

# UNPACK THE ARTS

European residency programme for cultural journalists

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# Presentation

Circus arts are an art form like theatre or dance, but have not yet a profound level of intellectual, cultural and institutional recognition it deserves, in Europe as well as at national and local level. Thereby political and financial support to this sector is quite low and there are structural weaknesses. There are strong imbalances in comparison to other creative areas, even when comparing the realities between regions or countries.

Despite the growing success of circus by the audience and programmers, circus arts are not covered by abundant literature, academic research, in-depth articles, reviews,... and artists themselves often experience difficulties in producing theoretical writing that communicates their practice, their creative processes and their productions. They rarely have the chance to exchange with critics and experts from the performing arts on theoretical or conceptual terms.

Also, many art writers are clueless about contemporary circus. Cultural journalists don't know the disciplines and techniques and overall they lack the contextual understanding to tackle a piece's dramaturgical choices, to reference other productions, or to interview artists creating non text-based works.

That's why Circuscentrum and 9 important circus festivals all over Europe conceived Unpack the Arts. Unpack the Arts is a European project – granted by Europe Culture – that provides residencies for cultural journalists in the context of twelve major festivals programming contemporary circus. The goal of the project is to

facilitate the circulation of knowledge and experience, to develop the critical discourses of its participants, and to further the role of the media within the circus arts and contemporary society.

## 12 Residencies – 120 Articles

Unpack the Arts consists of 12 residencies in 8 countries, spread over 2 years (August 2012 – February 2014). Each residency is set within the framework of a festival and follows the same format: over the course of 4 days, the participants contribute to a series of moderated thematic discussions, attend lectures by key circus experts, see 3-5 shows, and meet with and interview programmed artists along with a representative of the host festival. After the residencies, each participating journalist delivers one article. These texts are collected, translated and turned into an online, multilingual publication.

This fifth publication collects the texts of 10 European journalists who attended the residency at Hors Pistes and La Piste aux Espoirs in Brussels and Tournai, Belgium, 28 February – 3 March 2013.

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

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# Humour and Circus

BRUCE DESSAU

Circus in the 21st Century comes in many forms. From the traditional sawdust-sprinkled ring to the kind of stage performance that comes close to physical theatre or dance. One theme that runs through the best circus, wherever it takes place, however, is humour. From red-nosed clowns to sophisticated mime, making an audience laugh is an essential way of making a connection.

During my visit to two circus festivals in Belgium this thought occurred to me a number of times. Sometimes a performance would feel cold or distant. Lacking emotion. Then something funny would happen onstage to crack the tension. The sense of release could be heard in the laughs of the audience.

Claudio Stellato's *L'Autre* at the Hors Pistes festival at Les Halles de Schaerbeek in Brussels was a particularly intriguing production. The tall, gaunt Stellato appeared on a bare, dark stage carrying a wooden cabinet on his back, like Atlas struggling to support the world. For the next hour this amazing performer squeezed into the box or squeezed into a wardrobe and delivered a type of physical clowning that is all too rare today. Stellato has Mr Bean-style funny bones but uses physical comedy to say so much more about the human condition.

There were touching, tender moments to *L'Autre*, but for the audience the most striking moments were the comedic ones. As Stellato tried to fit inside the small cabinet his long, gangly limbs were exposed. It was like trying to contain an octopus in a string bag. As one limb went in another popped out. Later in the performance his head, illuminated at the top of a high wardrobe, appeared to be disconnected from his body, moving independently and defying the laws of gravity.

The following morning our group met Stellato and his colleague Martin Firket. *L'Autre* is a show that

they have been performing together for a number of years now and I assumed that it would be so well polished it would be the same every night. Yet they explained that the nuances of the performance, the small touches that make it funny, depend on the response of the audience. "We know within the first eight minutes if this will be a comedy," says Stellato. On the night I saw it, the giggles flowed thick and fast from start to finish. On other nights they can perform in complete silence. Still a success, yet not a comedy.

For me this underlines how comedy and tragedy can be two sides of the same coin. Nudge a performance in one direction and you have something dark, push it in the other and you have light entertainment. A subtle shift in facial expression, tempo or angle of the body can drive the audience's response in either direction. Stellato's deadpan face can be sad or it can make him the comedic fall-guy. He decides.

Modern circus can be as complex or as simple as you want. It can play it straight or it can subvert the established artform. On the third day of my visit to Belgium I saw David Dimitri's *L'Homme Cirque* in Tournai at the La Piste Aux Espoirs Festival. Incidentally, it says something about the popularity of circus in continental Europe that two circus festivals could take place at the same time within 90 minutes drive of each other. In the UK there are very few circus festivals. In fact circus often seems like a dirty word. Every January there is the London International Mime Festival, which Claudio Stellato has performed at. In any other country this might be called a circus festival. In London it is called mime.

Dimitri, a trim, compact veteran, was probably always going to be in the circus. His Swiss father was in the circus and his father's father was in the circus too. As a young man Dimitri performed with Cirque du Soleil and New York's Big Apple

Circus. In his own show, however, Dimitri, who travels the world performing in a tent, has added a new twist to a very old formula. He does everything himself. When we meet, two hours before he is shot out of a cannon, he is just wheeling the cannon into position at the side of the ring.

It is the way that Dimitri works with wit that makes the show such fun. From the very start children were giggling at the way he tried to put each shoe on while perched like a flamingo on one leg. Dimitri's performance was full of humour as he crammed a multitude of familiar acts into one hour. There was never a moment's rest. He even had to turn his own music on and off. It was no surprise that he was soon sweating buckets. This must be how he stays so thin.

But he did not just use the fact that he was a solo act to get laughs. He got laughs in all sorts of ways. There was a wry nod to the fact that animals used to be a popular part of the circus in the way Dimitri used a wooden horse, climbing on and off it acrobatically as he ran alongside on an adjacent treadmill. The joke was extended when the wooden horse left some fake lumps of horse shit on the stage and Dimitri had to clear it up before continuing with his acrobatic feats.

Where a classic circus would feature the clowns between the acts, Dimitri was the acts and the clowns, having fun with the wooden horse here, being hit on the head by a heavy – well, not really heavy – grain sack there. And then there was also humour within the spectacular feats too. Without his sparkly humour these acts would be nothing special. A twinkle in Dimitri's eye holds the audience's attention as he wobbles on the high wire. In our laughter we make an emotional investment in wanting Dimitri to succeed. The fact that he can make us laugh and then gasp as he shoots out of a cannon or bounces into the air makes it all the more breathtaking. As it says in the programme notes, Dimitri offers "a full circus programme that hovers between laughter and chills".

At Dimitri's show adults and children were laughing together. The circus created a bond between parent and child. The humour in a circus

often has a childlike appeal, but that does not mean circus is aimed directly at children. In Tournai I also saw *Ni Omnibus* by Jean-Paul Lefevre, which blurred the boundary between adult circus and children's circus. Lefevre, a lean yet incredibly strong veteran of nearly thirty years of making people laugh, used to be a part of the anarchic new circus group Archaos, who were famous for bringing motorbikes and chainsaws into the big tent and terrifying their audiences as well as making them smile.

Everything was big and noisy with Archaos. Lefevre could not have gone further in the opposite direction if he had started his own flea circus. In *Ni Omnibus* the action all takes place within a set that represents the back end of a truck. The piece is wordless. It is no surprise to discover that Lefevre is a fan of silent movies. There is something of the hangdog expression of Buster Keaton about his face. At one point a black and white film is projected onto a small screen which, with its exaggerated gestures and jerky movements, could have been made a century ago.

A lot of the humour in *Ni Omnibus* comes from the restricted space. As with *L'Homme Cirque*, the scale of the show brings an inherent sense of fun with it. The wiry Lefevre bangs his head repeatedly on the roof, climbs up tiny ladders to reach things, and when he spins around on a pole he can touch the sides of the set with his feet. His sidekick, Didier André, lurks in the shadows. He occasionally wanders up to the set to throw on a broom or a torch, but behaves as if he would rather be anywhere else. This is comedy of the imagination, making something funny out of almost nothing. No special props, just a few empty wooden crates and things Lefevre picks up.

So far, so childlike. And in fact this show, which took place in the afternoon in a marionette museum, attracted a lot of very small children who all laughed along at Lefevre's Keatonesque antics. But in a conversation afterwards Lefevre was keen to point out that he is not a children's entertainer and does not make shows aimed at children. His previous show, *Bricolage Erotique*,



*Claudio Stellato – L'Autre © Martin Firket*

was almost as adult-orientated as the title suggests. Children were allowed in but some of the ideas went over their head.

All of these shows featured highly skilled physical performers but none of them would have been as enjoyable without the moments of comedy. Circus may have evolved radically in the last four decades but the comedy element has remained important. Without humour modern circus has no chance of flourishing.

In recent years the boundary between circus clowning and the techniques of straightforward comedy shows, or even stand-up comedy, has been slowly falling away. At the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2012, New Zealand mime artist The Boy With Tape on his Face won a Panel Prize usually given to stand-up comedians, while the winner of the prestigious Foster's Comedy Award was American Phil Burgers, who performs in virtual silence as Dr Brown and would quite easily have fitted into the Brussels and Tournai Festivals.

I thought of Dr Brown's prize-winning performance during Karl Stets' *Cuerdo* in Tournai.

At one point the shaven-headed, Denmark-born artist got down from the stage and clambered over the audience to select a long-haired 'victim' to use her hair to cover his bald pate, much to the amusement of everybody who had not been selected. This was very much the kind of immersive, interactive approach Dr Brown takes in his comedy show.

When Dr Brown does this, though, the audience is terrified as well as amused. He is more like King Kong on the rampage. When Stets did it there was a zen-like grace, as there was to a lot of his humour. With his hairless head, bare feet and robe-like outfit he is part-clown, part-Shaolin monk.

Stets also reminded me of another comedian who was well-known on the London comedy scene a few years ago. Les Bubb's party trick was to wrap elastic bands around his face, twisting his features into a grotesque grin, part-Frankenstein, part-Quasimodo. Stets does a lot of tricks with a piece of rope – turning it into a walking stick or a snake or a pair of glasses. At one point he wrapped fishing line around his face, turning

himself into a monster in the same way Bubb did, once again blurring the barriers and definitions of what is circus, what is mime and what is comedy. Stets' old gag of popping a (fake) goldfish into his bag and a splash of water coming out is probably descended from a music hall gag that is almost as old as Joseph Grimaldi.

Clowns, stand-up comedians, mime artists, circus performers – they all draw on a similar pool of ideas today. The winner of the Best Newcomer Award at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2012 was Daniel Simonsen. He was more of a conventional storytelling, observational comedian, but like a classic clown he too made great use of physical movement and precision in his act. In fact it was not a surprise to discover that both Dr Brown and Simonsen had studied physical theatre at École Philippe Gaulier in Paris. Burgers also studied at the Nouveau Clown Institute in Barcelona. He then mastered his craft doing short appearances on the London comedy club circuit, but he could just as easily have joined a circus.

This cross-fertilisation of disciplines makes both circus and stand-up comedy more exciting than ever and it is clearly an ongoing process. On my return to London I was looking on the internet for local comedy shows to go to and discovered that Chris Lynam was doing a one-off show at my local pub in south London. Lynam is a veteran of the British alternative comedy scene of over thirty years. He is best known for closing his stage act by inserting a firework between his buttocks and lighting it.

Lynam was always a performer who marched to the beat of his own drum, but in recent years he has helped to bridge the gap between stand-up comedy and circus by introducing more familiar elements of the clown act into his club shows,

using props such as ladders onstage to create sublime solo knockabout sketches. He took a break from the comedy circuit a while ago to moonlight as a 'real' clown. As well as teaching clowning, he has been a part of famous Russian clown Slava Polunin's ensemble when they have performed his timeless *Snowshow*. Polunin has called Lynam "one of the world's funniest clowns".

All of this suggests that maybe circus is about to break through in the United Kingdom but not necessarily in the way that was expected. Perhaps the stand-up comedy world will embrace circus in a way that the theatrical world has been reluctant to. The dramaturgy of British theatre, which relies so much on text, has a natural resistance to an artform that is more about performance than what is written down. Clowning has more in common with stand-up comedy – both make a much more direct emotional connection with their audience.

Circus is often seen as a 'poor relation' among editors of newspaper arts sections, struggling for coverage in the mainstream press. Cirque Du Soleil is one of the few circus companies that are widely reviewed by the British mainstream press, but the slapstick clowns are often dismissed by high-minded critics as if they are intended purely for the amusement of toddlers hauled along by their parents.

Every year Charles Spencer, the esteemed theatre critic of the Daily Telegraph, finds a new way to mock the Soleil funny men. In 2005 he opened his review of *Dralion* at the Royal Albert Hall by writing: "If there is a more depressing phrase in the English language than 'zany clown routine' I have yet to come across it." Maybe it is time for the likes of Charles Spencer to take comedy more seriously.

# Circus Poetics

CESC MARTINEZ

The Catalan critic Sebastià Gasch (1897-1980) said that the circus arts rested on four pillars: strength, balance, grace and skill. This observation, first published in the magazine 'Destino' in the 1950s, has been cited many times since by specialists on performing arts and by the artists themselves because it is a clue to interpret what is mysterious. What Gasch said is not that the circus is based on any sort of *combination* of the four abilities, but on the maximum expression of each of them. In each of his words, as well, lies a highly calculated subjectivity that allows a circus show to be perceived from many directions and that reminds us also of the ritual origins of the performing arts in general.

If we observe how what we call the circus comes to thrill audiences, we have to pay attention to the signs that belong to it. In the Unpack the Arts programme, spread over the Hors Pistes Festival in Brussels and La Piste aux Espoirs in Tournai, without a doubt the show closest to the traditional circus code was David Dimitri's *L'Homme Cirque* – due to its performance in a tent, to the internal layout of the stands and the central ring, to the types of acts performed, and, finally, to the way the show evolves, one act following another without any apparent common thread linking them, forming a kind of alphabet by which the artist communicates with the audience. Needless to say that it works: we understand it perfectly.

Indeed, Dimitri begins *L'Homme Cirque* not with a show of force – not with a balancing act or a demonstration of skill – but with what we called 'grace' (Gasch wrote those words in Spanish and only lately they have been translated into Catalan; both in Spanish or Catalan, the word for grace may be the same that for something funny). So Dimitri begins with only his grace / humour. Right from the start of the show, he simply takes the ring over, becoming the sole focus of attention within the circular space of the tent thanks to his undeniable stage presence. Dimitri does not *do* anything at the start of the show, if we

# Poètica de circ

CESC MARTINEZ

Deia el crític català Sebastià Gasch (1897-1980) que l'art circense reposava sobre quatre columnes: força, equilibri, gràcia i destresa. Aquesta observació, que des que es va publicar, a la dècada dels 1950s a la revista *Destino*, ha estat citada moltíssimes vegades pels estudiosos de les arts escèniques i pels mateixos artistes, obre la porta a la interpretació d'un profund misteri. El que diu Gasch no és que la base del circ sigui una combinació més o menys capriciosa de quatre habilitats, sinó la màxima expressió de cada una d'elles. I encara més, perquè en cada un d'aquests mots hi ha una calculadíssima subjectivitat. Això dispara la percepció de l'espectacle en múltiples direccions sense perdre un sentit únic i, d'alguna manera, ens recorda l'origen ritual del que genèricament són totes les arts escèniques.

Però si hem d'observar la manera com això que anomenem circ arriba a emocionar els espectadors, hem de parar esment als signes que li són propis. Al programa d'Unpack the Arts als festivals Hors Pistes de Brussel·les i La Piste aux Espoirs de Tournai, sens dubte, l'espectacle que més s'acostava al codi circense tradicional era el de David Dimitri, *L'homme cirque*: la carpa, la disposició interior de les grades i la pista central, la tipologia dels números presentats i finalment l'evolució de l'espectacle, en què un número en succeïa un altre sense un lligam argumental aparent, formaven una mena d'alfabet amb el qual l'artista es comunicava amb el públic. No cal dir que funcionava: ens vam entendre a la perfecció.

Amb tot, Dimitri comença el seu espectacle no pas amb una exhibició de força, ni d'equilibri, ni tan sols d'habilitat, sinó de gràcia. En els primers moments de *L'homme cirque*, ell simplement s'apodera de la pista i es converteix en l'únic focus d'atenció dins l'espai circular de la carpa gràcies a una presència escènica treballada i incontestable. En els primers compassos de l'espectacle, Dimitri

understand doing something as an extraordinary action occurring on stage, according to the archetypical image of the circus. The real action, the performance of an act, is replaced by a representation. Alone, he evokes the entire circus universe. For a while, David Dimitri devotes himself to marking the tempo of the show and takes on a clown's rhythm by repeating muscular warm-up exercises on a treadmill with increasing haste. If he falls, the audience will laugh, but the expectations for humour that he creates do not go in this direction – rather, he centres on constructing an ambivalent character, half-comical and half-athletic, who knows how to move around the ring safely enough that he can afford to play and have fun. Finally, skilfully, he plays himself.

### A splendid paradox

The next day, during a meeting of the Unpack the Arts participants, nobody had any doubt that *L'Homme Cirque* was a traditional circus show, even though what we had seen was a rather theatrical version of one. Paraphrasing the poet Fernando Pessoa, David Dimitri presents himself as a faker who pretends that circus is the circus he carries inside. He gave us a clue to this during the brief meeting we had with him before the show: the son of the famous Swiss clown Dimitri, raised around the ring and trained as an artist in Budapest, his life is a series of anecdotes about unmistakably circus-related signs and events: a nomadic lifestyle, the big top, elephants... His show tells the story of all that, but it also *is* that circus.

The equipment inside the tent – a small one, 14.5 metres in diameter – soberly highlights circus iconography, with the cannon, the tightrope, the teeterboard, etcetera. Altogether, they suggest the show that we are seeing, helping us to understand it in some way. And even after performing his warm-up exercises, David Dimitri makes another evocation, this time of another archetypical and foundational element of the modern circus. Dimitri simulates equestrian exercises on a gym horse that has turned into a doll with a false head and tail. The pantomime reaches the point where it brings forth another element that has practically vanished from the

no *fa res*, si entenem per fer l'acció extraordinària que, segons la imatge arquetípica del circ, ocorre a la pista. L'acció real, l'execució d'un número, és substituïda per una representació. Evoca, sol, tot l'univers circense. Durant una bona estona, David Dimitri es dedica a marcar el tempo de l'espectacle i agafa un cert ritme de pallaso a base de repetir, cada vegada més de pressa, exercicis d'escalfament muscular sobre una cinta de córrer. Si caigués, faria riure, però l'expectativa humorística que genera no va en aquesta direcció, sinó en la de construir un personatge ambivalent, mig còmic mig atleta, que sap moure's per la pista amb una seguretat tal que es permet el luxe de jugar i divertir-se. I, amb ofici, s'interpreta a si mateix.

### Una esplèndida paradoxa

L'endemà, durant la trobada del grup de participants a Unpack the Arts, ningú va dubtar que *L'homme cirque* era un espectacle de circ tradicional, tot i que el que havíem vist n'era una versió bastant teatralitzada. Parafraçant el poeta Fernando Pessoa, David Dimitri es presenta com un farsant que arriba a fingir que és circ el circ que porta a dins. Ens en va donar alguna pista durant la breu trobada que vam tenir amb ell una estona abans de l'espectacle: fill del cèlebre pallaso suís Dimitri, crescut al voltant de les pistes i format artísticament a Budapest, la seva vida és un continu d'anècdotes relacionades amb elements inequívocament circenses: la transhumància, la carpa, els elefants... El seu espectacle és un relat de tot això, però també és aquell circ.

Els aparells disposats a dins la carpa —reduïda, de 14,5 m. de diàmetre— en subratllen sobriament la iconografia: un canó, un filferro d'equilibris, una bàscula coreana... Tot plegat connota l'espectacle que estem veient, ens el fa entendre d'una determinada manera. I encara després de l'exercici d'escalfament, David Dimitri es llança a una altra evocació, aquesta vegada jugant amb un altre element arquetípic, fundacional, del circ modern: el cavall. Dimitri simula exercicis eqüestres amb un cavall de salts de gimnàstica convertit en ninot, amb un cap i una cua falsos. La pantomima arriba al punt de portar a la pista, al final del número, un altre element pràcticament





David Dimitri – *L'Homme Cirque* © Raoul Gilibert

contemporary circus: animal faeces. Aware of the elegant presence of his body and the empathy that it arouses, his play with the fake manure from the fake horse is a new comical touch in which Dimitri gets to maintain his character's dignity.

The argument that the circus is the empire of the truth (again, made by Sebastià Gasch) does not lose value in *L'Homme Cirque* because David Dimitri reveals the tricks, unveils the theatrical structure of classic circus shows, and typifies them by demonstrating everything that constructs the image we have of them. I dare say that currently most people don't mind if a circus does not have real horses as long as they can see beautiful scenes that also convey the idea of an exceptional experience through a code of shared signs. This is even more so the case if, after the story has already been presented, the 'truth' of the circus finally appears: in the teeterboard act, David Dimitri performs a brief solo exercise by dropping the bags hanging from the top of the tent – persisting despite the fiasco of the first attempt, which drops a sack on his head (a comical delay that makes the first successful jump look more dramatic than it really is). The act

desaparegut del circ contemporani: la merda d'animal. Conscient de l'elegant presència del seu cos i de l'empatia que desperta, el joc amb la falsa tifa del fals cavall és una nova pinzellada còmica en la qual el personatge no deixa de mantenir la distinció.

L'argument segons el qual el circ és l'imperi de la veritat (de nou, Sebastià Gasch) no perd valor en *L'homme cirque*. Perquè David Dimitri fa evidents els trucs, deixa al descobert l'estructura dramàtica de l'espectacle circense clàssic i ho tipifica revelant tot allò que construeix la imatge que en tenim. M'atreveixo a dir que actualment al públic majoritari li és igual que en un circ no hi hagi cavalls de veritat a canvi de veure una escena plàsticament bella si, a més, comunica al públic la idea d'una vivència excepcional gràcies a un codi de signes compartit. I encara més si finalment, quan el relat ja ha estat presentat, la "veritat" circense apareix: en el número de bàscula, David Dimitri executa tot sol un breu exercici fent caure els sacs que pegen del capdamunt de la carpa, malgrat el fiasco del primer, que li cau al cap (una nova dilació còmica que provoca que el primer salt reeixit sembli més espectacular que no és). El

is presented just as it is, without any kind of fiction or evocation, and is simply linked to the 'story' that it represents. Though Dimitri's exercise would never be presented as a complete teeterboard act in a traditional circus, a second circus-related substance has been added here: the physical performance, what we called 'skill'. From that moment on, acts that require athletic ability in *L'Homme Cirque* gain ground over simple evocation in the way the show is poetically constructed. And this is done without giving up on interpreting the circus, its truths and its little tricks.

The tightrope act is unquestionably elegant and stretches out exquisitely until the moment comes for a backwards somersault and false falls. The day after the show, in the meeting, we asked ourselves if the two times that he fell were intentional or not. The entire tent had vibrated with excitement upon seeing that David Dimitri was not getting out of the situation, and the doubt came from the difficulty of accepting that it had not been spontaneous, but induced. Moreover, before the third leap he had given the audience to understand through gestures that he would not perform another backward somersault; he pretended it was too difficult and he would try a forward somersault instead – which is, in reality, even more difficult.

The human cannonball, a speciality of circus shows that has virtually become extinct, has an equally iconic value that transcends the burst of admiration that it provokes. And if, up to that peak point, the perfect ambience of a spectacle that is part of our collective memory had been created, the ending also had to have symbolic value. After being fired from the cannon, David Dimitri ascends to the canvas of the tent, walking along an inclined wire, opens a little door, and invites everyone to follow him outside. From the top of the tent, he begins a high rope walking display, getting more distant as he continues on his way to the sky. The story could not be any more complete.

### **Body and art face to death**

I have explained the details of *L'Homme Cirque* at length in an attempt to establish the signs that

número es presenta tal qual, sense ficcions ni evocacions de cap mena, senzillament enllaçat amb el "conte" que representa.

Tot i que en cap cas l'exercici de Dimitri no seria un número de bàscula complet en un circ tradicional, una segona substància circense ha estat introduïda: la *performance* física, el que n'hem dit "destresa". A partir d'aquell moment, en *L'homme cirque* l'execució de números que requereixen una habilitat atlètica guanya terreny a la simple evocació en la construcció poètica de l'espectacle. Això sí, sense abandonar la interpretació sobre el circ, les seves veritats i els petits trucs.

El número d'equilibri sobre el cable és d'una elegància inqüestionable, i s'allarga exquisidament fins que arriba el moment del salt mortal enrere i les caigudes falses. L'endemà de l'espectacle vam plantejar-nos si els dos cops que havia caigut ho havia fet expressament o no. La carpa sencera havia vibrat d'emoció veient que David Dimitri no se'n sortia, i el dubte venia de la dificultat d'acceptar que l'experiència viscuda no hagués estat espontània, sinó induïda. A més, ell havia donat entenent, abans del tercer salt, per mitjà de gestos, que no tornaria a fer el mortal cap enrere, que era massa difícil, i que ho provaria cap endavant.

L'home bala, que és una especialitat pràcticament extingida de l'espectacle circense, té un valor igualment iconogràfic, més enllà de l'esclat d'admiració que provoca. I si fins a aquell punt, àlgid, s'havia creat l'ambientació perfecta d'un espectacle que en el fons forma part de la memòria col·lectiva, el final també havia de tenir un valor simbòlic. David Dimitri puja fins a la lona de la carpa caminant per un cable inclinat, obre una portella i convida tothom a seguir-lo cap a fora. Des del capdamunt de la vela, inicia una exhibició de funambulisme, s'allunya, continua el seu camí ascendent cap al cel. El relat no podia quedar més rodó.

### **Cos i art davant la mort**

M'he allargat en l'explicació dels detalls de *L'homme cirque* en un intent de tipificar els signes que configuren l'espectacle, que provenen de la

make up the show, which come from the circus tradition and can be found in many other stage performances. Even though *L'Homme Cirque* is not a strictly archetypical show, Dimitri brings together a series of common ideas that he uses to create a linear dramaturgy. But none of the other four shows that we saw in Brussels or Tournai shared many of the 'classic' signs of circus language – not even to simply evoke them.

The first observation is that, unlike David Dimitri's production, the others were conceived for an eminently adult audience and the artists took the liberty of using other codes of communication with the assurance that they would be understood. And yet, there were children present in the audiences of those shows. Martin Firket, who worked with Claudio Stellato on the mise-en-scène of *L'Autre*, said that many times they had performed for an audience of mostly children and recognised that "the perception of what happens on stage is radically different", but had found it equally interesting to perform for children as for adults. Jean-Paul Lefevre, who presented *Ni Omnibus*, said something similar in the brief interview we had with him at the Maison de Culture in Tournai: "I don't have any problem with children, but the show is designed for an adult audience."

The audience is an important issue in the codification of the circus, as the exchange of energy – of tension, of mutual expectations – is more intense than in other performing arts. The audience will remember and be able to recognise the components of this almost ritual event in which a small number of individuals – and maybe only one, in the case of *L'Homme Cirque* – try to defeat all the people around them through a demonstration of their abilities. Their knowledge is associated to the idea of wonder, to the unexpected, to the extraordinary and therefore, almost inevitably, to childhood. There is nothing to be done about it: people continue bringing their children to venues in the evenings if they know that there will be a circus performance, even if they do not know what kind of show they are going to see.

But despite the usual perception of the show as a

pròpia tradició circense i que podem trobar en molts altres muntatges. Tot i que *L'homme cirque* no és un xou estrictament arquetípic, Dimitri recull una sèrie de llocs comuns amb els quals elabora una dramaturgia al capdavant lineal. Però cap dels altres quatre espectacles que vam veure ni a Brussel·les ni a Tournai compartia la majoria de signes del llenguatge circense diguem-ne clàssics, ni tan sols per evocar-lo.

La primera constatació és que, a diferència del muntatge de David Dimitri, els altres estaven pensats per a un públic eminentment adult, i els artistes es prenen la llibertat d'utilitzar altres codis de comunicació amb la tranquil·litat de saber-se compresos. I, amb tot, també hi havia públic infantil als altres espectacles. Martin Firket, col·laborador de Claudio Stellato en el muntatge *L'Autre*, afirmava que moltes vegades havien actuat per a un públic majoritàriament infantil i reconeixia que "la percepció del que passa a escena és radicalment diferent", però trobava igualment interessant actuar per a adults o per a infants. Jean-Paul Lefevre, que presentava *Ni Omnibus*, es va expressar d'una manera semblant en la breu entrevista que vam tenir amb ell a la Maison de Culture de Tournai: "No tinc cap problema amb els nens, però l'espectacle està pensat per al públic adult".

