

FRESH SEMINARS

COLLECTOR'S
EDITION
2017-2021



AN OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY
CIRCUS AND STREET ARTS ISSUES,
STAKES AND DYNAMICS FROM
AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

CIRCO
STRADA

EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR
CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS
AND OUTDOOR ARTS

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	3
FRESH CIRCUS#4: MORE THAN CIRCUS!	5
FRESH STREET#3: PLACE AND IDENTITY	47
FRESH CIRCUS#5: CIRCUS IS EVERYWHERE	81
FRESH STREET#4: THE SPACE IN BETWEEN	121
ABOUT CIRCOSTRADA & ARTCENA	158

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the FRESH SEMINARS' Collector publication!

Entitled *An overview of contemporary circus and street arts issues, stakes and dynamics from an international perspective*, this booklet gathers a compilation of four publications dedicated to the FRESH international seminars. If you are not yet familiar with the FRESH concept, there is no need to worry and we will do our best to enlighten this mystery by the time you reach the bottom of this page.

What are the FRESH seminars and why do we dedicate such an extensive piece of literature to it? This catchy name stands for International Seminars for the Development of Circus and Street Arts, the flagship events of Circostrada Network and key moments gathering all stakeholders from both sectors. As it often happens, it is much more than a big international conference celebrating circus and street arts: FRESH are a strong political and cultural lever for these fields and a powerful advocacy tool to make sure these art forms obtain a stronger legitimacy and recognition from cultural policies. FRESH events not only do provide a great visibility platform for both circus and street arts at the national and international levels, but they also connect people, give space for collective thinking and dialogue between artists, producers, artistic directors, researchers, journalists, students, policy makers, acting as a catalyst for change, innovation, cooperation and experimentation. Over the years, they have proven to show a real power to shift the lines and have greatly contributed to the support, promotion and structuring of these two art forms at European level. By bringing light to contemporary circus and street arts creations, voicing the sectors' issues and priorities, highlighting the impact, vitality and values of these two booming sectors, they have become a must-event.

To go back a little further in history, these seminars have been organised by Circostrada since 2008 with regard to circus arts, hosted by La Villette in Paris (France) for the first three editions, and were initiated for the first time in 2015 in Tàrraga and Barcelona (Spain) with regard to street arts, in collaboration with FiraTàrraga. From this date onward, they have been running every year, each year alternating between a focus on circus and the next following year on street arts. Up until now, they have been co-organised by different network's members and hosted in different countries across Europe.

If we choose to consider only four of them in this booklet, it is mainly to pay tribute to a 4-year project led by Circostrada, which stretched out from 2017 to 2021 and generated an outstanding number of resources and original narratives on circus and street arts through the implementation of the FRESH seminars. As this project just came to an end, we decided to highlight this legacy, all the issues, debates and stakes tackled these past four years in a written publication, to give a comprehensive picture of both sectors at this moment in time and because it struck us as being a much valuable testimony of circus and street arts history, specificities and evolutions on an international scale, that deserves to be preserved over time.

The seminars included in this collector publication took place respectively in March 2018 in Brussels, Belgium (FRESH CIRCUS#4), co-organised with Espace Catastrophe and Wallonie-Bruxelles Théâtre Danse, in May 2019 in Galway and Inis Oírr (FRESH STREET#3), co-organised with ISACS and Galway 2020 – European Capital of Culture, in October 2019 in Auch, France (FRESH CIRCUS#5), co-organised with CIRCa – National Pole for Circus Arts, and in November 2020 online due to the Covid-19 pandemic (FRESH STREET#4), co-organised with FNAS – Federazione Nazionale Arte In Strada, based in Turin, Italy. Four seminars, four headlines: "More than Circus!", "Place and Identity", "Circus is Everywhere", "The Space in Between", over 200 speakers involved, an audience of 2000 professionals reached on-site, these events were a vibrant celebration of the vitality, diversity and richness of circus and street arts.

We hope you'll enjoy the FRESH experience on paper (or behind your screens perhaps) as much as we enjoyed it live, and that it will bring you food for thought and inspiration for the future.

As a matter of fact, it will soon be time to look ahead and embrace a new era, a new project, a new FRESH event, new issues to discuss and question, new contemporary creations to discover, artists to encounter, voices to be heard. FRESH will be back for an epic seminar dedicated to both circus and street arts. It will take place in 2023, in the frame of the next Circostrada project, designed around the red thread of the BODY/IES. It will be a major event as 2023 will also be the opportunity to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Circostrada, so mark the dates already: FRESH is coming in autumn 2023 in France... stay tuned!

Circostrada Coordination Team

Stéphane Segreto-Aguilar, Circostrada Network Coordinator

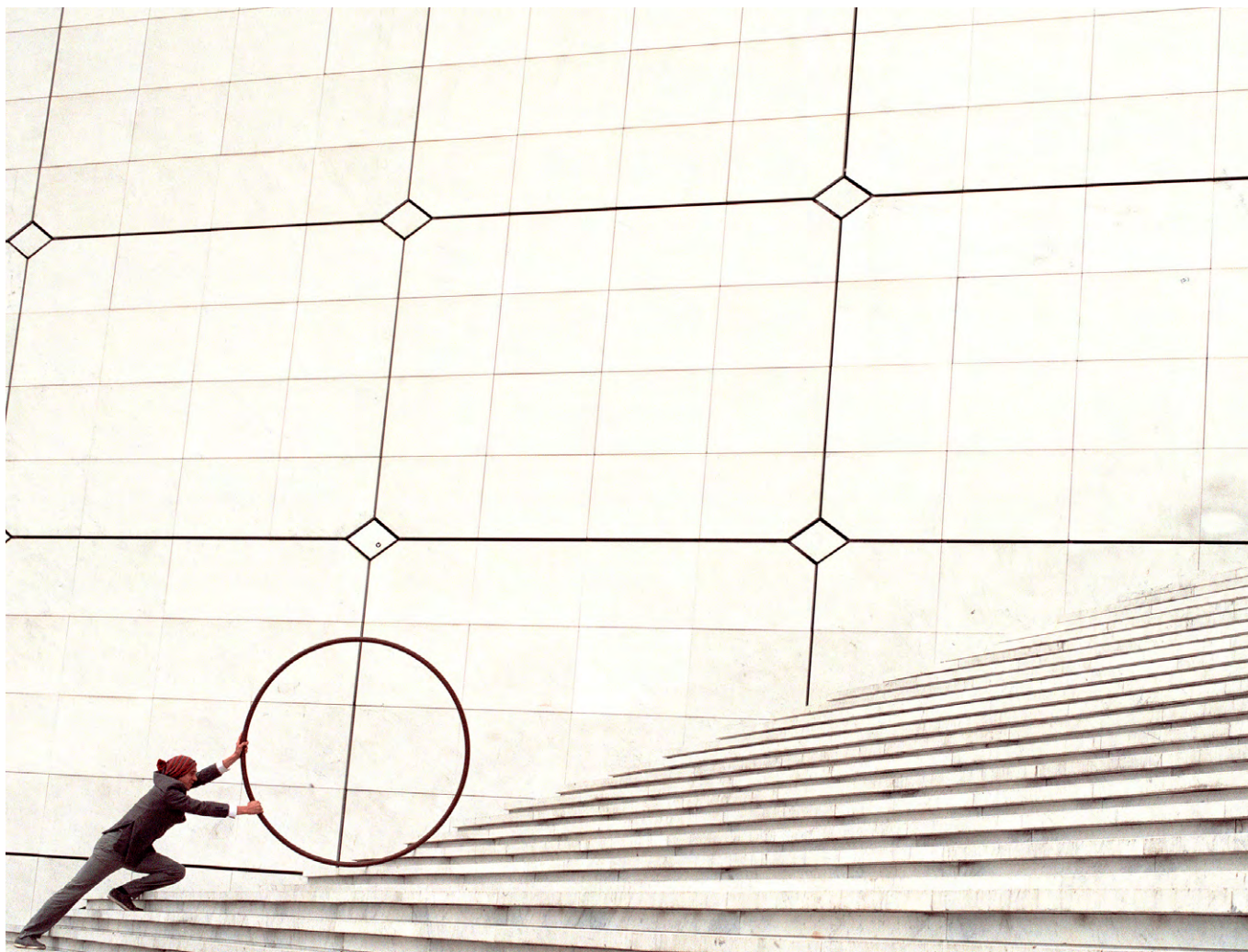
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FRESH
SEMINARS

FRESH CIRCUS#4

FRESH CIRCUS #4



ARTCENA

ARTCENA is the French National Centre for Circus Arts, Street Arts and Theatre, funded by the French Ministry of Culture. It coordinates the Circostrada network and has a permanent seat on its Steering Committee. It works towards its missions in three main areas: the sharing of knowledge through a digital platform and activities of documentation, the support to professionals via mentoring and training, the development of these three artistic fields by providing funding to authors and carrying out international development.



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European Network
Circus and Street ArtS

Since 2003, Circostrada Network has been working to develop and structure the fields of circus and street arts in Europe and beyond. With more than 100 members from over 30 countries, it helps building a sustainable future for these sectors by empowering cultural players through activities in observation and research, professional exchanges, advocacy, capacity-building and information.

FOREWORD

Memory, identity and heritage: three notions that are intimately linked in a subtle system of relationships that intertwine and nourish one another. Heritage, whether tangible or intangible, is often seen as a means for passing on memories, and seems as such to be the perfect tool for building shared identities. But far from being something that is fixed, heritage is constantly being made, unmade and remade as differences arise and provoke dialogue. Heritage is on the move; it is a political, economic and social issue in our contemporary societies. Celebrating it therefore becomes a unique opportunity to pass on concepts and practices, produce objects of knowledge and memory, and reinforce the recognition of a whole sector on the European stage.

2018 marks the 250th anniversary of modern circus, the Year of Protest, in homage to the 50th anniversary of the events of May 1968, and the European Year of Cultural Heritage. In this context, FRESH CIRCUS set up shop for the first time in Brussels, at the Théâtre National. Each edition of this Circostrada flagship event is developed in close collaboration with one or more network members (in this case Espace Catastrophe & Wallonie Bruxelles Théâtre Danse) and relies on the support of a dedicated working group (25 network members from over 10 different countries, for this edition alone) which lays the foundation for the seminar and sets out the issues at stake for circus arts at the international level.

The initial question raised by this fourth edition seems simple, but the challenge was no less complex. How can we change our relationship to stereotypes, while prompting discussion on the challenges and outlook for today's creative circus arts? While this exercise might seem rather formal, the idea was to give meaning to our future individual and collective actions, and expand and increase the long-term impact that they will have on the circus arts as a whole. The 'More than Circus' tagline was the thread around which we worked as we debated, got to know each other more deeply, and re-examined ourselves and our practices. Now it forms the spine of this publication that aims to capture some of the conversations, stories and ideas that emerged during the event, and that can equip us perhaps to better face tomorrow's challenges.

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A WORD FROM THE COPILOTS & CO-ORGANISERS

So many exchanges and enriching encounters, so much enthusiasm... so many shared experiences!

Far from the stereotypes and clichés, FRESH CIRCUS#4 demonstrated, if it was ever in doubt, the strength, potential and vitality of today's circus across countries and continents. Even though circus arouses much enthusiasm and passion, its actors continue to question their practices and achievements, always reinventing themselves, always looking for new fields, new horizons to explore, and new challenges to take up.

Cultural operators, artists, programmers, pedagogues, researchers, journalists – all different and yet united around a rallying cry: "More than Circus!", for a journey that took them to the heart of the circus practice of today and tomorrow.

As co-pilots and co-organisers of FRESH CIRCUS#4, we are very pleased by the success of this edition, which took place for the first time in Brussels. Thank you to the teams and partners who contributed to the good implementation of the event: the FRESH CIRCUS workgroup, the contributors, curators, moderators and speakers, the institutional partners, the teams of Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles and Circostrada, and, above all, a big thanks to all participants who, by their presence and commitment, gave meaning to this collective mobilisation.

Catherine Magis & Benoît Litt
Espace Catastrophe / Festival UPI
Séverine Latour
WBT/D



FRESH CIRCUS#4 IN A NUTSHELL

400 PARTICIPANTS

35 COUNTRIES FROM 4 CONTINENTS

80 SPEAKERS

3 FULL DAYS OF SEMINARS

1 CITY

3 INTRODUCTORY THEMATIC PLENARY SESSIONS

9 ROUNDTABLES

9 THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

9 PARTICIPATIVE WORKSHOPS

A FULL ARTISTIC PROGRAMME IN THE FRAME OF FESTIVAL UPI -
INTERNATIONAL BIENNALE OF CIRCUS ARTS

PARTNERS



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July 2018

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INNOVATION	11
FEATURE	12
● More than Innovation – by Lyn Gardner, The Stage (UK)	12
● Interview with Sebastian Kann, Artist, Manor House, Researcher (Belgium)	14
REPORTS & EXPERIENCES	15
● Public-private partnerships: funding options for circus arts?	15
● Transdisciplinary projects & cross-cutting practices	17
● Focus: Transdisciplinary work in practice – Interview with Sean Gandini, Co-artistic director, Gandini Juggling (UK)	19
● Building Cities, Building Circus	20
ARTISTIC PATHS AND CREATION PROCESSES	22
FEATURE	23
● Circus in the Golden Triangle – by Filip Tielens, De Standaard (Belgium)	23
● Interview with Sade Kampilla, Artist, Circus I Love You (Finland)	25
REPORTS & EXPERIENCES	26
● New supports for creative processes	26
● Artist trajectories: how does one become a circus artist?	28
● Focus: Breaking out in Japan – Interview with Hisashi Watanabe, Artist/Performer, Atama to Kuchi Company (Japan)	30
● Circus spaces	31
● Focus: Challenges for emerging artists – Interview with Cécile Provôt, Director, Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe/CircusNext (France)	33
IMAGES AND AUDIENCES	34
FEATURE	35
● Crossing barriers, building bridges by Laurent Ancion, CIRQ en CAPITALE (Belgium)	35
● Interview with Maroussia Diaz Verbèke, Artistic Director, Le Troisième Cirque (France)	37
REPORT & EXPERIENCES	38
● What image(s) for circus today?	38
● Focus: Presentation, voice and design – Interview with Maarten Verhelst, Head of Communications, Circuscentrum/Editor in Chief, CircusMagazine (Belgium)	40
● Where to find new circus audiences today?	41
● The influence of socio-political contexts on creation/distribution processes	43
● Focus: The meaning of social circus – Interview with Jessika Devlieghere, Co-founder and Co-director, Palestinian Circus School (Belgium)	45

FROM FRESH CIRCUS#3 TO FRESH CIRCUS#4



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The circus field has spent many years now engaged in the work of structuring itself – forming support instruments and advocacy bodies, founding centres and festivals, and, particularly, codifying circus training and education. And while in some countries this process is just beginning, in others it is reaching a kind of fruition. The benefits have been many: larger audiences, more companies and shows and styles of work, better facilities, and greater recognition. In fact, standing in the sumptuous foyer of the Théâtre National on the first day of FRESH CIRCUS, it was hard to shake the feeling that, here at least, circus had already arrived.

And yet attend any one of the sessions, or speak to any of the 300-some people gathered for the FRESH CIRCUS event, and it'd be clear that life for artists is not getting easier. Reductions in cultural funding, combined in the performing arts with the transience of creative work, leave many with the feeling that the bridge of their career is collapsing underneath them as they run along it. The reality of artistic labour is to travel incessantly, live project to project, and compete among a growing body of peers for a shrinking pool of opportunities. For

programmers, festival operators and other representatives of the 'professional' world, there are challenges as well: they in turn must cope with new budgets and cultural policies, changing habits of consumption, and shifting worldviews.

The purpose of a conference like FRESH CIRCUS, then, is to shine a light on both of these realities – to recognise the successes of the circus field and engage the obstacles it faces; to convene conversations and perhaps to find solutions. This publication attempts to capture some of the debates that took place across the three strands of the conference, with each major section introduced by the journalist that followed it – Lyn Gardner for Innovation, Laurent Ancion for Images and Audiences, and Filip Tielens for Artistic Paths and Creation Processes. Each has a different starting point, but their areas of concern overlap, and there are ideas and observations that recur throughout.

The taglines of the last two FRESH CIRCUS events – Moving Borders and More Than Circus – have both spoken to the desire to grow outwards, as well as to escape a kind of confinement. And for the field at large, this expansion is an interesting moment.

In the balance are the sense of circus as a community or a cohesive identity vs a wider view and greater relatedness; the opportunity to meet and influence larger social and economic systems vs the anxiety of being shaped by them; and the necessity of working internationally vs the impulse to render local service.

While we don't seek to resolve them, each of these tensions is a talking point and a source of new ideas and fresh perspectives. We hope you enjoy seeing them play out through the articles, session reports and interviews collected in this publication.

John Ellingsworth – Editor

INNOVATION

More than Innovation – by Lyn Gardner, The Stage (UK)



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As state funding diminishes, talk of 'innovation' intensifies. But what changes might this new situation demand of us - not only in terms of models of production and financing, but also in terms of aspiration, identity and purpose? Gathering the threads of FRESH CIRCUS, Lyn Gardner finds a sector poised for change.

"I can't change policy, but I can change people's lives," said Eleférios Kechagioglou, speaking in the opening session of FRESH CIRCUS. When we talk about innovation in the arts we often think of new economic models, such as public and private partnerships, or the use of technology, or cutting-edge collaborations across disciplines. All those were indeed discussed over two days at the Théâtre National in Brussels, and they all fed into what is perhaps the most radical innovation of all: the potential of art and circus to transform people's everyday lives, their sense of self, and the places where they live.

The symposium's strapline – 'More than circus' – reflected a growing understanding on the part of the circus community that in a colder funding climate, and a world where traditional representative democracy is under siege, circus doesn't need to stop

entertaining or delighting with its skills and aesthetic, but it can and must do more. It must be more than what Ruth Mackenzie in her keynote address called "a marvellous escape".

It is well-placed to lead the way, and in the process build new relationships with funders, businesses, cities, architects and planners and communities themselves, while all the time cooperating with other sectors to ensure that people live longer, feel happier, love and celebrate where they live and work, and have the agency to tell their own stories. If circus, or indeed any of the performing arts, are going to thrive in a changing economic and cultural landscape, then they have to be as crucial to the local community as the baker and the doctor's surgery. So why not make links and partnerships with the baker and the doctor's surgery?

Changes to cultural policy, both at a national or local level, can be viewed as a looming crisis for circus, or they can be seen as an opportunity to redefine what the art form is for, how it is delivered, where it takes place, and what benefits it brings to all. The latter must always include not just those it currently serves, but also those who it is not yet serving.

The benefits accrued may well be economic, including the creation of jobs, and they can include transforming landscapes – sometimes on a temporary and sometimes on a longer-term basis – and adding value for both neighborhoods and other stakeholders. But most of all, as circus celebrates its 250th anniversary, it is a chance for the art form to think hard about the role it will play in people's lives over the next 50 years. FRESH CIRCUS was not about looking back in nostalgia but looking to the future and how circus might be reimaged. As

architect Patrick Bouchain suggested in the plenary session, what is required is not just ingenuity and innovation but imagination. Imagination is the currency of artists.

It's a mindset that requires that all involved, particularly the artists, stop thinking about self-interest and instead start operating from a point of mutual and aligned interests that bring the greatest benefit to all, particularly those who have least and need most. As was repeated several times during the two days, this doesn't turn circus artists into social workers, but it does put circus and circus artists at the front of a radical artistic movement where circus-makers have a crucial role to play as enablers and collaborators with communities.

Circus has a head-start when it comes to engaging with communities and citizens. Many people have experienced circus performance as a child and the sense of magic stays with them into adulthood. Circus cuts across socio-economic divides. It brings people together. Unlike many art forms that expect and demand that the audience come to it and a special purpose-built space, circus often goes to its audience and is a guest in the community that hosts it. It has both insider and outsider status, which can be useful in winning trust and creating enduring relationships.

There was some irony that FRESH CIRCUS took place at the Théâtre National, a space that confers prestige, but which also unwittingly puts up barriers to engagement. Those who regularly attend the performing arts see the door at a theatre's entrance as a welcoming way in, but for those who are

non-attenders that same door can be something that keeps them out, and which reminds them that art is not for people like them. Where a piece of art happens is just as important as its content, and new locations add new meaning as circus practitioners are discovering.

In a new social and cultural landscape, innovation is not about the market but about people, and how and where you meet them and engage with them, whether it is Vicki Amedume and her company Upswing working with elderly residents in a care home, or Johan Swartvagher of Collectif Protocole creating long-term projects with communities. Innovation is about what Rachel Clare of Crying Out Loud described as "showing people the possible". In the case of circus sometimes doing so via the apparently physically impossible. Swartvagher echoed Kechagioglou when he said: "you can't change the lives of 10,000 people with an art project, but you can change some things for some people. Maybe only little things." But we should never underestimate the importance of changing small things or the amount of change that a tiny group of people can have on the world. Particularly a world crying out for change. As Kechagioglou observed, when current economic models have failed so many so badly, isn't it time for artists to offer ways of doing things differently?

But of course, that means that artists have to think about doing things differently too. You can't just shift your show out of the theatre and into the community. Swartvagher put it bluntly when he argued that you can't simply switch the way you work by making the

show on the street. You have to make it with the street. "These people and this place will change your project," he said. It is a constant process of negotiation and one that recognizes that while circus makers may be experts at circus skills, it is citizens who are experts in their own lives and communities. Without this negotiation, there is always going to be a power imbalance between artists and participants, and it is not a real collaboration. The most ground-breaking, fulfilling and long-lasting collaborations are those that leave genuine legacy, after the artists have left.

That means no longer seeing audience development as a means of achieving greater ticket sales. That is a transaction, whereas truly inclusive practice is an exchange and an invitation to make with rather than making for communities. As one participant said in one of the Building Cities, Building Circus sessions: "If we build it they will come, but if they build it they will stay."

They will, and one of the cheering things about FRESH CIRCUS was that the sector's curiosity about exploring new ways of working came with the understanding that it is when looking to make new partnerships in unexpected places where the need is greatest that the most exciting opportunities occur, opportunities that will help to build a resilient and sustainable sector and allow circus to take its place at the very heart of civic society.

Lyn Gardner is a theatre critic and journalist who writes for The Guardian, The Stage, and many other publications.



Interview with Sebastian Kann

Artist, Manor House, Researcher (Belgium)



The word innovation crops up a lot in policy and conferences like this one. Do artists in your peer group ever talk or think about 'innovation'?

Innovation has kind of a corporate tone. There's definitely talk of originality, and a fear that you're not being 'original'. So there's both a fetish for originality, and a feeling of lacking it. In the very particular corner of the circus world I'm in, there are also a lot of artists who feel outside the mainstream, or outside institutions, and so there's already this criticality with regards to what everyone else is doing and a feeling of 'I should be doing something different from what everyone else is doing'.

But often when you go into the studio with that attitude there's a kind of paralysis. I talk to friends who know very strongly what they don't want to do – what aesthetic they don't want to use, what sort of approaches to avoid. But when you try to flip it towards the affirmative they get very clogged.

Do you feel like there's something missing in the conversation around innovation?

I think what's missing is more scrutiny of what we mean by words like progress or innovation, and who gets to define them. If we proceed blindly to a 'better future' without discussing what it is and what it looks like, then the only way we can think of it is within an extremely normative framework because we didn't take the time and distance to re-design it.

I notice around me a whole underclass of circus artists whose work doesn't make it in the institutions, and maybe this has to do with the unexamined biases of the institutions with regards to what is interesting and what is not. These institutions take certain risks but really the risk gets funneled down almost entirely to the artists – the artist that writes five funding applications to have one accepted, or the artist that spent a year trying to put a project together that was never realised. The sector is so much running on this vast pool of unpaid labour, but it's like all artistic fields in that sense.

If you were using another word to have this conversation under what would you pick?

Multiplication, perhaps. Plurality... innovation has this sort of illusion of progress, and for me if we multiply the ways we work then we can multiply the things that we can think about as being progress. That's also a little bit this a question of sustainability, because the more diverse we are as an ecology the more sustainable we are. So it's an ethical and an artistic or aesthetic wish on my part, but it's also practical.

REPORTS & EXPERIENCES

Public-private partnerships: funding options for Circus arts?

CURATOR	Eleférios Kechagioglou, Director, Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde (France)
MODERATOR	Mark Eysink Smeets, Director, Festival Circolo (The Netherlands)
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF	Ouafa Belgacem, CEO, Culture Funding Watch (Tunisia) Benoît Roland, Administrator, La Coop ASBL (Belgium)

"I have the feeling that we are a very interesting but quite arrogant sector," said Eleférios Kechagioglou, director of Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde and curator of the session on public-private partnerships. In Eleférios' view, actors in the circus field have a powerful commitment to their work, but their tendency to see themselves at the

significant talking point in the circus field. Yet a recurring point of the session was that private-public partnerships have more to offer than simply covering gaps in the budget.

Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde has explored a number of different approaches. Now 25 years old, PPCM has a broad spread of ac-

new business models, and with a focus on training participants to be their own project managers by supporting them to plan their creations, raise money, find partners, and so on. SNCF Foundation gives money to PPCM but also is part of the committee for the Incubator ('they are our best ambassador', says Eleférios). Working with the French multinational Air Liquide, PPCM discovered that the firm had its own internal incubator, and arranged an exchange on the subject of innovation, looking for what engineering practice could teach artistic practice and vice versa. For SAIEM Malakoff Habitat, PPCM brought employees to see presentations of Incubator projects and then led them through a practical workshop, with the goal of changing their sense of what a workplace can be.

