencjonalnych kodów kulturowych dzięki którym jasno rozpoznajemy kobiecość i męskość jest tu więcej niż umowna. Pytanie zatem rodzi sama cielesność, której w pierwszym akcie odmawia się prawa do bycia widzianym, ciało jest ukryte, w jego miejscu pojawia się imitacja, sztuczna skóra. Może rzuca to światło na odczytanie fikcyjność tego pierwszego obrazu, na rozumienie jego jako symbolu poszukiwań siebie w różnych rolach kulturowych i sytuacjach, aż do znalezienia na końcu realnego ciała i związanej z tym transformacji, zmiany aż do stworzenia nowego ciała.

Ten cykl układa się w historię o przemienności, zaczynając od nadania życia plastikowych ludzikom, przez zniszczenie ich i rozpad, negację tego pierwszego ciała aż w końcu ku życiu.

Z kolei w drugim spektaklu Compagnie Non Nova w *L'après-midi d'un Faun* (nie Faun) wszystko jest fikcją, relacja pomiędzy sztuką a rzeczywistością jest bardzo cienka. Spektakl powstał dla Natural History Museum of Nantes, miał być powiązany z ruchem, jednak Phia Ménard, reżyserka, przebywając wśród wszystkich muzealnych eksponatów czuła się jak w miejscu, gdzie wystawia się śmierć, szczątki świata minionego i stworzeń, których już nie ma (jak Fauna? A może jego nigdy nie było?), tym co odczuwała błąkając się po muzeum był brak powietrza, brak cyrkulacji powietrza, ten bezruch kojarzyło jej się jeszcze bardziej ze śmiercią. Z brakiem oddechu. Postanowiła ożywić przestrzeń, przez powiew wiatru, kojarzący się z życiem. To równoczesne współistnienie życia i śmierci (jak w *Vortex*)

turning with such speed that they create the images of distorted circles. A character wearing a black coat appears in the middle of the stage, reminding us of a magician, who just like the demiurge starts to create the world. The performer coaxes the colourful plastic bags into delicate movements, bags that are just like those found in supermarkets. He cuts different shapes out of them, joins the strips with tape so that they can be carried with the wind, thereby starting their dance. The transformation gives impressive effects, at first, two-dimensional bags fill the air and play as if they were kids. Cheerful, lively and fully individual. Then the narration unfolds rather in accordance with myths and fables – a dragon or a snake appears (also made from plastic) which inspires terror among the creatures waving in the wind. There is a moving fight scene, and the mood changes. The narration and the dance formula link to the ballet; the story, told with the participation of the plastic bags, is stylised as a fable. There is a kind of magic in the procedure: artificial objects, shaped as a reflection of human beings, start to behave like people. However, they demonstrate a delicacy and softness in their dance of which any dancer could be jealous. Their form is easy to reshape; they are volatile, airy and move noiselessly – again they bring questions about the body's materiality and the possibilities for its alteration. The wind brings a new world alive, which is created in the image of our own.

By means of the same ploy of bringing the plastic bags to life and placing them in a human context, Compagnie Non Nova create two separate narrations and depict two versatile worlds. The arrangement of space and the number of props in both performances is similar, yet the burden of questions posed is incomparable. This formal process demonstrates enormous power as well as incredible tension, and the shock of finding that disposable plastic bags can dance keeps the audience extremely involved in the plot.

The double or even the triple nature of the narrations created, which link together for a moment only to follow completely different

pogodziła poprzez wprowadzenie – wentylatorów i użycia codziennych przedmiotów, plastikowych toreb, którym pęd powietrza nadał ludzką formę.

Na londyńskim festiwalu wokół małej areny wentylatory stoją blisko, obracają tak szybko skrzydłami, że widać tylko jakby rozmazane koła. Na środek sceny wchodzi postać w czarnym płaszczu, przypomina maga i niczym demiurg zaczyna tworzyć świat. Spokojnie wyjmując kolorowe plastikowe torby, takie zwyczajne jak te, które można dostać w supermarkecie, wycina z nich kształty, subtelnie łączy i skleja taśmą osobne paski, aby już za chwilę w magiczny sposób poruszone i nabrzmiące od podmuchów wiatru, mogły same podnieść się w górę i rozpocząć swój taniec. Transformacja uzyskuje tu niezwykle efekt, najpierw jednowymiarowe torby wypełnione powietrzem grają niczym dzieci. Wesole, zupełnie spersonalizowane i żywe. Potem narracja spektaklu przebiega raczej zgodnie z mitami czy baśnią pojawia się smok czy wąż – (również z folii), który czyni postrach wśród kołysanych wiatrem ludzików. Jest przejmująca scena walki. Zmieniają się nastroje, za pomocą wyczarowywania kolejnych sytuacji, ustawionych na foliowe ludziki z torebek. Narracja i formuła tańca przywodzi na myśl balet, podobny jest z opowieścią z udziałem plastikowych torbach, stylizowaną na baśń. Jest w tym zabiegu szczypta magii, sztuczne przedmioty zaczynają zachowywać się jak ludzie, ich kształty powstały na podobieństwo i wizerunek człowieka. Jednak w tańcu mają lekkość i finezję, której może pozazdrościć im każdy tancerz, ich forma jest łatwa do transformacji, są ulotne, zwiewne, poruszają się nie bezszelestnie – pozycja tancerza zostaje zagrożona i ponownie rodzi się pytanie o materialność ciała, i możliwości jego przemiany, jego analogie. Za pomocą wiatru powstaje nowy świat, stworzony na podobieństwo naszego.

Compagnie Non Nova wykorzystując ten sam chwyt nadania życia plastikowym torbom i wpisania ich w ludzki kontekst, prowadzi dwie różne narracje, pokazuje zupełnie odmienne

directions a second later, poses a challenge in terms of the performances' interpretation: they emphasise the problem of transformation in the context of the body's materiality and its form, which, after all, always expresses itself in connection with the internal and coherent sense of 'I'.

światy, choć pozornie zakres działań i aranżacja otoczenia, ilość rekwizytów w obu przedstawieniach jest bardzo podobna, to jednak ciężaru stawianych pytań nie da się porównać. Jest w tym zabiegu formalnym siła, podobnie jak niezwykle napięcie, zaskoczenie, że plastikowe jednorazowe reklamówki mogą tańczyć, trzymać widzów mocno wtopionych w ciąg akcji scenicznej.

Podwójność, a nawet potrójność kreowanych narracji, które tylko na moment się schodzą, aby potoczyć się zupełnie innym nurtem – stawia również wyzwanie do pełnego odczytania tych spektakli – ustanawiając w centrum problem transformacji w kontekście materialności ciała, jego formy, która przecież zawsze realizuje się w powiązaniu z wewnętrznym i spójnym poczuciem „ja”.

# Processes of Creation in the Contemporary Circus

AMÈLIA BAUTISTA BATLLORI

In today's circus, as in other fields of the performing arts and culture in general, different processes of creation are possible. Each type of process obtains a different result, and we can even say that similar ways of approaching a show lead to works that are very different from each other.

Specifically, unlike in dance and theatre, the circus lacks a historical repertoire of works and is generally not supported with texts. Thus, the starting point for the process of creation is different. Training in circus disciplines and the physical abilities of the artists are essential and get mixed with the creators' personal experiences, interests and imagination. And sometimes it is also simply about the vital need to express some feelings or ideas.

Each show is the unique outcome of a complex process of creation in which different elements participate and have influence: the creator and his or her artistic background, the other artists involved and their personal circumstances, current trends, the funding available, etcetera. Therefore, it is clear that each show is a unique case. But is this because it ends up having a certain form or structure, because it has a specific tempo? What relation does the artist aim to establish with the audience?

To begin to understand the processes of creation in today's circus, we held conversations with its directors and artists and studied some of the shows at the London International Mime Festival 2014. We were able to see these shows as part of the Unpack the Arts programme for cultural journalists in

# Processos de creació en el circ contemporani

AMÈLIA BAUTISTA BATLLORI

En el circ contemporani, com en d'altres àmbits de les arts escèniques i la cultura en general, existeixen diferents processos de creació possibles. Cada tipus de procés obtindrà un resultat diferent, i fins i tot es pot afirmar que maneres semblants d'enfocar un espectacle desembocaran en obres molt allunyades les unes de les altres.

Específicament en el cas del circ, i a diferència del cas de la dansa i el teatre, no es disposa d'un repertori històric d'obres i generalment no es compta amb el suport del text. Les bases de partida del procés de creació són altres. Són essencials les disciplines circenses i les capacitats físiques dels artistes, que es barregen amb les experiències i interessos personals dels creadors i el seu imaginari; a vegades també es tracta senzillament de la necessitat vital d'expressar uns sentiments o idees.

Cada espectacle és fruit únic d'un complex procés de creació en què participen i influeixen diferents elements: el propi creador i el seu bagatge artístic, els altres artistes participants i les seves circumstàncies personals, les tendències del moment, els recursos econòmics disponibles, etc. Queda clar, doncs, que cada obra és un cas diferent. Però perquè acaba tenint un forma o una estructura determinada, perquè té un ritme concret? Quina relació vol establir l'artista amb el públic?

Per començar a entendre els processos de creació en circ contemporani actual, i gràcies a converses amb els seus directors i artistes, hem analitzat alguns dels espectacles del

UNPACK  
THE  
ARTS

the EU, organised by the London-based production company Crying Out Loud.

Obviously, the uniqueness of each work makes generalisations impossible, but it is interesting to study very different productions to see how an artist's personality or a company's operations or aims lead to one type of show or another.

### **Compagnie Non Nova: L'après-midi d'un Foehn and Vortex**

Compagnie Non Nova, led by the French juggler Phia Ménard, opened the 37<sup>th</sup> Mime Festival with two shows based on wind that overlap despite their great differences. Both projects are very personal to Ménard, a former student of another prestigious juggler, Jérôme Thomas.

Ménard told us about her artistic background: first she learned to control her body and objects, but she then went beyond traditional juggling and became interested in uncontrollable objects. Indeed, she became enraptured by the idea of transformation, working on and exploring elements that change and cannot be controlled by their very nature. An example of this development is her previous show, *PPP* (*Position Parallèle au Plancher*), in which she handled and played with balls of ice, which, because of the material's properties, broke, melted and burned in her hands.

Next she turned to the wind, which cannot be seen and follows a path which cannot be predicted. And if we pay attention to what she told us, sweat is another material with which Phia Ménard will work.

### **The need to create**

According to Ménard, her process of creation is first the result of a need. Her personal interests push her past conventional juggling and prompt her to explore other uncontrollable elements based on the idea of transformation. With this concept and need in mind, Ménard has created three shows based on the wind. And how did the idea occur to her? It came from a research project she started at the Museum of Natural History of Nantes, where she spent a few nights among dead and stuffed animals to which she

*London International Mime Festival 2014. Es tracta d'obres que hem pogut veure en el marc del programa per a periodistes culturals de la UE Unpack the Arts, organitzat per la productora londinenca Crying Out Loud.*

Evidentment, la unicitat de cada obra fa impossible establir afirmacions generalistes, però l'anàlisi de muntatges molt diferents és interessant per comprovar com la personalitat d'un artista, el funcionament o l'objectiu d'una companyia desemboquen en un tipus o altre d'espectacle.

### **Compagnie Non Nova : L'après-midi d'un Foehn i Vortex**

La companyia de la francesa Phia Ménard va inaugurar la 37a edició del Mime Festival amb dos espectacles basats en el vent, amb punts en comú però ben diferents. Dos projectes molt personals d'aquesta malabarista, alumna d'un altre prestigiós artista d'aquesta disciplina, Jérôme Thomas.

Ménard ens va explicar la seva trajectòria artística: primer va aprendre a controlar el seu cos i els objectes, però després va voler anar més enllà del malabarisme habitual i passa a interessar-se per objectes incontrolables. En aquesta línia, es va deixar atrapar per la idea de transformació, i va treballar i investigar elements que canvien i que per la seva naturalesa no es poden controlar. Un exemple d'aquesta evolució és el seu espectacle anterior, *PPP* (*Position Parallèle au Plancher*), en què manipulava i jugava amb unes boles de gel, que, per la naturalesa del seu material, es trencaven, es fonien i a més li cremaven les mans.

Després ha estat el torn del vent. Un element que no es veu i del qual no es pot preveure la trajectòria. I si hem de fer cas del que ens va avançar, la suor serà un altre dels elements amb els que treballarà Phia Ménard.

### **Crear com a necessitat**

El procés de creació és, segons confessa Ménard, en un inici fruit d'una necessitat d'ella mateixa. Pels seus interessos personals es veu

UNPACK  
THE  
ARTS



finally managed to give new life thanks to the electric fans that ruffled their fur. From there, she began to study the wind and to work on it as a major element in her work. Both shows play with wind-related words in their titles: *L'après-midi d'un Foehn* uses the music of Claude Debussy based on a poem by Stéphane Mallarmé with a similar title (*L'après-midi d'un Faune*), but replacing the word *faune* with *Foehn*, a warm and dry wind well known in the Alps for causing headaches. *Vortex* refers to the whirlwind that is the star of the show.

Phia Ménard admitted that it has been hard for her to create something with other people because she is the only protagonist in the process, the one that leads it and knows where it is headed. Therefore, her projects are highly personal. Once the creation exists for her alone, it is easier for her to break away from it and let other people perform it, as happens with *L'après-midi d'un Foehn*.

Regarding her relation with the public, Ménard explains that it is vital for her that the audience disconnect from their daily lives and establish a link. "I think that you cannot create a theatrical situation unless there is this anaesthetic situation, this invitation to get lost in the world of the theatre," she has said. Thus, both *L'après-midi d'un Foehn* and *Vortex* start off in a similar way, with a fascinating dance of plastic bags that become such wonderful contemporary dancers that they leave the audience speechless.

From this process of creation emerge shows rather clear in structure: an initial anaesthetic part, as the artist would say, and then development with a climax and denouement serving Ménard's idea of playing with the wind while explaining a situation or concept at the same time. These are works with dark parts and different possible interpretations that attract audiences and do not leave them indifferent, at least from what we observed *in situ*.

### **Cie MPTA: A Bas Bruit**

The French circus company MPTA (*Les mains, les pieds et la tête aussi*) put on a show titled

avocada a anar més enllà del malabarisme convencional i a investigar sobre altres elements incontrolables en base a la idea de la transformació. A partir d'aquest concepte i d'aquesta necessitat, Ménard ha creat tres espectacles basats en el vent. I com va sorgir la idea? Va ser a partir d'un projecte d'investigació iniciat al Museu d'Història Natural de Nantes: l'artista es va passejar unes quantes nits enmig d'animals morts i dissecats, als que finalment va aconseguir donar vida gràcies a ventiladors que movien el seu pèl. A partir d'aquí va començar a analitzar el vent i a treballar-hi com a element principal de les peces. Els dos espectacles juguen amb paraules relacionades amb el vent en els seus títols: "*L'après-midi d'un Foehn*", utilitza la música de Claude Debussy basat en el poema de Stéphane Mallarmé i canvia la paraula "*faune*" per *Foehn*, un vent sec i calent molt conegut als Alps per causar mals de cap. "*Vortex*" fa referència al remolí que serà protagonista de la peça.

Phia Ménard va confessar que li costava crear conjuntament amb d'altres persones, perquè és ella la única persona protagonista del procés, qui el lidera i qui sap cap a on vol arribar. Es tracta, doncs, de projectes molt personals. Una vegada la creació ja existeix per si sola, és més fàcil que pugui independitzar-se d'ella i altres persones la puguin protagonitzar, com passa amb "*L'après-midi d'un Foehn*".

Respecte a la relació amb el públic, Ménard explica que per ella és imprescindible fer que l'audiència desconnecti de la seva quotidianitat i establir-hi un lligam. "Crec que no es pot crear una situació dramàtica fins que no hi ha aquesta situació anestèsica, aquesta invitació a oblidar-se del món que és el teatre", explica l'artista. I per això les dues peces "*L'après-midi d'un Foehn*" i "*Vortex*" comencen de manera semblant, amb un ball fascinant de bosses de plàstic que esdevenen les millors ballarines de dansa contemporània i que deixen el públic bocabadat.

D'aquest procés de creació se'n deriven uns espectacles amb unes estructures força clares: una primera part anestèsica, com diria l'artista,



#### Fuerzabruta – Fuerzabruta

*A Bas Bruit* at the Mime Festival 2014. The company's name is a declaration of intent: not only do they use the body, but they also work with the 'head': they work on concepts and ideas, and not just within a particular physical discipline.

During the talk at Unpack the Arts, we spoke with Mathurin Bolze, a circus artist who studied at the prestigious Centre National des Arts du Cirque and was a member of the collective Cirque Anomalie. Having become the artistic director of MPTA a few years ago, a company for which he is a co-founder, he follows the path of other circus artists that have had to do less physical work as they get older, switching to such things as directing and advising other companies. These roles are absolutely essential to the circus, where performing artists dominate but direction is often found lacking, especially in smaller shows.

Mathurin bases *A Bas Bruit* on the work of French filmmaker and anthropologist Jean Rouch, and especially a documentary titled *Moi, un Noir*, which describes the lives of Nigerian immigrants looking for work in Ivory Coast. Rouch is known for the influence of his ethnographic films, filmed mostly in Africa, and

i després un desenvolupament amb un clímax i un desenllaç al servei de la idea de Ménard de jugar amb el vent i explicar al mateix temps una situació o concepte. Obres amb algunes parts fosques i amb diferents interpretacions possibles, però que no deixen indiferent i atreuen a l'espectador, almenys pel que vam comprovar in situ.

#### Cie MPTA – À bas bruit

La companyia de circ francesa MPTA (*Les Mains, Les Pieds et La Tête Aussi*) ha presentat al Mime Festival 2014 l'espectacle *À bas bruit*. El nom de la companyia ja vol ser una declaració d'intencions: no només fan servir el cos, sinó que també hi ha un treball de "cap" al darrera, treballen amb conceptes i idees i no només al servei d'una disciplina física o una altra.

A la xerrada amb *Unpack the Arts* vam poder parlar amb Mathieu Maturin, artista de circ exalumne de la prestigiosa escola Centre National des Arts du Cirque, i membre del col·lectiu Cirque Anomalie. Convertit des de fa uns anys en director artístic de la companyia MPTA, del que és cofundador, segueix el camí d'altres artistes circenses que amb l'edat es veuen obligats a dedicar-se a tasques menys

because he has created a new style of documentary called ethnofiction with them that mixes documentary and fiction from an anthropological point of view.

To understand MPTA's process of creation, we must be aware that the company works with different components in each show and each includes the disciplines in which the artists are specialised. From the beginning of the creation of *A Bas Bruit*, they worked on all the different elements at the same time: light, sound, music and video, this time under the influence of Jean Rouch.

### **A puzzle with different pieces**

Afterwards, as if solving a puzzle, each artist and member of the company offers his or her ideas and suggestions about how to develop the show. In the end, as Mathurin told us, "the work ends up like a sweater made from many-coloured wool". It is a collective effort that aims to be "a kaleidoscopic portrait of the people in the street". According to the director, the show also deals with the idea of walking, whether on a wheel, like a hamster, or along a moving belt, telling us that "if you don't move, you'll be moved, and if you move, you'll stay in the same place".

Without intending to provoke the audience, Mathurin does seek to lower their defences so the show may be interpreted freely. "The images speak for themselves and I really don't like explaining them, because then they could lose their poetic mystery."

The show resulting from this collective process is just like Mathurin says: a puzzle with different acts, some images and no apparent structure, where moments with more acrobatic elements linked to the circus (hand-to-hand and a brief appearance by devil sticks) are combined with other, more theatrical scenes. The successive numbers, with no visible order or narrative thread connecting them, together with the use of lighting and video, creates a particular atmosphere but goes no farther than that. May we conclude that creating with different people that have brought different perspectives at different points in the process of creation

físiques com la direcció o l'assessorament a d'altres companyies. Feines completament necessàries en el circ, on predominen els artistes executants, però on sovint, sobretot en espectacles de petit format, es troba a faltar una millor direcció.

A *À bas bruit*, Maturin utilitza com a base l'obra del cineasta i antropòleg francès Jean Rouch, i sobretot un documental titulat "*Moi, un Noir*", que descriu la vida d'immigrants nigerians a la recerca de feina a la Costa d'Ivori. Rouch és conegut per la influència de les seves pel·lícules etnogràfiques, sobretot enregistrades a l'Àfrica i perquè amb elles va crear un nou estil de documental, anomenat etnoficció, en què barreja documental i ficció des del punt de vista de l'antropologia.

Per entendre el procés de creació de MPTA cal tenir en compte que la companyia treballa amb diferents components a cada espectacle, i cada obra inclourà les disciplines en què estan especialitzats aquests artistes. En el cas d' *À bas bruit*, des del principi de la seva creació van començar a treballar a la vegada en els diferents elements: llum, so, música i vídeo, en aquest cas com a influència de Jean Rouch.

### **Un puzzle amb diferents peces**

Després, com si d'un puzzle es tractés, cada artista i membre de la companyia va aportar les seves idees i propostes sobre com desenvolupar la peça. Al final, i segons va explicar Mathurin, "l'obra acaba sent com un jersei teixit amb llanes de diferents colors", és un procés col·lectiu que vol ser "un retrat caledoscòpic de la gent del carrer". Segons el seu director, la peça també té com a referent la idea de caminar, ja sigui en una roda gegant, com faria un hamster, o bé sobre una cinta transportadora, element que expressa que si "no et mous et mouen, i si et mous, et quedes al mateix lloc".

Sense voler provocar a l'espectador, Maturin vol destruir les seves defenses i deixar que interpreti lliurement la peça, "les imatges parlen i no m'agrada gaire explicar-les perquè llavors perdrien el seu misteri poètic".

promoted the collage-like feeling of the final result?

### **Compañía Fuerzabruta: *Wayra***

We were unable to speak with Diqui James, the director of the Argentine company Fuerzabruta's show, but we did talk with the executive producer and three of the artists starring in it at the Roundhouse in London (in this case, unrelated to the Mime Festival programme). The company consists of different teams that travel internationally to stage *Wayra* ("wind" in Quechua) simultaneously in different countries. Like Compagnie Non Nova, these are shows that were made a long time ago and have travelled to different capitals.

#### **Meaningless: a feast for the senses**

This is a show in which "there is no meaning or representation; nobody knows what the show means, because it has no meaning". This is what is written on Fuerzabruta's website, and the artists and producer confirm it. They receive no instructions from the director at all, nor are they required to master any circus discipline; they are merely asked to experience the show with honesty and as much energy as possible. Therefore, there is no idea or concept behind this series of visually and technically powerful images that come one after another, surprising and enveloping audiences all over: a feast for the senses using special effects, unexpected structures like swimming pools in the air, loud music, a powerful wind created with giant fans, etcetera.

In this case, the goal is for the audience to form part of the show, and for them to stay involved at all times and participate in the action. The company succeed in putting on a show that feels like a party where people can let loose, a catharsis inspired by Argentine carnivals.

This show was not created to be anything more than euphoria experienced to the maximum, with no messages or concepts. The director has not added any personal elements, which makes it easier to perform in different parts of the world with different teams. This process of

L'obra resultant d'aquest procés col·lectiu, és, ben bé com explica Maturin, un puzzle amb diferents peces i algunes imatges, sense estructura aparent, en què moments amb més aspectes acrobàtics i lligats al circ (mans a mans i una lleu aparició de pal xinès) es combinen amb d'altres escenes més teatrals. Aquesta successió sense un ordre visible ni fil conductor o narratiu, juntament amb l'ús de recursos com la il·luminació o el vídeo, crea un ambient particular però no va més enllà. Podem pensar que el fet de crear entre diferents persones, que han anat aportant diferents punts de vista en diferents moments del procés de creació, ha promogut aquesta sensació de collage del resultat final?