El públic és una qüestió important en la codificació del circ, per tal com l'intercanvi d'energia —és a dir: de tensió, d'expectatives mútues— és més intens que en altres arts escèniques. El públic retindrà i sabrà reconèixer els elements que configuren aquest acte gairebé ritual en què un grup reduït d'individus —fins i tot només un, com en el cas de *L'homme cirque*— és capaç de mostrar-se superior a tots els qui els envolten gràcies a una exhibició de les seves habilitats. És un coneixement que s'associa a la idea de meravella, a l'insòlit, a l'extraordinari i per tant, gairebé de manera inevitable, a la infància. No hi ha res a fer: la gent continua portant els fills al vespre a una sala de teatre si sap que hi fan circ, encara que ignori el tipus d'espectacle que va a veure.

Però malgrat la percepció habitual de l'espectacle com un codi infantil, en el fons hi ha la intuïció de

code for children, at the bottom there is the feeling of death, which demands the collective act of catharsis. In David Dimitri's show there is a real risk of death on more than one occasion, though he is able to overcome it. And in the company Carré Curieux's production *Le Passage*, death is the central theme.

The company Carré Curieux is made up of jugglers, but even if we interpret their performance in a circus context (of which jugglers are an iconic image), *Le Passage* evolves in a more narrative way over a range of theatrical performance styles. It is worth mentioning that, as happens with other circus artists apparently weak in the field of theatre but excessively confident in their own acting abilities, the piece hobbles. The supporting character in *Le Passage* has a profile so ambiguous as to be vague and the main character has scenes that would be a tough challenge for any experienced actor, such as moments at the beginning of the show when he reacts alone on stage to his own death. In the show's defence, it must be noted that it is a debut and has a long way to go in order to tighten up the connections between the languages of circus and theatre. Furthermore, the juggling performances (Luca Aeschlimann, with up to seven balls, and Vladimir Couprie, with diabolos that can be sustained like tops spinning on a longitudinal axis) are quite original, both with regard to the movement of the objects and the interaction of the jugglers' bodies. These are without a doubt the most successful scenes in *Le Passage* – those which are older, according to our conversation with the artists, as they were taken from a seven-minute, end-of-year presentation given at the École Supérieure des Arts du Cirque (ESAC) in Brussels.

But if we interpret the juggling as a metaphor, we can hardly figure out that it speaks to us of death. Rather, it would seem the opposite: the cyclical movement of the objects in the air makes us think more about the comings and goings of life than about the possibility of death; even if one of the objects – balls, diabolos or whatever else – falls to the ground, it only momentarily breaks the spell and does not force them to abandon their mission. As they themselves said in the interview

la mort, que requereix una acció col·lectiva de catarsi. En el muntatge de David Dimitri, hi ha risc de mort real en més d'una ocasió, per bé que l'artista és capaç de vèncer-la. A *Le passage*, de la companyia Carré Curieux, aquest és el tema central de l'obra.

Els components de Carré Curieux són malabaristes i, per tant, tot i que interpretem la seva actuació en clau circense —en són una imatge icònica—, *Le passage* evoluciona d'una manera més narrativa i recorren a la interpretació teatral. Val a dir que, com passa amb altres artistes circenses, una preparació en el camp del teatre aparentment feble i un excés de confiança en les pròpies habilitats actorals fan que el conjunt coixegi. El mateix personatge de l'acompanyant de *Le passage* té un perfil tan ambigu que queda desdibuixat i el protagonista té escenes que serien un repte altíssim per a qualsevol actor amb experiència, com els minuts que, al començament de l'obra i tot sol, passa reaccionant a la seva pròpia mort. En descàrrec seu, cal assenyalar que es tractava d'una estrena i que té molt de recorregut per endavant per anar polint l'encaix entre el llenguatge circense i el teatral. D'altra banda, els jocs malabars (Luca Aeschlimann, fins a set pilotes, i Vladimir Couprie, amb diabolos que poden aguantar-se com baldufes girant sobre un eix longitudinal) són prou originals, tant pel que fa al moviment dels objectes com a la interacció amb els cossos dels malabaristes. Són, sens dubte, les escenes més reeixides de *Le passage* —les que tenen més anys, segons ens van explicar, perquè estan tretes de la presentació de set minuts del final de carrera de l'École Supérieure des Arts du Cirque de Bruxelles (ESAC)—.

Però si llegim els malabars com una metàfora, difícilment podem interpretar que ens parlen de la mort. Més aviat tot el contrari: el moviment cíclic dels objectes en l'aire fa pensar més en els vaivens de la vida que en la possibilitat de mort, i encara que un dels objectes —pilotes, diabolos o el que sigui— pugui caure a terra, això només trenca momentàniament l'encís, no obliga a abandonar la comesa. Ells mateixos ho reconeixien en la trobada a Les Halles de Schaerbeek: "El risc de mort en el circ és un tema

at Les Halles de Schaerbeek: “The risk of death is a subject much argued over in the circus and we wanted to talk about it – even if nobody has ever died while juggling before!”

It isn't until the end of the show that they manage to create a more accurate metaphor – using soap bubbles, which they integrate theatrically through a kind of ritual to purify the corpse. By using this material, Carré Curieux reflect the story in the fragility of the bubbles.

We must agree that, in what we call contemporary circus, risk has evolved in tandem with the sensitivity of the general public in such a way that the game of life and death has lost its central place in the show, displaced by a much more subtle type of risk: that of converting one's body and physical skills into a poetic sign, and therefore becoming capable of expression through a physical grammar or dramaturgy. But since the basic material of the show is the body, the performers' actions must suggest their own exceptional nature; not only must they explain an emotion, but they have to produce it, regardless of whether that act or any other may jeopardise their life.

### **Are there any limits?**

The day after Claudio Stellato's show *L'Autre*, Merja Koskinie told me over breakfast that she would not hesitate to qualify it as fully a circus show. As she is a dance specialist, I thought that something had escaped my interpretation of the *mise-en-scène*, but I wasn't sure. If she did not immediately recognise dance, but circus, that meant the body of signs proper to this theatrical language is growing, changing and transforming.

In *L'Autre*, again, the connotative sign is the body of the performer (Claudio Stellato), who expresses himself to himself. And even though the speciality that he uses the most is contortion, which could be classified as pertaining to the circus world, the projection that he makes over the objects on stage, a cabinet and a box-table, is very personal and goes quite beyond an acrobat-actor's simple use of a piece of gymnastic equipment. The cabinet and the table may be seen as an abstract part of Stellato's own body, or

que serveix d'argument en els mateixos espectacles circenses, i nosaltres volíem parlar-ne. Encara que ningú no es mor fent jocs malabars!”

No és fins al final de l'espectacle que aconseguen crear una metàfora més exacta amb les bombolles de sabó, que ells integren dramàticament a través d'una espècie de ritual purificador del cos del difunt. En l'ús d'aquest material, els Carré Curieux utilitzen en pro de la història la connotació de fragilitat de les bombolles.

Cal convenir que, en el que anomenem circ contemporani, el risc ha evolucionat de braçet de la sensibilitat del públic en general de manera que el joc entre la vida i la mort ha perdut la centralitat de l'espectacle desplaçat per un risc molt més subtil: el de convertir el propi cos i les pròpies habilitats físiques en signe poètic, susceptible, per tant, d'articular-se en una gramàtica o dramàtica que en permeti la comunicabilitat. Però atenció: al mateix temps, com que el material de base de l'espectacle és el cos, l'acció de l'artista ha de connotar la seva mateixa excepcionalitat; no només ha d'explicar una emoció, sinó que ha de produir-la. I això, independentment de si tal exercici o tal altre comporta un perill que pugui comprometre la vida de l'artista.

### **I això té límits?**

L'endemà de l'espectacle *L'Autre*, de Claudio Stellato, Merja Koskinie em va comentar durant l'esmorzar que no dubtaria gens a qualificar-lo de plenament circense. Sent com és ella especialista en dansa, vaig pensar que alguna cosa se m'havia escapat de la lectura del muntatge, perquè jo dubtava. Si ella no hi reconeixia immediatament la dansa sinó el circ, volia dir que el corpus de signes propis d'aquest llenguatge escènic augmenta, canvia, es transforma.

A *L'autre*, novament, el signe connotatiu és el cos de Claudio Stellato, que s'expressa a si mateix. I tot i que l'especialitat que més utilitza és el contorsionisme, catalogable dins l'univers circense, la projecció que fa d'ell mateix sobre els objectes que hi ha a l'escenari, un armari i una

rather as 'actors' that replicate it in a purely physical dialogue. They may be containers or even a representation of his psyche. They are packaging. They may turn the protagonist into an animal or limit him in space. They are the self and also the other. Or they are his coffin. In effect, *L'Autre* also has the mystery that seemed to be common in almost all the shows that we saw over the course of Unpack the Arts: the presence of a hidden force, say 'death' or the unknown, which in fact is the reason why the action is produced and the thing which gives it meaning and excites us.

In fact, of all the productions that we saw, *L'Autre* is the one that deals with a philosophical subject with the most depth, and it surprised me that neither during the interview in Les Halles nor during lunch afterwards did Claudio Stellato, Martin Firket or assistant Chiara Ribera d'Alcalà mention it. "In this show, I wanted to find my other self in an enclosed space that could not be associated with the outside world in any way," was all Stellato said to explain. This 'other', which does not appear in the show at any time, is expressed through impossible movements of the cabinet and the table, which in the end are projections of Stellato himself. A classic question of puppet theatre – who's manipulating who? – is clearly being raised in this show: is it the actor who makes the objects move? Is another actor moving them? Are the objects what force the actor to have meaning? Poetically, *L'Autre* is a complex and dense production that thrills thanks to the unexpected beauty of its images and movements, by which we perceive a risk inherent to the artist's existence that is difficult to understand intellectually. And yet the show is not without theatrical risks, as the company explained to us the day after the event: "The furniture has never broke and we hope that never happens." Furthermore, it requires maximum concentration to perform *L'Autre*, because a brief mistake of synchronisation between Stellato and the rest of the team, as happens with illusionists, may mean the work fails completely or even causes physical injury.

And if Claudio Stellato displays his physical and psychological existence as an artist based on contortion, balancing, dance, magic effects and

tauleta, és molt personal i va molt més enllà de la simple utilització d'un aparell gimnàstic per part d'un acròbata-actor. L'armari i la tauleta poden ser vistos com una part abstracta del mateix cos d'Stellato o bé "actors" que li donen la rèplica en un diàleg purament físic. Poden ser contenidors o bé una representació de la seva psique. Poden convertir el protagonista en animal o bé limitar-li l'espai. Són ell mateix i també l'altre. O el seu taüt. Perquè, en efecte, en *L'Autre* també hi ha aquest misteri que sembla ser comú gairebé en tots els espectacles que vam veure aquells dies: la presència d'una força oculta, diguem-ne "mort" o el desconegut, que de fet és el motiu pel qual es produeix l'acció, que fa que tingui sentit i que emocioni.

De fet, de tots els muntatges que vam veure, *L'Autre* és el que tracta un tema filosòfic amb més profunditat, i em va sobtar que ni durant l'entrevista a Les Halles ni durant el dinar posterior ni Claudio Stellato ni Martin Firket ni l'assistent Chiara Ribera d'Alcalà no ho mencionessin. "En aquest muntatge, volia trobar el meu altre jo en un espai tancat que no es pogués relacionar de cap manera amb el món exterior", va ser tota l'explicació d'Stellato. Aquest "altre", que no apareix en cap moment del muntatge, s'expressa a través de moviments impossibles de l'armari i la tauleta, que al capdavall són projeccions del mateix Stellato. Una qüestió clàssica del teatre de titelles —qui manipula a qui?— es planteja clarament en aquest espectacle: és l'actor qui fa reaccionar els objectes?, els mou un altre actor?, són els objectes que obliguen l'actor a significar-se? Poèticament, *L'Autre* és un muntatge complex, dens, que reïx a emocionar gràcies a la bellesa insòlita de les seves imatges i moviments, que fan percebre l'existència d'un risc propi de l'existència de l'artista difícil de comprendre intel·lectualment. (D'altra banda, l'espectacle no està exempt de riscos escènics, tal com ens van explicar l'endemà de la funció: "Els mobles no s'han trencat mai i esperem que no passi". A més, per representar *L'Autre* s'ha de tenir una concentració màxima, perquè una breu errada de sincronització entre Stellato i la resta de l'equip, com passa amb els il·lusionistes, pot significar el fracàs total de l'obra o fins i tot provocar lesions físiques.)

extreme accuracy in each gesture, measuring the body with the movements of the cabinet and the table, something similar happens in Karl Stets' show *Cuerdo* (seen at La Piste aux Espoirs, Tournai). In this case, Stets' evolution and presence on stage are meaningful for the individual on both the physical and, as I understand it, the spiritual level.

Aesthetically speaking, there is evidence indicating that Stets' production has at least some sympathy for Eastern spiritual exercises. The presence on the stage of a slackrope is an immediate and unmistakably circus-linked sign that generates certain expectations, but then the fact that the slackrope supports are made of bamboo – combined with repetitive music with a penetrating sonority, like a type of mantra, and the artist's appearance – evokes practices that lie outside what an audience has come to expect from a circus show. And this, therefore, fosters a multiplicity of interpretations. Karl Stets builds his show, beyond its aesthetic connotations, with elements that we have considered uniquely belonging to the circus and that correspond in some way to the audience's demand for excitement: balance, the possibility of error, and, as a result, the threat of real physical pain – especially with the act where he walks between mousetraps blindfolded – as well as the realisation of the explicit fact with a grotesque sense of humour – the string that deforms his face, the mousetrap that pinches his tongue.

Unlike *L'Autre* and *Cuerdo*, in *Ni Omnibus* Jean-Paul Lefevre seeks the limits of the poetry of the circus in the space of representation, and not in the various dimensions within humankind. Furthermore, Lefevre goes against the usual tendency of the circus towards an ever larger size. With *Ni Omnibus*, it is the artist's body that acquires gigantic proportions by moving along a 4m<sup>2</sup> area with a total stage volume of 8m<sup>3</sup>. Everything takes place, in fact, in a cube contained within a truck. From the very moment that he enters, Lefevre's actions highlight that he just barely fits – he has to remove his shoes and socks in order not to strike his head against the ceiling – and, once inside, the props that identify the circus show have been forcibly reduced to the

I si Claudio Stellato, a base de contorsions, equilibri, dansa, efectes màgics i una precisió extrema en cada gest, compassant el cos amb els moviments de l'armari i la tauleta, exposa l'existència física i psicològica del mateix artista, una cosa semblant s'esdevé a l'espectacle *Cuerdo*, de Karl Stets (La Pise aux Espoirs, Tournai). En aquest cas, les evolucions i la presència en si d'Stets a l'escenari són significants de l'individu tant en un pla físic com —al meu entendre— espiritual.

Estèticament, hi ha traces que indiquen que en el muntatge d'Stets hi ha com a mínim una certa simpatia pels exercicis espirituals orientals. La presència sobre l'escenari de l'estructura de la corda fluixa, d'entrada, és un signe inequívocament circense que genera immediatament l'expectativa d'una emoció concreta, però el fet que els suports de la corda siguin de bambú, per exemple, combinat amb una música repetitiva de sonoritat penetrant, com una espècie de mantra, la mateixa gestualitat — que beu de la dansa— i l'aparença de l'artista evoquen unes pràctiques externes a tot allò que prepara el públic per a un espectacle circense. I per tant, la multiplicitat de lectures està servida.

Ara bé: Karl Stets basteix el seu espectacle, més enllà de connotacions estètiques, amb elements que hem considerat propis i únics del circ i que d'alguna manera es corresponen amb la demanda d'emoció de l'espectador: l'equilibri, la possibilitat de l'error i, en conseqüència, l'amenaça de dolor físic real —sobretot amb l'exercici de caminar per entre els paranys per a rates amb els ulls embenats—, com també la constatació d'aquest dolor fet explícit amb un grotesc sentit de l'humor —el cordill amb què es deforma la cara, la ratera amb què es pessiga la llengua...—.

A diferència de *L'Autre* i de *Cuerdo*, a *Ni Omnibus*, Jean-Paul Lefevre busca els límits de la poètica circense en l'espai de la representació i no en les diverses dimensions del dins de l'home. A més, Lefevre pren la direcció contrària a la tendència secular del circ a la grandària. Amb *Ni Omnibus*, és el mateix cos de l'artista el que adquireix proporcions gegantines en moure's en un una

smallest expression: he moves half-curved up over a slackrope, and uses a cut-off Chinese pole to navigate the verticality of the stage area... This forces him to develop his own technical prowess in a very original way.

In a talk after the show, Lefevre told us: "I can't reduce the stage area any more; if I did so, I wouldn't be able to move and maybe the show itself would be impossible." So, has he reached a limit? In any case, it would be a physical limit. As for poetic research, many doors remain open – as many as the artists' creativity can discover as they stretch the language of circus' signs and create pieces that can be understood through emotion alone. Which is to say, an almost infinite amount.

pista de 4 m<sup>2</sup> i un volum escènic total de 8 m<sup>3</sup>. Tot passa en un cub que figura l'interior d'un camió. En el mateix moment d'enfilars'hi, Lefevre subratlla a través de l'acció que hi cap just —s'ha de treure les sabates i els mitjons per no picar al sostre amb el cap—, i un cop a dins, els aparells que identifiquen l'espectacle de circ han estat reduïts, per força, a la mínima expressió: fa exercicis sobre una miniescala d'equilibris, es mou mig arrupit sobre una corda fluixa, utilitza la miniperxa xinesa per capgirar la verticalitat de l'espai escènic... Això l'obliga a desenvolupar la pròpia destresa tècnica en una línia original, inèdita.

Lefevre, a la xerrada posterior a la funció, ens va dir: "Ja no puc reduir més l'espai escènic; si ho fes, ja no m'hi podria moure i potser el proper espectacle seria impossible". Així doncs, ha topat amb un límit? En tot cas, un límit físic. Pel que fa a la recerca poètica, hi ha moltes portes obertes. Tantes com la creativitat dels artistes pugui estirar el llenguatge dels signes circenses i crear peces capaces de ser absorbides emocionalment. Que és gairebé tant com dir infinites.



# Circus Jumped into the Box

EEVA KAUPPINEN

My focus in this article is on the use of space and performance text in three of the shows we saw at the Hors Pistes and La Piste aux Espoirs festivals in Brussels and Tournai in 2013. I examine Claudio Stellato's performance *L'Autre*, Le Carré Curieux's performance *Le Passage*, and Jean-Paul Lefeuve's performance *Ni Omnibus*.

In analysing the use of space I draw on research on theatre, especially Una Chaudhuri's analyses of space and Richard Schechner's thoughts on environmental theatre. Like Hans-Thies Lehmann I understand the performance text to mean the entire texture of the performance, which includes the relationship between the play and the spectators, the temporal and spatial location, and the place and function of the event (Lehmann, p. 153). Playing with the space, with other spaces, and with the illusion of space was an organic part of the performances I have chosen to analyse here. It was one of their most fundamental starting points. Not a single maker or group chose a traditional arena stage; rather the circus leapt into a black box, or into many boxes – as the TV screens and video loops from one piece can also be understood as boxes.

What in theatre or the broader performing arts is interpreted as space? What does a box or arena articulate as a space?

The French structuralist Étienne Souriau crystallised the essence of the stage as a confrontation between a sphere and a cube. One or the other has always been dominant at different stages in the history of theatre.

Souriau's observation creates a tension in the performance space with regards to its different

# Sirkus hyppäsi laatikkoon

EEVA KAUPPINEN

Kiinnostuksen kohteeni on tilankäyttö ja esitysteksti kolmessa esityksessä, jotka näimme Hors Pistes- ja La Piste aux Espoirs -festivaaleilla Brysselissä ja Tournaisissa Belgiassa 2013. Tarkastelen **Claudio Stellaton** esitystä *L'Autre*, La compagnie Carré Curieux, Cirque Vivant!in esitystä *Le Passage* ja **Jean-Paul Lefeuven** esitystä *Ni Omnibus*.

Tilankäyttöä analysoidessani haen inspiraatiota teatterintutkimuksen puolelta, etenkin **Una Chaudurin** tila-analyyseistä sekä **Richard Schechnerin** ajatuksista ympäristönomaisesta teatterista.

Esitystekstin ymmärrän **Hans-Thies Lehmannin** tavoin tarkoittavan esityksen koko tekstuuria mukaan lukien esitystilanne, johon kuuluvat näytelmän (esityksen) ja katsojien suhde, ajallinen ja tilallinen sijoittaminen sekä teatteritapahtuman paikka ja funktio (Lehmann, sivu 153.) Leikittely tilalla, tiloilla ja tilan illuusioilla oli elimellinen osa valittuja esityksiä. Se oli yksi niiden rakenteellisista ideoista. Yksikään tekijöistä/ryhmistä ei valinnut estradiksi perinteistä areenanäyttämöä, vaan sirkus hyppäsi ihan konkreettisesti mustaan laatikkoon (black box) tai useampiin laatikoihin, jollaiseksi tulkitsen myös tv-monitorin ja valkokankaalle heijastetut videoluupit.

MIKÄ TEATTERISSA tai laajemmin esitystaiteessa luetaan/ tulkitaan tilaksi? Mitä laatikko (kuutio) tai areena (pyörönäyttämö) tiloina artikuloivat?

Ranskalainen strukturalisti **Etienne Souriau** kiteytti näyttämön perusolemuksen pyörön (sphere) ja kuution (cube) konfrontaatioissa. Teatterihistorian eri vaiheissa toinen tai toinen niistä on ollut dominanttina.

Souriaun havainto tekee esitystilasta eri muotoineen jännitteisen. Toisaalta heilunta tilan

shapes. On the one hand this swing between stage forms makes the performance area borderless, rowdy, highly variable and ever-widening: "No stage, no auditorium, no boundaries. Rather than section off a fixed fragment of the world you have decided to construct, you must find its dynamic centre, its beating heart..." (Souriau, pp. 66–67)

To Souriau the pulsing heart of the space and the action is *punctum saliens*; it reveals the core of the performance, its notable claims and stances.

"The group of actors (officiants, magicians) who incarnate this heart, they are the centre and the circumference is nowhere – forced to recede into infinity, absorbing the spectators themselves, catching them within the unbounded sphere." (Ibid.)

According to theatre researcher David Wiles, Souriau's vision is a theatre in which the actors would be in the light while the edges of the stage would be cloaked in darkness. The idea was to express the limitless cosmos (Wiles, p. 165). Wiles reminds us of physical logic: speech generates frontality whereas interaction and physical activity generate circularity.

The idea of a space without boundaries is present in both Claudio Stellato and his collaborator Martin Firket's performance *L'Autre* and Le Carré Curieux's performance *Le Passage*. The strong use of lights versus the darkness of the stage allows the spectator's imagination to 'leave' the stage and imagine the world of the performance continuing beyond the perceived limits.

Stellato's performance begins in primal darkness. The spectator hears a scratching sound but is unable to see anybody or anything. Then Stellato arrives from the back right corner of the stage, hunched over and carrying a wooden box on his shoulders like Atlas with the weight of the world. In the end Stellato leaves the box, which has formed a bridge along the stage to the back left corner, and walks out

muotojen välillä tekee esitystilasta rajattoman, vallattoman, vapaasti varioivan ja laajenevan: "No stage, no auditorium, no boundaries. Rather than section off a fixed fragment of the world you have decided to construct, you must find its dynamic centre, its beating heart..." (Souriau, sivut 66–67.)

Souriaulle tilan ja toiminnan sykkivä keskus on *punctum saliens*; se paljastaa esityksen ytimen, sen merkittävät väitteet, näkökannat. "The group of actors (officiants, magicians) who incarnate this heart, they are the centre and the circumference is nowhere – forced to recede into infinity, absorbing the spectators themselves, catching them within the unbounded sphere." (Ibid.)

Teatterintutkija **David Wilesin** mukaan Souriau visioi teatteria, jossa näyttelijät olisivat valoissa, kun taas näyttämön reunat verhotaan pimeyteen. Ideana oli ilmentää rajatonta kosmosta. (Wiles, sivu 165.)

Wiles muistuttaa fyysikaalisesta logiikasta: puhe/ puheet generoivat frontaalisuutta (frontality), interaktio ja fyysisen toiminnan esittäminen sen sijaan ympyrämuotoa (circularity).

AJATUS RAJATTOMUUDESTA istuu sekä Claudio Stellaton ja häntä avustavan **Martin Firket'n** esitykseen *L'Autre* että La compagnie Carré Curieux, Cirque Vivant!in esitykseen *Le Passage*. Molemmissa vahva valojen käyttö versus näyttämön pimennot tekivät katsojan mielikuvitukselle mahdolliseksi ikään kuin "poistua" näyttämöltä ja kuvitella esityksen maailman jatkuvan myös näkyvän tilan ulkopuolelle.

Stellaton performanssi käynnistyy alkupimeydellä. Katsoja kuulee raapivaa ääntä, mutta ei vielä pysty näkemään mitään tai ketään. Sitten Stellato saapuu näyttämön oikeasta takanurkasta kyttyrässä kantaen puista laatikkoa harteillaan kuin Atlas koko maailman painoa. Lopussa Stellato poistuu laatikoista muodostettua "siltaa" pitkin näyttämön vasempaan takakulmaan kuin kävellen tyhjän päällä. Syntyy illuusio luonnonlakien särkymisestä:



*Carré Curieux – Le Passage © Christophe Raynaud de Lage*

onto thin air. It creates the illusion of breaking natural laws: all weight has fallen away.

Le Carré Curieux widened the stage area by different means: 'corridors' made of backdrop curtains, a book of life that opens up, and the use of video and mirrors. I interpret them as passages or peep holes in the space between heaven and earth. The name of the performance, *Le Passage*, also points in this direction. In the story we are in limbo, moving from life to the kingdom of death.

Soap bubbles and a watchful eye projected onto the screen offered smaller peep holes to the world 'outside'.

In Christianity the eye drawn on the Christian symbol of the trinity symbolises the Eye of Providence – God's all-seeing eye.

*Le Passage* left the impression that a hole into a new dimension could burst open at any moment. On the other hand the individual who pushed against a stretching cloth was unable to get through. The audience saw him as a protrusion and a bulge. The scene brought up a very strong

kaikki paino on pudonnut pois.

Cirque Vivant! puolestaan avarsi näyttämötilaa useilla eri keinoilla: taustaverhoista muodostetuilla "käytävillä", auki lehahtavan elämän kirjan ja videoiden avulla sekä peileillä. Tulkitsin ne aukoiksi tai tirkistysluukuiksi taivaan ja maan välitilaan. Tähän suuntaan viittaa myös esityksen nimi *Le Passage*. Tarinassa ollaan välitilassa, siirtymässä elämästä kuoleman valtakuntaan.

Pienempiä kurkistusaukkoja "ulos" tarjosivat esimerkiksi saippuakuplat ja valkokankaalle heijastettu tarkkaileva silmä.

Kristillisessä symboliikassa kolmion sisään kuvattu silmä on Kaitselmuksen silmä tai Jumalan kaikkinäkevä silmä.

*Le Passage* jätti vaikutelman, että minne tahansa voi puhjeta reikä uuteen ulottuvuuteen. Toisaalta venyvää kangasta vasten ponnistellut yksilö ei päässyt tunkeutumaan sen läpi. Yleisö näki hänet vain pullistumina ja kohoumina. Kohtaus toi hyvin voimakkaan tunteen jonkun asian

feeling of something not being reached, of the impossibility of return.

Jean-Paul Lefevre on the other hand packed himself, in his performance *Ni Omnibus*, into a space the size of a man. Instead of unbounded space the performance articulated a claustrophobic world defined by anxiety and its borders. The piece was originally performed in a bus, and the stage at Tournai had been constructed to resemble the inside of a seatless bus.

The image of Jean-Paul Lefevre inside the box-like space, doing tricks on the vertical pole and horizontal slackline, brought to mind Leonardo da Vinci's anatomical drawings of an 'eight-bordered' man in a circle. Da Vinci's standing man is like a closed bubble, while Jean-Paul Lefevre performs acrobatics in a square metre that has been made to measure.

*Ni Omnibus* does not remain only inside its box. Technical assistant Didier André stands on the audience side, but is part of the performance. He can move in the space in a way that the audience cannot. He is a mediator, a performer and witness all at the same time.

Additionally, Jean-Paul Lefevre made use of projected video, which showed a dusty little road and a long grassy verge to create the illusion of making a journey through an outdoor space.