Asked what had been difficult about the project, Marjorie Bonnaire, the Incubator's project manager, replied that in collaborations between artists and enterprises each side can have misconceptions about the other, and that companies often don't realise the real costs of artistic performances. For physical exchanges the "frontier of the body" is a big challenge to overcome, and employees themselves might not always want to take a day out of their schedules for 'teambuilding'. Finally, large companies are divided into departments that can make it complex to talk to the right person or get confirmation for activities.

Challenges of this kind are pervasive in close-knit collaborations, but not every pu-



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margins of society, somehow apart, can be negative – especially at a time when the funding environment necessitates new forms of cooperation. "The world we used to live in is not there anymore."

This sense of a tidal shift, undercut by anxiety about the real or imagined consequences of new financing models, is a signi-

fication encompassing local and community work, pedagogy (amateur and pre-professional), and artistic creation, but tries as much as possible to cross these threads, linking social impact and social activities to artistic intervention and vice versa.

In July 2017, PPCM launched the Incubator, a scheme to work with artists interested in

blic-private partnership is. Administrator Benoît Roland presented the non-profit La Coop ASBL, which specialises in accessing money donated by corporations under the Belgian government's tax shelter scheme.

The tax shelter system is a great way of accessing money, explained Benoît, but can be "quite heavy" in administrative terms. La Coop was created by a group of producers to navigate the paperwork and make the funding accessible to both large and small organisations. The money received has to be spent in Belgium and must create taxable income, but artist salaries can meet this regulation. The tax shelter is also accessible for co-productions between Belgian and international companies.

As Benoît admits, it's "not an exciting kind of partnership". La Coop works with banks,

who in turn work with their clients. They have the names of the companies who give through the tax shelter, but otherwise no real contact. Nonetheless it brings a lot of money into the performing arts. "La Coop was created in March 2017, and in its first nine months raised 3.5 million euros for around 50-60 productions."

La Coop's strategy of centralising a vital, but time-consuming, administrative process is one followed as well by Ouafa Belgacem, the CEO of Culture Funding Watch. Ouafa sees a trend in which artists are expected to be managers, leaders, fundraisers and producers. "And it's impossible, you can't excel at all of this." CFW therefore seeks to share costs across activities related to 'mobilising resources', which encompasses gathering data for evidence-based advocacy, tracking fun-

ding opportunities, creating funding strategies, managing donor relations, and so on.

CFW maintains a range of clients, from very large organisations to young artists, and scales its services accordingly. Their model allows them to work with emerging artists for free within the framework of a two-year contract, and with the objective of bringing them to financial sustainability. They also run an apprenticeship programme where they share the cost of an apprenticeship with a larger organisation, and after two years the partner organisation can take the apprentice on permanently. The goal is to centralise expertise, but also to spread it through the sector – and improve the resilience and intelligence of the cultural field.

Time to Act *

Ideas from the final session

Jumping in

- Join a local group for entrepreneurs in order to mix outside the arts sector.
- Don't always focus on the 'usual subjects', but go as well to younger and smaller companies – "find the new economy, not the old economy".
- Use corporate events as a way of testing out partnerships before going deeper.

Exchanging knowledge:

- Organise a European seminar or conference on the topic of public-private partnership.
- Build databases of funding opportunities, and map experts for companies to contact. Collect information on specific initiatives in fields like health care.
- Develop documentation of good practices and example projects.
- Create a position within Circostrada, or a six-month secondment, for an individual who works with Circostrada members on public-private partnerships.
- Organise a Circostrada Lab on themes emerging from the session.

* All the contents of the *Time to act* sessions were collected and synthesized by [Aires Libres](#) - Concertation of Street Arts, Circus Arts and Fairground Arts from the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.



Transdisciplinary projects & cross-cutting practices

CURATORS

Rachel Clare, Artistic Director, Crying Out Loud (UK)
Laura Olgiati, Production Manager, Festival Cirqu'Aarau (Switzerland)

MODERATOR

Kath Gorman, Head of Participation and Engagement, Cork Midsummer Festival (Ireland)

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF

Victoria Amedume, Artistic Director, Upswing (UK)
Chloé Béron, Co-Founder/Artistic Director,
CIAM - Centre International des Arts en Mouvement (France)
Sean Gandini, Co-artistic Director, Gandini Juggling (UK)
Marisa König-Beatty, Cultural Entrepreneur/Producer, BEAM (Switzerland/USA)

In recent years the emphasis in 'transdisciplinary projects' has shifted away from collaborations between artistic genres, and towards exchanges that see artists working with business, science, technology, and the creative industries. Gathering together contributors from a diverse range of backgrounds, this session aimed to examine the nature of such initiatives and to highlight different examples of cross-cutting practices.

Marisa König-Beatty presented BEAM, a 'transdisciplinary dream tank' that produces projects involving partners from the arts, academia and start-up and business worlds, as well as third sector organisations. While ranging widely in its collaborations, the agency has a focus on work, organisation, civil society and business – a thematic identity that helps it in connecting with potential partners. Recent projects include The Future of Science, for which BEAM, in collaboration with the art and performance collective Neue Dringlichkeit, was invited to design an intervention for the We Scientists Shape Science conference organised by the Swiss Academy of Sciences. In a series of video interviews, conference participants were asked to imagine themselves in the year 2070 and to look back on the scientific, technological, social and societal achievements of the 21st century.

In a similar vein, CIAM - le Centre International des Arts en Mouvement, presented by co-founder and artistic director Chloé Béron, is a centre in Aix-en-Provence that

seeks to bring circus into new relationships with technology, the creative industries, business, and society at large. With their CIAMLabs series they've organised laboratories on circus and architecture (aimed at reimagining circus venues) and on circus and connected objects (in which design teams worked to imagine a device that

a strand of activities her company has been running with and for older people in the UK, explaining how the core concepts of circus – balance, risk, strength, etc. – can be adapted to different levels of physicality. In 2012-13, during the research and development phase of a performance called What Happens in the Winter, Upswing worked with the cha-



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could revolutionise circus teaching and practice). In 2019, they plan another lab looking at circus as a social enterprise and tool for 'hacking' various societal problems. This begs a further question: if transdisciplinary projects are seeking new ways to connect with society, what does circus uniquely have to offer? Vicki Amedume, the artistic director of Upswing, presented

rity Entelechy Arts to give a series of circus workshops for older people. From there, they went on to initiate a weekly activities day for the over 60s, hosted at the Albany Theatre in London, and eventually worked with the charity Magic Me to undertake a ten-week residency at Silk Court care home in Bethnal Green, supported by the care home provider Anchor.

Such initiatives open exciting opportunities to transform circus and people's perceptions of it, but, as the session reflected, may require advocating for a 'boxless' approach to funding and policy, as well as fostering a greater awareness of the nature of artistic processes and the importance of research and development.

Discussion in the session also touched on how producers play an important role in

brokering connections, but have a responsibility to reflect on how the projects they design frame and shape the artistic work. Transdisciplinary collaborations launched as top-down initiatives to reach new audiences, to access specific funding programmes, or simply to align with current trends run the risk of predetermining artistic outputs. The session workshop linked this pressure to produce a specific result to an ambiguity concerning what 'success' means within a

project – is it reaching a certain audience, selling a good number of tickets, or finding the right voice/form for a particular creative idea? Discussing the idea of artistic 'freedom', participants linked it to notions including the "removal of personal expectations" and "long-term human support without judgement". Or, as another participant put it, "Freedom is a room and a key."

Time to Act

Ideas from the final session

- Lobby policymakers to use their convening power to connect people across sectors, creating integrated funding opportunities and meaningful connections with educational institutions.
- Produce case studies of good practice for lobbying, training and education within the sector.
- Orient funding/support not only towards end products but also research and development.
- Give artists time and space without the pressure of producing an 'end product'.
- Think in a transdisciplinary way in the search for space for experimentation and approach festivals, universities and businesses.

Focus: Transdisciplinary work in practice



Interview with Sean Gandini Co-artistic director, Gandini Juggling (UK)



Is there anything specific to circus in transdisciplinary work?

When we made our show *4x4*, which combined ballet and juggling, a lot of people said what strange things they were to put together. And yet to me juggling and Washington trapeze are stranger bedfellows. In my mind juggling is closer to classical ballet than it would be to a person standing on their head on a swinging platform. So in a way the things that are traditionally associated with circus are already a curious conglomeration.

It makes me wonder if the radical thing would actually be to remove everything that surrounds a skill and just have it on its own – the bare bones.

In that case, what is there to gain from transdisciplinary projects?

The real transdisciplinary thing is to go out of your comfort zone, which hardly anybody likes doing. So for me the hardest collaborations have been the most fruitful. When we worked with Alexander Whitley on *Spring* he questioned me a lot: why do you have to put a funny scene in here? Do we need funniness? I think it has something to do with push and pull – and I guess if you trust someone then you let them have a say, and you learn to compromise. The compromise is a fascinating place because it's a place you wouldn't have visited otherwise.

It seems like you can also think about transdisciplinary projects in terms of artistic exchange but also in production terms – trying to cross over or combine audiences, access new resources, etc...

I feel like this is where it gets into dangerous territory, because circus is growing – at least in Europe – and alongside that the bureaucratic infrastructure has gotten bigger and more prescriptive. So I think producers have a difficult job: how can you be a catalyst but leave room for the artists? Because at the end of the day it is about the artists.

Right now I think there's a buzz around transdisciplinary work – especially video and high tech stuff. So there's some production pressure to perform to that. But often when you have a circus artist with a video projection the two don't interact, or in ballet it's very popular to have big digital installations but the dancing is intrinsically the same format – so the transdisciplinary element hasn't really changed anything, it's more like an illustrious frame.

Building Cities, Building Circus

CURATOR

Thomas Renaud, Director, Maison des Jonglages (France)

MODERATOR

Maaïke van Langen, Artistic Director, Rotterdam Circusstad Festival (The Netherlands)

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF

Jérôme Page, Urban Planner, Plaine Commune (France)
Lauréline Saintemarie, Development Manager, FAI-AR (France)
Felicity Simpson, Director/Creative Producer, Circolombia (UK/Colombia)
Johan Swartvagher, Artist, Collectif Protocol (France)

A city, according to Lauréline Saintemarie, the development manager of the school FAI-AR, is “a huge system of signs”. Advertising, shop windows, traffic signals, street names – the artist who creates in public space has to build their performance within the weave of stories and meanings that already exist there. As they develop work, and choose a site for it, this artist is by turns urban designer, geographer and surveyor.

the neighbourhood”, make the inhabitants of a place more sensitive to its architecture and streets, and to the flow of people and cars, and ultimately must bring them to a new point of view on their environment.

In a similar vein, the urban planner Jérôme Page sees artistic projects as a good way of addressing the “symbolic dimension” of urban change. Representing Plaine Com-

Pointing out that a two-year reconstruction project is often thought of in terms of inconvenience – traffic problems, noise, commercial disruption, etc. – Jérôme said that one benefit of a cultural project is to de-emphasise these negative aspects in favour of bringing forward the character and social dynamics of a district. Alongside designing a new public space outside the market that could be used for performances and social activities, Plaine Commune commissioned a two-year programme of cultural activity that could take place during the redevelopment period.



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Located in Marseille, France, FAI-AR is a training centre dedicated to creation in public space. Every two years the programme takes fifteen artists, from different backgrounds, who want to lead a project in public space. Lauréline reinforces that creating an outdoor show is not simply about transposing an indoor performance to the street. Instead the artist must “embody the shape of

mune, a conglomeration of nine city councils north of Paris, he presented the example of a major redevelopment on the Îlot du Marché at Le Quartier des Quatre Routes in La Courneuve. The site houses Paris’ third largest market, making it an important social hub and economic centre for the area, and one that is deeply connected to local inhabitants’ lives and livelihoods.

This programme was developed and delivered by Protocol, a collective of five jugglers that specialises in improvisation in public space. Artist Johan Swartvagher talked about the formation of the group, describing how it was a long process for them – as jugglers used to working in training halls – to move into public space. It was a shift that necessitated combining juggling with other disciplines, as well as getting extremely comfortable with improvisation (“if you don’t improvise, you are dead; the project cannot exist”). After a few years they began to make *Monument*, a four-day show that begins on the morning of the first day and ends during the night of the fourth. The goal for the company is “not to find how to play the show in the street, but to make the show *with* the street.”

For their two-year project with Plaine Commune, *Monument en Partage*, they collaborated with a video-maker and two architects, and eventually conceived an investigation of the local area that would take place in eight

acts, and that turned around the appearance of mysterious horse-headed men (a reference to the legend that La Courneuve was founded when Saint-Lucien's horse struck the earth with its hoof and uncovered a natural spring). Activities took place around the quarter – as well as, with the piece *Allo Jonglage*, in resident's homes. "We think art can help you understand where you live," says Johan.

Felicity Simpson, the director and creative producer of the company Circolombia, holds a similar view. Alongside Hector Fabio Cobo, Felicity started Circo Paro Todos in Santiago de Cali in 1995 as a school for

"determined children succeeding against the odds". It became Colombia's national circus school in 2006, but had more and more funding problems, and eventually the team made the radical decision to uproot and move from Cali to Bogota.

They were given an old train station (a large site that "no one else wanted") in the city centre and became part of a larger project to regenerate the area. In some respects, this has brought significant advantages. As part of the 'showcase' for Bogota's redevelopment, Circo Paro Todos and Circolombia frequently host and develop links with private partners. In 2017 they worked with

MIT, who sent 60 students to Bogota in order to work on finding 'new solutions for education' in the area.

But, explains Felicity, there is a balance to be struck. On the one hand they have been careful to establish themselves at the old train station, taking two years to create a formal plan to protect and manage the site as part of the city's heritage ("patrimony is our greatest friend"). On the other, they're prepared to uproot and move on if there's a radical change in the situation. As Felicity puts it: "It's really important to be permanently temporary."

Time to Act

Ideas from the final session

Getting started:

- Get out of your comfort zone by making a meeting with a city planner, going to public meetings. Ask: what can we contribute? Consider yourself as a worker/builder in your city and advocate for strong cultural policies.
- Think outside the box in terms of location and funding (look into budgets outside of culture). Consider small towns vs big cities; centres vs suburbs; backstreets vs central squares. Use temporary environments such as construction sites.

Locations and financing:

- Bring temporary artistic events into abandoned buildings to demonstrate their potential and contribute to the 'lifting-up' of a location/neighbourhood.
- Ask local shopkeepers to contribute to activities that generate business for them.
- Talk to property developers – advocate for cultural projects as adding value to developments.

Bringing together artists, planners and inhabitants:

- When putting up a big top in a city, ask the neighbourhood to participate. Invite the public to spend time in the 'circus space': in a caravan, or a camping ground at the circus event.
- Educate artists on the possibilities – and challenges – of art in public space, and do the same for urban planners/architects.
- Make the case that the arts have an economic role, and a role to play in terms of changing the image of a neighbourhood – and transforming the lives of its inhabitants.

ARTISTIC PATHS AND CREATION PROCESSES

FEATURE

Circus in the Golden Triangle - by Filip Tielens, De Standaard (Belgium)

Looked at from one angle, the evidence is everywhere: circus is booming. The number of festivals and companies is rising, new schools are educating the next generation of artists, and in many territories circus is improving its institutional standing. But rapid growth can bring its own challenges and problems. Filip Tielens asks the question: are our cultural policies and circus structures ready?

Let's start with the good news. At FRESH CIRCUS I heard artists from so many countries saying how much progress has been made in the last decade – or even the last five years.

In Flanders, where I live, we celebrate this year the tenth anniversary of the 'Circusdecreet', the law on circus. It's an understatement to say that this law has boosted the diversity and professionalisation of the circus field: there are many more circus companies, festivals, grants, and touring possibilities than a decade ago. Look to other territories and you find similar stories. Fabrizio Gavosto from Mirabilia Festi-

val told how in Italy, after years of fighting for recognition, the Ministry of Culture has come to consider circus as the 'fifth art form'. All over the country, residency spaces are being opened, and ten of fourteen national theatre circuits have chosen to dedicate a significant part of their programming to circus. In Portugal, as recounted by Cláudia Berkeley of Teatro da Didascália, circus is growing in the north of the country, with a permanent venue for circus opening in May 2018, and production support being provided for newly graduated artists of the local circus school.

In short, the circus field is experiencing rapid growth. But this is not to say there are no challenges ahead, and one of the biggest lies in finding ways to match limited resources to the growing number of artists now graduating from circus schools and entering the professional field. In the end it comes down to the 'golden triangle': to make circus, you need time, money and space. And in balancing this golden triangle, there is still a lot of work to do.

Time - creating on a treadmill

While a regular theatre production is created in six weeks to three months and a dance show in three to six months, creating a circus show easily demands a year or longer. It takes time to learn new circus techniques or search for new possibilities with objects. The companies

that are acclaimed internationally are usually the ones who had long creation processes that enabled them to take more artistic risks.

Take Claudio Stellato for example: this acclaimed artist has made only two shows in

ten years, and takes at least 18 months of solo preparation time before he starts to work with his performers. "I am fast in life and slow in creation," he joked during the session on artistic trajectories. "Everyone creates so fast. It takes years to develop something that is important to share with people." His words made me think of the legendary French artist Johann Le Guillerm, who never stops working on his always evolving circus universe.

Which is all very well, but time is a scarce commodity. Too often you see companies who had too little time and were forced to glue together different ideas with a random dramaturgy. They get stuck in mediocrity: not bad, but it could have been so much better. Sometimes I feel that the premiere of a show would be better labelled as an unfinished work-in-progress rather than a production ready to face the critical eye of programmers, journalists and audiences. But unfortunately, to be able to have enough time, you also need enough money.



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Money – jumping from project to project

Always a difficult topic, this one. Because when are budgets ever big enough? How can they grow fast enough to support the booming circus field? In Flanders, the 2.5 million euros spent each year on circus are peanuts compared to the amounts spent on theatre, dance, music and visual arts. Two thirds of this budget goes to Circuscentrum (a support structure) and the three major circus festivals. They do great things, but leave little budget available for the artists. In the next version of the Circusdecreet being planned by the Flemish Ministry of Culture there will still be no room for structurally funded circus companies – even though there are many such companies in other art forms like theatre and dance.

It's important to look at where budgets go to and where they come from, as this influences the artistic work. Artist Sade Kampilla explained how subvention in Finland is focused on creation rather than touring. In order to make a living, she has had to jump from the one creation process to the other, with the quality of the shows – which were barely seen by audiences – suffering. Because contemporary circus, like dance, is an international art form, and as most projects have a lot of co-producers who each invest small amounts of money, circus artists are obliged as well to travel to many countries in order to create work. This is often expensive and inefficient. It also shapes the work that's made by forcing artists to

adapt to generalised conditions, or making it impractical to take risks like working with large-scale sets.

The overall amount of circus funding in Flanders has remained almost the same over the last decade, yet the number of artists has multiplied. This puts pressure on budgets, limits the organic growth of the circus field, and often binds artists to uncertain and precarious working lives. Funding comes in irregular spurts, and is separated by long periods where artists write project dossiers and wait for them to be answered rather than spending time doing what they're good at: creating circus.

Space – going back to the tent

A lot of those dossiers and applications aren't even for subvention – they're aimed instead at accessing residency spaces (and, sometimes, their attached budgets for co-production). But there are big waiting lines for the available places. For the moment there is not a single permanent residency space for circus in Flanders, although this is something the Ministry wants to change. More cultural venues are opening up their spaces for circus residencies, but here there are extra technical challenges: you need height, rigging points, flat ground if you're going to host tents, and so on.

It is interesting to notice that La Villette in Paris, one of the biggest venues in Europe, is programming more and more circus in the chapiteau. This brings logistical problems (renting the big top, securing the right size for the right shows, having a place to store the tent when it is not in use, etc.) and technical problems (the installation of the technical equipment, the recreation of the black box feeling, etc.), yet it is a deliberate choice for La Villette. In moving to the tent, they can programme longer runs than they would be able to in their highly demanded theatre halls. And, as a positive side effect, the chapiteau creates another atmosphere

and attracts a larger, more varied audience than the same shows would if programmed indoors.

With these examples in mind, wouldn't it be better to focus on (permanent) creation and performing spaces in big tops rather than new-build theatre halls? The vision is attractive, but, as a few artists at FRESH CIRCUS mentioned, this can only work if venues and festivals also accept the nomadic lifestyle that comes along with these big tops: caravans, families, dogs, and all the rest.

Survival of the fittest

Institutional support for circus is not yet in line with the growth of the circus sector, and so there is increasing competition for resources. If we don't want it to be survival of the fittest – a situation in which more and more artists are competing against each other for residency spaces and relatively low government budgets – then the overall amount of resources, in terms of both space and finances, needs to catch-up with the present reality of the circus field.

Besides the need for more resources, their allocation must also be carefully consid-

ered, and adapted to the way artists live and work. It makes no sense to have a widespread network of residency spaces without having enough money for the artists to pay themselves properly. And it makes no sense to only finance the creation of shows without supporting them to be performed.

For better cultural policy and a strong circus field, the golden triangle of time, money and space needs to be in balance. The vibrant evolutions of the circus field need also to be reflected in generous government support and in flexible circus organisations.

Together they can develop the right conditions for artists to push the boundaries of circus and create shows which we, the spectators, will remember for the rest of our lives.

Filip Tielens is a journalist and the performing arts coordinator for the Flemish newspaper De Standaard.



Interview with Sade Kamppila Artist, Circus I Love You (Finland)



With the Circus I Love You project you've formed a collective and bought your own tent. What led you to it?

It was more a life choice than an artistic choice: we wanted to start on the path that would finally lead us to self-sustainability.

To do that, we wanted to step more clearly into the position of being artists directing our own project, and to make a show with a long lifespan. Something we discussed a lot is how circus skills can't be renewed in the same way that an actor can just learn a new play, or a dancer a new choreography. In Finland, for example, there's a lot of money to make new projects, but if I'm creating one new show every year I can't create new or innovative material at that rate. So I think it's a lot more energy efficient, and also a lot more truthful, to produce something new every four years or so and then tour it to different audiences.

How does the tent fit into a plan of self-sufficiency?

Eventually we want to be capable of reaching our audiences and selling tickets directly. It's something that we can maybe do in 3-5 years, but right now we're using the network we already have to sell our show to venues and festivals.

The vision for our first tour is to come from the South of France to Sweden, and then next year start in the Nordic countries and travel back south. I hope that this show can tour for at least three years, and then the next step would be a combination of working with festivals and self-producing shows in the gaps along the way.

With the tent, you can't just get on a plane for a gig at short notice – you have to plan a lot more in advance. But it's also like a home in all the places we visit. With the caravans as well, we're always somehow at home – it doesn't feel so ruthless as this hotel-and-venue way of living.

Is it a model that other artists can follow?

I feel there's quite a big need for artists to find ways to be self-sustainable, and I think this system of having cultural institutions is failing. There are just so many artists without work, and so many people fighting for the same opportunities, that we need new ways for artists to reach audiences and create demand for art. Cultural institutions are doing their best, and it's great that they exist to organise activities and festivals, but at the same time there's a lot of power of action that's not in use if artists are just sitting there waiting for an opportunity.

I think we're just trying to merge the best of what the traditional circus has done with the contemporary circus' touring and education system – trying to make a good combination of that which can work within the context of Europe, and for people our age, today.

REPORTS & EXPERIENCES

New supports for creative processes

CURATOR

Fabrizio Gavosto, Artistic Director, Mirabilia Festival (Italy)

MODERATOR

Jean-Michel Guy, Author & Stage Director/Research Engineer, Ministry of Culture (France)

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF

Jérôme Planche, Production Manager, ASIN member (France)

Stefan Sing, Artist (Germany)

Michiko Tanaka, Director, Setouchi Circus Factory (Japan)

Alexander Vantournhout, Artist (Belgium)

Creative processes are rarely simple or predictable, and more often than not throw up complex problems that cross the practical, artistic and interpersonal spheres. Support for creative work can therefore come in many forms – from financial aid, to logistical and production support, to artistic advice or coaching. For artists, it is not always easy to identify or admit what support is needed. For producers, there is perhaps a balance to be struck between engaging closely with a creative process and simply leaving artists to do their own thing.

Underlying all of this is the question of risk – a factor which the New Supports for Creative Processes session came to focus on. In circus we talk often of the physical risks embedded in the practice, but many artists are more comfortable managing these than they are the consequences that attend creative forms of risk-taking. In such cases, what's at stake is not only the 'success' of the production, but the artist's reputation, their employment, and the continued confidence of their supporters.

Anxiety about such consequences can be a guiding hand in the artistic process, ruling out certain choices or creative directions, and performances that go against the grain stand out. The panellist Alexander Vantournhout gave the example of his solo piece *Aneckxander*, made with Bauke Lievens, which from its opening minutes

is performed entirely naked. The artistic choice was made with the knowledge that nudity would make the work more challenging to sell – and in some instances disqualify it from consideration. Similar difficulties await productions that include spoken text or tackle a 'sensitive' topic, and even pieces that choose to work with a slower pace or more reflective tone can find themselves disregarded.

The question for artists, then, is perhaps when to be strategic, and to what degree? As one workshop participant pointed out, this question is more pointed for artists in territories with fewer resources than for those based in France or Belgium, who can benefit from intermittence. Working in Germany, the artist Stefan Sing felt that the scenography of his shows had been shaped by the available resources; in other words, there were certain creative risks that he never had the option to take.

