

Circostrada Network

Viktoria Dalborg
Stine Degerbøl
John Ellingsworth
Stéphane Hort
Louise Kaare Jacobsen
Anette Petterssen
Karoline Skuseth
Sanae Barghouthi &
Yohann Floch (coord.)

Arts Writers
& Circus Arts [vol. 2]

focus on circus bodies

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Presentation

The 5th edition of Cirko Helsinki Contemporary Circus Festival, Finnish Circus Information Centre and New Nordic Circus Network had the pleasure to continue the project started in June 2009 by Circostrada Network for the nurturing of critical discussions and reflections among the European circus critics. The four days of lectures, performances and artist meetings showed again the need and value of the project. From the behalf of the organizers I want to thank all the participants and wish this process shall continue also in future.

Tomi Purovaara

Director, Finnish Circus Information Centre

From the very first residency hold in Paris (France) in June 2009, Circostrada Network's purpose has been to expose critics, cultural journalists and editors of arts magazines, with the new aesthetics of the contemporary circus, allowing them to attend a series of performances, scheduling encounters with artists provide the necessary conditions for a deep reflection on the creative and innovative aspects of the circus within the realm of the performing arts and contemporary creation.

For this second edition in Helsinki, 9 participants from 6 countries were welcomed, most of them are theatre and dance writers: Stine Degerbøl, Stéphane Hort, Viktoria Dalborg, Karoline Skusest, Evianna Lehtipuu, John Ellingsworth, Louise Kaare Jacobsen, Anette Pettersen, Ira Aartelo. Public lectures were proposed by keynote speakers including circus researcher Jean-Michel Guy (France), professor Peta Tait (La Trobe University, Australia) and circus researcher Camilla Damkjaer (Stockholm University). The debates were moderated by circus festival director Ivan Krajl (Festival novog cirkusa, Croatia), Finnish Circus Information Center director Tomi Purovaara (Finland) and Circostrada Network coordinator Yohann Floch.

The participants attended several shows: Mue (Gaëlle Bisellach, company La Manœuvre), Magic (by Robert Jägernhorn) and P.P.P. (Philippe Ménard, company Non Nova). We sincerely thank all the artists that were met during the residency for their warm welcome and their participation in our fruitful debates.

The arts writers invited were driven by the desire to get closer to the circus arts. All felt the need to confront the various contexts in which the circus is evolving today, and to reflect on the specificity of an analytical and critical discourse when writing about the circus. As part of this residency, some participants were commissioned to produce one article so that they may deepen their reflection on the circus arts. We are very glad to publish these critical texts in several languages and we are already looking forward to organising the next residency for arts critics...

Yohann Floch

Coordinator, Circostrada Network

Absurd and Exciting New Circus

Absurd och spännande nycirkus

Article by **Viktoria Dalborg**

The body of the circus artist was in focus of the annual Cirko Festival in Helsinki, Finland, this year. Ice jugglers and surrealistic manipulators were among those illustrating the theme and Viktoria Dalborg listened in as the topic was discussed.

In *Mue*, by the Compagnie La Manoeuvre, the corporal theme is included in various ways. The piece was performed at Stoa Theater, in the eastern parts of Helsinki. The title of the piece means slough, as in a snake's changing of skin or an animal losing its fur. A time for maturing and moving from one stage to the next.

Body parts, skin and hair

Through manipulation of objects, contact juggling and rope acrobatics, the dancer, object artist and artistic director Gaëlle Biesellach-Roig, the rope artist Anna Buhr and the juggler Marijke Gevers take us along for a journey full of suggestions among body parts, skin and hair.

The stage is set in a darkness which initially is being slit open by sharp streets of light. The music is kind of scratchy and contains sounds from objects falling and a plethora of askew harmonies.

Tri-legged and four-handed hunched bodies are tip-toeing in a rhythmic fashion across the stage, stretching the standard biological vocabulary of movement. Doll-like masks used back-to-front and artificial arms and legs are being manipulated all through the performance, creating new, mutated forms of life, much like a kaleidoscope full of extremities.

Video projections are being used to create illusions and a shifting of perspectives. A gigantic curtain made of human hair, bodies are appearing and disappearing in one of many sequences.

Spiritual back step waltz

One of the most beautiful scenes in *Mue*, and a contrast to the grotesque, is the manipulation of a skin coloured ninepin by the juggler Marijke Gever. A spiritual back step waltz where the ninepin floats through hands and across bodies as if it was an extension of her thoughts.

At one point, loads of arms, cast in rubber, fall from the ceiling, creating a macabre picture of something looking like offal or a theatre of a war.

The director Gaëlle Biesellach-Roig started out as a dancer and then trained in Brussels to become a juggler. She also used to be part of an ensemble led by the artist and director James Thierrée. In a meeting with Gaëlle Biesellach-Roig, she says that *Mue* is the result of research into the distance between who we are and how we are being perceived. She wanted to shine a light on the way we cut the body into pieces and put a value on it. The female body in particular is treated like this. In the process leading up to this piece, the artists have shared their personal, intimate material with each other and it takes on a universal meaning when performed.

Isjonglörer och surrealistiska manipulatorer bidrog till att illustrera temat för den årliga Cirko-festivalen i Helsingfors. Där stod cirkuskroppen i fokus under de diskussioner som Viktoria Dalborg har avlyssnat.

Mue av Compagnie La Manoeuvre som gästspelade på Stoa teater i östra Helsingfors har på flera plan ett kroppsligt tema. Själva titeln syftar på ormens ömsande av skinn eller djurets föllande av päls. Den tid då vi mognar och förflyttar oss från ett stadium till ett annat.

Kroppsdelar, hud och hår

Med objektmanipulation, kontaktjonglering och repakrobatik tar jonglören och regissören Gaëlle Bisellach-Roig, luftakrobaten Anna Buhr och jonglören Marijke Gevers oss med på suggestiv resa bland kroppsdelar, hud och hår.

Man har jobbat med en mörk scenbild som inledningsvis snittas av skarpa ljusgator. Musikbilden är skrapig och innehåller ljud av föremål som faller och ett myller av skeva harmonier.

Trebenta och fyrehändigt krumma kroppar trippar rytmiskt över scenen och tänjer på standardbiologiskt rörelsevokabulär. Docklika masker som används bakochfram och arm- och benproteser manipuleras genom föreställningen så att nya muterade livsformer uppstår som i ett kalejdoskop av extremiteter.

Man använder sig av videoprojektioner för att skapa illusioner och perspektivförskjutningar. Ett gigantiskt draperi av människohår där kroppar dyker upp och försvinner är en av många sekvenser.

Själslig bakvals

En av de vackraste scenerna i Mue och en kontrast till det groteska är jonglören Marijke Gevers manipulering av en hudfärgad kägla. En själslig bakvals där käglan flyter genom händer och över kropp som vore den en förlängning av hennes tankar.

Vid en tidpunkt faller mängder av avgjutna gummiarmar från taket och bildar en makaber syn likt ett slakteriavfall eller en krigsskådeplats.

Regissören Gaëlle Bisellach-Roig har en bakgrund som dansare och utbildade sig som jonglör i Bryssel. Hon har även ingått i artisten och regissören James Thierrées ensemble. I ett möte med Gaëlle Bisellach-Roig berättar hon att Mue tillkommit genom research på distansen mellan vilka vi är och hur vi betraktas. Hon har velat sätta ljus på hur vi i vår tid styckar kroppen i bitar och värderar den. Särskilt kvinnokroppen. Artisterna har i processen delat med sig av personligt intimt material som i föreställningen får en universell innebörd.

Cirkuskroppens paradox

La Manoeuvre regissör reflekterar över cirkuskroppens paradox. Samtidigt som man kärleksfullt måste vårda och ta hand om sin

The paradox of the circus body

The director of La Manoeuvre reflects on the paradox of the circus body. While it is imperative to nurture and take loving care of your body in order to develop your skills, you also push it across every painful line.

There are some spokespersons for circus who claim that *Mue* is not a circus performance since it moves in the borderland between dance and performance. Gaëlle Biesellach-Roig claims to be in no need to manifest *Mue* as a circus performance. This is a statement that leads to a loud protest from Jean-Michel Guy, researcher from the French Cultural Ministry.

- The three of you are circus artists performing a piece, this makes it circus, he exclaims.

During the residency, Jean-Michel Guy, with 30 years worth of experience as a circus researcher, writer and director, offers an interesting presentation of the recently released dvd *Nuancier du cirque*.

The dvd is a panorama of circus creations made during the last fifteen years in France. It's a five and a half hour long documentation and divided into five main parts and consists of a categorisation of circus creations, stage sites, circus disciplines, circus scripts, fundamentals of drama and esthetical effects used in circus. Jean-Michel Guy also sorts out what is what when it comes to new circus and contemporary circus. He has defined a historical line between so called non-traditional creations from 1968 to 1995, which in France are called new circus and from 1995 and onwards, which are called contemporary circus.

France has a rich circus history. Each year, around 200 performances are presented and around 160 new pieces are created. What was new in France thirty years ago, could perhaps be seen as new in certain parts of the Nordic countries today?

Jean-Michel Guy talks about trends in circus. 'Cirque pur', pure circus, seems to be the latest form in France, referring to performances focusing more on the pure virtuosity the artists are displaying in their respective discipline rather than on theatrical story telling.

The boundaries of gravity

A Finnish example is *Petit Mal*, a show directed by Maksim Komaro and produced by Race Hors Company. It recently had its acclaimed premier in Helsinki. The acrobats Rauli Kosonen, Petri Touminen and Kalle Lehto stretch the boundaries of gravity on trampoline, pole, acrobatic balls, floorboards and tyres. The equilibristic acrobatics and the uniqueness of the artists are pieces of art in themselves.

Camilla Damkjaer from the Stockholm University gives us a refreshing lesson in the way gender roles that have been learnt often are being enhanced in circus acts. Camilla Damkjaer herself illustrates in a vertical rope in a humorous and precise way rather sad examples of the truth. We catch sight of the typical, smiling female artists soft, inviting body language and sexy hints. Or the typical male artist, climbing with clenched jaws up the rope, in pike, (using sheer arm power) and often enough with naked torso, manifesting his entire range of powers. Camilla Damkjaer may be presenting forced stereotypes, the kind that are shown in their opposites in contemporary circus shows, but gender roles are being highly encouraged in circus schools and

kropp för att utvecklas pressar man den också över smärtans alla gränser.

Det finns en del cirkusförespråkare som menar att Mue inte är en cirkusföreställning eftersom den rör sig i gränstrakterna mellan dans och performance. Gaëlle Biesellach Roig säger sig inte heller ha något behov av att manifesteras Mue som en cirkusföreställning. Ett uttalande som får Jean-Michel Guy, researcher från Franska Kulturministeriet att protestera högt.

- Ni är tre cirkusartister som gör föreställningen alltså är det cirkus! Uttropar han.

På residenset bjuder Jean-Michel Guy med sin trettioåriga erfarenhet som cirkusresearcher, författare och regissör på en intressant presentation av den nyläppta dvd:n Nuancier du cirque.

Dvd:n är ett panorama av cirkuskreationer de senaste 15 åren i Frankrike. Den fem och en halv timme långa dokumentationen är uppdelad i fem huvuddelar och består av en kategorisering av cirkuskreationer, sceniska platser, cirkusdisciplinerna, cirkusmanus, dramatiska grunder och estetiska effekter i cirkus. Jean-Michel Guy reder också ut begrepp som new circus och contemporary circus. Han har definierat en historisk skiljelinje där så kallade icke traditionella kreationer från 1968 -95 i Frankrike benämns som newcircus och från -95 och framåt "contemporary circus".

Frankrike har en rik cirkushistoria. Varje år spelas ca 200 olika föreställningar och ca 160 nya kreationer ser dagens ljus. Det som var nytt i Frankrike för trettio år sedan kanske idag anses nytt på vissa håll i Norden?

Jean-Michel Guy talar om trender inom cirkus. Om man ska se till den senaste i Frankrike är det "cirque pur" eller "ren cirkus" där föreställningar snarare sätter fokus på artisters rena virtuositet i sina discipliner än på ett dramatiskt berättande.

Gravitationens gränser

Ett finskt exempel är föreställningen Petit Mal i regi av Maksim Komaro och producerad av Race Horse Company som nyligen hade bejublad premiär i Helsingfors. Akrobaterna Rauli Kosonen, Petri Touminen och Kalle Lehto tänjer på gravitationens gränser på trampolin, pôle, studsbollar, plankor och bildäck. Den akrobatiska ekvillibrismen och artisternas unikum är ett konststycke i sig.

Camilla Damkjaer från Stockholms Universitet ger oss en uppfriskande lektion i hur inlärda könsroller ofta förstärks i cirkusnummer. I ett vertikalrep illustrerar Camilla Damkjaer själv på ett humoristiskt och träffsäkert vis ganska sorgliga sanningar. Vi får syn på den typiskt leende kvinnliga artistens mjukt inbjudande kroppsspråk och sexiga anspelningar.