At the end of the performance the rectangle of white cloth that signifies the back window of the bus shows a man running after it – Jean-Paul Lefevre's stage character, who is straight out of a silent Keystone Cops movie chase scene, or else one of Charlie Chaplin or Buster Keaton's films.

The spectator is in a surprising world with many layers, simultaneously outside and inside, in the auditorium and riding the bus, which appears to be at the same time on the stage and on a tour of the countryside via the video. Lefevre performs on the stage and in the video, and

saavuttamattomuudesta, paluun mahdottomuudesta.

JEAN-PAUL LEFEUVRE ahtautui *Ni Omnibus* -esityksessään päinvastoin juuri ja juuri miehen mittaiseen tilaan. Rajattomuuden sijasta esitys artikuloi klaustrofobista maailmaa, ahtautta ja rajallisuutta.

Esitys oli alunperin toteutettu linja-autoon.

Nykyinen näyttämötila on rakennettu penkittömän bussin sisätilaa jäljitellen.

Kuva Jean-Paul Lefevrestä laatikon muotoisen tilan sisällä temppuilemassa pystytangolla ja horisontaaliköydellä toi mieleen Leonardo da Vincin anatomiapiirroksen "kahdeksanraajaisesta" miehestä ympyrän sisällä. Da Vincin seisova mies on kuin suljettu kuplaan, Jean-Paul Lefevre harjoittaa akrobatiaa mittatilaustyönä tehdyssä neliössä.

*Ni Omnibus* ei kuitenkaan jää rakennetun laatikon sisään. Tekninen avustaja Didier seisoo yleisön puolella. Hän on osa esitystä. **Didier** voi liikkua tilassa, mitä yleisö ei tee. Hän on välittäjä, yhtä aikaa esiintyjä ja todistaja.

Lisäksi Jean-Paul Lefevre käytti hyväkseen videota, joka toi pölyisen pikkutien ja tietä reunustavan heinikon mukaan luomaan illuusiota matkanteosta, ulkotilasta.

Bussin takaikkunaa markkeeraava suorakaiteen muotoinen valkokangas näyttää esityksen lopussa bussin perässä juoksevan miehen, Jean-Paul Lefevren näyttämöhahmon, joka on kuin suoraan Keystone Cops -mykkäelokuvien takaa-ajokohtauksesta tai **Chaplinin** tai **Buster Keatonin** elokuvista.

Katsoja on yllättävässä kerroksellisten tilojen maailmassa, yhtä aikaa ulkona ja sisällä, katsomossa ja bussin kyydissä, joka on olevinaan näyttämöllä ja yhtä aikaa maaseututurneella videolla.

Näyttämöllä ja videolla esiintyvä Lefevre ja *Ni Omnibus* keikuttaa voimakkaasti tilallista tasapainoa ja hämmentää katsojan orientaatiota.

confuses the spectator's sense of space, making them lose their orientation.

In the performance space there is almost always these kinds of differently formed spaces inside one another, created by lights, objects or more traditional props and the *mise-en-scène*. Una Chaudhuri has analysed stage spaces and has said that the accidental similarity in the words 'plays' and 'place' expresses how difficult it is to separate them from each other. "The history of the theatre is framed by the endless variations in the relationships between the size and form of the space... Places where theatrical experiences take place contain all the possibilities to create fluid relationships between the actors and the spectators." (Chaudhuri, pp. 83–84)

The starting point of environmental theatre is to attack the traditional divisions, classes and codes of the theatre space. It strives to annul, clean away or even destroy. The leading environmental theatre theorist Richard Schechner includes the audience and other things apart from the stage in the discussion:

"If the audience is a place where the performance happens, the living space is another. Living space includes all the theatre structures in the space, not just the part that is called the stage." (Schechner, pp. 1–2)

Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty already dispensed with the auditorium and the stage and replaced them with a single space where the spectator was forced "into the middle of the events (...) in order to swallow the action and become the target of its physical influence". (Artaud, p. 96)

Jean-Paul Lefeuve's *Ni Omnibus* succeeded in getting the audience onboard.

Le Carré Curieux's performance *Le Passage* had a stronger effect by preventing any change, turn or return with regards to its direction. The performance was one-way only: from life to death. The main character in the piece is in a liminal space. According to anthropologist Victor Turner,

ESITYSTILASSA on lähes aina tällaisia eri muotoisia sisäkkäisiä tiloja, joita esimerkiksi valot, objektit tai perinteisemmin lavasteet ja näyttämöllepano (*mise-en-scène*) rajaavat. Näytelmien tiloja analysoinut **Una Chaudhuri** toteaa, kuinka englanninkielisten sanojen *plays* ja *place* samankaltainen ääntämys ilmaisee sattumalta, miten vaikeaa on erottaa näytelmät tilasta.

*"Teatterin historiaa kehystävät useiden erityyppisten teatterin tilojen todellisen koon, muodon ja tilojen välisten suhteiden loputtomat variaatiot. (...) Teatterillisen kokemuksen tapahtumapaikat sisältävät kaikki mahdollisuudet luoda näyttelijöiden ja katsojien välille alati muuttuvia suhteita."* (Chaudhuri, sivut 83–84.)

Ympäristönomaisen teatterin (Environmental Theatre) lähtökohta on hyökätä teatteritilan perinteisiä jakoja, luokitteluja ja koodauksia vastaan. Se pyrkii kumoamaan, pois pyyhkimään tai peräti tuhoamaan ne. Ympäristönomaisen teatterin johtava teoreetikko **Richard Schechner** poimii tilakeskusteluun yleisön ja muutkin kuin näyttämötilan.

*"Jos yleisö on yksi esityksen tapahtumapaikka, elävä tila on toinen. Elävä tila sisältää kaiken teatterirakennuksessa olevan tilan, ei pelkästään sitä mitä kutsutaan näyttämöksi."* (Schechner, sivut 1–2.)

Jo **Antonin Artaud**'n julmuuden teatteri poisti katsomon ja näyttämön ja korvasi ne yhdellä tilalla, jossa katsoja joutui "keskelle tapahtumia (...) toiminnan nielaisemaksi ja sen fyysisen vaikutuksen kohteeksi". (Artaud, sivu 96.)

Etenkin Jean-Paul Lefeuven *Ni Omnibus* onnistui keinoillaan imaisemaan yleisön esityksen kyytiin. *Cirque Vivant!*in esitys *Le Passage* vaikutti voimakkaammin estämällä kulkusuunnan vaihtumisen, kääntymisen, paluun. Esitys on yksisuuntainen: elämästä kuolemaan. Päähenkilö on liminaalitalassa. Antropologi **Victor Turnerin** mukaan liminaalitala on välivaihe siirtymässä vaiheesta toiseen esimerkiksi rituaaleissa. Liminaalitala on uudistumisen kannalta tärkeä ei-kenenkään maa. Esityksen myötä katsojat

liminal space is a transition stage between one phase and another (in rituals, for instance). *Le Passage* allows people a hypothetical peek behind the gates of death – into the no-man's land after life and before rebirth, a place we cannot realistically go.

According to Esa Kirkkopelto, it is possible in the theatre to playfully create the illusion of a certain kind of presence in the world: "The world does not disappear in any way in the theatre but it rather is there in the game." (Kirkkopelto, p. 20)

The performance *Le Passage* succeeds in creating a special sense of the world which is our own, but also works according to its own terms – those of contemporary circus or the stage arts.

Kirkkopelto emphasises that stages are not monadic, hermetic bubbles:

"The stage is not private (this is a tragic illusion), rather it is always a dimension of opening, revealing and receiving, at once a stage and presence on the stage, a possible relationship with the world." (Ibid., p 34)

I interpret this to mean that the choices made about space in the three performances I saw – space meaning also the space opened up by images or moving images – cut the chains of the relationship with traditional theatre space. Stellato's *L'Autre* played with a combination of two wooden boxes, which were like huge dominoes. Performer Claudio Stellato played hide and seek with the audience: he went completely or half into the box, or carried the box on his back like a snail's shell, or on his shoulders like Atlas, who had the weight of the whole world.

"Artaud brought to theatre the idea that boring, blocked realism should go – the stage was a place for theatre and dance, and that could mean a poem, tragedy, ritual and magic." (Purovaara, p. 108) *L'Autre* balanced between the different boxes of circus, using skilful acts, object theatre and stage poetry. It was a fireworks show made up of acrobatics, play and magic. On the surface the performance was bare and minimal. The stage

pääsivät hypoteettisesti kurkistamaan kuoleman porttien taakse – paikkaan minne meillä ei realistisesti ole pääsyä.

TAITEELLISEN TUTKIMUKSEN professorin **Esa Kirkkopellon** mukaan teatterissa on mahdollista luoda "leikisti" illuusio (ludere = leikkiä) tietynlaisesta maailmassa olemisesta.

*"Maailma ei teatterissa siis suinkaan putoa pois, vaan on leikissä mukana."* (Kirkkopelto, sivu 20.) *Le Passage* -esitys onnistuu luomaan erityisen maailman tunnun, joka on kuin omamme, mutta myös omilla (nykysirkuksen, näyttämötaiteen) ehdoillaan toimiva.

Kirkkopelto korostaa, etteivät näyttämöt ole monadeja, hermeettisiä kuplia.

*"Yksityistä näyttämöä ei ole (tämä juuri on traaginen harha), vaan näyttämö on aina avautumisen, paljastumisen ja vastaanottamisen dimensio, yhtäaikaista näyttämönä ja näyttämöllä oloa, mahdollinen maailmasuhde."* (Ibid., sivu 34.)

Tulkitsen, että nähdyt kolme esitystä tilavalinnoillaan – tila ymmärrettynä tässä myös kuvien/ elävän kuvan avaamiksi tiloiksi – katkoivat kahleita suhteessa perinteisiin näyttämötiloihin. Stellaton *L'Autre* pelasi kahden lautalaatikon kombinaatioilla. Laatikot olivat kuin jättikokoisia dominopalikoita. Esiintyjä Claudio Stellato leikki kuurupiiloo yleisön kanssa: hän meni laatikkoon kokonaan tai puoliksi, kantoi laatikkoa selässään kuin etana kuortaan tai harteillaan kuin Atlas, jolla oli taakkaan koko maailma.

*"Artaud toi teatteriin ajatukset, että tylsä, pysähtynyt realismi sai mennä – näyttämö oli paikka teatterille ja tanssille, joka olisi runoa, tragediaa, rituaalia ja magiaa."* (Purovaara, sivu 108).

*L'Autre* tasapainoili temppuihin perustuvan taidokkaan sirkuksen, välineteatterin ja näyttämöllisen runouden laatikoissa. Se oli akrobatian, leikin ja magian ilotulitusta. Päällisin puoli esitys on askeettinen ja minimalistinen. Näyttämöllä on vain kaksi puista laatikkoa, pieni ja

had just two wooden boxes, a small one and a long one, and one performer. *L'Autre* grows however to become bigger than the sum of its parts. It was a hybrid of object theatre, acrobatics and illusion, effecting changes in form and proportion through a gleeful theatrical trickery.

*L'Autre* also hides another factor, another performer (Martin Firket), invisible yet indispensable. Without one there would not be The Other (*L'Autre*).

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pitkulainen, sekä yksi esiintyjä. *L'Autre* kasvaa kuitenkin osiaan suuremmaksi. Kyse oli välineteatterin, akrobatian ja illuusioiden hybridistä: muodonmuutoksista, mittasuhteen muutoksista ja riemastuttavasta teatterillisestä hujauksesta.

Toisessa (*L'Autre*) on piilossa myös toinen toimija, toinen esiintyjä (Martin Firket), näkymätön mutta välttämätön. Ilman tätä toista ei olisi Toista (*L'Autre*).

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# Risk in circus

FILIP TIELENS

There is no circus without risk: an acrobat flying several metres into the air, a fakir juggling with burning torches, a knife thrower piercing the apple on top of his assistant's head, etcetera. Traditional circus exists by the grace of risk and within the advancing frontiers of its skill. Some shorter acts in travelling circuses even flirt with the (im)possibility of the challenge: twice, the audience is brought to suppose that the artist cannot bring the act to a successful conclusion, only for success to come at the third attempt. This pattern was demonstrated in David Dimitri's one-man show *L'Homme Cirque*, performed during the La Piste aux Espoirs festival in Tournai: only after two unsuccessful attempts at a backwards somersault on the slack rope did he succeed. Was it faked or did the act really hang by a thread? Even though the act is short, the sense of the performer's courage is increased until the impossible is made possible, the audience and the performer experiencing a kind of catharsis, a larger-than-life experience. He crosses a line no ordinary mortal would cross in taking his risks: that is the dominant dramaturgy in traditional circus. However, the risks are not always physical. A clown or juggler might not be harmed physically as easily as, say, a trapeze artist or a tightrope walker, but the risk of failure is the same when trying a new joke or adding extra juggling clubs. In traditional circus, those two risks, of life/death and of failure, are omnipresent. Even though death and failure are actually taboo in traditional circus.

In new and contemporary circus, those two risks are still present. Actually, circus exists in the first place thanks to danger and experimentation. However, the risk of injury or calamity in circus is nowadays much reduced – by safety nets, for example, or lunge belts. The risk of a disaster such as the circus tent catching fire, or a structure toppling down, is next to impossible due to

# De risico's van het circus

FILIP TIELENS

Zonder risico's geen circus: een acrobaat die metershoog in de lucht vliegt, een fakir die met brandende fakkels jongleert, een messenwerper die een appel op het hoofd van zijn assistente doorboort... Het traditionele circus bestond bij gratie van het risico en het verleggen van grenzen. Sommige van de korte acts in het rondreizende circus speelden zelfs met de (on)mogelijkheid van de uitdaging: terwijl het publiek tot tweemaal toe in de waan werd gelaten dat een artiest er niet in slaagt om zijn proef tot een goed einde te brengen, slaagt hij er de derde keer uiteindelijk wel in. Dit zagen we ook in de one man show *L'Homme Cirque* van David Dimitri tijdens het festival La Piste aux Espoirs in Doornik: pas na twee mislukte pogingen lukte zijn achterwaartse salto op het hangend koord. Doorgestoken kaart of hing het slagen van de act echt aan een zijden draadje? Tijdens zo'n korte act wordt de "prouesse" zodanig verhoogd tot het schier onmogelijke mogelijk wordt en het publiek samen met de performer een catharsis ervaart: een *larger than life* ervaring. Het overschrijden van een risicovolle grens waar een gewone sterveling niet in zou slagen: het is de dominante dramaturgie van het traditionele circus. Al hoeft het niet steeds om een lichamelijk risico te gaan. Een clown of een jongleur zal misschien minder snel fysiek gekwetst raken dan pakweg een trapezist of een koorddanser, maar hij loopt evenveel risico op mislukking wanneer hij een nieuwe grap uitprobeert of er nog een extra jongleerkegel bijneemt. In het oude circus zijn deze twee risico's, die op leven en dood en die op het falen, sterk aanwezig. Al is de dood en het mislukken wel een taboo in het traditionele circus.

In het nieuwe en het hedendaagse circus zijn deze twee risico's nog steeds aanwezig. Circus bestaat namelijk bij gratie van het gevaar en het experiment. Al is het risico op ongevallen of rampen in het huidige circus wel drastisch



stricter safety regulations in tents and halls compared to a century ago. Circus is no different from any society: more and more rules and safety measures should reduce the possible risks.

In new and contemporary circus, new risks have replaced the old ones. During one of the discussions at Unpack the Arts, someone formulated a beautiful sentence which I immediately wrote down, unfortunately without noting the speaker's name: "Contemporary circus is losing the risk of life for the risk of dramaturgy." This may be the most important issue in the contemporary circus scene: does a performance need to have visual and narrative dramaturgy, or do we primarily need to focus on the strength of the circus itself – the technique? Assuming the first model, we expect circus to scrounge off theatre and dance by developing characters and acting out or telling a story (in a broad sense). Assuming the second model, we drop all this 'dead weight' and focus on what is crucial in circus: the victory over any risk by the flawless mastery of the métier.

Let's compare two of the performances we witnessed during the Unpack the Arts residency in Brussels and Tournai to illustrate this dilemma: the aforementioned *L'Homme Cirque* by David Dimitri, and *Le Passage* by Le Carré Curieux. First of all there is the observation that David Dimitri has been touring with *L'Homme Cirque* for seven years, so there is less risk of failure in his performance. Contrarily, *Le Passage* by Le Carré Curieux premiered on the night we were there and was facing an audience for the first time (excepting a few try-outs). But the Brussels company – formed by Vladimir Couprie and Luca Aeschlimann – took an entirely different risk than David Dimitri in their choice to tell a story focused on such an emotionally charged subject as death. "I have seen many poor performances in circus theatre," recounted Koen Allary, director of Belgium's Circuscentrum, in an interview two years ago. It is always difficult to try and use circus techniques in a bigger setting or in service of a larger subject, especially one that has so many clichés surrounding it. A fellow journalist at Unpack the Arts, perhaps not entirely coincidentally someone a little older than me and

verkleind door bv. het installeren van vangnetten of het gebruik van beschermingstouwen. Het risico op een ramp, zoals een circustent die in de fik vliegt of een plafondconstructie die naar beneden tuimelt, zal door de verstrengde veiligheidsvoorwaarden in tenten en zalen ook sterk verkleind zijn in vergelijking met pakweg een eeuw geleden. In het circus is het waarschijnlijk niet anders dan in de rest van de samenleving: steeds meer regeltjes en verzekeringsclaims moeten de risico's proberen te beperken.

In het nieuwe en het hedendaagse circus zijn er andere risico's in de plaats gekomen. Bij een van onze discussierondes tijdens Unpack the arts zei iemand volgende prachtige zin, die ik meteen ijverig noteerde, helaas zonder auteursvermelding: "Contemporary circus is losing the risk of life for the risk of dramaturgy." Het moet zowat de belangrijkste discussie zijn in de huidige circusscène: moet een voorstelling ook een visuele of narratieve dramaturgie hebben of moeten we vooral focussen op de kracht van het circusmedium zelf, namelijk de techniek? Als we uitgaan van het eerste model, verwachten we dat het nieuwe circus leentjebuurt gaat spelen bij het theater en de dans door het ontwikkelen van personages en het uitbeelden of vertellen van een verhaal (in de brede zin van het woord). In het tweede geval laten we al die "ballast" achterwege en concentreren we ons op wat circus tot circus maakt: het overwinnen van een risico door een feilloze beheersing van het métier.

Laten we twee voorstellingen nemen die we tijdens deze circusjournalistenresidentie in Brussel en Doornik zagen om het over dit dilemma te hebben: het al eerder genoemde *l'Homme Cirque* van David Dimitri en *Le Passage* van Le Carré Curieux. Allereerst nog de bemerking dat David Dimitri minder risico op mislukking van zijn voorstelling liep, omdat hij al zeven jaar op tournee is met *l'Homme Cirque*. *Le Passage* van Le Carré Curieux daarentegen beleefde zijn première op de avond dat wij de voorstelling zagen en werd toen, op de occasionele try-out na, voor het eerst geconfronteerd met een publiek. Maar de Brusselse groep rond Vladimir Couprie en Luca Aeschlimann nam een heel ander risico dan David Dimitri in hun keuze om een coherent verhaal over



Karl Stets – Cuerdo © nn

perhaps also more often confronted with death than me, found that *Le Passage* stuck to “commonplaces about death” too much. However, I think that every cliché is based on a truth, and that Le Carré Curieux deserves respect for their nerve in approaching an all-encompassing, yet abstract and not very cheerful, subject. David Dimitri, by contrast, took the safe road in his narrative dramaturgy. The only narrative thread I can picture in *L’Homme Cirque* is the ageing circus artist’s melancholy: he is still touring but fighting against time, which will soon render his body unfit for the acts he is, for now, still capable of performing smoothly. *Le Passage* chooses the theatre setting of a black box, while *L’Homme Cirque* takes place in a circus tent. Le Carré Curieux aspired to create a coherent performance with a clear progression (tracking the deterioration in health of a sick man), while David Dimitri’s one-man show consisted of different acts that could have been performed in a different order just like in traditional circus, except for the high wire act at the end. My chief remark on *L’Homme Cirque* is that Dimitri, unlike Le Carré Curieux, does not dare to take many artistic risks. The acts in his performance have all proven their

zo’n groot en beladen thema te vertellen als de dood. “Ik heb al veel slecht circustheater gezien”, zo vertelde Koen Allary, de directeur van het Circuscentrum, twee jaar geleden in een interview. Het blijft een moeilijke zaak om circustechnieken te gebruiken voor een groter doel, zeker wanneer het over een onderwerp gaat waar zoveel clichés de ronde over doen. Een collega-journalist bij Unpack the arts, misschien niet toevallig iemand die wat ouder was dan ik en daardoor al wat vaker met de dood in aanraking zal zijn gekomen, vond dan ook dat *Le Passage* te veel bleef hangen in “commonplaces about death”. Maar volgens mij zit er in ieder cliché een bron van waarheid en verdient de durf van Le Carré Curieux om een omvattend, maar tegelijk ook abstract en niet bepaald happy thema aan te snijden, op zich al respect.

Dan speelde David Dimitri het heel wat veiliger op het vlak van een verhalende dramaturgie. Het enige wat ik mij qua narratief kan voorstellen bij *l’Homme Cirque* is de melancholie van een al wat oudere circusartiest die toch nog steeds toert, vechtend tegen de tijd die zijn lichaam binnenkort ongeschikt zal maken voor de acts die hij nu nog probleemloos uitvoert. Waar *Le Passage* echt kiest voor de theatersetting in een black box, vindt *l’Homme Cirque* plaats in een circustent. Le Carré Curieux streefde naar een coherente voorstelling die zich in een bepaalde volgorde afwikkelt (namelijk het aftakelingsproces van een zieke man), terwijl de one man show van David Dimitri naar traditionele circusgewoonte bestond uit verschillende acts die ook in een andere volgorde hadden kunnen plaatsvinden, op de koorddans in de lucht op het einde na dan. Mijn voornaamste kritiek op *l’Homme Cirque* is dat Dimitri, in tegenstelling tot Le Carré Curieux, weinig artistieke risico’s durft te nemen. De verschillende acts die hij doet, hebben in de loop der jaren hun succes al meermaals bewezen. Bovendien weet Dimitri ook helemaal hoe het publiek zal reageren op iedere stunt of grap. Hij speelt er perfect op in, of meer nog, hij manipuleert de toeschouwers om hen te krijgen daar waar hij hen hebben wil: vol bewondering en bevredigd omdat Dimitri hen exact geeft wat ze willen zien. De aanwezige kinderen en hun grootouders hadden een fantastische tijd, maar

success in the past, and Dimitri can perfectly predict the audience's reaction to each stunt or gag. He can anticipate it, and can even manipulate the audience into the desired feeling: amazement and satisfaction as Dimitri gives them exactly what they want to see. The children and their grandparents had a great time, but an art critic like me prefers a performance that offers more than what I already know or expect.

Where is the risk of failure in a performance that has already lasted seven years? How does one challenge oneself artistically? Is there, then, any difference between the repetition of *L'Homme Cirque*'s success and, say, Cirque du Soleil, except for the whole concept and development of the acts that have been worked out by Dimitri himself? Please do not misunderstand my point: certainly, Dimitri's performance is first class in its genre and the artist himself deserves respect for perfecting each act and for carrying the whole show on his own. However, perfection is boring. To me, *L'Homme Cirque* was particularly spiritless. There was only one moment in the performance in which I shifted to the edge of my seat: when Dimitri twice failed in performing a somersault. Not for seeing a circus artist fall off his pedestal or for laughing at someone else's failure, but because the otherwise so perfect Dimitri exposed his vulnerability for one moment. I thought I saw in his expression that the failed somersaults were accidental; however, when we discussed the performance afterwards, we concluded that it was probably orchestrated. Even if Dimitri is the perfect master of his character, such slick manipulation of the audience – one that is so easily ensnared – gets on my nerves. Failing on purpose for a wilder applause: no, not my favourite style.

*Le Passage* by Le Carré Curieux, on the other hand, took big risks in its artistic and experimental content. They chose a narrative thread, and in doing so took on the risk of trying to narrate a multi-layered story without the use of words – which is a difficult task if you compare it to the work of an actor, who in most cases uses language and has had more training in dramaturgy. One of the remarks made by fellow journalists was that Le Carré Curieux did not

voor mij als kunstcriticus mag een voorstelling toch wel wat meer bieden dan datgene wat ik al ken of verwacht.

Waar zit het risico op falen in een voorstelling waar je al zeven jaar mee op tournee bent? Hoe daag je jezelf nog artistiek uit? Is er nog wel een verschil tussen het telkenmale herhalen van het publiekssucces van *L'Homme Cirque* en wat pakweg Cirque du Soleil doet, behalve dan dat het hele concept en het uitwerken van de acts door Dimitri zelf is gebeurd? Begrijp me niet verkeerd: natuurlijk is wat Dimitri doet kwalitatief in zijn genre en verdient hij respect omdat hij iedere act zo perfectioneerde en omdat hij de hele voorstelling in zijn eentje draagt. Maar perfectie is saai. *L'Homme Cirque* was voor mij vooral zielloos. Er was maar één moment in de voorstelling waarbij ik op het puntje van mijn stoel ging zitten, namelijk toen Dimitri twee keer mislukte in zijn salto. Niet om een circusartiest van zijn voetstuk te zien vallen of om te kunnen lachen met het falen van iemand anders, maar wel omdat de anders zo perfecte Dimitri hier even zijn kwetsbaarheid toonde. Op het moment zelf meende ik aan Dimitri's gezichtsuitdrukking te zien dat de mislukte sprongen niet gespeeld waren, maar tijdens onze discussies achteraf bleek dat de kans dat dit in scène gezet was, reëel te zijn. Ook al speelde Dimitri zijn rol dan perfect, toch krijg ik de kriebels bij zo'n gladde manipulatie van het publiek, die wel met open ogen in de opgezette val trapt. Bewust mislukken om nog meer applaus te krijgen: nee, dat zint me niet.

*Le Passage* van Le Carré Curieux daarentegen nam veel meer risico's op het artistieke vlak en qua experiment. Wanneer je kiest voor een narratief zoals zij, heeft dit als keerzijde het risico dat je het als meestal niet pratende circusartiest veel moeilijker hebt om een meerlagig verhaal op te bouwen dan een acteur, die meestal wel de taal als wapen heeft en bovendien meer in dramaturgie geschoold is. Eén van de kritieken van de andere collega-journalisten was dan ook dat Le Carré Curieux er niet helemaal in slaagde om de eendimensionaliteit in hun verhaal te overstijgen. De boog die de voorstelling maakt is die van aftakelingsproces richting exit: de hoofdrolspeler verliest uiteindelijk zijn ongelijke

entirely succeed in surpassing the rectilinearity of their story. The storyline in the performance is about the process of deterioration most of us will have to face as we exit from this world: the main character ultimately loses the unequal fight against death (played by a devilish individual, a Caligari type), and his body is embalmed before he enters the heavenly gate. In order to make this rather straightforward story captivating throughout, Le Carré Curieux employ great theatrical techniques: with illusion as well as with video, many effects are generated that prove to be very resourceful according to its advocates – “They have so many ideas!” a colleague cooed. Opponents, on the other hand, thought the acts were not elaborate enough and were only embellishing an otherwise modest story. ‘Less is more’, seems to be their comment. Another repeated criticism was that *Le Passage* was too illustrative and lead the audience too much by the hand, which reduced the opportunities for spectators to add to the performance with their own imaginations. Personally, I think that Le Carré Curieux did succeed in creating a new kind of mysticism – using highly symbolical images taken from various religions and near-death experiences, among other things – which managed to move me. *L’Homme Cirque*, by David Dimitri, did not.

The pre-knowledge one has when watching a performance is of course also very important. Because everyone knew that the young, local company Le Carré Curieux were having their premiere, we felt more generous while watching their performance. If we supposed this performance had been made in a commercial context, the audience would have a lot to say about the one-to-one relation of the images and their suggested meaning – as if the creators thoroughly underestimate the audience’s capacities. It would be similar to the difference between a fresh bakery and an industrial bakery: one tends to prefer the taste of home-made bread over industrial bread. With Le Carré Curieux we are less picky when their pace is not yet up to speed. Some scenes from *Le Passage* seemed just a tad too lengthy, but the slow pace curiously matched the serenity of the subject perfectly.

strijd met de dood (hier gespeeld door een duiveleske figuur annex Caligari), tot zijn lichaam gebalsemd wordt en hij door de hemelpoort stapt. Om dit vrij rechtlijnige verhaal boeiend te houden, haalt Le Carré Curieux de grote theatrale middelen boven: zowel met illusie en video worden vele effecten gecreëerd, die volgens de voorstanders erg inventief zijn (“They have so many ideas!”, kigde een collega-journalist), maar voor de tegenstanders niet genoeg uitgewerkt waren en dienden om het eenvoudige verhaaltje overdadig op te smukken. “Less is more”, lijken zij te zeggen. Een andere vaak gehoorde kritiek was dat *Le Passage* niet alleen te illustratief was, maar ook het publiek teveel bij de hand leidde, waardoor je als toeschouwer niet meer de ruimte zou krijgen om met je eigen verbeelding de getoonde ideeën zelf verder in te vullen. Voor mij slaagde Le Carré Curieux er wel in om met deze uiterst symbolistische beelden, die onder andere uit bijna-doodervaringen en verschillende godsdiensten kwamen, een nieuw soort mystiek te creëren die me erg wist te ontroeren. Dit in tegenstelling tot *L’Homme Cirque* van David Dimitri, dat mij koud liet.