Switching to this question of how to support artistic work in under-resourced territories, the session heard from Michiko Tanaka, the director of Setouchi Circus Factory. A non-profit organisation that aims to foster circus culture in Japan, SCF has five pillars of activity: a programme of residencies and creation; an annual festival; training courses for artists and technicians; circus classes for children and adults; and participation in pro-



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fessional networks (including the launch of a new Japanese network for circus in 2018).

Cultural funding in Japan tends to be small and intermittent; Michiko explained that it is better in fact to think of subvention as an "occasional present". Ticket income is therefore very important, highlighting the fact that audiences also take risks. In Japan, Michiko says, it's always easier to sell uplifting performances with simple narratives, and yet "everything changes" if a link can be created to the local population and culture. Michiko believes this connection between

performance and place is the key to building a circus culture in Japan.

The residencies at SCF therefore aim to develop artists but also to shape and change the circus audience – an initiative that is slowly bearing fruit. SCF have now hosted artists such as Camille Boitel, CirkVOST,

and GdRA, while contemporary circus companies have appeared in the programmes of venues including the Tokyo Metropolitan Theater, Setagaya Public Theater, Za-Koenji, Owl Spot Theater, and Kochi Museum of Art.

Supporting creative processes, then, is holistic work, and the session closed with the

sense that more dialogue was needed on major topics including the importance of improving communication between artists and professionals, the need for a financial safety net that allows artistic risk, the question of how to treat failure within a creative process, and the challenges of bringing new artistic proposals to different territories.

Time to Act

Ideas from the final session

Bridging the gap between artists and professionals:

- Create more opportunities for artists and professionals to meet one another – whether through informal bar meetings or structured activities like a ‘winter camp’.
- Take the model of artistic project pitches and turn it on its head: have venues and festivals pitch to artists so they can put a face to each organisation and understand its specificities.
- Develop a grant programme to support the presence of artists at Circostrada Network meetings.
- Have open days at venues, and also make the programming process more transparent – have venues invite artists to curate, collaborate on, or accompany a festival.
- Hold moderated discussions on ‘failure’ in artistic work, bringing together artists, professionals and audiences.

Supporting artistic risk/failure:

- Create cooperatives that spread risk through a co-production network – like the FONDOC network in Occitania.
- Consider specific financing for risky projects along the lines of the guarantee the French organisation ONDA offers to venues.
- Develop a European-level intermittence status that can stabilise artist income through difficult phases of creative work.
- Create a system of financial insurance, such as a cooperative fund, that can cover the losses of venues programming risk-taking work.

Artist trajectories: how does one become a Circus artist?

CURATORS

Cláudia Berkeley, Director/Programmer, Teatro da Didascália (Portugal)
Raffaella Benanti, Head of Circus Programmes, La Villette (France)

MODERATOR

Marik Wagner, Project Manager, Atelier Lefevre & André, Clowns Sans Frontières France - Clowns Without Borders International (France)

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF

Claire Aldaya, Artist, Akoreacro (France)
Giorgia Elisa Giunta, Co-founder and General Manager, FEKAT (Ethiopia)
Danny Ronaldo, Artist, Circus Ronaldo (Belgium)
Alexandra Royer, Artist, Barcode Circus Company (Quebec)
Hisashi Watanabe, Artist/Performer, Atama to Kuchi Company (Japan)
Aurélien Bory, Author & Stage Director/Artistic Director, Compagnie 111 (France)
David Dimitri, Artist (Switzerland/USA)
Sade Kamppila, Artist, *Metsä - The Forest Project* (Finland)
Claudio Stellato, Artist (Italy/Belgium)

The circus field has spent much of the last 40 years structuring its methods for training, artistic education and production, and at least in some countries the main path into the sector is clear – running from youth circus, through foundation training, into higher education, and out into professional work. But is this the whole story? When we look closer we find circus artists emerging in countries without the benefit of infrastructure, as well as individuals who, for one reason or another, choose to step outside ‘the

system’. Even for those who do follow established paths, perhaps this generalisation doesn’t do justice to their private journeys of artistic development and discovery.

To tackle the topic from multiple angles, the Artist Trajectories session brought together a diverse collection of artists from around the world – and found among their contributions a strong desire for independence and self-determination directing their paths through life.

For Quebecois artist Alexandra Royer, this meant founding a company. Like many graduates of the École nationale de cirque in Montreal, she had early experiences working for big companies like Cirque du Soleil, Cirque Éloize and The 7 Fingers – but over time developed a desire to find her own methods for creation. Alongside three other ENC artists she founded Barcode Company. Rather than seek funding or support, they invested their own money so that they could take time to create on their own terms – eventually producing the outdoor show *Plus C’est Haut, Plus C’est Beau*.

This willingness to invest both in self-development and collective work was echoed by Claire Aldaya, who first started training at the Ecole de cirque de Châtellerauld as part of her school baccalaureate. The small group of friends, she trained and performed with, wanted to go forward together, but found they were unable to attend a school in France. Instead, their path took them to Russia and the Moscow Circus School. A decade later, they remain collaborators under their company Akoreacro – a group with an enduring commitment to collective creation.



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While artists like Alexandra and Claire came to circus from a young age, others emphasised the value of a career switch. Aurélien Bory started out with a qualification in physics, working in acoustic architecture until an overbearing boss drove him to quit and head for the south of France. In Toulouse, he joined the school Le Lido, training as a juggler before working with the theatre director Mladen Materic in his Théâtre Tattoo. Now, Aurélien calls on his scientific education as he develops a “théâtre physique”, or as he works on the abstract, geometric scenographies of shows like *Les sept planches de la ruse*.

Belgian/Italian artist Claudio Stellato also studied at Le Lido, but not before making a start as a jazz musician at the Scuola Civica Jazz in Milan. Speaking of his experiences travelling for training and knowledge, he described a career path that saw him work as a dancer – with companies and choreographers including Cie Kdanse, Roberto Olivan, and Karine Pontiès – for almost a decade. Returning to circus in 2011, he created his solo production *L'Autre* – a pie-

ce that toured the world and launched a new phase of his career.

The necessity of mobility is a major characteristic in the lives of most artists – and not only during education. Sade Kamppila described “becoming homeless” as the most important step of her artistic career. Her recent decision, alongside a collective of eight artists, to buy a tent and begin the project *Circus I Love You* is only the latest in a series of attempts to escape the limitations of standard touring. Previous projects include *Metsä -The Forest Project*, made for woodlands, and the show *DuoJag*, targeted to older people and their grandchildren, and suitable for care homes, schools and daycare centres.

For artists born into circus families, one could imagine that the path to becoming an artist would be clear-cut – but for Danny Ronaldo and David Dimitri this was not quite the case. Danny went to a regular school before eventually stepping out to tour with the family circus, and when he did return it was with the realisation that Circus Ronaldo needed to transform itself. Working with his brother, he shaped it into what it is today – a

circus neither traditional nor contemporary, but somewhere in between. David Dimitri's path took him first to the State Academy for Circus Arts in Budapest, but then to the Juilliard School in New York for studies in dance – a mix of influences he put to use when he created his 2001 solo, *One-Man Circus*.

Looking further afield, final contributions for the session came from Japanese artist Hisashi Watanabe (see interview), and Giorgia Elisa Giunta, co-founder and general manager of Fekat Circus in Ethiopia. Describing Fekat's two core pillars of social and artistic work, Giorgia touched on the ways the two overlap and the ways in which artistic origins define identities. Fekat's first show *Queen Makeda* told the history of a legendary Abyssinian queen and was accompanied by traditional Ethiopian music. With a later production, they tried to create a more universal aesthetic in order to tour internationally, but received comments from audiences and professionals that they preferred the first performance – a problem they continue to grapple with.

Time to Act

Ideas from the final session

Raising awareness of circus as a vocation:

- Collaborate with primary schools to get students involved with circus at a young age.
- Deepen awareness among circus audiences by using wraparound activities – workshops, aftershow discussions, etc. – and by producing documentary materials in the form of videos, podcasts, and so on.

Training and working:

- Extend/enhance the mobility of teachers between schools with the help of Erasmus+.
- Create mentoring schemes where the artist has a role model to accompany, guide and direct them. This could be another figure from the circus world or an expert from another field (administrative, legal, marketing, etc.).
- Develop shadowing opportunities and opportunities for knowledge transfer (like the French model of the *compagnonnage*) to support emerging artists.

Focus: Breaking out in Japan



Interview with Hisashi Watanabe Artist/Performer, Atama to Kuchi Company (Japan)



| What's been your path into circus?

I started juggling when I was twenty – kind of late for a juggler – and afterwards became a contemporary dancer and then a circus artist. I didn't expect any of it. I was a student in textile design at an arts university, and then after two years I realised that I needed dance for my physicality and I started dancing. I started off doing breakdancing and ballet, but soon realised that I had difficulty doing both: ballet makes you taller, moves you towards the sky, and the breakdance is more on the floor. It's difficult to find a middle ground.

Juggling also has both aspects: it towers up when you throw the ball, but when you drop the ball, you're on the floor, at the same level as your body. I realised that I like picking the ball up off the floor more than throwing it to the sky. So I quit ballet and decided to mix breakdance and juggling.

I was invited to work for a contemporary dance company, Monochrome, and performed with them for three years. After I made my own solo piece, *Inverted Tree*, which was well received in the contemporary dance field but also became popular in the circus world. I actually never called myself a circus artist but I happened to be invited to many circus festivals.

| For people who practice circus what are the possibilities in Japan?

In Japan, because it's isolated and separated from the other countries, it's like a Galapagos island. It's as though there are some unique animals living there; unique people come from nowhere. We don't have a circus school, and so those unique people train themselves. It would be nice if there was a platform to accept them, but the reality is that right now it's very hard for them to become professional artists. I'm very lucky.

| Working in Europe what's been your view of the field here and the work that's made?

I have seen many pieces in Europe where I could feel that there was something like a stereotype or common aesthetic. It's almost like a mindset that if you put this and this together then it becomes something like an artwork. I have seen many pieces with more of a theatre style, where people talk or act more, and pieces where the artists were trying to get small laughs from the audience – kind of a dry atmosphere which I feel isn't for me.

Then lots of pieces with chairs and tables, and works where the artists wear suits and jackets but I couldn't see the reason why they wore them. I'm from a different culture, so what I don't understand in Europe is how they're able to use so many objects.

Circus spaces

CURATOR	Raffaella Benanti, Head of Circus Programmes, La Villette (France)
MODERATOR	Koen Allary, Director, Circuscentrum (Belgium)
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF	Aurélien Bory, Author-Stage Director/Artistic Director of Compagnie 111 (France) David Dimitri, Artist (Switzerland/USA) Elodie Doñaque, Artist (Belgium) Sade Kamppila, Artist, <i>Metsä - The Forest Project</i> (Finland) Danny Ronaldo, Artist, Circus Ronaldo (Belgium) Claudio Stellato, Artist (Italy/Belgium)

Space is always in demand. Few artists own their own facilities, instead creating work across multiple residency sites which vary in their dimensions, staging, local context, technical affordances and mood. Does this diversity enrich projects by bringing new ideas and influences, or does it layer successive restrictions on them – forcing a generic ‘black box’ format that will fit more easily into a broad touring circuit?

For the Italian/Belgian artist Claudio Stellato, the impact of diverse spaces has been positive. In his contribution to the session, he described how the characteristics of different creation spaces contribute to the artistic work: the wooden floor of one space becomes a surface that is carried forward in the staging; a visit to a square space sets the dimensions of the work. In this way the project accumulates characteristics from its various environments, and the theatrical space of the final performance captures and remembers the spaces of its creation.

For the Brussels-based artist Elodie Doñaque, space is not only the contributor of discrete elements of a creation; rather, the space “makes the work”. Her current project *Balade[s]* is a film series that presents portraits of urban landscapes through site-specific circus performance. The first piece, made in Brussels, sees Elodie on trapeze amid cranes and towers, framed against the sky, or reflected in the water of the Port de Bruxelles. The circus technique responds to the visual composition and timbre of the environment, while in turn the

circus practice opens a new way of reading the landscape.

In situ work of this kind seeks to unite the sites of creation and performance – a convergence which, in another way, the circus tent achieves. In recent years the chapiteau has seen renewed interest among young artists who are interested both in its

This emphasis on finding spaces for free creation was echoed by the Finnish artist Sade Kamppila, who, along with Viivi Roiha, took an unusual route for *Metsä - The Forest Project*. Made in ‘forest residencies’ in Finland and France, and first performed in 2016 at Lapland’s Silence Festival, the piece takes inspiration from folktales and cultural legends, and adapts itself to different forests.



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aesthetic possibilities (playing in the round, large-format shows, complex rigging), and by the opportunity it seems to present to sidestep the limitations of the normal processes of production. Danny Ronaldo and David Dimitri both spoke of the tent as a space of artistic freedom; a place where the artist can do what they want.

Apart from artistic curiosity, the project was driven partly by the desire to find possibilities for presentation outside the regular production circuit.

While such alternate routes can lead to rich creative possibilities, the afternoon session attested to the difficulties that can also

emerge. The reality is that it takes a lot of time, and therefore resources, to adapt performances to a particular space and make them truly responsive to the site. From the perspective of producers/programmers, as well, such projects can be labour-intensive and difficult to pull off. There are practical obstacles around gaining permission for

the use of non-traditional sites, or attracting audiences to them, and the producer also takes a risk by programming a 'process' more than a finished performance.

Circus tents likewise bring logistical challenges. A big top needs a longer run to be cost effective, bringing substantial risks that can

fall both on artists and hosts. Yet the rewards are concomitantly greater: venues are waking up to the potential of the tent to reach new audiences, and particularly those who would not typically enter a theatre.

Time to Act

Ideas from the final session

- Develop touring models for big tops that can share out the financial risks of longer runs.
- Increase artists capacity to work in different spaces by raising their technical knowledge (for example, through a year of practical work experience at the end of circus education).
- Conduct knowledge exchanges between companies experienced at working with big tops and hosting organisations.
- Improve communication with audiences to change their expectations, perceptions and experiences of big top/street shows.

Focus: Challenges for emerging artists



Interview with Cécile Provôt Director, Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe/CircusNext (France)



What are some of the main challenges you see facing early career circus artists?

The biggest challenge for all of them is to have the means to start to create. Even before the production stage they don't have the funds to get started, or they're not aware of which venues might support them.

I think generally speaking another challenge is that they don't have an overview of what's happening in Europe. I work a lot with emerging artists, and often they don't have a sense of the wider artistic culture or the history of that culture. I suppose that hinders them as creators – if you want to find the financial and other means of production you need to be able to talk about your artistic work, and about yourself as a creator and a citizen in society...

But balancing that out there's a DIY ethic in the circus field – especially in the countries that don't have cultural policies or venues for circus. Because you have to do things yourself you're the creator but also the project leader in the sense of being an entrepreneur. So I think there's that feeling of being autonomous: I want to do it, I need to do it, I am going to do it.

It feels like the focus is on entrepreneurship because the number of artists is growing quickly. How do you feel about the possibilities for them to find and make work?

Yes, we have more and more graduations out of more and more good schools, and so there's that question of professional integration – are there too many artists? Or is there not enough demand for the supply? And in fact there's no answer for that. Really. Because demand can also be affected by policy.

But in general cultural policies don't have enough funds to offer, venues don't have enough residency spaces to work with. During the last FRESH CIRCUS the keynote speaker Lucho Smit, from Galapiat Cirque, ended by saying that France has been kind of a sponge for all this growth, but that France can no longer answer the requests of all the artists who want to tour there. In the past France has been the place where there's the most production and touring venues, the most schools, but I think the balance should shift – and is shifting.

At the same time the French policymakers are less aware of the contemporary circus, less involved in it. We had our Year of Circus in 2001-2002, and now we can feel that we need a new one. So it's interesting at a European level to see that France will be less of an example and people will develop their own models. But as a French person myself I'm a little bit scared. France is facing what everyone has been facing: that there's less money for culture. The golden years are gone. We're in a transition that not everyone is ready to face.

IMAGES AND AUDIENCES

FEATURE

Crossing barriers, building bridges by Laurent Ancion, CIRQ' EN CAPITALE (Belgium)

The struggle to make a radical break from tradition has been a rite of passage among modern arts, but is there another way of refreshing artistic images and language? Laurent Ancion sets out to build the bridge between past and present.

While most art forms (painting, theatre, dance) advance through aesthetic revolutions that upend and replace the previous movement, circus is a cumulative art form. Although evolving through the interplay of

of imagining performance - when it seems that the time has come for a circus of human proportions? Is the word 'circus' even still appropriate? Certainly, if to use it works not as a barrier, but as a bridge. By definition,

the art of doing the most useless thing in the world." And everyone knows, in the depths of their being, that useless things are often the most precious.



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The circus of today, plural, is excised to explore the tension between inventing new images and integrating images from tradition. Maintaining that balance is not to submit to the past, but to understand it and defy it. We are for the better in asking new questions, like the one that seeks to know the meaning of circus - fundamentally, what is it good for, if not nothing? "For the circus entrepreneur Phineas Taylor Barnum, in the 19th century, circus needed to bring the marvellous into our everyday, in a vision of the world that was both protestant and capitalist. All efforts were made to show that anything is possible," says Corine Pencenat, art critic and professor at the University of Strasbourg. "Today, circus has its place in society for exactly the opposite reason. In a technological world, where machines act on our behalf, the body of the circus performer reestablishes vulnerability, the living and the human."

social and artistic metamorphoses (the demolition of the Circus Maximus in 476, the transformation towards theatre of the *nouveau cirque* in 1984), circus arts are a practice that never totally erases its erstwhile forms, but rather contains them. The central place of the body is fundamental to this unbroken line. The deep love in recalling and ironising (even parodying) past forms plays an important role in circus writing, including in the most contemporary iterations that cannot deny the history preceding them.

How are we to manage the 'retinal' heritage of Barnum & Bailey - this larger than life way

circus has always been a pioneer in all things mixing and remixing. In France, the most recent performance by Maroussia Diaz Verbèke, the aptly named "Circus Remix" (2017), is a very explicit example of that. The soloist amuses herself - and us - with silent words, plastered across cardboard or on screens, that she defines in practice and illustrates with radio extracts. The body, the challenge, the urge, the word, the beginning, the end, the animal - all chapters that outline the uselessness of the contemporary as fundamentals of circus. What then could the vast array of the portmanteau signify? "Circus," the artist responds with malice, "is

We can then speak of a veritable reversal of the stereotype. The "future images" of circus can certainly be placed on a tabula rasa, but they can also copy, paste, use and recycle, just like any postmodern art form has done or will do. This audacity that consists of re-connecting rather than opposing, counts as well in attracting new audiences. Like in any creative field, it is essential to take risks, to think outside the box - or the stage, including the adoption of techniques taken from fields completely different from circus. Have other forms of modern art not gone through the same dilemma that force them to liberate

themselves from old stereotypes in order to attract a new audience? During the early 2000s, street art had to battle against the stigma of 'graffiti,' just as circus seeks today to be freed from the "clowns and lions" image.

As much has been shown in a study done by the TOHU, in Montreal, that one in four people think that circus is, well, still the same. In Canada, the image of circus is completely tainted by Cirque du Soleil. "For more people, circus is fun, extravagant, costly and constituted of two hours of tension!", explains Annie Leclerc-Casavant, communications director for the TOHU. In Western Europe, the clichés are more linked to wild animals, although more and more countries have banned their use. In order to expand the circle of spectators, it is first necessary to expand their perspective. At the same time, the stereotype isn't entirely a negative one. It is important to note that most people *think* at least something about circus when asked out of the blue. Not every form of modern art can lay claim to such a reputation. The same survey carried out on modern dance or fine arts, for example, did not have comparable results.

Even if incomplete or obsolete, this imagery is the fertile soil in which new ideas grow. Through its non-verbal (or less verbal) aspect, circus is able to touch an audience that wouldn't otherwise go to a live performance. Once in the theater or under the tent, these spectators are in need of no explanation. New images are forged in skin. "Our goal is to allow the diversity of forms

in circus arts to be discovered in the place where people only see but a few colors of the spectrum," Annie Leclerc-Casavant adds, who describes her continuous strategy as a blog for the audience, at least four 'behind the scenes' videos per show, that are filmed in places that have nothing to do with circus, such as in surprising buildings or in the countryside. "You have to think of the circus beyond the stage," says Annie. And think outside of the box.

Diversify the audience? Evolve the circus' public perception? For Patrick De Groote, artistic director of the festival Zomer van Antwerpen (Belgium), the strategy to follow is quite clear. "If you want to diversify your audience, in age as in origin, start by diversifying your teams! At Zomer, we work with employees and volunteers of all backgrounds. They are the best ambassadors. If not, then you can't complain that you're stuck in a closed circle. If opening up to new audiences is important to you, you have to put that in the budget. These are things that many either forget or put off for another day."

To diversify their audiences, wouldn't it also make sense for these spaces and festivals to start by diversifying their programming? This is one of the challenges that the world of social circus raises today, confronted by the stereotype of being 'humanitarian' (which is true) and not artistic (which is false). "Like any other circus troupe, we need time and trust, space and patience," says Badr Haoutar, from the troupe Colokolo (Rabat, Morocco), "How do we evolve if no one is

willing to take the risk with us? Are we going to allow for European circuses to create another barrier for us, demanding that we have a diploma from one of their schools? But who cares if we've been to the Cnac, the Esac, the Splac or the Clac [laughs]. We're all just doing circus work, sharing something that is spread with words."

Postmodern? The term itself may seem stereotyped. Let's keep but the basic premise, meaning this ability of art to interrogate itself, including in the writing of its forms. Cinema (with Sergei Eisenstein for example) and theatre (with Ariane Mnouchkine) have borrowed heavily from circus, which has itself borrowed from cinema, theatre and dance. At present, circus can take from its own history, from its own experiences as circus. A new maturity that connects more than it opposes. In Belgium, we can think of the work of Alexander Vantournhout who, in 2014, explored with 'capriciousness' the fundamentals of circus – object and risk. In the immense space within the Halles de Schaerbeek in Brussels, suspended by a strap around his neck, he illustrated the most ancient image of peril and the most contemporary image of minimalism. No doubt, for circus to continue its metamorphosis, it must continue tirelessly to put its neck out.

Laurent Ancion is editor-in-chief of the magazine C!RQ en CAPITALE, dedicated to contemporary circus and published by Espace Catastrophe.



Interview with Maroussia Diaz Verbèke Artistic Director, Le Troisième Cirque (France)



What is the third circus?

The name of the company, Le Troisième Cirque (the Third Circus), was chosen to reference a question at the very heart of its work: what might the third circus look like? To my mind, the first circus describes classical circus, and the second circus refers to contemporary circus, to which I belong because of the training (Enacr and Cnac - French national circus training centres) I have had. These two worlds seem very far apart to me, and even seem to oppose each other. I understand the significance that this opposition might have had in the past but, now, I am interested in what could exist beyond this divide. This means understanding the importance and the strengths of the first, an aspect often neglected when you're involved with the second. The number three also represents an opening beyond the reaction of the second to the first.

When you create work what's your relation to the classical circus – its images and associations?

I have an increasing appetite for and curiosity about the classical circus, not only its images, but also its structures and how performances are composed, its codes, rhythms and recurring motifs. From my experience, these are all very interesting means of expression that are the very essence of the original and alternative art form we call the circus. At the same time, I think there are also a lot of people in the younger generation who don't have this heritage of watching circus shows to the same extent. At my latest show, *Circus Remix*, a young spectator told me this was the first circus performance (of any kind) that she had seen, but that she could recognise it as circus because it was "different from theatre" – which is in fact the historic definition of the circus: in the 1800s, a circus show could be anything as long as it was not theatre.

What sort of research or preparation did you do for *Circus Remix*?

I made a huge shift towards circus history, something that I was not at all familiar with. I met researchers and leading circus figures, I read and researched French archives to try to understand my own "circus reflexes", which, I discovered, have much more in common with circus history than I had realised. What I had thought were personal feelings were often echoes of this history of which I had no conscious knowledge, but that I was probably repeating unconsciously (for example, the unique relationship between the circus and the spoken word, forbidden in circuses in 1806 and 1807; the importance of the play on costumes and clothes, my love of lists!). In addition, I've noticed that the more I look into the essence of the circus and what is unique to it and makes it so special, the more I take a similar interest in other arts and the more I appreciate the specificities of each language.

Do you think there's a generation split in the circus field when it comes to attitudes towards the past?

Personally, ever since my training in the French national circus schools, I have seen the classical circus despised, or at least, a lack of interest in it. I've experienced that myself. At one time, I rejected it, too. Now I find this attitude expressed in a number of ways: a rejection of the "circus" label; or when people say things like "it's more than a circus show", "it's not just circus", "it's beyond circus". It's as if we are hung up on not having enough tools or elements to flourish in our own art. Obviously, there's great desirable richness in blending arts together, but it can also hide shame of or a desire to escape our own language...

REPORT & EXPERIENCES

What image(s) for circus today?