Eller den typiskt manlige artisten som klättrar i pik (med rå armstyrka) uppför repet sammanbitet och inte sällan med bar överkropp manifesterande hela sitt styrkeregister. Camilla Damkjaer visar visserligen på hårddragna stereotyper som den nutida cirkusen visar många motsatta exempel på men könsroller uppmuntras i allra högsta grad fortfarande på cirkuskolor och av regissörer och koreografer. Cirkusen speglar vår samtid. Vi lever i ett samhälle där människokroppen mer än någonsin sexualiseras i reklam, på film och i media. En förhoppning är att vi snart står inför en motreaktion mot den rådande objektifieringsspsykosen. Efter

by directors and choreographers. The circus is mirroring our present times. We are living in a society where the human body is being sexualized more than ever, in advertising, in film and in media. Hopefully we will soon be standing in front of a counter reaction against the ruling objectifying psychosis. Having taken part of Camilla Damkjaer's on the mark lecture on gender I want to exclaim 'Reclaim the circus body!'

Glacial fear

The act called *P.P.P.* and the juggler Philippe Ménard gave me my strongest experience during the well organized residency at the circus festival.

Five hundred kilos of ice, distributed over hundreds of ice balls hanging from the ceiling and in crushed form on the stage. A frozen, knitted dress, three upright cabinet freezers and a big block of ice – those are the props and the landscape on stage in the juggler Philippe Ménard's and Compagnie Non Nova's *P.P.P.* show.

A human being in a fur and a fur cap is sitting, leaning slightly forward, on an ice block, showing his back to the audience when we take our seats in Stoa Theatre. The ice is dripping and crackling as it melts.

An ice ball suddenly falls from the ceiling and smashes to pieces against the floor. We are from the very beginning put in a vice of fear. Many more balls will be falling, in dangerous vicinity of the juggler on stage. Philippe Ménard manipulates ice balls and crushed ice with a playful imagination, much like that of a child.

The three upright cabinet freezers move across the stage in a sterile ballet circling around the juggler's enquiring female character, accompanied by the sound from rattling trains and big cities. Thoughts are bouncing in reactions associating to the replicants in *Bladerunner*.

A monotonous female voice keeps repeating 'My name is Lisa' and other voices repeat in an inquisitive manner 'What's your name?'. The voice of Lisa is recorded from a young prostitute who sings a song at the end of the show.

Everything is falling apart

From the ice cabinets, small ice balls are being brought out and juggled and manipulated one by one, two by two, three by three, all the way up to five balls which are irreversibly smashed to pieces against the floor and are being replaced by new ones and in an aggressive crescendo, heightened bit by bit, the ice balls are crushed. The ice burns straight into the marrow of the spectator. Dressed in nothing but panties and bra and leg warmers, Philippe Ménard confronts his non-jugglable element before it's smashed to pieces and melts. Everything we love must be destroyed some time.

In one of the scenes the lips of a female figure are painted red whereupon follows a manipulation of a butcher's knife in a menacingly beautiful way around wrists and the insides of the thighs of the figure.

A favourite part of the act is when big, round circles of crushed ice are shaped with the help of an iron spade, accompanied by the humming of 'Singing in the rain'. At all times there's humour present in the pitch dark universe into which we are being hurled. Never before have I seen a lonelier human being created on stage. *P.P.P.* portrays Philippe Ménard's transgender persona's journey

att ha tagit del av Camilla Damkjaers träffsäkra genderföreläsning vill jag utbrista "Reclaim the circusbody!"

Iskall skräck

Föreställningen P.P.P. och jonglören Philippe Ménard är min största upplevelse under det välarrangerade residenset på Cirkofestivalen.

Femhundra kilo is som disponerats på ett hundratal isklot som hänger i taket och i krossad form på scenen. En fryst stickad klänning, tre frysskåp och ett stort isblock är jonglören Philippe Ménards och Compagnie Non Novas rigg och sceniska landskap i föreställningen P.P.P.

En människa i päls och pälsmössa sitter något framlutad på ett isblock med ryggen mot publiken när vi bänkar oss på Stoa teater. Det droppar och knastrar från smältande is.

Ett isklot faller plötsligt från taket och krossas mot marken. Vi försätts redan inledningsvis i ett skruvstäd av rädsla. Många fler klot ska komma att falla farligt nära jonglören på scenen. Philippe Ménard manipulerar isblock och krossad is med lekfull uppfinningsrikedom som hos ett ensamt barn.

*De tre frysskåpen rör sig över scenen i en steril balett kring jonglören sökande kvinnokarakter till ljudet av tågslammer och storstad. Tankarna studsar associativt till replikanterna i filmen *Bladerunner*.*

En monoton kvinnoröst upprepar "My name is Lisa" och andra röster upprepar frågande "Whats your name?" Rösterna Lisa är inspelad från en ung prostituerad som mot slutet av föreställningen sjunger en sång.

Philippe manipulerar inte bara is utan i lika hög grad sig själv. Ensam och iklädd aftonklänning och boa plockar jonglören ut ett bowlingklot av is ur ett av frysskåpen. Det tunga isklotet manipuleras i en frustrerad dans som börjar i fosterställning och genomgår en mängd metaforiska bilder av kvinnlig längtan innan det hamnar under klänningen och föds fram som genom stor smärta.

Allt går sönder

Ur frysskåpen plockas också små isklot som jongleras och manipuleras ett och ett, två och två, tre och tre ända upp till fem klot som oåterkalleligt krossas mot marken och ersätts av nya och som successivt stegras i ett aggressivt crescendo av krossade isklot. Isen bränner ända in i benmärgen hos betraktaren. Iklädd endast trosor och bh och benvärmare konfronterar Philippe Ménard sitt icke jonglerbara element innan det slås i bitar och smälter. Allt det vi älskar måste en gång förstöras.

I en av scenerna målas kvinnogestaltens läppar röda för att sedan manipulera en slaktarkniv hotfullt vackert kring handleder och lårens insidor.

En favoritscen är när stora runda cirklar av krossad is formas med hjälp av en plåtspade till nynnandet av "singing in the rain". Humorn finns hela tiden närvarande i det nattsvarta universum som vi slungas in i. Aldrig har jag sett en ensam människa gestaltas på scenen.

P.P.P. handlar om Philippe Ménards resa från man till kvinna som transgender person. När föreställningen skapades för två år sedan hade han påbörjat sin resa mot ett fullständigt könsbyte. Den dag det är genomfört har föreställningen spelats klart säger Ménard.-

from man to woman. When this show was created two years ago, he had started his journey toward a complete change of sex. When that is completed, the show will not be performed again, according to Ménard.

In a meeting with the French juggler at the Kiasma Theatre we are being told that the title *P.P.P.* is a reaction to an encounter with a star producer a couple of years ago. The producer suggested that Ménard created a show to please the audience, 'pour plaire au public', which Ménard saw as prostitution. The initials *P.P.P.* were kept as an ironic revenge and symbolic reminder of the type of theatrical forms of confirmation that Philippe Ménard totally repudiates.

Ménard started juggling at age 17 after having seen the juggling legend Jérôme Thomas. The encounter with his juggling was the entrance to imagination for young Philippe Ménard. After many years of training in the art of juggling, Philippe Ménard was accepted in the Jérôme Thomas Company. A philosophical approach to juggling was founded and Jérôme Thomas encouraged the then male Philippe to, just as The seven samurais, walk his own way. Philippe Ménard eventually realized that his way was all about identity.

- My transformation to a woman is a joy but not every day. It's a radical phase and you do not know what you are losing, Ménard says in a laconic way. You lose your power. The power of men.

Philippe Ménard wishes for the world to become more open, to allow people to be as they want to be. That the society will understand that transsexuals are not dangerous.

P.P.P. deals with transformation and separation. The choice of ice as juggling objects is done because it breaks. Becomes water and symbolizes the state of transformation of the juggler himself.

The choice of ice as juggling objects is part of a larger search for objects which cannot be juggled. Philippe Ménard's next project is about juggling with the wind.

Virtuosity and death

- The audience is expecting virtuosity and death. Death in this case has to do with a juggling object falling to the ground. I have a problem with juggling these days. Juggling is a bit like magic, it's impressive because the audience doesn't understand how it's possible. Many jugglers abuse the virtuosity to become stars, Ménard points out.

- I like seeing the phases of an object. The vulnerability. When a ball falls and we get to see the human being. What are you doing on stage? Who are you?

- Juggling is a reaction to society and an aspiration to something else, according to Philippe Ménard's belief.

Jean-Michel Guy adds that the paradox of juggling contains the art of not dropping the object as well as the art of dropping it. About how the importance is put on throwing and catching the object is put in relationship to the biggest disgrace: to drop it.

- It's impossible to avoid dropping, says Jean-Michel Guy. The dropping is a vital part of juggling. The definition of the art form and the humane lies in the moment when you do drop, he says. The message from Philippe Ménard before we part is 'continue to imagine all impossibilities'. Try all the ways. Not only virtuosity.

I ett möte med den franska jonglören på Kiasma Teater får vi veta att titeln P.P.P. är en reaktion efter ett möte med en stjärnproducent för ett par år sedan. Producenten uppmanade Ménard att göra en föreställning som tillfredställde publiken "pour plaire au public" vilket Philippe tolkade som prostitution. Initialerna P.P.P. behölls som en ironisk hämnd och symbolisk påminnelse om den typ av sceniska bekräftelseformer som Philippe Ménard med hela sitt väsen tar avstånd ifrån.

Ménard började jonglera som sjuåring efter att ha sett jongleringslegenden Jérôme Thomas. Mötet med Jérôme Thomas jonglering var för den unga Philippe Ménard en inträdesport till fantasin. Efter flera års träning i jongleringskonsten antogs Philippe Ménard i Jérôme Thomas kompani. En filosofisk syn på jonglering grundades och Jérôme Thomas uppmanade den dåvarande mannen Philippe att likt De sju samurajerna gå sin egen väg. Philippe Ménard insåg så småningom att hans väg handlade om identitet.

- Min transformation till kvinna är en glädje men inte varje dag. Det är ett radikalt moment och man vet vad man förlorar, säger Ménard lakoniskt. Man förlorar sin makt. Mannens makt.

Philippe Ménards önskan är att världen ska bli mer öppen för människor att vara som de vill. Att samhället ska förstå att transsexuella personer inte är farliga.

P.P.P. handlar om transformation och separation. Valet av is som jongleringsobjekt för att det går sönder. Bli till vatten och symboliserar jonglörens eget tillstånd av förvandling.

Isjongleringen är ett objektval som även ingår i ett större sökande efter icke jonglerbara objekt. Philippe Ménards kommande projekt handlar om att jonglera med vind.

Virtuositet och död

- Publiken förväntar sig virtuositet och död. Död i detta fall när ett jongleringsobjekt faller till marken. Jag har problem med jonglering nuförtiden. Jonglering är lite som magi, det imponerar därför att publiken inte förstår hur det är möjligt. Många jonglörer missbrukar virtuositeten för att bli stjärnor, konstaterar Ménard.

- Jag gillar att se momenten med ett objekt. Sårbarheten. När en boll faller och vi kan se människan. Vad gör du på scenen? Vem är du?

- Jonglering är en reaktion på samhället och en strävan mot något annat, tror Philippe Ménard.

Jean-Michel Guy, researcher på franska kulturministeriet tillägger att jongleringens paradox innehåller just konsten att inte tappa objektet och konsten att tappa. Hur vikten läggs vid att kasta och fånga objektet i relation till den största skammen att tappa.

Det är omöjligt att inte tappa, säger Jean-Michel Guy. Tappandet är en viktig del av jongleringen. Definitionen av konstarten och det humana finns i den stund då du tappar, menar han.

Philippe Ménards budskap innan vi skiljs är "continue to imagine all impossibilities" Prova alla vägar. Inte bara virtuositet.