### **Compañía FuerzaBruta: *Wayra***

En el cas de la companyia argentina FuerzaBruta, no vam poder parlar amb el director de l'espectacle, Diqui James, sinó amb la productora executiva i tres dels artistes que el van protagonitzar al Roundhouse de Londres (en aquest cas, fora de la programació del Mime Festival). La companyia està formada per diferents equips itinerants a nivell internacional, que posen en escena "Wayra" (vent en quítxua) de forma simultània a diversos països. Com la Compagnie Non Nova, es tracta d'espectacles que fa temps que estan creats i que ja han viatjat a diferents capitals.

#### **Sense cap significat: festa per als sentits**

Ens trobem amb una obra en què "no existeix cap significat o representació; ningú sap el significat de l'obra, perquè no el té", segons ens explica la web de FuerzaBruta. Els artistes i la productora ho confirmen. No tenen indicacions del director en cap sentit, tampoc se'ls exigeix el domini de cap disciplina circense, només se'ls demana que visquin l'espectacle amb tota l'energia possible i amb honestedat. No hi ha, doncs, cap idea o concepte al darrera. Una sèrie d'escenes molt potents visual i tècnicament que es segueixen una darrera a l'altre i que sorprenen i envolten el públic per tot arreu. Una festa per a tots els sentits a través d'efectes especials, estructures sorprenents com unes

creation is different from that of the other shows mentioned here and is based on an honest focus on entertainment and business that we believe achieves the expected result in the end.

### **Without conclusions**

We have seen that a personal need to express oneself, a concept, and entertainment are all different reasons or starting points from which a contemporary artistic circus performance comes into being: without a text (though still with dramaturgy) and with a significant presence of the body and the handling of objects. However, our talks with the artists reveal that aside from the initial motivation, how the process of creation unfolds and the role that the artist wants it to play for the audience is equally important: if there is a unique personal view of how the show has to be, if different people with different views are involved, whether they want the audience to think or simply be entertained, etcetera.

All these aspects and more influence the type of show that emerges from the process in the end. It would be too ambitious to draw general conclusions from an analysis of the works mentioned here, but at the same time, do we not achieve a better understanding of what a work is like, how it is structured and how the audience experiences it, when we consider the motivation of the artists and the processes employed to create their shows?

piscines aèries, música a un volum elevat, un potent vent creat amb ventiladors gegants, etc.

En aquest cas l'objectiu és que el públic formi part de l'espectacle i s'hi entregui, i se l'implica en tots els moments, promovent la seva participació. Aconsegueixen que la sensació de l'espectacle sigui el d'una festa per passar-s'ho bé, una catarsi inspirada en els carnivals argentins.

Des de la seva creació no pretén ser més que una experiència eufòrica viscuda al màxim, sense missatges ni conceptes. El director ha creat sense aportar elements personals, fet que facilita la seva reproducció a diferents llocs del món per part de diferents equips. Es tracta d'un procés de creació diferent al dels altres espectacles citats, basat en un honest objectiu comercial i d'entreteniment que obté, al nostre entendre, el resultat final esperat.

### **Sense conclusions**

Hem vist que la necessitat personal d'expressar-se, un concepte o l'entreteniment són diferents motius o punts a partir dels quals neix una peça artística de circ contemporani: sense text (això no vol dir sense dramaturgia) i amb un important presència del cos i la manipulació d'objectes. Les converses amb els artistes evidencien però, que, a part de la motivació inicial, és igualment important com es desenvolupa el procés de creació i quin paper l'artista vol que jugui el públic: si hi ha una única visió personal de com ha de ser l'espectacle, si diferents persones amb diferents visions hi intervenen, si es vol que el públic pensi o s'entregui, etc.

Tots aquestes aspectes i d'altres influeixen perquè el resultat final sigui un espectacle i no un altre. Seria massa ambiciós extreure conclusions generalistes a partir de l'anàlisi de les peces citades, però a la vegada, no entenem millor com és una obra, la seva estructura i com la vivim com a públic si tenim en compte la motivació dels artistes i els processos de creació dels espectacles?

# The Body as Battlefield – (tentatively) connecting Artistic Research and Dramaturgy in Circus

BAUKE LIEVENS

*(Do excuse me for the autobiographic introduction)*

Since my encounter with the French circus company Maboul Distorsion in the heat of a southern French summer almost ten years ago, I have been somewhat addicted to circus. The tent, the caravans, the unity of the audience, the direct communication! Still, familiarisation has been setting in these last few years. The reason for this? Many circus makers seldom question their practice and, without any irony, tend to mistake their lifestyle and undoubtedly exceptional métier for artistic skill and for art tout court. And this without any irony. The outcome: an acute shortage of enthralling performances. As for myself: Cie Maboul Distorsion has since made way for a dramaturgic practice that focuses on methods for artistic research in the creation of contemporary circus performances.

Should you question the relevance of this autobiographical introduction and fretfully feel that this discourse belongs in the column page of your local paper, here are two motivations for you. One. My personal balancing between the definition of circus as a uniting ritual in which art and life are one, and the questions I put to the medium with regard to research that is based on a personal and artistic necessity as a precondition for circus to be even considered a form of art, reflects the balancing of circus itself: somewhere between sports, ritual and performing arts.

# Het lichaam als slagveld: een (voorzichtig) verbinden van artistiek onderzoek en dramaturgie in circus

BAUKE LIEVENS

*(vergeeft u mij deze autobiografische inleiding)*

Sinds een ontmoeting met het Franse circusgezelschap Cie Maboul Distortion in de hitte van een Zuid-Franse zomer, nu bijna tien jaar geleden, ben ik enigszins verslaafd aan circus. Die tent, die woonwagens, dat één-zijn van het publiek, die onmiddellijke communicatie! Toch treden er bij mij de laatste jaren steeds vaker gewenningsverschijnselen op. De oorzaak? Veel circusmensen bevragen zelden hun praktijk en hebben de neiging om hun levensstijl en hun weliswaar uitzonderlijke ambachtelijke kunnen zonder ironie te verwarren met kunstenaarschap en met kunst *tout court*. En dat zonder ironie. Het gevolg: een nijpend tekort aan boeiende circusvoorstellingen. Wat mij betreft: Cie Maboul Distortion heeft ondertussen plaatsgemaakt voor een dramaturgische praktijk die focust op methodes voor artistiek onderzoek in de creatie van hedendaagse circusvoorstellingen.

Mocht u zich vragen stellen bij de relevantie van deze autobiografische introductie en geïrriteerd bedenkt dat dit schrijven thuishoort in de columnsectie van uw plaatselijke krant (en zelfs dan nog), ik geef u twee redenen. Eén. Mijn persoonlijke balanceren tussen de definitie van circus als een verbindend ritueel waarin kunst en leven één zijn en de vragen die ik stel aan het medium wat betreft onderzoek dat vertrekt

UNPACK  
THE  
ARTS

And two. My dramaturgic practice corroborates a causal connection between the methods employed in the creation of contemporary circus performances and the final dramaturgy of the very same performances. This text is a first, tentative attempt at naming that connection. In casu: *A Bas Bruit* by Cie MPTA (Mathurin Bolze) and *Vortex* by Cie Non Nova (Phia Ménard), both of which performed at the London International Mime Festival in January 2014.

### **Vortex: humankind in the eye of the storm**

*Vortex* is the fight of one performer with nine fans, miles of plastic sheet, and wind, plenty of wind. Like any battle, *Vortex*, too, is an attempt at transformation. It is a pursuit of stripping the countless layers of skin (social, cultural and sexual) in hopes of arriving at the naked truth of the individual. However, as every attempt at taming the wind is without avail, this fight, too, is lost in advance. For what is left when the battle with all that surrounds us is fought? When are we 'truly' ourselves, except when we are born and when we die? And what is the meaning of such a wrestle with an ephemeral and unsettled element that forces us to let things go instead of trying to control them? It is the wind that makes us adapt ourselves to its course, not the other way around. This futility, however, does not prevent us from joining battle over and over again, hoping for a change, a catharsis or a rebirth.

Phia Ménard, who juggled for many years with Jérôme Thomas' company, now targets the wind as object to be manipulated and conquered in *Vortex*. Still, while she engages in combat with this 'unjugglable' element, the wind juggles her just as much. Accordingly, the arena in *Vortex* is circular, as is the residue of the spiralling trajectory of a cyclone<sup>1</sup>. In this intangible, natural décor, Phia Ménard finds herself positioned amid plenty of plastic, the

1 A vortex is a spinning motion in a vertical flow. A vortex may be two- or three- dimensional. Two-dimensional vortices are stable, whereas three-dimensional vortices are unstable. Vortices may occur as mono-, bi- or tripolar spin axes. Found at the *Dutch Aviation Encyclopedia*, reference: <http://www.nederlandseluchtvaart.nl/forums/f28-nederlandse-luchtvaart-encyclopedie-dutch-aviation-encyclopedia/vortex-4639/>.

vanuit een persoonlijke en artistieke noodzaak als voorwaarde om mogelijks over circus als kunstvorm te kunnen spreken, reflecteert het balanceren van het circus zelf: ergens tussen sport, ritueel en podiumkunst.

En twee. Mijn dramaturgische praktijk bevestigt het vermoeden naar een causaal verband tussen de methodes die worden toegepast in de creatie van hedendaagse circusvoorstellingen en de uiteindelijke dramaturgie van diezelfde voorstellingen. Deze tekst is een eerste, voorzichtige, aanzet tot het benoemen van dat verband. In casu: *A bas bruit* van Cie MPTA (Mathurin Bolze) en *Vortex* van Cie Non Nova (Phia Ménard) die beide te zien waren tijdens het Londen Mime Festival, januari 2014.

### **Vortex: de mens in het oog van de storm**

*Vortex* is een gevecht voor één performer, negen ventilatoren, meters plasticfolie en wind, veel wind. Net zoals elke strijd is ook *Vortex* een poging tot transformatie, een streven om de ontelbare lagen (sociale, culturele en seksuele) huid af te strippen in de hoop tot de naakte essentie van het individu te komen. Maar net zoals elke poging om de wind te temmen tevergeefs is, is ook dit gevecht op voorhand verloren. Want wat blijft er over eens het gevecht met alles wat ons omgeeft gestreden is? Wanneer zijn we 'echt' onszelf, behalve wanneer we geboren worden en wanneer we sterven? En wat betekent die worsteling met een efemeer en onstabiel element dat ons verplicht om de dingen los te laten in plaats van diezelfde dingen te willen controleren? Het is de wind die ons dwingt om ons aan te passen aan haar traject, en niet omgekeerd. Die vergeefsheid belet ons echter niet om telkens opnieuw de strijd aan te binden in de hoop op een verandering, een catharsis of een hergeboorte.

Phia Ménard, die jarenlang jongleerde in het gezelschap van Jérôme Thomas, maakt in *Vortex* de wind tot het te manipuleren en overwinnen object van haar kunnen. Echter, terwijl zij de strijd aanbindt met dit

pre-eminent symbol of overconsumption, pollution and other excrescences of our human efforts to control the elements that surround us.

The audience, seated in a circle around the small arena of *Vortex*, witnesses a struggle that questions the nature and limits of our identity and of the outlines we use to think about ourselves. Cie Non Nova achieves this in a way worthy of its name: “Non nova, sed nove” or “not new things, but in a new way”.

### **“Non nova, sed nove”**

This ‘new way’ of working is of particular importance in choosing the object and the relationship with it, and the way this relation evokes a specific presence of the body. Artistic research, in other words. Specifically, research that originates from a reflection on the essence of circus: the relationship with the object and the corresponding technical expertise. Still, the significance of the body on the stage is not rooted in spectacle, nor in the display of seemingly infeasible physical abilities. Owing to the object (the wind) becoming the central signifier in *Vortex*, the performance tells the tale of the influence this object has on the body. In other words: the meaning is expressed in the way the intangible wind manipulates the plastic and how the very same wind transforms the juggler’s body. The potential meaning is thus based on the specific nature of the circus discipline itself, which in turn influences the dramaturgical structure of the performance. And it influences the body, that appears as the field for this battle. In this way, the object and the body accept a dialectical relationship and the body is turned into an object as well. This approach is also to be recognised in the work of other contemporary circus companies such as Cirque Ici / Johann Le Guillerm and Compagnie Un Loup pour l’Homme.

### **The tragedy of circus and the relationship with the object**

For the past few years, Phia Ménard has been conducting research on I.C.E., or *Injonglabilité Complémentaire des Eléments*

‘onjongleerbaar’ element, manipuleert de wind haar evenzeer. De arena van *Vortex* is dan ook cirkelvormig, net als het residu van het spiraalvormige traject van een wervelstorm.<sup>1</sup> In dit onzichtbare, natuurlijke decor plaatst Phia Ménard zichzelf te midden van veel plastic, hét symbool bij uitstek van overconsumptie, vervuiling en andere uitwassen van onze menselijke pogingen om de elementen die ons omgeven te controleren.

Het publiek, gezeten in een cirkel rond de kleine piste van *Vortex*, is getuige van een strijd die de vraag stelt naar de aard en de grenzen van onze identiteit en van de concepten die we hanteren om over onszelf na te denken. Cie Non Nova doet dit op een manier die haar naam waardig is: “Non nova, sed nove” oftewel “niet met nieuwe dingen, maar op een nieuwe manier.”

### **“Non nova, sed nove”**

Die ‘nieuwe manier’ van werken situeert zich vooral in de keuze voor en de verhouding tot het object, en in hoe die relatie het lichaam een specifieke aanwezigheid geeft. Artistiek onderzoek, dus. Meer in het bijzonder een onderzoek dat start vanuit een reflectie op wat de kern uitmaakt van het circus: de relatie tot het object en de bijhorende technische expertise. Toch is de betekenis van het lichaam op scène niet geworteld in spektakel, noch in het tentoonspreiden van een quasi-onmogelijk fysiek kunnen. Doordat het object (de wind) de centrale betekenisdrager wordt in *Vortex*, is de voorstelling het relaas van de invloed van dit object op het lichaam. Anders gezegd: de kern van de betekenis wordt uitgedrukt in hoe de onzichtbare wind de plastic zakken manipuleert en hoe diezelfde wind het lichaam van de jongleur transformeert. De mogelijkheid tot betekenisvorming is dus gefundeerd in de specifieke aard van de circusdiscipline zelf, wat op zijn beurt invloed heeft op de dramaturgische

<sup>1</sup> Een vortex (lucht)wervel is een draaiende beweging in een fluïdum. Een vortex kan twee- of driedimensionaal zijn. Tweedimensionale zijn stabiel, terwijl driedimensionale vortexen instabiel zijn. Vortexen kunnen voorkomen als een mono-, bi- of tripolaire wervel. Gevonden in de *Nederlandse Luchtvaart Encyclopedie*, te raadplegen op: <http://www.nederlandseluchtvaart.nl/forums/f28-nederlandse-luchtvaart-encyclopedie-dutch-aviation-encyclopedia/vortex-4639/>.





Company Non Nova – Vortex © Jean-luc Beaujault

(Complementary Unjugglability of the Elements). This research has echoed in a cycle of performances. In *PPP. (Position Parallèle au Plancher, 2006)* and *Black Monodie (2010)*, Ménard juggled ice. In *L'après-midi d'un Foehn (Version 1, 2008)*, *Vortex (2011)* and *L'après-midi d'un Foehn (Version 2, 2011)* she experiments with wind, how it can be manipulated while at the same time the body is subject to the object of manipulation. At present, Ménard prepares *Belle d'Hier* (creation 2015), the fifth component in the cycle, in which the research is continued with water and vapour as 'unjugglable' elements.

Ice and wind are in fact everything classical juggling balls and clubs are not: they are neither functional, nor predictable elements. While in traditional juggling the juggler determines the movements of the object, here it is the object juggled with that determines the trajectory. While circus traditionally stands for taming the forces of nature, in this circus a human is placed in the midst of an unstable, not entirely controllable and sometimes even dangerous force. Or, in Phia Ménard's words: "I am matter

structuur van de voorstelling. En op het lichaam, dat verschijnt als het slagveld van die strijd. Op die manier komen het object en het lichaam in een dialectische relatie tot elkaar te staan en wordt het lichaam eveneens tot object gemaakt. Deze aanpak is ook te bespeuren in het werk van andere hedendaagse circusgezelschappen, zoals dat van Yohann le Guillerm/ Cirque ici en Cie un loup pour l'homme.

### De tragiek van het circus en de relatie tot het object

Phia Ménard voert sinds een aantal jaren onderzoek naar ICE, oftewel de *Injonglabilité Complémentaire des Eléments*. Dit onderzoek vond z'n residu in een cyclus van voorstellingen. In *PPP. (Position Parallèle au Plancher, 2006)* en *Black Monodie (2010)*, jongleert Ménard met ijs. In *L'après-midi d'un foehn (Version 1, 2008)*, *Vortex (2011)* en *L'après-midi d'un foehn (Version 2, 2011)* experimenteert ze hoe wind kan gemanipuleerd worden terwijl het lichaam tegelijk onderhevig is aan het object van manipulatie. Momenteel bereidt Ménard *Belle d'hier* (creatie 2015) voor, het vijfde luik van deze cyclus, waarin het onderzoek wordt verdergezet met water en stoom als 'onjongleerbare' elementen.

Ijs en wind zijn in feite alles wat klassieke jongleerballen of –kegels niet zijn: het zijn geen functionele, noch voorspelbare elementen. Daar waar in het traditionele jongleren de jongleur de bewegingen bepaalt van het object, bepaalt hier hetgeen waarmee 'gejongleerd' wordt het traject. Daar waar circus traditioneel staat voor het temmen van de natuurkrachten, wordt hier een mens te midden van een onstabiele, niet volledig controleerbare en soms zelfs gevaarlijke kracht geplaatst. Of, in de woorden van Phia Ménard: "I am matter which is transformed by the eroding properties of air."<sup>2</sup>

Het resultaat is de blootlegging van de tragische strijd die het circus in wezen is: hoe

<sup>2</sup> Phia Ménard in gesprek met Anne Quentin in het presentatiedossier van *Vortex*, beschikbaar op [www.cienonnova.com](http://www.cienonnova.com).

which is transformed by the eroding properties of air."<sup>2</sup>

The result is the exposure of the tragic struggle that is circus in its essence: no matter how valiantly one tries to control his/her surroundings or objects (the body of the flyer, the trapeze, juggling balls, the Chinese pole or Bengal tiger), it is to no avail. Just as in Johann Le Guillerm's work, another circus maker of consequence, this type of research stages an erring human being, who in spite of his futile efforts, does not surrender and exhibits his human capacities *en cours de route*. This is the ritual heart of circus that reminds us of the Greek tragic hero whom the audience knows in advance will perish. Just as inside the Greek amphitheatre or Le Guillerm's arena, the naked, stumbling human in the arena of *Vortex* makes progress only by running in circles. In this way, a specific method of artistic research (to consider the angle of the object that is to be manipulated) translates into the performance's dramaturgy: the body becomes the central character in the communication of meaning, and the dramaturgical structure of the performance is tragic.

### S.O.S. dramaturgy

Dramaturgy is a particularly thorny subject in circus. Whereas dramaturgy in traditional circus consists of a series of loose acts, each with their own tension and held together by the ringmaster or a unity of style at best, the *nouveau cirque* usually errs in using an old-fashioned interpretation of narrative dramaturgy that obediently moves from A to B. The result of the latter is threefold. One. As regards dramaturgy, such a performance separates into narrative/dancing fragments on the one hand and circus acts on the other, because at the highlight of an act all communication that does not denote the physical danger disappears. Two. The object (trapeze, juggling balls, silk) is supposed to represent something else in a hardly convincing way. Picture for a random example cringe-

2 Phia Ménard in conversation with Anne Quentin in the presentation document for *Vortex*, available at [www.cienonnova.com](http://www.cienonnova.com).

hard de mens ook probeert zijn/haar omgeving of object (het lichaam van de voltigeur, de trapeze, jongleerballen, de Chinese mast of een Bengaalse tijger) te controleren, het is een vergeefse strijd. Net zoals in het werk van Yohann le Guillerm, die andere circusgrootheid, voert dit soort van onderzoek een falende mens ten tonele, die desondanks zijn vergeefse pogingen niet opgeeft en ons *en cours de route* zijn menselijke capaciteiten toont. Dit is de rituele kern van circus, die ons herinnert aan de held uit de Griekse tragedie waarvan het publiek op voorhand wist dat hij zou komen te sterven. En net zoals in het Griekse amfitheater of zoals in de piste van le Guillerm komt de naakte, struikelende mens in de arena van *Vortex* enkel vooruit door cirkels te maken. Op die manier begrepen vertaalt een specifieke methode van artistiek onderzoek (namelijk het denken vanuit het te manipuleren object zelf) zich in de dramaturgie van de voorstelling: het lichaam wordt het centrale teken in de communicatie van betekenis en de dramaturgische structuur van de voorstelling is die van een tragedie.

### S.O.S. dramaturgie

Dramaturgie is een bijzonder heikel punt in het circus. Daar waar de dramaturgie van het traditionele circus bestaat uit een aaneenschakeling van losse nummers, met elk hun kleine spanningsboogje en bijeengehouden door de spreekstalmeester of in het beste geval door een eenheid in stijl, bezondigt het *nouveau cirque* zich meestal aan een ouderwetse interpretatie van narratieve dramaturgie die zich braaf van a naar b beweegt. Het resultaat van deze laatste aanpak is driedelig. Op dramaturgisch vlak valt een dergelijke voorstelling ofwel uiteen in verhalende/dansante fragmenten enerzijds en circusnummers anderzijds, want op het hoogtepunt van elke act verdwijnt elke communicatie van een andere betekenis dan het fysieke gevaar zelf. Ofwel wordt het object (trapeze, jongleerballen, doek) op een weinig geloofwaardige manier geacht de representatie te zijn van iets anders. Denk hierbij aan tenenkrullende circusnummers waarin de Chinese mast de mast van een schip voorstelt, om maar iets te zeggen. Ten slotte worden de

worthy circus acts in which the Chinese pole symbolises a ship's mast. Three. Bodies in this type of circus dramaturgy are turned into psychologically shallow characters, as if they were a kind of puppets that perform tricks without any apparent motive, in a borrowed narrative that seems forced upon them.

Indeed, dramaturgy is one of the biggest challenges in the versatile practice that tends to call itself contemporary circus. It is a challenge that is, in my opinion, inextricably bound up with reflection on circus as a medium and with the specific principles that are intrinsic to that medium. In the case of *Vortex*, the empirical and reflective roots of artistic research into the nature of the object and discipline (juggling the wind) ensure that the form (how?) and content (what?) coincide in a dramaturgy that functions as a structuring and organising principle. After all, the struggle with the wind appears both as a circus discipline or technique and as the signifier that communicates meaningful content to the audience. The result is not that Phia Ménard's body ends up being a fictitious character in a borrowed dramaturgy, but that the performance's essence is enclosed in the struggle of her body with the object. The circus discipline and content of the performance are thus managed out of the very same idea. One could even argue that the meaning follows from the circus discipline. In this dramaturgy, the body is led into a confrontation with a real natural force and therefore, in the present moment. And that proves to be the particular strength in circus, which, regrettably, all too often drowns in a dressing of implausible, theatrical fiction.

### **On necessity**

Apart from its roots in the specific nature of the object and discipline of circus, the artistic research process in *Vortex* seems to originate primarily from a personal necessity that needs to be addressed. The onset for this creation is, as Phia Ménard describes, this issue: in what way can she put the relation between who she is and the abstract concept of who she is, on the stage? Central to this issue is the reflection

circuslichamen in deze dramaturgische aanpak steeds tot vlakke en psychologisch ondiepe personages gemaakt, een soort poppetjes die zonder duidelijke beweegredenen *truukjes* uitvoeren in een geleend verhaal dat hen lijkt opgelegd.