De pretext die je hebt wanneer je naar een voorstelling gaat kijken, speelt natuurlijk ook een grote rol. Omdat iedereen weet dat het jonge, lokale gezelschap Le Carré Curieux net in première ging, ben je genereuzer voor wat je te zien krijgt. Maar als je weet dat deze voorstelling in een commerciële context gemaakt zou zijn, zou iedereen de mond vol hebben over de één-op-één verhouding tussen de beelden die gemaakt worden en wat wij erbij moeten denken, alsof de makers het publiek danig zouden onderschatten. Het zou hetzelfde verschil zijn als dat tussen een warme bakker en een industriële bakkerij: je meent toch ook altijd te proeven dat een zelfgemaakt brood lekkerder is dan eentje uit een fabriek. Als we Le Carré Curieux als de warme bakker beschouwen die ons voor het eerst van een nieuw brood laat proeven, dan kijk je minder streng toe wanneer bijvoorbeeld het tempo nog niet helemaal op punt staat. Zo leken sommige scènes uit *Le Passage* net iets te lang te duren, maar sloot dit trage tempo op een vreemde manier wel perfect aan bij de sereniteit van het onderwerp.

*Le Passage* flirts with visual arts and live art, and takes a risk with this interdisciplinary approach. The acts on the stage are generally not very spectacular. Unnecessary technical circus acts are left out in order to reinforce the internal coherence that was indeed present, in spite of the abundance of ideas. *Le Passage* breathes an almost mystical feeling that lasted through the whole performance. It would have been easier for Le Carré Curieux to create a gloomy, dawdling performance about death, but they did not. They chose the beautiful intent of one person taking care of the other as their starting point. It was a great risk to describe death in a positive, almost blissful way. Apart from the somewhat unnecessary happy ending, which was also too symmetrical to the initial image (the circle of life, you know), *Le Passage* avoids the pitfall of needlessly livening up the subject of death. Therefore, Le Carré Curieux took many more risks than David Dimitri did, something I – as an art critic – can fully appreciate.

*Le Passage* flirt echt met de beeldende kunst en de live art, en neemt in deze interdisciplinariteit ook een risico. Spectaculair is wat er op de scène gebeurt meestal niet. De technische circuskunstjes die onnodig waren, zijn hier overboord gegooid om de interne coherentie – die er ondanks de hoeveelheid aan ideeën wel degelijk was – te versterken. Uit *Le Passage* sprak een haast mystiek gevoel dat de hele voorstelling consistent werd aangehouden. Het zou voor Le Carré Curieux gemakkelijker geweest zijn om een zwaarmoedige, lijkige voorstelling rond het thema dood te maken, maar dat deden ze niet. Ze kozen ervoor om het mooie moment waarop iemand verzorgd wordt door iemand anders als uitgangspunt te nemen. De dood op een positieve, zelfs haast gelukzalige manier tonen, was een groot risico. Op het misschien overbodige happy end na, dat bovendien iets te symmetrisch was met het beginbeeld (de *circle of life*, weet je wel), trapt *Le Passage* ook niet in de valkuil om het thema dood onnodig op te leuken. Le Carré Curieux nam dus veel meer risico's dan David Dimitri, wat ik als kunstcriticus uitermate kan appreciëren.

# The Unpack the Arts Residency and Two Circus Festivals in Belgium

JASNA COCE

Whenever we meet with our colleagues from other countries and other media it proves to be an enriching experience, and it is in fact the exchange between peers that makes our work as cultural commentators so lively and dynamic. This is why I was looking forward to the Unpack the Arts residency in Belgium. At first it seemed a little strange that there were two similar festivals – Hors Piste and La Piste aux Espoirs – going on at the same time and so close to each other, with one in Brussels and one in Tournai. But on the very first day, after meeting the others attending the residency and after going through the programme, I realised why it was important to visit both festivals and to see the different faces of contemporary circus.

During the first session I realised I was entering an interesting and seductive world, a world that I was not familiar with. I come from a country that does not have a tradition of circus art; we do not have schools or academies either. Our main contact with this type of performance art comes through the annual Festival Novog Cirkusa in Zagreb, which has been running now for eight years.

The show *L'Autre* by Claudio Stellato, the first show in the Unpack the Arts programme, opened the doors to the world of magic. In this production a multi-layered story is told with a minimum of scenography. The performer, Stellato himself, has to rely completely on his control of his own body, and to trust absolutely the other agent (The Other of the title), who is always present but fully invisible.

# Novinarska rezidencija i dva cirkuska festivala u Belgiji

JASNA COCE

Svaki susret s kolegama iz drugih zemalja i medija iznimno je koristan jer naš posao čini stalno svježim i dinamičnim. Upravo sam se zbog toga veselila novinarskoj rezidenciji u Belgiji. U početku mi se činilo pomalo neobičnim da se na tako maloj udaljenosti istovremeno odvijaju čak dva slična festivala. No već se prvog dana, nakon susreta s kolegama polaznicima rezidencije i upoznavanja s programom, pokazalo zbog čega je važno susresti se s onim što se događa u i Briselu, ali i Tournaiu.

Odmah tijekom prve sesije shvatila sam da ulazim u jedan zanimljiv, zavodljiv i meni nedovoljno poznat svijet. Dolazim iz zemlje u kojoj ne postoji tradicija ovakve umjetnosti, ne postoje škole i akademije, a Festival novog cirkusa u Zagrebu, kao mjesto na kojem se susrećemo s ovakvim scenskim izričajem, postoji tek od prije nekoliko godina.

Predstava *L'Autre*, Claudia Stellata, otvorila je tu čaroliju. Slojevita priča ostvarena s minimalnim scenskim sredstvima u kojem je glumcu najveći oslonac njegovo vlastito tijelo, ali i onaj netko drugi, stalno prisutan iako posve nevidljiv.

Stellatova priča likovno je čisto postavljena, jednostavna i na takav način komunicira s publikom. Zato je lako čitljiva njezina ideja o samoći i tjeskobi, o situacijama u kojima se svakodnevno nalazimo i u kojima moramo preživjeti, pa makoar to bila strogo ograničen prostor kutije. Sve to Stellato nam priča savršenim jezikom pokreta koji sažima njegovo dugogodišnje iskustvo s uličnim kazalištem, cirkuskom umjetnosti i suvremenim plesom.

Stellato's piece is visually very clean and simple, using this starkness to establish a clear, strong line of communication with the audience, and to make its central theme – of solitude and anxiety, of the threatening situations we all face on a daily basis – easy to read. Stellato tells us *L'Autre's* story in a perfect language of movement which brings together his long years of experience in street theatre, circus art and modern dance.

The concept of the Unpack the Arts residency was excellent. We started each day with a debate on the show we saw the day before. It was particularly useful for me, because as a journalist working at the culture desk of a public television station I have to cover all cultural events. Focusing on this one sector and building up specialist knowledge about it is potentially very useful and important for my future work. My colleagues for the residency were mostly theatre experts, though some were indeed contemporary circus specialists, and I was able to learn a lot from their experience and from their takes on the shows we saw together. Another brilliant idea for the residency was to organise discussions with the artists. These encounters – where there was no barrier between us and them, journalists and artists – gave us all a new perspective on the works they presented and made us all insiders, in a way, as we were able to see things through their eyes. It was useful to learn first-hand how artists work on the text, the dramaturgy, the rhythm of their shows – from the initial idea through to the opening night – and about the life, and indeed the lifespan, of a circus production after its premiere.

Informal chats after the sessions were also quite useful, allowing us to learn more about the artists and their lives: what they eat, how they keep fit (very important for someone like Stellato), what they do on the day of the show... All these insights brought new dimensions to the shows we saw onstage.

The show *Le Passage*, by the company Le Carré Curieux, echoed the aesthetic of the whole Brussels festival by exhibiting a penchant for experimenting and combining various contemporary modes of expression. *Le Passage*

Rezidencija je bila odlično koncipirana. Započinjali smo diskusijom o predstavi predhodnog dana. Meni je to bilo posebno dragocjeno, jer sam kao novinarka kulture u Informativnom programu javne televizije, prisljena pratiti sva kulturna događanja, a ovakvo fokusiranje na samo jedan segment čini mi se korisno i iznimno važno za moj budući rad pri susretu s drugim izvedbenim projektima. Moje kolege na rezidenciji bili su uglavnom stručnjaci za kazalište, neki upravo za novi cirkus pa sam iz njihovih iskustava i pogleda na predstave koje smo zajedno gledali, puno naučila. Druga sjajna ideja radionice bili su razgovori s umjetnicima. Taj susret u kojem nema ničega između nas i njih dalo nam je posve novu perspektivu u razumijevanju djela koje su predstavili i na određen nas je način učinilo insaderima. Sve smo mogli sagledati i iznutra. Bilo je korisno iz prve ruke saznati kako se radi na tekstu, dramaturgiji, koliko prođe od ideje do premijere, i kakav je nakon nje život predstave, koliko dugo uopće živi.

Također su bili važni i neformalni razgovori nakon sesije u kojima saznajemo više o glumcima i njihovom životu, primjerice što jedu, kakve su im kondicijske vježbe, što je za nekog poput Stellata iznimno važno, što rade na dan predstave. Sve to, ono što smo vidjeli na sceni, učinilo nam je još bliskije.

Predstava *Le Passage* potvrdila je estetsku orijentaciju briselskog festivala, sklonost k eksperimentu i kombiniranju različitih suvremenih izričajeva. *Le Passage* objedinjuje tako akrobatiku, video, film, suvremeni ples, suvremenu likovnost, elemente klasičnog i suvremenog cirkusa. I da, sve to se čini puno. Puno izričajeva, puno poetika, puno ekspresije u samo jednoj predstavi. Vladimir, Luna, Pedro i Filip bili su nadahnuti, ili možda čak opsjednuti temom smrti. U razgovoru su nam kazali kako se zapravo sve događalo. U svojim su istraživanjima krenuli od starih civilizacija. Zanimalo ih je kako su smrt doživljavali, razumijevali i interpretirali stari Egipćani, Feničani, Sumerani, ali i kako ju shvaća naša civilizacija i naše vrijeme.. Razgovarali su s ljudima u bolnicama, u terminalnoj fazi bolesti, s ljudima koji su imali iskustva s kliničkom smrti. Na osnovu svih tih segmenata gradili su svoju priču o

thus brings together acrobatics, video, film, modern dance, modern visual art, and elements of the classic and modern circus. Yes, this does seem quite a lot: a lot of different forms of expression, a lot of different poetics, in a single show. *Le Passage's* creators, Vladimir, Luna, Pedro and Filip, were inspired, perhaps even obsessed by, death. In our post-show discussion they told us how the show came about. Taking the ancient civilisations as their starting point, they embarked upon a research process, wanting to know how the ancient Egyptians, Phoenicians and Sumerians experienced, understood and interpreted death, as well as how death is seen by our own civilisation today. They talked to people in hospitals, with the terminally ill, and with those who had been revived after being declared clinically dead. They used all these pieces to build their story of death as a constant, ever-present process: in fact, as life.

The performance in Brussels was the premiere of the show, which had been more than two years in the making, and was a sort of stress test to see if the complex story would hold. As the company confessed the next day, the show requires some cleaning up and some cuts, with a view to making it flow more easily and to make it more readable, but the Brussels audience nonetheless gave it a standing ovation.

After Brussels, our visit to Tournai for the La Piste aux Espoirs festival, where we saw three shows, marked a departure from the usual run of business in our residency. It was interesting for a number of reasons. The two-hour drive through the monotonous and grey Belgian countryside towards the French border took us to a completely different festival. The small, beautiful town of Tournai is the perfect backdrop for a festival, and we should not be surprised that one dedicated to the circus arts came into being there and is still thriving.

As we met some of the 47 employees working at the town's cultural centre, we learned how it is possible to successfully run cultural events in a small community – events whose repercussions go far beyond the town itself and are felt year-round. Tournai has 17,000 inhabitants; thanks

smrti kao stalnom kontinuitetu i procesu, zapravo o životu.

Briselska izvedba bila je premijera predstave koja je nastajala više od dvije godine i za same je autore bila svojevrsni test izdržljivosti složene priče. Kako su nam sutradan priznali, u onom dragocjenom dijelu, razgovoru s umjetnicima, predstava zahtjeva određena pročišćenja i rezove. To bi joj trebalo donijeti bolju protočnost i lakšu čitljivost, iako ju je i bez toga briselska publika dočekala s ovacijama.

Odlazak u Tournai, na tri predstave tamošnjeg festivala, bilo je posve drukčije poglavlje naše novinarske rezidencije. I samim tim zanimljivo iz više razloga. Pomalo jednoličan i sivi belgijski pejzaž na dva sata vožnje od Brisela prema francuskoj granici vodio nas je u posve drukčiju festivalsku priču. Mali, prelijepi Tournai već svojom arhitekturom djeluje iznimno scenično, pa stoga ne čudi da se baš tamo razvio i zaživio festival cirkuske umjetnosti.

U susretu s nekima od zaposlenika iz kulturnog centra, ima ih 47, saznali smo kako je moguće kvalitetno organizirati kulturna zbivanja u maloj sredini koja imaju odjeka puno dalje od samog grada, preko cijele godine. Tournai ima 17 000 stanovnika, zahvaljujući ponajprije centru za kulturu i ljudima koji znaju pronaći novac iz različitih regionalnih i europskih fondova, suradnjom s turističkom zajednicom cijelom regijom, ostvaruje se budžet od oko 3,5 milijuna eura. Osim festivala cirkusa, Tournai tako ima i jazz festival te međunarodni sajam knjiga.

A što se festivala cirkusa tiče, bila je to ona priča o cirkusu koja vraća u djetinjstvo, budi nostalgiju i prisjeća na uzbuđenje ulaska u veliki šator. Sve to imala je predstava *L'Homme cirque*, Davida Dimirija, vjerojatno najupečatljivije što smo toga dana vidjeli u Tournaiu. Sam umjetnik cijeli nam je doživljaj svoje predstave upotpunio i vlastitom životnom pričom. Doista je fascinantna, odrastao je u cirkusu, njegov je otac bio klaun, i sam je nastavio živjeti tu priču, no njegov je sin bankar. Dimitri, međutim i dalje živi cirkus, doslovce živi i naziv ove svoje predstave *Čovjek cirkus* – sve čime se koristi, naime sam je projektirao i izradio





Karl Stets – Cuerdo © nn

primarily to the cultural centre and the people who work there – who know how to draw money from various regional and European funds and who work side by side with the tourist association and the regional authorities – the festival has a budget of about 3.5 million Euros. Apart from its circus festival, Tournai also boasts a jazz festival and a book fair.

La Piste aux Espoirs offers the kind of experiences that take you back to your childhood, awakening nostalgia and reminding you of the excitement you felt as you entered a big top for the first time. The show *L'Homme Cirque* by David Dimitri had exactly that feeling: it is probably the most impressive show we saw in Tournai that day. The artist added to our enjoyment of the show by sharing his life story with us. It is quite fascinating: he grew up in a circus (his father was a clown), and Dimitri went on living the same story (even though his own son is a banker). Dimitri still lives for the circus, and he lives the title of his show, *The Circus Man*: he has designed and made all the props and contraptions used in the show, and he, Dimitri, performs the whole thing alone in a white tent. Dimitri carries the equipment around in a big

od šatora , konja, sprava , a i sve što se u bijelom šatoru događa izvodi sam Dimitri. Svu tu opremu Dimitri sami vozi na velikom šleperu putujući po svijetu . Gdje ga pozovu, nađe mjesto za svoj šator i publici bez dobne granice prenosi ono što je i nama donio , jednostavnu priču o životu, samoći, ljepoti , svemu onome zbog čega se vrijedi zavući u bijeli šator.

I druge dvije predstave, *Omnibus* i *Cuerdo*, bile su na tragu ideje –kako ostvariti čaroliju u malome i s malo .

*Omnibus* je još jedna jednostavna i upečatljiva predstava. Strogo zadani omjeri sagrađene kutije zapravo su pozornica predstave i zadani okvir za priču. I tu se razvija egzistencijalističko pitanje – kako sve osmisлити i pokazati u tako malom, zadanom i strogo definiranom prostoru. Duhoviti i akrobatski zahtjevni manevri u kutiji uveseljavali su ponajprije najmlađu publiku kojoj je predstava primarno i namjenjena. I u ovoj predstavi, Jeana Paula Lefeuvre baš kao i u onoj Claudija Stellata priča se događa u kutiji i pitanje prostora i što s njim i s tijelom u njemu, ono je što zaokuplja njihove autore. Prepoznajemo tako u duhovitim

trailer truck as he travels the world. Wherever he is invited, he finds a spot to erect the tent and to share with the audience, regardless of their age, all those things he shared with us: a simple tale of life, solitude and beauty.

The other two shows we saw at the festival, *Ni Omnibus* and *Cuerdo*, were following the same track: looking for ways to create magic in a small space and with only a few elements.

Jean Paul Lefeuve's *Ni Omnibus* is yet another simple and impressive show. The strictly defined space of a small 8m<sup>3</sup> box is the framework for the performance – both its stage and its inspiration, as the show is all about trying to work out how to move and perform in such a small, restrictive space. Humorous and acrobatically demanding manoeuvres in the box made the audience laugh, particularly the small children. In Jean Paul Lefeuve's show, just like in Claudio Stellato's, the story unfolds inside a box, and the piece engages with issues of space – and of the body in space. In Lefeuve's comedic scenes, some of them playing out in video projected into the box, we recognise echoes of Jacques Tati and Buster Keaton, but most of all we see the skill and humour of a former French farmer who came to love the circus. But just as *L'Autre* has its silent other, in *Ni Omnibus* there is another person exerting an influence on the performance: *Ni Omnibus'* director, Didier André, stands outside the box, leaned up against a wall, only moving to throw in the occasional prop.

The show *Cuerdo* was the last we saw in Tournai, and indeed the last show we saw as part of our residency. Karl Stets shows an incredible concentration and focus in this show. Everything the Danish artist does on stage appears to be simple, but it is quite obvious that the perfection of the performance is the result of huge effort and skill. There were many scenes in the show which combined circus, clowning, street art, and audience participation.

Although this show marked the end of our visit to the festival in Tournai, as we exited the theatre we were able to see that at night the streets themselves become the stage.

Lefeuveovim prizorima i Tatija i Bustera Keatona, no ponajprije vještinu i duhovitost ovog bivšeg francuskog farmera koji je zavolio cirkus. I ovdje je opet važan i netko drugi, kao podsjećanje da ne možemo sami. Baš kao što i Lefeuve ne može bez pomoću Didiera Andrea koji je redatelj predstave. Prostor kutije od 4x2 m na neki je način proširen video dijelom koji cijeloj predstavi daje poseban šarm.

Karl Stets u predstavi *Cuerdo*, posljednjoj predstavi koju smo vidjeli u Tournaiu, a i posljednjoj na našoj novinarskoj rezidenciji, pokazao je nevjerojatnu koncentraciju i fokusiranost na jednostavne stvari.

No, sve ono što ovaj danski umjetnik izvodio na pozornici kuće kulture u Tournaiu, samo je naoko bilo jednostavno. Posve je jasno da iza savršene izvedbe stoji ogroman rad i velika vještina. Puno je elemenata njegove predstave, onaj cirkuski, klaunovski, street art, a u sve je to uključivao i publiku.

Iako je ova predstava bila kraj našeg posjeta festivalu u Tournaiu, odmah nakon nje uvjerali smo se da se predstava s pozornice u noćnim satima preselila na ulice.

Na svakom trgu, u svakom svakom baru u gradu kostimirani ljudi, veseli bendovi koji su pokazali koliko im je festival važan, cijelome gradu.

Sjajno zamišljena i jednako tako sjajno i uspješno realizirana briselska novinarska rezidencija sa sesijama čije su teme jedna drugu nadopunjavale, odabir predstava i susreti s umjetnicima, sve mi je to bilo iznimno nadahnjujuće i obogatilo moje spoznaje o cirkusu o kojem nisam znala puno.

Jednako je tako zanimljivo bilo susresti se s ljudima koji stvaraju kulturne projekte, koji ih realiziraju i sve to godinama uspjevaju održati na životu.

Bilo je jednako tako zanimljivo vidjeti kako funkcionira „Les halles“, kako realizira svoje programe, te koliko znači lokalnoj zajednici.

S novinarskog aspekta upravo su razgovori s ljudima iz kulturne proizvodnje iznimno korisni jer

On each and every square, in each and every bar, people wearing costumes and merry bands were there to show how important the festival is to them and to their town.

The Unpack the Arts residency was brilliantly conceived and just as brilliantly and successfully implemented: the topics of the sessions complemented each other, as did the selection of shows and the encounters with the artists. I have been inspired and my knowledge of circus, which was not that great when I came, has been enriched.

It was just as interesting to meet the people who bring cultural projects to life, and who manage to keep them alive for years, and to see how Les Halles (the venue at the centre of the Hors Pistes festival) works – how it realises its programmes and just how much it means to the local community.

From the journalistic point of view, talking to the people who produce culture was particularly useful, because they offered us a glimpse of what goes into the making of a show or a festival – the activity before the actual event – which we would not see if we only went to the evaluate the final product.

What I see as the greatest benefit from my Belgian residency is definitely a newly developed relationship with a form of art I had not known enough about – and a new love for the magical world of circus which I will surely build on.

The knowledge I gained from the debates and exchanges of opinion with my colleagues over the four days have enriched me on several levels. It will assist me in my day-to-day job – not only when I have to cover a circus performance, but whenever I have to deal with any form of performance art.

I believe it would be important to continue running these kinds of residencies as, in just a few days, everyone is able to experience something important and inspiring. All in all, Unpack the Arts was a unique and invaluable opportunity for us to grow and develop as we do our work...

nam pružaj pogled na događanja prije onoga o kojemu pišemo i zbog kojeg odlazimo u neku instituciju i kojeg na neki način ocjenjujemo.

No, ono što mi se čini moj najveći kapital belgijske rezidencije je , sasvim sigurno , novostvoreni odnos prema jednoj do sada nedovoljno poznatoj umjetnosti , ljubav prema čarobnom svijetu cirkusa kojeg ću sasvim sigurno razvijati .

Jednako tako i saznanja i razgovori koja sam tijekom četiri dana vodila i izmjenjivala sa svojim kolegama, obogatilo me na više razina. Pomoći će mi u mom svakodnevnom radu , ne samo kad se budem susrela s nekom cirkuskom predstavom , već u susretu s bilo kojim djelom izvedbenih umjetnosti.

Smatram da je zbog svega ovoga važno organizirati radionice jer se nakon samo nekoliko dana svima dogodi nešto važno i nadahnjujuće. Posebnost ove rezidencije je što je pratila festivale , pa smo odmah imali prilike diskutirati o onome što smo zajedno gledali . Sve u svemu , jedinstvena i neprocjenjiva prilika da u svom poslu stalno profesionalno rastemo i razvijamo se..

# Circus Theatre, Circus Actor

CSÁKI JUDIT

The international project Unpack the Art gives publicity to the circus, specifically the 'new' or 'contemporary' circus – a well-known artistic branch internationally that exists as a revival genre in Hungary. As part of this initiative, cultural journalists and critics are participants in a series of workshops – held in different locations, this time in Brussels – where contemporary circus performances are shown and the artform is discussed.

The writer of these words is a theatre critic who contemplates every public performing act – even a politician's equivocation in the Hungarian Parliament – from a theatrical point of view. This is a relevant approach for circus as it has necessarily has everything that makes theatre: performer and audience.

Les Halles in Brussels (once a market hall, now, in the name of fashionable trend 'new simplicity', renovated as a cultural centre) is much like a cultural centre in Budapest, the Trafó: it has no resident theatre company, working instead as a centre that welcomes different theatre and other artistic companies from Belgium and from across the borders. It also organises festivals and workshops (such as Unpack the Arts) in spaces that can be changed on demand to satisfy all technical and artistic needs.

## Narratives

The writer of these words has no doubt that the circus and the contemporary circus are theatrical genres, even if they must be measured by aspects other than the textual one; after all, they have what theatre needs: an audience.

For a theatre critic it is somewhat unusual that a production working with the tools of circus can be 'about' something, apart from the tricks themselves. Being 'about' something is really

# Cirkuszház, cirkuszház

CSÁKI JUDIT

Az Unpack the Arts nevű nemzetközi projekt a cirkuszt, konkrétan az „újcirkusnak” nevezett, szerte a világon közismert, Magyarországon pedig mostanában éledező régi-új művészeti ágat népszerűsíti. Kulturális újságírók és kritikusok a résztvevői annak a hol itt, hol ott – ezúttal éppen Brüsszelben – megrendezett workshopnak, amelynek keretében újcirkuszi előadásokat látnak, és az újcirkusról beszélgetnek.

E sorok írója színikritikus, így minden nyilvános előadóművészeti produktumot – például egy, a magyar parlamentben előadott politikusi mellébeszélést is – a színház felől szemlél. Ez adott esetben releváns megközelítési mód, hiszen adott minden, ami a színházat teszi: az előadó és a közönség.

A brüsszeli Les Halles – egy egykori piacból a mostanában trendinek számító „új egyszerűség” jegyében átalakított kulturális centrum – leginkább a budapesti Trafóhoz hasonlít: társulata nincsen, elsősorban befogadóként működik hazai és külföldi produkciók terepén, fesztiválokat rendez, workshopoknak (mint például az Unpack...) ad helyet; tetszés és igény szerint variálható terei minden műszaki-művészi igényt kielégítenek.

## Narratívák

Hogy a cirkusz és az újcirkus színház, ahhoz tehát e sorok írója szerint nemigen fér kétség, noha a hermeneutikai aspektuson kívül – vagyis hogy van neki közönsége – számos más szempontból is mérlegre lehet tenni a műfajt.

Színikritikusnak legalábbis szokatlan, hogy egy cirkuszi eszköztárral működő produkció „szóljon” valamiről, mármint a mutatóvonalon kívül. A valamiről szólás ugyanis valóban a színház terepe – nota bene, nemcsak a verbális, prózai színházé, hanem az úgynevezett fizikai színházé is, ami

what theatre is all about – not only in verbal, literal theatre but in the so-called physical theatre as well, which can be dance, performance or anything else. It is true that the repertoire of productions structured around thoughts and interpretations is growing wider and wider. Sometimes a production can even have some circus elements, yet circus itself historically never communicated more to its audience than the tricks themselves.

Nevertheless, it is worth examining whether these contemporary circus productions have anything to say. (Contemporary circus itself has several eras and sub-genres as well; however I would not like to bore the reader with this newly acquired knowledge of mine.) The question is not only whether these productions have a storyline in the traditional, theatrical way (sometimes yes, sometimes no), but whether these productions connect to any theatrical narratives. Will the tricks and the performance portray an overall picture, of which we can say ‘this is the meaning of the production’? And regardless of whether this is the case or not, another question comes up: does the whole picture (or the lack of it) correlate with the quality of the production?

One of the performances we saw, *L’Autre* (which I will talk about it in detail below), had this ‘message’: behind the only visible circus artist we could sense somebody else continuously and the two of them told a lot, on the one hand, about solitude and, on the other hand, about their invisible, yet essential teamwork. All the tricks and the scenography (with carefully composed lighting) described this ambivalent, realistic relationship with ease and supercilious confidence, yet not at all didactically.

On the other hand, didacticism was more than enough in the production *Le Passage*. This was about the thin line – the corridor – that leads from life to death. On the stage, between harsh lighting and huge cubes, there is a tight passage. Through projected film sequences we see the obligatory life-reminiscences, and are shown the images that can be found in all clichéd photo collections – from childhood pictures to relationship snaps and so on. Meanwhile some tricks appear in the

lehet tánc, performansz, bármi. Igaz ugyan, hogy a gondolat és interpretáció köré szerveződő produkciók eszköztára egyre tágul, esetenként olyannyira, hogy cirkuszi elemek is részét képezik, de mindezidáig a cirkusz maga nem „üzent” közönségének többet, mint a mutatványt magát.