The Rage of the Elements

Elementernes rasen

Article by **Stine Degerbøl**

Dynamic polarities

Love and hate. She sits on a block of ice. Loneliness and interdependence. She slides around on a block of ice. Certainty and uncertainty. She walks into a refrigerator. Embrace. Attraction and repulsion. Surrounded by ice. Victory and defeat. Hot and cold. The skin reddens on contact. Near and far. Catch and miss. She crushes ice between her teeth. Joy and seriousness. She arranges the eggs of ice. Leading and following. She twirls round in circles. Destruction and creation. She places a block of ice underneath her dress. Pain, anxiety, fear, doubt. She hurls ice to the floor. Aggression and passivity. She lies down on a heap of ice. Happiness and disaster. Bits of ice stick to her eyebrows. Power and powerlessness. She shovels ice. Secrets. The ice melts. She sticks her feet in a bucket of water. Confusion and clarity. The floor is wet. Strength and weakness. Struggle and forgiveness. Yet another clump of ice falls. Life and death. Identity. Existence. (Compagnie Non Nova: P.P.P. Helsinki, 11 May 2010)

Transformation

P.P.P. is a solo performance. Hundreds of balls of ice, the size of clinched fists, hang from the ceiling in rows. The ice makes the room cold. Our body heat affects the ice and makes it melt. They loosen their grip and randomly splinter down onto the stage floor throughout the performance. The floor is covered with black dance vinyl and scattered with ice in all shapes and sizes: big blocks and piles of crushed ice. There are three refrigerators on the stage that have a life of their own as they, remote-controlled, skate around on their tiny wheels. The scenography is in black and made of ice and the lighting is sharp and cold. The ice melts and changes shape and its transformation goes together with his transformation from man to woman. Juggling, his/her personal story telling and the props represent a consistent entirety of transformation. The performance is a transformation and renewal of the art of juggling. A dynamic lies in the transformation from tradition to renewal determined by each other. It is an investigation of juggling and the potential of the ice as an element. There is a particular dynamic in the paradox between 'dropping' and 'not dropping' and the performance deals with and distance itself from the classic 'not dropping' state by hurling the 'props' to the floor so that the ice splinters all over the place. The dynamic polarity between tradition and renewal is, in my opinion, an attempt to contextualize contemporary circus. As mentioned, the performance is also about transformation of gender and even though I don't identify with 'project gender transformation' as such, her loneliness and her struggle touch me and make me identify with her fully. The ice also undergoes a transformation from solid to liquid. By using ice, the artist brings a natural element onto the stage, an element that is both powerful and fragile – just like her and just like life. I am left with a feeling of restlessness and uncertainty brought on by my thoughts about identity and existence.

Lurking danger

When one of the theatre staff after the premiere wishes to present

Dynamiske polariteter

Had og kærlighed. Hun sidder på en isblok. Ensomhed og samhørighed. Hun kurer afsted på en blok af is. Usikkerhed og sikkerhed. Hun går ind i et køleskab. Omfavnelser. Tiltrækning og frastødning. Omgivet af is. Sejr og nederlag. Kulde og varme. Huden bliver rød ved berøring. Nærhed og distance. Gribes og mister. Hun knuser is mellem tænderne. Glæde og alvor. Hun lægger is(-æg) til rette. Føre og følge. Hun kredser i cirkler. Ødelæggelse og skabelse. Hun tager en klump op under kjolen. Smerte, angst, frygt, tvivl. Hun kyler isterner i gulvet. Aggressivitet og passivitet. Hun lægger sig i en bunke is. Lykke og ulykke. Isternerne klæber til øjenbrynene. Magt og afmagt. Hun skovler is. Hemmeligheder. Isen smelter. Hun stikker fødderne i hver sin spand vand. Forvirring og afklaring. Gulvet er vådt. Styrke og svaghed. Kamp og eftergivelse. Endnu en isklump falder. Liv og død. Identitet. Eksistens. (Compagnie Non Nova: P.P.P. Helsinki 11. maj 2010)

Transformation

P.P.P. er en solo-performance. I rækker i loftet hænger hundredvis af kugler af is på størrelse med knyttede hænder. Isen gør rummet koldt. Vores varme påvirker isen, som smelter. Undervejs igennem forestillingen slipper de vilkårligt deres tag og splintres på/mod scenegulvet. Gulvet er dækket af sort dansevinyl, og der er is i alle afskygninger: store blokke og dynger af knust is. På scenen er også tre køleskabe, der lever deres eget liv, når de fjernstyret skøjter rundt på deres små hjul. Scenografien er sort og is, og belysningen er skarp og kold. Isen smelter og ændrer form, og dens forandring glider sammen med hans/hendes forandring fra mand til kvinde. Jonglørkunsten, den private fortælling og rekvisitten udgør et konsistent hele om transformation. Forestillingen er en transformation og fornyelse af jonglørkunsten. Der ligger en dynamik i transformationen fra tradition til fornyelse, og en dynamik i polariteten mellem gammelt og nyt – der betinger hinanden. Det er en nysgerrig afsøgning af jonglørkunstens og elementets muligheder. Der er en særlig dynamik i paradoxet i not dropping og dropping, og forestillingen gør op med og bryder netop med den klassiske not dropping ved at kyle 'sin rekvisit' i gulvet, så isen splintrede til alle sider. Den dynamiske polaritet mellem tradition og fornyelse er mit bud på en måde kontekstuel at placere nycirkus. Desuden handler forestillingen (som sagt) om transformationen af køn, og selvom jeg ingen identifikation har med 'projekt kønsskifte', rammer hendes ensomhed og kamp mig, og gør identifikationen er fuldkommen. Der foregår desuden en transformation af isen i dens foranderlighed fra fast til flydende. Ved at anvende is, bringer kunstneren et naturligt element ind på scenen, der er både kraftfuldt og skrøbeligt – som hun selv og som livet. Jeg sidder tilbage med en uro og usikkerhed i kroppen afledt af tanker om identitet og eksistens.

Farer lurar

Først efter premieren da en af teatret medarbejdere ønsker at overrække kunstneren en buket, og bliver vist væk fra scenen med henvisning til de resterende iskugler i loftet, går det op for mig hvilken fare de udgør. Philippe Ménard udtaler i den efterfølgende

the artist with a bouquet of flowers and is shown away from the stage because of the remaining balls of ice still hanging from the ceiling, I begin to understand the danger of it all. Philippe Ménard says in the subsequent artist talk: 'I know that they will fall, I just don't know when. Just as it is in life: danger lurks'. He ends with the statement: 'Circus is the celebration of life – and life is dangerous.'

Working with staged danger and fear and playing on our often inherent fear of death is (for me) closely linked to traditional circus. The set is an elegant example of a renewal of tradition in the way that the ice presents both a real and a fictional threat. Fictional, because the choreography is determined by it. I don't completely agree that life is dangerous, but I do know that I enjoy the tension that arises when danger lurks.

It is a grey, overcast afternoon. I can feel the concrete through my neoprene socks. I dive in headfirst. My goggles stay in place. The waves are big, the water is dark and I can't see or touch the bottom. The cold water fills my wetsuit. I tread water and wait for the others. We swim in pairs to the first buoy. My partner disappears in the waves and then pops up again. My breathing is fast. My strokes are long but they don't take me as far as they usually do. The water is strong and powerful. I get used to the temperature and my breathing calms down. My strokes become more vigorous. I move effortlessly through the water. On the way back to the mole, I am able to follow the rhythm of the sea. Surrounded by it. I give in to it and can feel how I ride on the wave and glide along.
(Open water, Copenhagen. 10 June 2010)

Afterwards, I am filled with this odd feeling that is a mixture of pleasure and fear as I acknowledge that I was there on behalf of the sea. Just like playing catch when you are not sure whether it is fun anymore or if you are actually scared of being caught. When a laugh becomes a screech and then a scream. Where the fictional threat feels real. Where the real and the fictional threat melt together.

Heat pours out

The warehouse is dimly lit. Human sized glass sculptures made of long stalks of tied up glass illuminated with pink light hang from the ceiling. A drum set in glass. A woman dressed in white pushes a heavy sliding door to the side to reveal a glassblowing workshop. Heat pours out. There is a big clump of glass at the end of the rod. The cutting torch with its blue flame. The kiln glows yellow. She pours a strip of liquid glass onto the floor. The stream of glass is cut off. The glassblower rolls a substance into the strip and absorbs it. A sprinkle of coloured powder. A new portion from the ladle, in a new stream. He rolls it in. And again. And yet again. A thin stream. A thick stream. It goes on and on. They add shattered drinking glasses and they melt into the mass. She spins in her ring in the middle of the hall. The platform beneath her is surrounded by big and small glass bubbles with a phosphorescent glow. The sound from the symphony orchestra in the corner and her movements melt together. She spins sometimes fast, sometimes slowly. Like liquid glass forming around the ring.
(Catch, Kosta Boda, Sweden. 13 June 2010)

The performance *Catch* is another example of a beautiful renewal of circus based on the combination of contemporary circus, a symphony orchestra and glassblowing. Using fire in circus is not new at all. Juggling with fire and fire eating go way back in history but it is new to use fire's hot and massive functionality to create

artist-talk: Jeg ved de vil falde, men ikke hvornår. Som i livet: farer lurer. Og runder af med følgende statement: Circus is the celebration of life – and life is dangerous.

At arbejde med den iscenesatte fare og frygt, og spille på vores ofte iboende frygt for døden, er (for mig) tæt knyttet til det traditionelle cirkus' virkemidler. Scenografien er et elegant eksempel på en fornyelse af traditionen idet isen udgør på én gang en reel og en fiktiv trussel. Fiktiv, fordi koreografien er afstemt derefter. Jeg er ikke helt enig i at livet er farligt, men jeg ved, at jeg selv nyder den særlige spænding, der opstår, når faren lurer (lige rundt om hjørnet).

Eftermiddagen er overskyet og grå. Jeg mærker betonen under mine neoprensokker. Jeg springer på hovedet i. Svømmebrillerne bliver siddende som de skal. Bølgerne er store, vandet er mørkt og jeg kan hverken se eller røre bunden. Det kolde vand fylder våddragten. Jeg træder vande og venter på de andre. Vi svømmer parvis. Hen til den første bølge. Min makker forsvinder i bølgedale og dukker op igen. Jeg trækker vejret til venstre - væk fra bølgeretningen med strandkanten i syne. Jeg trækker vejret hurtigt. Jeg tager gode tag, men de fører mig ikke så langt ad gangen som jeg er vant til. Elementet er stærkt og kraftfuldt. Jeg vænner mig til temperaturen og min vejtrækning bliver roligere. Jeg trækker lidt kraftigere. Ligger fint i overfladen. På tilbagevejen lykkes det mig at følge havets rytme. Omgivet af det. Giver jeg mig hen, og mærker hvordan jeg rider på bølgetoppene og glider videre. (havsvømning // Open water, København//Øresund. 10. juni 2010).

Bagefter er jeg fyldt af denne mærkelige (berusende) fornemmelse af blandingen mellem fryd og frygt, fordi jeg erkender, at jeg var der på havets præmisser. Som i en fangeleg ikke at være klar over om det (stadig) er sjovt eller om man faktisk er bange for at blive fanget. Lige dér, hvor grin bliver til hvin, der bliver til skrig. Hvor den fiktive trussel synes reel. Hvor den reelle og den fiktive trussel glider sammen.

Varmen spreder sig

Lagerhallen er svagt belyst. Der hænger enkelte menneskestore glasskulpturer af sammenbundne højstilkede glas oplyst med pink. Trommesættet er udført i glas. En kvinde i hvidt skubber en tung skydedør til side. Bagved er et arbejdende glaspusterværksted. Varmen strømmer ud. For enden af stangen er allerede en stor klump glas. Skærebrenneren flammer blåligt. Ovnen gløder gyldent. Hun hælder flydende glas i en stribe på gulvet. Strålen bliver klippet over. Glaspusteren ruller massen i striben og absorberer den. Et drys farvepulver. En ny portion fra øsen i en ny stråle. Han ruller det ind. Og igen. Og en gang til. En tynd stråle. En tyk stråle. De bliver ved og ved. De fjører knuste drikkeglas til, der smelter ind i massen. Hun snurrer i sin ring i midten af hallen. Plateauet under hende er omgivet af små og store glasbobler, der lyser fosforiserende. Lyden fra symfoniorkestret i hjørnet og hendes bevægelser smelter sammen. Hun snurrer - snart hurtigt, snart langsomt. Som flydende glas; former sig om ringen. (Catch, Kosta Boda, Sverige. 13. juni 2010)

Et andet eksempel på en smuk fornyelse af cirkus er forestillingen Catch, der er baseret på kombinationen af nycirkus, symfoniorkester og glaspusteri. Det er ikke nyt at bruge ild i cirkus; både ildjonglering og ildpusteri rækker langt tilbage i historien – det nye er ildens funktionalitet; varmen er massiv, og den bliver brugt til at skabe et kunstværk. Forestillingen trækker samtidig tråde til den før omtalte iscenesatte fare og frygt både i kraft af gentagelsen, når de hælder glas på gulvet på en nærmest manisk måde, mens klumpen vokser sig større og større, og truer med at

an artwork. The performance also has a link to the aforementioned staged danger and fear in the form of the repetitive pouring of glass onto the floor in an almost manic way, while the clump grows bigger and bigger and threatens to get go the rod and crash to the floor. I hope that they will soon stop, while the going is good. At the same time, staged danger and fear feature in the aerial number because if she falls, she will roll off the edge of the platform and down into the glass bubbles and crush them. She spins steadily and gives me no reason to fear or doubt.

The rage of the elements

In *P.P.P.* the material is ice, which comes from and again becomes water. The sound of ice being crushed between teeth resounds in my head and I can feel the discomfort spreading in my body by the memory of the pain of crushing ice between my teeth and because she questions the very essence of (my) life, existence and identity. In *Catch*, one of the elements is fire. On the one hand, the heat is comforting and her movements make me feel safe. But on the other hand, the heat is menacing if you come to close. The heat brings about the transformation from solid to liquid and liquid to solid. A tiny thread of liquid glass can burn itself deep into your skin.

In *P.P.P.* the elements of ice and juggling are explored, as the glassblower and aerial artist explore their elements and I do explore what I can do in my elements – in this case in the water and through the written word. Fire, air, earth and water are the basic elements. Breaking ice, waving water and flaming fire. The elements rage – in us.