Dramaturgie is dus wel degelijk één van de grootste uitdagingen voor de veelzijdige praktijk die zich het hedendaagse circus placht te noemen. Het is een uitdaging die naar mijn mening onlosmakelijk verbonden is met een reflectie over het circus als medium en over de specifieke wetmatigheden die eigen zijn aan dat medium. In het geval van *Vortex* zorgen de empirische en reflectieve worteling van het artistieke onderzoek in de aard van het object en de discipline (het jongleren met wind) er voor dat vorm (hoe?) en inhoud (wat?) samenvallen in een dramaturgie die werkt als structurerend, ordenend principe. Immers, de strijd met de wind verschijnt als circusdiscipline of techniek en is tegelijk de drager van de betekenis die wordt gecommuniceerd naar een publiek. Het resultaat is dat het lichaam van Phia Ménard niet tot een fictief personage gemaakt wordt in een geleende dramaturgie, maar dat de betekenis van de voorstelling net vervat zit in de strijd van datzelfde lichaam met het object. Circusdiscipline en inhoud van de voorstelling worden dus gehanteerd van hetzelfde idee. Men zou zelfs kunnen stellen dat de betekenis voortvloeit uit de circusdiscipline. In deze dramaturgie verschijnt het lichaam in een confrontatie met een reële natuurkracht en dus in het hier en nu. Dat is ook de specifieke kracht van circus, die jammer genoeg al te vaak verloren gaat onder een sausje van ongeloofwaardige, dramatische fictie.

### **Over noodzakelijkheid**

Naast de verankering van het artistieke onderzoek in de specifieke aard van het circusobject en de -discipline, lijkt het onderzoeksproces van *Vortex* in de eerste plaats te ontspringen aan een persoonlijke noodzaak die wil gecommuniceerd worden. Phia Ménard benoemt als vertrekpunt voor deze creatie de vraag naar hoe ze de relatie tussen wie ze is en het denkbeeldige concept

on her body being the *objet de préférence*, and her search for another object, one that can cause her body to transform. While talking about the relation between body and object, one automatically faces the subject of the eye of the Other. After all, it is the same eye that turns the body into an object, through that act of looking itself. The performance's content deals with the process of shaping the performer's corporeality into an object by means of manipulating wind, as well as through the eye of the Other. That is the precise reason why the choice for a live medium with *spectators* (literally those who watch) and the emphasis on corporeality are a necessity.

### **A Bas Bruit: the walking human being**

Whereas *Vortex* forms a very relevant part of the uniting and continuous lines of research that run through Phia Ménard's oeuvre, that is not the case with *A Bas Bruit* (2012) by Cie MPTA (Les mains, les pieds et la tête aussi). *A Bas Bruit* is described as "how certain epidemics spread, well before they have a name and a face".<sup>3</sup> *A Bas Bruit* does this with the rhythm of an initial, collective movement: walking quietly. Mathurin Bolze associates this growing rhythm with the work of the French nouvelle vague anthropologist Jean Rouch, who conducted research on the structure and origin of processes of collective movements.

In *A Bas Bruit*, the walking human being is put on the stage in a hamster wheel, on an electric treadmill, and in projected film. In its greatest moments, the rhythmical footsteps remind us of the fact that one single human being is the beginning of a collective endeavour, both literally and figuratively. Or as anthropology once taught us: the intimately personal lies within the collective, and vice versa. In other words: *no big deal*.

### **Old glue**

On the frontal stage there are two men and a woman whose walking is sprinkled with a dance every now and again, a male voice reading aloud fragments of text by Jean Rouch

van wie ze is, op een scène kan zetten. Centraal hierbij is haar reflectie dat het lichaam het *objet de préférence* is, en dat haar zoektocht er één is naar een ander object dat het lichaam kan doen transformeren. Tegelijk komt men, wanneer men spreekt over de relatie tussen lichaam en object, automatisch terecht bij de blik van de Ander. Het is immers ook die blik die het lichaam tot object maakt, en dat doorheen het kijken zelf. Net omdat de voorstelling inhoudelijk handelt over het proces waarin de lichamelijke van de performer wordt vormgegeven tot een object door de manipulatie van de wind, maar ook doorheen de blik van de ander, is de keuze voor een live medium met toe-schouwers (letterlijk 'zij die kijken') én met de nadruk op lichamelijke m.a.w. noodzakelijk.

### **A bas bruit: de mens al wandelend**

Daar waar *Vortex* zich op een bijzonder relevante manier laat inschrijven in de verbindende en continue onderzoeklijnen die het oeuvre van Phia Ménard doorkruisen, is dat helaas niet het geval met *A bas bruit* (2012) van Cie MPTA (Les Mains, les Pieds et la Tête aussi). *A bas bruit* presenteert zichzelf als een voorstelling "die zich verspreidt als een besmetting voordat het virus een naam heeft gekregen".<sup>3</sup> *A bas bruit* doet dat met de cadans van een beginnende collectieve beweging: stiltejes wandelend. Mathurin Bolze verbindt dit kiemende ritme aan het werk van de Franse nouvelle vague antropoloog Jean Rouch, die onderzoek deed naar de structuur en het ontstaan van collectieve werkprocessen.

In *A bas bruit* wordt de wandelende mens ten tonele gevoerd, in een draaiend rad, op een elektrische loopband en in een geprojecteerde film. Op de beste momenten herinneren de ritmische voetstappen ons aan het feit dat één wandelende mens het begin is van een collectieve beweging, en dat zowel letterlijk als figuurlijk. Of zoals de antropologie ons leerde: het intiem persoonlijke ligt verscholen in het collectieve, en omgekeerd. *No big deal*, dus.

<sup>3</sup> See website Cie MPTA, available at: [www.compagnie-mpta.com](http://www.compagnie-mpta.com).

<sup>3</sup> Zie website Cie MPTA, te raadplegen op: [www.compagnie-mpta.com](http://www.compagnie-mpta.com).

(on walking, naturally), a classical 'clown falls down a flight of stairs' act, or a hand-to-hand duo. It all seems glued together with a type of glue long past its expiry date, and so it falls to pieces. The only constant is the walking and the visual use of space, which is designed around two mobile wooden platforms, one with the turning hamster wheel and the Chinese pole, the other with the treadmill and a wooden roller blind.

Both the scenic space and the dramaturgical structure of *A Bas Bruit* are at the same time fragmented and designed (very) narratively. In a conversation with Mathurin Bolze afterwards, he describes *A Bas Bruit* as an example of 'circus dramaturgy': an empirical way of working, in which the performance is "written in a physical way". He describes his directorial duty as "the spatial organisation of three persons and their corresponding personalities on the scene". There is no mention at all of an intentional embedding of research in the particularity of some circus discipline or other, quite the contrary.

### Artistic research

*A Bas Bruit* is the result of a process in which a (rather vague) idea is pictured, to then be expressed through a seemingly random choice of circus techniques. Or it is the result of a procedure in which the perceptions and observations that were learned during rehearsals, are 'assembled', in hopes that the audience will not be looking for a straightforward idea behind it and will allow itself to drift away on empirical impressions. During the same conversation, Mathurin Bolze indicated that the second option would apply: "circus is 'real' in the sense that the dramaturgy is a collection of perceptions and experiences that can be remembered by the audience afterwards. It is not the expression of an idea. This way, it is more concrete and there are more layers for interpretation than in theatre." Yet, what is performed on the stage is the theatrical dramaturgy of a collage, a montage technique not seldom venerated in nouveau cirque in the 1980s and 90s as an innovative and post-dramatic strategy. The part that

### Oude lijm

Op de frontale scène staan twee mannen en een vrouw, wiens wandelen af en toe doorspekt wordt met een dansje, een mannenstem die tekstfragmenten van Jean Rouch voorleest (over wandelen uiteraard), een klassiek 'clown valt van de trap'-nummer of een hand-op-hand duet. Het geheel lijkt aan elkaar geplakt met een soort lijm waarvan de houdbaarheidsdatum reeds lang verstreken is en valt dan ook in brokken uit elkaar. De enige constanten zijn het wandelen en het plastische ruimtegebruik, vormgegeven in twee mobiele houten platforms met respectievelijk het draaiende rad en de Chinese mast, de loopband en een houten rolgordijn.

Zowel de scenische ruimte als de dramaturgische structuur van *A bas bruit* zijn tegelijk fragmentarisch en (zeer) narratief vormgegeven. In een nagesprek noemt Mathurin Bolze *A bas bruit* een voorbeeld van 'circusdramaturgie': een empirische manier van werken waarin de voorstelling op een "fysieke manier wordt geschreven". Hij omschrijft zijn taak als regisseur als "de ruimtelijke organisatie van de drie mensen en hun bijhorende persoonlijkheden op scène". Nergens is er sprake van een bewuste verankering van het onderzoek in de specificiteit van deze of gene circusdiscipline, integendeel.

### Artistiek onderzoek

*A bas bruit* is het resultaat van een manier van werken die ofwel een (bijzonder vaag) idee vooropstelt en dan allerhande, schijnbaar willekeurige, circustechnieken kiest om dat idee uit te drukken ofwel van een procedé waarin de percepties en ervaringen die worden opgedaan in het repetitieproces aan elkaar worden 'gemonteerd', in de hoop dat de toeschouwer niet op zoek zal gaan naar een duidelijk idee, maar zich laat overspoelen door dezelfde empirische indrukken. Mathurin Bolze geeft in hetzelfde nagesprek aan dat het eerder om de tweede optie gaat: "circus is 'echt' in de zin dat de dramaturgie een verzameling van percepties en ervaringen is die de toeschouwer zich achteraf kan herinneren. Het is niet de uitdrukking van een idee. In die zin is het

particularly fails in this attempt at 'realness' is that the characters are in fact cardboard blueprints. The female character for example, is typecasted in every cliché available on femininity: she balances between the caring mother figure and femme fatale with her jacket carelessly draped on her back, complete with tango dress and high-heeled dancing shoes.

The body is not explored or used as an explicit carrier of meaning, neither in relation to an object, nor in relation to the other bodies on the scene. This is not contemporary circus, this is old-fashioned theatre in which the lines are simply swapped for (walking) circus bodies. This is confirmed by Mathurin Bolze's statement that "*circus enables us to embody metaphors such as 'be upset about something' or 'put your life in someone's hands', and make them 'real'*" Circus cannot conform to the representation of something else, particularly because the relationship to an object and the métier that is intrinsic to most circus disciplines make the body into a presence that will not stand for an illustration of something else. Should contemporary circus wish to keep growing, I think it is time for artists to employ artistic research methods that are rooted in the specific nature of the medium itself. Or, as Phia Ménard has understood well: in relation to the object, the métier and corporeality in the present moment.

*concreter en zijn er meer interpretatielagen dan in het theater."* Echter, wat verschijnt op de scène van *A bas bruit* is een theatrale dramaturgie van de collage, een montage-techniek waar het *nouveau cirque* in de jaren '80 en '90 niet zelden mee dweept als een vernieuwende en post-dramatische strategie. Wat vooral niet werkt aan deze poging tot 'echtheid' is het feit dat de personages bordkartonnen schetsen zijn. Zo is het vrouwelijke personage bijvoorbeeld getypecast in alle mogelijke clichés van vrouwelijkheid, balancerend tussen zorgende moederfiguur en *femme fatale* met het jasje nonchalant over de rug gedrapeerd, inclusief tango kleedje en dansschoenen met hak.

Nergens wordt het lichaam onderzocht of ingezet als specifieke drager van betekenis, noch in de relatie tot een object noch in de relatie met de andere lichamen op scène. Dit is geen hedendaags circus, dit is ouderwets theater waarin de tekst simpelweg vervangen werd door (wandelende) circuslichamen. Getuige hiervan de woorden van Mathurin Bolze wanneer hij zegt dat "*circus ons toelaat om metaforen zoals 'ergens van ondersteboven zijn' of 'je leven in iemands handen leggen' te belichamen en ze op die manier 'echt' te maken*". Circus past niet in het keurslijf van de representatie van iets anders, net omdat de relatie tot een object en het ambachtelijke kunnen dat inherent is aan de meeste circusdisciplines het lichaam een aanwezigheid verlenen in het hier en nu die zich niet laat inzetten als symbool voor iets anders. Wil het hedendaagse circus dus verder groeien, dan is het tijd, denk ik, dat artiesten artistieke onderzoeksmethodes hanteren die zijn verankerd in de specifieke aard van het medium circus zelf. Of zoals Phia Ménard goed gezien heeft: in de relatie tot het object, het ambacht en in een lichamelijke in het hier en nu.

# The Circus of Tomorrow Disregards the Future

JOOST GOUTZIERS

*They work their fingers to the bone, artists in contemporary circus. To create, to develop and to renew are the buzzwords. They are, however, swayed by the issues of the day. There is no database of performances and not much that adds to the cultural heritage. Hardly any performance is reprised. Those are new grounds yet to be opened up.*

Mathurin Bolze is artistic director of Compagnie MPTA. He makes circus with his hands, feet and head, is how he describes his work. At once this accounts for the company's full name: Les mains, les pieds et la tête aussi.

In the associative, fragmented performance *A Bas Bruit* he combines acrobatics with dance, music, design and technique in an intelligent train of scenes about the rambling, running and seeking man. As the performance unfolds, projections become more essential.

The performance is not a very transparent one. For the maker, it is sure to form a complete whole, but the spectator is left with unanswered questions. Those who wish to see this beautifully designed performance again will need to revisit the theatre. There are no impending plans to make recordings.

Mathurin Bolze is a French circus maker and much applauded innovator. His company is already credited with five performances, among which is the well-received *Du Goudron et des Plumes*.

He has developed an innovative oeuvre, which would make one expect that he would want to have his work recorded. Still, that is not the case.

# Circus van morgen vergeet de toekomst

JOOST GOUTZIERS

*Ze werken zich een slag in de rondte, de artiesten van het eigentijds circus. Creëren, ontwikkelen en vernieuwen zijn de toverwoorden, maar de waan van de dag regeert. Een databank met voorstellingen ontbreekt en het cultureel erfgoed wordt weinig gevoed. Reprises van voorstellingen zijn er nauwelijks. Daar valt nog een wereld te winnen.*

Mathurin Bolze is artistiek leider van Compagnie MPTA. Hij maakt circus met handen, voeten en het hoofd, zo omschrijft hij zijn werk. Dat verklaart meteen de naam van zijn gezelschap: les Mains, les Pieds et la Tete Aussi.

In de associatieve, fragmentarische voorstelling 'A bas bruit' combineert hij acrobatiek met dans, muziek, vormgeving en techniek, in een intelligente aaneenschakeling van scènes over de wandelende, rennende en zoekende mens. Gaandeweg krijgen projecties een grotere rol.

Het is een weinig transparante voorstelling. Voor de maker zal de puzzel kloppen, maar hij laat zijn toeschouwer met vragen achter. Wie deze mooi vormgegeven voorstelling nog eens wil zien, moet terug naar het theater. Een registratie ligt niet in het verschiet.

Mathurin Bolze is een Franse circusmaker en een bejubeld vernieuwer. Met zijn gezelschap heeft hij inmiddels vijf voorstellingen op zijn naam staan, waaronder het uitstekend ontvangen 'Du Gudron en Les Plumes'.

Hij werkt aan een innovatief oeuvre en dan zou je verwachten dat hij het belangrijk vindt dat

UNPACK  
THE  
ARTS

Mathurin Bolze: "There are no recordings of my first performances left. I don't like those and trailers are even worse. They show only the highlights, without any nuance. My performances need to be witnessed and experienced. You have to feel the spectators next to you on the stand. If recording my performance proved inevitable, I'd prefer photographs. Such isolated images can convey the atmosphere rather well. Or film images of visitors describing my performance several years later; I think those can be beautiful recordings."

Mathurin Bolze is an artist and has great confidence in a moment's magic. From his point of view, that is hardly surprising.

Every move, every manipulation, every sound is well-considered. His performance is one to experience. A recording is a poor substitute for the original, bereft of character or enchantment. It is no more than an uninspired impression beyond the maker's reach.

He draws his inspiration from art by others. He is a ready spectator in performances by colleagues. There, he absorbs impressions with the eyes of a professional, and 90 minutes of watching equals 90 minutes of working. Anthropologist Jean Rouch's films are another source of inspiration. In the case of *A Bas Bruit*, it is the film *Jaguar*, in which three fortune seekers emigrate from Niger to Ghana.

Dance, theatre and music are stimuli, too, which becomes clear by the references in his performance. Still, how will Bolze inspire new generations of circus makers? Through personal connections? That is possible, yes. But recordings of his work would be a longer lasting and more tangible contribution.

### **Booming development**

Contemporary circus is a relatively new form of art, and if its development keeps booming plenty of artistic companies will surface and be part of the cultural heritage next to the polished Cirque du Soleil. Their repertoire makes useful

zijn werk wordt vastgelegd. De werkelijkheid is anders.

Mathurin Bolze: "Van mijn eerste voorstellingen zijn geen opnamen bewaard gebleven. Daar houd ik niet van en trailers vind ik helemaal verschrikkelijk. Je ziet dan de hoogtepunten, niet de nuance. Mijn voorstellingen moet je meemaken, zelf ervaren. De toeschouwers naast je op de tribune, die moet je voelen. Als mijn voorstelling dan toch moet worden geregistreerd, dan heb ik een voorkeur voor foto's. Die geïsoleerde beelden geven de sfeer beter weer. Of filmbeelden van bezoekers die mijn voorstelling zoveel jaren later gaan beschrijven, dat vind ik ook een mooie registratie."

Mathurin Bolze is kunstenaar en hij zweert bij de magie van het moment. Dat is vanuit zijn perspectief een begrijpelijke keuze. Over elke beweging, elke manipulatie, elk geluid is nagedacht. Zijn voorstelling, daar moet je bij zijn. Een registratie is een slecht aftreksel van het origineel, ontdaan van sfeer, betovering. Niet meer dan een liefdeloze impressie waar de maker geen grip op heeft.

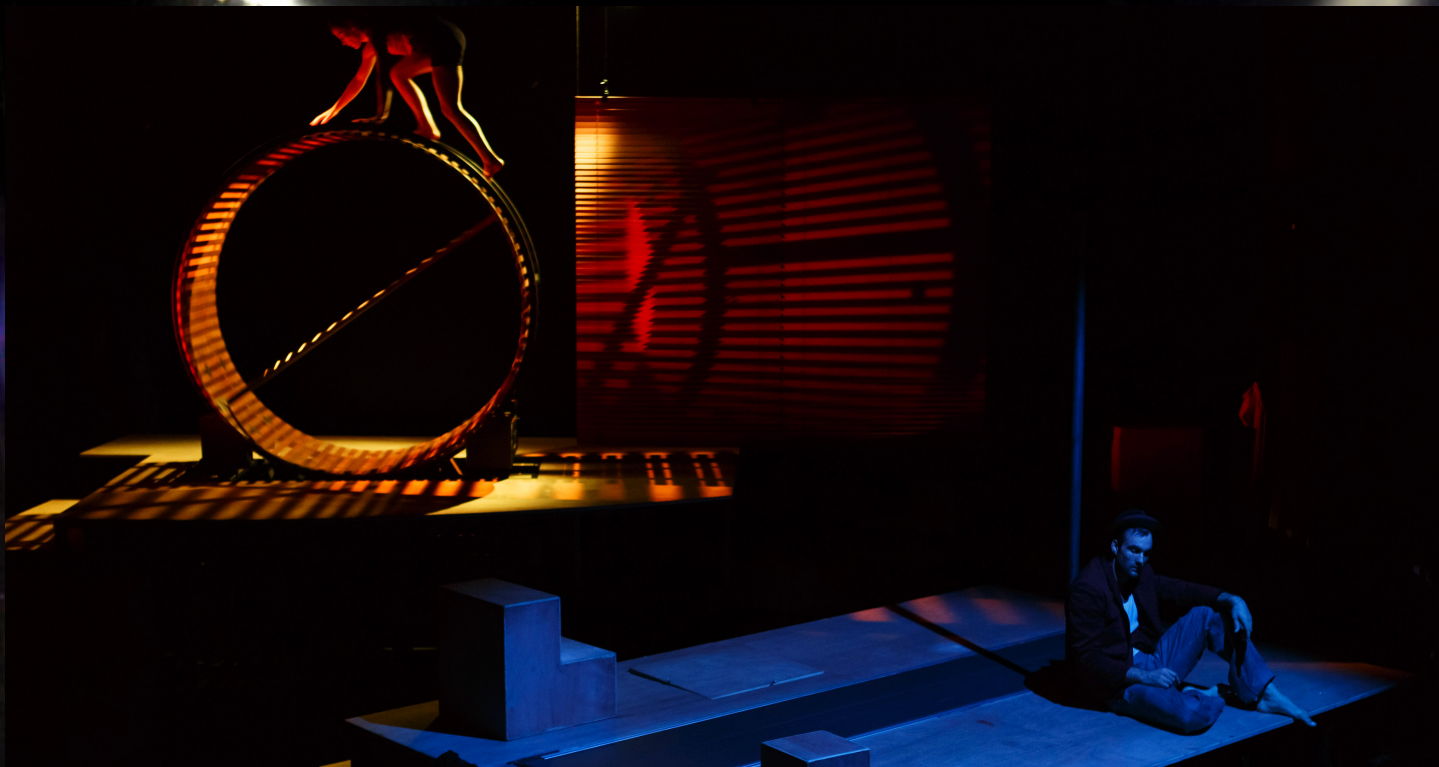
Zelf laat hij zich inspireren door kunst van anderen. Hij is graag te gast bij voorstellingen van collega's. Hij zuigt dan de indrukken op, kijkt als een professional en anderhalf uur kijken is bij hem anderhalf uur werken. De films van antropoloog Jean Rouch inspireren hem ook. In het geval van 'A bas bruit' is dat de film 'Jaguar' over drie mannen, gelukszoekers, die van Niger naar Ghana emigreren.

Dans, toneel en muziek stimuleren hem net zo, dat blijkt uit de verwijzingen in zijn voorstelling. Maar hoe gaat Bolze nieuwe generaties circusmakers inspireren? Door persoonlijk contact, ja, dat kan. Maar de registratie van zijn werk is een blijvende, meer tastbare bijdrage.

### **Stormachtige ontwikkeling**

Eigentijds circus is een relatief nieuwe kunstvorm en als de stormachtige ontwikkeling doorgaat, komen er naast het gelikte Cirque du Soleil vanzelf artistiekere gezelschappen en





Company MPTA/Mathurin Bolze – *A Bas Bruit* © Christophe Raynaud De Lage

material for cultural scientists and not least interesting material for enthusiasts and students of circus arts at the outset of their careers. Recordings are essential for research into contemporary circus and allow circus makers to capture their creative property. Technical facilities abound. It is intention that is sparse.

Among artistic products, theatre has the advantage that scripts were documented and preserved, that performances were described, and repertoire is repeated and interpreted over and over. In ballet, there is a specific notation system to record movements, and cameras are welcome tools for choreographers.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Shakespeare is well-known by enthusiasts. The same goes for *The Nutcracker* by Marius Petipa or more modern works by choreographers such as Pina Bausch, George Balanchine, Hans van Manen and Jiří Kylián. Their work is part of the world repertoire.

Dutch choreographer Hans van Manen has had his repertoire inventoried using video recordings that were digitalised later on. His dance testament is stored in an archive.