CURATORS/MODERATORS

Adolfo Rossomando, Director, Ass. Giocolieri e Dintorni/Juggling Magazine (Italy)
Maarten Verhelst, Chief Editor of CircusMagazine/Head of Communications, Circuscentrum (Belgium)

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF

Annie Leclerc-Casavant, Communications and Marketing Manager, TOHU (Canada)
Raffaele de Ritis, Historian/Author (Italy)
Maroussia Diaz Verbèke, Artistic Director, Le Troisième Cirque (France)
Corine Pencenat, Art Critic/Lecturer, University of Strasbourg (France)
And members of the INCAM Network - International Network of Circus Arts Magazines

The work of updating circus' image can sometimes seem endless – not least because the visual ideas and concepts of the traditional circus still have a strong hold on our cultural consciousness. For those working in marketing and media there are hard choices to be made about when to lean on the universal reach of these images from the past, when to attempt to reconcile them with the present, and when to start entirely from scratch. Phrases like 'new circus' and 'contemporary circus' have the advantage of capturing a sense of shift or evolution, but can themselves be restrictive in generalising a wealth of different disciplines and approaches. And as the historian and author Raffaele de Ritis pointed out in this session,

any image of circus is rooted in its specific local context and culture: there are many different flavours of 'traditional' and many different types of 'contemporary'.

Opening a view on one such specific context, Annie Leclerc-Casavant, the communications and marketing manager at TOHU in Montreal, spoke about the results of a research study the venue undertook in order to reach a better understanding of its audiences. In Quebec, she explained, there are two main images of circus: the 'ancien cirque'/traditional circus (evoking big tops, animals and clowns; often associated with lower quality work), and then the image that Cirque du Soleil has shaped over the years

(intensely acrobatic, with elaborate costumes, large-scale scenography, and expensive tickets). All told, circus represents 1.5-2.5% of cultural entertainment in Quebec.

Analysing the situation, the team at TOHU identified a number of obstacles to growing the audience for circus. One is that in circus, fame is rare – there are few well-known companies, let alone artists, but in a crowded cultural field the reputation of an artist or company is an important factor in pulling in audiences. At TOHU the solution to this issue has been to try and create their own 'star system', working particularly with companies like Cirque Alfonse and The 7 Fingers that generate their own media content. When they host a company they also make sure to highlight any prizes or awards it might have received, as well as to talk up its international standing.

A further obstacle TOHU identified is the substantial language gap that exists between the circus community and the general audience. Audiences can have trouble distinguishing between different techniques and styles in circus, and might not know that large variations exist in circus' physical and stage languages. This has a significant impact on attendance. In their study TOHU found that 25% of respondents thought that circus is always the same – and that there was therefore no reason to see more than one show a year.



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In some respects this 'gap' is a media challenge, as journalists and other content producers play a crucial role in providing the information that frames a performance, but venues can also be active in educating their audiences. Responding to the findings of their study TOHU has begun to favour editorial content above promotional media, creating a blog with original content and investing in social media with the goal of creating their own "media ecosystem". Along-

side this they have started: codifying circus by introducing a consistent vocabulary and categorisation; prioritising video; focusing on digital communications (they are now 80% digital); targeting influencers on social media; segmenting audience data in order to personalise communications; and refining messaging through A/B testing.

Reflecting on the need to bridge the 'knowledge gap', the session also identified

this as something that currently separates professional circus networks from youth circus initiatives: education on art and aesthetics tends to only come much later if students choose to professionalise and pursue higher education. If they built their understanding at an earlier phase they could perhaps be significant ambassadors for the field – and play a major role in helping to reshape the image of circus.

Time to Act

Ideas from the final session

- Connect audiences with the creative process behind a performance to increase their appreciation of its subtleties and unique characteristics.
- Focus on inventing new ways to communicate in circus: break norms in promotion and images; use video; reach for something beyond the 'ordinary'.
- Connect with journalists as mediators that help people to understand and appreciate circus.
- Be honest in communication and promotion, and take the focus off marketing and sales.

Focus: Presentation, voice and design



Interview with Maarten Verhelst Head of Communications, Circuscentrum/Editor in Chief, CircusMagazine (Belgium)



In part the image of circus arises from its visual identity in press and marketing. How do you think about this topic while running a magazine?

Right from the start one of the main objectives of CircusMagazine, and also of Circuscentrum as an organisation, was to break from the traditional image of circus – to break from it radically, actually. So we wanted to make a modern arts magazine that was about circus. From the beginning, we had to be firm with our graphic designer: no ‘circus typography’, no layouts using stars as a visual element, no red and yellow colour scheme. When it comes to photos we try to assign photographers to create original portraits – and often it’s a close-up of the artist in a natural setting. When you depend on a company’s press photos what you tend to get is their show in a black box. It can be nice, but when you look at something like a film magazine, that’s not how they work.

If the goal is to change the image of circus... how’s that going?

Very slowly, but we feel things are improving. We used to spend a lot of time reaching out to the press and persuading them to come to festivals. But now we really don’t have to work that much to get the press to come to something like Smells Like Circus in Ghent [the yearly festival organised by Circuscentrum]; they are coming to us now. But the most important factor in that isn’t Circuscentrum’s work. It’s really that the artists themselves are breaking boundaries. Some of the new generation are really very open and making good artistic work that gets them picked up by theatre and performance festivals. They’re working both in and outside of the circus field.

As those boundaries are crossed how do you feel about the word ‘circus’ as a label or category?

Right now there’s basically two types of circus: classical/traditional circus and contemporary/new circus. That’s too restrictive. A big circus company with a bunch of gymnasts who do the craziest technical tricks, and a solo artist who does nothing but throw one ball in the air naked, are both called contemporary circus. It’s like putting the same label on Lady Gaga and a free jazz quartet: it’s not good for either of them. The strength of music is that you have this one all-encompassing label (music), but instantly there are dozens of subdivisions (like pop, rock, jazz, folk) and hundreds of sub-subdivisions and styles. It makes things quite clear: both for the musicians and the audience. And most important of all: no single soul in the world says he or she hates ‘music’. Why? Because there are so many sorts of music. Yes, you can dislike jazz, but that doesn’t mean you don’t like music. Same with the instrument: no one hates the piano by itself; it depends on who plays it and in which style.

It would be great if we could achieve a similar way of thinking when talking about circus – making it this umbrella with hundreds of divisions, subdivisions, styles and instruments. Then the most experimental avant-garde circus artist could proudly say: ‘Yes, I’m doing circus. Namely post-contemporary minimal circus.’ And the seventh generation circus clown who performs the same act for decades could say: ‘Yes, I’m doing circus. Namely traditional 19th century circus.’ It would be much more interesting and respectful to this large diversity.

Where to find new circus audiences today?

CURATOR

Mara Pavula, Director, Riga Circus School (Latvia)

MODERATOR

Linda Beijer, Chair/President, Manegen (Sweden)

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF

Patrick de Groote, Artistic Director, Zomer van Antwerpen (Belgium)

Jacqueline Friend, Marketing and Audience Development Manager, Crying Out Loud (UK)

Alexandra Henn, Project Manager/Assistant to the Managing Director, Chamäleon Theater (France/Germany)

Duncan Wall, Author, *The Ordinary Acrobat*/Co-Founder, Circus Now (USA)

Jackie Friend, the marketing and audience development manager for UK producing house Crying Out Loud, opened the session by describing audience development as “organisation-wide, evidence-based, and ongoing”. When COL launched their

approaches (print publicity, Facebook advertising, outreach programmes, and so on), but having detailed data on demographics and attendance allows these activities to be directed to specific cold spots. At times, analysis of the data opens up new ideas. When

Each year ZvA do a survey to compare their festival-goers to regional demographics and find which groups are under-represented. Patrick de Groote, ZvA’s artistic director, told how ten years ago the under 26 audience was 4-5%, pushing the team to create Zomerfabriek, a new space for young diverse audiences, of all social backgrounds, hosted on the grounds of a former factory. The key to the new site’s success was making it a participative project: ZvA took on a lot of young guest curators, with and without experience, and “made a programme that for our Ministry of Culture is not culture; but for the people that come it is their culture”.

The space is open seven days a week, all day and all night, and funds itself by throwing three big parties a week. ZvA’s under 26 audience is now 30-35%, and an emphasis on participation has come to underlie all the festival’s work. When ZvA wrote its last big funding application it asked for the help of its audience by putting up caravans everywhere and inviting them to come and do the writing. “The more people who think of this festival as their festival, the more likely they are to bring in other people,” says Patrick.

Installed at sites throughout the city, the festival also puts a lot of effort into designing environments around shows – special sets and locales that always include a bar. These make a significant contribution to ZvA’s budget, but also play an important role in drawing new audiences in. “Most people know exactly what to do when they



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project Circus Evolution, a five-year initiative to develop a regional touring circuit for contemporary circus in England, they took a data-led approach.

Working with the eleven venues in the Circus Evolution network, COL profiled their audiences to understand gaps in the market and attitudes to circus. Since 2014, the project has delivered ten tours. The accompanying marketing work has been broad-based and encompassed many traditional

they found that people who have a moderate engagement with culture wouldn’t share arts content on social media, but did share local content, COL created a series of regional trailers that combined the two. A short film for Ipswich that featured parkour sequences in recognisable locations brought 120 new bookers to the venue.

The Belgian festival Zomer van Antwerpen is another organisation that focuses on gathering information about its audiences.

see a bar,” says Patrick – and once they’ve sat down for a drink the next step of getting them to a performance is much easier.

For Alexandra Henn, project manager and assistant to the managing director at Berlin’s Chamäleon Theater, the focus has been not only on finding new audiences but also retaining old ones as the venue changes identity. Formerly a variety theatre, the Chamäleon now focuses on programming contemporary circus – a core change that was made in 2004 when the name changed from Chamäleon Variete to Chamäleon Theater. They banned the word ‘variety’ from all their communications, but it still took “eight years” for people to stop calling them by the old name. For the last two years they’ve been using the strapline: ‘New circus, simply different.’

The Theater still retains a cabaret feeling, however: the audience are seated around small tables, food is served before performances, and a discrete bar service runs throughout. The Theater receives no funding, though Alexandra stresses that the artistic vision comes first and sales/marketing

follow. Programming two big productions a year for six-month runs, and then smaller shows on shorter runs five times a year, the venue hosts seven shows a week, or 350 in a year. Tickets are 37-59 euros each. The venue’s audience breaks down as being 50% from Berlin and the surrounding region and 50% tourists. 10% are from abroad. Many are visitors who would not go to a typical classical theatre or cultural programme. Alexandra’s philosophy of audience care boils down to believing in the product, creating a strong identity/concept, and “never promising anything that isn’t true”.

Offering a final perspective, Duncan Wall presented Circus Now – a community organisation that was founded in 2013 to “change the reputation of circus in America”, and create internal connections within the emerging field.

Duncan explained that the focus at CN was on tapping into existing grassroots energy: following the example of union organising, they thought in terms of building a community rather than a product, working on volunteer mobilisation, on “elevating the

conversation” around circus, and on promoting the idea of circus as an identity or lifestyle choice. At the same time CN worked on creating an online community, building a Facebook page with 20,000 followers.

To initiate institutional partnerships, CN went to performing arts theatres and festivals and offered to be a resource for knowledge and connections – an approach which led to a circus programme – also called Circus Now – at the Skirball Centre in New York.

CN achieved a lot, but found it hard to stabilise and is now largely dormant. Among the factors that led to the organisation going dark, Duncan counts the fact that it never found a successful financial model (in its best year, the peak budget was \$20,000); not knowing how to deal with the tension created between volunteers and professionals; and suffering an inability to make long-term plans in an environment that forced them to be opportunistic.

Time to Act

Ideas from the final session

Building audiences:

- Invest in digital work – and see digital not only as a means of building audience relationships but as a new space where performances can be uploaded or performed live.
- Mobilise the audience – create a programme to train cultural workers in the soft skills required for managing volunteers/ambassadors/influencers.
- Enter new contexts – create performances in restaurants, or in civic and social spaces, and give these new audiences a taste of circus.

Building skills:

- Increase awareness by disseminating the research findings of the EU-funded audience development research programme Engage Audiences (engageaudiences.eu).
- Develop case studies on different facets of audience development: building audiences through special collaborations, bringing performance to new spaces, working with influencers/ambassadors, etc.

The influence of socio-political contexts on creation/distribution processes

CURATOR

Ophélie Mercier, Development Manager, Caravan International Youth and Social Circus Network (France)

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF

Jessika Devlieghere, Co-founder/Head Palestinian Circus School (Belgium/Palestine)
Jose do Rego, Advisor/Zip Zap Ambassador, Zip Zap Circus (South Africa)
Xavier Gobin, Producer, Phare (France/Cambodia)
Noha Khattab, Artist, Outa Hamra Street Clown Collective (Egypt)
Clara Norman, Deputy Manager Pedagogy and Training, Cirkus Cirkör (Sweden)

This session on socio-political contexts turned on a difficult challenge: when artistic activities are linked to social circus projects, how to talk about the background of the work in a way that is true to its origins but not contained by them? And how, then, to interest a field of European production and creation that has previously dismissed the artistic value of such projects?

Such questions are common among projects labelled 'social circus' once they reach a certain size and age: it's natural that the participants of these projects, as they gain experience, will want to build careers and step into artistic work. Presenting her work with the Palestinian Circus School, of which she is co-founder and head, Jessika Devlieghere told the group how the first students that entered the school ten years ago are now expressing a desire to become professional circus artists. To begin to move in this direction they have started to take international volunteers and to run artistic exchange projects with European circus companies in order to train their artists. Their last production, *Coffee in Town*, was based on stories of refugees that the artists collected. They began the creation process internally, and then invited Paul Evans from NoFit State to come and support the direction of their show. It will tour in Europe through 2018.

José do Rego, an advisor and ambassador for Cape Town's Zip Zap Circus, told a similar story. Founded in Cape Town in 1992, just after the end of the apartheid regime, Zip Zap is today focused on developing a

professional performance arm to accompany its pedagogic activities. Their Dare to Dream programme is a vocational training scheme that prepares students for professional work by putting them through a structured course that sees them create their own performances and work during the

Clara Norman presented one possible model in the form of Sweden's Cirkus Cirkör, explaining that Cirkör is technically a circus school that owns a professional circus company. The proceeds from the artistic shows go directly to the circus school. Their last two productions, *Limits* and *Borders*, worked



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corporate season. From a larger perspective, it aims to tackle youth unemployment while also giving Zip Zap a stronger base of instructors and trained staff that it can draw on for all its activities.

When organisations such as Zip Zap and the Palestinian Circus School reach a point where they are investing strongly into developing their artistic branch they usually find that this means expanding from a donor-based funding system, and even reimagining their projects as social enterprises.

with the experience of refugees, and some who took part in social circus projects integrated into the professional company.

Producer Xavier Gobin gave another model in the form of the Cambodian company Phare. Phare has its origins in the school Phare Ponleu Selpak, an NGO that gives art and circus classes to children in Battambang, and that was founded in 1994 to support displaced children following the Cambodian genocide. Over time the project grew, and in 2013, looking to find alternative

sources of income, they opened a new site at Siem Reap, near the Angkor temples, and created Phare – an artistic company and social enterprise. They now offer nightly professional shows under a 330 person big top, and have become the second biggest tourist attraction in Cambodia after the temples. They also manage the Phare Boutique, which sells original paintings, drawings and

music CDs from Phare Ponleu Selpak, as well as local products made by Cambodian NGOs. Almost 75% of all profits go back to the school in Battambang.

While social enterprises with strong local roots are important models, many in the session expressed a desire to break into the European market – as well as uncertainty

about how to do this. There seemed to be a catch 22: in order to be programmed, European producers needed to see their work; but in order for them to see it, the work needed to be programmed at an international festival or showcase. At last, the conclusion seemed to be that it is important for programmers to take a risk, and step outside the circle of their usual network.

Time to Act

Ideas from the final session

Exchanging views:

- Create a network which facilitates social circus and artistic training through international exchanges.
- Forge partnerships with professional circus schools/companies in order to facilitate training, raise awareness of the European market, and create performances suitable for audiences there.
- Pair local directors with visiting international directors, or create opportunities for local directors to shadow/assist directors abroad.

Improving distribution:

- Change the term 'social circus' so that it encompasses activities directed towards promoting cohesion, cooperation, fair trade, grassroots participation, and all forms of social transformation.
- Co-produce projects with European venues and residency centres to boost distribution.
- Implement a quota of social circus companies to be met in the programmes of Circostrada members.
- Create a festival of companies outside of Europe, or create such a showcase within existing festivals.

Focus: The meaning of social circus



Interview with Jessika Devlieghere Co-founder and Co-director, Palestinian Circus School (Belgium)



What do you think about the designation 'social circus'?

It has a good and a bad side. It's useful for the development and recognition of the work we do, and for social circus practice worldwide. In Palestine it has also brought a better understanding of the real aims and impact of our work at the level of the personal development of children and young people. I would prefer not to talk about social circus as only for people 'at risk', though, and the term 'social' is often limiting or devaluing. Expectations are that the quality of 'social circus' will not be that good, because it's created with more vulnerable groups in society and the aim is 'social'. That's a very narrow way of looking at it – as if our practice stops when we feel our kids' personalities are a bit more 'balanced'.

I believe it is important to have the idea of a social circus pedagogy or practice, but when we move into performance I think it's time to move away from the labeling. Of course the quality has to be good enough: if we want to be seen as good trainers and artists, and not as 'poor, sweet Palestinians', then it's also up to us to prove we can produce the work.

How are you developing artistic and technical skill at the School?

International cooperation with professional circus schools and artists, directors and producers has been very important for technical and artistic guidance. An initiative we started recently is a biennial international circus festival; the first in 2016 was such an enormous success that we feel very encouraged to go further down that path.

We've also played with the idea of developing a professional circus education programme, but at the moment it's impossible: too expensive, too few students, and there's no 'market' where artists can live from their work. The only market would be the international one, and even there we've some comparative disadvantages as Palestinians – visa horror, serious travel restrictions, very expensive international travel, etc. The only way for them to really be part of a market would be to become European and move to Europe – and that's a whole other story.

Still, the dream of eventually creating a professional education stays alive.

The School has toured some performances overseas. What have been your experiences finding a market there?

In the beginning we only performed within the broader 'solidarity' context. With time, our students evolved into trainers and artists. They improved technically, their general and artistic reflection became much more mature, and they no longer wanted to be seen and recognised for their 'social' background, but as good artists with a strong story. Our last show *Sarab* was able to move many audiences, and people told us it was very close to a full professional show. We know we can convince audiences, but we have a much harder time convincing the programmers, who are still swayed by the technical standards of the Western circus schools.

FRESH
SEMINARS

FRESH CIRCUS#5

FRESH CIRCUS #5



ARTCENA is the National Centre for Circus, Street and Theatre Arts, created by the French Ministry of Culture. It coordinates Circostrada and has a permanent seat on its Steering Committee. It works closely with sector professionals and offers them publications and multimedia resources through its digital platform. It develops mentoring, training, tools and services to help them in their daily practices. It provides support to contemporary creation through national programmes and encourages international development of these three sectors.



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by John Ellingsworth



European Network
Circus and Street ArtS

Since 2003, Circostrada Network has been working to develop and structure the fields of circus and street arts in Europe and beyond. With more than 120 members from over 35 countries, it helps building a sustainable future for these sectors by empowering cultural players through activities in observation and research, professional exchanges, advocacy, capacity-building and information.

FOREWORD

Circostrada, ARTCENA and CIRCa – National Pole for Circus – Auch Gers Occitanie were delighted to organise the 5th FRESH CIRCUS, International Seminar for the Development of Circus Arts. Following on from three events co-organised with La Villette in Paris and one in Brussels, co-organised with Espace Catastrophe/Festival UP! and Wallonie-Bruxelles Théâtre Danse, the 2019 edition of the seminar took place in Auch (Gers) from 22 to 24 October.

The contemporary circus world has an exceptional and close bond with the French department of Gers, so for the Circostrada Network's members, it seemed entirely natural that the 32nd Festival of Contemporary Circus (18 to 27 October 2019) would be an ideal setting for enquiry and dialogue on the subject of circus' regional relationships.

The seminar provided an opportunity to share experience and best practice among international professionals and artists, who are involved in developing projects which often owe their singular nature to their rapport with their home area and immediate surroundings.

CIRCUS IS EVERYWHERE

FRESH CIRCUS is an unmissable highlight of the circus calendar. It is a chance for participants to meet and talk to 750 European and international professionals from every type of background, who are currently working to develop the circus scene in Europe and around the world. Artists, teachers, event programmers, journalists, students, researchers and policy-makers were all there.

The 5th edition of FRESH CIRCUS was the first to take place in a rural area, one hour from Toulouse, and included conversations between circus professionals and amateurs, artistic performances, case studies showing the development of circus projects, informal meet-ups, themed debates, interviews with circus schools and plenty of other activities besides.

A BIG THANKS TO

A warm thank you to the members of Circostrada who participated in the organisation and set up of this 5th edition, and to the steering committee of the network, who joined the reflections and discussions on the main theme of the event. Special mention to the FRESH CIRCUS Workgroup members, whom we would like to congratulate on their work, engagement and energy, and who widely contributed to the quality of this seminar.

FRESH CIRCUS#5 workgroup

- Chloé Béron – Centre International des Arts en Mouvement (France)
- Raffaella Benanti – La Villette (France)
- Claudia Berkeley – Teatro da Didascália (Portugal)
- Serge Borrás – La Grainerie (France)
- Jean-Marc Broqua – La Grainerie (France)
- Muriel Dominé – Latitude 50 (Belgium)
- Fabrizio Gavosto – Mirabilia (Italy)
- Giulia Guiducci – Tutti Matti per Colorno (Italy)
- Cappucine Hec-Couton – FEDEC (Belgium)
- Isabel Joly – FEDEC (Belgium)
- Patricia Kaputsa – Le Prato (France)
- Eleférios Kechagioglou – Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde (France)
- Véronique Laheyne – WBTD (Belgium)
- Séverine Latour – WBTD (Belgium)
- Benoît Litt – Espace Catastrophe (Belgium)
- Catherine Magis – Espace Catastrophe (Belgium)
- Olivier Minet – Latitude 50 (Belgium)
- Thomas Renaud – La Maison des jonglages (France)
- Veronika Štefanová – Cirqueon (Czech Republic)
- Michiko Tanaka – Setouchi Circus Factory (Japan)
- Sverre Waage – Cirkus Xanti (Norway)



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FRESH CIRCUS#5 IN A NUTSHELL

750 PARTICIPANTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

KEYNOTE	52
● Can circus stimulate regional development? By Lionel Arnaud	52
CIRCUS AND TERRITORIES	54
● The Word Lilac Interview with Yaëlle Antoine, by John Ellingsworth	55
● On the Verge of Blossoming Interview with Hsing-Ho Chen, Yu-Lun Chiang and Austin Wang, by John Ellingsworth	56
● The Mestizo Identity By César Omar Barrios	58
ARTICLES AND VOICES	60
● Overlapping Circles By Katharine Kavanagh	60
● Murmurations: Antoine Thirion on Möbius Interview by Māra Pāvula	63
● What if we all Stayed at Home? By Kiki Muukkonen	65
● Punks Not Stars: Julien Auger on Circus I Love You Interview by Viktoria Dalborg	67
● Organising Principles By John-Paul Zaccarini	69
● A Common Language: Valia Beauvieux on Monstro Interview by Marion Marchand	72
THE LAST WORD	74
● Jérôme Thomas: The Artist as a Tomato	74
● Circo Zoë: The Ring Our Territory	75
● Les filles du renard pâle: A place for living	76
● An outside view on circus: some inspiring thoughts	77

CAN CIRCUS STIMULATE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

By Lionel Arnaud

Regions have interests – economic, social and political – which art can often fall between, or be swallowed by. In his opening address for FRESH CIRCUS#5, Lionel Arnaud reflects on the thorny challenge of cultural policy.

These days, culture and the arts are incorporated into every issue imaginable: sustainable development, job creation, social integration, diplomacy, and even the fight against radicalisation. While all of these ‘functions’ have led to an increase in the number of demands made on ‘culture’, they have also encouraged its administration and evaluation by other authoritative bodies outside the ‘art world’, while carefully avoiding artistic and cultural values in assessment criteria. As a result, the destiny of some companies is now controlled less by rue de Valois¹ or local authorities’ cultural services than by urban policy makers, the Minister of Labour or the General Commission for Territorial Equality, where evaluating a region’s or town’s cultural policy is as much about estimating the number of festival-goers and users of cultural spaces or facilities as it is about counting the number of tourists accommodated, meals served in restaurants and jobs created within the region. By contrast, cultural value upon which cultural stakeholders base their appraisals for the public good, seems to be hidden and protected from evaluative processes, reflecting the idea that cultural visions thrive firstly on subjectivity, intuition, sensitivity to artistic expression and an understanding of society’s expectations,

but also on a commitment, a requirement and an indiscernible, indisputable belief in ‘culture’ and the role it must play in the world today.

All of this goes without saying. However, this position also contributes to the reduction of cultural professionals’ democratic control of cultural choices. In an environment where laypeople are increasingly involved in the public space, this way of generating culture questions the very definition of cultural policy. This refusal to clarify and explain the objectives and expectations of cultural policies, in other words to give them a sense of direction, means that they also end up losing their place to other public policies (social, urban, environmental) where cultural policies are ultimately subject to evaluative measures and broader mechanisms that are defined elsewhere.