About the author

Stine Degerbøl is currently working on a PH.D in contemporary circus, focusing on the body in aesthetic communication at the University of Copenhagen. Stine Degerbøl is a former swinging trapeze artist educated at the Academy of Untamed Creativity (AFUK) in Copenhagen and at Escuela Nacional de Circo in Havana, Cuba. Besides teaching at the Department of Exercise and Sport Sciences at Copenhagen University, she freelances for Copenhagen International Theatre and the Danish Artist Union and writes for the quarterly dance magazine *Terpsichore* in analysing a work of art in which elements of 'new circus' can be recognisable. Consulting texts whose subject is circus and its history, but also its declinations and influences, could ideally complete the whole. In fact, I want to strike a blow for the theoretical part of the discipline, at present rather unknown, but which results on the whole well equipped if we search, not even too perilously, for texts that deal with the history, evolution and practice of circus arts. There are also analyses about the presence of these last in other arts: both as source of inspiration, suffice it to think of the fetish circus seemed to be for Fellini, and as added value in performances created by professionals of other disciplines.

I conclude these considerations on the possibilities of art criticism to confront itself with contemporary circus, launching a small and perhaps banal provocation. After all, till now, criticism has welcomed and faced other areas of research that came to blend in the so-called 'avant-garde performances', from oriental meditation disciplines, to neurosciences, to psychoanalysis, up to new technologies. I think 'New Circus' can be tackled on the whole, with a 'light heart', because it's fed by and develops all the elements of performing arts, real nourishment for critics.

slippe sit greb på stangen og knuses mod gulvet. Jeg ønsker at de snart stopper, mens legen er god. Samtidig indgår den iscenesatte fare og frygt i luftnummeret, for hvis hun falder, vil hun trille ud over plateauanten og ned i glasboblerne og knuse dem. Hun snurrer ufortrødent, og giver mig ikke grund til at frygte eller tvivle.

Elementernes rasen

I P.P.P. er materialet is, der kommer af, og bliver til vand. Lyden af is der knuses mellem tænderne genlyder i mit hovedet og jeg mærker ubehaget brede sig ved erindringen om den smerte det foranlediger i mig at knuse is mellem tænderne, og fordi hun stiller spørgsmålstejn ved alt grundlæggende i mit liv og alle eksistentielle følelser om (min) eksistens og identitet. I Catch er en af elementerne ild. På den ene side virker varmen beroligende og hendes bevægelser gør mig tryk. På den anden side er varmen faretruende, hvis man kommer den for nær. Varmen foranlediger at glasset forandres fra fast til flydende til fast. Én tråd af flydende glas kan brænde sig langt ind i huden.

Phia Ménard afsøgers sine muligheder med sitelement, glaspusteren og luftartisten deres, og jeg mit – i vandet, og i skrivende stund. Ild, luft, jord og vand – er verdens grundelementer. Isen springer, bølgerne ruller og ilden flammer. Elementerne raser – i os.

The Common Sensation

Article by **John Ellingsworth**

Among my notes from Helsinki I have this quotation from Gaëlle Bisellach-Roig, the artistic director of *La Manœuvre*: 'the body has the right to be in common sensation.' Just that. There's some idea or interpretation that I wrote below but then crossed out violently enough that I can't read it now, and when the notes resume they are transcribing some further part of the conversation with Gaëlle. At a distance of weeks I can't trace back the line of her speech or thinking.

I like the phrase though, the common sensation. *Mue*, the piece that *La Manœuvre* were at the Cirko festival to perform, is a work of impression and sensation — not thoughtless or unstructured, but with the elements of its construction (the story of its origin, if you like) worked so thoroughly and deeply into the texture of the piece that for audiences it arrives as though in another language. It glides serenely from one scene to the next — showing us a mass of prosthetic limbs, dropped from the ceiling, that are gathered and treated as both a sombre memorial and the site of a child's game; lengths of chain that snake and rattle across the stage, then lengths of hung fibrous cotton that cascade around a tiny figure, falling upward; a woman with her head turned backward impossibly, and another careening through space on the end of a rope — these images unexplained but carrying perhaps the seed of a thought, an emotion, a private connection. You don't have to understand what it means, and (sometimes at least) it doesn't matter. Circus is a language that you don't have to speak for it to speak to you.

It may not be, in that respect, unique among other forms of physical theatre (such as mime or puppetry or dance), but circus has a particular power of sympathy and resonance that comes from seeing a body operating in extreme circumstances — up a rope or standing on one hand or propelled acrobatically through space. In the artworks that have the greatest reach (and I think in the majority of productions that get tagged as contemporary circus) we don't look upon these actions purely as expressions of an athleticism we cannot ourselves attain, as the actions of people apart: rather they open channels that allow us to experience some piece or echo of what the performer experiences — whether it is nothing more than the literal strain and effort of their exertions, or whether their physical hardship becomes a conduit for emotion and metaphor.

Firmly in the latter category, Compagnie Non Nova's *P.P.P. (Position Parallèle au Plancher)*, another of the performances at Cirko and for me the highlight of the festival, intimately understands the power of common sensation. Made by the transgender artist and juggler Philippe Ménard, and developed over a period of several years during which she transitioned from a man to a woman, it engineers a face-off between desire and danger through the admittance of deliberate (but real) risk: large spheres of ice hang above the stage, and as the temperature of the auditorium rises (in part due to the body heat of the audience) they begin to fall, dropping at seemingly random intervals, sometimes very close to Philippe, startling her, other times as far away as the stage allows, barely acknowledged.

What plays out is a theatrical narrative where desire shapes and controls the body — most explicitly in Philippe's transgenderism and the steps taken toward transition; but also in the fidgety boredom of sexual and romantic longing, at once sensuous and somehow careless to the fact of being embodied, and in the seduced fascination with risk and death that gives the performance its compulsive energy and inspires the full title, *Position Parallèle au Plancher* or *Position Parallel with the Floor*.

It's the position of both sleep and death, familiar to us all, and in *P.P.P.* a reminder of the troubling threeway relationship between self-extinction, self-determination and human creation. When Philippe is laid out on a bed of ice chips — like a morgue corpse, but in underwear and fetching earmuffs — you can feel if not hear the intake of breath among the audience, the sympathetic reaction, and Philippe talks about this moment as one where the spectators take her place: they feel more than she does. ('It is much worse for them; I am busy!') For me it was watching Philippe struggle into a wet dress — and in fact seeing any contact between skin and cold water — that brought on the creeping horrors, but it didn't strike me as the spectacle of self-harm or seem the same as watching a person like a fakir. What *P.P.P.* does I think is use situations of extreme physical stress to echo some of the ethical arguments which, particularly in countries with state health systems, tend to gather around the use of surgical and pharmacological treatments for gender dysphoria. It doesn't have the answers, but it has found a way to theatrically encode the questions in all their complexity. Is it voluntary? Is it simply necessary? Is it hardship or a source of strength? Is it happiness? How do you feel about it? How would you feel about it? At the end of the performance, after a quick shower, Philippe comes back to talk to the audience, and explains how the show came about, and talks a little of her life. 'I am a transgender person and I am a human being. Just like you.'

There is another phrase I like, from the *Nuancier du Cirque* DVD that was presented in Helsinki by circus critic and researcher Jean-Michel Guy, which is that with certain manifestations of contemporary circus (those described on the DVD as 'contemplative') the audience are in the position of 'being intimate strangers to what they see'. I think that very often that's true, and that it captures the spirit that both *P.P.P.* and *Mue* seek to engender: a performance style of abstraction and radical strangeness that invites intimacy simply because it is the only way to understand. Both productions ask of the audience that they act like good friends—that they be attentive, that they care, that they mirror and seek resonance—when what performer and audience have in common is nothing more, or nothing greater, than a sensation.

A Question of borders...

Question de frontières

Article by **Stéphane Hort**

"In their most recent evolution, borders between artistic genres have begun creeping over one another, or more precisely, their demarcation lines have been infringing on one another".

Theodor W. Adorno, *Art and the arts*, Berlin, 1966

Borders. Our political and geographical view causes us to perceive our world based on borders, with little states uniting to form a larger state, a nation, which also unites with countries to form a union, a continent, that is part of an even larger structure, etc. Two countries never overlap. At best, there are a few enclaves... And the whole thing forms a large puzzle that, once brought together, makes up a vast territory where all cultural differences are placed beside each other.

Since all borders are meant to be crossed, man does not hesitate to move about. To quench our thirst for knowledge, our need to see everything, we run. Everywhere. We travel around the planet. We go beyond our borders, sometimes never to return. Double nationalities are becoming more and more common and migration more intense, but other population shifts bother us: massive immigration, exile, expatriation, refugees... So then, free circulation? Open borders? Closed borders?

Yes the border problem is a very current one. But does the same concept exist for art? Can we think of it in the same way?

After a contemporary show, whether it's circus, dance or theatre, it's become increasingly common to hear many individuals, spectators as well as critics, asking themselves about the genre (or more precisely, the genres) explored in the creation they have just seen. They are therefore thinking about interdisciplinarity; borders that are approached, crossed and overridden. Some wonder about this interdisciplinarity and others accept it. Some refuse and contest the label of "circus" when it comes to certain creations that perform beyond all borders. They argue that the fundamental values of the circus are no longer present in them and that circus techniques are not sufficiently put into use.

So, is there a border problem in art?

Although it may appear to be the perfect terrain for reflecting our society, art is far from functioning in the same way and our geographic and political models cannot serve as an example! To see art as the grouping of arts, or the circus as the totality of circus arts would be to say that there are indeed distinct arts, with their own borders, whose territories are geographically, or rather, artistically beside each other. While the temptation and the need to label and categorize are great, the origin of these various territories and their defined borders is more historical than natural.

To again refer to the words of Adorno, the German art theorist and sociologist, art can only be interpreted by the law of its movement and not by invariants. Art dictates its own rules, defines its own demarcation lines as well as its borders if it has

"Dans l'évolution la plus récente, les frontières entre les genres artistiques fluent les unes dans les autres, ou plus précisément: leurs lignes de démarcation s'effrangent".

Theodor W. Adorno, L'art et les arts, Berlin, 1966

Frontières. Notre vision politique et géographique nous incite à percevoir notre monde en fonction des frontières, en petits états qui, réunis, forment un plus grand état, une nation, laquelle-même s'unit avec d'autres pays pour former une union, un continent, qui s'intègre dans une structure encore plus grande, etc. Jamais deux pays ne se superposent, tout au mieux il existe quelques enclaves... Et le tout forme un grand puzzle qui, une fois assemblé, compose un vaste territoire où toutes les différentes cultures sont ainsi côte à côte.

Puisque toute frontière ne demande qu'à être franchie, l'homme n'hésite pas à se déplacer.

Pour assouvir notre soif de connaissance, notre besoin de tout voir, nous courons. Partout. Nous voyageons tout autour de la terre, nous nous rendons au-delà de nos frontières, parfois sans y revenir. Les doubles nationalités sont de plus en plus fréquentes, la migration devient de plus en plus intense, mais d'autres mouvements de peuple nous dérangent : immigration massive, exil, expatriation, asile... Alors, libre circulation? frontières ouvertes? Frontières fermées?

Oui. Le problème des frontières est très actuel.

Mais le même concept existe-t-il dans l'art? Pouvons-nous réfléchir de la même façon?

Il est devenu de plus en plus fréquent d'entendre à la sortie de spectacles contemporains, que ce soit de cirque, de danse ou de théâtre, plusieurs personnes, spectateurs comme critiques, se questionner sur le genre (ou précisément les genres) qu'explorait la création qu'ils venaient de voir et ainsi s'interroger sur l'interdisciplinarité, sur les frontières approchées, franchies ou dépassées. Certains se questionnent, certains acceptent cette transdisciplinarité. D'autres refusent, contestent carrément l'appellation "cirque" à certaines créations qui jouent au-delà de toute frontière, prétextant que les valeurs fondamentales du cirque n'y sont plus présentes, que la technique circassienne n'est plus assez poussée, etc.

Alors, y a-t-il également un problème de frontières dans l'art?

L'art, même s'il semble être le terrain idéal pour refléter notre société, est loin de fonctionner

de la même manière et notre modèle géographique et politique ne peut servir d'exemple! Voir l'art comme le regroupement des arts, le cirque comme l'ensemble des arts du cirque, reviendrait à dire qu'il existe bel et bien des arts distincts, avec leurs propres frontières et dont les territoires sont géographiquement, ou plutôt artistiquement, côte à côte. Certes, la tentation et le besoin de classer, catégoriser est grand, mais l'origine de ces différents territoires aux frontières définies est davantage historique plutôt que naturelle.

any... It is constantly redefining itself in a movement that is all its own while we struggle to look for names, expressions and labels, to find borders, or to define them. But we will only be running after evolution, after art, which imposes its own forms.

Art precedes categorization.