The Tanztheater Wuppertal, just another appealing example, keeps Pina Bausch's choreographies alive. On the occasion of the

voorstellingen bovendien die tot het cultureel erfgoed gaan behoren. Dat repertoire is bruikbaar materiaal voor cultuurwetenschappers, maar minstens zo boeiend voor de liefhebber en de circusstudent die aan het begin van zijn carrière staat.

Registraties zijn onontbeerlijk voor onderzoek naar eigentijds circus en geven circusmakers de mogelijkheid hun creatief eigendom vast te leggen. Technische mogelijkheden zijn er genoeg. Nu de wil nog.

Toneel heeft als kunstuiting het grote voordeel dat teksten bewaard zijn gebleven, voorstellingen zijn beschreven en repertoire wordt voortdurend gespeeld en geïnterpreteerd. Ballet kent een eigen notatie om bewegingen vast te leggen en een camera is een welkom hulpmiddel voor choreografen.

'Midzomernachtdroom' van Shakespeare zit in de hoeden van liefhebbers. Dat geldt evenzeer voor 'De Notenkraker' van Marius Petipa of modern werk van choreografen Pina Bausch, George Balanchine, Hans van Manen en Jiri Kylian. Hun werk behoort tot het wereldrepertoire.

De Nederlandse choreograaf Hans van Manen (1932) heeft zijn repertoire laten inventariseren.

company's 40th anniversary in 2014, *Café Müller* is being performed. Collective cultural awareness is nurtured by conveyance, by reprises and recordings.

Tim Roberts, director of the London circus school Circus Space, applauds the notion of a database for circus performances. "We lack a canon of existing work from which we can draw during classes. Because it is one thing to make recordings, which often does not happen, and another entirely for us to be able to see those recordings."

### **It is haphazard**

How can a circus canon be created? And are there truly so few recordings in contemporary circus? Of course there are many. This is the 21st Century and performers have grown up with social media. Just open YouTube, it is teeming with circus videos. Often, those are trailers. When it is not the companies or artists themselves who post the material on the internet, it is the spectators or the PR persons in their stead.

This still happens, however, in a haphazard way; it does not create a manageable database. It is a task for the companies themselves to capture their repertoire. Resource centres can help in building a digital library. HorsLesMurs is such a resource centre for contemporary circus. This French organisation manages a documentation centre and publishes on modern circus.

Furthermore, there are recordings by the professional enthusiast: Jean-Michel Guy, who works at the French Ministry of Cultural Affairs, and his associate Julien Rosemberg, both circus connoisseurs. They assembled two DVDs with a selection from the contemporary repertoire. It is the result of their passion for modern circus, which in a way also applies to Philippe Cibille's photographs of a variety of circus acts, artists and performances.

Does an artist or company personally profit from recordings? Without a doubt. Firstly, they offer the opportunity of establishing one's own artistic property. Just to be clear about the

Van zijn werk zijn video-opnamen gemaakt die later zijn gedigitaliseerd. Zijn danstestament ligt opgeslagen in een archief.

Het Tanztheater Wuppertal, om nog een aansprekend voorbeeld te noemen, houdt de choreografieën van Pina Bausch in leven. Tijdens het veertig jaar bestaan van het gezelschap in 2014 is 'Café Müller' te zien. Collectief cultureel bewustzijn wordt gevoed door overdracht, door reprises en registraties.

Tim Roberts, de directeur van de Londense circusschool Circus Space, juicht het toe als er ook een databank met circusvoorstellingen zou ontstaan. "We missen een canon van bestaand werk waaruit we tijdens de lessen kunnen putten. Want als er al registraties van acts worden gemaakt, en dat gebeurt vaak niet, hoe komen wij daar dan aan?"

### **Het is willekeur**

Hoe komt een circuscanon tot stand? En wordt er in het eigentijds circus dan helemaal niets bewaard? Natuurlijk wel, de gezelschappen leven in de 21<sup>e</sup> eeuw en groeien op met sociale media. Zoek maar op YouTube, het wemelt van de filmpjes. Vaak zijn het trailers. En zetten gezelschappen en artiesten hun materiaal niet zelf op internet dan doen de toeschouwers of pr-mensen van theaters dat wel.

Maar dat blijft willekeur, daarmee ontstaat nog geen afgewogen database. Het is aan gezelschappen om hun repertoire vast te leggen. De steunpunten kunnen helpen bij het opbouwen van een digitale bibliotheek. Hors les Murs is zo'n steunpunt voor eigentijds circus. Die Franse organisatie beheert een documentatiecentrum en publiceert over het moderne circus.

Daarnaast is er verslaglegging door de professionele liefhebber. Jean-Michel Guy, hij is werkzaam bij het ministerie van cultuur in Frankrijk, en zijn compagnon Julien Rosemberg, beide circuskenner, maakten twee dvd's met een selectie van het repertoire van eigentijdse gezelschappen. Het is een gevolg van hun bezieling voor het moderne circus en dat geldt in zekere zin ook voor de foto's die Philippe Cibille

creators. Secondly, programmers at theatres and festivals, too, benefit from elaborate recordings. Programmers obviously do not base decisions solely on DVDs, but, still, an introduction to a company can make them decide to attend a performance, which can result in another performance for the artist.

Thirdly, recordings simply make good money. The commercial crew behind the Canadian company Cirque du Soleil is very well aware of that. DVDs with recordings of shows such as *Dralion*, *Quidam* and *Alegría* are for sale on the markets or available via their own web shop.

### Reprise, a dirty word

A database of performances can help new generations of artists resume acts or performances created by predecessors. However, it is exactly this 'resuming' that is the touchy subject in contemporary circus.

Tim Roberts: "We do not use the repertoire in the way theatre or dance academies do. Students of circus will never randomly reproduce a performance by 7 Fingers or Archaos. It is not in our genes. Our students create new material. That is our strength and our weakness."

Reinterpretations of existing work do present opportunities, according to Roberts.

"Surely I can imagine reinterpretations of appealing performances being made. Our circus students may one day take a close look at *Traces* by 7 Fingers, like the theatre students that keep creating new versions of *Waiting for Godot*."

Roberts' colleague Samuel Jornot, who is artistic director at ACaPA, the Academy for Circus and Performance Art in Tilburg (NL), does not believe in reprises or new performances using existing material. "Circus is by definition the performance of excellence in the present moment. An individual accepts a challenge and deals with it. It is a metaphor for one's existence in the presence of an audience. Every act is therefore unique and entirely dependent on that individual artist."

maakte van uiteenlopende acts, artiesten en circusvoorstellingen.

Heeft een artiest of gezelschap zelf ook baat bij registraties? Daar is geen twijfel over mogelijk. In de eerste plaats biedt het de mogelijkheid om het eigen artistiek eigendom vast te leggen. Het kan maar duidelijk zijn wie de geestelijk vader is. Maar ook programmeurs van theaters en festivals zijn gebaat bij uitvoerige registraties. Niet dat elke programmeur zich laat leiden door dvd's, maar hij/zij krijgt wel een indruk van een gezelschap en kan op basis daarvan besluiten een voorstelling te bezoeken. Dat levert de artiest weer een optreden op.

En dan valt er natuurlijk gewoon goed geld te verdienen met registraties. De zakelijke jongens achter Cirque du Soleil weten dat als geen ander. Dvd's met opnamen van shows als 'Dralion', 'Quidam' en 'Alegría' liggen in de winkels of zijn te bestellen via de eigen webshop van het Canadese circus.

### Reprise, een vies woord

Een databank met voorstellingen kan nieuwe generaties helpen om de acts of voorstellingen van voorgangers te hernemen. Maar dat 'hernemen' ligt bij het eigentijds circus gevoelig. Tim Roberts: "Wij gebruiken het repertoire niet zoals theater- of dansacademies dat doen. Circusstudenten zullen nooit een performance van 7 Fingers of Archaos lukraak reproduceren. Dat zit niet in onze genen. Onze studenten creëren nieuw materiaal. Dat is onze kracht en onze zwakte."

Herinterpreteren van bestaand werk biedt volgens Roberts wel kansen.

"Ik kan me goed voorstellen dat later herinterpretaties van aansprekende voorstellingen worden gemaakt. Mogelijk gaan onze circusstudenten ooit 'Traces' van 7 Fingers onder de loep nemen, zoals theaterstudenten alsmat nieuwe versies maken van 'Wachten op Godot'."

Zijn collega Samuel Jornot, artistiek directeur van ACaPA, de circusopleiding in Tilburg, Nederland, gelooft niet in reprises en nieuwe

“A circus artist does not play a character, he is authentic. Like a sculpture, a circus performance is an artistic expression that can only be made by this particular artist. That is why I do not believe in recording and preserving repertoires in order to remake them in the future. In a remake, an actor plays the circus artist and that makes it theatre, not circus. Recordings are, on the other hand, suitable for critical analysis and scientific research into the artistic work.”

Cirque du Soleil – whatever your opinion on the exploitation of a polished concept – knows how to manage and exploit a repertoire. Shows are performed, year after year, and interchangeable artists concurrently play the same concepts in different places in the world. More finicky companies, too, play their performances for a succession of years. This often happens for commercial reasons, because the costs need to be recovered.

Deep down, companies will want to develop new creations continually. Mathurin Bolze of Compagnie MPTA is such an artist, and it has established his reputation. Still, he does not ignore the option that one of his shows could become a reprise. Perhaps, one day. The doubt, the consideration, they suit this young, inspired form of art.

Even though it conflicts with the urge for renewal, there is more than one company to be found that already considers reprises. The market does have its own considerations. Audiences and programmers ask for reprises of previous successes. Sometimes money has to be brought in, but reprises also are a means for companies to establish their repertoires and to make them live on.

Aurélien Bory of Compagnie 111 chose to rerun earlier work. His company created *Plan B* in 2003 and reprised the show in 2013. The cast is new, which provided opportunities for revitalising *Plan B*. In the performance – on, in front of and against a high wall – fine acrobatics, juggling and martial arts are combined with technical refinement.

voorstellingen met bestaand materiaal. “Circus is per definitie het tonen van excellentie in het hier en nu. Een individu gaat een uitdaging aan en dealt er mee. Het is een metafoor voor het bestaan en het publiek is erbij aanwezig. Elke act is om die reden uniek en volledig afhankelijk van die ene artiest.”

“Een circusartiest speelt geen karakter, maar hij is authentiek. Net als een sculptuur is een circusperformance een kunstuiting die alleen door die ene artiest kan worden gemaakt. Daarom geloof ik niet in registeren en het conserveren van repertoire om er later remakes van te maken. Bij een remake speelt een acteur de circusartiest en dan is het toneel, geen circus. Registraties zijn wel geschikt voor kritische analyses en wetenschappelijk onderzoek naar het artistieke werk.”

Cirque du Soleil – wat iemand ook vindt van het uitmelken van een gepolijst concept – dat gezelschap weet repertoire te beheren en te exploiteren. Shows worden jaar na jaar gespeeld en inwisselbare artiesten spelen dezelfde concepten tegelijkertijd op meerdere plaatsen over de wereld. Ook meer eigenzinnige gezelschappen spelen hun voorstellingen een reeks van jaren. Vaak is dat een zakelijke keuze, de kosten moeten worden terug verdiend.

Diep in hun hart zullen gezelschappen het liefst steeds nieuwe producties ontwikkelen. Mathurin Bolze van Cie MPTA is daar een voorbeeld van en hij dankt er zijn reputatie aan. Toch sluit hij niet uit dat een van zijn shows ooit in reprise zal gaan. Misschien, ooit. Die twijfel, die afweging, het past bij deze jonge, bevlogen kunstuiting.

Maar al druist het in tegen de drang te vernieuwen, toch zijn er meerdere gezelschappen die nu al een reprise overwegen. De markt kent nu eenmaal zijn eigen afwegingen. Het publiek en programmeurs vragen om herneming van successen. Soms is het noodzaak omdat er geld in het laadje moet, maar reprises zijn ook een mogelijkheid voor gezelschappen om hun repertoire te legitimeren en te laten voortleven.

Another example: Cie Archaos performed its show *In Vitro 09* in 1999. The performance has been reprised with contributions by circus students from Rio de Janeiro in 2009.

Then there are the old performers at Les Arts Sauts. These acrobats astounded with their spectacular aerobatics, accompanied by an opera singer. The singer, as well, found herself high in the air. The audience watched the show from reclining chairs positioned in circles around the ring.

Les Arts Sauts was discontinued in 2007. However, from the collective new initiatives got going. The heritage is kept alive. The aerial acrobatics, the atmosphere, the music and even the comfortable chairs return in a performance by the French CirkVOST. But to be honest, there are few examples of reprised performances. Ask Tim Roberts, ask the artists – they can only give a handful of examples.

### **Personal dedication**

It is interesting to take a closer look at the work of French juggler Phia Ménard. Her work is small-scale, smaller than that of Compagnie 111 or Les Arts Sauts, and she still creates a personal repertoire in her own way. For the performance *L'après-midi d'un Foehn* she was inspired by world repertoire: composition by Claude Debussy and choreography by Vaslav Nijinsky.

Phia once was called Philippe Ménard. She is a juggler who learnt much from Jérôme Thomas, an innovator of juggling. Change is the basis of her performances, and the theme is hardly separable from her life as a transgender artist.

Juggling clubs belong to the past now. Look at *PPP* for example: against a background of refrigerators she juggles ice balls, delivers a huge sphere of ice, and catches ice balls falling from the sky. In a playful way, she exhibits her womanliness and this appears to be a personal dedication.

Aurélien Bory van Compagnie 111 koos ervoor eerder werk opnieuw uit te voeren. Zijn gezelschap maakte 'Plan B' in 2003 en hernam deze show in 2013. De cast is nieuw, dat bood hem kansen om 'Plan B' te revitaliseren.

Deze voorstelling – op, voor en tegen een hoge wand – combineert fraaie acrobatiek, jongleren en martial arts met technisch raffinement. Nog een voorbeeld: Cie Archaos speelde de show 'In Vitro' in 1999. Deze voorstelling is in 2009 met inbreng van circusstudenten uit Rio de Janeiro opnieuw aan het publiek getoond. En dan zijn er de oude rotten van Les Arts Sauts. Deze acrobaten verbaasden met spectaculaire luchtacrobatiek, begeleid door een operazangeres. Ook die zangeres bevond zich hoog in de lucht. Het publiek bekeek het spektakel vanuit ligstoelen die in kringen om de piste stonden opgesteld.

Les Arts Sauts is in 2007 opgeheven, maar uit het collectief ontstonden nieuwe initiatieven. Het erfgoed blijft levend. De luchtacrobatiek, de sfeer, de combinatie met muziek en zelfs de comfortabele ligstoelen zijn terug te zien in een voorstelling van het Franse Cirk Vost. Maar eerlijk gezegd: veel voorbeelden van reprises zijn er niet. Vraag het Tim Roberts, vraag het aan de artiesten, ze komen niet verder dan een handvol voorbeelden.

### **Een persoonlijke opdracht**

Het is boeiend het werk van de Franse jongleuze Phia Ménard onder de loep te nemen. Zij werkt kleinschalig, kleinschaliger dan Compagnie 111 of Les Arts Sauts, maar ze creëert op haar eigen manier een persoonlijk repertoire. En met een voorstelling als 'L'après midi d'un foehn' (een woordspeling) laat ze zich inspireren door wereldrepertoire: de compositie van Claude Debussy, de choreografie van Vaslav Nijinsky.

Phia was ooit Philippe Ménard. Een jongleur die veel opstak van Jerome Thomas, vernieuwer van de jonglerie. Verandering is de basis van haar voorstellingen en dat thema is nauwelijks los te zien van haar achtergrond als een transgender.

In the new performance *Vortex* she plays with wind, a concept interpreted with fans. The audience watches a burlesque man dressed in black and white. He sticks strips to a plastic bag and the wind from the fans turn the plastic into a dancing doll who is then joined by other dolls.

The burlesque character gradually changes, lets go of fundamentals, and everything that gets peeled off his body is inflated by the wind into moving, sometimes threatening figures. The atmosphere changes from merry, elated to oppressive. And telling for Ménard: the character changes gender.

Despite the universal qualities of the story, the personal theme of Phia Ménard is interlaced with the performance. Which would lead to the assumption that she is the only one that can perform *Vortex*.

“Not at all,” she candidly relates. “I consider inviting other performers to play *Vortex*. I want to see if that is possible. It is a question that occupies my mind.”

That is how Phia Ménard circulates her repertoire. She passes her knowledge over, on a personal level. It is an informal manner that is more common in contemporary circus than is the intentional construction of cultural heritage. Mathurin Bolze may recognise this practice.

But besides the circulation through personal contacts (like Marthurin and Phia) there is a new and large area to be developed: registrations and databases. There is still a world to win.

*This article is inspired by the residency of cultural journalists at London International Mime Festival 2014, as a part of Unpack the Arts. Thanks to Yohann Floch, Rachel Clare, Minnie Boardman, Tim Roberts, Samuel Jornot, Wim Claessen, Phia Menard, Mathurin Bolze, Fuerzabruta and the participants of the residency.*

Ze jongleert al lang niet meer met knotsen. Neem ‘P.P.P.’: in een decor met ijskasten jongleert ze met ijsballen, bevalt ze van een grote ijsbal en vangt ze ijsballen die naar beneden vallen. Speels toont ze haar vrouwelijkheid en dat lijkt een persoonlijke opdracht.

In de nieuwere voorstelling ‘*Vortex*’ speelt ze met wind, een concept met ventilatoren. Het publiek ziet een burleske man in zwart en wit. Hij plakt stroken aan een plastic zak en wind uit ventilatoren verandert dat plastic in een dansende pop die weer gezelschap krijgt van andere poppen.

Het burleske personage verandert gaandeweg, laat essenties los en alles wat het van het lichaam pelt wordt door wind opgeblazen tot bewegende, soms bedreigende figuren. De sfeer wisselt, van vrolijk, uitbundig naar beklemmend. En tekenend voor Ménard: het personage verandert van sekse.

Hoe universeel het verhaal ook moge zijn, het persoonlijke thema van Phia Ménard zit in de performance verweven. Dan zou je veronderstellen dat zij, alleen zij, ‘*Vortex*’ kan spelen.

“Welnee,” vertelt ze onbevangen. “Ik overweeg andere performers uit te nodigen ‘*Vortex*’ te gaan spelen. Ik wil weten of dat kan. Die vraag houdt me bezig.”

Zo verspreidt Phia Ménard haar repertoire. Ze geeft haar kennis door op een persoonlijk niveau. Dat is een ongedwongen manier die bij eigentijds circus meer gemeengoed is dan het bewust bouwen aan cultureel erfgoed. Mathurin Bolze zal zich in deze werkwijze herkennen.

Maar naast de overlevering via persoonlijke contacten (zoals Mathurin en Phia) is er een nieuw en groot terrein dat ontgonnen moet worden: registraties en het vormen van een database. Er is nog een wereld te winnen.

*Dit artikel is geïnspireerd door een residentie van cultuurjournalisten tijdens London International Mime Festival, als onderdeel van Unpack The Arts. Grote dank aan: Yohann Floch, Rachel Clare, Minnie Boardman, Tim Roberts, Samuel Jornot, Wim Claessen, Phia Menard, Mathurin Bolze, Fuerzabruta en de deskundige deelnemers aan de residentie.*

# Compagnie Non Nova: L'après-midi d'un Foehn and Vortex

NATASHA HASSIOTIS

With his ballet *L'après-midi d'un faune* in 1912, Nijinsky shocked Paris with a fetishistic statement on auto-erotic gratification. Diaghilev's lover assumed – on stage – a different identity under the pretext of following the narrative/poetry of S. Mallarmé. A member, via his mentor, of the gay scene of the era, Nijinsky exhibited a polymorphous sexuality that was seen either as pornography by many or as a seductive, newly found artistic freedom by a 'crowd' of connoisseurs.

For her work *L'après-midi d'un Foehn*, Phia Ménard mixed languages (French and German) and paraphrased the original title while keeping Debussy's score. A circle of inward turned fans, arranged around a circular stage, limited and delineated the space within which the performance took place. Cécile Briand, the performer of *L'après-midi d'un Foehn* – a shorter and more fairytale-like version of a second Non Nova performance, *Vortex* – was heavily dressed in clothes that resembled those of a monk from Late Medieval times. Her hairstyle further pointed in that direction. Other possible explanations for the choice of costume (obviously an essential element of the show) would again be associated with that particular period and its esoteric, metaphysical quest. Her appearance created a sense of mystery and alluded to the figure of 'the storyteller', the one who 'will reveal secrets of the supernatural' to his/her audience, like a circus performer, or the old kind of 'wanderer'. The metaphysical element came to the fore also as a reference to the alchemists who mixed different elements to achieve immortality, while studying animals, like salamanders, which could be *transformed*, even

lose a part of their body and continue to live or regenerate the cut-off part. A third association: the monk who famously lost the part of his body that 'sinned', the French theologian and philosopher Pierre Abelard. To all those familiar with Phia Ménard's personal history, and her sex change operation, all this can hardly seem to be set on stage by chance.

In her interview with the participants of the residency programme Unpack the Arts, Phia Ménard said that she "wanted to speak about transformation, and that, via a repetitive, indifferent act in the beginning of the work, [she] wanted to totally engage her audience in what was about to follow". I would say that she succeeded in that, although the sight of the performer cutting plastic bags and putting the pieces together using scotch-tape as the show began rather put me off at the start, as it reminded me of a postgraduate thesis and research "on the nature of performance in real time in possibly diverse environments". (And we have seen so much of that in the past twenty years or so...)

Therefore by association *L'après-midi d'un Foehn*, from the start, brought into mind two themes that I believe to be of paramount importance in the work of Phia Ménard, both of which deal with identity: on the one hand, the transformation of characteristics of her profession, namely as an artist (once a juggler) of the circus; and her sex, being a transgender person. One might say that the two are interwoven.

Circus has been, or in many occasions still is, marginal, 'different', homeless except during

those days that the troupe pitches in order to perform; it has, or used to have, freak shows, meaning that it hosted the abject, what is outside the norm, what is unacceptable in society. By making a show out of the 'irrational' (metaphorically speaking), circus brought back to society what was previously rejected as 'improper', 'monstrous', 'abnormal'. Circus, though, is made *by* humans *for* humans. To entertain fear, to push limitations, to show the extreme, to play with 'l'interdit'. What is forbidden and what is unspeakable. Having said that, one may assume that for many circus performers, life – as has been mythologised through cinema and even cartoons – was impossible and (at times) cruel. Bitterness and self-pity are not unknown feelings to ageing or other circus participants.

Phia Ménard made a considerable effort to put concrete, extreme circus acts under scrutiny, to distil and reveal their ability and to bring to the surface what is potentially impossible to speak or to successfully enunciate; this could possibly 'falsify' a regular dance performance, leading people to wonder as to what they were watching – acrobatics, theatre, performance or other... Circus may mediate with its non-fixed signifiers and create metaphors capable of explaining to an even a very young audience (as was surprisingly the case with *L'après-midi d'un Foehn*) things about creation, balance, pain, emotions, and more. In any case fairytales are made of such (sometimes harsh) themes, and children in the audience seemed to greatly enjoy the show.

Back to the work: it was sheer magic to see the plastic bags, simple plastic bags that can be found in any supermarket around the world, in all colours, being inflated by the air of the fans and made to 'dance' around the stage, taking the shape of human figures, engaging in partnering and making movements that humans would have made if they danced ballet or any type of ballroom dance. The 'magician' on stage let the little 'puppets' whirl and then chased them and gathered them in a box. Ballet, the high and/or mainstream art, white, associated with the dominant male culture, an

artform filled with patriarchal notions on gender and transforming the most base of sentiments and thoughts into abstract material of pure idealisation of the body, a system that rationalises psychological activity, has its jugglers and magicians too, such as the one in *The Nutcracker*. Dr. Drosselmeyer brings the magic doll to Clara on the significant night of Christmas Eve, Dr. Coppelius delves into the mysteries of life, and even in *Pétrouchka* the mysterious puppeteer brings sensational spectacles to the pageant of the little village.