Circus arts are particularly interesting from this point of view insofar as their ‘revival’ has primarily taken place against the backdrop of a movement protesting both artistic and political classifications, a function adopted after 1968 when new stakeholders became involved and subverted traditional circus arts, attempting to reinvent them or at least adapt them to fit

their own aspirations and lifestyles. In this respect, when the Ministry of Culture included circus arts within its remit in 1979, this represented far more than a simple administrative shift; it played a part in recognising the circus as an artistic practice in its own right. Now, if we consider that the strength of art lies in its ability to redefine our world view, this institutional adoption no doubt favoured a rejuvenation of circus arts as well as a new perspective on these practices (which certainly went on to shake up other artistic disciplines, too).

The fact remains that in a world where art has become a commodity just like everything else, and even a choice investment for businesses eager to capitalise on it to enhance their image and sell their products – witness the purchase of a number of festivals by multinationals and investment funds –, then the issue is to determine how art’s ability to unsettle and break down boundaries can best be used. Gone are the days when cultural contributors were trained on the job, when they were artists, activists and enthusiasts first and foremost rather than ‘cultural professionals’, and when the cultural economy mainly existed – rather than marginally existed – in the form of grants and voluntary work.

¹ Reference to the French Ministry for Culture, located at 3 rue de Valois, Paris.

Whether we want it or not, or rather, whether we make an effort to resist it or not, it is in this much-vaunted 'new world', where the boundaries between art and communication, traders and non-traders, businesses and associations, volunteering and unpaid work, subversion and 'disruption' become a little fainter every day, that issues of culture and cultural development are being played out. And, in consequence, the future development of CIRC'a and circus arts, too.



© Ian Grandjean



Lionel Arnaud is a Professor in Sociology at the University Paul Sabatier in Toulouse and a member of the Laboratoire des Sciences Sociales du Politique (Sciences Po Toulouse). His research topics tackle cultural politics, the frameworks of the sociocultural development of cities and cultural movements in France and internationally. He recently published *Agir par la culture. Acteurs, enjeux et mutations des mouvements culturels* (Toulouse, L'Attribut, 2018).

CIRCUS AND TERRITORIES

by John Ellingsworth

Round back of CIRCa's dome, following a path threading between two ranks of warehouses and across a concrete bridge, one finds the vast Caserne Espagne, a 19th Century military building that once served as cavalry quarters. In the future, the city of Auch envisages the renovation of the building and the unification of the area, the Quartier Espagne, as a cultural quarter touching both west and east bank of the Gers. For now, however, the grand Caserne is unused – or would normally be.

For it was here that FRESH CIRCUS#5 began in earnest. Spread across a chain of cold, dusty rooms (formerly the stables), twenty project presentations engaged the question of how territories can shape the circus form.

Many of these centred on creating meeting points – whether in the form of festivals acting as temporary hubs, like the African Circus Arts Festival (previously hosted in Ethiopia and perhaps headed next to Cape Verde) and SETO LA PISTE in Japan (part of a small upswell in activity in the country); cross-disciplinary cultural spaces, like Borderline Fabrika, a cultural café and shared workspace in France, and ARTmosfera, a converted farm in Spain; or more traditional training spaces like CircusTrainingCentre Salzburg (Austria), Katapult (Germany), and Oak Circus Centre (UK). The website Perform Your Art, an information hub for performing artists, represented the world online.

Using circus training itself as a tool for community engagement or audience building was another key focus, ranging from the Palestinian Circus School's work with young people and local organisations, to the audience outreach of Italy's Quinta Parete Circus Community. Two presented projects used wire walking to draw symbolic connections between people and places – *Ballade(S) Funambule(S)* in France by Le Grand Raymond and Wires Crossed in



© Circostrada

Ireland by Galway Community Circus –, while Boîte Noire in France/Spain were leveraging circus to advocate for gender equality, and Galapiat's Génération Cirque project in France intervened on social care.

Boosting circus activity and supporting nascent scenes was the goal for Cirquons Flex and their work in Réunion and across the Indian Ocean, as well as Un loup pour l'homme's RIDE & CAMP, a sort of mobile collaboration centre travelling central and south-east Europe. Within artistic research, Kitsou Dubois' Le Corps Infini was an initiative uniting students from circus, cinema, and audiovisual studies to recreate the experience of zero gravity.

From this broad spectrum, we here shine a light on just three of the presented projects. Yaëlle Antoine, co-director of Compagnie d'Elles, talks about the development of *Le Mot Lilas, haut comme il est large*, a performance devised with detainees from a detention centre in Muret, a city located 16 km from Toulouse. Three voices from Taiwan provide perspectives on a country where, after years of grassroots activity, a new space is about to be opened under the wing of an ultramodern new arts complex, Taipei Performing Arts Center. Finally, César Omar Barrios, one of the instigators of FiCho festival, gives an account of how culture makes its way in Guadalajara, Mexico's 'city of opposites'.



John Ellingsworth works as a writer and editor in the cultural field. As an editor, he has worked on projects and publications for the Swedish Institute, Kulturrådet, IETM, Dansehallerne, the European League of Institutes of the Arts, and Flanders Department of Culture, Youth and Media. He also leads the company MES, which specialises in developing websites with complex information architectures.

<http://sideshow-circusmagazine.com>

THE WORD LILAC



Interview with Yâlle Antoine, by John Ellingsworth

For *Le mot Lilas, haut comme il est large*, you worked by blending text, circus arts, sign language, and more with 16 offenders from the Muret detention centre. How did you manage to bring these different worlds together?

In December 2009, I worked on Italo Calvino's text *Marcovaldo or The Seasons in the City* in a prison. This initial project inspired me to go back to the detention centre, perhaps because it had been so brief, as we only gave about twenty or so performances. And as I already had contacts there, orchestrating a more ambitious project seemed more feasible. In parallel, I was also putting together a project entitled SigN'Cirk in collaboration with La Grainerie, La Drac Occitanie and the choreographer Lucie Lataste. We were working on an acrobatic sign language, so it was a natural extension for me to approach the prison environment through signing.

Then, the Marathon des Mots literature festival in Toulouse asked us to work on Marguerite Duras. One of the actresses, Karine Monneau, had just read a collection of her writings in *Outside*. I really liked the one about an illiterate woman who described how she recognised metro stations by visualising the words like images. This text created the link to sign language, and reinforced my desire for 'naturalness' in prison.

How did the offenders react to the circus?

I learnt, to my expense, that the word 'circus' attracts a lot of derision in prison. For quite a few offenders, circuses are 'for children',

and are synonymous with outdated aesthetics and miserable animals. So I decided not to use that word when talking to them about the project. Much like I avoided telling them that we would only be using material (texts, paintings, music) that had been written and created by women. This feminist material was actually central to the project. Several components of the project literally thrilled the offenders. Firstly, working with sign language meant they could communicate with each other like the wardens! Then, the circus element was added in stages, thanks in particular to Nicolas Cheucle, a deaf juggler, whose act involved juggling hundreds of kilos of potatoes, and not forgetting the acrobatic lifts carried out in Rosas by Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker. Finally, a choir marked the end of the show with an adaptation of the song *J'ai Osé* by female rapper, Keny Arkana. Two other circus artists also contributed to this project: Laura Terrance on the aerial rope and Amanda Righetti on the Chinese pole, both of whom joined us at the end of the process and whose performances utterly astonished the prisoners. So that's how the project came together: going from deconstruction to construction, and from one discovery to the next. This helped us to retain the offenders' interest and keep their concentration going when they were required to participate.

You worked at both the detention centre and La Grainerie. What impact did these different spaces have on creativity?

At the detention centre, we worked in the chapel, a cold room that echoed like a sports

hall and had wooden benches screwed to the floor. For the performance in the prison, we literally transformed this space into a theatre, with side curtains and projectors borrowed from La Grainerie. When we left our creative site to perform at La Grainerie, we could feel the draughts coming in from all angles in this hugely vast, open and busy space. The prisoners arrived at around 9.30 am and left at around 6 pm; they rehearsed, ate, waited for the audience, performed and discussed like artists. This digression was both disconcerting and highly enjoyable for them. Their families came to see the performance, people who otherwise would never have set foot in a venue like La Grainerie.

What legacy has this project left behind?

The project was a success. I have created a breach and established long-lasting collaborations between my partner organisations and the Muret detention centre. There is just one thing I regret: I didn't review the project with the prisoners. An error on my part? I didn't see them again after the performance, and I'm kicking myself. Was it an oversight? Every well-tailored project always has one negative point. I haven't returned to the prison since *Le Mot Lilas, haut comme il est large*. For some time now, I've been tempted to return with a new project called *Les Arbres*, probably in partnership with Laurie Quersonnier from Domaine d'Ô... The project is focused on acrobatic lifts and smells.

A documentary about the creative process involved in *Le Mot Lilas, haut comme il est large* is available on the company's website.



Yâlle Antoine is artistic director of Compagnie d'Elles. She was trained at the Fratellini and Lido schools in tightrope and contortion. Yâlle's first circus piece *Lames Sœurs* won the 2017 Beaumarchais Prize. She is the key adviser for tightrope and contortion on the Lido's professional training programme.

🌐 www.compagnie-d-elles.fr

ON THE VERGE OF BLOSSOMING



Interview with Hsing-Ho Chen, Yu-Lun Chiang and Austin Wang, by John Ellingsworth

How established is circus in Taiwan?

Hsing-Ho: For Taiwanese audiences it's actually very easy to see a certain kind of circus. We have one school, the National Taiwan College of Performing Arts. The training system is from China, and the kids start there when they're 10, so they have a very good technical foundation. But in my opinion their thinking is quite isolated. So, it's easy to see what we call 雜技 [Záji, acrobatics]. But when you travel you realise there is something more to circus, with new ways of working and creating. In Taiwan it's easy to earn money from commercial events but not so many people want to do creation.

Yu-Lun: That's why our work with Hsingho Co., Ltd. is a lot about independent thinking. One of our projects is Ting-koo-ki Juggling – a juggling battle based on the breakdancing format. Artists create signature moves and are judged on foundation, originality and personality. It's not only a competition; it's a way of encouraging the artists to create something which is unique to them.

And is awareness building among audiences?

Austin: Everyone knows they can go to the circus to see something spectacular, but they don't realise yet that the circus can do a lot more besides – that it can move people, that it can tell a story. Or tell the artist's own story. But in the end, I think it will break through. In South East Asia lots of companies have worked with Phare in Cambodia, and from that they've developed a style of circus rooted in storytelling.

Hsing-Ho: My parents' generation would see circus in traditional theatres or on the streets, and some of the performers became



© Patrick Barbier

quite well-known. For my own generation, we also have some small celebrities thanks to social media. In my case, I worked with Cirque du Soleil in 2010 and 2011. At the time, few Taiwanese people had done that, and so afterwards I was in some documentaries and did a TED talk and my face ended up on the side of a taxi. Now, there are a lot of talent shows on TV in Taiwan and circus artists become known for that.

Austin: With partners and funders as well, it seems people really recognise that circus is something that's coming up. They've seen Cirque du Soleil perhaps, or a few smaller things. There's also a lot that's going on in Macao. So, they have an idea; all we need to do is give them a push.

Now your two organisations are working together on a permanent space, a Circus Hub, at Taipei Performing Arts Center...

Austin: Yes. The Center is slated to open in 2022. In the meantime, we have another

space at the Center. It used to be a swimming pool, and we're installing the facilities to make it a circus studio. We should open the Circus Hub, for training, workshops and residencies, in September 2020.

Will circus also have a place in the Center's wider programming?

Austin: Looking at the plan for the whole year, the idea is to programme circus at the start of the season, in January or February, during the Chinese New Year. Traditionally there aren't any performances during that period, but I'd like to put something on because lots of people have nothing to do during their vacation, nowhere to go. I am convinced it can work. Circus has a magic that is getting lost in modern theatre. Broadway shows all involve a lot of machinery now. Every night the actor has to stand on the exact same spot to deliver the exact same lines. Circus brings back old memories of the magic in theatre.

| What are your hopes for the future?

Austin: We need more hubs; one won't be enough. But circus is a little less recognised than other forms, so it will take some time. For us, we have the facilities, we have the resources, we just need to get it started –

and when people are using the Hub, I think something will emerge. After that, we need more public and private institutions.

Hsing-Ho: I see a problem in Taiwan: the kids from the school are amazing but afterwards they work on the street, or not at

all. If we can use the Hub to get them involved in creation, then the government will notice that circus exists as an art form. If we do that, we can help young artists.

Yu-Lun: We hope the Hub will become a breeding ground for circus in Taiwan...



Hsing-Ho Chen is a versatile artist who after years of Chinese Opera training began his journey in the circus world. Specialised in Chinese Opera clown character; interested in circus, juggling and physical theater. He worked with Cirque du Soleil «KA» in Las Vegas as a martial arts artist. Since 2011 he has become a motivational speaker. To share the enjoyment of circus with more people, he has run various workshops, training programmes globally for both professionals and the audience. He founded Hsingho Co., Ltd., it endeavours to promote the circus culture in Taiwan and also introduce Taiwanese circus talents to the world.



Yu-Lun Chiang performed in numerous important dance pieces and holds a long-term collaborative relationship with the HORSE Dance Theatre. Besides performing works, she co-founded the Hsingho Co., Ltd. & HoooH with Hsing-Ho Chen, which is dedicated to promoting the circus culture in Taiwan and holds large-scale circus events and professional workshops. By introducing dance and theatre culture, the company has enriched and expanded the definition of circus in Taiwan.



Austin Wang worked as Senior Production Manager and Stage Designer for Cloud Gate Dance Theatre. He has worked with other troupes as stage and lighting designer or technical director for their productions. Selected honors and awards: National Award of Arts presented by the National Culture and Arts Foundation (2014); chief stage designer for the opening/closing ceremony of Taipei Deaflympics (2009); jury member of Prague Quadrennial and the convener of Taiwan team, with the Taiwan Hall project winning the Gold Medal for Best Use of Technology (2007).

🌐 www.hsingho.wordpress.com

🌐 www.tpac-taipei.org

THE MESTIZO IDENTITY

By César Omar Barrios

As much as creative projects can alter a territory, they are in turn formed by their surroundings. The Mexican circus festival FiCHo grew out of a company, Les Cabaret Capricho, but also out of a city – Guadalajara. César Omar Barrios, one of the organisers, takes up the tale.

Guadalajara is the second biggest city in Mexico and it's very conservative. On the one hand, we have a lot of Catholicism and Catholic influence. On the other, we have a privileged location in the country: the city is in an economically strong area, with a lot of business, a lot of enterprises. It's not far from the US, not far from Central South America. So, there is money, there is religion, but there is also a lot of class conflict and oppression. This is a horrible mix. When I was at university, we would call it a two-faced city – a city of opposites. It is rich, but with a lot of poverty. It has the biggest gay community in the whole of the country, and it's the city where there are the most deaths connected to homophobic attacks.

In this context you're angry when you're young because you feel there is a lot of oppression. But you can also create a lot; the social exclusion, the feeling of oppression, creates a counterculture of artists who want to challenge the conservatism. The audiences as well: they also need to see things being broken to be able to breathe. What you mostly find in Guadalajara is traditional mariachi, pop culture, conservative things like classical music. A lot of people want to escape that.

For two years before starting FiCHo we organised cabarets every month. Each one had new artists, new acts, a new venue, a new theme. They would last six hours. If the audience didn't like what they saw they could throw cabbage at the stage; or if they did, flowers. Our inspirations were *lucha libre* and *fiesta*: two things that Mexicans love. We won't buy a ticket to the theatre,



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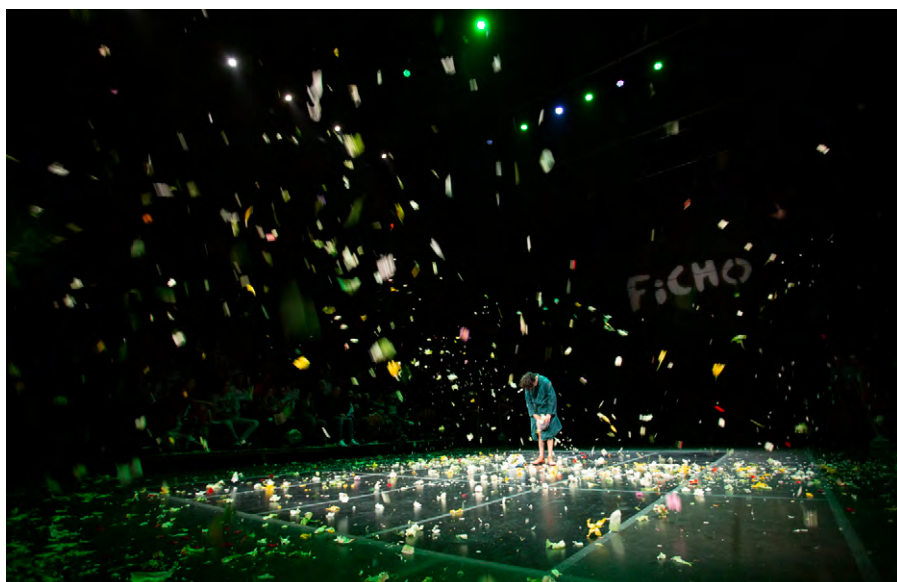
but if you invite us to a party, a *fiesta*, with bands playing? Then yes, we'll come.

The other inspiration was *teatro de carpa* – 'tent theatre'. It was a style of performance that rose up in Mexico during the 1930s and 40s, a format mixing circus and cabaret, with a lot of comedy acts who over time became famous. The whole style was very Mexican, but at the same time very universal. We'd say it's a *mestizo* thing – a mix, just like Mexicans are *mestizos* because we're a mix of indigenous and Spanish peoples.

When we started the cabarets, we didn't have many circus artists in our city, so we had to invite people from dance, rap, graffiti, every kind of theatre or music. It was an open laboratory for experimentation.

Over time we got to be known in Guadalajara. With audiences, but also with the Mexican circus artists – old travellers – who were passing through town and would come in to perform. Naturally the cabarets became a kind of meeting place, and so we decided it was time to make the jump to a big festival. The first edition was in 2011, and we've had one every two years since then.

A lot of people are surprised when they come to FiCHo. They get to see shows they could never find in any other festival, nor any theatre, so perceptions of circus are changing. It's a very slow process, and our influence is very small, but we have a captive audience and the number of Mexican circus companies is rising. When we started there were three companies in our area; now we can count 19.



© Gilberto Torres / FiCHO 2019

We usually call what we do 'urban circus' because the traditional circuses are based more outside of towns. In Mexico, most of the people who are doing it make their living from something else. In Les Cabaret Capricho we have biologists, filmmakers, engineers. The closest thing to circus is one performer who trained as a dancer. What this gives us is a community of professionals who are, perhaps, a little more questioning in the way they approach circus. It's not better or worse, but they have a different perspective to someone who went straight into the field.

These days about 60% of FiCHO's programme is international. We need an international festival because we need international influences. With the younger generations it's as if they got into the University of YouTube: they learn online, which

is OK, but they're missing a lot of history. With the jugglers, everyone knows Wes Peden but nobody knows Jérôme Thomas.

At the same time, we're always talking about how to make our own circus. Mexico is a copying country. It's in our culture. Before the Spanish colonisation we were around 160 nations, each with its own culture and language. Then came the Spanish and Catholicism, and more waves of immigration from the Lebanese, the Jewish, the French. So, we are always taking from here and there, mixing things up – it's the *mestizo* identity. It's OK, it's who and what we are. But you can also lose yourself in all this mixing. You can copy something in a way that it never really passes through you.

Being international has opened a lot of doors and opportunities for us. It has also

given us a sense of security. I think in Latin America, and in Mexico especially, you always feel less: less than Europe, less than America, because you have less money, fewer opportunities.

When we come to Europe, we're always asking ourselves in the discussions, When will we have these French conditions to create circus? It is like a dream, almost absurd: in France there's all this investment in circus, in culture, all these facilities. But then we meet people from other parts of the world, from Eastern Europe say, and we feel we have a lot in common. Not only in terms of conditions but also in the spirit of things: you realise that there are a lot of things you already have, and that France is paying for. Freshness is one of those. France has to pay its artists so that they can create, so that they can focus. For us, we need to create to have work; we have to really commit to research, to being authentic, in order to earn our place.

Sometimes I even feel we're more engaged because of the lack of resources. We do it anyway. And we have an enthusiasm; we just never stop. Mexico is now in one of the bloodiest moments of her whole history. Violence everywhere, dead people everywhere, blood everywhere. And still people say: We need to get out of this. We *will* get out of this.

For artists there is always provocation, always stimulus. They feel like they need to do something.



César Omar Barrios is a multidisciplinary artist: actor, dancer, clown and performer who explores stage work in all its diversity. Since 2011, he has been working as an actor and artistic director with various collectives including Pneumus and Les Cabaret Capricho, which he founded in 2007. He also created the "La Maroma" training course and, in 2011, the "Festival Internacional de Circo y CHou de México - FiCHO".

🌐 www.fichofest.com

ARTICLES AND VOICES

OVERLAPPING CIRCLES

By Katharine Kavanagh

A festival is itself a meeting place, a crossroads, a territory. Moving through the interlocking cultures of Festival CIRC*a*, Katharine Kavanagh muses on circus' various communities, and their links to the outside world.

A territory without creatures to inhabit it is just space, boundless and incongruent. It is the flocks of individual lives, convening and departing, staking claim or relinquishing hold, that give shape and meaning to the space, territorialising it. Or deterritorialising it, only to reterritorialise anew. For this publication, I was asked to consider the FRESH CIRCUS#5 programme through the lens of Community, but the perpetual motion of circus territories leads instead to Communities, multiple flocks gathering here for three days of discussion and sharing before dissipating once again

into other constellations. The notion of a single Community is deceptive, promising comfort and belonging whilst being simultaneously restrictive and exclusionary. Communities, such as I see in motion here in Auch, offer freedom and evolution, combining and recombining with shifting, porous boundaries. The FRESH CIRCUS symposium echoes the murmuration of birds, or of Cie XY's acrobats, whose latest premiere *Möbius* has been inspired by these movements. This fifth edition of the conference has – once again – set a murmuration of communities into flight,

causing meetings and crossed pathways, the very zones where productive change takes place.

A three-high tower of bodies stands between two huddles of humans at ground height. From the group in front, an outstretched form is pitched into the air while the top-mounter of the tower falls back into the arms of those behind, replaced by the new arrival from below. One falls, one flies. The configuration is the same, the configuration is different. In a cycle of rotating places, a two-high column grows and sheds. The ensemble are clustered around the porter at its base, lifting, sliding shoulders under feet in place of floor. Shoulders that push to standing, then find new shoulders inserted beneath their own feet, new shoulders that push to standing until the first feet have left the original shoulders, launching into space to reconnect with two pairs of waiting arms behind, then rejoining the cluster to lift, to slide, to push. Shifting positions, shifting roles, keeping the pattern flowing.

I am here as a member of the INCAM network, presenting a short introduction to our International Network of Circus Arts Magazines as part of the Circus Explorations tours on Day 2 of the symposium. As such, I'm part of a small and thinly spread community of circus writers – as my



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co-presenter Adolfo Rossomando from the Italian *Juggling Magazine* puts it, a 'minority group within the minority group of circus'.

I live in the UK and, though I came to the festival alone, I also find myself part of a larger community that links producers, performers, students and teachers from the British Isles together through a familiarity with national context and shared language. No matter that I see some of these people outside of the UK more frequently than we see each other on home turf. We have a shared cultural understanding of circus and its status in our own country that links us in a delicate web. A wave and a smile across a crowded courtyard acts as a safety line of comfort that allows me to reach out further and explore deeper into new territories with confidence.

I have recently started a PhD investigating audience experience and public representations of circus, which gives me membership too of a sprawling academic community. And, within that, a place in the growing 'Circademic' community that specialises in circus-based research¹. Examples of this research are offered in the colourful graphic novel-style book included within our delegate information packs, published following the 2017 Circus & Space conference in Münster and sharing its discussion points in a fun and lively format. One of the speakers admitted at that conference that circus studies are often a 'secret love', a cuckoo's egg nestled inside more established academic departments. (My own degree, for example, is housed in the university's School of English, Communication and Philosophy). The result of these interdisciplinary stowaway studies is yet more meetings of different communities' perspectives and knowledges – exchanges that nourish all parties.

I also notice here that I'm part of a community of women. One where mainstream media conventions of dress and make-up don't have to apply to allow us to fit in. Where authenticity, strength, practicality and out of the box thinking are prized regardless of gender

identity. Where activities such as breastfeeding and childcare slot inside the other events of the symposium instead of being relegated to hidden corners behind closed doors. My communities intersect and interchange, in perpetual motion. The traces I carry between them cross-pollinate and germinate, sharing new potentials, new possibilities.

Not action and reaction, but perpetual reactions. To their own body, and motion, and



© Ian Grandjean

space, and to those it connects with and to those it shares distance with. Formations and mutations. Science and cells. Chaos and order. Sustaining this motion is exhausting. We need the resting places of comfort and temporary stability provided. Feeling part of a community is like the feeling of being in safe hands. The XY acrobats look safe in each other's hands, and I feel in safe hands watching them. They pass from one to another. Their community reacts. I react. Our communities connect.

One of the beauties of FRESH CIRCUS#5 is the range of varied circus interests present, all feeding into the conversations. Alongside performers and producers are programmers and policymakers; alongside students and researchers are social enterprise partners and trainers. Since its first edition, Festival

CIRCa has invited FEDEC professional schools to bring groups of students to Auch, where they share their work and their energy, meeting other cultures of practice and other aesthetics of performance to expand their understanding of what circus careers can be. FRESH CIRCUS delegates are invited to the Circle program of student presentations, and I see recent graduates from Argentina's Circo de las Artes – who show part of their final performance, which they are hoping to de-

velop and tour as a full production – and second year students from INAC in Portugal, who have created a 20 minute performance specifically for this event.