Therefore, to want to contain contemporary creation in a predefined territory, to no longer accept certain shows as part of the 'circus' genre, or to be afraid to consider as a circus performance shows such as Mue by the Manoeuvre company, whose aesthetics are more reminiscent of image theatre or dance, or Philippe Ménard's *P.P.P.*, which approaches performance and pulls away from spectacular juggling, would also be to claim to know the borders of this art, all the while fearing that it might evolve or create its own dynamic.

Of course, an artist (almost) never thinks about these questions during the creation phase, because, like a traveler or globetrotter, he or she goes around the world without worrying about which borders are being crossed and without pulling back from visiting any new territory. The artist is in art itself and worries little about categories. Victor Hugo said it well in his own time: there are no borders in art. However, this must not prevent the artist from returning from time to time to accept momentarily being part of a certain territory.

But this does not mean that one should renounce one's origins or become too attached to one's roots. It is common to perceive roots as a vital element that nourishes us. In his book *Origines*, the author and novelist Amin Maalouf offers us another perception of these roots, which, for him, 'sink into the ground, tying themselves within the mud, blossoming in the darkness. They hold the tree captive as early as its birth and feed it at the price of blackmail: Free yourself and you will die!' Unlike roots, 'origins are in no way a hindrance at our feet, which are meant to walk and not to stand still. We are made to take to the road [...]. And if at times we look backward, it is only to measure the ground we have covered, for it is important to recreate the first gesture, to relive the first time, to finally understand where we come from.'

Perhaps we should also take inspiration from this thought as it pertains to the domain of contemporary circus and, more generally, to our understanding of the performing arts today: to know how to concentrate on origins more than on roots, to accept that we are growing, that we are taking new and at times unexplored roads. Yes, growing beyond one's roots, even cutting contact with them, does not signify the end, or death.

The art critic, among others, can play a crucial role at precisely this moment by supporting artists in their flight beyond borders that do not even exist and by encouraging a separation from roots. With a certain level of appreciation, the art critic can perceive the origins of a new creation with an informed eye and discover the different paths taken by artists (who are perhaps not even aware of their new itinerary). Thanks to the art critic's able pen, the artist's work can be described to an audience that needs to reproduce in art the political and geographic system in which it lives, that needs labels, categories and also borders.

Pour reprendre une nouvelle fois les mots d'Adorno, théoricien de l'art et sociologue allemand, l'art ne peut être interprété que par la loi de son mouvement, non par des invariants. L'art dicte ses propres règles, définit ses propres lignes de démarcation et aussi ses frontières s'il y en a... il se redéfinit perpétuellement, dans un mouvement qui lui est propre, et nous, nous nous efforçons de chercher des noms, des expressions, des étiquettes, à trouver des frontières, à les définir, mais nous ne ferons que toujours courir derrière l'évolution, derrière l'art qui impose ses propres formes.

L'art précède la catégorisation.

Vouloir ainsi retenir la création contemporaine dans un territoire prédéfini, ne plus vouloir accepter certains spectacles dans le genre "cirque", ou craindre d'appeler cirque un spectacle tel que Mue de la compagnie Manoeuvre, dont l'esthétique rappelle davantage le théâtre d'image et la danse, ou P.P.P. de Philippe Ménard, qui se rapproche beaucoup de la performance et s'éloigne de la jonglerie sensationnelle, viendrait ainsi à prétendre connaître les frontières de cet art, tout en ayant peur que ce dernier évolue, qu'il réponde à sa propre dynamique.

Certes, un artiste ne se pose jamais (ou presque) ces questions lors de la phase de création, car tel un voyageur, un globe-trotter, il parcourt le monde sans se soucier des frontières traversées, sans se retenir de visiter un nouveau territoire. Il est dans l'art et se soucie peu de sa catégorisation. Victor Hugo le disait déjà bien à son époque : en art point de frontière. Cependant, cela ne doit pas l'empêcher de se retourner de temps en temps, et aussi d'accepter d'être sur le territoire sur lequel il se trouve momentanément.

Mais cela ne signifie pas pour autant qu'il faut renier ses origines, ni à l'inverse trop s'attacher à ses racines. Il est courant de percevoir les racines comme quelque chose de vital, qui nous nourrit. L'auteur et romancier Amin Maalouf (dans son livre Origines) nous apporte une toute autre perception des racines qui, selon lui, "s'enfoncent dans le sol, se contorsionnent dans la boue, s'épanouissent dans les ténèbres; elles retiennent l'arbre captif dès sa naissance, et le nourrissent au prix d'un chantage: Tu te libères, tu meurs!", alors que, contrairement aux racines, "les origines ne sont en aucun cas une entrave à nos pieds qui sont faits pour marcher, non pour se fixer. Nous sommes faits pour prendre la route [...]. Et si parfois nous regardons en arrière, c'est simplement pour mesurer le chemin parcouru, car il importe de recréer le premier geste, de revivre la première fois, pour comprendre enfin d'où nous venons."

Peut-être devrions-nous aussi nous inspirer de cette pensée dans le domaine du cirque contemporain et de manière générale dans la perception du spectacle vivant d'aujourd'hui : savoir se concentrer davantage sur les origines que sur les racines, accepter que nous grandissons, que nous prenons de nouvelles routes, parfois inexplorées. Oui, grandir au delà de ses racines, voire même couper le contact avec elles, ne signifie pas la fin, la mort.

Le critique d'art, entre autres, peut jouer précisément à ce moment-là un rôle crucial, en soutenant l'artiste dans son envol au-delà des frontières qui n'existent finalement pas, et dans sa séparation d'avec ses racines. Avec sa capacité d'appréciation, il peut y percevoir les origines d'une création nouvelle, avec son oeil averti y découvrir le chemin parcouru par l'artiste (peut-être lui-même inconscient de son itinéraire), et grâce à sa plume habile, il peut aider à décrire le travail de l'artiste envers un public qui a besoin de reproduire dans l'art le système politique et géographique dans lequel il vit, c'est-à-dire qui a besoin d'étiquettes, de catégories et aussi de frontières.

Contemporary Circus - in Between Performativity and Theatricality

Ny-cirkus - mellem performativitet og teatralitet

Article by **Louise Kaare Jacobsen**

A three-day seminar on contemporary circus. About aesthetics, the body, the experience and about how to share these journalistically. So, how does one do that? What is the result of numerous presentations, discussions and debates featuring some of the most experienced and knowledgeable contemporary circus experts? At first... confusion. The unresolved answer is that feeling of not being able to make an objective and intellectual analysis of the performances.

But why is it so difficult to find words to describe the experience of contemporary circus? I maintain that it has something to do with the type of experience contemporary circus offers, which builds on both a theatrical and a performative dimension.

Theatricality and performativity in contemporary circus

Conventional circus is often characterised as being performative, self-referential and reality construed. The artists aren't anyone other than themselves as they perform acts that shouldn't mean anything more than what they are. Real actions carried out by real people.

The performative dimension is also evident in contemporary circus. Generally, contemporary circus does not point out a definite interpretation of the acts themselves. The performers carry out actions that don't mean anything more than what they are. Actions that are carried out in the here and now in front of the audience, who allow themselves to be completely captivated by the sometimes super-human artists as they challenge everyday and physical barriers.

Underneath the immediate performative layer flows a theatricality that is also found in conventional circus. Every single action has been rehearsed down to the smallest detail but presented night after night as being unique, groundbreaking and dangerous. The audience must be able to latch on to that feeling of excitement and then triumph each time a trick ends. Contemporary circus has also incorporated another form of theatricality. It does not present individual numbers but instead builds up universes uniting all the elements of the performance into a conceptual whole. This complete dramaturgy offers the opportunity to fictionalise the performers and their actions, as they become a part of a theatrical universe removed from the audience's 'reality'.

Theatricality and the performativity exist side by side in contemporary circus, just as they do in conventional circus but the staging of the two discourses can help define the form of experiences contemporary circus performances offer their audience.

P.P.P. – Performativity as production strategy

A good example is *P.P.P.* by Compagnie Non Nova. Juggler, Philippe Ménard throws herself into a juggling and survival act, with ice as a co-star. Heavy balls of ice hang from the ceiling and crash to the floor in intervals. She has a gigantic block of ice and three rotating freezers containing endless numbers of snowballs on the stage with

Tre dages seminar om ny-cirkus. Om æstetikken, om kroppene, om oplevelsen – og om, hvordan man journalistisk viderefremidler denne oplevelse. Og hvordan gør man så det? Hvad er resultatet af oplæg, samtaler og debatter med en række erfarne og vidende ny-cirkus eksperter? Umiddelbart... forvirring. For det uforløsende svar er den undren, der sætter sig på tværs i forsøget på distanceret at intellektualisere forestillingerne. Men hvorfor er det så svært at sætte ord på oplevelsen af ny-cirkus? Jeg vil påstå, at det hænger sammen med den form for oplevelse, ny-cirkus tilbyder, som bygger på en både teatral og performativ dimension.

Teatralitet og performativitet i ny-cirkus

Konventionelt cirkus karakteriseres ofte som performativt i betydningen selvreferentielt og virkelighedskonstituerende. Artisterne er ikke andet end sig selv, mens de udfører kunster, der ikke skal betyde andet end det, de er. Virkelige handlinger udført af virkelige mennesker.

Den performative dimension er også tydelig i ny-cirkus. Generelt set peger ny-cirkus ikke selv på en fast betydning af det fremviste. Performerne udfører handlinger, der ikke betyder andet end det, de er. Handlinger, der udføres i et her-og-nu foran publikum, som kan lade sig betage af de til tider nærmest overmenneskelige kunster, hvor performerens overskrider hverdagens og fysikkens grænser.

Under denne umiddelbare performativitet flyder dog en teatralitet, som også findes i konventionelt cirkus. Alle handlinger er øvet til hudløshed, men iscenesættes aften efter aften som enestående, grænseoverskridende og farlige. Publikum skal mærke suset, og de skal benoves hver gang et trick lykkes. Ny-cirkus har også tilført en anden form for teatralitet. Ny-cirkus præsenterer ikke enkeltstående numre, men opbygger universer, der samler alle elementer af forestillingen til en konceptuel helhed. Denne helhedsdramaturgi tilfører en mulighed for at fiktionalisere performerne og deres handlinger, og de bliver en del af et teatralt univers adskilt fra tilskuernes "virkelighed".

T
eatralitet og performativitet eksisterer altså side om side i ny-cirkus, lige som det gør i konventionelt cirkus, men iscenesættelsen af de to diskurser kan være med til at definere, hvilken form for oplevelse, ny-cirkus forestillingen tilbyder sit publikum.

P.P.P. – performativitet som iscenesættelsesstrategi

Et eksempel er P.P.P. af Compagnie Non Nova. Her kaster jongløren Philippe Ménard sig ud i et jonglerings- og overlevelsesakt med isen som medspiller. I loftet hænger tunge isklodder, der med mellemrum falder til gulvet med et brag. Med sig på scenen har hun en gevaldig isklods og tre roterende fryserer, der indeholder et uendeligt antal snebolde. Hun kaster sig i isen, jonglerer med den, spiser den og knuser den samtidig med, at tøjet ryger af, og hun ender med kun at være iført undertøj. Til slut smider hun også bh'en og sine bryster og viser, at hun biologisk set er en mand. Vi får altså som et ekstra lag en fortælling om, hvordan performerens

her. She throws herself around in the ice and juggles with it, eats it and crushes it as she strips her clothes off, down to her underwear. In the end she also removes her bra and her breasts to reveal that she biologically is a man. Here the story has an extra layer revealing how the performer challenges gender categories and his biological certainty as man. It is her personal battle that is performed.

There is an incredibly strong performative dimension in this piece. Due to the presence of the ice and its contact with the performing body as well as the performer's presence as a representation of herself, the piece carries on from 1960's performance and body art. The immediate reaction from the audience is determined by the performer's bodily relationship with the ice when she throws herself around in it, hugs it, sits on top of it and bites it, and as a member of the audience you can almost feel the ice yourself and feel the cold in the room.

At the same time, the audience warm the room up, which makes the balls of ice hanging from the ceiling melt and fall down from their strings and crash onto the floor where the performer is moving around. So, in actual fact each member of the audience contributes to putting the performer in danger's way.

All of this refers to a clear performativity. The ice and its effect on the often nearly naked performer and on the audience is real, as well as the heavy balls of ice which fall to the floor at risk to the performer. The fact that the performer is actually transsexual also refers back to reality.

There is also a crucial theatrical element involved here. A huge amount of preparation has taken place prior to this performance. The rate at which the ice melts has been carefully calculated in order to avoid being hit by falling balls of ice and Ménard's choreography is absolutely precise. In a performance situation, you get the feeling that the person is subordinate to the ice when in reality it is the opposite that applies - the human desire to conquer the ice. In other words, nothing is left to chance here. In *P.P.P.* the performative is used as a production strategy, which covers over the fundamental theatricality of the piece. How does this influence the public's experience of and reaction to the piece?

Phenomenological perception

It is mostly the body that is in focus, both as the core of the performance and as the receiving apparatus for the audience. By staging herself within a performative discourse and by defining the focus on the body, *P.P.P.* provides its audience with a phenomenological perception of the performance.