Mindazonáltal érdemes megvizsgálni, vajon szólnak-e valamiről az újcirkusz produkciói. (Az újcirkusznak magának is több korszaka és alfaja létezik; ezzel a frissen szerzett tudással azonban most nem untatnám az olvasót.) Nem csak az a kérdés, van-e a szó hagyományos, színházi értelmében vett történet (olykor van, máskor nincs), hanem hogy bekapcsolódik-e az adott produkció valamilyen színházi narratívába. Az egyes mutatványokból vagy azokon kívül megszületik-e egy olyan összkép, amelyre azt mondhatjuk: erről szól az előadás. És akár van ilyesmi, akár nincsen, újabb kérdés, hogy vajon korrelál-e az összkép (avagy annak hiánya) az előadás minőségével.

A látott előadások közül a *L’autre* című produkciónak – melyről részletesebben alább szólok – volt, vagyis lett ilyen „üzenete”: az egyetlen látható cirkuszművész mögött mindvégig érzékelhetően ott volt egy másik, és így együtt sokat mondtak egyrészt a magányról, másrészt a láthatatlan, egyszersmind nélkülözhetetlen összjátékról. Mind a mutatványok, mind a scenika (a gondosan komponált világítással együtt) ezt az ambivalens, relativisztikus viszonyt taglalták; ráadásul könnyedén, mintegy fölényes magabiztossággal, csöppet sem didaktikusan.

Éppen didakszisból volt elviselhetetlenül sok a *Le Passage* című előadásban, amely arról a keskeny sávról, folyosóról szólt, amely az életből a halálba vezet. Infúzió, éles fények, nagy kubusok közti kis szoros a színpadon, és a vetített képsorokon az obligát élet-émlékeket látjuk leperegni, ahogyan azt minden közhelygyűjtemény tartalmazza, a gyerekkori emlékektől kezdve a szerelmekig és tovább. Közben mintegy mellékesen került a produkcióba néhány zsonglórmutatvány és néhány trükk; a két művész leginkább a lételméleti-ontológiai mondanivalóra koncentrált. Halálosan unalmas volt.

production randomly; the two artists rather concentrate on the ontological message. Deadly boring.

We also had the chance to see three performances at the La Piste aux Espoirs festival in Tournai. Three different types of 'contemporary circus', of which some rather reminded us of the old one.

The artist in the production *Ni Omnibus*, Jean-Paul Lefevre, might not have thought that his performance tells the story of the ageing artist. And yet who once performed his tricks in the luminous circus ring, now performs in a tiny box, in the back of a minibus, and, well-suited to this situation, he takes the status of a clown. There is as well an anachronistic formality that he emphasises with old-fashioned projected film, or rather with film combined with real scenes (on the screen he is detaching a ladder from a minibus, and in the next second he actually appears with a ladder in his hand). He is a sad clown but he is a clown: he makes the children in the audience laugh. Only the grown-ups think about what artistic past and experience made Jean-Paul Lefevre and his only partner Didier André – who in this production takes the role of an assistant and technician, but who is also a circus artist – choose to strike out alone.

The production *L'Homme Cirque* takes place in a 'real' circus tent that is small yet still more than enough for David Dimitri, as his is a one man show. It is a real 'vintage' piece: it has everything that the circuses had in our childhood, in a reduced or modified form. The theatrical effects are present in the changes: the tightwire is lower (but one can still fall down badly); the costume is shiny, but not as much; the music is familiar, but comes recorded from a music player; and the acrobat is a clown as well, performing giving a sugar cube to the pommel horse on which he 'conjures' a head, ears and tail. David Dimitri's circus tells stories about the circus of old times.

The performance *Cuerdo* reminded me of a group of young people whom I saw in one of Budapest's underpasses dancing with amazing dexterity to loud techno music, as it was like seeing a street

A Tournai-ban megrendezett biennálé három előadását kaptuk el; három különböző „újcirkuszt”, melyek közül egyik-másik igencsak hasonlított a régire.

Az Omnibus című egyszemélyes előadás szereplője aligha gondolta, hogy produkciója az öregedő művésztől mesél. Aki a valahai fényes manézs helyett egy parányi dobozban, egy kisbusz hátuljában adja elő mutatványait, és a helyzethez, helyszínhez igencsak illő módon a bohóc státuszát foglalja el. Az anakronisztikus külsőségek, amelyeket ráadásul vetítésekkel, illetve a vetített képsorok és a valódi jelenlét összekombinálásával hangsúlyoz (a vásznon éppen egy létrát szerel le a kisbusz hátuljáról, majd egy pillanat múlva valóságosan megjelenik a létrával a kezében). Szomorú bohóc, de azért bohóc: nevetésre ingerli a gyerekközönséget. Csak a felnőttek gondolkodnak el azon, hogy vajon milyen művészi előélet és tapasztalat sarkallta Jean-Paul Lefevre-t arra, hogy egyetlen társsal, az ebben a produkcióban asszisztensként és technikusként működő, de amúgy szintén cirkuszművész partnerével együtt a saját lábára álljon.

A L'Homme Cirque című előadás „igazi”, noha méretét tekintve kicsi cirkuszi sátorban játszódik, ami azért éppen elég David Dimitrinek, hiszen ez is egyszemélyes produkció. És valódi „retro”: méretarányosan kicsinyítve vagy változtatva minden van itt, ami gyerekkorunk cirkuszában megvolt. A színházi hatás persze éppen ezekben a változtatásokban van: hogy alacsonyabban van a kötél (de azért innen is nagyot lehet esni), hogy fényes a ruha, de nem annyira, hogy ismerős a zene, de persze gépről szól, hogy az artista egyben bohóc is, és eljátssza, hogy cukrot ad a tornatermi lónak, melyre egyébként fejet és fület és farkat is „varázsolt”. David Dimitri cirkusza a régi cirkuszról mesél.

A Cuerdo című előadás láttán az egyik budapesti aluljáróban boszorkányos ügyességgel hangos gépzenére táncoló ifjak jutottak eszembe, mert mintha utcacirkuszt láttam volna. Voltaképp Karl Stets is beszélt a magányról, csak az ő előadásában egy csöppnyi melankólia vagy

circus. Actually, Karl Stets was talking about solitude as well, but there was no melancholy or sorrow in his performance. A closed world with its own harmony, that is what we see, while the paradoxical surface suggests the appearance of the artist maintaining a connection with the audience, pretending to care about them as well as himself. But I wasn't fooled: this young man happily reached higher and higher, to impossible heights, with incredible tricks executed in his own universe.

So the performances 'talked'. Not only about the world in general but mostly through themselves about this extraordinary world, the circus. About danger becoming everyday practice, about the boundaries of artistic life (in terms of lifespan and ability), about taking risks and the quest for perfection.

### The Circus-Actor

I have never thought of a circus artist as an actor before – maybe because of my childhood circus experiences, or maybe because the predominantly verbal characteristics of acting prevented me from making the connection. Though I think it is evident that a circus artist will use a variety of theatrical meta-language tools to achieve the proper effect, I think the dominant element is still more important: the trick itself.

The trick is something that is extraordinary in the realm of physical abilities; the audience will gasp (or burst out in applause) when the artist walks along the rope or does a somersault on it, or juggles with seven balls. By comparison it is beside the point whether he is smiling or not (he is), or his costume shines or not (it does not).

The performance *L'Autre* (The Other) strongly, let's say evidently, puts the theatrical aspect of circus art in the limelight: we can only see one person on stage, and the 'talking' is done through body language with the help of two objects, a small box and a wardrobe. Up to this point we could think of it as 'ordinary' movement theatre (and Claudio is a dancer, we could see that). However, we have to be amazed by the movements, the physical tricks his body performs. The poses, the postures, the moves sometimes

szomorúság sem volt. Egy zárt világ a maga teljes harmóniájában: ez tárult föl előttünk, azzal a bizonyos paradox felszínnel, amely azt a látszatot keltette, hogy a művész, hiszen ad magára és a közönségére, kapcsolatot is tart az őt bámulókkal. De nem dőltem be: ez a fiatalember a maga univerzumában boldogan hágott egyre képtelenebb magaslatokra, hihetetlen mutatójaival.

Szóval az előadások „beszéltek”. Nemcsak a világról, úgy általában, hanem leginkább önmagukon át erről a különös világról, a cirkuszról. A veszély hétköznapivá válásáról, a művészlét időbeli és képességbeli hatáiról, a kockázatról és a tökéletesség vágyáról.

### A cirkusz-színész

Még soha nem gondoltam a cirkuszművészre színészként – talán a gyerekkori cirkusz-élmények, talán a színészet túlnyomórészt verbális karaktere akadályoztak ebben. És noha evidensnek gondolom, hogy a cirkuszművészek a hatás elérése érdekében megannyi színészi metanyelvi eszközt is használnak, mégis fontosabbnak gondolom a domináns elemet: a mutatóját magát.

A mutatója ugyanis valami olyasmi, ami a fizikai képességek terén rendkívüli; a közönség lélegzete akkor akad el (vagy épp akkor tör ki a viharos taps), amikor az artista végigsétál a kötélén, esetleg szaltót is produkál rajta, vagy hét labdával zsonglőröködik. Ehhez képest mellékesnek tűnik, hogy közben mosolyog-e (mosolyog), vagy csillog-e a dressz, ami rajta van (nem csillog).

A *L'autre* (A másik) című előadás erősen – mondhatni, evidensen – fölvetette a cirkuszművész színészi aspektusát: egyetlen embert látunk a színpadon, amint két tárgy – egy kisebb doboz és egy szekrény – segítségével testnyelven „beszél”. Eddig vélhetnénk „sima” mozgásszínháznak, amit csinál (ráadásul táncos, ezt látni is), bár muszáj elcsodálkoznunk azon, milyen mozdulatokra, fizikai trükkökre képes a teste. A tartások, a pozitúrák, a mozdulatsorok hol félelmet, hol csodálkozást, hol kíváncsiságot fejeznek ki. A hatás attól teljes, hogy nemcsak a férfi, de a tárgyak is mozognak; billen a szekrény,



*Claudio Stellato – L'Autre © Martin Firket*

express fear, sometimes astonishment and sometimes curiosity. The expression comes not only from the man but from the movement of the objects as well: the wardrobe tilts, the door opens and closes, the box raises itself. These discrete movements join together to make the performance yet they represent melancholy rather than harmony.

You don't need long to realise that Claudio Stellato is not alone. Not in the metaphysical way, but actually: there must be somebody else, who invisibly but not unnoticeably helps with the tricks. Light only reveals the whole stage once – somewhere in the middle of the performance, by which time our suspicion has grown into certainty – to show the audience what we no longer believe: that the artist is all by himself. The other ('The Other') appears here and there and 'has a say' in the performance invisibly; he either emphasises the solitude of the artist or makes it relative, while solitude becomes more and more the central theme of the performance in this paradoxical way.

When Stellato slips into the box (and moves with

nyílik-csukódik az ajtó, emelkedik a doboz. A magányos mozgások egymásba kapcsolódnak, de inkább valami melankóliát, semmint harmóniát sugároznak.

Nem kell sok idő ahhoz, hogy rájövünk: Claudio Stellato nincs egyedül. Nem a szó metafizikai értelmében, hanem konkrétan: kell lennie „egy másiknak”, aki láthatatlanul, de nem észrevétlenül segít a mutatványokban. Egyetlenegyszer – valamikor az előadás közepén, amikor gyanúnk már bizonyossággá erősödik – vetül éles fény a színpad, illetve a játéktér egészére, hogy lássuk, amit persze ekkor már nem hiszünk el: a művész mégiscsak egyedül van. A másik – „a másik” – hol itt, hol ott bukkan fel és „szól bele” láthatatlanul az előadásba; ezzel hol hangsúlyozza, hol relativizálja a művész magányát, amely egyébként mindinkább az előadás központi témájává emelkedik, méghozzá ezen a paradox módon.

Amikor Stellato belebújik a dobozba (és ráadásul helyet is változtat vele), mintegy magától megdől a szekrény, megáll az élen a levegőben, ellene mondván a fizikának. Amikor a látható artista a szekrényben van, a doboz „megy arrébb”, vagyis



it), the wardrobe starts to tilt as though it will fall – yet it stays on its edge, contradicting the laws of physics. When the visible artist is in the wardrobe, the box ‘moves’, indicating indirectly the presence of ‘the other’.

In the last scene Stellato walks down the red carpet that rucks and smooths itself (a ‘simple magic trick’, say the more versed in circus arts), steps up on the box, laughs at the audience, then slowly marches into the air, away into the black void. Giga solitude.

At the curtain call, two (deliberate) lookalikes, Claudio Stellato and Martin Firket, take a bow. They started to work on this performance five years ago, since invisibility needs enormous practice. Every performance requires thorough preparation – a strictly manual setting of the stage.

The production *Le Passage* talks about solitude in a different way that targets philosophical or even ontological heights. For this it uses the language of the circus. The passage is a small path that leads from life to death (or at least this is how everybody imagines it). Depending on your beliefs, this journey into the light is either accompanied or not. In this production it is – therefore we see a performance by two people.

We see parallel solos, unfortunately, with rather didactic turns. In the opening scene the protagonist walks along the ‘life line’ on the stage – highlighting to the audience the essence of the performance. Then he stops in the middle of the path; fluid from a hospital drip is dripping onto his arm, while behind him there are prisms and mirrors, and the back curtain as a screen. Hospital, death, smoke, and not much light; then next to the protagonist the helper appears, who is maybe death himself – at least that is what his black costume and his ‘evil’ hair (standing up, of course) suggests. His movements are gentle though, while the other, with fake despair on his face, throws balls: he tries to throw them away but they always come back, and more and more balls appear. This must be the master act of the production, and yes, he juggles with seven balls, a fantastic juggler. The audience has hardly finished

közvetve jelzi „a másik” jelenlétét. Stellato mimikával is reagál a látszólagos képtelenségre, vagyis irányítja a mi befogadói reakcióinkat: higgyünk csak a szemünknek.

Az utolsó jelenetben Stellato elegánsan lép néhányat az egyébként magától is gördülőgyűrődő- kisimuló piros szőnyegen („egyszerű bűvésztükk”, magyarázzák nekem a cirkuszművészetben jártasabbak), föllép a doboz tetejére, ránk nevet, majd kecsesen, lassan vonul lépked a levegőben, el, a fekete semmibe. Giga-magány.

Aztán ketten hajolnak meg, két, egymásra rendkívül – és szándékosan – hasonlító férfi, Claudio Stellato mellett Martin Firket. Öt éve kezdtek el dolgozni ezen az előadáson; hiába, az észrevétlenséghez rengeteg gyakorlás kell, és minden egyes előadáshoz alapos előkészület, saját kezűleg, szigorúan.

Másképpen szól a magányról a *Le Passage* című előadás, amely egyenesen filozófiai, sőt, ontológiai magaslatokat céloz meg, melyhez eszközül választja a cirkusz formanyelvét. A „passzázs”, amiről szó van, az a keskeny folyosó (legalábbis mindenki ilyenformán képzelettel), amely átvezet az életből a halálba. Vagy van kísérő ezen az úton, vagy nincs: ebben az előadásban van – tehát két ember produkcióját látjuk.

Párhuzamos szólókat, sajnos, meglehetősen didaktikus fordulatokkal. A kezdőjelenetben a főhős lassan végigsétál a rivalda vonalában lefektetett „fényvonalon” – megüzenve nekünk az előadás lényegét. Aztán megáll középen, karjába infúzió csöpög, mögötte hasábok és tükrök, valamint a háttérfüggöny mint vetítővászon. Kórház, halál, füst, derengő fény – a főhős mellett megjelenik a segítő, aki tán maga a halál, legalábbis ezt sugallja fekete öltözéke és „gonoszra” fésült frizurája (égnek álló haj, persze). Pedig a mozdulatai szelídek, miközben a másik mű-kétségbeeséssel labdákat dobál; próbálná eldobni, de mindig visszakapja, egyre többet és többet – sejtjük, ez itt a csúcsmutatvány, és valóban: hét labdát dobál, remek zsonglőr. De mire kitapsoljuk magunkat, már aláhullik a



Jean-Paul Lefeuvre – *Ni Omnibus* © Laurence Guillot

their applause when a huge book falls from above and on its pages the life of the protagonist appears. That's what we see projected as well. More and more white sheets of paper fall from above, some of them well constructed paper airplanes that fly back into the illusionist's hand like a boomerang.

After Death lights a candle on the protagonist's head he leads his victim to the bright light: a dissection table, illuminated from underneath, filled with shallow water that the 'departed' lies in. The slow washing of the body is a peg on which to hang an act: huge soap bubbles float in the air, some of them appearing like caul, and it's no surprise when at the end of the show the 'deceased' is rolled on stage, reborn, curled in a fetal position.

In La Piste aux Espoirs the fifty-something, lean artist of the above mentioned *Ni Omnibus* performs his tricks in the back of a minibus, in a concentrated space. There is a pole and a slackrope (so low it is almost touching the floor), a ladder, and some boxes which he moves around himself skilfully. He plays an awkward clown, the

magasból egy óriási könyv, melynek lapjain természetesen a főhős élete tárul föl, ezt látjuk vetítve mi is; majd egyre több fehér papírlap hullik alá, köztük ügyesen hajtogatott papírrepülő, amelyek bumeráng-módra visszazáznak a bűvész kezébe...

Miután a „Halál” gyertyát gyújt a fején, és bekíséri áldozatát a nagy fényességbe, egy alulról megvilágított „boncaszta” gurul be, amelyen sekély vízben fekszik az „elhuny”. A komótos lemosdatás szappanbuborék-mutatvány ürügye: óriás buborékok szállnak a levegőben, némelyik olyan, akár egy burok, ezért nem is csodálkozunk, amikor az előadás végén a „halott” egy óriási „magzati” burokban gördül be a színre.

A Tournai-ben rendezett cirkuszi biennálén a fentebb említett „Omnibus” artistája ötvenes, szikár férfi, aki a kisbusz hátuljában mintegy sűrített térben adja elő mutatványait. Van rúd, van köté (szinte a padlón), van létra, és vannak dobozok, amelyeket boszorkányos ügyességgel variál maga körül. Esetlen bohócot játszik, az örök szerencsétlent, noha minden mutatvány pompásan sikerül. Legfőbb hatáseleme a

eternal unfortunate though all of his tricks are splendidly performed. His greatest impact, apart from his sad wondering, is the bizarre proportion of body and space: big and small. In the 8m<sup>3</sup> and rather low space it is even hard to stand upright. Whenever he fails to perform a trick he stands in front of the audience, in boxer shorts, with an expression of pensive wonderment. By comparison his freshness, energy and serenity at the discussion after the show is surprising, as he talks about the repertoire he and his partner have created through the years (since 2001), the company's frequent performances, and his decision to leave a thriving new circus company for this two-man circus.

David Dimitri – who once studied in Budapest's acrobatic training school and still remembers some Hungarian phrases – is an excellent representative of the travelling circus. His custom-made tent, alongside the environment and atmosphere of the show, exactly resembles the world of travelling circuses that is so well-known in Hungary: circus ring, round auditorium, just as it should be. The middle aged acrobat recalls or executes superbly the usual tricks performed in this environment – even if it's a sandbag that lands at the other end of the teeterboard, and not another person, so that he can perform a somersault. Dimitri replaces teamwork with ingenuity. He also plays the essential clown and inserts linking scenes between the tricks. He animates the (young) audience happily and ceaselessly. He keeps continuous connection with them – entertains us and makes us forget the cold winter outside. We had a debate whether the two 'unsuccessful' attempts at a trick on the tightwire were on purpose, or was the third attempt successful because of the audience's increasing applause and encouragement?

And yet, there is something indirectly melancholy in the air: the feeling of the last night. Dimitri has been touring the world with this production for six or seven years now. Initially it was not a big success, but later the business took off and this vintage production is a must in many circus festivals. But, as he explains, he lives a lonely life, far away from his family, and after his daily exercises he hardly has time to think of a new

szomorú csodálkozáson kívül a test és a tér bizarr aránya: nagy és kicsi. A nyolc négyzetméternyi és igen alacsony térben szinte fölegyenesedni is alig tud, és miközben egy szál alsónadrágban kötelező jelleggel abszolválja a „sikertelen” mutatványokat is, maga a méla csodálkozás áll előttünk. Ehhez képest meglepő az előadás utáni beszélgetésen mutatott frissesség, energia és derű, amellyel beszámol a társával együtt hosszú évek során (2001 óta) kialakított repertoárról, a sűrű szereplésről, és arról, hogy saját döntése volt ez a kétfős cirkusz, egy jól menő, mondhatni üzleti újcirkuszt hagyott oda érte.

David Dimitri – aki annak idején a budapesti artistaiskolában tanult, és őriz a magyar nyelvből néhány fordulatot – a vándorcirkusz kiváló képviselője. Saját készítettésű sátrában a környezet és a hangulat pontosan idézi a Magyarországon is jól ismert vándortársulatok világát: manézs, körkörös nézőtér, ahogy kell. A középkorú artista híven földidézi, vagyis parádésan végrehajtja az ebben a környezetben szokásos mutatványokat, noha a billenő „mérleghinta” másik felére egy másik artista helyett súlyos zsák zuhan, hogy végre tudja hajtani a szaltót; Dimitri a csoportmunkát pótolja találékonyssággal. Eljätssza persze a nélkülözhetetlen bohócot is, összekötő számokat illeszt a mutatványok közé. Jókedvűen és fáradhatatlanul animálja a (gyerek) közönséget, szüntelen kapcsolatot tart vele – szórakoztat, feledteti a csípős telet odakint. Elvitatkozunk: vajon szándékos-e a kötélmutatvány kétszeri „kudarca”, vagy csak a nagyobb tapsvihár érdekében sikerül harmadszorra megpördülni a levegőben...

És mégis, van valami közvetett melankólia a levegőben: az utolsó este „feelingje”. Dimitri hat-hét éve járja a világot a sátrával és ezzel a produkcióval – eleinte alig is vették, aztán hirtelen beindult az üzlet, és a különböző újcirkuszi fesztiválok kihagyhatatlan vendége ez a retró. De, mint mondja, magányosan, a családtól távol éli az életét, és a napi gyakorlásán kívül új előadásra már nemigen gondol. Ezt fogja csinálni, amíg bírja és tudja – és amíg van közönsége. Színészi fegyelmezettséggel, „on suite” nyomja a produkcióját, melyen – nyilván a mutatványok végrehajtásához szükséges fizikai és szellemi

production. He is going to perform this show as long as he can and as long as he has an audience. He performs his shows with the actor's discipline, and the audience cannot feel any apathy, probably because of the physical and mental concentration that is needed to perform these tricks. And when at the end of the production he leaves the circus ring at the top of the tent, and walks a wire sloping up into the air, pursued by a gentle Nino Rota song and the admiration of the leaving audience, it seems like he is heading to nowhere. (Though there is a pylon at the end of the line, from which he easily and quickly climbs down...)

Karl Stets drags his huge luggage onto the stage: that is his 'tent'. From the bag he draws mousetraps that he arms and places in a line on the floor before walking among them carefully yet energetically. Then he stretches a rope on stage and hangs some bells on it – and his astounding tricks are even more atmospheric with the sound of the bells...

Yet, this is not the most important thing. Rather it is the inner power that comes from the remoteness of his personality; maybe he developed this personality while he was a street performer, and had to learn to concentrate on the task in every environment, or maybe he was born this way. All in all – though he walks with a smile on his face among the audience to fulfil the requirements of interaction – we are spectators of a monodrama. Even horror elements appear: he wraps a wire around his head to make his face look distorted, or he swallows a fish that looks alive then takes it out of his stomach; whatever happens the disciplined actor-acrobat serves the appropriate effects.

I am fascinated by this consciousness that, of course, curbs, or restrains, the extraordinary talent. It's not only the dramaturgic partitioning of the show but also the acting of the actor-acrobat which communicates: "this is what I brought; see it; now I leave".

### Humour

Only the performance *Le Passage*, which was about death and the fear of death, made no use of humour. It seems that the humour of the

koncentráció okán – nem érződik a fásultság. És amikor az előadás végén a sátor tetején távozik a manézból, majd a kitóduló közönség bámulatától kísérvé finom Nino Rota zenére végigsétál a szabadban egy magasan kifeszített kötélén egy hosszú rúddal egyensúlyozva – mintha a semmibe tartana. Pedig ott a végén a villanyoszlop, amelyen aztán megkönnyebbülten és fürgén lemászik...

Karl Stets bevonszolja a színpadra hatalmas táskáját: neki ez a „sátro”. Ebből kerülnek elő az egércsapdák, amelyeket kibiztosítva egymás mellé tesz, és óvatosan, egyszersmind lendületesen lépked köztük. Aztán kötelet feszít a színpadra, harangocskákat aggat rá – az amúgy elképesztő mutatványait hangulatos harangszó kíséri...

De nem ez a lényeg. Hanem az a belső erő, amely a személyiség zártságából fakad; tán az utcaművészként indult artista fejlesztette ki magában, hogy bármilyen környezetben a feladatra tudjon koncentrálni, tán eleve ilyen volt. Minden esetre – sétáljon bármilyen kedves mosollyal a közönség körében, ilyenformán abszolválva a műfaj interaktív parancsát – monodramát látunk. Horror-elemek is beleférnek: a fején spárgát teker körül, eltorzítva az arcát, avagy élőnek játszatott halat nyel le, majd húzza ki a gyomrából; bármi is történik, a fegyelmezett színész-artista porciózza a megfelelő hatáselemeket.

Engem lenyűgöz ez a tudatosság, amely természetesen a rendkívüli tehetséget zabolázza, tartja kordában. Nemcsak a produkció dramaturgiai tagolása, hanem a színész-artista játéka is arról beszél: „ezt hoztam, nézzétek, aztán elmegyek”.

### Humor

Talán csak a halálról, halálfélelemről szóló *Le Passage* című előadás nem operált a humorral. Amúgy úgy tűnik, az újcirkusz humora – akárcsak a régié – a mutatványok keltette feszültség oldására, színezésére szolgál. A humor a közönségkapcsolat záloga, a humor önvédelem, a humor menekülési út.

contemporary circus, just like the old one, operates to dissolve and colour the tension caused by the tricks. Humour is the pledge of the connection with the audience; humour is self-defence, a way out.

Nevertheless, this kind of humour sometimes makes us laugh as if there was no laughter in laughing at all. There is a relief, a sigh – but not laughter. Humour is one of the most important and special tools of the contemporary circus and maybe the circus itself. It works differently from theatre.

### **Theatre**

The new circus is heading towards the theatre – not just because of world famous companies that have been touring for years. And when it arrives, theatre will notice it and will absorb some of its elements. It's a win-win.

Mindazonáltal ez a humor sokszor nevetet úgy, hogy a nevetésben éppen nevetés nincsen. Van megkönnyebbülés, fellélegzés – de nem kacagás. A humor az újcirkusz – tán a cirkusz mint olyan – egyik fontos, és nagyon különleges eszköze. Másként működik, mint a színházban.

### **Színház**

Az újcirkusz – és nemcsak az évek óta turnézó, világhírű együttesei révén – a színház felé tart. És amikor odaér, a színház fölfigyel majd rá, és magába szívja egyes elemeit. Win-win.

# Embodiment in a Circus Performance

MERJA KOSKINIEMI

*Despite the abundance of props – ropes, balls, boxes, poles, teeterboards, trapezes and tightrope – and the mise-en-scene, the circus artist's most important instrument is their body. The circus artist trains their muscles and nervous system with the same intensity as a dancer, repeating the same movements thousands of times to meet the challenges set by the performance. How do I (as a dancer) view the way in which circus artists use their bodies compared to the way dancers do?*

An evening at Tournai's La Piste aux Espoirs circus festival gave me the chance to see three solo works one after another. These three pieces had interestingly different approaches to the use of the body and movement. Each offered the spectator a virtuoso display of mastery over one's body and the different ways in which one can make the best of one's skills and strengths. Watching them, I was comparing their use of the body to dance artists, looking for both traditional and modern elements.

In traditional dance training one practices mostly the same movements and movement series, and many of these movements are performed to the spectators without alteration. The link between training and performing is straightforward and clear. For instance, the dancer learns to make a specific jump or pirouette in a perfect manner and then dances in a choreography, in front of an audience, that includes that movement.