If *L'après-midi d'un Foehn* was an innuendo, *Vortex* was more or less explicit, or so it became as the work progressed. This time it was the choreographer/director who performed, situated amidst a set of fans put in a circle, creating the same 'miraculous' effect of blowing air into the plastic bags, which again were partly prepared by Ms Ménard at the very beginning of the show, who cut and taped together pieces of plastic bags until the spectators had taken their seats and all noises had ceased. This time it was an Old Testament-like scene that came into life in front of us: the air, like the breath of God, gave life to a multi-coloured 'society' of plastic puppets who flew freely and effortlessly in the air, dancing and whirling, occasionally even embracing in front of the excited eyes of the beholders. A sense of threat somehow altered the ambiance of ease and Paradise-like happiness, as stripey bags mingled with the smaller, brightly coloured ones. It brought into mind a regulative process, a call into the norm, symbolised by the association of the stripey bags to the formal suits of the white collar dominant male executive culture. After a while, she filled the *circular* stage (another allusion to her circus background) with more bags which she took out of the pockets of her huge overcoat. At some point, the bags, with the appropriate direction of air flow, created a basic DNA sequence above the head of the performer. All right, we have seen those schemes and symbols before, in dance performances which aimed at showing inequality, lost 'Ages d'Or', and general concern about the human condition. Nonetheless, in the context of





Company Non Nova – *L'après-midi d'un Foehn*

*Vortex*, as signifiers shifted constantly from performance to allusions to circus and to gender, such symbols acquired somewhat fresher overtones.

So, there we were in the middle of the performance, lamenting *Paradise Lost*, and drawing from the authority of the Good Book and popular notions about the 'brotherhood of men' in order to justify the artist's decision to claim her right to equality and freedom, first as a human being and second as a gendered being who, on top of everything, chose – despite all shifting and shifted signifiers – to have a *specific sex* and a *gendered life*. Like juggling, Ms Ménard's performance was a constant balance of paradoxes: from free-flow to set rules, where on the outside her situation may be seen as defying rules.

By the time she started to rip off the pantyhose with which her whole body was covered (after

having discarded her coat) as if it was a cocoon, and had come to a 'new life', *Vortex* had become the daring effort to speak of a personal experience of deep transformation. From chrysalis to woman, the artist showed anger – probably her own sentiments prior to her sex change operation, and possibly after, if we consider the sarcastic umbilical cord-like length of plastic she pulls out of her vagina (as mimicked anatomically by a plastic organ). An allusion, again, both to the well-known magic trick of the handkerchiefs that seem to endlessly come out of the magician's pocket until, if overdone, the performer arrives at a paradoxical admittance of a lack of control over the act (i.e. fabric keeps coming and coming and coming out of the pockets of a clown), and to the basic point of diversification in naturally born women: their reproductive system. At that time, apart from the legitimate cry for a recognition of equality and denial of any prejudiced attitudes, this act of birth seemed slightly odd, because it brought to mind a traditionally misogynist male attitude towards women as the 'weak sex' because of their ability to give birth, and, at the same time, Ms Ménard's balancing act while trying to situate herself as a female among women.

I would say that her attitude is still informed by a slight misogyny; she defined herself as the 'eternal seductress', an 'ideal woman', an ageless object of desire, away from concerns about children-bearing, or an ageing body and a loss of sex-appeal due to an overdose of family life and worries, as is often the case, or as it is traditionally seen should be the case, for many women. In her interview with the Unpack the Arts participants, she did not refer to her sex change or any experience that had to do with this aspect of her life. She stated though clearly that she is "a woman", and that she does not "mind having her work idealised, but would not like this to also happen to [her], because that way [she would] be very lonely, and [she does not] like to be alone".

That is as much as may be said about her works presented at the London International Mime Festival, because any other attempt, in my

opinion, would have to go through the meanders of whether there is women's art, gay art and so on and so forth. If we decide to go into this territory we should decide what makes 'female writing' be seen as such – its possible attributes, its peculiarities, its subject matter, its stance towards dominant ideologies and more. It would be a long itinerary into discovering the 'untold' stories of impossible to pin down identities, even of females in regard to themselves. We should examine and make room for the overload of mythologies in regard to our bodies, our education, our morality and/or ethics, our politics, our ability for symbiosis through child-bearing, our relation to family, love, eroticism and sexuality. Our flair for freedom, our aggressive side, our *histories*. How do we address then Ms Ménard's role as enchantress (apparent in her coquettish appearance and girlish style)? As a 'we don't need another misogynist comment, an enemy from within' or as a 'free to choose her stance and attitude, free to join and try to understand the marginal, the *abject*', the latter of which Ms Ménard seems especially to have had quite an experience with, both in terms of professional choice as well as of personal life?

I shall close my thoughts on Phia Ménard's double-bill by concentrating on the new things that her artform may mean for dance, performance. The power of its metaphor is slowly turning into an alternative scene. "Life is a Circus" said Martha Graham, an exponent of mainstream culture and expressionism, in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century; it helped her express her feelings about Erick Hawkins. "I could eat you alive", she wrote about her sentiments during rehearsals. Monty Python's Flying Circus called for surrealism in life and even *Madagascar III* called for – yes, a traditionally familiar big spectacle with trapeze, animal acts, and so on, but also for joining the uncertainty of circus life. It might be a useful balance act between 'sens propre' and 'sens figure' to use 'circus' as a different way to see. 'Contemporary circus' may become a good companion, despite the differences, of contemporary and experimental dance. They can fill gaps and give new impetus to each other. Maybe without rope performers and jesters, who even filled Nietzsche's imagination in *Zarathustra*, but instead with shifting (literal and metaphorical) signifiers of bodies ready to accept and embrace, even express the marginal, the unspeakable, the abject.

# Some Reflections on the Show *Fuerzabruta* at the Roundhouse in London

ÖRJAN ABRAHAMSSON

On the final evening of the Unpack the Arts residency in London we were invited to a show that our hosts refused to tell us anything about in advance, although Yohann Floch's wry smile spoke volumes. The show *Fuerzabruta* at the Roundhouse was obviously going to be some way off the track beaten by contemporary circus. No matter. It does you good sometimes to see shows about which you know nothing and without any (or least not too many) preconceived ideas.

## **So we came, we saw, we conquered.**

Conquered in the sense that no show during our residency evoked such powerful, and at times such heated, feelings among our little group of experts. Nor did any other show demonstrate the existence of such a clear difference in outlook among the dance and theatre critics, academics, producers and specialists in contemporary circus in our party. A fascinating and disparate exchange of ideas, in which the word fascist was even used, took place in the Tube after the show and then continued in the bar of our hotel and no doubt in other places.

Why such heated feelings? Thought-provoking it most assuredly was. A result of the differences in our backgrounds and our perspectives as professionals? Probably. All the same it is interesting that it took a show like *Fuerzabruta* to make those differences almost crystal clear, not that I got the impression that

# Vissa reflektioner kring föreställningen "*Fuerzabruta*" på The Roundhouse i London.

ÖRJAN ABRAHAMSSON

Sista kvällen under "Unpack the Arts" i London bjöds vi till en föreställning som våra värdar vägrade att berätta någonting om i förväg, låt var att Yohann Flochs skeva leende sade mer än tusen ord. Föreställningen "*Fuerza Bruta*" på The Roundhouse låg uppenbart en bra bit utanför den utstakade nycirkusvägen. Men låt gå. Ibland är det av godo att se scenkonst utan vare sig förkunskaper och (alltför) förutfattade meningar.

## **Så vi kom, vi såg, vi segrade.**

Segrade i den meningen att ingen föreställning under residenset väckte så starka, bitvis hätska känslor i vår lilla expertgrupp. Ingen föreställning visade heller så tydligt skillnaden i perspektiv mellan residenset dans- och teaterkritiker, akademiker, producenter och nycirkusspecialister. Ett fascinerande och disparat tankeutbyte, där till och med ordet fascist användes, utspelades i tunnelbanan efter showen, och fortsatte sedan i vår hotellbar och säkert på andra ställen.

Varför så heta känslor? Onekligen tankeväckande. På grund av våra olikartade bakgrunder och professionella perspektiv? Sannolikt. Likväl är det intressant att det krävs en show som "*Fuerza Bruta*" för att tydliggöra skillnaderna, även om jag inte uppfattade att någon direkt älskade showen utan snarast tvärtom. Men utifrån ganska olikartade motiveringar.

UNPACK  
THE  
ARTS

anyone loved the show exactly, rather the reverse. Although for rather different reasons.

To begin with a little background information and some facts about the show – or the Las Vegas-show as one of the, uhm, French experts called it.

When *Fuerzabruta* premiered in London in 2006 it was the “fastest-selling show in Roundhouse history”, and so it returned for 100 (!) performances in December 2013. A hit show or to spell it out in block capitals: a lot of quick and easily earned money.

On their home page, the Roundhouse sells *Fuerzabruta* as an “electrifying show” and “an event where dreams are real and reality takes a back seat. Give in to it, let go and enjoy the spectacular ride.”

And there is no doubt that *Fuerzabruta* is spectacular. The frantic music is eagerly egged on by various percussion instruments, there are aerial acrobatic numbers by the bucketful, stroboscopic lamps together with the kind of extreme and spectacular lighting effects you’d find at an exclusive technoparty, and a great deal else besides, while the audience stand in the middle of the Roundhouse stage, interacting benevolently and cautiously with the show to some degree, and being invited to dance now and then, which they do with rather forced pleasure on this chilly Friday evening.

The reason *Fuerzabruta* has taken so long to return to London is because the show has been more or less permanently resident in New York for five whole years, with the company giving 2000 performances. Half a million spectators, just in New York.

Rather confusingly the company and the show share the same name. The company was formed in Argentina in 2003 as an offshoot of a previous company, De La Guarda (1993-2003), whose show *Villa Villa* was a sort of early, crude version of *Fuerzabruta*, which literally means brute force.

Till att börja med lite bakgrundsinformation och fakta om föreställningen, eller Las Vegas-showen som någon, hmm, fransk expert kallade den.

När “Fuerza Bruta” hade Londonpremiär 2006 var det den “fastest-selling show in Roundhouse history”, och återkom därför i december 2013 med 100 (!) föreställningar. En publiksuccé vilket i klartext betyder stora, snabba och lättförtjänta pengar.

På sin hemsida säljer The Roundhouse in “Fuerza Bruta” som en “electrifying show” och “an event where dreams are real and reality takes a back seat. Give in to it, let go and enjoy the spectacular ride.

Och spektakulär är tveklöst “Fuerza Bruta”. Med hektisk musik ivrigt påhejad av diverse slagverk, luftakrobatsnummer en masse, stroboskopeffekter liksom extrema och spektakulära ljuseffekter som på ett exklusivt technoparty, plus mycket annat, medan publiken står mitt på The Roundhouse scen och delvis, men vänligt och försiktigt, interagerar med föreställningen, och bitvis uppmanas att dansa, vilket dock sker med viss tillkämpad glädje denna kyliga fredagskväll.

Varför “Fuerza Bruta” dröjt så länge med att återkomma till London beror på att showen varit mer eller mindre bosatt i New York i fem (!) år, där kompaniet gav totalt 2 000 föreställningar. En halv miljon åskådare, bara i New York.

Förvirrande nog har kompaniet och showen samma namn. Själva kompaniet grundades 2003 i Argentina som en avknoppning av det tidigare kompaniet “De La Guarda” (1993-2003) vars föreställning “Villa Villa” var ett slags tidig, råversion av “Fuerza Bruta”, vilket ordagrant betyder “brute force”.

Kompaniets leds av Diqui James, som var med i “De La Guarda” och var en av Fuerzabrutans två grundarna, och som 2003 omedelbart anlidade flera medlemmar från just “De La Guarda”. Som kompositören Gaby Kerpel, liksom från den

The company is led by Diqui James, who was part of De La Guarda and one of the two founders of Fuerzabruta, and who, in 2003, immediately engaged several former members of De La Guarda. Among them the composer Gaby Kerpel and, on the technical and coordination side, Alejandro Garcia and Fabio D'Aquila.

The management of the company is made up of a total of five men with skills and experience ranging from theatre and music to technical and purely practical matters. The driving force is Diqui James, who also has the final say. He was born in 1965 and has a background in the theatre. He spent seven years on stage before realising he preferred being a creator, director and artistic director.

The company's manifesto can be read on their home page: "*Fuerzabruta* is today. It is not the theater of the future, nor the work that is repeated over and over from the past. *Fuerzabruta* is now. Invents nothing. It is an unavoidable natural phenomenon, the result of millions of years. It originated in the ocean, at the bottom of a glass, walking down the sidewalk. *Fuerzabruta* is not to be understood. It simply is."

Those last two sentences in particular are bound to make a professional critic feel sceptical, to put it mildly. And potentially superfluous. And if this proves to be more than a minor trend eventually unemployed. However, my experience as a critic over twenty years – I have been a freelance dance, performance and circus critic for Sweden's leading daily Dagens Nyheter for fifteen years, although I am a literary critic at heart – tells me always to doubt when artists insist they know what they are doing.

The basis for any judgement of art of the moment has to be what is actually occurring on stage, or as at the Roundhouse, in the roof and on the walls, while a thousand or so exhilarated spectators throng the stage itself (in my case the crutches I am holding mean I am generously assigned a seat) and the show whirls back and

tekniska och koordinerande sidan, Alejandro García och Fabio D'Aquila.

Totalt består kompaniets ledning av fem män, med en samlad kunskap från teater och musik, till teknik och rent praktiska frågor. Drivande och avgörande är uppenbarligen Diqui James, född 1965, med en bakgrund inom teater. Han stod på själv på scen i sju år innan han insåg att han föredrog att vara kreatör, regissör, konstnärlig ledare.

På kompaniet hemsida finns en programförklaring:

*Fuerzabruta* is today. It is not the theater of the future, nor the work that is repeated over and over from the past. *Fuerzabruta* is now. Invents nothing.

It is an unavoidable natural phenomenon, the result of millions of years. It originated in the ocean, at the bottom of a glass, walking down the sidewalk. *Fuerzabruta* is not to be understood. It simply is.

Framför allt de två sista meningarna gör givetvis en professionell kritiker skeptisk, milt sagt. Och potentiellt överflödigt. Arbetslös. Min erfarenhet som kritiker under tjugo år – jag är frilansande dans-, performance- och cirkuskritiker i Sveriges ledande dagstidning Dagens Nyheter sedan femton år, men är i botten litteraturvetare – säger mig dock att alltid tvivla när en konstnär påstår sig veta att de gör.

Ögonblickets konst måste bedömas utifrån vad som faktiskt sker på scen, eller som i The Roundhouse, i taket och väggarna, medan ett tusental upprymda människor trängs på själva scenen (med kryckor i hand får jag själv generöst nog en sittplats) och showen virvlar fram och tillbaka i högt tempo, till än högre, hektisk musik.

Det är en i tvetydig mening en bedövande show. Som varken för tankarna till dans, teater eller cirkus, utan snarast till andra, extremt framgångsrika, shower från 90-talet och framåt, som "Stomp", "Riverdance", "Tango Pasi3n", "Gypsy Fire" och givetvis Cirque de

forth at great speed to ever louder and more frantic music.

This is a stunning show, and I use the word with deliberate ambiguity. And one that doesn't make you think of dance, theatre or circus so much as of those other extremely successful shows of the 90s and onwards, such as *Stomp*, *Riverdance*, *Tango Pasi3n*, *Gypsy Fire* and, of course, all of Cirque du Soleil's incredibly popular shows. Or rather 'events', in the sense, as *Fuerzabruta* would have it, of the show as something that is not "to be understood. It simply is."

There is, however, one interesting difference. Almost all these major shows have a more or less given, overarching concept – as in the case of *Stomp* and the shows of Cirque du Soleil. Even *Riverdance* at least tries to tell a story, albeit with questionable success.

*Fuerzabruta* lacks an obvious conceptual or dramaturgical driving force of this kind – it just "is" – and, strangely enough, has managed to become a hit show by just thundering away and crashing along. Although there are one or two recurrent metaphorical elements that provide a fragile underpinning for the show. More on those later on.

The common denominator for these huge hit shows seems to be entertainment along with elements of the spectacular that are extravagantly and, quite evidently, expensively mounted. It is supposed to feel like a luxury being able to see these shows that always seem to be on endless world tours and that are almost always, and as a matter of reflex, brutally savaged and patronisingly dismissed by the professional critics.

Why? This is an interesting question, if you can set aside for a moment the experienced and therefore sceptical stance of the critic towards anything that smacks of spectacle rather than art.

But shows such as *Riverdance* and *Fuerzabruta* never make themselves out to be art even in

Soleils alla sansl3st popul3ra f3rest3llningar. Eller snarast "event", ungef3r i den anda som just "Fuerzabruta" framst3ller det, som inte 3r "to be understood. It simply is."

Det finns dock en intressant skillnad. N3stan alla dessa stora shower har ett mer eller mindre givet, sammanh3llande koncept som "Stomp" och Cirque de Soleils shower. Till och med "Riverdance" f3rs3ker 3tminstone ber3tta en historia, l3t vara med tvivelaktig framg3ng.

"Fuerzabruta" saknar en s3dan uppenbar konceptuell eller dramaturgisk drivkraft – den bara "3r" – och har m3rkv3rdigt nog 3nd3 lyckats bli en succ3, genom att bara dundra och braka p3. Likv3l finns ett par 3terkommande, metaforiska element som br3ckligt b3r f3rest3llning. Mer om det l3ngre fram.

Den minsta gemensamma n3mnaren f3r dessa enorma publikframg3ngar tycks vara underh3llning med spektakul3ra inslag i 3verd3digt och uppenbart p3kostat format. Det ska k3nnas lyxigt att se dessa shower som st3ndigt tycke befinna sig p3 3ndl3sa v3rldsturn3er – och som med ryggm3rgsreflexer n3stan alltid s3gas, g3rna elakt, f3rklenande och brutalt av den professionella kritiken.

Varf3r? Det 3r en intressant fr3ga, om man f3r ett 3gonblick gl3mmer den professionella kritikens erfarna, och d3rmed g3rna skeptiska blick inf3r allt som 3r luktar spektakel snarare 3n scenkonst.

Men shower som "Riverdance" och "Fuerzabruta" utger sig aldrig f3r att vara konst 3ns i ordet vidaste bem3rkelse, utan erbjuder 3gonblickets f3gring, uppseendev3ckande artisteri, scenografiska underverk. Kort sagt, det slags underh3llning och shower som i alla tider lockat den s3 kallat vanliga, eller otr3nade, publiken, snarare 3n erfarna scenkonstfantaster.

En stunds trivsamt verklighetsflykt. Kravl3s underh3llning som str3ngt taget lika g3rna, eller snarast hellre, borde recenseras och kritiseras

the broadest sense of the word. What they are providing instead is the beauty of the moment, sensational artistry, and miracles of set design. The kind of entertainment, the kind of show, to put it bluntly, that has appealed throughout the ages to an 'ordinary' or unsophisticated audience, rather than to knowledgeable fans of the stage arts.

The enjoyable escapism of the moment. Undemanding entertainment that might just as well – or, strictly speaking, should – be reviewed instead by a sports journalist, say, or analysed by a social scientist or an ethnographer or an anthropologist.

And yet it is part of my professional duties to review, although fortunately not that often, shows like *Fuerzabruta* for Dagens Nyheter. Which I always do with some apprehension as it is almost always devastatingly easy to write a crudely witty review. But as a critic for a daily paper I have to write for the readers of that paper and I would be doing them a disservice by being hopelessly predictable. The challenge is to try to describe what may actually be admirable, even staggering, without abandoning a critical stance. Undeniably a balancing act on a slack rope.

I now realise this article has turned into something rather different from what I originally intended. No matter. Just have to put up with it. Back to *Fuerzabruta*.

As I pointed out, the show lacks a concept or a clearly discernible narrative and just sort of thunders along at maximum speed with all the frenzy of the fairground, scene after scene, without any real coherence. It begins with a musical number, continues with aerial acrobatics, and follows that with a scene in which a giant shimmering silver curtain is drawn halfway round the circular stage and two women leap into the air, so to speak, horizontally over the curtain, which is moving in waves, helped by human hands, while being illuminated in various bright synthetic colours. In purely visual terms this number is one of the most stunning in the show, for a few minutes at least.

av säg en sportjournalist eller analyseras av en samhällsvetare, etnolog eller sociolog. Klassisk kritik av detta slags shower är dömd att vara hopplöst förutsägbar och självklart negativ.

Likväl tillhör det åtminstone mitt professionella arbete att, lyckligtvis inte alltför ofta, recensera föreställningar som "Fuerzabruta" i Dagens Nyheter. Vilket jag alltid gör med viss vanda eftersom det nästan alltid är förödande enkelt att skriva smart, roligt, elakt. Men som dagstidningskritiker måste jag trots allt skriva för tidningens läsare och jag gör dem ingen tjänst genom att vara, som sagt, hopplöst förutsägbar. Utmaningen är att försöka skildra vad som faktiskt är omtumlande och beundransvärt, utan att förlora den kritiska blicken. Onekligen ett balansnummer på slak lina.

Inser nu att den här artikeln blivit något annat än jag hade som utgångspunkt. Men låt gå. Försök stå ut. Åter till "Fuerzabruta".

Som sagt saknar showen ett koncept eller en tydlig berättelse, och liksom bara brakar på i högsta tempo i en rent karnevalisk yra, med scen på scen, utan egentligt sammanhang. Det börjar med ett musiknummer, fortsätter luftakrobatnummer, vidare en scen när en gigantisk, silverskimrande ridå dras halvägs runt scenens cirkel och två kvinnor så att säga springer i luften, horisontalt på ridån som dels rör sig i vågor, med mänsklig hjälp, dels belyses i diverse starka, syntetiska färger. Rent visuellt tillhör det numret showens mest bedårande, åtminstone i några minuter.

Det är också vad som framför allt genomsyrar denna 80 minuter långa show: varje scen pågår länge och utdraget, för att liksom alla i publiken ska hinna med och förstå. "Fuerzabruta" drar ut på och återupprepar snarare än varierar varje nummer, så att effekten blir att i stort sett varje nummer verkar pågå i en evighet.

Särskilt förtjust tycks Diqui James vara i scenen med mannen i skinande vit kostym som tokspringer på ett löpband, som dras in mitt på scen bland publiken. Han springer och springer, blir plötsligt skjuten i bröstet, men fortsätter



#### Fuerzabruta – *Fuerzabruta*

That could also be said to apply to the whole of this eighty-minute-long show: each scene is drawn out at length, so that every member of the audience has time to get it. Rather than varying each number, *Fuerzabruta* extends and reiterates them with the result for the most part that each number seems to go on for an eternity.

Diqui James seems to be particularly fond of the scene that consists of a man in a blinding white suit who runs like crazy along a conveyor belt that has been hauled into the centre of the stage among the spectators. He just keeps running and then is suddenly shot in the chest but still goes on running, stoically and with a wobble, and after that he runs through walls (of cardboard) and his house and the history of his life.

The scene recurs three times in total with some pretty insignificant variations just so no one will fail to grasp what is, intrinsically, an interesting

ändå att stoiskt vacklande springa och springa senare genom väggar (av papp), och sitt hus och sitt livs historia.