Hosting the symposium at a festival means both delegates and festival participants can benefit from each other's presence. Co-temporal and co-spatial activity around Auch during the week also includes a FEDEC pedagogy lab for circus teachers, and an academic study day organised by the French researcher network *Le Collectif de Chercheur.e.s sur le Cirque*. Periods of free time in the FRESH programme allow me to catch up with friends and colleagues from each event, over coffee, at lunch, attending facilitated artist talks with companies playing at the festival, or at presentations on the first day of the symposium. We're asked to choose

¹ There is a dedicated group on Facebook – Circademics – for anyone interested in the nexus of circus arts and academic inquiry. More info at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/circademics>.

one of 20 presentations on Day One under the banner of Local Areas Under the Microscope. I select Room Four, where representatives of Galapiat Cirque and Compagnie d'Elles discuss their retirement home and prison work. The connecting thread for these seemingly disparate communities is the session theme, 'Making links with hard to reach audiences'. Artists from both organisations acknowledge that success comes through time spent with participants getting to know each other, and that a project won't necessarily go where you think it will at the start. All participants have their own ideas and tastes, and it's important to open space for these or else a form of cultural imperialism is imposed. Supportive partners who believe in the project are also valuable, although creators must often balance a fine line between different needs when political tensions arise. Before success can be achieved, we have to discover what success means to each of the parties involved, and the ability to evolve and change with new discoveries is key. 'The goal,' says François Alaitru of Galapiat Cirque, 'is to meet people. Circus is just the tool.'

White and tan costumes begin to appear amid the black outfits, disrupting the previous smoothness. Not through any fault, or malice, but because a new mode must be discovered. The acrobats find ways to protect and support these new versions of themselves. To facilitate ease again. Individuals break out and do their own thing, then are accepted back without pause or question.

These three days are an opportunity, too, for the dynamic, transient communities of FRESH CIRCUS to meet and intersect with local communities of Auch. Our AirBnB hosts tell us proudly about the shows they have seen each year at the festival while driving us up and down the hill to their home. The Circus Explorations tour pairs artistic and support organisations with local bu-

sinesses, finding our partner Fabrizio Roselli juggling lime green buckets amid the Armagnacs of Maison Ramajo's local produce store, while our volunteer guide tells me about her two circus performer sons, neither of us speaking the other's language beyond a few words. At dinner on the first evening, our seating arrangements are organised by coloured napkins that correspond to our registration. Green, Purple,

comfort zone – creating a safe space for experimentation and pushing at the boundaries of risk. Edges are blending places where communities meet, and in the wider world of nationalist groups, single issue politics, and special interest parties, these meetings that circus facilitates so well – with care, and connection – are also an offering. It's unreasonable to suppose that 'The Circus Community' can save the world but,



© Ian Grandjean

Blue and Yellow mix bookers, students, creators, and guests from local councils and organisations. (I'm Red – I think that stands for Other!) I'm reminded of the opening speech given by Guy Fitzer, Secretary General of the Prefecture of Gers, Sub-Prefect of the District of Auch, as we were welcomed to the symposium: 'Circus makes it possible to reach out to very diverse publics. It's a space of sharing, of cooperation.'

It's widely understood that circus is a meeting place of bodies and forces, but we should also celebrate its power as a meeting place of communities. Porous edges between familiarity and novelty allow circus artists to feel at home in new configurations – even when outside of their immediate

undoubtedly, the circus ability to share and accept and learn from each other's Communities can help change it for the better.

Three-year old Noa from Nowhere Circus has drawn me a picture of Möbius. After sitting very good and quiet for the first 65 minutes of the 70 minute-long show, he's crawled away from his mum to come and find me to play with. I've paper in my bag and a pen in my hair, and drawing is a nice quiet game to keep him occupied for the final five minutes. Swirls and spirals and loops and whirls connect and stream away from each other on the page, punctuated by single dots pressed through the paper. The company take their bow, joined by a rapturous meeting of hands.



Katharine Kavanagh is a circus writer and researcher with a background in devised performance. She runs the online platform The Circus Diaries, which is a digital hub for critical response and circus thinking, and is currently pursuing a PhD on circus criticism and audience experience at Cardiff University. Katharine has taught at institutions including the National Centre for Circus Arts, Circomedia and Stockholm University of the Arts (SKH), and can otherwise be found working in children's hospitals as a Giggle Dr for Theodora Children's Charity.

 www.thecircusdiaries.com

MURMURATIONS: ANTOINE THIRION ON MÖBIUS



Interview by Māra Pāvula

Now touring their fourth production, Compagnie XY have become known for developing an intricate language of group acrobatics. Their new performance, *Möbius*, a collaboration with Rachid Ouramdane, sees them in search of something essential.

Circus performances often speak of the artist, the individual, of who he or she is. With this show, we've tried to erase that to an extent. It's not necessarily me, Antoine, who is important, but rather the group. As in ballet, it's the energy and choreography that count, and the relationship between individuals.

When we began collaborating with Rachid Ouramdane, we shared a desire to be displaced and to shake up our habits. We wanted to allow ourselves to lose our bearings, to lose ourselves a bit all together, while feeding on each other's worlds to make progress. Murmurations weren't our main focus at the start. Rachid had already done a show called *Murmurations* and shows where they were the initial premise. It was a premise he frequently used and that he had explored. It was also something we had both already discussed.

How does the group exist, adapt and change? Who leads and who follows? Who is in charge? Who takes up too much space? Who doesn't take up enough? For ten years now, we've been asking these questions about our group. It was very compatible with our world and we decided to look at these issues.

What really interested us was the notion of a continuum. We didn't want to create a show where the scenes, aesthetic world and references to different styles were ordered. Nor did we want to limit our acrobatic performance to isolated, ostentatious moments that deconstructed and recreated the performance. Instead, we



© Ian Grandjean

wanted to position it on a continuum, harnessing the idea of writing acrobatic movement: where do acrobatics come from and where are they going? We pushed our research into the body and movement towards this continuum by using notions of speed, rhythm and confusion through movement to allow the concept of murmurations to emerge.

What is interesting about the murmurations of birds is that there is an instinctive, overall attentiveness, a flow. They are aware of each other and everything happens in metamorphosis. Aside from murmurations, which are clearly identified in our show, we also explored the transformations that take place in nature. The decomposition and recomposition of things, the circle of life. These things emerged when we broke things down and rebuilt them, in our deconstructions and our reconstructions. I hope this show helps to reveal nature and the way it functions. Metamorphosis, disappearance and the creation of something else. The end of things and their rebirth.

This time, we yearned to embrace something more streamlined. In *Il n'est pas encore minuit*, we wanted to focus more on individuals, on stories, and in so doing, we wanted to leave more space for perception, emotion and the strength of a group. Of course, notions of trust, mutual assistance and support still remain as they are central to what we do. They're a feature of our discipline. Circus arts encompass many individual disciplines. For us, the ba-



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sic relationship is carrying someone and being carried. That's something expressive in itself. It can give the audience a feeling of deep empathy; carrying is a simple movement we can all do, as is being carried, in the sense of being shielded from gravity.

We believe that acrobatics have their own poetry. We want to explore this poetry: how it exists, how it is created, the energy, the relationship between the carried and carriers, between the acrobats. Many things can be said, felt and experienced. The bodies, the choreography and the writing all allow you to feel something. Our vision was to let emotion emerge. And secondly, to let individuals find their own meaning. Everyone has their own poetry, their own imagination. We wanted to leave

the door open, rather than drop big hints by guiding the audience in their understanding or feelings: the "feel this and that, now feel that", or "the poetry is here" stance.

One of the challenges we brought to the table at the start of our creative process was to identify the poetry in the smallest of things. Often, as acrobats and circus performers, we aim for prowess. In *Möbius*, that's part of it, of course, but we didn't want it to be about one-upmanship in terms of achievement. We looked for ways to dismantle that in this particular creation, to explore what makes up our acrobatic language, to pinpoint the simple things that sometimes mean a lot. We wanted to offer audiences an emotional journey rather than just a series of acrobatic feats to enjoy.



After completing his training at the National Centre for Circus Arts (CNAC), together with Aurore Liotard, Antoine Thirion joins the Cirque des Nouveaux Nez (2005). With his duo, he collaborates with different circus and cabarets. Their performance was awarded a golden medal at the Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain and a golden medal at the Nikulin Festival in Moscow (2009). The same year, he joins the company XY for the collective creation *Grand C* and then continues with *Il n'est pas minuit...* (2014). In 2010, he collaborates with Théâtre d'Un Jour for the show *L'enfant qui...* Antoine also worked with the company MPTA for the in situ creations *Utopistes*.

 www.ciexy.com



Māra Pāvula is the head of strategic development in Riga Circus, producer in festival Re Rīga! and residency programs in the multidisciplinary festival Sansusi in Latvia. Passionate about contemporary circus since 2009, she is the founder of a contemporary circus platform in Baltic states called "Next Door Circus" and has been working as a circus researcher and journalist.

WHAT IF WE ALL STAYED AT HOME?

By Kiki Muukkonen

The circus artist is everywhere. They move for opportunities, for training, for work; at times it seems like the only way to survive. But is there another choice hidden in plain sight? Kiki Muukkonen digs into the topic of internationalism.

Once upon a time I was chatting with a juggler who had been elected laureate of circusnext, and offered him a residency in Stockholm. To my surprise he answered that he would rather stay at home. Travelling shattered his mind, he said, and took focus away from his work. Residencies abroad were a waste of time. He asked me if there was any way I could help him find a residency close to his hometown instead.

I was baffled. I'd taken it for granted that we all see travelling as a privilege, something to long for. After all, circus is international by definition. We, the circus, are a community of travellers, always appearing in different geographical, artistic, social and cultural territories. We use international relations for our local development, and for our own personal and artistic growth. The

we also become 'famous' at home, which brings its own opportunities.

Well, OK, this is not true in every case. For instance, French artists can tour mainly in France. They have their national poles, their programming networks and *intermittence* (and oh, how we envy them). But most other countries are a totally different story. In Sweden, for one, it is difficult for a circus company to survive without going international (unless, that is, they create children's shows).

At FRESH CIRCUS I attended an artist talk with Circus I Love You, a circus company consisting of artists and producers mainly from Finland, France and Sweden. They spend a lot of time and money travelling. In their presentation, they said that their original vision was to tour a tent in the Nordic

take a little of what's available from many different places. Where they once grew up is not relevant to them anymore – they no longer have a place called home. 'Home is where we had our last gig.' Paradoxically, and probably quite annoyingly, they get invited to perform all over Europe – but not in the Nordic countries.

Even though one would think their multiculturalism might bring some funding benefits, allowing them to apply for subvention in several countries, finding a sustainable economic model has been difficult for them. The dream they are pursuing is very expensive, and their touring creates a lot of problems. They have spent months studying EU documents, trying to understand how to tour their tent and truck throughout Europe in a legal manner – but wherever they turn they seem to get stuck in an administrative and bureaucratic mess. As one of the artists put it: 'Circus is illegal everywhere. You will be employed to do dangerous things, and your employer could go to jail. Circus is a resistance against the system, just by its pure existence.' Though not outspoken, it seems to me that, next to their most obvious motivation (the love of circus, naturally) the driving force for the company is exactly this spirit of resistance, of revolution. Circus I Love You are on a mission, and they never expected it to be easy.

During the FRESH CIRCUS week, this is an idea I hear echoed repeatedly by different people from different contexts: 'Circus is a symbol of resistance.' 'Circus is a political counterforce in its essence.' 'Art is disruptive.' 'We can and must resist the forces of capitalistic cultural management.'

But, as many companies find out, revolution has its price. And I'll say this: it's kind of expensive. It's quite utopian to think we could have it all: the market, the money, and the re-



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market is international, and quite often funding is more easily accessible for international collaborations than for local ones. A side effect of working internationally is that

countries, the territories that were originally home for most of them. But Circus I Love You have made a deliberate decision not to be based in one place. Their ambition is to

volution. The form of resistance many in the circus field have chosen – a revolution that requires constant travelling – also places other things at stake. When we are nomads, a reality for many of us in the circus, what happens to our sense of identity, our sense of connection? At a time when being brave has to be one of our most important qualities, how does that affect our art, dreams, relations, identities? Could our international work prevent the circus from growing a real relationship with its own territories?

With the memory of the travel-reluctant circusnext laurate firmly in mind, this leads me to another question: What if we all stayed at home?

'Circus is everywhere', the theme of FRESH CIRCUS#5, expresses quite a grand idea of omnipresence, and possibly also of us as missionaries and prophets of the circus. As we all know, being a prophet at home is the most difficult of tasks. And yet CIRCus, located in Auch, surrounded by the rural Gers region, has somehow succeeded. Every year the international circus community makes its pilgrimage to this small town in the south of France, to see mainly French performances. It is amazing how scores of local volunteers take part in making the festival happen. As the mayor of Auch pointed out in his welcoming speech, art enhances the identity of a territory, and indeed circus has made Auch internationally famous. It is quite a miracle. At the same time, CIRCus is definitely a market place, and one that provides French artists with international work. Whether its existence constitutes some kind of resistance, however, whether it is somehow revolutionary in its local context – I don't know, and I will leave that for the French to say.

The circus company Cirquons Flex from Réunion is an interesting example of local inter-

culturality. Réunion is, at a fundamental level, an intercultural island. At FRESH CIRCUS the company explained their desire to create a circus closely related to their territory and identity. As the first professional circus company on the island, they found international cooperation was not an option but a necessity. If you want to be the first in your field, it's good to be able to point to the successes of international friends. This is how the contemporary circus wave started in Sweden – and it's also why the Swedish circus of today is totally intercultural. At the same time, Cirquons Flex say that you can only find a circus like theirs on Réunion – they even call it a 'native' circus. The local and international has become interwoven into an identity of its own. Whether Cirquons Flex's existence is somehow revolutionary in its local context, I don't know. I will leave that for the citizens of Réunion to say.

And yet my feeling is that if our revolution consists in creating a new (kind of) market, it is the *audience* who must be everywhere. Opening to local possibilities, we can dig where we stand, innovate where we already sit. For sure intercultural meetings, within and beyond Europe, develop us, open our minds, inspire us. I believe that dealing with intercultural friction makes us better people and helps us live together in this world. If we don't meet, we can't create or share our common dreams, create our common revolutions – but we should be open about what form they take. One evening in my hotel room in Auch I read a quote from Esteban Gonzáles Pons on this theme: 'Europe is not a market, it is the will to live together... We can have a common market, but if we don't have common dreams, we have nothing.' And as one of the members of Cirquon Flex said at one of the FRESH CIRCUS seminars: 'We need to build new stories for a new future: an inclusive narrative, a story about collaboration.'



What, then, is our story? That's not an easy question, but we could start by reimagining our internationalism. In the programme for FRESH CIRCUS it says that while circus can find a home anywhere, 'the way it takes root differs depending on the areas and partnerships involved'. Taking root is the key to calling somewhere a home or territory. How much we can make the earth shake under our feet depends on how deep our roots are. It's usually not the visitors who fly by and are gone the next day that make the real revolutions happen. On the other hand, if we are very deeply and firmly rooted, it becomes difficult to shake hard enough to stir the ground. We need contact with other territories, other identities, other artistic and cultural universes.

Today I don't necessarily regard travelling only as a privilege. Mobility has a price tag: it shatters my mind and affects my sense of identity and belonging – not to mention that it is not sustainable for the planet. However, I'm very pleased to have the intercultural knowledge and perspective I have gained over the years. Without it, the development of our art form would not have been possible. But now I want to run home to the circus. I want it to be possible to survive without constantly buying plane tickets. I want a real relationship with my territory. Maybe circus, as I know it, needs to be disrupted – or will inevitably be. Working from our own corner of the world we might invent new models that reconcile the necessity of intercultural exchange with the necessity of a territory we can call our own.

Just before leaving Auch, I met a colleague in the street. 'Where are you going?' He asked. 'I'm just on my way home,' I said. 'Aha, and which hotel are you staying at?' He asked in response. 'No. I'm going home home – to Stockholm.'



Kiki Muukkonen is artistic director of the circus department at the Swedish cultural centre Subtopia. She manages national and international programming, residencies, artistic development projects, seminars, and international relations and offers advice to artists on their projects. Since 2009 she has produced the annual Subcase and curated the circus program in Hangaren Subtopia. In 2019 Kiki created the regional festival CirkusMania, which will run its 3rd edition in February next year.

 www.subtopia.se
 www.cirkusmania.se

PUNKS NOT STARS: JULIEN AUGER ON CIRCUS I LOVE YOU



Interview by Viktoria Dalborg

Shamelessly flirting with the traditional circus (while mixing in some Nordic charm), *Circus I Love You* is a company and performance founded by circus artists Julien Auger and Sade Kamppila. Having successfully toured several parts of Europe, now the company want to crack the Nordic countries – technically, their home turf.

We don't come from traditional circus families, but we're very excited by the traditional circus format. We're interested in what comes out when we aren't trying to fit ourselves into the 'art box' – when we shamelessly

place ourselves closer to traditional circus and the entertainment field.

Right from the start, we wanted to call what we were doing 'ethical entertainment' – as a way of saying that it can be entertaining

without being sexist or having bad values. We know that there are a bunch of circus people who aren't pleased by the way we've done things, but in the end we don't really care. We don't play for them, we play for the everyday audience.

We'd like to tour more in the Nordic countries since we have a lot of artists from the region and receive Swedish funding. But we find it very difficult to get bookings in Sweden and the Nordics. Programmers are often afraid of the logistics of the tent, and of all our caravans and trailers. They're not used to programming this format and are often stressed out by the fact that we live on-site. Sometimes it comes close to discrimination against the cultures of travelling people. The discussion always arrives at, 'Do you have to come with your caravans?'

If we contact an outdoor festival it can happen that they say we're not an outdoor show, and if we reach out to a theatre, we're sometimes told they already have a stage and they ask if we can do the show without our tent and caravans. It pushes us to think about organising our own tours and selling our own tickets.

When we created *Circus I Love You*, Sade and I came up with the concept. We had this clear idea that everyone would be on stage from the beginning of the show through to the end, and that we'd play in the round.

We knew we wanted circus disciplines that would be easy to bring on and off stage – and to go beyond the idea of ordering acts based on their rigging. We wanted to create the



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dramaturgy of a punk concert, with no silent moments and music from beginning till end. The idea was also that the circus artists would join the musicians and play instruments in-between their circus performance. Sometimes we were tempted to slow down and have silent moments, but we decided to stay with the 'punk concert' format, even though we knew it wouldn't be for everyone.

When we started, we had a list of the artists we wanted to work with – skilled acrobats who could also play instruments. But it's difficult to find artists who can be on tour and away from home for six months, living in caravans. We pay well, but these days a lot

of circus artists want to tour like superstars. They live in a city and then fly to other cities all over the world for short gigs. This has become their lifestyle.

It's always difficult to replace our artists because they not only need to have the right skills, they also need to be ready for all the other work: rigging the tent and taking it down, helping out with more or less everything connected to the tour.

When we decided to start this project, and set out to buy a circus tent from Italy, everyone said, 'Oh, but it's going to be an ecological catastrophe. Your tent is a huge piece of plastic.' And yes, it's true – our tent

is a huge piece of plastic. But when we calculated the carbon footprint, we could see that the fuel we'd burn over a whole tour was equal to a single flight to a single gig in New York.

We want to be a travelling circus, but it's not easy. From time to time we wonder if we'd be better citizens if we didn't do it. And yet this is our life, and this is the place we've taken in society. We're trying to do the best we can. In ten years perhaps we'll look back and say we were such fools, but for now it feels like the right thing for us to do.



Julien Auger graduated from DOCH, University of Dance and Circus, in Stockholm in 2012. He is one of the founder of La Meute. He is an acrobat specialized in group acrobatics including teeterboard, Russian swing, banquine, hand to hand and perch pôle. He plays the saxophone, piano and tuba. He directed *Tension Trail*, the graduation show of Codarts in Rotterdam and the show *Bloom* from Cirkus Cirkör. Julien also worked as an acrobat with La WALF, Cie Escale and Animal Religion. He is now touring with the shows *100% circus* and *Circus I Love You*, created in 2018.

🌐 www.circusiloveyou.com



Viktoria Dalborg is a director based in Stockholm with a background as a physical actor and circus performer. She is artistic director at Kompani Giraff and also head of the independent courses in circus at SKH/Stockholm University of the Arts.

ORGANISING PRINCIPLES

By John-Paul Zaccarini

In a field full of collectives and ensembles, how do we organise our companies and ourselves, and how does this bear on what we see on stage? John-Paul Zaccarini presses himself for a set of perspectives on Collectif Sous le Manteau's single discipline performance, *Monstro*.



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'Did you enjoy the show?' / 'Did you like it?'

It takes a moment for me to get over my sudden confusion around these simple, oft-used questions. Perhaps it's not the words, it's who those words are directed to that confuses me – which John-Paul are they asking? The artist? The professor? The head of a Master programme?

My answer becomes: *'My remit isn't really to enjoy or not. To like or not. My mission is to try and understand.'*

And then if they press me for an opinion with, *'So, what did you, yourself think of it then?'*, I have to reply, *'Which self are you asking?'* or *'I think from a lot of different places'*. And then I ask myself why I am so actively avoiding giving my opinion on a circus show. So instead I ask *'What did you*

think?' And I get my answer. What interests me is what circus shows do to other people; this is what I like, this is what I enjoy. I want to understand the in-between zone between an ongoing, and never finished programme of practice and the polished performance, how artists organise their practice and ways of working with each other, and how we negotiate the gap between practice and presentation.

'Circus is everywhere' is the tagline for this edition of FRESH CIRCUS.

But 'Society' is also everywhere, even if it seems physically absent when you are alone. It is still there as an absence somehow. A condition of being able to be alone.

Circus is everywhere, even when someone leaves a show and says, 'That's not circus',

a statement I thankfully hear less and less. So, even when a performance falls outside of the parameters of what one thinks of as a circus, circus is still there, as an absence. It depends who gets to do the naming, who has the power of naming something 'circus'. Is a virtuoso b-boy or spectacular parkour enthusiast not doing circus just by virtue of the training? Or is a circus artist delivering simplicity, or monotony, or unspectacular, slow un-tricksy-ness doing circus precisely because of their everyday practice? Or are they un-doing it?

Society is everywhere in *Monstro*, in its depiction of collective organisation within an architecture of poles and in how individuals struggle to maintain... what?... personality, desire, autonomy, integrity within the demands of the group?

Society is everywhere in the discussion of how the company, Sous le Manteau, organises itself to organise a presentation of a show about organisation. But Circus is also everywhere in *Monstro*. In its pattern of presenting the tension between the solo act and the ensemble, what I notice first is that the collective law seems to work very smoothly. It seems to be contained by an invisible set of articles, but once individuals are given a moment to be 'themselves', these 'selves' are stressed, frustrated and even potentially unsafe. In the language of child psychology, their emotions haven't got an adequate container. Alone, they can't seem to make sense of the architecture that defines their borders. How does the individual cope in the collective? *I thought that this was the question Monstro was asking.*

'It takes time to develop a language together.'

These are often the words we use to describe the beginning of a collaborative process, where we need to 'get on the same page', or find shared vocabularies. Language concerns me, it's something I want to take care of, and even if it has been uncommon for it to appear on the circus stage, it is there as an absence, a condition. Language concerns circus most vitally when it comes to collectives, because there are clearly some agreements that can only be made by bodies working together, and some questions that can only be resolved with words.

But if the question *Sous le Manteau* wanted to ask was 'how to construct a collective?', then my reflections turn to a more specific use of language – the writing of articles: articles of constitution, articles of organisation, even articles of faith, gathered around their common practice of Chinese pole.



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It took four laboratories to create the conditions for them to work, drawing in artists from six different schools and seven nationalities. That's a lot of languages babbling around one organising object – different ways of speaking about the practice of pole, misunderstandings, imperfect translations, different aesthetic territories coming to agreements. I'm not writing here just about the translation from French to Danish to English, but also about the only ever approximate translation of felt experience into language. The pole collects these individuals

in such a way as to define what is necessary for the space to work and what should be left out. My feeling about the show itself is that it is the individual that is left out, and yes, left out in the cold, lost in the woods. Here, in these moments of solitude the artists are clearly self-scripted, autonomous – but to what end? In the collective endeavour of creating a show, each individual has a clearly defined administrative end/role. In the show they do not; the individual seems purposeless. *I think the show spoke to me about a flattening of language that can be difficult to exist within. The artists need parentheses () within the clauses of their contractual agreement to freak out inside of. But that's Utopia, certain things are not allowed in a space if it is to function smoothly. I haven't seen a Utopia yet at this festival that I want to be a part of. And there's lots of them. I'm interested in what they're excluding in order to operate,*

more than what they're including in the show.