Contemporary dance does not necessarily overlook traditional dance training (many contemporary dance groups start their morning with a ballet lesson), but the choreographic process takes the dancer away from the comfort zone created in such training. This process means

# Kehollisuus osana sirkusesitystä

MERJA KOSKINIEMI

*Mitä moninaisimmista välineistä - köysistä, palloista, laatikoista, tolpista, vipulautoista, trapetseista, nuorista - ja näyttämökuvista huolimatta sirkustaitelijan tärkein työväline on hänen oma kehonsa. Samalla intensiteetillä kuin tanssija, sirkustaitelija treenaa lihaksistoaan ja hermostoaan tuhansien toistojen kautta vastaamaan esityksen haasteisiin. Miten sirkustaitelijan kehonkäyttö vertautuu minulle tanssijan työhön?*

Ilta Tournain *La Piste aux Espoirs* sirkusfestivaalilla (27.2. - 4.3.2013) tarjosi nopeassa tempossa kolme sooloteosta, joista löytyi kiinnostavan erilaisia lähestymistapoja kehonkäyttöön ja liikkeeseen. Jean-Paul Lefevre (*Omnibus*), David Dimitri (*L'Homme cirque*) ja Karl Stets (*Cuerdo*) antoivat kukin taidonnäytteen omasta kehonhallinnastaan ja erilaisista kyvyistään hyödyntää omaa osaamistaan ja vahvuuksiaan. Itselleni heidän kehonkäyttönsä vertautui akselilla perinteinen - uudenaikainen suhteessa tanssitaiteilijan kehonkäyttöön.

Perinteiseen tanssitreenaukseen tukeutuvissa muodoissa tanssija treenaa pitkälti tiettyjä liikkeitä ja liikesarjoja. Näistä monet liikemuodot päätyvät sellaisenaan yleisölle esitettäviin koreografioihin. Treenauksen suhde esitykseen on suoraviivainen ja selkeästi nähtävissä. Harjoitellaan esimerkiksi tietynlaista hyppyä tai piruettia, pyritään siinä virheettömään huippusuoritukseen ja esitetään taito yleisölle osana koreografista kokonaisuutta.

Nykytanssi ei välttämättä väheksy perinteistä tanssitreenausta (monilla nykytanssiryhmillä aamun treenitunti on edelleen balettitunti), mutta koreografinen prosessi saattaa johdattaa tanssijan kauaksi treenitunnin mukavuusalueelta.

seeking, finding and polishing new forms of movement. The training teaches the body to receive, create and remember a new kind of movement and its dynamics.

The biggest difference between a circus and dance performance is to do with the use of equipment and props. A dance performance may use props (most often is used a chair), but the starting point for the training is the human body. In circus, however, mastery of one's body is closely linked to mastery of the equipment, and its use can follow the circus tradition or strive for new inventions.

### A big man in a small space

Jean-Paul Lefevre's *Ni Omnibus* puts a man with long limbs inside a limited space. When there are only a few centimetres above one's head, and one's hands can almost touch both walls at the same time, movement becomes restricted. Lefevre, however, doesn't mind. He has performed in different-sized arenas all his life and explains that his stages have become gradually smaller and he loves it.

Lefevre has not made his movements smaller. He performs the movement series just as fully and extends just as far from the centre point of his body as he would in a bigger space. Typically for circus, the piece is comprised of scenes that either build on the use of equipment (bags, boxes, a brush, a rope) or use the body alone (acrobatics, bodily communication with the audience). The small space has not pushed Lefevre towards studying and transforming his movement language. The space that surrounds him tightly gives new possibilities as the walls support his movements, but apart from that the movement material, which builds on flexibility and acrobatic prowess, is familiar from other performances.

*Ni Omnibus* does not offer surprises with regards to the use of the body or movement. What makes the piece interesting and humorous is the way in which something large is fitted into a limited space. Lefevre is like a dancer who sticks to the technique he knows but offers the audience something new through his choice of venue. The

Koreografinen prosessi on liikkeen ja sen uudenlaisen muodon etsimistä, löytämistä ja hiomista. Treenaus valmentaa kehoa vastaanottamaan, muodostamaan ja muistamaan erilaista liikettä ja siihen liittyvää dynamiikkaa.

Sirkus- ja tanssiesityksen suurin ero on välineiden ja rekvisiitan käytössä. Tanssiesityksessä saatetaan käyttää rekvisiittaa (tanssissa käytetyin väline on tuoli), mutta treenauksen lähtökohta on aina pelkkä keho. Sirkuksessa kehonhallinta taas liittyy oleellisesti taiteilijan valitsemiin välineisiin ja niiden hallintaan. Välineiden käyttö voi kuitenkin noudattaa sirkusperinnettä tai etsiä uusia sovellutuksia.

### Iso mies ja pieni tila

Jean-Paul Lefevren *Omnibus* asettaa pitkäraajaisen miehen pieneen tilaan. Kun pään yläpuolelle jää enää muutama senttimetri ja käsillä koskettaa samaan aikaan lähes seinästä seinään, se asettaa liikkumiselle omat rajoituksensa. Lefevre ei piittaa tilan rajoituksista. Pitkän uran erikokoisilla maneeseilla tehnyt mies sanookin näyttämöidensä pienentyneen koko ajan ja hänen vain nauttivan tilanteesta.

Lefevren tekemän liikkeen koko tai liikeradat oman kehon puitteissa eivät ole kuitenkaan pienentyneet. Taiteilija suorittaa liikesarjansa yhtä täydesti ja laajasti oman kehonsa keskiviivasta lähtien huolimatta ympäröivästä tilasta.

Teos rakentuu sirkukselle ominaisesti kohtauksista, joissa joko käsitellään rekvisiittaa (laukut, laatikot, harja, köysi) tai kohtaus rakennetaan oman kehon varaan (akrobatia, kehollinen kommunikaatio yleisön kanssa). Pieni tila ei ole sysännyt Lefevrea tutkimaan ja muokkaamaan itse liikekieltä. Ympäröivä tila antaa toki uusia mahdollisuuksia seinien toimiessa erityisesti asentojen tukena, mutta muutoin lähinnä kehon liikkuvuuteen ja akrobatiaan pohjautuva liikemateriaali on tuttua ja koettua myös muilta näyttämöiltä.

Kehollisesti ja liikkeellisesti *Omnibus* ei yllätä. Kiinnostavuus sekä humoristisuus syntyvät

dynamics of the movement seem to remain the same whether it takes place in an open or limited area.

### **The risk of injury calls for full concentration**

David Dimitri's one-man circus has a trace of the traditional as *L'Homme Cirque* takes place in a tent with a traditional circular ring. Dimitri has had a long career in big circus companies and has also worked with animals. *L'Homme Cirque* builds on the acts Dimitri has performed during his career to-date, but he has made new versions of them as there are no longer horses, elephants or other circus artists onstage with him.

Of the three shows I saw in Tournai, *L'Homme Cirque* is most loyal to the aims of traditional circus to perform something that is truly amazing and almost impossible. The risk of physical injury is strongly present in most acts. The performance starts with an innocent looking dance on a treadmill and moves on to teeterboard somersaults and the tightrope, as well as a human cannon ball act and a high wire walk performed outside the tent and without a safety net.

What is essential in this performance is an uncompromising mastery of the body, exact timing and full concentration. The movement material has demanded thousands of repetitions, and skills must be continuously updated. Even though Dimitri says that while on tour he does not really rehearse the acts, every performance requires that the body be taken care of with a warm-up and recovery period.

Timing and precision in the use of space are of the utmost importance. Doing a somersault on the treadmill needs to take place on exactly the right spot at exactly the right time or it will all go wrong. The person sitting next to me sounds shocked when he says that Dimitri would have landed on top of us when he fired out of the cannon had he not managed to conveniently catch the rope – one needs to shoot out in exactly the right direction. When another person or a trained elephant is not available to push on the teeterboard, a carefully placed and measured

suuren sijoittamisesta ja mahdolluttamisesta pieneen. Lefevre on kuin tanssija, joka pitäytyy oppimassaan tanssitekniikassa, mutta tuo muutoksen yleisölle tilavalinnallaan.

Tanssiteoksissa rajattu tila usein näkyy myös liikkeen dynamiikassa, mutta näin ei käy Lefauvrelle. Liikkeen dynamiikka vaikuttaa olevan sama, on ympärillä suljettu tila tai ei.

### **Loukkaantumisen vaara vaatii fyysistä keskittymistä**

David Dimitrin yhden miehen sirkus antaa häivähdyksen traditionaalisesta sirkuksesta. Teltta ja perinteinen pyöreä maneesi luovat puitteet *L'Homme cirque*lle. David Dimitrillä on takanaan pitkä ura suurissa sirkusseurueissa, ja hän on työskennellyt myös eläinten kanssa. *L'Homme cirque* rakentuukin Dimitrin urallaan tekemiin temppuihin, jotka ilman hevosia, elefantteja ja muita taitelijoita ovat saaneet uudenlaiset tulkinnat ja toteutukset.

*L'Homme cirque* on teoksista voimakkaimmin kiinni perinteisen sirkuksen tavassa esittää jotain ihmeellistä, lähes mahdotonta. Useimmissa tempuissa fyysisen loukkaantumisen vaara on selkeästi läsnä. Esitys kaareutuu viattomasta juoksumatolla tanssimisesta vipulaudan ja nuoran voltteihin, tykinkuulasta nuoralla kävelyyn huimassa korkeudessa teltan ulkopuolella ilman turvavälineitä.

Kehollisesti teoksessa on olennaista ehdoton kehonhallinta, ajoitus ja keskittyneisyys. Esityksen liikemateriaali on vaatinut taakseen paitsi tuhansia toistoja, myös jatkuvaa taidon ylläpitoa. Vaikka Dimitri kertookin, ettei kiertueella ollessaan treenaa erityisesti fyysisiä temppujaan, jokainen ilta vaatii omat kehonhuollolliset toimenpiteensä lämmittelyineen ja palautumisineen.

Ajoitus ja tarkkuus tilankäytössä ovat ratkaisevassa asemassa. Kuperkeikan suorittaminen juoksumatolla täytyy sijoittaa juuri oikeaan kohtaan ja aikaan, jotta temppu onnistuisi. Vieruskaverini huokaa järkyttyneenä, että Dimitri olisi syöksynyt tykistä suoraan sylimme, ellei hän olisi onnistuneesti ja



sack of sand can do the trick.

What makes Dimitri's movement intriguing is how he manages to transform acts that are normally performed with others into solo acts and adjusts his body to this challenge – although when it comes to the teeterboard the act may actually become easier with the use of a sack of sand that always falls from the same height and weighs the same compared to the varying force with which a human being or an animal hits it. As Dimitri rides a static and coarse wooden horse the viewer gets the illusion that he is galloping wildly around the rink. The true praxis in the body is modified to help the illusion the audience get.

If David Dimitri was a dancer he would be a technical virtuoso with an extremely polished dance technique and acts. He makes the audience hold its breath, sigh and give a round of applause between the acts. He is like the classical ballet prince who can jump very high and whose solo becomes more and more demanding.

The spectators are fascinated with the physical risks that Dimitri takes: they want to see him succeed but fear that he will fail. This is a point where dance and circus differ. A dance performance never places anybody at risk of losing their life – the dancer may get injured if they make a mistake, but the viewer is not usually even aware of this prospect. Moreover, a dancer never tries again if she fails in something, and in fact, apart from some imbalances, total failures are very rarely seen in a dance performance. Failures in the circus are typically linked to the relationship between the physical performance and the equipment. Dimitri's somersaults are physically impeccable but he does not manage to land back on the tightwire without losing some of his bodily control. Trying again does not disturb the flow of the performance or the audience. On the contrary, the audience collectively gets right behind him and wills him to succeed on the next attempt.

The viewer experiences embodiment as virtuoso control of one's body. *L'Homme cirque* does not renew movement, rather the performance makes use of traditional movement patterns, even if the

tarkoituksenmukaisesti saanut kiinni köydestä. Sinkoutuminen tykistä täytyy siis suorittaa juuri oikeaan suuntaan. Ja kun vipulautaa ei ponnauta ilmaan toinen ihminen, - tai siihen opetettu elefantti - löytyy ratkaisu oikein sijoitetusta ja mitoitettusta hiekkasäkistä.

Dimitrin liikkeessä on mielenkiintoista, miten hän onnistuu muuttamaan normaalisti ryhmätempuina nähdyt temput yksilötempuiksi ja suhteuttamaan oman kehohallintansa tähän. Tosin vipulaudassa ilta toisensa jälkeen samalla painolla ja samasta korkeudesta putoava paino saattaa jopa helpottaa suoritusta verrattuna iskuvoimaltaan epätasaiseen henkilö- tai eläinvoimaan. Dimitrin ratsastaessa paikallaan seisovalla karkealla puuhevosella, katsoja näkee hänen laukkaavan vanhasti ympäri maneesia. Todellinen kokemus kehossa on näin muokattu palvelemaan katsojille syntyvää illuusiota.

Tanssissa David Dimitri vertautuu teknisesti virtuosomaiseen tanssijaan, jonka tanssitekniset taidot ja temput ovat hiottu äärimilleen. Hän saa yleisön pidättämään henkeään ja huokaamaan. Myös väliplodit kuuluvat asiaan. Dimitri on kuin klassisen baletin korkealle hyppäävä prinssipuoliso, jonka soolo huipentuu aina vain vaikeampaan suoritukseen.

Dimitrin ottamat fyysiset riskit kiehtovat katsojia, jotka odottavat onnistumista, mutta pelkäävät ymmärtäessään epäonnistumisen mahdollisuuden. Tässä suhteessa sirkus ja tanssi eroavat. Tanssissa tuskin koskaan on läsnä selkeä kuolemanvaara. Epäonnistuminen voi aiheuttaa loukkaantumisen, mutta harvoin katsoja edes tiedostaa tätä mahdollisuutta. Tanssija ei myöskään koskaan uusi epäonnistunutta suoritusta, ja horjahduksia lukuun ottamatta totaalaisia epäonnistumisia nähdäänkin todella vähän. Sirkuksessa epäonnistuminen liittyy yleensä fyysisen suorituksen ja välineen väliseen suhteeseen. David Dimitrin voltit ovat kehollisesti sinänsä moitteettomia, mutta laskeutuminen tasapainoisesti nuoralle epäonnistuu. Tempun uusiminen ei kuitenkaan häiritse esitystä tai yleisöä. Päinvastoin, yleisön kollektiivinen kannustus haluaa tukea taitelijan uusintayritystä.



David Dimitri – L'Homme Cirque © Raoul Gilbert

performer executes them all solo.

### Searching for different movement

Dane Karl Stets embarks on a new kind of journey in his work *Cuerdo*, which means 'healthy' in Spanish. For a Finn the name *Cuerdo* sounds like the English words 'curio' and 'weirdo', and in his performance Stets is certainly both.

The clown has a large bag, which turns out to be a treasure chest of different kinds of equipment that Stets uses during the performance. His hands can find many uses for a string or a rope, but he is not only good with his hands as he makes use of his entire body to either perform acts or create certain impressions on the stage.

Making a knot with one's feet or head shows the spectator new methods of knot making. When the rope is turned into a snake that slithers on Stets' arm the aim is to create an illusion and the spectator doesn't see a rope act, just the snake.



David Dimitri – L'Homme Cirque © Raoul Gilbert

Katsojalle kehollisuus näyttäytyy keuhonhallinnan mestarillisuutena. Liikkeellisesti *L'Homme cirquessa* ei ole uusia muotoja, vaan toiminta tukeutuu perinteisiin liikesarjoihin, vaikka esiintyjä suoriutuukin kaikesta yksin.

### Erilaisen liikkeen etsintää

Tanskalainen Karl Stets lähtee teoksessaan *Cuerdo* erilaiselle polulle. *Cuerdo*, espanjankielellä "terve", assosioituu suomalaiseen korvaan englanninkielisiin sanoihin "curio" (harvinaisuus) sekä "weirdo" (omituinen tyyppi). Teoksessaan Stets on kaikkea tätä.

Klovnihahmon suuri laukku on aarrearkku, josta Stets kaivaa esiin esityksensä keskeisen rekvisiitan. Naru tai köysi muuntuu Stetsin käsissä moneksi. Kyseessä ei kuitenkaan ole pelkästään sorminäppäryys, vaan Stets käyttää koko kehoaan hyväksi puhtaasti joko tempputarkoituksessa tai luodakseen katsojalle erilaisia mielikuvia.

But then when the audience gets excited Stets reveals the string he uses to move the rope as if to say: 'Anybody could do this'. He is wrong, however, as his mastery in controlling his body is crucial in succeeding in his acts and in managing to create the illusions so powerfully.

Transforming a loose rope into a walking frame is not possible without first carefully studying the complexities of the human body and learning to control it. The same goes for the act where Stets eats a fish he finds in his case and later vomits it up. We all know that the fish never entered his mouth but we are happy to accept the illusion. The creation of the illusion looks physically easy and perfectly plausible, but actually there is a lot of hard work involved to create such an effect.

Stets also manages to change his appearance and identity with a length of string. The visage he creates after a few seconds spent wrapping his face in fishing line comes as a total surprise to the audience, and Stets changes his body language too, transforming himself into a charming monster, a Frankenstein, who joins the audience and dreams of hair that would cover his bald head.

The act with a mouse trap seems out of place in a performance which is built on the use of ropes. The use of the mouse trap does, however, introduce the danger of circus: having a mouse trap snap shut on one's toes is not as dangerous as falling from a high tightrope, but it does make the spectator fear for physical injury. This scene is interesting from the perspective of bodily control as criss-crossing between mouse traps blindfolded requires kinaesthetic memory and balance. When one does not see, the mastery of space is based on embodied memory.

To me the use of the body in Stets' performance resembles what dancers and choreographers do in contemporary dance. I don't know if there is a group of circus artists who create monster faces with ropes or master the making of knots with different parts of the body, but it seems to me that Stets has personally searched for and created his physical appearance and the acts that he uses in his piece. Every scene is based on working with one's body to find a creative way to

Solmun tekeminen jaloilla tai päällä on temppu, jossa katsojalle halutaan näyttää tavallisuudesta poikkeava taito tehdä solmu. Köyden muuttuessa pitkin käsivarsia luikertelevaksi käärmeeksi tavoitteena on illuusio ja katsoja näkeekin käärmeen eikä köysitemppua. Yleisön reagoidessa ihastuneena, Stets vähätellen osoittaa käärmeköyden apunarua kuin sanoakseen "kaikkihan tämän osaisivat". Siinä Stets on kuitenkin väärässä, sillä hänen treenatulla kehonhallinnallaan on ratkaiseva merkitys, toisaalta temppujen onnistumiseen, toisaalta onnistuneiden illusioiden syntymiseen.

Löysän köyden muuttuessa ihmistä tukevaksi rollaattoriksi, taustatyö vaatii monipuolista kehon havainnointia ja hallintaa. Sama pätee kohtaukseen, jossa Stets syö ja myöhemmin oksentaa laukustaan onkimansa kalan. Me kaikki tiedämme, ettei kala todellisuudessa käy Stetsin vatsassa, mutta olemme valmiita hyväksymään meille esitetyn illuusion. Fyysisesti esitetty lopputulos näyttää helpolta ja uskottavalta, mutta sitä itse työskentelyprosessi ei koskaan ole.

Narun avulla Stets myös muuttaa oman ulkonäkönsä ja identiteettinsä. Muutamassa sekunnissa sidotut kasvot yllättävät yleisön täydellisesti. Kehonkieli muuttuu tukemaan syntynyttä Frankensteinia, hurmaavaa hirviötä, joka kiipeää yleisön sekaan ja haaveilee hiuksista kaljun kallonsa peitoksi.

Köysiin liittyvässä kokonaisuudessa teoksen hiirenloukku-kohtaus vaikuttaa irralliselta. Toki se tuo tähän esitykseen konkreettisesti mukaan sirkuksen vaaran: fyysinen vaara ei ehkä ole korkealta nuoralta putoamisen luokkaa, mutta hiirenloukun napsahtaminen varpaille toteuttaa myös hyvin pelon loukkaantumisesta. Kehonhallinnallisesti kohtauksella on oma merkityksensä. Sokkona hiirenloukkujen välistä pujottelemineen vaatii kinesteettistä muistia ja tasapainoa. Tilanhallinta ilmenee puhtaasti kehollisen muistin kautta, kun näkökenttä on peitetty.

Stetsin koko esitys fyysisyydessään vertautuu minulle nykytanssijan tai koreografin työhön. En

perform an act or create the desired illusions and there is the sense of something unique and new. The performance builds on physical training and control of the body, but the results of the physical training as such have not been brought to the stage.

Stets' resourcefulness delights me: his body and his movement language are not tied to one style or technique or a so-called 'correct' way of doing things. Anything is possible and his inventions are refreshingly surprising, which is something one can also experience in a contemporary dance performance.

### **From traditional mastery of one's body towards new ideas**

This article has focused on observing the bodily choices and physical acts in three solo works performed at the La Piste aux Espoirs circus festival and comparing the use of the body in circus and dance art.

Jean-Paul Lefevre, David Dimitri and Karl Stets are professionals who are well aware of the requirements their performances place on the body. Each physical performance succeeds in delivering what it aims for: Lefevre's *Ni Omnibus* plays around with space, David Dimitri's *L'Homme Cirque* strives for the impossible, and in *Cuerdo* Karl Stets looks for novel bodily expression.

In a comparison to dance art, Dimitri would represent a highly skilled ballet dancer, Lefevre uses a traditional technique in a new way with regards to the use of space, and Stets looks for entirely new possibilities like a contemporary dance choreographer. Embodiment and mastery of the body are a powerful and crucial part of each performance.

tietenkään tiedä, kiertääkö sirkuskenttää vuosiluokallinen taiteilijoita, joilta onnistuu hirviökasvojen sitominen ja joiden intohimona on solmujen tekeminen eri kehonosien avulla. Ajattelen kuitenkin, että Stets on joutunut pitkälti itse etsimään ja työstämään omaa fyysistä hahmoaan ja temppujaan juuri tähän esitykseen. Jokainen kohtaaminen on vaatinut kehollista työskentelyä, jossa on etsitty omaa luovaa tapaa suorittaa haluttuja temppuja tai luoda toivottuja illuusioita. Mukaan on etsitty myös uutta, persoonallista ja ennennäkemätöntä. Taustalla on hallittua kehonkäyttöä, mutta perustreenaus ei ole suoraviivaisesti ollut siirrettävissä itse esitykseen.

Katsojana ilahdun Stetsin kekseliäisyydestä. Koen, että hänen kehonsa ja liikekielensä ei ole suljettu yhteen muottiin, tekniikkaan tai niin sanottuun "oikeaan" suoritustapaan. Kaikki on mahdollista ja yllätyn raikkaasti hänen valinnoistaan. Tätä samaa voin kokea nykytanssiesityksessä.

### **Perinteisestä kehonhallinnasta uusiin ideoihin**

Tässä artikkelissa olen keskittynyt havainnoimaan *La Piste aux Espoirs* sirkusfestivaalin kolmen sooloteoksen fyysisiä kehollisia valintoja ja suorituksia, ja vertaamaan niitä tanssitaiteessa nähtävään kehonkäyttöön.

Jean-Paul Lefevre, David Dimitri ja Karl Stets ovat ammattilaisia, jotka tiedostavat esitystensä keholliset vaatimukset. Jokaisen fyysinen suoritus on onnistuneessa suhteessa valittuun toimintaan. Lefevren *Omnibus* leikittelee tilalla, David Dimitrin *L'Homme cirque* kurottaa mahdolltomuuteen ja *Cuerdo* Karl Stets etsii kehollisesti uusia ilmaisutapoja.

Suhteessa tanssitaiteeseen Dimitri edustaa huipputreenattua balettitanssijaa, Lefevre käyttää perinteistä tekniikkaa tilallisesti uudella tavalla ja Stets etsii uusia mahdollisuuksia nykytanssikoreografian tavoin. Kehollisuus ja kehonhallinta näyttävät voimakkaana ja tärkeänä osana jokaista esitystä.

# The Invisible Other, The Blind Spot

METTE GARFIELD

*At the annual festival Hors Pistes in Brussels one can experience the wonderfully simple contemporary circus performance L'Autre, which blurs distinctions between acrobatics, dance, juggling and human contortion, and humorously explores fundamental philosophical questions of the individual's relationship to the other.*

The stage is completely dark, almost pitch black. The floor is covered by a red carpet. No music. A man enters dressed in a plain business suit carrying two wooden cupboards. One, small and square; the other, large and rectangular. So begins a condensed, minimalist performance that is abundant in imagery. The man moves the cupboards around; he dances on them and hides inside them. He moves in and out of the shadows and precisely set lighting to emphasise the spaces between the cupboards. He stands on them, walks on them, and places them carefully. He piles them up, crawls inside, and uses them as coffins so they topple over and his limbs poke out in surrealistic ways.

A magical and organic space is created, where vertical and horizontal play with light, shadow and darkness is beautifully merged with a strange, unsettling choreography performed to the sounds of the performer's own rhythm – his breathing and the scraping of feet against the floor.

The performer's body is soft as his movements engage with the hard wooden furniture and red carpet. Like some kind of scientist he systematically examines all the possibilities offered by the objects in this space, the patters of movement they incite. Circus and dance skills are

# Den usynlige anden, det blinde punkt

METTE GARFIELD

*Den såre enkle nycirkus forestilling L'autre, hvor grænserne for akrobatik, dans, jonglørtricks og slangemenneskefærdigheder udviskes, man kunne opleve på den tilbagevendende festival Hors Pistes i Bruxelles, fortæller og undersøger humoristisk og organisk grundlæggende filosofiske fortællinger om selvet og relationen til den anden*

Scenerummet er fuldstændig mørkt, næsten sort. Gulvet er beklædt med et rødt tæppe. Ingen musik. Ind kommer en mand i anonymt, klassisk jakkesæt bærende på to træskabe: et lille kvadratisk og et større rektangulært. Så begynder en minimalistisk billedmættet og fortættet forestilling. Manden flytter rundt på, jonglerer, danser med og gemmer sig i skabene. I skyggerne og i det præcist satte bløde lys bevæger han sig rundt i rummet med skabene. Han stiller dem op, stabler dem, kravler ind i dem, som kister, så de vælter, så lemmerne ind i mellem stikker surrealistisk ud til siderne skævt, står på dem og går på dem.

Et magisk organisk rum og univers opstår, hvor legen med lys, skygger og mørke både vertikalt og horisontalt spiller sammen i en smuk, sær, foruroligende koreografi kun til lydene, rytmen, tempoet fra performerens blæsende åndedræt og skabenes fødder, der rammer gulvet.

Performerens bløde krop og bevægelser går i clinch med de hårde træmøbler på det røde tæppe. Som en anden videnskabsmand undersøger han systematisk de muligheder objekterne giver ham i rummet. Hvilke bevægelsesmønstre det kan give. Cirkus- og dansefærdighederne går i et med og skabes



*Carré Curieux – Le Passage © Christophe Raynaud de Lage*

merged and developed along with the story. Toying with the expectations of the audience, the performance leaves the spectator confused, misguided, then suddenly included. A form of seduction, a dance, a pas-de-deux, *L'Autre* can be seen as a physical metaphor or allegory for the individual's discovery of the self, and for the exploration of personal limitations, of the other, and of the world. It is an investigation of the fundamental conditions of life – of time and space. Yet simultaneously it dissolves this same time and space.

From time to time gravity itself is dissolved. As if by magic the performer can stand and walk in places that seem physically impossible. Likewise the cupboards almost attain their own personality, with feelings and expressions equal to the artist's – like individuals he can engage with. One begins to question whether he really is the only performer on the stage? Maybe there is something – or someone – else that the

samtidig med fortællingen. Og en leg med publikums forventninger starter. Man bliver forvirret, ført rund i manegen, men så pludselig også imødekommet. Som en forførelse, en dans, en pas de deux. Forestillingen kan ses som en fysisk metafor for eller allegori over individets opdagelse og undersøgelser af sig selv, den anden og verden; undersøgelser af fundamentale livsvilkår - af tid og rum. Men også opløsning af tid og rum.

Undertiden ophæves ligefrem tyngdekraften. Som ved tryllekraft lykkes det performereren at stå og gå, hvor det ikke burde være fysisk muligt, ligesom skabene får deres eget liv og bevæger sig helt af sig selv. Skabene bliver næsten som karakterer med følelser og udtryk på lige linie med artisten; karakterer han kan interagere med. Og man kunne få tanken og stille sig det relevante spørgsmål om, han nu virkelig også er den eneste, agerende person på scenen? Måske er der en anden eller noget andet, performereren og

performer and audience cannot see? The invisible other?