Scenen återkommer totalt tre (!) gånger, med vissa, tämligen obetydliga variationer, liksom för att ingen ska undgå att fatta den i och för sig intressanta metaforiska bilden: Människan som fruktlöst försöker fly sitt öde och springa ifrån sig själv. Om man är riktigt påhittig kan man kanske tolka scenen som ett slags inverterad metafor av Becketts "I väntan på Godot". Fast Beckett är roligare.

Möjligen finns här föreställningens röda tråd, dess sammanhållande metaforiska idé. Det handlar om människans fruktlösa försök att undfly sitt öde, om kärlekens omöjlighet, om naturens obändiga krafter. Och om att kunna höra sirenernas berusande, euforiska sång, men aldrig beröra och förenas med dem (eftersom sången fick de sällan simkunniga männen att hoppa i havet).



metaphorical image: a person futilely attempting to flee from their fate and run away from themselves. If you were feeling really inventive you might even interpret the scene as a kind of inverted metaphor for Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Although Beckett is more amusing.

This may be the connecting theme of the show, its overriding metaphorical idea. The futility of attempting to escape your fate, the impossibility of love, and, perhaps most strikingly, the untameable forces of nature. It may also be about being able to hear the intoxicating, euphoric song of the sirens while never being able to join them.

The impossibility of love is portrayed with shocking power when a man and a woman suspended on lines from the roof spin round in a gigantic sail above the heads of the audience like two survivors of a shipwreck. They try to reach one another ever faster and ever more frantically, but in vain. Centrifugal forces, harsh reality, make their desperate attempts to reach one another impossible.

The show's most captivating and at the same time most problematic scene occurs when the audience suddenly catch sight of two enormous pools with transparent plastic undersides in the roof of the Roundhouse. The pools pitch and sway so the audience can see the water swirling back and forth as well as six half-naked women swimming and being thrown about in the pools like miraculously beautiful mermaids at the mercy of the power of the sea. Mermaids, nymphs, unattainably distant sirens, or less glamorously, goldfish in their bowl.

Initially the effect is surprising, inventive and fabulously beautiful, particularly as the pools are gradually lowered towards the heads of the spectators until we can actually touch the undersides of the pool. This ought to be a breathtaking experience but all the stage magic goes up in smoke when it runs slap bang into what turns out to be a fairly repellent male chauvinist reality.

Kärlekens omöjlighet gestaltas omtumlande starkt när en man och en kvinna hängande i linor från taket, snurrar runt i ett gigantiskt segel ovanför publikens huvuden, som två överlevande från ett skeppsbrott. Allt snabbare, allt hetsigare, försöker de nå varandra, men förgäves. Centrifugalkraften, den bittra verkligheten, omöjliggör deras desperata försök att nå varandra.

Föreställningens på en gång mest betagande och problematiska scen är när publiken plötsligt i Roundhouse tak får syn två enorma bassänger med botten av transparent plast. Bassängerna lutar och gungar, så att publiken kan se såväl vatten skölja fram och tillbaka och sedan sex halvnakna kvinnor, som simmar och kastas omkring i bassängerna som undersköna sjöjungfrur utlämnade åt havets krafter. Sjöjungfrur, nymfer, ouppnåeliga sirener som vi inte kan nå, eller mindre förskönande, guldfiskar i sin skål.

Inledningsvis är det överraskande, fyndigt och fabulöst vackert, särskilt när bassängerna gradvis sänks ned mot åskådarnas huvuden, tills vi rentav kan beröra bassängens botten. Det borde vara en svindlande upplevelse, men istället går den sceniska magin upp i rök när den möts av i en ganska motbjudande machosexistisk verklighet.

För givetvis tar ett antal medelålders män tillfället i akt att, skrattande och grisigt, trycka sin händer mot kvinnornas bröst, stjärtar och könsdelar. Effekten blir, åtminstone i mina ögon, alltför mycken – manschauvinistisk – verklighet och förtar omedelbart scenens potentiella magi. Om man så vill uppstår en Brechts "Verfremdungseffekt", men med knappast avsedd verkan.

Strängt taget påstår jag inte att männen agerar fel, låt vara grisigt, utan att hela iscensättningen bottnar i en unken kvinnosyn, som redan är uppenbar genom att endast, dessutom halvnakna, kvinnor simmar i bassängerna. Medan Männen istället sköter maskineriet.

Because, of course, a number of laughing middle-aged men take the opportunity to press their hands smuttily against the women's breasts, bottoms and genitals. To my mind at least, the result is far too much like real life male chauvinism and it immediately destroys the potential magic of the scene. What Brecht called a 'Verfremdungseffekt' comes into play, as it were, although this alienating effect could scarcely have been intended.

I am not saying that what the men did was wrong, strictly speaking, no matter how smutty they were, but that the way the scene is staged is based on a particularly stale view of femininity, already evident in the fact that only women, and half-naked ones at that, are swimming in the pools. While the men tend to the machinery. By the way, as my translator Frank Perry, who has kindly turned my Swedish into English, informed me in an e-mail, part of *Fuerzabruta's* spectacular set actually collapsed during a show in mid-January (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-25792353>). The show stopped of course. But, as just a few people were injured and no one actually died, *Fuerzabruta* was soon back on the money track. The show must always go on. And on.

I am not trying to be politically correct or even to apply a feminist perspective (although that would be rewarding). Besides, as the heterosexual male I am it would be pathetic to deny that half-naked female bodies most definitely exert a certain attraction and have a, uhm, particular effect and presumably not only on me. And yet this scene leaves me turned off for the most part. And bored.

The original idea of two transparent pools suspended from the roof is brilliant, as are the waves on the water, and the metaphorical image of the human being having to submit to the forces of nature, which is yet another metaphor that runs like a theme through the show.

The problem is only partially to do with the way women are viewed. The main problem is that

Jag försöker inte vara politiskt korrekt eller ens anlägga ett feministiskt perspektiv (även om det vore tacksamt). Dessutom, som den heterosexuella man jag är, vore det patetiskt att förneka att halvnakna kvinnokroppar absolut har en viss attraktionskraft och, hmm, speciell effekt på, gissningsvis, inte enbart mig. Likväl gör denna scen mig mest avtänd. Och uttråkad.

Själva ursprungsidén med två genomskinliga bassänger hängande i taket är lysande, rentav briljant, liksom vattnets vågor, liksom den metaforiska bilden av människan som tvingas underkasta sig naturens krafter, för övrigt ytterligare en metafor som präglar föreställningen.

Problemet är bara delvis kvinnosynen. Huvudproblemet är "Fuerzabruta"s regissör här liksom i hela showen, liksom nöjer sig med det omedelbart spektakulära och aldrig tycks kunna ta ett steg ifrån ursprungsidén, utveckla och förändra den. Kort sagt, dramaturgin är snudd på frånvarande: varje scen står liksom och stampar på samma ställe, i vad som för mig blir en smått plågsam evighet.

I den långa "guldfisksscenen" – bassängerna sänks och höjs två gånger – finns ingen koreografi eller ens försök till utveckling av idén, vilket gör att min första association till Ester Williams snart raseras. Det finns inte heller något virtuost nycirkusartesteri att tala om. Så förutom att erbjuda en daterad kvinnosyn, blir hela den inledningsvis så undersköna scenen oändligt lång, seg och tråkig.

Synd på så rara ärtor, men jag tror, som sagt, att en pekuniär succéshow som denna kräver detta slag frånvaro av klassisk känsla för dramaturgi och varje försök till genuin konstnärlighet. Det är just spektaklets och den karnevaliska yrans enkelhet, eller fränare uttryckt den demokratiska enfalden, som är grunden till framgång.

Visst finns fabulöst vackra och smarta och omtumlande ögonblick i "Fuerzabruta" men de var få och oftast just korta, ögonblickliga. Som helhet är det en platt, intetsägande, bitvis

*Fuerzabruta's* director seems to be perfectly content here as in the rest of the show to make do with what is immediately spectacular and never appears able to take the next step on from the original idea, which would involve developing it or changing it. Dramaturgy is virtually absent, so that each scene ends up just plodding on the spot, so to speak, for what turns out to be an almost unendurable eternity as far as I am concerned.

Besides, there isn't even a hint of choreographic bodywork or any attempt to develop the concept in the lengthy 'goldfish' scene – the pools are lowered and raised twice – which means that my initial association with Esther Williams pretty soon disappears. Nor is there any virtuoso contemporary circus artistry worth mentioning. So apart from offering a dated view of women, the entire and initially so magically beautiful scene becomes far too long, repetitive and boring.

It's a shame, of course, that something that promises so much should deliver so little. But, as I said, I think that a show that is as big a success in monetary terms as this one, actually requires this kind of absence of dramaturgy in the classic sense, and of any attempt at genuine artistry. It is the very simplicity of the spectacle and that fairground frenzy, or to put it more harshly the gullibility of the masses, that is the foundation of its success.

There are, of course, fabulously beautiful, clever and stupefying moments in *Fuerzabruta* but they are few in number and usually very brief, not to say momentary. As a whole the show is flat, nondescript, now and then repellent, despite its persistent frantic pace.

So, sadly enough, I've ended up with a hopelessly predictable piece of criticism, despite my obviously futile attempts to see and interpret *Fuerzabruta* in a benevolent light.

Just like the man in his blinding white suit, I can't run away from myself either.

motbjudande, och framför allt paradoxalt nog långtråkig show, trots det genomgående intensiva tempot.

Så landar också jag i en hopplöst förutsägbar kritik, trots försök att se och tolka "Fuerzabruta" i välvilligt ljus.

Inte heller jag lyckas springa ifrån mig själv.

Slut

# The Uncanny in Space

ROBERT ALAGJOZOVSKI

*The use of body, space and audience in the performance Vortex by Phia Ménard and the theatre show of the Argentine company Fuerzabruta*

During the Unpack the Arts residency in London for cultural journalists and art critics, organised by Crying Out Loud, I saw four different performances in the field of contemporary circus, all involving elements of physical and dance theatre. As a newcomer to the wonders of contemporary circus, an ordinary review on one of the four shows will probably prove to be a difficult task. Nevertheless, in the style of someone inexperienced in this field, I decided to compare and contrast the two disparate performances *Vortex* by Phia Ménard and *Fuerzabruta* by the Argentine company of the same name. At the very start I would like to point out that the performances, the type of circus, and their format are in complete opposition, yet it is precisely their difference that allows insight into the different artistic visions adopted in looking at some of the basic categories in contemporary circus, such as body, space and audience.

In both performances the dominant role is played by the circus artists and their corporeality. These shows are all about the performers. Even though in their action and plot both performances use different props that simulate natural elements such as wind, water and hard matter, the shows are nevertheless based on the actors: they play a central role in characterisation. Hence, *Vortex* confronts us with a close-up of the body of the actress. The stage is small and circular so as to present this corporeality even more directly, to make us feel the actress as if under a magnifying lens, since

# Нелагодноста во просторот

ROBERT ALAGJOZOVSKI

*Употребата на телото, просторот и публиката во претставите на Фиа Менар, Вртлог (Phia Menard, Vortex) и на аргентинската трупа Фуерцабрута (Fuerza bruta)*

Во рамките на новинарско-критичарската резиденција во Лондон, во организација на Crying out loud, а во рамките на проектот на Unpack the Arts, видов четири различни претстави од областа на новиот циркус, испреплетени со елементи на физички и денс театар. Веројатно, за новајлија во чудата на современиот циркус и обична рецензија за едно од четирите шоуа ќе претставува тежок жанр, но јас, токму и во манирот на неопитен во областа, решив преку компаративно-контрастивна анализа да ги споредам диспаратните изведби на Фиа Менар, Вртлог (Phia Menard, Vortex) и на аргентинската трупа Фуерцабрута (Fuerza bruta). Уште веднаш ќе кажам дека претставите, типот на циркус, форматот се целосно спротивни, но дека токму нивната различност ќе овозможи добар увид во различните визии кои можат да ги имаат уметниците во користењето на едни од основните категории во современиот циркус како телото, просторот и публиката.

И во двете претстави циркускиот уметник, односно неговата корпоралност игра доминантна улога. Овие претстави се претстави на актерите. Иако и двете користат помошни реквизити, односно ги користат симулациите на природните елементи како ветрот, водата, тврдата материја и во драматургијата на дејствието, сепак претставата е базирана на актерите, тие имаат централно место во карактерологијата. Во таа смисла, Вортекс

UNPACK  
THE  
ARTS

the artistic idea and the meaning of the performance is expressed through the body. The body of the actress is a metonymy for the world, for the cosmos. The transformation of the actress is the transformation of civilisation, of the cosmos. Civilisation changes from the outside, from materialised relations, to the inside, to the human condition: the exotic becomes esoteric, the outside worlds replace the inner worlds, the man tries to find himself, to liberate himself from the built-up layers, rejecting all that civilisation carries, rendering it as the abject<sup>1</sup> colon in the gut, as a black serpentine monster that must be defeated and outplayed, so that man can reach himself and his inner essence. The entire performance is dramatically composed as a spiral journey towards the self, as an increase of intensity, as a gradual rejection of the coating of civilisation, of the layers of costumes through the process of peeling one's own skin and revealing one's new self: a new birth, a newborn, inherently connected to the cosmos. In fact, the post-Freudian and transgender aspects of the body, based on the theories of Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler, deserves a whole study. Thus, perhaps the extratextual information that Phia is an artist who has changed her sex and gender should be taken into consideration, although this is not explicitly incorporated into the performance.

Unlike in *Vortex*, in *Fuerzabruta* the way in which the actors are used is completely different. They are presented at a distance. Even though there are many actors, they are suspended farther off in space, performing their acts high above the audience, akin to faraway stars. They are distanced and alienated as if projected on a film screen. But even in this spectacular show the emphasis is put on that which is human – human fate, human life – so the central message is again conveyed by the actors' bodies. They vibrate above us in space, they run from and seek one another, they enjoy themselves. Just as the name of the company suggests, the artistic vision is not gentle towards the bodies of the actors. They are put in a situation where their physical capabilities are stretched to the limit. Moreover, certain

не соочува со телото на актерот во крупен план. Сцената е камерна, кружна за да ни ја претстави што подиректно корпоралноста, да не натера да го почувствуваме актерот како под лупа, зашто преку телесноста се пласира уметничката идеја и знаковноста на претставата. Телото на актерот е метонимија на светот, на космосот. Трансформацијата на актерот е трансформацијата на цивилизацијата, на космосот. Цивилизацијата се менува од надвор, од предметените односи, кон внатре, кон човековите состојби, егзотериското станува езотериско, надворешните светови ги заменуваат внатрешните, човекот сака да се најде себеси, се ослободува од напластените слоеви, го отфрла сето она што цивилизацијата го носи, како абјектно<sup>1</sup> дебело црево од својата утроба, како црн змијолик монструм што треба да се победи и надигра, за да може човек да дојде до себеси, до својата внатрешна суштина и себност. Целата претстава е драматуршки организирана како спирално патување во себеси, како засилување на интензитетите, градациско отфрлање на цивилизацискиот слој, од натрупаните костими преку лупење на сопствената кожа и откривање на својата нова себност, новото раѓање, како новороденче, исконски поврзано со космосот. Може да се направи цела студија за постфројдистичките или трансродовите аспекти на телото, на трагата на теориите на Јулија Кристева и Џудит Батлер. Во таа насока може да се земе предвид и екстратекстуалната информација дека Фиа е уметница која што го променила својот пол и род, иако тоа имплицитно не е инкорпорирано во авторската изведба.

За разлика од *Вортекс*, во *Фуерцабрута* се користи сосема различен концепт на употреба на актерите. Тие се дадени во далечен план. Актерите иако се многу тие висат далеку во просторот, ги изведуваат своите точки високо над публиката, како далечни ѕвезди. Далечни и оттуѓени како на филмско платно. Но и во ова спектакуларно шоу, и покрај многуте помошни реквизити, нагласката е ставена на човечкото, на

scenes in the show highlight the brutality of contemporary life, in that the bodies of the actors bring down walls, run as fast as they can, hang suspended like helpless puppets, and ferociously bang themselves against the performance platform.

Even though both performances foreground the body of the actor, it can be concluded that their conceptual origin is completely different: the concept of the detail versus that of the panoramic plan, that of the exotic versus the emphasised esoteric. Still, they both insist that the audience feel and see the body, and sensually and emotionally identify with the actors through their corporeality. Both performances have different motives for their brutal treatment of the actor's body. *Vortex* symbolically and subtly destroys, tears, transforms its body, whereas *Fuerzabruta* subjects the body to external, suicidal, hopeless brutality.

Moments of difference, but also correspondence, are visible in respect of the second dimension mentioned in this text, namely the relationship to space. The space in *Vortex* is small, chamber-like. The set is circular, and the audience is in near proximity to the actress. Because the action is esoteric and personal, the small stage invites the audience into the intimate world of the actress, and its circular shape offers a situation of comprehensiveness, where everyone is able to see all that is unfolding. Through this concept the audience is in fact part of the action, part of the actress' world: there is no border between the audience and what is happening on stage. The experience of the actress implies the experience of the viewers. Hence the need for a small and intimate space: to feel the veracity of what is unfolding in front of our eyes.

*Fuerzabruta* shares the same artistic vision of embracing the world, but employs a completely different methodology. The cast settles for spectacle, for the use of the entire space of the great and deep circular hall. It aims to present space as a metonymy for the earth's sphere, to

човечките судбини, на животот на луѓето, така што главната порака повторно ја пренесуваат актерските тела. Тие вибрираат горе во просторот, бегаат, се бараат, уживаат. Како што и самото име на трупата кажува, уметничката визија не е нежна кон актерските тела. Тие се поставени во ситуација на максимално растегнување на своите физички можности. Уште повеќе, одредени сцени во претставата инсистираат на суровоста на современиот живот, така што телата на актерите рушат ѕидови, трчаат најбрзо што можат, висат како немоќни марионети и се удираат со сета сила од подлогата врз која што настапуваат.

Можеме да заклучиме дека и двете претстави го ставаат телото на актерот на преден план, дека иако поаѓаат од две сосема различни концепции, на детал и на панорамски план, на нагласена егзотерија, наспроти нагласена езотерија и двете настојуваат публиката да го почувствува, да го види телото, и сензитивно и емотивно да се поистовети со актерот преку неговата телесност. И двете претстави од различни мотиви имаат сурв однос кон актерското тело. Вортекс симболички и суптилно го уништува, го кине, го трансформира своето тело, а во Фуерцабрута тоа тело е подложено на надворешна или на суицидна, безизлезна бруталност.

Моменти на разлика, но и на преклопување може да се констатираат и во однос на втората димензија со која што се анемаваме во рамките на овој текст, односот кон просторот. Просторот во Вортекс е мал, камерен. Сцената е поставена кружно, а публиката е на блиска дистанца од актерот. Бидејќи дејството е езотериско, лично, малата сцена ја поканува публиката во интимниот свет на актерот, а со самото тоа што е кружна инсистира на постигнување ситуација на сеопфатност, секој да може да види сè што се случува. Со таквата концепција публиката е всушност дел од дејствието, дел од светот на актерот, нема граница помеѓу тоа што се случува на сцената. Искуството на актерот се

convey human fate in an epic dimension. The ensemble uses various vertical, horizontal, as well as dangerous slanting angles to show the oneness of time, the oneness of space, as in the current process of globalisation. This massive space is also restless. It does not follow the conventions of the fourth wall. It is active. The space shrinks, the space presses down, the space diminishes frightfully. The space is another metonymy, this time of the complexity of life itself. Just like in real life, in the space of *Fuerzabruta* we sometimes feel subdued, oppressed, as if carrying the whole world on our shoulders. Other times we feel powerless, we float in space, motionless, just like in real life we find it impossible to move despite life's possibilities. There are times when we run and chase ourselves through life, unable to find ourselves, passing each other by, unable to understand each other – much like what we see in the high planes of *Fuerzabruta*. Sometimes we share space, we fill it, we enjoy it, either as participants or voyeurs. And sometimes we cannot move from the same spot, from the same space, regardless of how hard we try to run away. Akin to the tradition of absurd theatre, the performance *Fuerzabruta* creates several such brilliant scenes: of being penned in, of being unable to escape from life, from its almost metaphysical frozenness, despite its ephemeral dynamics.

Hence, regarding the use of space, it can be concluded that the authors of both performances use a populated and active space with the aim of bringing the audience as close as possible to the action in order to obfuscate the conventional border between the artistic truth and reality. In *Vortex* this space is intimate and static, whereas in *Fuerzabruta* it is massive, but active and dynamic due to the various fragmentations and divisions of space during the course of the performance.

What was previously mentioned about the body and space can also be applied to the use of the audience, because all parts make up one artistic vision, and it is precisely this consistent realisation of the various components of the circus performance concept that confirms the

подразбира и како искуство на гледачите. Затоа е потребен мал и камерен простор. Да се почувствува веродостојноста на она што се одигрува пред наши очи.

Фуерцабрута поаѓа од истата артистичка визија да го прегрне светот, но користи сосема поинаква методологија. Трупата се определува за спектакл, за користење на широк, на целиот простор на огромната и длабока кружна сала. Таа сака да го долови просторот како метонимија за земјината топка, за да ги прикаже човечките судбини во нивната епска димензија. Ансамблот користи различни вертикални и хоризонтални, дури и опасни коси планови за да ја покаже севременоста, односно сепросторноста, актуелната глобализација. И тој масивен простор не е пасивен. Не ги следи конвенциите на четвртиот ѕид. Активен е. Просторот се стеснува, просторот притиска, просторот ужасно се намалува. Просторот е уште една метонимија, овојпат на комплексноста на самиот живот. И во просторот на Фуерцабрута како и во животот, некогаш се чувствуваме тескобно, притеснето, како цела земјина топка танталовски да ја носиме на своите плеќи. Другпат се чувствуваме немоќно, лебдиме неподвижно во просторот како што сме неможни во животот и покрај сите негови можности. Другпат се бркаме низ животот, а не можеме да се најдеме, се разминуваме, не можеме да се разбереме како што се бркаме низ високите планови на претставата на Форца Брута. Некогаш просторот го споделуваме, го исполнуваме, уживаме, воајерски или партиципаторно. А некогаш не можеме да се помрднеме од едно исто место, од еден ист простор, колку и да се трудиме со сите сили да избегаеме. Како во најдобрите традиции на театарот на апсурдот, во претставата на Фуерцабрута се создадени неколку такви брилијантни сцени, на прикleshтеноста, на неможноста да се избега од животот, на неговото речиси метафизичко замрзнување и покрај сета ефемерна динамика.

quality of the work of art. However, it seems that these two performances differ the most when it comes to the way in which the audience is used. In both shows the audience is drawn into the action, but the method is quite different. The audience in *Vortex* is packed within a small space, and thus they can almost feel that the action on stage is happening to them; they can feel the actress' breath, her skin, her sweat, her transformations. But, although present, this audience is passive. They are just a mute witness to what is happening on stage and they are not involved in any way in the actress' performance or in the generation of meaning. The wind, the plastic figurines or monsters can touch the audience, but the spectators are powerless to intervene.

The audience in *Fuerzabruta* is massive: this is a big show with many actors, performed on a large and mobile stage, with various props and perspectives. But yet again the strategy of the artistic vision is to use the audience in the role of an actor. The audience and their behaviour can even alter and affect the course of the action, regardless of how controlled the action is by the technicians. The spectators are in the middle, in the centre of the set. The show is happening everywhere around them: the audience can not only see, but they can also feel the bodies of the actors. It even seems that the audience is aggressively attacked by the action on the stage: with the wall between the spectators and the spectacle gone, the audience even attempts to fight off the invasion of actors, as a metonymy for the invasion of the Other in life, of life itself.<sup>2</sup> The ceiling descends – it is a pool of water that can drench the audience at any moment, at the same time being full of the artists' attractive, half-naked bodies. The desire of the audience to reach out for the offered pleasure, combined with the impending danger from the same source, is an excellent metaphor for the complexity of today's urban life.