The language of Utopia works by exclusion. It needs walls. Perhaps in this case, just one: the fourth wall. Since the collective does not seem to be addressed to us, but without us would be 'just' practice, not presentation, we start to look like the necessary 'excluded inclusion'. The collective operates just fine without me. But individuals break free from its smooth operations, through tiny cracks, through loopholes in the clauses, in tiny corners where Big Brother can't see them,

in order to express something that would otherwise disrupt the ongoing production of 'collectivity'. For that they need us, this passive sponge, to soak up this repressed affect. Where else is it going to go? The more a Utopia excludes, exiles out into the wilderness, beyond its walls, the truer it can stay to the articles of its faith and the more singular those articles can be. But the value of consensus around the single-story is a dangerous fiction. It's not the same as specificity, which also excludes, in order to focus and entertain us in an idea. *I think Monstro shows how dangerous to the human psyche this consensus can be, how it can become aesthetic dogma, but at the same time celebrates a sort of specificity of practice. I think this is the in-between it plays with, and it is ambivalent about it.*

The pole – in its difficult, ungiving vertical singularity – can dictate a lot of what ought to be excluded. On a meta level, it excludes the disciplines of theatre and dance, which must be worked through in these confessional solo moments (*which, in parentheses, looks to me like a maybe unconscious comment on circus education*).

The one discipline performance is, for me, a window onto a practice that we are not regularly witness to. I am more fulfilled watching people train than watching them perform. It has something to do with the internal focus and, dare I say it, integrity of getting the difficult job done, with no one to impress except the unspoken, individually scripted contracts that we make with the circus. This is where the depth of the artist's commitment shines for me, and as a circus artist in his fifth decade, this is what keeps me in the circus world.

Time unfolds differently for a 50-year-old than a 20 or 30 something circus artist. In this respect *Monstro* is a mature work. It allows itself time to unfold, not in one-liners, punchy catchphrases, or singular statements but in the comprehensive development of one argument. It doesn't succumb to the pressure to entertain – although it does stay true to the meaning of entertainment in that it entertains one idea throughout, and it involves us in that argumentation rather than



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distracting us with a bricolage of disciplines that some circuses still hold dear.

I often hear, as a criticism, that a presentation was 'just a series of research vignettes', as if this was not enough, approaching one idea, one discipline, from different angles in order to expose or perhaps even exhaust its potential.

I felt invited to an incredibly intimate world. I was granted access, permission to view, quietly and without comment (applause), a practice that did not need my opinion in order to get the job done.

Specialisation. It's nerdy. It's flat.

Monodisciplinary can also be monotone. It plays no tricks, delivers no surprise, and

its variation is limited. One could say it is continuous, it does not give us a break. The collective work on the pole is solid, compressed, dense, so these are other words for 'heavy'; it's not frivolous, it's not fickle, it can keep its attention on one thing without thinking that there might be something better around the corner, its aesthetic is focused, pared-down, austere. Monogamous not promiscuous. It's in it for the long run.

Monstro is also more of a plateau of intensity than a series of disconnected climaxes. It is a sustained, physical meditation. Entertainment not divertissement. Initiation not exclusion.

This is an analogy for ethics, before it becomes the basis for a politics, or a social organisation: ethics as a prerequisite for political

organisation. Specialisation as a prerequisite for circus.

How often are ethics lost in politics as it actually operates? What do we lose from circus practice when it obeys the rules of the market?

In Monstro I saw what I have been missing, what I have been losing in the transition between training and performance. Monad – an elementary individual substance which reflects the order of the world and from which material properties are derived. Give me one thing from which we can make an analogy for the world. Please, allow me to focus, for an hour, on one thing. In this respect, it was a privilege to be entertained by Monstro's single focus.

One could ask oneself, within the context of CIRCa, what one felt was excluded – perhaps not consciously – or what was lacking representation. What one notices or does not notice shows how comfortable or uncomfortable we feel – how at home in this territory, in this microcosm of culture we feel, and how we feel included, or not, in the aesthetic worlds represented there. *Monstro includes, for me, that which circus performance can sometimes exclude as unnecessary, and that which, for me, is the only thing still of interest in the circus, its ethical mode of organisation as an analogy that helps me to reflect yet again on how we collect around important social issues through our practices.*



John-Paul Zaccarini is an associate professor in circus at DOCH - Stockholm University of the Arts, a circus artist, choreographer, theatre director and writer. Head of Master programme in contemporary circus practice, he has also created the concept of Circoanalysis - the incorporation of psychoanalytic concepts into circus work.

A COMMON LANGUAGE: VALIA BEAUVIEUX ON MONSTRO



Interview by Marion Marchand

Collectif Sous le Manteau is a new seven-acrobat ensemble that works around Chinese pole. Their first performance, *Monstro*, explores the tension between individual and collective — a subject that hits close to home.

Creating a show for eight isn't always easy. In fact, we admit that outright at the very start of the show when we're explaining what *Monstro* is about: the difficulty of being alone when part of a group.

It's an almost political reflection. In a world where we worry about the rise of individualism, there's an urgent need to create col-

beyond the Chinese pole, there's a collective commitment. We wanted to write a show together, but above all, we wanted to take collective responsibility for it. But we had no idea how to do that. We spent huge amounts of time structuring our approach. There aren't just seven artists in Collectif Sous le Manteau, but eleven members in total, seven of whom are on-set author-in-

acrobats, and seven have remained. It's something that's always bothered me, having first created a company (Compagnie Sisters) surrounded by men. Then, we looked to establish our cultural difference. That was already in our DNA: the collective is made up of seven artist-acrobats from six different countries, all graduates from major circus schools (Codarts, ESAC, DOCH, Académie Fratellini, ENACR, AFUK, CNAC and the Lido).

As we didn't attend the same schools, we needed to create a shared language. We wanted to help our discipline to evolve, push boundaries and change the way in which it is perceived. Is the Chinese pole a vertical discipline? Then let's work horizontally! And explore multiple poles: seven poles to form a new performance area, using the space between poles to experiment with new flows. We wanted a collective experience, doing the Chinese pole as a group – not to perform the same movements, but to create collective physical mechanics. We researched figures featuring counterbalance, i.e. climbing the pole with the help of someone else, being mutually dependent. We invented a new acrobatic language.

Thirteen weeks of creativity later and at a house in Saint-Denis (our first shared space), the show *Monstro* was born: the 'monster', which is the ego, the collective which is our 'monster', the alienating mass which constitutes the 'body'. "Who are we as a collective entity?"; "Who am I in the group?"; "Does being part of a collective mean forgetting yourself as an individual?" Creating a 'shared language' is about



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lective artistic propositions. The collective is a political response, as is the individual. I think that, as an artist, I have a tendency to be egocentric, to be focused on myself as a sort of protection. The collective calls out to me by acting as a mirror, it helps me overcome my fears. That's what we've tried to show in *Monstro*: our desire to share the experience of what creating this collective has meant. It's a sort of group autobiographical performance.

terpreter-acrobats, one musician, two technicians and a production director. We have established a flat, collegiate structure whereby each person is a "point of contact" for a particular subject, and we make decisions together, as a group.

The collective came together around two main principles, the first of which is equality. In our discipline, few girls practice the Chinese pole, which is traditionally a male speciality. We met up with fifteen or so

pushing your own individuality aside and learning to be 'part of a group'.

To us, this first creation feels like the 'manifesto-performance' of our collective, exploring its initial experiences but also its weaknesses. The collective is still very young, and it will continue to evolve. Our idea is to create a framework that can last over time, perhaps without its founders being present. We are part of an approach that could be described as open-source: we are in the process of creating a new language for the multiple pole, a new form of codification emerging from the input of each member and which, we hope, will become a tool, a foundation for others, a point of reference within our discipline.



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Collectif Sous le Manteau comprises: Valia Beauvieux, Maxime Burochain, Anatole Couety, Laurence Edelin, Jesse Huygh, Benjamin Kuitenbrouwer, Cathrine Lundsgaard Nielsen, Clara Marchebout, Lisa Lou Oedegard, Catarina Rosa Dias, and Simon Toutain.

 www.cslm.eu



Marion Marchand worked for five years as International Coordination Officer for Circostrada – European Network for Circus and Street Arts – within the team of ARTCENA – French National Centre for Circus, Street Arts and Theatre Arts. After studying Political Sciences at Sciences Po Rennes and completing a Master's degree in "Cultural Projects in Public Space" at Paris 1 Sorbonne University, Marion worked for IN SITU – European Platform for the Artistic Creation in Public Space – in Marseille. For eight years now, she has been promoting international cooperation in the performing arts field, supporting especially circus and street arts artists and professionals at large.

THE LAST WORD

On the final day of FRESH CIRCUS, in Cine 32, artists from CIRCa's programme gave a series of talks, guided by researchers who nudged them towards the territories theme. Here, we give three of them the last word.

JÉRÔME THOMAS: THE ARTIST AS A TOMATO

'Creativity is not based on opening, quite the contrary, it is based on closing. I am rather an artist who closes rather than one who opens'.

Founded in 1992 in Bourgogne, Compagnie Jérôme Thomas soon made the decision to close in on one area: research into the manipulation of objects. To narrow the focus in this way, says Thomas, creates a framework. Once the frame is set 'we can open inside the framework'. A small frame can admit both the small and 'the infinitely large', and so his company has worked in visual arts, dance, acrobatics – but always through the frame of its core research.

The conversation turns to sustainability as Thomas confirms his company is 'in transition'. ('The whole planet is in transition!') Declaring himself an admirer of Greta Thunberg and an avid watcher of her Atlantic voyage, he suggests we should look for ways to replace 'growth' with 'resilience'. Within the company, they are searching for ways they can tour more lightly and intelligently – on a circular route, taking nothing but 'the bodies'.

Sustainability, he underlines, is not only an ecological question. 'What I've been feeling here, in Auch, is that people are dropping out. There are men and women who



© Christophe Raynaud de Lage

are currently leaving and switching profession. They are tired, exhausted'. Looking for coproducers, financing, residencies, new ideas, and without easy access to spaces to train and work, 'we are losing our connection to practice'.

Ecological practices are 'perhaps, a great means of finding it back', and finding resilience. He suggests that the circus artist of today should be 'like a tomato': nourished by its soil, working with the seasons (in winter, time to close the doors and write the next

show), selling into local markets. 'I think that today's utopia consists in the territoriality relying on the short cycle', says Thomas.

To keep going today, we must turn our eyes to tomorrow. Here, Thomas remembers the words of the great German juggler, Francis Brunn, then in his seventies, tired but carrying on after a night's performance at the Moulin Rouge: 'Each day, you must think that you will be juggling tomorrow.'

🌐 <http://www.jerome-thomas.fr>

CIRCO ZOÈ: THE RING OUR TERRITORY

'I think that initially, our company does not seek to define a territory when it comes to language and place'.

Two of Circo Zoè's members met at circus school in Turin, then went on together to Académie Fratellini where they met the other members of their group. In 2012, they founded a company which was to become split between France and Italy.

'The company was born administratively in France and then we made the choice of going back to Italy'.

In Italy, the classical arts receive the lion's share of funding, and the contemporary

arts, even forms like contemporary dance, are not well financed. Circo Zoè would like to bring circus to a higher level of recognition, and were the first contemporary circus company to get financial help from Italy's Ministry of Culture. They concede life would be easier if they were based only in France, but it was 'a political choice'. Now they move between their identities as needed. 'Sometimes whether you are considered Italian or French depends only on the invoice'.

To date they've made three shows: one for theatres, one for outdoors, and a third, *Born To Be Circus*, their Auch performance, for the tent as a 'homage to circus'.

To have their own big top was a long-held dream for the company, but also a way of grounding a life spent on tour. *Born to be Circus* audiences enter the main space of the tent by following a corridor that passes along the perimeter – an external ring that also projects the show's surround sound music. It is a performance created for this tent alone, and one that reflects its intimacy and closeness, drawing the audience into the company's universe. 'We live life on tour so for us the tent is our home, and the ring is our territory.'

🌐 <http://www.circozoe.com/fr>



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LES FILLES DU RENARD PÂLE: A PLACE FOR LIVING



© Ian Grandjean

'With *Résiste*, I wanted to stand on the wire, no matter what. That's where I feel right, where I belong.'

Learning to wire walk at a young age, Humblet later went on to study at both the École de Cirque de Bruxelles and Académie Fratellini. After working almost a decade for other companies, she set out to create *Résiste*, a performance that would explore the broad idea of resistance through a kind of single-minded determination. Aside from its physical demands, a full-length performance on wire was also an artistic challenge: 'As it is already very constrained as an apparatus, it is often difficult to express oneself on the wire, we also often go on the ground or elsewhere to be able to express ourselves.'

In search of flexibility and variation, Humblet wanted to create a new mechanical structure that could change itself through the course of the performance. Finally, the finished set has two motors that allow a single wire to raise, lower and tilt at an angle, as well as a hydraulic system for managing tension. 'It is quite a structure, an impressive machinery!'

The wire is its own kind of home. Today, Les filles du renard pâle is based at Châlons-en-Champagne, in the Grand Est, but could as well be somewhere else. 'In our profession, we are constantly on the move,' says Humblet, explaining that her desire is 'to go everywhere', both geographically and artistically, and 'to explore any place she can' (an ambition that has already seen

her create a six-hour improvised performance over a swimming pool in Cergy).

'For me, the wire is a link. Something that binds us, brings us together. And the notion of territory is also very much about making encounters.' At the festival Chalon dans la rue, Humbert spent 24 hours on the wire with the goal of creating 'a place for living'. Running midnight to midnight, the performance spanned a storm (Humbert had a plastic mac and little umbrella) and day of baking heat. When she got down at the end, the assembled crowd sang to her – a parting gift. Now, months later, people sometimes recognise her in town. 'The tightrope walker leaves traces. All our crossings leave traces.'

🌐 <https://www.lesfillesdurenardpale.com>

AN OUTSIDE VIEW ON CIRCUS: SOME INSPIRING THOUGHTS

Sylvie Buscail, Managing Director of Ciné 32 (Auch, France), was invited to talk and share her views during the closing plenary session of FRESH CIRCUS. Below is the raw content of the text she read in front of the audience, fragments of her thoughts and reflections on circus and its connections to the territory. The voice of an alleged outsider to the field, yet a thorough observer and fervent circus advocate.

My name is Sylvie Buscail, I'm the Managing Director of Ciné 32, an organisation with strong roots in the Gers region. This year, Marc Fouilland put an unusual proposition to me: to take part in FRESH CIRCUS and to reflect upon connections to the region and, by extension, to its inhabitants with you. What relationships do we maintain as artists and cultural workers with the world and with our world – the world that surrounds us, the world that we create and, lest we forget, the world that gives our lives meaning.

We opened these three days with a film (*French Circus* by Tisha Vujicic) and with dramatist Denis Lavant as our patron, so there was already a beautiful, harmonious quality linking the circus and the cinema, so that I could enter your world; and I would like to start by citing the very beautiful opening to the film: "In the beginning, there is always the verb, the verb and the movement. The fairground, circus movement pronounced by the entire body, which is conjugated bodily, which is declined by the case per body, the body of the body, again. Humanity as a whole understands and speaks this language." And what interests us here is how we can use this language to establish a connection, produce an emotion that helps us get in touch with our own self, but also with others: established audiences, potential audiences, neighbours, inhabitants. But contact is reciprocal, so what do we therefore have to share? To listen to? To convey?

Later in the film, acrobats and tightrope walkers, whose names I didn't note, but for convenience I shall call Marc, because that

name symbolises the circus for me... so, Marc the acrobat and Marc the tightrope walker surround the Caserne d'Espagne; and besides the beauty of these disaffected premises, whose history is already familiar to us, the fact that I recognise these spaces intensifies the emotion in me. My subjectivity enters into contact with that of the artists through this place in our shared imaginative worlds. And here we broach the subject of 'territory' in its original sense: topographically, geographically. Which is also central to the work of Pascal Fournier, aka Kalou, who I met during stopovers in Auch and who offers circus ballads that highlight nature and draw inspiration from the spaces inhabited in collaboration with the people who live there, thus revisiting known places in a different way. Just like how the Aix-en-Provence Festival offers a circus dialogue with places on local heritage days. And like *Circus I Love You* described to us this morning, a geographical territory can also be experienced within companies. A vast territory of artists from Finland to Spain, reconfiguring new adoptive and native territories, crossing borders to find money in France, the Big Top in Italy, the sun in Spain and the stars in the North.

And in this film, of course, there's the issue of schools, training, and Marc the tightrope walker warns us, like Marc the sociologist will do later, against the professionalisation of culture and the packaging of training. We mustn't lose or, indeed, we should rekindle the passion of enthusiasts trained on the job, close to home and their commitments. Here, it's about the professional territory helping, reassuring and making us feel less alone, as Stéphane Segreto-Agui-

lar reminds us in the introduction, but also possibly conditioning, preventing, constraining us. The territory is also alluded to by the public authorities in the introduction, culture being a lever of local development, regional planning, an element of pride, an element that brings people closer together. But just afterwards, Lionel Arnaud asks us to pay attention to these terms, which can hide the financial aspect of our living materials, and we also know that art, if it can unify, can also bring about social divide, excluding some by accentuating class differences – yet another point to consider. There is also the territory that Marc tell us about, the truth this time, like nearby space which goes beyond the geographical to embrace the poetic, the artistic, and the human.

And, during the afternoon workshops, the territory is combined with encounters, which may be with researchers, neglected audiences, schools, other disciplines, local inhabitants, groups of women. The issue is definitely being raised here, as indicated in the title of one workshop, is 'Weaving threads to create connections'. The body becomes infinite like the name of the show by Kitsou Dubois, and we talk about interdisciplinarity, interculturality, dialogism in a relationship and the social acceptance of circus arts. In the evening, the confluence is effective thanks to a very good, colourful idea that brings together professionals, volunteers, students, artists and cultural workers; the politicians are the only ones who refused to get involved, which is a real shame. We know that our community projects are created by committed men and women who are guided and supported by



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a strong political drive. Today, it's important to maintain this close connection with our tutelage, this trust that we will continue to strengthen. But the conversation definitely begins with sharing.

Yesterday morning, we went into town, showing up at people's homes. Here, territory is synonymous with intimacy. And within the local community, you'll find an international current through companies that talk to us about Taiwan – 'China's Corsica', according to Valentin – South Korea, Portugal, Cape Verde, Ethiopia, and so on. The region is filled with elsewhere, with traditional cultures, with dialogue between yesterday and today, and between yesterday and tomorrow. And in the diverse adventures we hear about, who could forget the tale about a group of 15 youngsters who arrived in a village with 250 inhabitants in the Loir-et-Cher region, and 15 years later, accompanied by children and new fellow travellers, generated the reopening of a school and a bar, the involvement of its inhabitants in a festival and their training

in circus arts, while fostering a dialogue between artists and the village. We all hope that the territory can be an anchor for a rekindled, thriving collective. Of course, the tale is that of Cheptel Aleïkoum, which can be a source of inspiration but not a model, as the two Marcs here remind us.

All that's left is to reflect on the performances that constituted FRESH CIRCUS. From the youngest to the oldest, the artists have all been creative on planet CIRCa – I don't know if that's a territory or not, it probably is! – offering a beautiful alchemy to the mixed audience of professionals and amateurs who gathered here. It all illustrates, I think, that circus arts are not yet a simple commodity, as Lionel Arnaud predicted, nor the dream machine against which André Malraux railed, and that, here, it really is all about poetic and aesthetic territories created from show to show. And as Marc from *Circus I Love You* would say, an artistic world born partly from a way of life that embraces the collective, commitment, risk, courage and necessity. Let's

hope these artistic worlds will continue to be factors in emancipation, as popular education would have it.

In conclusion, I've seen a cultural world that's actually quite similar to my own – definitely less bourgeois and more rough around the edges – but one that shares the same ambitions, the same barriers, and where the issues raised are relevant today. I like to say that cinema is the film between two chairs, between the wholesale film trade and the local film shop: shunted between a standard, uniform entertainment cinema and an arthouse cinema, afflicted, all too often, with a 'serious mindset'. You, too, must take care to avoid contesting the different forms of circus arts – traditional, current, new, and goodness knows what else – but to work with their evolutions and continuities. There's a risk of creating borders that are not porous enough, that enclose artists and industry contributors within paralysing, inhibiting systems that weigh heavy on creativity, production processes, reviews, locations

and the audience itself. Just like a fractured French society, spectators are all too often carefully classified and spaces shared out, reflecting a difference that's become the norm. For us, these arthouse cinemas with self-proclaimed 'good taste' are temples of consumption where cinema is just a loss leader. Promoting, often in self-defence, destructive social grouping.

Your circus tents are spaces that are more democratic and more open – preserve that! Industry is more distant from you, but consumption has taken hold of cultural practices, leading to analyses that are often based on the numbers, masking all the fundamental issues at the heart of our professions. The competitive rationale between artists, performances and films, performance rooms or venues leads to a loss of meaning and shared objectives. But we hope it remains to guide artists and performances, to strive for a difficult but

necessary cultural democratisation; our spaces are still too white, managed too frequently by men. Let's create a collective – you know how to do it, and you definitely know how to experience it – so teach us so that, together, we can create an infinite number of places, permanent or nomadic, that encourage individuals to mix.

And finally, here's a small collection of the comments we've gathered from you:

"Since doing circus arts, I've led a somewhat precarious but happy life";

"Being on stage is about destroying the ego to become sincere";

"Circus is Everywhere – really?";

"A cultural project is a possibility and not a constraint";

"Buy me a drink";

"Culture is cultivated at the risk of rootlessness"

"Is art still subversive when culture is being managerialised?"

"Why is it far less acceptable for a woman to create a company than a man?";

"A Big Top is a prison";

"The more difficult a performance is, the more accessible it is";

"We think that all connections are good, we strive to create bridges with businesses";

"I would like us to consider volunteers a bit more";

"If an artist is here, I need to know";

"We shouldn't do lots of projects, because we need to be open to the projects that life keeps for us";

"Why make it simple when you can make it complicated";

"Bonds have to be woven";

"For grey-haired circus performers like us, bamboo is a symbol of resistance, strength, longevity".



Sylvie Buscail is the Managing Director of Ciné32 (Auch, France), a long-time partner and neighbor of CIRC.a. She studied political sciences in Toulouse and graduated from the cinema department of ESAV. She later on worked in distribution (Films du Safran; Films du Losange) and collaborated with the festival of Gindou for about ten years. She has been the Director of the Ciné32 association for 12 years now, in charge of the programmation and the animation for a network of 16 cinemas in Gers.

FRESH
SEMINARS

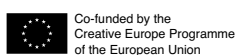
FRESH STREET #3



FRESH STREET #3



ARTCENA is the National Centre for Circus, Street and Theatre Arts, created by the French Ministry of Culture. It coordinates Circostrada and has a permanent seat on its Steering Committee. It works closely with sector professionals and offers them publications and multimedia resources through its digital platform. It develops mentoring, training, tools and services to help them in their daily practices. It provides support to contemporary creation through national programmes and encourages international development of these three sectors.



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and edited
by John Ellingsworth



Since 2003, Circostrada Network has been working to develop and structure the fields of circus and street arts in Europe and beyond. With more than 120 members from over 35 countries, it helps building a sustainable future for these sectors by empowering cultural players through activities in observation and research, professional exchanges, advocacy, capacity-building and information.



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Cranna Foirtíl

Written by Máirtín Ó Direáin

**Luigh ar do chranna foirtíl
I gcoinne mallmhuir is díthrá,
Coigil aithinne d'aislinge,
Scaradh léi is éag duit.**

Stout Oars

Translated by Tomás Mac Síomóin and Douglas Sealy

**Lean on your own stout oars
Against leap-tide and ebb,
Keep alight the coal of your vision;
To part with that is death.**

We would like to thank Cló Iar-Chonnacht and Mary Sealy for their permission to reprint this excerpt.

FOREWORD

"Where are you from?"

A seemingly simple question, which we tend to ask on a first encounter.

A question that forms the basis for our understanding of the geographic, politic, historic, economic, linguistic, emotive and expressive identities of the person standing in front of us. Yet, an answer that is likely to be read through biased lenses. A question that frames a pre-determined opinion towards those we are talking to. Yet, an answer that forces our interlocutors to account for themselves, placing them beyond the community.

A seemingly simple question, which implicitly is a statement.

All these thoughts formed the initial links between "Place and Identity", the red thread of FRESH STREET#3, which was then carefully explored through discussions, immersive walks and artistic presentations. Facing, as we are, a world more polarised than ever before, with inequalities and racialized nationalisms on the rise across continents, it is hard not to wonder how can street arts play their historical pivotal role in delivering messages of hope and stimulating new human connections. For better or worse, identities may well be a central topic in tomorrow's political life, and during these three days we resolved to debate on how identities can transform places, but also on how places can inform identities.

As the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, stated in the opening words of FRESH STREET#3: *"In situating the arts as a glorious element in a living community, and by building a "meitheal" – the Irish word for mutual and reciprocal support – between artist and audience, we can contribute to a society in which every person can feel invited and empowered to take part"*.

The need to be. The need to know who we are. The need to be known. The need to be clear of our viewpoint and what shaped it. The need to know our origins and our roots. The need to understand our neighbours and their experience. The need to connect and form bonds across territories. The need to bridge and understand the past. The need for art to relate, express, translate, digress. The need for public expression and collective experience. The need for street arts to revolutionise, alter and transmute our notion of space and where we belong. The need for art to democratise.