Dancer, choreographer and contemporary circus artist Claudio Stellato's piece *L'Autre* was presented at the annual contemporary circus festival Hors Pistes in Brussels and combines several artistic practices – which seems to be a common trend in most contemporary artforms. Stellato draws fully upon all his artistic skills and roles, from contortionist to dancer, choreographer, juggler, visual artist, storyteller and physical theatre maker.

This hybrid and abstract performance simultaneously plays with combinations and dissolutions of genres, making it open to numerous interpretations. It is as if the audience, performer and objects develop the arc of the performance together. The spectators become an intentional and evident part of the performance. Possibly the audience can be considered the answer to the question of the invisible other in *L'Autre*?

### The individual's blind spot

In *L'Autre* ('The Other') nothing is superfluous. All that is there is absolutely required. The performer explores the space and its objects – the cupboards – with almost scientific precision. This performance is a metaphor for an individual examining his relationship to things and the world – a metaphor and a story of the self, the other and the world. But these immense philosophical questions – 'who am I?', 'who is the other?', 'what is the world?' – are presented organically in a relatable and matter-of-fact style. The entire choreography, the story and the performance elegantly spring from the performer's body and his movements in relation to mundane struggles with objects and cupboards in the space. Our protagonist could just be a labourer or removal man at work.

As mentioned previously there could be another presence on stage in *L'Autre*. The cupboards acquire their own life and move by themselves. And occasionally one wonders if the performer is assisted in his magical tricks. But he is alone. The performer Claudio Stellato is the only person you

publikum ikke kan få at se? En usynlig anden?

Danser, koreograf og nycirkusartist Claudio Stellatos succesfulde *L'Autre*, som klart var en af de bedste forestillinger, man kunne opleve på den tilbagevendende nycirkusfestival Hors Pistes i Bruxelles, sammenblander, som man ser en markant tendens til i øjeblikket indenfor nærmest alle kunstarter, flere forskellige praksisser. Stellato udnytter alle sine kreative færdigheder til fulde, som slangemenneske, danser, koreograf, jonglør, billedkunstner, fortæller og fysisk teatermand.

Den hybride og abstrakte forestillings leg, sammenblanding og opløsning af genrer gør den åben for publikums fortolkninger. Det er som om publikum, performer og objekter sammen skaber udviklingen af forestillingen. Publikum bliver intentionelt en iøjnefaldende og tydelig del af performancen. Måske publikum ligefrem er svaret på spørgsmålet om denne usynlige anden, *L'Autre* i forestillingen?

### Det blinde punkt i selvet

I *L'Autre*, Den anden, er alt overflødig skåret fra. Kun de absolut nødvendige elementer er tilbage. Performeren undersøger som sagt rummet og objekterne, skabene nærmest som en videnskabsmand. Og man kan se forestillingen som en metafor for individet, der undersøger sig selv i relation til tingene, til verden. En metafor og fortælling om selvet, den anden og verden. Men de filosofiske store spørgsmål om hvem jeg er, hvem den anden er, og hvad verden er for en størrelse, bliver frembragt på en højt sympatisk, helt nede på jorden og organisk måde. Hele koreografien, fortællingen, forestillingen udspringer ganske enkelt bare fra performerens egen krop og bevægelser i relation til og hverdagslig karambolage med tingene, skabene i rummet. Vores hovedperson kunne ganske enkelt være en arbejdsmand, en flytteemand på job.

Det er sagt som om, der er også kunne være anden til stede på scenen i *L'Autre*. Skabene får deres eget liv og bevæger sig helt af sig selv, ligesom man kunne få tanken, at performereren på scenen må få hjælp til at generere sine magiske trylletricks. Men der er ingen andre end performereren, nycirkusartisten, danseren,

see during the entire performance. Yet one could claim that there is a blind spot, a darkness, something you *can't* see. A blind spot that reflects or imitates the blind sides of oneself – or the point from which you cannot see yourself. The things you can't see or know about yourself that only others perceive.

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida describes in the book *Mémoires d'aveugle: l'autoportrait et autres ruines* a number of self portraits made by various artists. He describes how several painters blur one side of their face, hide it, in order to express this blind spot that won't permit itself to be seen or captured artistically. Similar occlusions occur in fictitious self-portraits from contemporary literature, such as Kafka's diary, Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, and Maurice Blanchot's *La Folie du Jour*. Each of these stories contains a sense of emptiness, a questioning of the self, that is predominant yet unanswered and therefore remains blind.

In *Mémoires d'aveugles* Derrida also explains and utilises a visual expression of the blind spot: the pupil of the eye. When a person attempts to discover his/her true self, they will look deep into their eyes through the mirror to find an answer. Only in doing so all that returns the gaze is a black hole, a nothing, the chasm of one's own pupil.

One could claim that the same applies to the performance *L'Autre*. The possible other on stage, who makes the cupboards move, who creates magic, is invisible, an expression of the blind spot and the unanswered questions about the self asked by the performer. And like the relationship to the other, these questions also remain unanswered.

The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan believes that the self, the subject, evolves by going through several stages. The initial stage he calls the mirror stage. This is where the self is defined in relation to the other. Separation from the mother's body happens during this stage. It is in this reflection that the child discovers himself for the first time, yet it is as another, an image, that he understands himself as an individual. It is only when an other,

slangemennesket Claudio Stellato at se på noget tidspunkt i forestillingen. Der er et blindt punkt, et mørke, noget man ikke kan se i forestillingen, kunne man hævde. Et blindt punkt, som spejler eller mimer den blinde vinkel i selvet; det punkt ude fra, hvorfra man ikke kan se sig selv. Det man ikke selv kan se og vide om sig selv, som kun andre ser.

Den franske filosof Jacques Derrida beskriver i bogen *Memoirs d'aveugles - L'autoportrait et autres ruines* selvportrættet hos en række billedkunstnere. Han skitserer, hvorledes flere malere i deres selvportrætter ofte slører den ene side, skjuler en del af ansigtet, som et udtryk for netop dette blinde punkt i selvet, som ikke lader sig se eller indfange kunstnerisk. På samme led finder man også i litteraturens modernistiske fiktive selvportrætter såsom Kafkas dagbog, Rainer Marie Rilkes *Malte Laurids Brigges optegnelser* og Maurice Blanchots *La folie du jour* eksempler på et tomrum, et spørgsmål om hvem jeg'et er, der kredses om, men som ikke bliver besvaret., forbliver blindt i fortællingerne.

Derrida forklarer og bruger i *Memoirs d'aveugles* ligeledes det visuelle udtryk for dette blinde punkt: pupillen. Når man eventuelt vil forsøge at forstå og virkelig finde ud af, hvem man er; se sig selv, kunne man forsøge at se sig selv dybt i øjnene i spejlet for at finde frem til et svar. Men når man gør det, ser man dybt ind i et sort hul, et ingenting, en slugt ind i sin egen pupil.

Man kunne hævde det samme gør sig gældende i forestillingen *L'Autre*. Den anden på scenen, der måske er tilstede og som får skabene til at bevæge sig, som skaber magien; den anden person er usynlig, den anden person er et udtryk for det blinde punkt, det ubesvarede spørgsmål om selvet, som performereren stiller sig i forestillingen, ligesom spørgsmålene om relationen til den anden heller ikke bliver besvaret.

Den franske psykoanalytiker Jacques Lacan mente at selvet, subjektet gennemgår flere stadier. Det første stadie kalder han spejlstadiet. Her bliver selvet dannet i relation til den anden. I dette stadie sker afskæringen fra moderens krop. Det er i spejlbilledet, når barnet første gang ser



the reflection, sees the child that he is separated from the mother's body. Thus it is in relation to the other, in a dialectic, that he begins the process of becoming himself.

Correspondingly one could say that the performance *L'Autre* presents situations and physical images – expressions – that explore mirror images or doppelganger motifs that are an examination of the other in order to understand oneself, to be seen.

The philosophical questions asked in the performance are not in any way answered by the performance. The riddle of the self, the blind spot and the relationship with the other remains as obscure as the dark space Stellato literally floats away in at the end of *L'Autre*.

### The relationship to the audience

Another blind yet very important spot in the performance could be defined as the audience. There is an obvious intention to allow the audience to be co-creators of *L'Autre*. The performance is inviting and completely open to various interpretations, due to the overarching questions which remain unanswered and the minimalist aesthetics, simple and abstract like those of a musical composition or a piece of conceptual art. The performance is in some ways 'nothing more' than the performer's unique and splendid physical skills, the cupboards, the red carpet, light and darkness, rhythm and tempo, and this simplicity seems to allow the audience to become submerged in the unfolding performance. *L'Autre* needs, just like the self, to be seen by an other, by its doppelganger or reflection, by the audience so that it can exist. One could claim that the performance has no other function than to combine the different qualities that arise in the presented elements: the artist's movements, the cupboards, the red carpet, the light and darkness, etcetera.

In strong opposition to, for instance, the performance *L'Homme Cirque* by the Swiss artist David Dimitri, which could be seen under a genuine circus tent at the La Piste aux Espoirs festival in the small town of Tournai just outside of

sig selv og forstår det er sig selv, det ser, men som en anden, som et billede, at det forstår sig selv som et afskærmet individ. Det er altså først, når en anden, spejlbilledet ser barnet, og det afskæres fra moderens krop, altså i relationen til den anden, i en dialektik, at det er på vej til at blive sig selv.

På samme måde kunne man sige, at forestillingen *L'autre* giver optrin og konkrete fysiske billeder, udtryk for en undersøgelse af et spejl- eller dobbeltgængermotiv; en undersøgelse af relationen til den anden, for at forstå sig selv, for at blive set.

De filosofiske spørgsmål, der bliver stillet i forestillingen, bliver dog ikke besvaret på nogen måde. Gåden om selvet, det blinde punkt og relationen til den anden forbliver ligeså dunkelt som det mørke rum Stellato bogstavelig talt går svævende ind i til sidst i *L'autre*.

### Relationen til publikum

Et andet blindt, men yderst vigtigt, punkt i forestillingen kunne som nævnt være publikum. Det er tydeligt, hvorledes intentionen med forestillingen er at lade publikum være medspiller og medproducent af *L'autre*. Forestillingen er imødekomende fuldstændig åben for fortolkning, idet de overordnede spørgsmål man kunne mene blev stillet i opførelsen forbliver ubesvarede, udover at forestillingens æstetik er så minimalistisk, simpel og abstrakt, som et stykke musik eller konceptuelt maleri/kunstværk. Forestillingen er på sin vis 'ikke andet end' performerens unikke og enestående fysiske færdigheder, skabene, det røde tæppe, lyset og mørket, en rytme og et tempo, som tillader publikum at væve sig ind i, ånde, trække vejret sammen med udviklingen af performancen. *L'autre* kræver fuldstændigt ligesom selvet at blive set af den anden, sin dobbeltgænger, sit spejlbillede, af sit publikum for at blive til og eksistere. Og man kunne lige sådan hævde at performancen ikke har anden betydning end lige netop de forskelle, variationer, spil, der opstår i sammenstillingen af opførelsens elementer: artistens krops bevægelser, skabene, det røde tæppe, lyset og mørket osv.

Brussels, the performance *L'Autre* refuses to dictate to or control its audience. *L'Homme Cirque* is a one-man-show that comments on classical circus expressions with great skill and humour – but which still cannot escape the trappings of them. Raised within a circus family, David Dimitri constructs the classical circus acts, such as the high wire, the human cannonball, clowning, and rope tricks accompanied by background music and fanfares in such a way that the audience has no option but to follow his lead and experience what he wants them to. Unfortunately he doesn't manage to take you by surprise. Also to be seen at La Piste aux Espoirs was Danish contemporary circus artist Karl Stets, who may well have found inspiration in Stellato. In Stets' curious and zen-like performance *Cuerdo* one can find a similar kind of simplicity, level headedness, cross-aesthetic interest, as well as an openness and attentiveness to the audience. Stets even runs out among his audience during the performance to pull them into his slightly alarming games with mousetraps. In the beginning Stets, who is based in Barcelona and has toured Europe, enters the space carrying a suitcase on his back, much like Stellato. The character in *Cuerdo* is hard to define. A clown and anti-hero wearing a strangely significant expression. A person who might resemble the artist himself.

Aided merely by three red ropes and nine mousetraps, produced from the suitcase, he proceeds to create a peculiar, poetic and uncanny universe. He becomes a rope walker and a snake charmer; he ties knots with his tongue and does funny magic tricks accompanied by a repeating piano motif. *Cuerdo* toys with simple effects in ways that make the audience rediscover the objects: the ropes, the mousetraps, the enchantment of everyday life. The title of the performance is a play on words in Spanish: 'cuerda' means rope and 'cuerdo' refers to a person who is technically cunning or crafty. This performance was presented in Copenhagen at Copenhagen International Theatre's contemporary circus festival in 2012.

*L'Autre* was just as cunning and crafty: a particularly unique and admirable experience due

I stærk modsætning til fx forestillingen *L'homme Cirque* af schweiziske David Dimitri, som man kunne opleve i et rigtigt omrejsende cirkustelt på den samtidige, genkommende festival La Piste aux espoirs i den lille by Tournai lidt udenfor Bruxelles, dikterer og styrer performancen *L'autre* ikke sit publikum. *L'homme Cirque* er et one man show, der humoristisk og kompetent kommenterer på det klassiske cirkus-sprog og udtryk, men som stadig ikke har frigjort sig fra det. David Dimitri, der kommer fra cirkusfamilie bygger således klassiske cirkusnumre såsom linedans, kanonkonge klovnerier og rebtricks op med baggrundsmuzak, fanfarer og mimik, så publikum ikke har rum og plads til at gøre andet end præcis det, han vil have og forventer de skal føle og opleve. Man overraskes ikke rigtigt på noget tidspunkt desværre, mens den danske nycirkus artist Karl Stets, som man også kunne se på La Piste aux espoirs, måske har fundet inspiration hos Stellato. I Stets underfundige og zen-agtige forestilling *Cuerdo* finder man i hvert fald samme enkelhed, jordbundenhed, tværæstetiske interesse, åbenhed og opmærksomhed mod publikum. Stets løber sågar ud blandt publikum midtvejs i forløbet og trækker dem med ind i opførelsens lidt uhyggelige leg med musefælder. Til at begynde med kommer Karl Stets, der har base i Barcelona og nu gennem mange år har rejst rundt i Europa som artist, næsten som Stellato ind med bøjet ryg bærende på en kuffert, ind gennem publikumsområdet. Karakteren i Karl Stets forestilling *Cuerdo* er svær at definere. En form for klovn og antihelt med en særlig udtryksfuld mimik. En person, som måske i virkeligheden ikke ligger så langt fra artisten selv. Ved hjælp af kun tre røde reb og ni rottefælder fundet frem fra kufferten åbner han ind til en sær, poetisk og småuhyggelig verden. Han bliver linedanser, slangetæmmer, binder knuder på tungen og laver skægge trylletricks til et gentaget, enkelt pianomotiv. Karls Stets forestilling *Cuerdo* leger med enkle virkemidler, så publikum pludselig igen får øje på tingene: rebene, rottefælderne, hverdagens fortryllelse. Titlen på forestillingen, man også kunne opleve i august 2012 på Københavns Internationale Teaters genkommende ny cirkus festival, er et spansk ordspil. 'Cuerda' betyder reb, mens ordet 'cuerdo', der ligger tæt på, bruges om en i teknisk

to the big philosophical questions raised in such a surprising, down-to-earth and physical manner. It included everyone with its playful and beautiful openness towards the audience. It will be exciting to follow the future progress of contemporary circus and its experimentation with audience interactions. Maybe we will see more performances dedicated to allowing the audiences' experience to be the experiment? Similar trends can be spotted in for instance performance art, installation pieces and contemporary dance, which all seem to be moving from site-specific to audience-specific work. One example of this would be the Canadian contemporary dance choreographer Noemie Lafrance's 2012 piece *Choreography for Audience*, where the audiences were dressed in different coloured costumes and had to execute directed patterns of movement inspired by gaming culture, the audience becoming the dancers and presenters of the piece.

sammenhæng snild eller listig person.

*L'autre* var ligedes snild og listig: en særdeles unik og prisværdig oplevelse netop på grund af de store filosofiske spørgsmål som blev stillet på en overraskende, jordbunden og fysisk facon, så alle kunne være med og på grund af sin leg med og smukke åbenhed for sit publikum. Hvordan ny cirkus forestillinger vil udvikle sig og interagere samt eksperimentere endnu mere med sit publikum bliver spændende at se. Måske man fx vil opleve flere forestillinger som decideret lader publikums oplevelser være eksperimentet? Samme tendens som man fx ser indenfor performance, installationskunst og moderne dans, som går fra at være site-specifik til at være audience specifik. Et eksempel herpå er den canadiske, moderne dans koreograf Noemie Lafrances *Chorepgraphi for an Audience* fra 2012, hvor publikum alene og selv i ført forskelligt farvet tøj skulle udføre anviste og givne bevægelsesmønstre med inspiration i game kulturen; publikum blev altså selv dansere, performere udøvere i værket.

# Things Are Not What They Seem: Object and Expectation at the Circus

ROSIE TRUMP

When contemporary circus is placed upon a proscenium theatre stage each dramatic element (costumes, light, sound and prop) takes on a hyper-importance. The audience sees each element as a potential clue as to what is about to unfold and how to make sense of the world being presented to them. The props and objects circus performers use serve as instruments to their techniques, just as a piano would serve a pianist. However, in the world of circus these objects can be used as more than mere servants to showcase tricks. The deftly used prop can manifest surprise, awe and magic in its own right. A prop has the potential to be as animate as a live performer or make a scene stealing entrance. It is exciting to see a banal object transform beyond its everyday meaning into the realm of enchanted possibilities. With the mastery of his prop, a circus performer can manipulate audience expectations for a heightened sense of suspense/relief.

I would like to discuss *Le Passage* by Carré Curieux and *Cuerdo* by Karl Stets. These two shows from the Hors Piste festival in Brussels, Belgium and the La Piste aux Espoirs festival in Tournai, Belgium use objects in exemplary ways.

## Le Passage

The show *Le Passage*, performed by Carré Curieux on 1 March 2013 at Les Halles imagines the voyage between life, death and rebirth. *Le Passage* features two main characters, The Dying Man played by juggler Luca Aeschlimann and The Guide played by diabolo artist Vladimir Couprie. Overall, this is a show with lots of 'things' on stage. Sometimes the objects delight, charm and

captivate; at other times they seem flat or cutesy. At their best, they punch tremendous visual impact. At their worst, they make the stage feel empty and poorly blocked.

*Le Passage* begins with a theatrical prologue. A glowing rope beats out the pulses of a heart rate monitor on the downstage floor. The beat slows, shortens and ends as an unidentified pair of feet walk along the rope. This is the first of the many visual metaphors that unfold during the show. The Dying Man is introduced standing centrestage, arm reached out to receive drips from an IV bag hanging high above his head. The IV dangles out from a peculiar chandelier, setting the audience up for two things – a vertically oriented dramaturgy and a gothic-steeped aesthetic.

The narrative, despite the angsty acting, is rather straightforward. A young man dies in the hospital, then his soul journeys to the next stage of being (complete with a life flashing in front of the eyes cliché). He is guided by a dubious figure clad in black. Although we are never quite sure if he is the reaper, an angel, a god or a devil, The Guide is nonetheless rather benign. It remains unclear what truly motivates the relationship between The Dying Man and The Guide. What does seem to bind these two characters together through *Le Passage* is their interactions with the various objects encountered journeying from life to death.

## The Circus Object as Banal

In *Le Passage* juggling balls and diabolos are used both as the tool of the artist and as a visual

metaphor. The circus object as a tool of the technique of juggling or of diabolo is executed with technical brilliance. However, in *Le Passage* the juggling balls and the diabolo spinning top actually deliver the weakest visual metaphor. These accessories (smartly appearing in the colour white) are meant to signify a universal experience. The 'juggling' of life choices; the 'balancing act' of life challenges thrown your way. Alas, in this instance the result is that the circus object comes to represent the obvious, the uncomplicated, the trite. The opportunity is missed for these tools to transcend their direct function. While the performer takes great technical risk with these objects, their narrative potential is actually left unchallenged and unexplored.

### Video Projection as Prop

Video media is incorporated into *Le Passage* at several different points. Each time the video provides supplemental images to the action occurring on stage. The first time video projection is utilised, it represents an out of body experience for The Dying Man. He sees himself projected in front of himself (as if reflected in a mirror), then floating above his body lying in a hospital bed, and then as an omniscient witness to the grief of his loved ones. The projection surface for the out of body sequence is a tall, narrow set piece, triangular shaped with one side covered in white fabric. This is a rather straightforward dramatic use of a projection surface, yet allows for an interesting 'doubling' of the main character.

The second instance of video projection serves as a life flashing in front of the eyes trope, but the moment is saved by the clever use of object. As The Dying Man is moving from the emotional phase of denial to the emotional stage of acceptance, a huge book drops from the sky. The Dying Man picks the book up to place it on a jumbo pedestal and the book suddenly flies open. Its pages expand up and out of the book, creating a piecemeal screen hovering above the characters. A photo album like video is projected onto the book's pages, highlighting cherished, embarrassing and loving moments from The Dying Man's life. The oversized book prop, which at first looks almost comical, instead contains a

very unexpected element. While the set up of the book falling from the sky seems to beg a St. Peter's 'Book of Life' moment, expectations are not met. Rather the audience is unpredictably manoeuvred into an interactive digital interpretation of seeing one's life flash before their eyes.

### The Everyday Object and Circus Magic

Before The Guide closes the big book, The Dying Man tears a small piece of paper from the book, symbolising his desire to carry with him a memento from his previous existence. He crafts a paper airplane out of the page. The paper airplane soars around the stage, triggering an avalanche of white paper to fall from above. The blank pages symbolize the collective memories from a lifetime. The paper avalanche certainly steals the scene and lays the ground (literally) for a beautiful sequence where the Dying Man juggles paper airplanes. The planes fly long, lofty circles around him as he sends them off into flight. In this scene, juggling becomes more than a skill for Aeschlimann. It transcends the act of managing several objects in the air and becomes the channel by which something splendid and tender is presented. Not to mention that the paper airplane juggling infuses the narrative with vital freshness.

The true highlight of *Le Passage* is the body washing ritual. The Guide washes the body of The Dying Man as he lays unconscious in a shallow, watery casket. The Guide crafts soap bubbles off of the Dying Man's prone body. Small bubbles evolve into larger bubbles, then small fog-filled bubbles give way for large-fog filled ones. In true circus fashion, the prouesse of this scene has the audience sitting on the edge of their seats, holding their breath to see what could possibly come next. An everyday item such as a soap bubble is transformed into a magical object. Couprie's skills shine during the body washing ritual and elevate far beyond the technical display. The body washing ritual provides the most dramatic visual impact of the entire show.

### Cuerdo

*Cuerdo* by Karl Stets, a show usually set outdoors, was performed 2 March 2013 at the La Piste Aux



Karl Stets – *Cuerdo* © nn

Espoirs festival in Tournai, Belgium on a proscenium theatre stage. At the top of the show, Stets enters from a door in the back of the house and hobbles his way down the seating aisle towards the stage carrying a cumbersome object on his back. With this non-traditional entrance setting the tone, *Cuerdo* is a show that intricately sets up and then defies expectations. *Cuerdo* revolves around Stets, an undeniably master performer, pulling bizarre items from a large suitcase, and interacting with them.

### The Reveal

A (literal) bag of tricks is the main prop of the performance. It sits for most of the show rather unglamorously in the centre of the stage. How and what is pulled from the bag, though, keeps the bag of tricks shtick from becoming just a hokey gimmick.

Stets removes a series of items from his big bag of tricks including a halfmetre long red rope, a cane-shaped pipe, mice traps, bells, and a fish line and hook. What unifies the seemingly random array of items is that each grows beyond what it first appears to be. The red rope is knotted,

unknotted and twisted into a pair of glasses. The cane houses a rope that slithers and dances like a snake. The duration for which Stets plays with each item is fairly long. He is able to sustain the audience's fascination with each prop by continually revealing each anew. He takes the time to develop the transformative potential of each object. Stets manoeuvres his objects to surprise and to represent something they are not. The magic is in how Stets sets up expectations with his props, and then manages those expectations. He may fulfil an expectation (or not) or take something in a completely unexpected direction. He keeps the audience eagerly guessing his next move.

### Seeing Sound

One of the first items removed from the bag is a megaphone with a long cable attached to a small tape player. Stets manually plays, rewinds, fast-forwards and stops all the music for *Cuerdo* from this device. The result is a gritty, localised sound score; the musical composition for *Cuerdo* becomes an object in itself. The audience sees where the sound is coming from (the megaphone draped up and over a tall pole) and how it is being

changed (Stets controlling the device's buttons). On the street, this is obviously an act of necessity for self-containment. Yet when placed on the theatrical stage, it becomes an act of inversion. The magic of the theatre – with behind the scenes sound technicians and a discretely shrouded audio system – is not in use here; instead the performer is empowered to show the audience a deliberate aesthetic choice. He turns what we hear into a physical object to be seen and manipulated, just like any other prop pulled from his bag.

*Cuerdo* features a slackline routine that is a nice enough display of Stets' skills of balance. How Stets tweaks his routine with sound, though, makes seeing him performing on the slackline special. Stets ties two bells (one large and one small) onto his line before he mounts it. This produces a musical dimension to all of the action on the line. The audience hears a jingle with every micro quiver Stets produces. In this way, the in-betweens, the recovery, the preparations are highlighted, rather than just the main tricks performed on the slackline. Stets crafts sound into an observable object.

### **The Danger Element**

Stets establishes a tone of whimsy with his character's timid persona, yet bubbling under the surface of *Cuerdo* is something weird. Dangerous. Grotesque.

Midway into *Cuerdo*, Stets pulls a small sack full of mousetraps from his suitcase. He has the audience set the traps to trigger, then positions these familiar household items into a dangerous obstacle course. Blindfolded and standing on one foot, Stets side steps across the traps with the composure of a Buddhist monk – only moments later to purposely clap a trap closed on his tongue. In doing so he leverages the fresh relief the audience feels from his successful navigation of the mousetrap obstacle course into the empathetic shock they then experience watching his tongue snapped by a trap.

One of the last items Stets rummages out of his bag is a small wobbling fish hooked on a fishing line. Evoking the carnivalesque geek, Stets swallows the fish. He proceeds to wrap the line around his face, morphing himself into a disfigured monster. Gallivanting into the audience, Stets ensures his grotesque face can be seen close-up by all. At this point, the emphasis is turned inward as he manipulates his own body as a prop. His facial distortion is the ultimate display of the oddness riding under *Cuerdo*.

On the dramatic stage, the best objects incite wonder and surprise. They confront us with the unexpected. They leave us satiated, yet dreaming of the possibilities left unseen.

# Showbiz's Lonely Friars

ZITA SÁNDOR

As part of the Unpack the Arts programme, ten journalists of seven nations were present in workshops between 28 February and 3 March 2013. The composition of the group provided for an interesting experience in collective thinking, as the cafeteria/office table of the Les Halles cultural centre in Brussels was populated by journalists of all classes and positions – from young beginners to those who have been working in the industry for decades.

The aim of the residency, part of an almost two year long project, was to raise the awareness critics (and through them audiences) have of contemporary circus, an artform which is neglected by the press in several countries. Through the residency's academic/historical presentations we learned – and later, during the performances, were convinced – that the circus is a swiftly developing world, one which pushes human performance to the limit, is full of tricks, and keeps pace with the changing shape of our present culture in a dynamic and clever way – whether the changes come from technological advancements or from the evolution of culture and showbiz.

## Solos in the Circus

In the five performances – seen across two festivals: Hors Pistes in Brussels, and La Piste aux Espoirs in Tournai – the 'old' classical elements of circus appeared from time to time as well (in different proportions of course, which determined much of the style of the performance). However, these new and contemporary circus productions are also strongly tied to dance, theatre and physical theatre, illusion and magic shows. The intertwining of the genres makes it difficult to define contemporary circus; however, with the demolition of boundaries these circus

# A szórakoztatóipar magányos szerzetesei

ZITA SÁNDOR

Az Unpack the Arts program keretében, a 2013. február 28. és március 3. közé szervezett workshopon hét nemzet tíz kulturális újságírója volt jelen. A csapat összetétele biztosította az együtt gondolkodás érdekességét, ugyanis a fiatal, szinte kezdőtől a már több évtizede a pályán lévő, gyakorlott szeműig mindenféle rendű és rangú újságíró ülte körül a brüsszeli Les Halles kulturális központ ebédlőjének/irodájának asztalát.