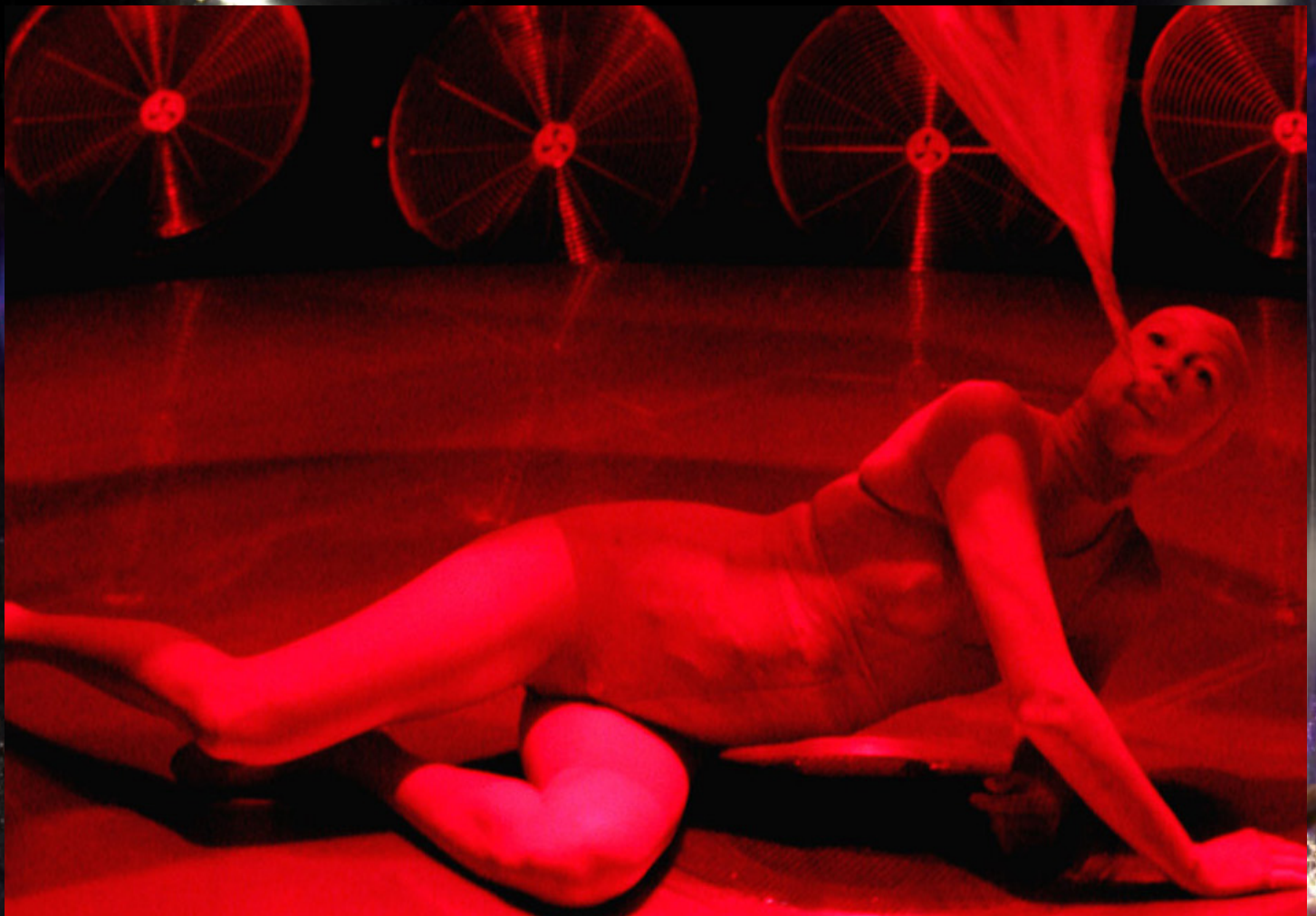
As a conclusion to this review, I would say that both performances, *Vortex* and *Fuerzabruta*, show innovation, and thus, risk, through the way in which they employ the bodies of the

Значи, и за употребата на просторот може да заклучиме дека авторите на двете претстави користат еден населен и активен простор чија цел е да ја донесат публиката што поблиску до случувањето за да се претопи конвенционалната граница меѓу уметничката вистина и реалноста. Во Вортекс тој простор е камерен и статичен, во Фуерцабрута е масивен, но активен и разигран преку различните декомпозиции и поделби на просторните планови во текот на претставата.

Она што го рековме за телото и просторот можеме да го кажеме и за користењето на публиката, затоа што сите сегменти се испреплетени во една уметничка визија, и токму доследноста на остварувањето на концептот во различните компоненти на циркуската претстава го потврдува квалитетот на самото уметничко дело. Но, се чини дека по начинот на користење на публиката, овие две претстави најмногу се разликуваат. И во двете претстави публиката е вовлечена во дејствието, но тоа го прават на сосема различен начин. Публиката во Вортекс е набиена на мал простор, и поради тоа речиси го чувствува дејствието на сцената како на неа самата да и се случува, го чувствува здивот, на актерот, неговата кожа, неговата пот, неговите трансформации. Но иако е присутна, оваа публика е пасивна. Таа е само нем сведок на она што се случува на сцената и не е вовлечена на кој било начин во актерската игра, или во генерирањето на значењата. Ветрот, пластичните човечиња или монструми, можат и неа да ја допрат, но таа е немоќна на кој било начин да интервенира.

Публиката во Фуерцабрута е масивна, тоа е една голема претстава, шоу на многу актери, на голема и подвижна сцена, со различни реквизити и планови. Но повторно, стратегијата на уметничката визија е да ја искористи публиката како уште еден актер. Таа и нејзиното однесување може дури и да го смени или да повлијае на текот на дејствието, без разлика колку е контролирана од техничкиот персонал.





Company Non Nova – *Vortex* © Jean-luc Beaujault

actors, the space and the audience. By breaking the convention of keeping the audience at a distance, and thus by actively including the audience in the shaping of the space, they enable a more direct experience and create an impression of involvement. However, this closeness may have a double effect. On the one hand, a group of people may really enjoy the performance, but there are also those whose expectations, greater than usual, are not lived up to – due to the overwhelming feeling of involvement. Hence, my personal impression of both shows was that they lasted too long, that the spiral dramatic play of *Vortex* revolved around several unnecessary circles, while *Fuerzabruta's* socio-political statements at the beginning of the performance were watered down into an entertainment spectacle.

1 I would like to provide a lengthier reference on the abject because I believe it could be the basis for another study on *Vortex*. I have decided to do this because, on a symbolic level, the moment of ejecting the big plastic band that was later transformed into a serpentine monster left the greatest impression on me. A true culmination occurred during the dancing duel with the large black beast, which, propelled by the unpredictable natural power of the wind, the actress had to defeat, constantly adjusting her dance and movements to the

Публиката е во средината, во централниот дел од сценскиот простор. Шоуто се случува насекаде околу неа, таа не само што може да го види и да го почувствува телото на актерите. Таа е дури нападната агресивно од дејствието на сцената, сидот меѓу неа и спектаклот е паднат и таа дури посегнува да се одбрани од натрапништвото на актерите, како метонимија за натрапништвото на Другите во животот, на самиот Живот. Плафонот, се спушта, тоа е еден базен со вода и во секој момент може да се излие врз главата на публиката, без разлика што тоа истовремено е и базен со атрактивни, полуголи тела на уметниците. Стремежот на публиката да посегне по задоволството што и се нуди заедно со надоаѓачката опасност од истиот извор е одлична метафора за комплексноста на денешниот урбан живот.

Како заклучок на целиот есеј би рекол дека и двете претстави, Вртлог и Фуерцабрута, покажаа голема иновативност а со тоа и ризик одбирајќи ги начините на кои ги користат телата на актерите, просторот и

movements of the monster, i.e. the abject. What is the abject? According to the Macedonian cultural theorist Jasna Kotevska, there are two ways of understanding the abject. The first is the use of the word in English as a term that denotes something (morally) low, debased, degraded, but from Julia Kristeva onwards it is used as a complex notion for what stands between the sub-ject (I) and the ob-ject (everything that is not I); hence she chooses the word ab-ject.

The theory of Kr(i)steva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980) illuminates the duality (the attraction and repulsiveness) of the phenomenon of the unclean. For Kristeva, the unclean is one of the four aspects (together with taboo, food and sin) through which the category she names as the abject is manifested. What is the abject? Before and after Kristeva's book, the term in the English language remains related to the categories of the disdained, the wretched, the lowly, but has little direct connection to physical uncleanliness: rather it is associated with a moral, cultural, social decline. However, after Kristeva's book – though dictionaries continued to register the everyday use of the term *abject* as a negative phenomenon – in aesthetics, literary theory, contemporary psychoanalysis and gender studies, the abject began to be used as a complex tool for addressing a specific, borderline phenomenon. Namely, according to Kristeva:

The abject is seen as a place between the unconscious and the conscious, where at one place and one time the inside and outside meet (drives and outside phenomena). The abject is the subject's border from the inside to the outside and vice versa. The abject has a super-personal location and a super-historical time. It is the place where the archaic and contemporary (the animalistic and cultural) suddenly meet.

The abject does not exist in two places simultaneously, but within an interspace, because if we come to the end of one object (assuming that the object borders another object from the same substance), we will come to the beginning of the other object; those two objects are not ideally separated, but rather they come into contact with a mutual quality; they merge in one place and exchange something mutual – the abject.

The abject is a position of tension and danger. Mary Douglas has already discussed this in her work *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966). Here she claims that the person who transcends from one state into another is in a position of danger and presents danger for others, and that to be on the margins means to be in touch with danger, to be in touch with the source of power. The abject contains both threat and violence, as is suggested in the first sentence of Kristeva's essay: "There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable." Both the outside and inside are a threat to one another, since the essence of our being, of our existence, is violent, rebellious. However, the danger in question is not a danger to the subject, but solely to order and its institutions. (See Kotevska, Jasna. (2006). *Sanitary Enigma*. Templum: Skopje, pp. 46-52.)

- 2 It seems unpalatable to comment on this, but simply as an anecdote – a surreal breakthrough of the subconscious in life, an incorporation of Murphy's Law – only a week after the performance that is the subject of this essay, during another performance, in a terrible accident, part of the set really did collapse, injuring several actors and audience members.

публиката. Нивното рушење на конвенцијата на дистанцата на публиката, односно активното вклучување на публиката во обликувањето на просторноста овозможува искуството да биде многу подиректно, создадоа впечаток на инволвираност. Но токму таа преголема блискост може да постигне и двоен ефект. Од една страна да создаде група на луѓе кои премногу ја сакаат претставата и луѓе кај кои претставата не ги исполнува очекувањата кои се и поголеми од обично, поради преголемото чувство на вовлеченост. Во таа смисла на ниво на личен впечаток, мојата импресија и од двете претстави беше дека предолго траеја, дека спиралната драматургија на Вртлог се вртеше во неколку непотребни прстени, а дека Фуерцабрута ги разводни социополитичките знакови од почетокот на претставата во спектакл на забава.

- 1 Би сакал да дадам поголема референца за абјектот затоа што сметам дека тоа би можело да биде тема на уште една студија за претставата Вртлог. А тоа го правам затоа што на едно симболичко ниво, моментот на исфрлањето на големата црна пластична лента, која што потоа се претвори во змијолик монструм ми остави најголем впечаток во претставата. Вистинска кулминација беше моментот на танчерски двобој со огромниот црн свер, воден од непредвидливата природна сила на ветрот којшто актерката мораше да го победи во еден нерамноправен дуел постојано прилагодувајќи го својот танц и движења во однос на движењата на монструмот, односно абјектот. Што е абјектот? Според македонската теоретичарка на културата, Јасна Котеска, има два начини преку кои се сфаќа абјектот. Првиот е дека зборот абјект на англиски се употребува како термин за нешто (морално) ниско, паднато, недостоинствено, итн. но од Јулија Кристева наваму се користи и како комплексен поим за она што стои помеѓу субјектот (мене) и објектот (што не е јас), оттука таа го бира токму зборот а-бјект.

Теоријата на Јулија Кристева од "Моќта на ужасот: есеј за абјектот" (1980) ја осветлува двостраноста (привлечност и одбивност) на феноменот на нечистото. Кај Кристева нечистото е еден од четирите чинители (заедно со табуто, храната и гревот) низ кои се пројавува категоријата што ја именува како абјект. Што е абјект? И пред, и по книгата на Кристева, зборот абјект во англискиот јазик се врзува за категориите на презреното, подлото, ниското, но што помалку има директна врска со физичката нечистотија, а повеќе асоцира на морален, културен, социолошки пад. Но, по книгата на Кристева иако речниците продолжија да ја регистрираат секојдневната употреба на абјектот како негативен феномен – во естетиката, литературната наука, современата психоанализа и родовите студии абјектот почна да се исползува како сложена алатка за определување на еден специфичен, граничен феномен. Имено според Кристева:

- 1) Абјектот се сфаќа како место помеѓу потсвеста и свеста, каде на една локација и во исто време, се среќаваат внатрешното и надворешното (нагоните и надворешните феномени). Абјектот е субјектовата граница од внатре кон надвор и обратно.
- 2) Абјектот има и над-лична локација и над-историско време.

Тоа е она место каде одеднаш се допираат архаичното и современото (анималното и културалното).

3) Абјектот не постои на две места одеднаш, туку на меѓу-простор, бидејќи ако стигнеме до крајот на едно нешто (под претпоставка дека нештото се граничи со друго нешто што е од иста супстанца), ќе дојдеме до почетокот на другото нешто, но тие меѓусебе не се идеално одвоени, туку се допираат со еден заеднички квалитет, се слеваат на едно единствено место и таму споделуваат нешто заедничко, тоа заедништвото е абјектот.

4) Абјектот е позиција која е напната и опасна. Ова го пишува веќе Мери Даглас: "Личноста која минува од една состојба во друга самата се наоѓа во опасност и зрачи опасност по другите", и: "Да се биде на маргината значи да се биде во допир со опасноста, да се биде на изворот на моќта". Абјектот содржи закана и насилство. Првата реченица од книгата на Кристева гласи: "Во самата абјектност се назира еден од оние жестоки, мрачни бунтови на битието, насочени против заканата која како да излегува од една прекумерна надворешност или внатрешност, исфрлена надвор од досегот на можното, дозоленото, замисливото". И надворешното и внатрешното претставуваат закана едно за друго, затоа што суштината на битието, на нашето суштествување е насилна, револтна. Но, опасноста за која зборуваме не е опасност по субјектот, туку единствено по поредокот и неговите институции. Види во: Јасна Котеска, „Санитарна енигма“, Темплум, Скопје, 2006, 46-52 стр,

- 2) Сметам дека би било невкусно да се коментира, но сепак како анегдота, како еден надреалистички пробив на несвесното во животот, како инкорпорација на марфиевиот закон, само една недела по претставата што е предмет на оваа рецензија, во друга изведба, плафонот навистина се урна и повреди неколкумина, и актери и публика, во еден ужасен инцидент.

# Transformation as an Impetus

VERONIKA ŠTEFANOVÁ

Each of us has experienced, either consciously or unconsciously, a process of transformation. Social changes accompany transformations of lifestyle, fashion or artistic trends. If an art critic is not able to effectively react and accommodate his/her attitudes to such transformations, which naturally emerge, s/he can't openly speak on and evaluate works of art created by others.

A major transformation in my own critical attitudes has perhaps occurred over the last six years, during which time I have decided to follow the path of contemporary circus and its aesthetic transformations. In this period I have witnessed accelerated and unrestrained changes in contemporary circus as it has taken issue with its audiences, as well as with itself. As Jean-Michel Guy states in his article 'The Specificity of Circus', published in the collection *Documentation of CARD. Circus Artistic Research Development*: "Circus is a social and historical construction that varies considerably according to time, space, cultures, people, and maybe from one moment to another for a single individual."

If we want to understand the contemporary circus and its transformation, in terms of both its temporal and spatial relations, it is necessary to 'dis-locate' ourselves since the contemporary circus is an extremely international enterprise, and, in most cases, is predominantly an expression of non-verbal art. The pivotal expressive element remains a body and the human ability to generate extraordinary and extreme movements. The charm and difficulty of contemporary circus lies in its multi-genre nature and its potential to transcend the boundaries of artistic disciplines.

Similar to a theatre or dance work, a contemporary circus production consists of various elements. The key, and at the same

# Transformace jako hnací síla

VERONIKA ŠTEFANOVÁ

Procesem proměny prochází každý z nás, ať už si to vědomě přizná, nebo jen podvědomě přijme. Proměňuje se společnost, s ní životní styl, módní trendy i trendy umělecké. Pokud není kupříkladu umělecký kritik schopen proměňovat své názory v čase a ve vztahu ke změnám, které se kolem něj přirozeně dějí, nemůže otevřeně hovořit a hodnotit umělecká díla jiných.

Snad nejvíce jsem si svou vlastní kritickou proměnou prošla za posledních šest let, kdy jsem se rozhodla následovat cestu nového cirkusu a jeho estetickou proměnu. Za tuto dobu jsem poznala, jak rychle a svobodně se nový cirkus mění. V této proměně polemizuje s námi i se sebou samým. Jak píše Jean-Michel Guy ve svém článku *The specificity of circus* uveřejněném ve sbírce *Documentation of CARD. Circus Artistic Research Development*:

*Cirkus je sociální a historický konstrukt, který se proměňuje ve vztahu k času, prostoru, kulturám, lidem a možná z jedné chvíle na druhou ve vztahu k určitému individu.*<sup>1</sup>

Chceme-li poznávat nový cirkus a jeho proměnu v čase i prostoru, je třeba nesetrvávat pouze na jednom místě. Nový cirkus má totiž výrazně mezinárodní charakter. Především díky tomu, že ve většině případů je uměním beze slov. Hlavním vyjadřovacím prostředkem zůstává tělo a schopnost člověka pomocí něj vytvářet neobvyklé a extrémní pohyby. Půvab a komplikovanost nového cirkusu spočívá v jeho multižánrové povaze a jeho potenciálu přesahového uměleckého druhu. Inscenace nového cirkusu se skládá, stejně jako

1 Circus is a social and historical construction that varies considerably according to time, space, cultures, people, and maybe from one moment to another for a single individual.

time the least accessible, element of such a production is the live artist – actor, acrobat, performer, mime, dancer, etcetera. The artist transforms his/her personality and physical self into a form that represents other concrete or abstract phenomena – a form that refers to other realities. However, the contemporary circus marks a discernible blending of signifier (signifying performer) and signified (character/role): performers always present themselves and their real physical performance, yet, simultaneously, they produce a certain image, illusion, situation or atmosphere while performing the specific circus routine.

In the contemporary or traditional circus, an artist ensnares a spectator with his/her movement; s/he can even transport the viewer into an ecstatic state. The audience, confronted with the conspicuous accentuation of human physical materiality, is enabled to generate new meanings. Acrobat's body influences spectator's body; the former stimulates physical and mental impulses or reactions in the latter. The body manifests itself and, simultaneously, it potentially refers to a different reality. The movement is offered as a coded message communicated by the author of the production to a spectator who, then, can decipher it. Thus, the movement is an imaginary line through which an artist can connect with a spectator.

During the Unpack the Arts seminar I had an opportunity to attend three productions presented at the London International Mime Festival (*Vortex* and *L'après-midi d'un Foehn* by Compagnie Non Nova, and *A Bas Bruit* by MPTA – Compagnie les mains, les pieds et la tête aussi) and a gigantic spectacle at the Roundhouse (*Fuerzabruta*). We can't argue that all four productions fall exclusively under the category of contemporary circus. Nonetheless, they included aspects of some circus routines – pair acrobatics, Chinese pole, manipulation with objects, aerial dance.

Besides a meditation on the form, all four productions provoked me to recognise the meaning and function of the acrobats who appeared in these productions. One topic which

inscenace divadelní nebo taneční, z různých složek. Zásadní a zároveň nejnepřehlednější uchopitelnou složkou každé takové inscenace je živý umělec – herec, artista, performer, mim, tanečník atd. Svou osobnost a své fyzické já tento umělec transformuje do podoby, která představuje jiné konkrétní nebo abstraktní jevy, odkazuje k jiným skutečnostem. V novém cirkusu ale v umělcově výkonu dochází k viditelnému prolnutí představujícího a představovaného; vždy bude představovat sebe samého ve svém reálném fyzickém výkonu a zároveň, pomocí tohoto specifického cirkusového pohybu, vytvářet určitou představu, iluzi, situaci nebo náladu.

V cirkusu, novém i tradičním, artista uchvacuje diváka svým pohybem, může ho uvést i do stavu excitace. Nápadné zvýrazňování lidské fyzické materiálnosti umožňuje publiku při pohledu na ni vytvářet nové významy. Tělo artisty ovlivňuje tělo diváka, vyvolává v něm fyzické i psychické impulzy a reakce. Tělo ukazuje sebe samo a zároveň může odkazovat k jiné skutečnosti. Pohyb je pak divákovi nabídnut jako kód k rozluštění toho, co nám autor inscenace, chce sdělit. Pohyb je tedy pomyslnou spojovací šňůrou, kterou se artista může propojit s divákem.

V rámci semináře Unpack the Arts jsem měla možnost zhlédnout tři inscenace v rámci festivalu London International Mime Festival (*Vortex* a *L'Après midi d'un Foehn* od Compagnie Non Nova, *A Bas Bruit* od MPTA – Compagnie les mains, les pieds et la tête aussi) a mimo festival také gigantickou show v Roundhouse (*Fuerzabruta*). Nelze přímo říct, že se v případech všech čtyř inscenací jednalo výsadně o nový cirkus. Nicméně prvky některých cirkusových disciplín se v nich objevovaly – párová akrobacie, čínská tyč, manipulace s předměty, vzdušný tanec. Kromě zamýšlení se nad formou mě všechny čtyři inscenace provokovaly především k tomu, abych si uvědomila význam a funkci umělců v těchto inscenacích vystupujících. Jedno téma, které by všechny čtyři události mohlo propojit, je i téma transformace.

could interconnect all four events was the motif of transformation.

### In one's own skin

Phia Ménard, the founder and the main performer of Compagnie Non Nova, experienced during her life an important intimate and personal transformation. Looking at her present work, it is apparent that she has primarily undergone a major artistic transformation. As a pioneer of modern juggling, she concentrates on manipulation with objects. Today Phia Ménard can be perceived not only as a circus artist, but as an artistic visionary and experimenter. In her new productions, she has deepened her research of object manipulation to such an extent as to turn it into a high-level artistic discipline with skilled technique.

In the productions of both *Vortex* and *L'après-midi d'un Foehn* she, as an author and director, used similar staging: a little circular arena surrounded by several functioning fans. Spectators could watch the stage action from any angle, just as in the traditional circus.

The dramaturgy of *Vortex* is based on various semantic levels. Inanimate objects – plastic bags – are animated by means of the blowing wind. The plastic bags resemble human bodies – head, two legs, two arms. The only performer in *Vortex* is Phia Ménard, who at the beginning of the show demonstrates to the audience that the plastic bag puppets are inanimate objects which, there on stage, she forms into the shape of a body. She slowly and precisely cuts and glues, and naturally captivates the audience's attention. The most striking and surprising moment occurs when she dynamically throws the glued plastic bag figurine up in the air and it starts dancing in the gusts of wind blowing from the fans. Hence, the plastic bags, manipulated by an artificially produced element, are not like traditional puppets, which are usually manipulated by a human. The trajectories of their movements are contingent on many factors. Consequently, they can surprise both audience and performer.