The basis of phenomenological philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory is that consciousness cannot be separated from the body. Perception is generated via the human bodily presence in the world and not as a separate consciousness process. The body is the entrance to the world and another person's movements and actions can become a part of your own if both parts have the 'right' attitude towards the fusion of gesture and experience horizons.

By staging herself within a performative discourse, *P.P.P.* is able to generate the 'right' attitude among the audience. They experience being placed in front of a person who carries out reality construed actions such as changing gender as well as moving around on the stage under the constant danger of being hit by heavy balls of ice. And they experience that their very presence in the room provides a threat to the performer.

eller karakteren udfordrer køns kategorierne og sin biologiske fastfrysning som mand. Det er hendes egen kamp, der performs. Der er en meget stærk performativ dimension i denne forestilling. Via isens tilstedeværelse og kontakt med den optrædende krop samt performerens nærvær som et billede på sig selv lægger forestillingen sig i forlængelse af 1960'ernes performancekunst og body art. Og den umiddelbare publikumsoplevelse hænger sammen med performerens kropslige forhold til isen. Når hun kaster sig i det, jonglerer med det, krammer det, sidder på det og bider i det, kan man som tilskuer næsten selv mærke isen. Og man kan mærke isens kulde i rummet.

Samtidig er publikum med til at varme rummet op, hvilket får iskuglerne i loftet til at smelte af deres ophængssnore og falde ned på det gulv, hvor performereren bevæger sig rundt. Og man er som tilskuer med til at udsætte performereren for fare.

Alt dette peger umiddelbart på en tydelig performativitet. Isen og dens virkning på den ofte næsten nøgne performer krop og på publikum er virkelig, og det samme er de tunge isbolde, der falder til jorden til fare for performereren. At performereren selv er transseksuel, peger også tilbage på virkeligheden.

*Samtidig er der dog en meget afgørende teatralitet på spil. Der ligger nemlig et enormt forberedelsesarbejde forud for forestillingen. Isens smeltehastighed er nøje regnet ud, og for at undgå at blive ramt af iskuglerne, er Ménards koreografi fuldkommen fastlagt. I forestillingssituationen får man indtryk af, at mennesket er underlagt isen. I virkeligheden er der dog tale om det modsatte, nemlig menneskets forsøg på at beherske isen. Der er med andre ord ingen tilfældigheder på spil. Jeg vil derfor påstå, at der i *P.P.P.* er tale om performativitet som en iscenesættelsesstrategi, der dækker over en grundlæggende teatralitet. Og hvad gør det ved publikumsoplevelsen?*

Den fænomenologiske perception

*Det er i høj grad kroppen, der er i fokus, både som forestillingens centrum og som modtageapparat for publikum. Ved at iscenesætte sig selv inden for en performativitet diskurs og ved at fastholde fokus på kroppen tilbyder *P.P.P.* sine tilskuere en fænomenologisk perception af forestillingen.*

Grundlaget i fænomenolog Maurice Merleau-Ponty's teori er, at bevidstheden ikke kan skilles fra kroppen. Perception foregår via menneskets kropslige væren-i-verden og ikke som en adskilt bevidsthedsproces. Kroppen er adgangen til verden, og et andet menneskes bevægelser og handlinger kan blive en del af en selv, ved at begge parter har den rette holdning til denne sammensmeltning af gestus og erfaringshorisonter.

*Ved at iscenesætte sig selv inden for en performativitet diskurs opnår *P.P.P.* at grundlægge denne "rette" holdning hos publikum. De oplever at være placeret foran et menneske, der udfører virkelighedskonstituerende handlinger som at skifte mellem kønnene samt at bevæge sig rundt på scenen under konstant fare for at blive ramt af de tunge iskugler. Og de oplever, at de er medskyldige i at udsætte performereren for fare ved at være til stede i rummet.*

Det betyder, at publikum ikke bare lever sig ind i performerens fiktive rolle, men at de lever med hende som menneske. Med Merleau-Ponty's ord er der tale om en fysiognomisk perception, hvor tilskueren mærker performerens krop i sin egen krop. Isens tilstedeværelse medfører en sensorisk oplevelse for publikum, som ikke kun går gennem syns- og høresansen, men også gennem

This means that the audience does not only identify with the performer's fictional role but that they identify with her as a person. In the words of Merleau-Ponty: it is about physiognomic perception, where the audience can feel the performer's body in their own bodies. The presence of the ice adds a sensory dimension, which doesn't only operate on a sight and sound level but also through the sense of touch, which makes the audience aware of their own bodies.

There is also the notion of a potential audience phenomenological perception where the ice and private storytelling's performative strategy lays the foundation.

The audience shares a bodily experience of what the performer is going through when her naked body makes contact with the ice and her fear of being hit by the balls of ice is riveted in the audience.

Theatricality shows the way

As her bodily experiences become a part of ours, so too does her world. It is linked to the pain and anguish of living as a transsexual and this is not presented to the public in a symbolic manner but through a physically experienced perception. The acknowledgement of this lies in the body and despite all we have seen, a fundamental theatricality is present. Furthermore, the performative as production strategy gives the audience the opportunity to experience a concrete phenomenological perception.

Theatricality is far from immaterial as it controls the phenomenological perception's character. In *P.P.P.* we meet the transsexual performer and encounter her pain and anxiety during the performance, which can be interpreted as a picture of the real Philippe Ménard's experiences as a transsexual. In other words, it is a phenomenological experience with a semiotic, which is controlled by the performance's theatricality as the staging of transsexuality and the ice's power over the performer, which refers to the underlying reality but at the same time is a staging and potential fictionalisation of it.

Performativity and focus on the body create a basis for a phenomenological perception just as in conventional circus, but the experience takes on a direction and a meaning that is controlled by the concept and the 'fictional' universe's theatricality. By so doing, it is also possible to direct the audience experience to a certain theme or problem. It is not an intellectual post rationalisation understanding process, but a phenomenological experience – a lived or experienced process – that gives the audience's experience its meaning.

So maybe it isn't so strange that it can be difficult to find the words to describe what it is like to experience contemporary circus. The experience that sits in your body isn't easily defined by intellectual post rationalisation or words that just aren't enough. So what can you do as a contemporary circus writer other than remember that language can only stretch some of the way? That is why it is never enough and you must exert yourself and point the readers in the right direction so they can work out the rest of the way themselves.

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følesansen, og de får fokus på deres egen krop. Der er altså tale om en potentiel fænomenologisk perception for tilskuerne, og isen samt den private fortællings performative strategi skaber grundlaget. Publikum får en kropslig oplevelse af, hvad performeren går igennem, når hendes nøgne hud er i nærkontakt med isen, og angsten for at blive ramt af iskuglerne forplanter sig ud til publikum.

Teatraliteten som styrepind

Ved at hendes kropslige erfaringer bliver en del af vores, bliver hendes verden en del af vores. Det er forbundet med smerte og angst at leve som transseksuel, og den oplevelse præsenteres ikke i symbolsk form for publikum, men via en fysisk erfaret perception. Erkendelsen er i kroppen. Og det på trods af at der, som vi har set, er en fundamental teatralitet på spil. Men performativiteten som iscenesættelsesstrategi giver tilskuerne mulighed for en konkret fænomenologisk perception.

Teatraliteten er dog langt fra uvæsentlig. Den styrer den fænomenologiske perceptions karakter. I P.P.P. har vi at gøre med en transseksuel performer, hvis smerte og angst under forestillingen kan ses som et billede på den virkelige Philippe Ménards oplevelser som transseksuel. Det er med andre ord en fænomenologisk oplevelse med en semiotik, der er styret af forestillingens teatralitet – teatraliteten her forstået som den iscenesættelse af transseksualiteten og af isens magt over performeren, som peger på en bagvedliggende virkelighed, men som samtidig er en iscenesættelse og potentiel fiktionisering af denne.

Performativiteten og fokus på kroppen skaber grobund for en fænomenologisk perception akkurat som i konventionelt cirkus, men oplevelsen får en retning og en betydning, der styres af konceptet og det "fiktive" univers' teatralitet. Hermed er det altså muligt at fokusere tilskueroplevelsen på en bestemt tematik eller problematik. Og fordi det er en fænomenologisk oplevelse, er det ikke en intellektuelt efterrationaliseret betydningsproces, men en levet eller oplevet proces, der tildeler oplevelsen betydning.

Så er det vel ikke så underligt, at det kan være svært at sætte ord på oplevelsen af ny-cirkus. Den oplevelse, som sidder i kroppen, lader sig ikke let definere af en intellektuel efterrationalisering, og sproget kommer til kort. Så hvad kan man gøre som ny-cirkus skribent andet end at huske på, at sproget kun rækker en del af vejen? Derfor er det aldrig helt nok, og derfor må man arbejde ekstra for at udpege resten af vejen for læseren, som selv må gå det sidste stykke.

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A Crash Course in Circus

Article by **Anette Therese Pettersen**

From circus to circus art, from jester to novice, after a three-day introduction to circus art's many shapes and forms.

The big top

Circus. For me, the word smacks of popcorn, candy floss and adrenaline. My upbringing wasn't exactly bursting with stage and theatre experiences. There was the Christmas show at the regional theatre once a year, and a handful of concerts at different arenas and venues. And the occasional circus. Traditional, conventional circus with a big top, elephants and all that. It was all about skill and ability, with a big Wow-factor. As a child, it was pure magic, but where does circus go after that? Theatre productions, exhibitions and concerts increasingly knocked on my door, but what happened to circus?

Let me start off by being absolutely honest and admitting that I didn't have any special interest in circus. Rather the opposite. 'That circus thing I'm going to', is how I referred to the circus seminar in Helsinki, before I went. Even though I'm a theatre and stage critic, attending around 100 performances every year, I had seen vanishingly little new circus. Until recently, I wasn't even aware of the term 'contemporary circus'. So what did I expect to see in Helsinki?

Poetic escapades

Over three days, I broadened my perspective and understanding of circus at such a rate that I felt like my head was going to explode. To say my personal knowledge base of the circus multiplied dramatically would be a serious understatement.

I arrived in Helsinki with my head full of other things, and in the first performance I soon discovered that I lacked the 'tools' to enter the contemporary circus world. The body language in both La Manœuvre production *Mue* and Philippe Ménards' *P.P.P.* immediately reminded me of dance. At the same time, it fundamentally broke with that art form. The way the performers used their bodies, the manner in which they moved, is neither theatre nor dance - the borders between the different art forms were shifting before my eyes. I had to find the 'right' way in, to enter the performance or artwork on its own terms.

Blurring the boundaries

Circus floats between different genres: between different art forms and at times even coming close to sport. Its focus on skills and abilities makes it very similar to acrobatics and gymnastics. At the same time, many of the arts are skills orientated - that applies both to ballet, painting and sculpture, and music (perhaps classical music in particular).

From circus to circus art

So where is the boundary - here or elsewhere, between art and skills? During my three days in Helsinki, I moved from associating circus with so-called 'conventional circus' or new circus, which had its day between 1968-1995, towards appreciating it as contemporary circus. Confused? Not necessarily. Bewildered? Absolutely. But I was also curious and was keen to learn more.

Fra sirkus til sirkuskunst, og fra narr til novise, etter tre dagers innføring i sirkuskunstens mange former og fasonger.

The big top

Sirkus. Ordet har for meg alltid smakt av popcorn, sukkerspinn og adrenalin. I min oppvekst var det ikke direkte overflod av scenekunstopplevelser. Omtrent én gang i året var det juleforestilling på regionteatret, samt et lite knippe konserter spredt utover svært ulike arenaer og sammenkomster. Og en sjelden gang; sirkus. Tradisjonelt, konvensjonelt sirkus med rundtelt, elefanter og det hele. Det var ferdighetsorientert og med stor wow-faktor. Som barn var det ren magi - men hvor ble det av sirkuset etter hvert? Teaterforestillinger, utstillingene og konsertene oppsøker jeg stadig hyggigere - men hvor er sirkuset blitt av?

La meg like gjerne være ærlig og innrømme det først som sist: jeg nærer i utgangspunktet ingen spesiell interesse for sirkus. Tvert i mot, kanskje. 'Den der sirkus-greia' var betegnelsen på oppholdet mellom meg og mine venner før jeg dro på seminar i Helsinki. Til tross for at jeg er scenekunstkritiker og ser gjennomsnittlig hundre forestillinger i året så har jeg sett forsvinnende lite nysirkus - eller, som jeg inntill nylig ikke var klar over var en term: samtidssirkus. Hva forventet jeg da av et opphold i Helsinki?

Poetic escapades

I løpet av tre dager utvides mitt perspektiv på og kunnskaper om sirkus i et slikt tempo at det føles som om hodet mitt skulle sprenges. Å si at min private kunnskapsbase om sirkus mangedobles vil være en kraftig underdrivelse.