A majd kétéves projektbe illeszkedő workshop célja a kritikusok (és rajtuk keresztül a nézők, a közönség) figyelmének felhívása a kortárs cirkuszra, mellyel számos országban a szakmai sajtó csak alig foglalkozik. A bevezető elméleti-történeti prezentációk során előbb tudomást szereztünk, majd az előadásokon meg is győződünk arról, hogy a cirkusz egy rohamléptekkel fejlődő, az emberi teljesítőképesség határait próbára tévő, trükkökkel teli világ, ami dinamikus és ötletesen tart lépést jelenünk minden irányú változásával, az újabb és újabb technikai eszközök megjelenésétől kezdve a szórakoztatóiparban végbemenő változásokig.

## Szólók a cirkuszban

A Les Halles által szervezett programsorozaton és a Tournai-ban megrendezett *La Piste aux Espoirs* fesztiválon látott öt előadásban a „régit”, klasszikusként emlegetett cirkusz elemei is föl-föl tűntek – eltérő mennyiségben persze, ami nagyban meghatározta az előadás jellegét –, ám ezek az új és kortárs cirkusz kategóriájába sorolható produkciók erős szálakkal kötődnek a tánchoz, színházhoz és a fizikai színházhoz, a bűvészethez, varázsláshoz. Az előadói műfajok egymásba kapcsolódása nehézkessé teszi a műfaji meghatározást, ugyanakkor a határok



performances (which carry on a dialogue with contemporary arts) give a diverse yet complete experience.

From the shows we saw at the two festivals it was the solo circus performances that were particularly exciting to me: the loneliness of circus performers, the creation process for solo performances, the help or even the lack of help from an invisible/visible partner. There are typically no dramaturgs or playwrights in circus, sometimes not even a director (which sometimes happens with theatre performances as well). And if we find any of these in circus, most of the time they only help at the end of the creative process, as an 'outside eye'. The creators of the four shows I saw had to work without the help on an outside eye. These productions were created independently, walking their own inner paths.

The solitude of the performers on stage manifests differently in these shows – some of it is apparent, some is actual. Solitude does not mean loneliness. It is interesting to investigate the possible stages of solitude we witnessed in the four performances, and one may be curious whether the artist facing the audience alone is taking more risk when they are all alone or when they are (also) dependent on a partner who is reacting in the background as they follow the performer's movements and tricks. Taking risks is an essential component of the circus, but it's the quality and method of risk that determines the nature and texture of a performance.

### **Stage Manager and/or Helper**

Jean-Paul Lefevre started his carrier at Archaos, which played a significant role in initiating a new wave in circus history. Starting in dangerous and spectacular productions that filled huge arenas he performed on smaller and smaller stages until arriving, for his show *Ni Omnibus*, at a tiny 4m<sup>2</sup> area offering a mere 8m<sup>3</sup> space. The location, a cube made from wooden boards, reminded me of the inside of a smaller bus cut in half – because of the sound effects, because of Jean-Paul Lefevre's imitation of driving, and because of the film projected on the screen that was installed at the back of the box and which functioned as a rear view mirror. After switching from the role of the

megszűnésével sokrétű, teljes élményt nyújtanak a kortárs művészetekkel párbeszédet folytató cirkuszi eladások.

A két fesztivál felkínált produkcióit látva számomra különösen izgalmasnak a cirkuszi szlók körül felmerült kérdések tűntek: a cirkuszi művészek színpadi magánya, az egyetlen szereplős előadások létrejöttének folyamata, a láthatatlan-látható társ segítsége, vagy éppen hiánya. A cirkuszban nincsenek dramaturgok vagy szövegkönyv/forgatókönyv írók, rendezőt sem találunk mindig (mint ahogy ez előfordulhat színházi alkotások esetében is), ám ha van, az esetek többségében az alkotófolyamat végén, mint valami külső szem segíti az előadóművészeket. A megtekintett négy szlólőelőadáson az alkotó(k) tényleges külső szem segítsége nélkül dolgoztak – önállóan létre hozott, egy belső út megtételéből következő produkciókról van tehát szó.

Az előadók színpadi magánya eltérő jellegű, néhányuké látszólagos, másoké tényleges; a magány nem feltétlenül jelent egyedüllétet. Érdekes megvizsgálni, hogy a magány milyen lehetséges fokozatait láthattuk a négy előadásban, s azon is el lehet morfondírozni, hogy a magányosan közönség elé lépő művész vajon akkor vállal nagyobb kockázatot, ha teljesen egyedül van, vagy akkor, ha a háttérből, az ő mozdulataira, mutatványaira rákapcsolódó-ráhangolódó társától (is) függ. A kockázatvállalás a cirkusz esszenciális összetevője, minősége és módja adja meg egy-egy előadás jellegét, textúráját.

### **Ügyelő és/vagy segítő**

Jean-Paul Lefevre az új cirkuszi hullám megindításában jelentős szerepet vállaló Archaosban kezdte karrierjét. A hatalmas arénát betöltő veszélyes és látványos produkciókban töltött évek után egyre kisebb területű színpadokon dolgozott, s eljutott egy egészen pici, 4 m<sup>2</sup> alapterületű, mindössze 8 m<sup>3</sup>-nyi helyet biztosító térig. A helyszín egy farostlemez oldalú kocka, mely egy kisebb busz félbe vágott belsejére emlékeztet, főleg a bejátszott hangeffektek és Jean-Paul Lefevre vezetést imitáló mozdulatai, valamint a visszapillantóként funkcionáló, a doboz belsejében felfüggesztett képernyőn vetített

bus driver to a jolting passenger and leaving behind the illusion of the bus interior, the artist starts to perform circus tricks: juggling with boxes, tightrope walking, performing pole tricks and acrobatic feats.

Jean-Paul Lefeuve is not all alone, even though we can only see him on the stage. The other half of the two-man company is Didier André, who is standing behind the audio-mixer and does all the technician's tasks, controlling video spots, and timing the music, the light and the sound effects. At some point it becomes clear that he is as skilled an artist as his partner on stage: he throws the broom into the box with stunning precision. His sudden but precise and determined throw proves that he is not only an operator of the technical apparatus but a helper who knows the difficulties and essence of stage work and connects to the artist's job. The idea and realisation of *Ni Omnibus* is Jean-Paul Lefeuve's, yet a supportive partner is constantly next to him, who, with his presence and attention, provides a sense of security (and in case of an error he adjusts technology to the events, or he can even hide unwanted incidents).

After each trick the clown played by Lefeuve seeks out the audience with his sad eyes and his mouth turned down, and, after gaining trust and empathy, he starts to undress. His pieces of clothing land in different spots on the box via small tricks, while Lefeuve remains in the confined, almost claustrophobic space in his black underwear. On the one hand the almost naked body lends a strange, melancholic tone to the performance, because the audience sees an ageing body with evident signs of wrinkles in skin that has lost most of its tightness – yet at the same time skin which covers a flexible body in perfect condition, and muscles that easily obey their owner during the acrobatic tricks. On the other hand the clown becomes truly lonesome by taking off his clothes. Without clothes one cannot wink to the helper outside, so Lefeuve becomes isolated from André's secure proximity and emphasises the differences between the two of them.

The uncovered parts of the skin emphasise the

jelenetsorok miatt. A buszsofőr szerepének a zötykölődő utasra cserélését követően, a buszbelső illúzióját maga mögött hagyva, cirkuszi mutatványokat ad elő: dobozokkal zsonglörködik, kötélén jár, rúdon forog, akrobatikus számokat mutat be.

Jean-Paul Lefeuve nincs teljesen egyedül, habár a színpadon csak őt látni. A kétszemélyes társulat másik fele, Didier André egy keverőpult mögött állva, a nézők szeme előtt végzi a technikai feladatokat, irányítja a videó bejátszásokat, időzíti a zenét, a fény- és hangeffekteket. Egy ponton világossá válik, hogy ő is ugyanolyan képzett művész, mint a színpadon lévő társa: szembeötlő pontossággal dobja be a partfist a dobozba. Hirtelen, ugyanakkor centiméterre pontos, határozott dobása bizonyítja, hogy nem csupán a technikai apparátust kezelő ügyelőről, hanem a szakma, a színpadi munka nehézségeit és mibenlétét ismerő, ezért az előadó munkájára rácsatlakozó segítőről van szó. Az ötlet és a megvalósítás Jean-Paul Lefeuvé, ám mindvégig mellette áll egy támogató társ, aki jelenlétével, figyelmével a biztonság érzetét nyújthatja (s az esetleges hiba esetén a színpadi eseményekhez igazíthatja a technikát, akár el is leplezheti a be nem tervezett eseményeket).

A Lefeuve játszott bohóc minden egyes trükk után szomorú szemeivel és lefelé görbülő szájával kitekint a közönségre, s a bizalom és az empátia megszerzése után elkezdi vetkőzni. A ruhadarabok apró trükkökkel kerülnek a doboz különböző pontjaira, míg Lefeuve végül fekete alsónadrágban marad a szűkös, majdnem klausztofobikus térben. A szinte meztelen test egyrészt furcsa, melankolikus tónust kölcsönöz az előadásnak, hiszen egy öregedő testet látni, amin egyértelműen mutatkoznak a feszességéből sokat veszített bőr ráncai, s ami kiváló kondícióban lévő, akrobatikus mutatványoknak könnyedén engedelmessé izmokat, ruganyos testet takar. Másrészt a ruhák levételével igazán magányossá vált a színpadi bohóc. Ruha nélkül nem lehet barátilag rákacsintani a kinn álló segítőre, így Lefeuve leválik André biztonságot adó közelségéről, a kettejük közti különbséget nyomatékosítja.

vulnerability and fragility of the body, and enhance the bareness and clarity in this small space: the acrobat only uses some very simple objects, just as he wears a rather simple costume – his own body. The pursuit of barrenness and simplicity can be detected in André's presence as well: the artists almost reveal themselves as they show the technical background, not hiding any tricks, everything happening before our eyes. The bus driver who appeared at the beginning of the show embarks on an inner journey, instead of driving miles and miles, in a space that becomes more and more intimate and lonesome.

### **Mystery Mastery**

Claudio Stellato's production *L'Autre* can keep the audience in continuous excitement and amazement for almost an hour. The artist only 'appears' to be alone on stage, yet his solitude is unquestioned in the first part of the performance. His body almost coalesces from a box that stands on tiny legs. The parameters and mobility of the box, standing on an illuminated rug in the middle of the room, are made perceptible and measurable to the audience through Claudio's own body. The proportions of the box's sides can be observed in comparison to his legs, torso and arms, and the audience can see where the artist puts his weight to balance for seconds or even minutes on the edge of the box. The space lost in the dark background becomes suspicious when Claudio pushes his long, lean body into the box, and, while he is behind the closed door, the folds of the red carpet seem to rise – but as the living body leaves the box, the carpet becomes completely lifeless and still, as if the last few moments were just a mirage, a false experience of eyes staring at the darkness.

A bit later the light illuminates a huge wooden box at the back end of the carpet – big enough to swallow a human body. The box starts to waggle menacingly, yet it does not fall over in spite of its rocking. From this point on, Claudio and the boxes start a surreal game where the living body and the inanimate objects slide into a world governed by rules unknown to us. Body and object forget the law of gravity from time to time, yet you never know when they are bound by the rules of one or the other world. The audience is overcome by a

A szabadon hagyott bőrfelületek a test sebezhetőségét, törékenységét hangsúlyozzák, s ebben a kicsi térben a lecsupaszítotttságot, letisztultságot fokozzák: az akrobata csupán néhány nagyon egyszerű tárgyat használ, ugyanúgy, mint ahogy testét is egy nagyon egyszerű jelmezbe bújtatja. A lecsupaszítotttságra, egyszerűsége való törekvés André jelenlétében is tetten érhető: a művészek szinte leleplezik magukat, megmutatják a technikai hátteret, nem rejtenek el semmilyen trükköt, minden a szemünk előtt történik. A produkció elején megjelenő buszvezető kilométerek megtétele helyett belső utazást jár be, egy fokozatosan intimmé és egyre magányosabbá váló térben.

### **Titokzatosság mesterfokon**

Claudio Stellato produkciója majd egy órán keresztül képes a nézőt folyamatos izgalomban és ámulatban tartani. A cirkuszművész csak „láthatólag” van egyedül a színpadon, az előadás első szakaszában meg sem kérdőjeleződik magányossága. Egy apró lábakon álló dobozzal szinte összenő a teste, a terem közepére tett és megvilágított szőnyegen a doboz paramétereit, mozgathatóságát a nézők számára saját testén keresztül teszi érzékelhetővé, megmérhetővé. Megfigyelhetőek a doboz oldalainak a lábához, törzséhez, karjaihoz mért arányai, s azt is látni, hogy testsúlyát hová helyezve válik lehetségessé a doboz élén hosszú másodpercekig, szinte percekig tartó egyensúlyozás. Gyanússá akkor válik a sötét háttérbe vesző tér, mikor Claudio hosszú, vékony testét belepréseli a dobozba, s míg a bezárt ajtó mögött kuksol, addig a vörös szőnyeg redői mintha megemelkednének – ám ahogy az élő test kilép a dobozból, a szőnyeg újra teljesen élettelen és mozdulatlan, mintha az előző néhány pillanat csak káprázat, a sötétségbe meredő szem téves tapasztalata lett volna.

Kicsivel később a fény a szőnyeg hátsó vonalán elhelyezkedő, egy emberi testet is benyelni képes, hatalmas fadobozt világít meg. A doboz vészjóslóan inogni kezd, ám kilengései ellenére mégsem dől el. Ettől a ponttól kezdve Claudio és a dobozok szürreális játékba kezdenek, mely során az élő test és az élettelen tárgyak át- meg átcsúsznak egy számunkra ismeretlen szabályoknak engedelmeskedő világba. A test és



*Claudio Stellato – L'Autre © Martin Firket*

constant (yet entertaining) tension – an excitement – where every second holds unexpected and dangerous movement.

The performance of the almost magical stage movements, combining the elements of circus, physical theatre and dance, would have been impossible to achieve without another person hiding in the darkness, behind the scenes, or to be more specific, on the edges of the space. Martin Firket, who only appeared at the curtain call, works at least as hard as Claudio during the performance. It is not a mere coincidence that the two men are about the same height, and wear very similar costumes, hairstyles and beards.

*L'Autre* evolved into its current form after a three year long research period, and the two creators did not take part in other projects during this time. The precision of the performance and its openness to endless interpretation is the result of this long research, during which the two men worked toward the final performance by observing each other and recording themselves on video. As they told us, they left out several elements from the final version after finding that

a tárgy olykor elfeledkezik a gravitációról, ám sosem tudni mikor vannak egyik vagy másik világ megszabta szabályok között; egy állandó (szórakoztató) feszültség, izgalom keríti hatalmába a nézőteret, minden pillanat váratlan és veszélyes mozdulatokat ígér.

A varázslat határát súroló, a cirkusz és a fizikai színház, a tánc eszközeit felhasználó színpadi tevékenységsor végrehajtása lehetetlen lenne egy másik, a kulisszák mögött, pontosabban a tér szélein mozgó, sötétségbe bújó társon kívül. A csupán tapsnál előbukkanó Martin Firket legalább annyit dolgozik az előadás egész ideje alatt, mint Claudio, s az sem véletlen, hogy a két egyforma magasságú férfi igen hasonló ruházatot, sőt haját, arcszörzetet visel.

*A másik – L'autre* – című produkció három évig tartó kutatómunka után kapta meg a jelenlegi formáját, s ezen kívül másik, párhuzamos projektben nem is igen vett részt a két alkotó. A sallangtalan és túppontos, végtelen számú értelmezési lehetőségnek teret adó előadás hosszas kutatás eredménye, a két férfi egymást figyelve, illetve önmagukat videóra véve jutott el a bemutatásra szánt állapotig. Elmondásuk szerint

music and certain pieces of choreography were unnecessary. The production was created without any outside help or significant technical equipment. The props were created and the lights were set up by Claudio and Firket themselves. They withdrew from themselves and from the production everything that was unnecessary or was not a consequence of the dynamics of the piece's consecutive moments in an almost ascetic way, so the result was exceptionally pure. Their ascetic way of mind and the effect of this on their everyday life is demonstrated by the fact that Claudio only eats vegetables on the day of the show, so as to keep his body properly light and airy.

The idea and the initial etude was Claudio's; however, most of the work was done by both of them. Firket helps Claudio in the birth of magic, yet his job is carefully hidden from prying eyes – his exact work is unknown and one can only guess later that he was seen for moments in some of the episodes. The particular world created by the two of them, their linked solitude, is the most important component of their calculated and precise performance. They have to tune into each other extremely well, which is only made possible by their long-lasting, isolated work process, and their equal faith in this joint venture.

### **The Cunning Trick Grabber**

The solitude of Karl Stets is actual. In his performance *Cuerdo* he is the only artist; there is no visible or hidden creative partner. He arrives to his performance with a huge backpack, wading through the auditorium to the stage. Stets then works on an empty stage with the objects that he digs out from his bottomless baggage – one object at a time, so his performance can easily be divided into sections. Between the sequences (first with the bag, then later with some mousetraps, shorter and longer ropes, a puppet, a fake fish and hook) he operates the music himself with quickly installed audio equipment: selecting the right music, slowing it down or making it faster, is part of the stage performance.

With his slim and agile body Stets presents a harmonious sequence of movements, as if his inner self were in a meditative state. Despite the

számos elemet kihagytak a végső változathoz, a zene vagy bizonyos jól megcsinált koreografikus alakzatok szerepeltetését nem találták eléggé indokoltnak. Az előadás bármiféle külső segítség, komolyabb technikai felszerelés bevetése nélkül jött létre; a kellékeket maguk készítették, s a világítást is ők állították be. Szinte aszketikus módon vontak meg magunktól és az előadástól mindent, ami esetleg indokolatlan, vagy nem szervesen az egymásra következő pillanatok dinamikájából született, így lett az eredmény rendkívül letisztult. Aszketikus beállítottságukat, belső felkészülésük komolyságát, életvitelükre való hatását mutatja, hogy Claudio az előadások napján csak zöldségeket eszik, hogy megfelelően könnyű és levegős maradjon a teste.

Az ötlet és a kiinduló etűd Claudiohoz köthető, ám a munka nagy részét ketten végezték. Claudiot Firket segíti hozzá a varázslat megszületéséhez, munkája azonban gondosan el van rejtve a kíváncsi szemek elől – nem tudni, hogy mi a feladata, s azt is inkább csak utólag lehet sejteni, hogy néhány pillanat erejéig őt is láttuk a színpadon. Közösen létrehozott sajátos világuk, kettősük összekötött magánya a centire és másodpercre kiszámolt előadás legfontosabb alkotóeleme. Rendkívül egymásra kell hangolódniuk, aminek lehetőségességéhez nagyban hozzájárul a kettejük vállalta hosszan tartó elszigetelt munkafolyamat, s a közös vállalkozásba vetett hit.

### **A leleményes trükkhalmozó**

Karl Stets színpadi magányossága tényleges, *Cuerdo* című produkciójában ő az egyetlen szereplő, nincs megmutatott vagy eltitkolt, vele utazó alkotópartnere. Belső figyelmet és magányos elmélyültséget sugárzó előadására egy nagy utazótáskával a hátán érkeznek, a nézőtérre keresztülgázolva jut el a színpadig. Karl Stets az üres színpadon a feneketlenség illúzióját nyújtó táskából kibányászott tárgyakkal dolgozik – egyszerre csak egyfajta eszközzel, így könnyedén szakaszokra bontható előadása. Az először magával a táskával, majd egérfogókkal, hosszabb és rövidebb kötelekkel, bábbal, csengőkkel, műhallal és horoggal előadott szekvenciák között egy sebtiben összeállított kis hangberendezés segítségével maga irányítja a zenét: a színpadi

fact that he several times makes direct contact with the audience (he gives the mousetraps to audience members, and later climbs over the theatre's seating with his face tied up in, and disfigured by, fishing line), he remains detached – plunges into himself rather than seeking relationships or revealing himself. He tries to present the continuous, ever more difficult tricks in his own characteristic way, using all the different qualities of his instruments.

The audience may enjoy watching Stets walk across a slack rope with bells hanging from it, but certain other scenes are too long. These tiny losses of proportion may be the consequence of the lack of an outside observer or supervisor – Stets has been working and travelling alone for years now, though his solitude is relative as the lights and the music were designed by other artists. From the moment of the premiere, however, the presentation, the timing and the proportions within the sequences have been totally up to him. We can learn something about the temperament of the artist himself as we look into *Cuerdo's* cleverly assembled world, watching Stets almost dancing through it with his floating, meditative movements.

### The Hermit with a Tent

*L'Homme Cirque* is a real one-man show. David Dimitri worked in several companies for many years before deciding to follow his own path and establish his one-man circus. His act is a circus performance in the traditional style: once an acrobat, he presents circus sketches one after the other, such as acrobatic acts, riding tricks, tightrope walking and somersaults. The difficulty of the different tricks increases, the tension grows due to several intentional errors, and the performer only arrives at the end of a sequence after a long preparation. The 'big trick' is also withheld until the end of the production.

Dimitri is the master of creating an atmosphere: he introduces all of his tricks with huge smiles as he looks at the audience patiently; his gestures even react to children's interjections. He does everything by himself: he sets the next music track, he moves the scenery; he is a circus artist

játék része a számok váltogatása, lassításuk vagy gyorsításuk.

Karl Stets vékony és mozgékony testével harmonikus mozgássorokat mutat be, mintha bensője az előadás ideje alatt meditációs állapotban lenne, s annak ellenére, hogy többször közvetlen kapcsolatba lép a közönséggel (odaadja az egérfogókat a nézőknek, összekötöztök arccal bemászik a sorok és a székek közé), mégis távolságtartó marad – sokkal inkább önmagába merülő, mint kapcsolatokat kereső vagy feltárulkozó. Az egymást követő, fokozódó nehézségű, tulajdonképpen előre sejtethető trükköket igyekszik egyéni, csak rá jellemző módon előadni, egy-egy eszköz tulajdonságainak minden dimenzióját számba veszi.

A két rúd közé kifeszített, csengőkkel felszerelt kötélén való járását még szívesen elnézné az ember, a rövidke kötélrész kigyóként való szerepeltetése viszont túlságosan hosszúvá nyúlik. Az aprócska aránytévésztések a külső, felügyelő szem hiányából fakadhatnak – évek óta egyedül utazik előadásával, ám Stets magánya mégis viszonylagos, hiszen fényeket és a zenét más művészek segítségével állította be –, a bemutató pillanattól kezdve az előadásmód, a tempó és a szekvenciák belüli arányok csak rajta múlnak. Az előadó alkatáról is megsejthetünk valamit, míg egy izgalmas, igazán találékony elemekből összerakott, szinte táncoló „lebegő”, meditatív mozdulatokból megkonstruált világot látunk magunk előtt.

### A sátras remete

A *L'Homme cirque* igazi magánszám, Oneman Show. David Dimitri több évig dolgozott társulatokban, majd úgy döntött, hogy saját útjára lép és megalakítja egyszemélyes cirkuszát. Előadása cirkuszi előadás, a tradicionális értelemben: az eredetileg kötél-táncos előadó tipikus cirkuszi jeleneteket mutat be egymás után, mint például akrobatikus mutatványok, lovas gyakorlatok, kötélén való járás és szaltózás. A különböző trükkök nehézsége egyre nő, a feszültség szándékosan elkövetett baklövésekkel fokozódik, s csak hosszas előkészületek után jutunk el egy-egy szekvencia végére, a „nagy mutatvány” is a produkció záró szakaszába kerül.

and a ringmaster in one. In the small tent, custom made for Dimitri, the tricks are adapted for the one-man performance: he performs some of his acrobatics on a treadmill, adjusting the speed himself; an ironic wooden horse is used for the equestrian exercise; and the bags that first seemed heavy and difficult to move, 'accidentally' turn out to be light as a feather.

*L'Homme Cirque* represents the classical circus style, and the production is made exceptionally engaging due to the performer's personality, wit and sense of proportion. An almost nostalgic mood can be sensed during the production as the gray-haired tightwire-dancer performs those old, well-known circus tricks all by himself – and just before shooting himself out of a cannon, he plays a sad song on his trumpet as he lies on the wire. Every second of the show is precisely calculated; the mistakes are part of the dramaturgy, and Dimitri's movements are exact and graceful. He has been performing this show all around the world for years now, refining his acts steadily and passionately chasing a state of perfection that perhaps is impossible to reach.

During his shows his loneliness is complete, and is accepted into the dramaturgy. The technical transitions are embedded in humorous scenes. His acts are highly cultivated. Perhaps the risk is not in performing the tricks – the somersaults – anymore, but in the fact that Dimitri has to hold the whole mechanism, the environment of these dangerous, precisely calculated movements, the wholeness of the illusion of the circus and the scenery, in his own hands. The burden of a whole tent filled with tricks rests on the shoulders of this friendly Swiss performer, who can only rely on himself if he falls.

### **The Degrees of Solitude**

These four performances were all considered to be solo performances; however, the solitude of the performers was not the same in each case. We were given excellent examples of possible variations of loneliness on the stage: from serious teamwork well hidden behind the curtains, to declared or visible cooperation, to real solitude lasting for shorter or longer periods, to even hermitage. Maybe it is not too much to say that

Dimitri a hangulatteremtés mestere, széles mosollyal vezeti be minden egyes trükkjét, szemét nyugodtan pihenteti a közönség tagjain, gesztusai olykor a gyerekek közbeszólásaira is reagál. Mindent egymaga végez, egy kis pulton ő állítja be a soron következő zenét, ő tologatja a díszleteket; cirkuszi művész és porondmester is egyben. A kisméretű, kifejezetten számára tervezett sátorban a trükkök az egyszemélyes előadásmódhoz adaptálódnak, olykor összevonódnak, máskor lelepleződnek. Dimitri artista mutatványainak egy részét egy futópadon végzi, aminek sebességét ő maga állítja be; a lovas gyakorlathoz ironikus módon egy falovat használ; a kezdetben nehezen mozgatható, súlyos zsákról „véletlenül” kiderül, hogy pihekönnyű, csak ki van tömve.

*A L'homme cirque* a klasszikus cirkuszi vonal képviselője, az estét az előadó személyisége, ötletessége, arányérzéke teszi igazán érdekessé. Szinte nosztalgikus hangulat lengi át a produkciót, ahogyan az ősz hajú kötél-táncos régi, ismert trükköket elevenít fel és old meg teljesen egyedül, s még mielőtt kilőné magát egy ágyúból, a kötélen fekvé eltrombitál egy szomorú dalt. A show minden egyes másodperce kiszámított, a hibák a dramaturgiába ágyazottak, Dimitri mozdulatai pontosak és kecsesek, évek óta ezzel az előadással járja a világot, rendületlenül és szenvedéllyel finomítja trükkjeit egy talán elérhetetlen tökéletesség felé törekedve.

Előadásai közben magánya teljes és felvállalt, a technikai átkötéseket humoros jelenetekbe ágyazva oldja meg. Trükkjei rendkívül kigyakoroltak, az igazi kockázatvállalás talán már nem is az egyes mutatványok, szaltók elvégzésében rejlik, hanem abban, hogy az egész mechanizmust, a veszélyes, pontosan kiszámolt mozdulatok körülményeit, a cirkuszi illúzió teljességét, a díszlet minden egyes pontját egyedül Dimitrinek kell kézben tartania. Egy egész sátornyi, mutatványokkal teli világ terhe nyugszik a kedélyes svájci művész vállain, aki ha megbotlik, csak saját magára számíthat.

### **A magányosság fokai**

A bemutatott négy előadás mindegyike szólónak

these solutions are the different degrees of solitude of circus performers. The variations of solitude are not related to the quality of the performances (this depends on the work invested and the talent of the performer); the perfect performance can be achieved by any of these solutions. There is no doubt, however, that the personality of the performers is an essential component of their production, and their turns of minds and creative methods have almost become their trademarks and brands.

tekinthető, ám a művészek egyedülléte messze nem egyforma. Az igazán komoly, kulisszák mögé rejtett csapatmunkától kezdve a bevallott, sőt felmutatott együttműködésen át az igazi egyedüllétig, annak rövidebb, vagy már sok éve tartó, szinte remeteségig vezető változataig kiváló példákat láttunk a színpadi magány előfordulásainak lehetséges változataira. Talán nem túlzás azt állítani, hogy ezek a megoldások a cirkuszi szólók prototípusai a cirkuszi előadók magányának fokozatait illetően. A magány variációi nincsenek összefüggésben az előadások minőségével (az a befektetett munkától és az előadó tehetségétől, adottságaitól függ), kiváló produkció bármelyik megoldással elérhető. Kétségtelen viszont, hogy a művészek személyisége nagyon fontos komponense a produkcióknak, s észjárásuk, alkotói módszerük szinte védjegyükké, branddé válik.





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