The exceptional nature of *Vortex* lies in its dual manipulation, in the so-called meta-manipulative

### Ve vlastní kůži

Phia Ménard, zakladatelka a hlavní performerka Compagnie Non Nova, prošla ve svém životě nejen velmi zásadní osobní a osobnostní transformací, ale při pohledu na její současné dílo je patrné, že prošla především výraznou transformací uměleckou. Jakožto průkopnice moderního, řekněme novocirkusového žonglování, se dnes více soustřeďuje na experimentální manipulaci s předměty. Phia Ménard lze dnes vnímat nikoli jen jako cirkusovou artistku, ale jako uměleckou vizionářku a experimentátorku, která ve svých nejnovějších inscenacích povyšuje manipulaci s předměty na vysokou technickou i uměleckou úroveň.

Pro inscenace *Vortex* a *L'Après midi d'un Foehn*, jako jejich autorka a režisérka, použila stejný scénický prostor; malá kruhová aréna, osázená po celém obvodu několika funkčními větráky. Diváci tak měli možnost nahlížet jevištní akci ze všech stran jako v tradičním cirkusu.

Dramaturgie *Vortex* je postavena na několika významových úrovních. Neživý objekt se v představení proměňuje pomocí větrného živlu v objekt živý. Tímto objektem jsou igelitové sáčky, jejichž tvar připomíná lidské tělo – hlava, dvě nohy, dvě ruce. Hlavní a jedinou účinkující inscenace *Vortex* je Phia Ménard, která hned na začátku publiku dokazuje, že igelitové loutky jsou neživé předměty, které přímo na jevišti formuje do tvaru lidského těla. Pomalými a přesnými pohyby stříhá a lepí, a diváky tak přirozeně napíná. Nejsilnější moment překvapení nastane, když slepeného igelitového panáčka dynamickým gestem vyhodí do vzduchu a on začne tančit v poryvu větru. Ten vytvářejí spuštěné větráky. Sáčky pak nejsou klasickými loutkami, jimiž manipuluje člověk, jsou totiž manipulovány uměle vytvářeným živlem. Trajektorie jejich pohybu je náhodná. Proto mohou překvapit nejen diváky, ale i samotnou performerku.

Výjimečnost *Vortex* spočívá i ve dvojí manipulaci, takzvané metamaniplativní technice: vítr je manipulován a vítr zároveň manipuluje loutky. Phia Ménard se pak během

technique: the wind is manipulated and simultaneously manipulates the puppets. Phia Ménard, then, can observe the movement of puppets with whom she physically interacts: she follows, changes, or interrupts their trajectories.

The question of transformation is related to the duality of Phia Ménard's stage character. At certain points, Ménard switches from the level of an object, a status which at the beginning of the show is enhanced by her costume and an artificial male mask, to the level of a subject, especially in the scenes in which she undresses parts of her body. Following the object-subject alterations, Ménard oscillates between her role and herself. Symptomatic of this is the image in which she struggles with a black plastic monster, symbolically disembowelled from inside of her coat.

Ménard's stage presence is a declaration: 'have a body and be a body'. In this state she switches between the fictitious world of play and real corporeality. The artist, then, transforms her body from the semiotic order to the order of real body. She doesn't act, she co-exists with objects.

### From the self to the role

The dramaturgical concept of the production *L'après-midi d'un Foehn* appeals to a younger spectator who will be able to appreciate not only the charm, originality and fragility of the images, but also the narrative character of the show. The images, created by a technique similar to that of *Vortex*, have an almost fairytale-like atmosphere that comes from the use of puppetry. The puppets represent actual characters which interact with each other. The atmosphere also creates dramatic situations in which the crucial conflict stems from the struggle of good and evil – in the case of *L'après-midi d'un Foehn* with no happy ending. In this show, dramatic situations emerge from the story, which draws inspiration from the music of Debussy's ballet of the same name.

At the beginning of *L'après-midi d'un Foehn*, there is a woman (Cécile Briand) who stands on the circular stage, surrounded by the fans, as she cuts and glues figures from the plastic bags

představení může věnovat sledování pohybu loutek, se kterými navazuje přímý fyzický kontakt. Jejich trajektorii buď opisuje, nebo fyzickou silou mění, případně přerušuje.

S otázkou transformace se pojí především dvojí charakter Phii Ménard existující ve scénickém prostoru. Phia Ménard v určitých momentech přechází z roviny objektu, který je na začátku představení umocněn kostýmem i umělou maskou muže, do roviny subjektu, zvláště pak v obrazech, jejichž součástí jsou pomalu obnaženy části jejího těla. Stejně jako se mění objekty v subjekty, přechází Phia Ménard z role k vlastní osobnosti. Zvláště pak v obraze, v němž zápasí s černým plastovým monstrem, které symbolicky vyvrhla z útrob svého kostýmu.

Existence Phii Ménard ve scénickém prostoru je také deklarácí „míti tělo a být tělem“. V tomto stavu přechází z fiktivního světa hry do reálné tělesnosti. Artistka se tak transformuje z těla znakového do těla reálného. Nehraje, ale koexistuje s předměty.

### Od osobnosti k roli

Svým dramaturgickým pojetím má inscenace *L'Après midi d'un Foehn* blízko k mladšímu divákovi, který dokáže ocenit nejen půvab, originalitu a křehkost jednotlivých obrazů, ale také narativní povahu inscenace. Skoro až pohádkově působí jednotlivé obrazy, jež jsou vytvářeny stejnou technikou jako ve *Vortex*. Pohádkovost *L'Après midi d'un Foehn* spočívá v použití loutky jakožto zástupce konkrétních postav, které mezi sebou navazují vztahy. Také ve schopnosti vytvářet dramatické situace, v nichž zásadní konflikt spočívá v boji dobra se zlem; v případě *L'Après midi d'un Foehn* bez šťastného konce. V této inscenaci jsou vytvářeny jednotlivé dramatické situace v návaznosti na fabuli příběhu inspirovaného hudbou stejnojmenného Debussyho baletu. Na začátku představení *L'Après midi d'un Foehn* je přítomna žena (Cécile Briand), která na kruhové scéně osázené větráky stříhá a lepí postavičky z igelitového sáčku, stejně jako Phia Ménard ve *Vortex*. Na rozdíl od Phii Ménard Cécile Briand v *L'Après midi d'un Foehn* hraje

– in the same manner as Phia Ménard in *Vortex*. Unlike Phia Ménard, in *L'après-midi d'un Foehn* Briand enacts a role. In the opening scene she doesn't mask her face; she only covers her body in a black cowl. Briand, contrary to Ménard, embodies a character and, at the same time, is a master of the stage action. She controls and manipulates the plastic bag figures. Thus, she is simultaneously a performer and manipulator. She partially controls the movement of puppets with a little stick with which she pulls them towards herself or pushes them away.

*L'après-midi d'un Foehn* isn't primarily a circus production, even though we as spectators witness an extraordinary movement of floating and fluttering puppets whose kinetic energy is transformed into the semantic movement paradigms of dance and acrobatics.

### Dismantled puzzle

Phia Ménard and Mathurin Bolze, the founder of MPTA – Compagnie les mains, les pieds et la tête aussi, belong to the generation of circus artists from the 1990s who took the art in a different direction. The fusion of individual artistic disciplines and forms with contemporary circus came about very fluidly. Contemporary circus as an artform became more autonomous and authentic. New and powerful creative individuals, who increasingly cooperated with artists from other artistic disciplines, emerged. The fusion resulted in a real and vital artistic synthesis.

The contemporary circus of the 1990s experienced its own transformation. As a member of this generation of circus artists forming in France, Mathurin Bolze also experienced an artistic transformation. He started as a circus acrobat and ended up as a contemporary circus director.

Circus directing is not a discipline to be studied as, for example, is dance choreography or theatre directing. It is a process which a circus artist must gradually undergo through his first-hand experience with his/her own body. S/he can create only on the basis of his/her intense perception and recognition of the body and its

roli. Na začátku představení nemaskuje svou tvář, pouze halí své tělo do černé kápě. Cécile Briand je na rozdíl od Phii Ménard hereckou postavou a zároveň demiurgem jevištní akce. Ovládá a manipuluje plastové figurky vyrobené ze sáčků. Je tedy interpretkou a zároveň manipulátorkou. Částečně usměřňuje pohyb loutek a pomocí hůlky si je k sobě přitahuje nebo je odstrkuje.

*L'Après midi d'un Foehn* nevnímáme primárně jako cirkusovou inscenaci, nicméně i tak jsme jako diváci svědky výjimečného pohybu, který ve vzduchu předvádí poletující a třepetající se loutky, jejichž kinetická energie se transformuje do významových pohybových vzorců tance a akrobacie.

### Rozložená skládačka

Mathurin Bolze, zakladatel souboru MPTA – Compagnie les mains, les pieds et la tête aussi, patří podobně jako Phia Ménard ke generaci novocirkusových artistů devadesátých let dvacátého století, v nichž nový cirkus nabral jiný směr. Jednotlivé umělecké druhy a formy se s cirkusem mísily mnohem plynuleji. Nový cirkus se jako umění začal více osamostatňovat a nabývat na autentičnosti. Začaly se objevovat silné tvůrčí individuality, které více spolupracovali s umělci z jiných uměleckých oborů. Vznikla tak skutečná živá umělecká syntéza.

Nový cirkus v devadesátých letech prodělával svou vlastní transformaci. Jakožto součást generace cirkusových artistů formujících se v devadesátých letech ve Francii prošel si uměleckou transformací i Mathurin Bolze. Začal jako cirkusový artista a dnes je novocirkusovým režisérem.

Cirkusová režie je obor, který nelze studovat tak jako třeba taneční choreografii nebo divadelní režii. Je to proces, ke kterému se cirkusový artista musí postupně dopracovat na základě přímé zkušenosti se svým tělem. Díky schopnosti tělo maximálně vnímat a uvědomovat si jeho schopnosti a možnosti může tvořit. Cirkusový režisér, jakým je i Mathurin Bolze, si musí uvědomit i limity těla a





Company MPTA/Mathurin Bolze – *A Bas Bruit* © Christophe Raynaud de Lage

capacity. A circus director must also be aware of the limits of the body and empathise with the bodies of the artists s/he works with in productions. As a contemporary circus director, s/he transforms performers' bodies in order to put his/her artistic vision into practice.

In Mathurin Bolze's *A Bas Bruit*, it was easier to perceive individual elements rather than a complex work. As spectators, we watched a spectacular mobile scenography, frequent light changes, film projections, and mostly extreme and virtuous movements of the human body. The strongest of the elements was the movement of the artists, enhanced by an original stage machinery which resembled a perpetual motion machine. A big rotating barrel even reminded us of a hamster wheel. There was also a conveyor belt on the stage, which irregularly accelerated or slowed down. Set design consisted of various doors, trapdoors and holes in which artists appeared and disappeared. In *A Bas Bruit*, human action accepted the movement of stage machines; it was, then, intentionally transformed into the

umšt se empaticky vcítit do těl artistů, které ve svých inscenacích režijně vede. Jako novocirkusový režisér totiž transformuje jejich těla do své inscenační vize.

V jeho inscenaci *A Bas Bruit* bylo snazší složky vnímat odděleně spíše než komplexně. Jako diváci jsme byli svědky velkolepé pohyblivé scénografie, častých světelných proměn, filmové projekce, a především extrémních a zároveň virtuózních pohybů lidského těla. Nejvýraznější z těchto složek byl právě pohyb artistů umocněný originální scénickou mašinérií, připomínající perpetuum mobile. Velký točící se válec dokonce vypadal jako křeččí kruh. Na scéně byl také pojízdný pás, který se nepravidelně zrychloval nebo zpomaloval. Scénografii doplňovala různá dvířka, propadla a otvory, kterými artisté prolézali, propadávali, zjevovali se a mizeli. V *A Bas Bruit* je pohyb přizpůsobován strojům umístěným na scéně, je tedy záměrně transformován do rytmu a formy pohyblivé dekorace. Jako kdyby s jednotlivými kusy mašinérie každý z artistů navazoval osobní

UNPACK  
THE  
ARTS

rhythm and form of moving decoration. It was as if each performer personally interacted with individual pieces of machinery, searching for the possibilities of how to merge with them in order to become a part within their whole. As a result, their physical expression was dehumanised, transformed into the artificial form of the machine.

Mathurin Bolze mentioned in an interview that he always bases his productions on the nature and expression of the artists themselves. There is, then, an obvious question: what is the position of an artist in *A Bas Bruit*? Is his/her stage presence determined by the particular character, or does s/he present himself/herself? If the latter is the case, then the abstract movement expression didn't represent another reality, being a manifestation of personal experience.

In the production's programme, as well as in the interview, Mathurin Bolze indicated that all three performers (Mitia Fedotenko, Elise Legros, Cyrille Musy) were also co-authors of the piece. Such an approach is quite characteristic for the contemporary circus. Thus, a contemporary circus artist is considered not only a performer but rather a creative individual whose movement and gestures are unique and irreproducible. The individuality, both kinetic and expressive, of all three artists pervaded the performance. Even though they co-produced some stage images, it seemed that each of them formed around himself/herself an isolated, impenetrable micro-space. Within the hardly comprehensible concept of the production, the artists kept disappearing somewhere in-between the characters they represented and themselves.

### **Manipulation and euphoria**

Brought to London all the way from Argentina, *Fuerzabruta* didn't resemble any production we are used to attending either in a theatre or a circus tent. Although it was presented in an enclosed space, it had the character and gaiety of a carnivalesque procession. It was a social event full of wild rhythm, colour and exuberance, connected with an immediate corporeal

vztah, hledal možnosti, jak s nimi splynout, stát se jejich součástí. Tím se jejich fyzický výraz odliššťoval, transformoval do umělé podoby stroje.

Mathurin Bolze v rozhovoru prozradil, že při práci na inscenaci s jinými artisty vždy vychází z povahy i výrazu artistů samotných. Nabízí se tedy otázka, jakou pozici má v inscenaci *A Bas Bruit* účinkující artista? Zda je jeho přítomnost v inscenaci podmíněna představováním určité role, nebo v ní vystupuje sám za sebe? Tím pádem by pohybové abstraktní vyjádření nebylo reprezentací jiné skutečnosti, ale prezentací osobní zkušenosti.

Mathurin Bolze v programu k inscenaci i v rozhovoru uvedl všechny tři účinkující artisty (Mitia Fedotenko, Elise Legros, Cyrille Musy) jako spoluautory inscenace. V novém cirkusu se s takovým přístupem setkáváme často. Artista je pak vnímán nejen jako interpret, ale jako tvůrčí individualita, jejíž pohyb, gesto i mimika jsou jedinečné a neopakovatelné. Individualita pohybová i výrazová se u všech tří artistů projevila i během představení. I přesto, že společně figurovali v některých scénických obrazech, působili, jako by si každý kolem sebe vytvořil izolovaný a neprostupný mikroprostor. V rámci ne příliš srozumitelné koncepce inscenace se artisté ztráceli někde mezi svou postavou a sebeou samými.

### **Manipulace a euforie**

*Fuerzabruta* dovezená do Londýna až z Argentiny nemá rysy inscenace, jaké obvykle vidíme v divadle nebo šapitó. I když je uváděna v uzavřeném prostoru, má charakter spíše průvodového karnevalového veselí. Tato společenská událost je totiž plná divokého rytmu, barevnosti i bujarosti. Není spojena s blaženým estetickým opojením, ale s přímým fyzickým zakoušením těla na tělo. Diváci jsou doslova vrženi do jedné arény, kde společně napjatě čekají, co se bude dít. Toto napětí naruší silné dunění bubnů a hlasitý hrdelní zpěv. Zvuky, rytmická melodie, světelná show a rejdní artistů zavěšených na laněch poletujících vzduchem přirozeně způsobují úlek i ohromení divácké klaky.

experience rather than with blissful aesthetic elation. Spectators were literally thrown into an arena in which they waited for whatever would come. Excitement was interrupted by powerful drumming and loud throat singing. Sounds, rhythmic melodies, light shows, and the bustle of artists, hanging on the ropes and flying up in the air, naturally startled and overwhelmed spectators.

After a short time spent in the wild tumult of artists, who moved and screamed above the heads of onlookers, it was clear that the authors of *Fuerzabruta* wanted to surprise, shock and entertain. As a matter of fact, they intentionally disrupted the border between audience and stage, and involved spectators in the heart of action. The stage was, then, anywhere, encompassing the standing spectators who became an integral part of the performance.

Rambunctious gaiety and euphoria – that was *Fuerzabruta*. The artists drew the audience into an atmosphere of mutual entertainment in which both parties enjoyed every moment. It was of no consequence to search for the meaning of images, created by artists hanging on the ropes, running on a conveyor belt, or swimming half-naked in see-through pools. Each spectator could create his/her own meaning, if s/he felt like doing so. A galactic show full of flashing colourful lights and constant spatial changes, accompanied by an irresistible desire to move to the thunderous rhythm, *Fuerzabruta* excluded concentration and rational articulation of stage action.

*Fuerzabruta* was more than a production. It was a physical experience and temptation. On the one hand, it might perhaps be a pandering temptation; on the other, hardly an irresistible one. The name *Fuerzabruta* says it all: power and euphoric energy, enacted with almost brutal commitment by the body of each artist, manipulates the energy of the spectators. The intensity of the manipulation is enhanced by the immediate physical interaction between artists and spectators.

The authors of the show know very well which elements have an impact on the psyche of the

Po chvíli divokého rejdní a pokřikování artistů nad hlavami přihlížejících je zřejmé, že autoři *Fuerzabruta* chtějí překvapovat, lekat a bavit. Záměrně proto narušují hranice mezi hledištěm a jevištěm, čímž vtahují diváky do centra dění. Jeviště je pak všude tam, kde stojí diváci, kteří jsou integrální součástí akce.

Bujaré veselí a euforie, to je *Fuerzabruta*. Artisté navozují divákům pocit, že se společně všichni dobře baví a užívají si opojení každého okamžiku. Nemá smysl hledat jeden význam v obrazech, které artisté na lanách, běžící muž na páse nebo polonahé dívky v průhledných bazénech vytvářejí. Každý z diváků si za ně může dosadit, cokoliv chce, má-li potřebu nějaký význam vůbec dosazovat. Galaktická show plná záblesků barevných světél, neustálé přesuny z místa na místo, a navíc těžko překonatelná touha pohybovat se v dunivém rytmu člověku ani neumožní soustředit se a přemýšlet nad tím, co se to všechno kolem něj vlastně děje.

*Fuerzabruta* je víc než inscenace. Je fyzickým zakoušením a pokušením. Na jednu stranu možná podbízivým, na stranu druhou těžko odolatelým. Název *Fuerzabruta* je doslova nomen omen; síla a euforická energie, která skoro hraničí s brutalitou dobrovolně páchanou na těle každého artisty, manipuluje energii diváckou. O to intenzivněji tato manipulace probíhá, dojde-li k přímému fyzickému kontaktu artisty s divákem.

Autoři této show moc dobře vědí, jakými prostředky působit na psychiku diváka a jak jeho náladou manipulovat. Je to jiná forma komunikace prostřednictvím kódu zašifrovaného ve více či méně ustálených pohybových tvarech.

Ve *Fuerzabruta* proto není manipulována loutka, ale živý jedinec. Dochází tak k transformaci energie obou zúčastněných stran, ale také k transformaci sociálních rolí. Divák přestává být divákem a tak, jak je tomu v tradičním karnevalovém veselí, se stává právoplatným účastníkem. I divák je v průběhu představení transformován: vyšší produkce

spectator, and how to manipulate his/her mood. It is a different form of communication by means of a code encrypted in more or less stable kinetic patterns.

In *Fuerzabruta*, there was no manipulation with puppets but this was achieved instead with individuals. The energy of all the participants was transformed, as were their social roles. The spectator ceased to be a spectator, and, as it was in traditional carnivalesque gaiety, s/he became an effective participant. Even the spectator was transformed throughout the show: increased production of endorphins resulted in a trance-like state, achieved by the audiences as they surrendered to the rhythmic movement and the drumming music. Physical energy was transformed into one stream, which gradually engulfed all the spectators. Although it was not a Dionysian festival, nor Brazilian Candomblé, *Fuerzabruta* was very close to carnivalesque festivity and ritual.

In all four productions extreme human movement and manipulation exerted by a human had a particular meaning, and as such fundamentally fulfilled the dramaturgical essence of contemporary circus. In *A Bas Bruit* and *Fuerzabruta*, the dominant mode was the transformation of physical power; in *Vortex* and *L'après-midi d'un Foehn* it was the transformation of personal power. The different natures of transformation were reflected by the meaning and function of the individual artists performing in these productions.

Consequently, spectators were either confronted with mere physical power (*Fuerzabruta*), or with physical power permeated with mental manipulation (*A Bas Bruit*), which increasingly stimulated the spectators' imagination. In *Vortex* and *L'après-midi d'un Foehn*, there were only slight indications, supported with other visual elements, which guided spectators towards conceptual thinking.

Transformation is a process and each process produces new energy. This energy is inevitably an impetus. In which direction does it take us? It is up to us as individuals to decide.

endorfinů funguje na principu transu, kterého účastníci dosahují na základě rytmizovaných pohybů podmalovaných hudbou vyluzovanou převážně bicími nástroji. Fyzická energie se transformuje do jednoho proudu, na nějž se postupně nabalují okolo postávající diváci. Není to oslava boha Dionýsa ani brazilské Candomblé, ale k festivitě karnevalu a rituálu má velmi blízko.

Extrémní pohyb, lidský i člověkem manipulovaný, nabýval ve všech čtyřech inscenacích významové povahy a v podstatě tak naplňoval dramaturgickou podstatu nového cirkusu. V některých byla patrná více transformace síly fyzické (*A Bas Bruit* a *Fuerzabruta*), v jiných transformace síly osobnosti (*Vortex* a *L'Après midi d'un Foehn*). Proto se lišil i význam a funkce jednotlivých artistů v těchto inscenacích účinkujících. Na diváky tak někdy působila jako hybný prvek jen síla fyzická (*Fuerzabruta*), jindy (*A Bas Bruit*) se fyzická síla prolínala s mentální manipulací a podporovala více diváckou představitost. A někdy zůstalo jen u náznaku (*Vortex* a *L'Après midi d'un Foehn*) a jinými vizuálními prostředky byl divák veden k abstraktnímu myšlení.

Transformace je proces a každý proces je produkcí nové energie. Tato energie je zákonitě hnací silou. Jakým směrem? To už si každý určíme sám.



**Circus  
centrum**

**KØBENHAVNS INTERNATIONALE TEATER**

**SUBTOPIA°**

**FESTIVAL  
NOVOG CIRKUSA**



**les halles**



Sirkuksen  
Tiedotuskeskus

CircusInfo Finland



## Partners

### PROJECT LEADER:

- Circuscentrum (B)

### CO-ORGANIZERS:

- Copenhagen International Theatre (DK)
- CIRCa (FR)
- Festival novog cirkusa (HR)
- Subtopia (SE)
- Halles de Schaerbeek (B)
- Finnish Circus Info Centre (FI)
- Circusstad Festival Rotterdam (NL)
- Humorologie (B)
- Crying Out Loud (UK)

**UNPACK  
THE  
ARTS**



Culture

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

© Unpack the Arts. Only the project leader and co-organisers of Unpack the Arts can freely use this publication. If another organization or medium wants to publish (extracts of) the article, please contact [maarten@circuscentrum.be](mailto:maarten@circuscentrum.be).

**www.  
unpack  
thearts  
.eu**

*Coordination publication:*

Maarten Verhelst

*English editing:*

John Ellingsworth

*Graphic design:*

Wilfrieda Paessens

[www.wilfrieda.com](http://www.wilfrieda.com)

**UNPACK  
THE  
ARTS**