Jeg ankom Helsinki med hodet fullt av andre ting, og i møtet med oppholdets første forestilling oppdaget jeg raskt at jeg manglet 'verktøy' for å entre samtidssirkuset. Både La Manœuvre forestilling Mue og Philippe Ménards P.P.P. har et kroppsspråk som umiddelbart fikk meg til å tenke på dans. Samtidig bryter de fundamentalt med den kunstformen. Måten å bruke kroppen på, bevegelsesmønsteret, unndrar seg både teater og dans - samtidig som grensene mellom kunstformene er glidende. Men kanskje nettopp derfor ble det ekstra viktig for meg å finne 'rett' vei inn, å entre forestillingene eller kunstverkene på deres egne premisser.

Blurring the boundaries

Sirkus ligger og vaker mellom flere ulike sjangre: mellom de ulike kunstformene og samtidig også nært opptil idrett. Orienteringen mot ferdigheter gjør at akrobatikk og gymnastikk har mange likhetstrekk. Samtidig, også store deler av kunstfeltet er ferdighetsorientert - dette gjelder både ballett, billedkunst og musikk (kanskje særlig klassisk musikk).

From circus to circus art

Og hvor går grensa - her som ellers, mellom kunst og ferdighet? I løpet av tre dager går jeg fra å assosiere sirkus med såkalt 'konvensjonelt sirkus' og enkelte nysirkus-former, til å avskrive 'nysirkus' som en passert epoke tidfestet til 1968-1995 og bevege meg videre inn i samtidssirkuset. Forvirret? Ikke nødvendigvis. Omtåket? Absolutt. Men også nysgjerrig og med en økt vitebegjærighet.

When I see any performance, in any art form, I attempt to redefine both the 'art' or artistic genre of circus/theatre/dance, etc. You can make a division between circus or circus art, or artistic and sporting performance, or straightforward entertainment – but what is the aim of circus art? When contemporary circus distances itself from traditional circus by blending in elements from dance and theatre, among other things – how do they avoid going backwards when they wish to cleanse their own art form? And at the same time, how do they maintain circus art within the art?

Revealing the intimate

What had I expected from P.P.P.? I don't really know. But I know I got something completely different. If I take the tabloid approach, and select one highlight, it was this performance, which radically changed my view of circus as an art form. I was tired after a long day in the Kiasma Theatre, but suddenly I was awake again. Ménards' sincerity and focused presence completely grabbed my attention. Jean-Michel Guys' lecture on circus, with illustrating film clips, had given me reference points and tools to see circus with a fresh eye – but this was where I got the full circus art experience.

Celebrating conviviality

I shouldn't generalise too much when writing about an art form that I clearly only partially know and understand. But Norwegians don't exactly have overwhelming access to contemporary circus. The large majority continue to associate circus with a big tent, elephants and clowns. Having said that, they also connect the visual arts with figurative, two-dimensional paintings. Dance with ballet (where the public at least has a large reference bank from the TV programme *So You Think You Can Dance*), and theatre with classic drama with a clear narrative development. As a theatre studies student and stage art critic, I find it strange that I know so little about contemporary circus. This introduction to contemporary circus widened my understanding of other art forms.

'We can do what we want, be who we want to be. We don't choose to be born – we just keep on living.'
Philippe Ménard.

Most of us urgently need to escape reality, as Philippe Ménard said on the seminar's last day. But, to quote Ménard again, that escape from reality doesn't have to be pleasant. An artistic experience can make you see the world differently. In this way, each work has changed my understanding of the world, and my worldview, and also changed my view of art itself, and art forms generally. And maybe this is the basic difference between circus arts and the traditional circus. I believe that watching people with skills and knowledge that you don't have yourself has a real value. A relatively limited value, but a value nonetheless. But when that experience also opens your eyes a little bit wider it becomes really interesting. As Heidegger and Gadamer have stated, when your horizon widens, your view of the world is also challenged. Possibly only a little, but that is enough. The world will never be the same. For better or worse. Art is an open invitation to think out loud with other people. To see alternative solutions. As with Ménard, my eyes were opened to new stage art forms. I practically grew up in the library, and didn't stumble across the stage arts until my twenties. It might only be appropriate that I didn't discover circus art until I was in my thirties? One question remains: which art form will I discover in my forties?

I møte med nær sagt alle forestillinger, innenfor alle kunstformer, så tar jeg meg i å redefinere både 'kunst' og kunstsjangrene sirkus/teater/dans etc. Når man skiller mellom sirkus og sirkuskunst, og blant annet trekker et skille ved forestillinger hvis utøvere er sportsutøvere og som har underholdning som prioritet – hva er da sirkuskunstens formål? Når samtidssirkuset tar avstand fra det tradisjonelle sirkuset ved å ta opp i seg elementer fra blant annet dans og teater – hvordan unngår de da i neste omgang å gå tilbake når de igjen ønsker å rendyrke sin egen kunstform? Og samtidig, hvordan beholde sirkuskunsten i kunsten?

Revealing the intimate

Hva hadde jeg forventet av P.P.P.? Jeg vet ikke helt. Men jeg vet at jeg fikk noe helt annet. Hvis jeg skal være tabloid og trekke fram ett høydepunkt fra oppholdet, én ting som radikalt endret mitt syn på sirkuskunsten så må det være denne forestillingen. Jeg var trøtt etter lange dager inne i Kiasma teatersal, men med ett var jeg likevel helt våken. Oppriktigheten og den konsentrerte tilstedeværelsen til Menard sørget for full oppmerksomhet. Selv om Jean-Michel Guys forelesninger om sirkus, med illustrerende filmsnutter, har gitt meg referansepunkter og verktøy til å se sirkuskunst med et nytt blikk – så er det her jeg får opplevelsen av sirkuskunst.

Celebrating conviviality

*Nå skal jeg ikke generalisere for mye innenfor en kunstform jeg åpenbart fortsatt har begrenset kunnskap om eller kjennskap til. Men, så vidt meg bekjent, så er tilgangen på samtidssirkus i Norge ikke direkte overveldende. Jeg er stygt redd for at et stort flertall av nordmenn fortsatt forbinder sirkus med et rundt telt med elefanter og klovner. Men, når det er sagt, så er det en viss sjans for at de aller fleste også forbinder billedkunst med figurative, todimensjonale malerier. Dans med ballett (her har muligens det generelle publikummet fått en større samlet referansebank av tv-program som *So you think you can dance*), og teater med klassisk drama bestående av en klar narrativ utvikling. Men som teaterviter og scenekunstkritiker er det litt underlig at jeg har så lite kunnskap om samtidssirkus. Denne innføringen i samtidssirkuset gir også resten av kunstfeltet en større dimensjon for meg.*

*"We can do what we want, be who we want to be. We don't choose to be born – we just keep on living."
Philippe Ménard*

Behovet for å glemme omverdenen er, som Philippe Menard uttalte på seminarets siste dag, stort hos de aller fleste. Men, for igjen å støtte meg på Menard, så trenger ikke en virkelighetsflukt bare være behagelig. Etter en kunstopplevelse ser gjerne verden annerledes ut. Slik hvert verk endrer min oppfattelse av verden, mitt bestående verdensbilde så å si, så er verkene også medvirkende årsak til at jeg endrer min oppfatning av kunstformene og kunst generelt. Og det er kanskje her vi er inne i den grunnleggende forskjellen mellom sirkuskunstens og det tradisjonelle sirkuset. Jeg tror at det å observere mennesker som er i besittelse av kunnskaper og ferdigheter vi selv ikke har i seg selv kan ha en verdi. En relativt begrenset en, men likevel. Men det er når opplevelsen også åpner blikket ditt ytterligere at det blir interessant. Når horisonten din, for å si det med Heidegger og Gadamer, utvides og ditt bestående verdensbilde utfordres. Muligens bare litt, men det er nok. Verden blir aldri den samme. På godt og vondt. I kunsten finner jeg en åpen invitasjon til å tenke høyt sammen med andre. Til å se på alternative løsninger. I likhet med Menard hadde jeg en sen scenekunstoppvåkning. Jeg vokste praktisk talt opp på biblioteket, og veien over til scenekunsten kom ikke før i tyveårene. Sånn sett er det muligens bare passende at det ikke er før jeg når tredveårene at jeg oppdager sirkuskunsten? Spørsmålet som gjenstår da er hvilken kunstform jeg får øynene opp for i førtiårene.

Not Necessarily Beautiful – a Newborn Circus Critic's Confessions

Ikke nødvendigvis vakkert – en nyfødt sirkuskritikers bekjennelser

Article by **Karoline Skuseth**

When I started writing this text, it was apparent to me that I would try to discuss the challenges of Contemporary Circus criticism by using perspectives from different directions in theatre, dance and art theory. The recurring point of debate seems to be the lack of a vocabulary – 'we have no references', we do not know the terms! Theatrical theory does arguably have its origins in literary theory. Would it not be natural to assume that circus theory could be inspired by the theoretical system that surrounds theatre and dance? Either way, it certainly has a large shared consciousness. The problem still remains: how can today's common cultural critic attempt a critique of modern circus when they have only the slightest inkling of what it actually involves?

But theory can be dry. I have an almost brutal desire to push all the books and notes of my desk, as if I am in some mediocre American comedy show. It feels pointless to go into a complicated theoretical hypothesis when the impressions I keep on returning to relate more to my senses and emotion than intellect. To be quite frank, I wish I had access to some futuristic medium that let me use colours, shapes and movements to explain exactly how I feel.

I am a so-called emotional person, with all that entails. This means that I easily get carried away when I discover an exciting new formal language or aesthetic. I'm conclusively often captivated when confronted with complete compositions of color, sound, smells and light – exactly the kind of composition you find in both contemporary and classical circus. I'm entranced by the smell of buttered popcorn and sticky candyfloss, the dirty sawdust, the damp red velour curtains, the glittering one-piece costumes ready to use, the humanely trained elephants.. Hang on. I trace off. Contemporary Circus is more than that. Let me attempt a definition: 'Contemporary Circus is typically a dramatic work that is performed with/ gets help from/ uses circus disciplines! There, that should cover it – or perhaps not? I feel there is something missing.

One can't escape the fact that Contemporary – and New – Circus has a tendency to seek the stage. In this, the form is redefined: it goes beyond its prime purpose of offering pure entertainment towards an anticipation of deeper meaning and abstraction – communicated through a dramaturgy based on classical principles. While New Circus often relies on displays of illusion and the abolition of gravity, Contemporary Circus makes a clean break through its use of elegant, frugal props. The lack of the spectacular is a statement in itself.

Then there is the typical convention that circus is something beautiful. One might wonder why that is, when historically the format has been everything but aesthetically pleasing with its Pantalone characters, gladiator battles and bearded ladies. The form has been ruled by an anarchic kind of balance, where people who in their time were seen as deviants have found their identity and role. This argument is not as strong today, where one seems

Da jeg begynte å skrive denne teksten hadde jeg klart for meg at jeg ville forsøke å problematisere utfordringene rundt samtidssirkuskritikk ved hjelp av perspektiver fra ulike retninger innen teater- dans- og kunstteori. Dette fordi det stadig tilbakevendende poenget i debatten later til å være mangelen på empiri - «vi har ingen referanser», «vi kjenner ikke begrepene». Teatervitenskap har jo diskutabelt nok sitt opphav i litteraturvitenskap, en naturlig deduksjon følger at sirkusvitenskap kan la seg inspirere av det teoretiske systemet som omgir teater og dans. Det er uansett ingen tvil om at bevisstheten rundt dette må bli større. Hvordan kan dagens gjengse kulturanmelder skrive en kritikk på et sirkusverks premisser når hun eller han ikke har den fjerneste anelse om hva dette innebærer?

Men så ble teorien pluselig tørr. Jeg har et nærmest brutalt behov for å skyve alle bøker og notater av skrivebordet, som i en middels god amerikansk komedie. Det føles meningsløst å begynne i innfløkte teoretiske hypoteser når inntrykkene jeg stadig vender tilbake til knytter seg mer til sanser og emosjon enn intellekt. For å være helt ærlig skulle jeg ønske jeg levde noen hundre år fram i tid og hadde tilgang på et ikke enda oppfunnet medium, så jeg kunne vise hva jeg tenker i farger, form og bevegelse.

Jeg er et såkalt følelsesmenneske, på godt og vondt. Dette innebærer at jeg lett lar meg fascinere når jeg møtes med et formspråk og en estetikk jeg liker. Som et lite barn er jeg altså lett solgt når jeg konfronteres med totale komposisjoner av farger, lyd, lukt og lys - komposisjoner som ofte går igjen i sirkusverdenen, både samtidig og klassisk. Jeg blir henført av tanken på lukten av popcorn og sukkerspinn, skitten sagmugg, fuktige røde velurgardiner, glitrende heldrakter klare til bruk, humant dresserte elefanter... Vent litt. Jeg sporer av. Samtidssirkus handler om mer enn dette. Jeg prøver meg på en definisjon: «Samtidssirkus er (som oftest) dramatiske verk formidlet med/ved hjelp av/via sirkusdisipliner.» Der. Det burde være dekkende. Eller? Jeg føler at noe mangler.

Man kommer ikke utenom det faktum at samtidssirkus, i likhet med sin artsfelle nysirkus, har en tendens til å søke mot scenen. I dette redefineres formen - fra å hovedsaklig bære ren underholdningsverdi tillegges sjangeren en forventning om et dypere meningsgrunnlag, formidlet gjennom en dramaturgi basert på klassiske prinsipper. Der nysirkus gjerer hviler på oppvisninger i illusjon og opphevet gravitasjon, skiller samtidssirkus seg klart fra stammen med sin elegante nøysomhet med virkemidler; fraværet av det spektakulære blir et moment i seg selv.

Videre er en vanlig konvensjon er at sirkus er noe vakkert. Man kan spørre seg om når denne oppsto, i og med at formen historisk sett har vært alt annet - med sine respektive Pantalone-skikkelser, gladiatorkamper og skjeggete damer.

to prefer fighting the idea of normality to avoid simply being one of the masses. Contemporary Circus has access to this range of feelings in its lack of the spectacular: it's not a dramatic premise that the players on stage constantly have to surpass themselves – climb higher or fall more dramatically. When a discipline is applied, it can just as easily be interpreted symbolically, such as Philippe Menard juggling with her/his pregnant belly in Cie Non Nova's *P.P.P.*

One thing that also constantly strikes me about Contemporary Circus is the format's ability to redefine the boundaries being human is limited within. It may suddenly reveal the spectacle of a deadly spider in vertical silk, or an elegant and powerful chimpanzee that sneaks up a rope as if it was the easiest thing in the world. In my view, contemporary theatre forms has the same responsibility for abstraction of the human being, but circus has an obvious advantage in its endless possibilities in the artists' sheer physical dexterity. There is nevertheless a harmonic similarity between the forms, stylized in the battle for the genre characteristics.

In modern times, art has to compete against the mass media for people's attention. A need for simple entertainment has been generated – fastfood for the mind. After a busy day at work, why should one care about other people's problems? It sounds logical indeed, but is a disturbing trend – if this continues we'll soon vote out the most boring kids in daycare centres and the world will collapse in a pool of old frying fat.

Both theatre and circus often has to work on compromises with its intent. State-subsidised theaters is forced to focus on children's musicals and broad farce, travelling classic circus constantly experiments with new discount arrangements, and New Circus performances are merged with poker tournaments. Contemporary Circus seems to have escaped this trap for now, most likely because of its audience appeal, an audience often attracted by marginality and innovation.

Enough gloom. Isn't circus supposed to be life-affirming? In connection with Cie Non Nova's *P.P.P.*, one audience member said they found no or little joy in the performance. Of course, joy is not a feeling one usually associates with a person's exposed sex transformation, infamous cold and potentially deadly balls of ice dropping from the ceiling – but if one is permitted to be led into the symbolism of the performance, it could very well end up as one of the clearest emotions in the end. It was like that for me. Throughout the performance, I had a constant desire to jump up and offer my assistance, hit the ice balls off the stage in fury, help the seemingly helpless figure on stage, stuck to a block of ice for everyone to see. The joy lay in the overwhelming humanitarian urge. At the same time I felt guilty. My presence was helping to create the danger, as my body gave out part of the heat that triggered the melting process.

Where is the divide between a circus artist's private life and stage-self? Philippe Menard's gender identity is an obvious example, but the boundaries are expanding in many places. Disciplines such as trapeze and juggling requires years of arduous training, and are thus an all-consuming way of life. One can of course have good prospects by nature, but is still required to enhance physical and mental qualities such as strength and coordination. In Contemporary Circus the body is a tool. This fact creates an intricate problem for the culture journalist. Symbols and interpretation, stage effects and scenography, yes – but circus disciplines? One should be able to describe each movement with

Det har hersket en anarkistisk form for balanse, der mennesker som i sin samtid har blitt sett på som avvikere har funnet sin identitet og funksjon. Dette argumentet er ikke like sterkt i dag, idet malen for normalitet synes å være det det ofte kjempes mot, individet vil nødig bare være en del av massen. Samtidssirkus har tilgang til dette følelsesregisteret i fraværet av det spektakulære - det er ikke et dramaturgisk premiss at aktørene på scenen stadig skal overgå seg selv; klatre høyere eller falle mer dramatisk. Når en disiplin tas i bruk kan den like gjerne tolkes rent symbolsk, som eksempelvis Philippe Ménards sjonglering med sin gravide mage i P.P.P.

Noe som stadig slår meg i forbindelse med samtidssirkus, er mulighetene formen har til å abstrahere mennesket. Plutselig oppstår et vidunder av en dødelig edderkopp i silke, eller en elegant og råsterk sjimpanse som smyger seg opp tau som om det var den enkleste sak i verden. Samtidige teaterformer bærer i mine øyne et lignende ansvar for abstraksjon, men sirkuset har uendelig flere muligheter i utøvernes fysiske ferdigheter. I dette ligger likevel en betryggende likhet mellom formene, stilisert i kampen for sjangerens egenart. I moderne tid er det ingen hemmelighet at begge kunstformene, i likhet med mange andre, slåss med massemedier om mengdens oppmerksomhet. Det genereres stadig behov for enkel underholdning, fastfood for hjernen. Etter en travel dag på jobb trenger man ikke andres problemer. Det høres logisk ut, men er likevel en grusomt illevarslende trend - snart sorterer man barnehagebarn etter underholdningsverdi og verden kolliderer i en pøl av gammel frityroffe.

Over til noe mindre dystert. Både teatre og sirkus fungerer ofte på kompromiss med sin egen intensjon. Statsfinansierte teatre ser seg nødt til å fokusere på barnemusikaler og revylignende farser, omreisende klassiske sirkus eksperimenterer stadig med nye rabattordninger, og nysirkusforestillinger slås sammen med pokerturneringer. Samtidssirkus ser hittil ut til å ha sneket seg utenom denne fellen, sannsynligvis på grunn av stilartens publikumsappell, et publikum som gjerne tiltrekkes av marginalitet og nytenkning på flere plan.

Men alvorlig talt. Nok svartmaling. Skal ikke sirkus liksom være livsbejaende? I forbindelse med Cie Non Novas P.P.P. kommenterte en tilskuer at det ikke fantes noen glede i forestillingen. Klart, glede er ikke en følelse man vanligvis assosierer med et menneskes blottlagte kjønnstransformasjon, infam kulde og potensielt dødelige iskuler, men om man lar seg føre inn i forestillingens symbolikk kan det likevel ende opp som en av de klareste følelsene man sitter igjen med til slutt. For mitt vedkommende var det sånn. Jeg hadde gjennom forestillingen et konstant ønske om å springe fram og hjelpe, slå iskulene til helvete vekk, hjelpe den tilsynelatende hjelpeløse figuren som lå på scenen klistret fast til en isblokk til alles beskuelse. Gleden lå i den overskyggende humanitære følelsen. Samtidig følte jeg skyld: kroppen min var delaktig i å skape fare ved at jeg avga en del av varmen som utløste smelteprosessen.

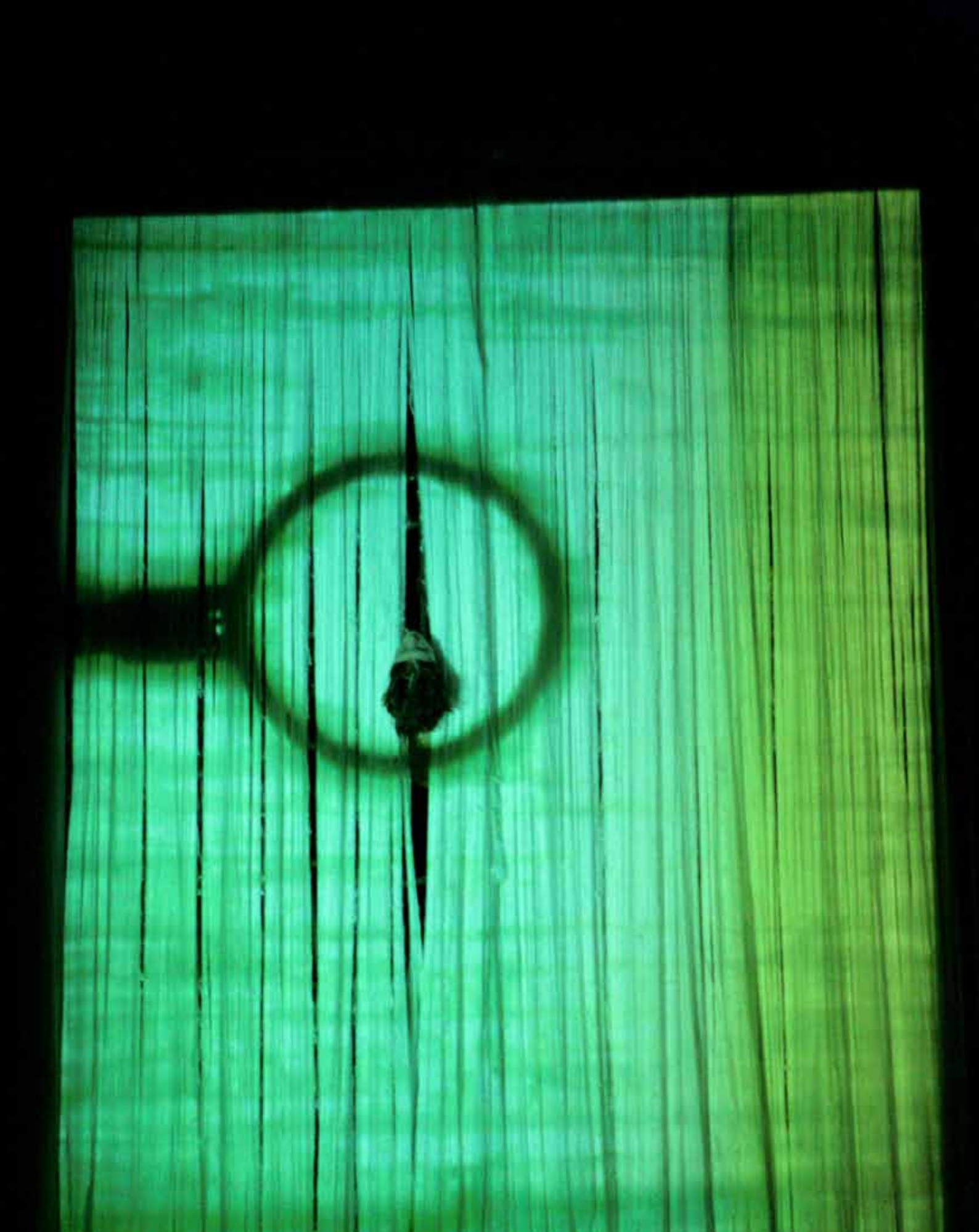
Hvor går skillet mellom en artists privatliv og sceniske jeg? Philippe Ménards kjønnsidentitet er et åpenbart eksempel, men grensene er utflytende flere steder. Disipliner som trapes og sjonglering krever årevis av knallhard trening på sine respektive felt, og blir dermed altomfattende valg. Man kan selvfølgelig ha gode forutsetninger fra naturens side, likevel kommer man ikke utenom foredling av fysiske og mentale egenskaper som styrke og koordinasjon. I samtidssirkuset er

the same meticulous attention as a judge in an Olympic diving competition. At the same time there is a responsibility on the critic to write in a language people understand, a language that isn't reserved solely for artists and aspiring circus theoreticians.

One solution for developing Contemporary Circus criticism may lie in a collaboration between theory and practice, both in developing a register of terms and vocabulary and a continuous open dialogue. I have trouble accepting the divisions that have arisen between certain fields in the theater world – it is absurd to think of the mutual antipathy that prevails in certain environments; critics who compare performances to their own unborn lovechildren and creative artists who view criticism as personal attacks. It would be more constructive for the art form and its theory to co-operate to benefit from each others knowledge and experience.

kroppen et redskap. I dette ligger også essensen av problemet - kulturjournalisten befinner seg på dypt vann. Symbolikk og tolkning, lyseffekter og scenografi, ja - men sirkusdisipliner? Man burde vært i stand til å beskrive enhver bevegelse med like nitid oppmerksomhet som en dommer i en olympisk stupekonkurranse. Samtidig ligger det et ansvar på kritikeren om å skrive på et språk folk forstår, et språk som ikke kun er forbeholdt artister og aspirerende sirkusteoretikere.

En løsning for utviklingen av en profesjonell samtidssirkuskritikk kan ligge i et tett samarbeid mellom teori og praksis - både i utvikling av et begrepsregister, og i en videre åpen dialog. Jeg ser med mistro på splittelsen som har oppstått mellom feltene i teaterverdenen - det er helt absurd å tenke på den gjensidige motviljen som hersker i enkelte miljøer; kritikere som sammenligner alt med sine egne ufødte hjertebarn og utøvende kunstnere som tar all kritikk som personangrep. Det ville være mer logisk om kunstformen og dens vitenskap samarbeidet for å nyte godt av hverandres kunnskap og erfaring.



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CIRCOSTRADA NETWORK
HORLES MURS



Sirkuksen Tiedotuskeskus
Finnish Circus Information Centre