Lucy Medlycott
Director, ISACS

Stéphane Segreto-Aguilar
Head of International Development at ARTCENA, Circostrada Network Coordinator

FRESH STREET#3 IN A NUTSHELL

260 PARTICIPANTS

30 SPEAKERS

3 FULL DAYS OF SEMINARS

1 CITY

2 PLENARY SESSIONS

4 THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

1 FIELD TRIP ON AN ISLAND

A FULL ARTISTIC PROGRAMME

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Additional note



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

● Jay Pather, Impressions from a Keynote	86
INIS OÍRR	89
● Interview: Kate Boschetti & Liam Wilson – Artists in residence at Áras Éanna Arts Centre	90
● Interview: Deana Kolenčíková	92
● 'Spaces of Opportunity: Artistic Creation on the Periphery', by Gert Nulens	93
WORKING THE LAND	96
● Interview: Reinaldo Ribeiro, Colectivo Lamajara	96
● Interview: Kim Tilbrook, Life Cycles and Landscapes	97
IMAGINING FRESH STREET BY MARY PATERSON	98
GALWAY	104
● James Riordan, Gaillimh Abú	105
ONLY CONNECT	108
● Breakout Session I: Making Connections	108
● Interview: Nullo Facchini, Cantabile 2	110
TRUST ME	111
● Breakout Session II: Red Tape	111
● Interview: Sho Shibata, Stopgap Dance Company	113
LEARNING ON AND OFF THE STREET	114
● Breakout Session III: Education	114
● Interview: Jean-Sébastien Steil, FAI-AR	116
THE CHANGING CITY	117
● Breakout Session IV: Urban Environment	117
● Interview: Heba el-Cheikh, Mahatat for Contemporary Art	119

JAY PATHER, IMPRESSIONS FROM A KEYNOTE

25 years after apartheid, Cape Town remains a divided city. In these extracts from his keynote address Jay Pather, curator of the festival *Infecting the City*, asks what it might mean for South Africa to remake its place and identity.

The theme of place and identity is both compelling and vexing. As human beings we intrinsically believe in a good story – one that has a beginning, a middle and an end. When it comes to place and identity we expect progress and transformation, leading to common understanding and peace. We believe that, like any good story, our societies will simply get better. And so it is deeply confounding to the soul, and indeed shocking to the human spirit, when there are all the signs of a deepening crisis around rights and economic inequality, brought on by a voracious global economy that serves a minority, and in many instances a tiny minority.

In the midst of this there has been an attack on migration, which has been a feature of human lives since the beginning of time. In

Europe and the United States, but can be found in such places as Brazil, Israel and India. Now, nationalism is not such a bad thing when affirmation of heritage is needed, but our current crises have brought about a reactionary and forcefully entrenched nationalism, sparked by selfish interests and pedalled through ignorance and fear. When common consensus is so hard to achieve, the effect on all sentient beings is devastating; and so we have entered the age of the Anthropocene, when what we have done to the planet and our ecosystems is impossible to reverse. Coming from Southern Africa, where 400 people just died in massive flooding, the idea of identity becomes a luxury when place has been so brutalised. There are many contradictions within this debate. With modernity has come globa-

kery of the very notion of diversity that was meant to be at the centre of globalisation. I believe it is these complexities, contradictions and hypocrisies that artists are best equipped to deal with, because performance is about mutability, embodiment, critique, and an intersectional vision that can cut across borders, race, gender, class and sexuality. Understanding the momentum of change, art has the tools to open up identity as malleable, flexible, complex – not limited to any one thing.

But I will leave the world of Europe and narrow down on South Africa, the country of my birth, where place and identity have been central to our national debates since 1994 when Nelson Mandela came to power. For colonised countries like mine, the notion of modernity was not something that arose from indigenous nations but was something imposed on us by the West – as was globalisation, first embarked on, not only through migration, but through the forceful takeover of land, of identity, of name, of culture, of our own nationalisms.

In 1994, South Africa gained an independence that was hard won. As Nelson Mandela became President, South Africa gave the world a gift in the form of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), a way to bring the oppressor and the oppressed together. It was tempting in its neatness and dramatic resonance: climatic, with quick character turnarounds, grand gestures of compassion, and needed endings. It was going to open a way to reclaim place and identity; to address, in short, apartheid. However, apartheid was complex; it was immense, unending, systemic, multimodal and pervasive. It lay not in what individual dicta-



© *Infecting the City*

a good story one expects fluidity of borders, greater sharing amongst different kinds of people... but this is under attack. The growing nationalism is not only present in

lisation, which has opened up migration. And yet migration has brought the closing and tightening of borders, and an upsurge in the kind of nationalism that makes a moc-

tors did, but in what ordinary people did to other ordinary people.

Most of all though, the TRC glossed over the fact that South Africa's wealth and land remained pretty much where they were under apartheid. Reparations were not spoken of, land and wealth were not redistributed. Equity among rich and poor, black and white, has still not been achieved, a quarter of a century after Nelson Mandela became President. Today the statistics speak for themselves: our unemployment rate is 30%, and 65% of black people live in poverty. From a global perspective, our country lies locked in the world economy. At the height of apartheid our currency was equal to the

fully infecting a city is a playful intervention on etymology and a conscious act to inform place and identity. Cape Town ranked the international winner of Trip Advisor's Travelers' Choice Awards, and is considered the best destination in Africa by the World Tourism Awards. It is also a city where apartheid was born, and the remnants of it have an enduring presence in a topography which, 25 years after apartheid was supposed to have ended, still separates the white suburbs and the black townships.

Many of the festival works speak directly to this. In 2014, Phumulani Ntuli (with Nkateko Baloyi and Pule Magopa) created *Umjondolo*, a piece that metaphorically brought

it into a space where you can eat, smell and taste. There was one piece where a scent artist, Tammy Frazer, infused the public fountains with smells of the forests. Another artist, Katie Urban, in a work titled *Processional Walkway*, created a rose petal carpet that emerged from Cape Town station, the place where most of the working class, living far away in the townships, come in for work each day. She created these red petal carpets that led from the station into the middle of the city.

There's also a lot of work around memory. It's not often talked about, but Cape Town is a place where slaves were bought and sold. Many of them came from Indonesia and Malaysia, but also from parts of Africa, and their bones are buried in various places. In 2012, Nicole Sarmiento, Memory Biwa, and Tazneem Wentzel did a lot of work trying to find where these bones were and as a result created *The Callings*, a series of on-site ritual performances spread around the city. In another on-site exhibition, artist Haroon Gunn-Salie created *Witness* in District Six, an area that was demolished during apartheid. The government had replaced the old buildings with new houses, but of course you can't just put in a new house; once you tear down a building you tear down a community. They'd built these new houses, painted white, and very few people wanted to move back. So, Gunn-Salie created a piece about these empty houses by placing single objects in empty white-walled rooms – a tin mug, a frozen porcelain cat, a prayer mat, an abandoned taffeta ballgown – reminding us of a community that we will never get back again.

Many artists are also working with remaking place on a more obviously positive note. Neo Muyanga did an operetta in Cape Town's Grote Kerk, a church that was one of the bastions of apartheid in South Africa, located across the road from where the slave quarters, the Slave Lodge, used to be. He worked with a choir from Khayelitsha township, and, using a poem by Antjie Krog that treated the theme of reconciliation, created some extremely moving and beautiful performances around the pain that is caused, the betrayal and the healing. People



© Infecting the City

American dollar; when Nelson Mandela came to power our currency dropped to twelve rand to the dollar. Land was not redistributed, keeping our markets fragile but safe. Fearful of redistribution of land, fearful of what might happen to our economy, white South Africa owns exactly what they always did during apartheid.

Infecting the City, as a festival that takes root firmly in the centre of Cape Town's business district, tries to do something with this. 'Infection' is loaded with negative connotations. The body, like the city, is a sacrosanct yet contested space, sealed shut with skin yet porous and vulnerable. The act of wil-

the township to the suburb by recreating shack settlements in suburban Cape Town. In 2013, Tebogo Munyai went to Thibault Square in the Central Business District and put up shack-like structures with bullet holes in the walls. On the inside were performers, but you couldn't see them unless you looked through a bullet hole, and most of the time you could only see part of what was happening. You felt like a voyeur, and it was a very intelligent evocation of where we are now – looking in, but not joining in.

Another aim of the festival is to take the Business District, which is alienating for so many South Africans, and make it familiar – make

were crying because of what this church represented, and because of what the piece was trying to say from inside it.

This brings us to a final strand for the festival: resilience and dreaming; artists talking about place and identity as something achievable through adaptation and resilience. One example of this is the contemporary artist and academic Khanyisile Mbongwa, who has been developing work around *iRhanga* – the pathways that thread among homes in black townships.

Evoking the theorist Jordache A. Ellapen, who sees the township, prevented from being either fully modern or rural, as a hybrid space, Mbongwa constructs the alleyway as a liminal space within this liminal space – a space, as Mbongwa writes, within Frantz Fanon's concept of a 'world without spaciousness'. She continues: 'In many cases township spaces are represented as temporary and uninhabitable. But how does the existence of the alleyway enable much more complex dialogues about the paradoxes of black, lived experience? If townships are an apartheid project, where are the spaces of resilience that people have carved within them as these spaces continue to seem permanent in post-apartheid South Africa.' She argues that the alleyway is precisely such a space that enables black radical imagination.

Mbongwa also writes about a dance form called Pantsula that has developed in the townships and spread through South Africa: 'Pantsula centres heavily on footwork – complex, accelerated, or slow-motion – as it is the feet that allow you to run, to work, to walk to the train station. In Pantsula, one moment one is walking fast, the next one is running, jumping, then coming to a sudden halt. It's the silent revolution of those who dared themselves to go beyond an abject



© Infecting the City

space that was designed to try and make them passive and docile.'

The range of works that Infecting the City programmes embodies this social velocity – the pace of change, the reality of collapse, and the rebuilding and remaking of place and identity in our societies. But the desire for stability in our spaces and solace in our homes continues to be a challenge.

One edition of Infecting the City closed with a work by Aeneas Wilder called *Under Construction*. It was built in District Six, the site of forced removals during apartheid, and consisted of the painstaking construction of a complex yet fragile wooden structure. The pieces were not bolted together but were self-supporting and precariously balanced. After days spent creating the work, on the final day Wilder ceremonially kicked it, destroying it in seconds.

Such works remind us that in South Africa the idea of making place – at least with the

materiality of something solid, long-standing, bolted-down and firm – still eludes us. But they remind us as well that something in the alchemy of live art, public and public spaces is still subject to feverish interrogation and infectious reimagining. What we experience in these works may be the turbulence of a deeply unsettled society, the aftershocks of the catastrophes that have come before, or predictions of what is to come, but for now these nudges and nods to how place may be remade are overwhelmingly performative and temporal and yet powerful and enduring. In their temporality, all these works can really do is ask us to confront the weighty and pressing need for something more integral to turn to in our global and local societies. A mirror and flame to ignite more significant transformations in power and to afford all of our citizens the luxury of a place that will not again shift, displace and expel; and identities that allow for multiplicity, choice, tolerance, self-determination, respect and dignity.



Jay Pather is an associate professor at the University of Cape Town, director of the Institute for Creative Arts (ICA), curator for Infecting the City and the ICA Live Art Festival, and artistic director of Siwela Sonke Dance. Recent addresses include for Festival of the Future City (UK), Independent Curators International (New York) and at the Haus der Kunst (Munich). Recent articles appear in *Changing Metropolis II*, *Rogue Urbanism*, *Performing Cities*, *Where Strangers Meet* and the book, *Transgressions, Live Art in South Africa*.

🌐 www.ica.uct.ac.za

INIS OÍRR



To consider themes of place and culture, heritage and identity, the FRESH STREET delegation journeyed to Inis Oírr – the smallest of the three Aran Islands that stretch across Galway bay, settled since 1500BC, and a place well used to visitors.

Asked about the island's history, Mícheál O'hAllúin, local raconteur and intermittent FRESH STREET island guide, spins a good tale: in the 6th century a warrior-king-turned-monk named Enda arrives on the Aran Islands to establish a monastic settlement. It grows, spreads out, others follow, and the whole country (untouched by Roman occupation as Ireland, 'Hibernia', was considered too cold) becomes a flourishing centre of scholarship. And just as well: the Roman Empire unravels, and Europe falls to its dark age. With the light of learning extinguished it's up to the children of Enda – the people of Ireland – to go forth and reignite civilisation on the continent. ('Ha!' O'hAllúin laughs. 'You didn't expect to be hearing *that* now did you?')

Today, Inis Oírr has a population of around 280 – and holding steady. Emerging from

decades of slow decline, the island has 'found its confidence' again by reorienting its economy towards a bustling tourist trade. The season runs March to October, and up to 3000 visit each day, but of course island life continues year-round.

Stepping into this miniature world, the FRESH STREET delegation saw work produced by visiting artists Kate Boschetti and Liam Wilson, residents at Inis Oírr's own Áras Éanna Arts Centre, and Deana Kolenčíková, whose one-day micro-residency led to an installation at O'Brien's Castle – a stone hill-fort with panoramic views over the island. The day was rounded out with a performance on the quayside by Turas Theatre Collective.

For most of the FRESH STREET crowd it was an exceptional experience of the wild

and remote. But while Inis Oírr might feel like a frontier – on the fringe of Europe and the edge of the Atlantic Ocean – that's more of an outsider's view.

'We are the centre of our universe,' says O'hAllúin, turning towards the mainland. 'And the rest – that's just another island over there.'



INTERVIEW: KATE BOSCHETTI & LIAM WILSON - ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE AT ÁRAS ÉANNA ARTS CENTRE



Kate Boschetti and Liam Wilson have lived and immersed themselves entirely on the island in May 2019, creating a site-responsive, fresh piece of work for and with the island. They were joined for their residency by filmmaker Andrea Galad, who worked on a documentary to be released later this year.

How did you feel coming to the island as outsiders?

Before we arrived, our thoughts and feelings were mixed – we were happy and excited to receive this gift, and it was clearly a great privilege, but we admit there was also a degree of apprehension connected with the unknown elements. Of course, there was the risk that we would feel unable to live up to the challenge that we had accepted.

As soon as we arrived we realised just how welcoming and beautiful the island is, and our concerns quickly dissolved – to be replaced by new ones! Yes, we soon felt the

The local residents are amazing and we felt a great warmth and acceptance of our presence, and an enthusiasm and curiosity concerning our work. It's also clear that there's a great diversity of characters on the island, so we'd say we could have easily spent years here before getting to know the people deeply. The pub is one of the main places to socialise, and we had many great discussions in the small hours of the morning.

How did you come to work with Inis Oírr's stones walls?

When you go to the Aran Islands, you notice the dry stone walls immediately. They are

As jugglers we typically seek the props which best fit the style of movement we are interested in. There's an overwhelming choice of clubs, balls, rings, hats, etc. available to buy, mostly made of light and bouncy plastics. The fact that stones are heavy and hard and often difficult to handle was a point of great interest for us, as we saw a chance to turn this norm upside down – to let the 'prop' influence our style of movement and play a more active role in the conversation.

You were on the island for a month. How did your sense of it change over time?

The feeling of arriving and exploring the island was elating and energising. In the following weeks, as we grew familiar with the place, there was a shift towards an appreciation of the tranquil beauty of Inis Oírr. This peace had a deep effect on our attitude to the work we were doing; it is something we really value and perhaps one of the most special gifts we have received.

As the showing approached there was a second wave of excitement which was, in some ways, difficult to reconcile with the quiet we were feeling inside. This peaked as the group arrived from Galway and we made the final preparations for the showing. It is a great challenge to describe the emotions that this moment brought up in us. We became aware that there was a contradiction in the desire to have a collective experience representing the outcomes of our presence on Inis Oírr – as so much of what we had received was connected with



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value of being in a new context, and working in a place with possibilities of a kind that just don't exist in Berlin or Milan. It was exactly because of our inability to imagine working here that we had so much to gain and no excuse to do anything but face it.

striking and beautiful and if you take an interest in them you will be rewarded as you realise that each wall is unique in character and they all tell personal and local stories. In this context it is hard not to think about working with stone.



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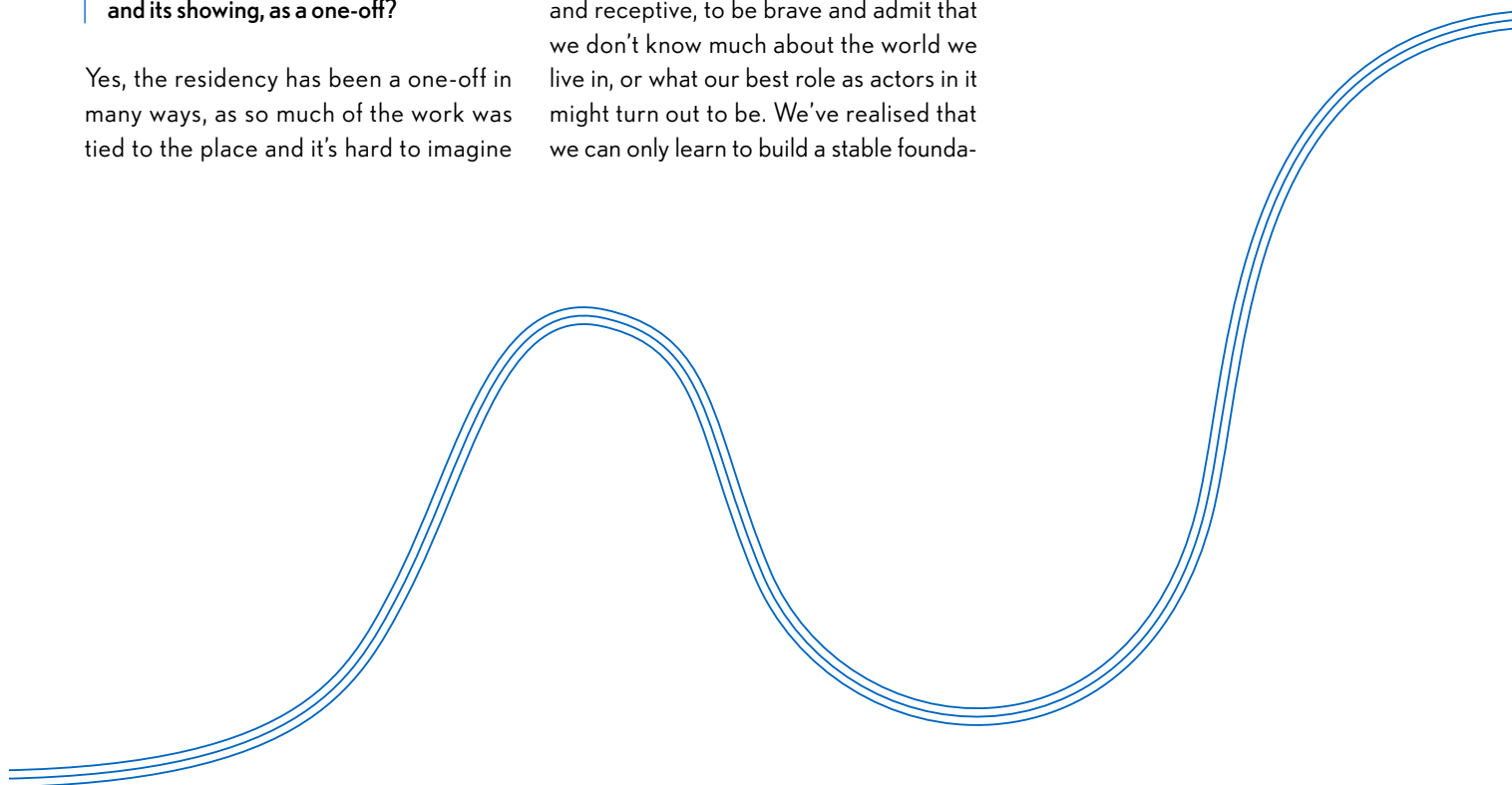
the serenity of the place, an isolated beauty which is fragile, sensitive, personal, not at all easy to package and present through the medium of live performance.

In that case, do you see the residency, and its showing, as a one-off?

Yes, the residency has been a one-off in many ways, as so much of the work was tied to the place and it's hard to imagine

translating that to other contexts. At the same time, the way of working and the attitude to research and creation we found on Inis Oírr will definitely influence us as we go forward. We feel we've better understood how important it is to be empty and receptive, to be brave and admit that we don't know much about the world we live in, or what our best role as actors in it might turn out to be. We've realised that we can only learn to build a stable founda-

tion for our work if we accept that we don't know beforehand what it will look like, and that we will get much stronger through our process if it includes an acceptance of our weaknesses.





INTERVIEW: DEANA KOLENČÍKOVÁ



Deana Kolenčíková was born and grew up in Bratislava (Slovakia). She took part in the European project *The Spur* (2016-2018), along with five other selected visual artists to carry out research work in residency with particular emphasis on working and creative processes. She was resident on Inis Oírr as part of the FRESH STREET programme. There, she questioned the knowledge, perception and imagination of the inhabitants through the interrogation of memory and mapping. www.deanakolencikova.com

How did you get into working in public space?

I actually started out in photography, working in a kind of free documentary style. Every week I would go out onto the streets of my hometown, Bratislava, and explore new areas of public space – places I'd never been before. I was always interested in finding a different or surprising perspective on the city, so before I went onto the street I'd choose a topic. Normally a photographer works the other way around – finds their images and then tries to arrange them in a theme – but I liked to hunt for the people and scenes that matched my topic. And I always found some. I stopped using photography as my main tool of expression and work more now with intermedia approaches, but there's still a connection. Photography is always open to interpretation, and I find the same thing with art in public space. I like to comment on things – to observe and to comment – but I don't necessarily need to find solutions.

Quite a lot of your work has involved commenting on systems or rules – whether that's simulating obscure paperwork in a piece like *The counter*, or, during a residency in Albi, trying to mail a crêpe in a French post office...

Yes, and with the crêpe it really got a reaction: they called the supervisor and then the boss of the post office. Afterwards I documented this in an exhibition and a woman who came was inspired enough to send me her own crêpe. Hers was wrapped in cling film though, which made it acceptable, and so when it arrived it was with a very formal letter from the post office apologising for damage to the pancake.



© *New Territories* by Deana Kolenčíková

On an island like Inis Oírr perhaps there are fewer human systems and nature is more present. What's struck you in your time here?

I come from a landlocked country, so I had a lot of small, and I suppose naive questions: how do you get cars to the island? Is there a hospital? Things like that.

But the island itself is such an interesting space. From the highest point, you can look at it as if it were a map – you can see the outline of the whole island, really define the whole space. With the stone walls as well, you see the shape of it.

Residencies like yours on Inis Oírr are usually quite short, and the work that's made can be quite ephemeral. What do you think they leave behind?

I don't think it has a huge impact on anyone, or on any space. For me what's valuable is if it can, in a more subtle way, trigger something for someone – some memories, ideas, a moment of inspiration. That's a victory for me because then the work can develop into something else, something unexpected. I also think that memory can work surprisingly well, and that if something is good it will stick in a person's mind, or in their cells perhaps, and can come back years later.

'SPACES OF OPPORTUNITY: ARTISTIC CREATION ON THE PERIPHERY', BY GERT NULENS

Residencies have become a staple of artistic creation and happen just about everywhere – from city centres to distant countryside. Surveying the field, Gert Nulens finds opportunity on the periphery.

Kate Boschetti and Liam Wilson's work-in-progress performance on Inis Oírr was a clear example of how an artwork can be inspired by its place of creation. Stones from the island became circus objects that transformed into walls – walls between the two jugglers, between the artists and their audience, and between audience and landscape. Beyond these stone borders, the open air and wild ocean.

The performance of Kate and Liam, the visit to the Áras Éanna Arts Centre, and the walk on this remote Irish island, all raised a host of questions about place and identity. How does this rural and remote context shape an artistic creation? Can a place be more than a kind of background or scenery? Does a rural environment differ from urban creation processes, and in what sense? What makes a place rural or urban? What about in-between places, or non-places?



© Declan Colohan, Áras Éanna Arts Centre

Lots of these questions are real brain-teasers and this article is not pretending to have all the answers. But the questions are certainly worth thinking about. Let us take

a journey then from remote islands to city centres, from the rural to the urban, from cultural participation to cultural exclusion, from city outskirts to rural spaces.

The rural, the urban, and the periphery

The opposing archetypes of rural and urban have been used in a range of sectors to justify one-dimensional divisions in society. Going back to sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies' famous distinction between *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* in the late 19th century, these archetypes still have an enormous impact on planning and policy in the fields of economics, mobility, education, the arts, and environmental management. A recent example of the contrast between these opposites is the renewed effort, following arguments concerning pollution and climate change, to centralise people in dense city centres and convince rural inhabitants to

give up their romantic dream of a detached house with large garden and double garage. In Flanders, the government recently went so far as to introduce the 'mobiscore', a means to measure a property's impact on the environment by its location. Not surprisingly, accommodation in cities has a much better mobiscore than houses in rural areas. The introduction of the mobiscore was the starting point of a controversial discussion between both sides of the urban-rural separation. This ongoing discussion often implies an unspoken hierarchy between the dominant city discourse and the subordinated rural areas.

The terms rural and urban can be useful, but in a European context it no longer makes much sense to retain this kind of oppositional thinking. It is much more interesting and relevant to focus on the interwovenness of the two opposites. Rural and urban have become dynamic scales instead of static antonyms. Cities can have a very urbanised economy and yet their communities may have rural characteristics (giving us the idea of a city as a 'collection of villages'). In some urban districts population density is declining or becoming more homogeneous (in terms of background, education, etc.) – a typically 'rural' characteristic. In some vil-

lages, meanwhile, one can see a spectacular concentration of artistic activity or technological development. Indeed, it seems more relevant to interpret reality in terms of urban rurality or rural urbanity.

For the arts, cities have always been places that attract activity. Cities combine the availability of professional education, artistic community, cultural infrastructure, financial oppor-

tunities, and a large potential audience. What's more, cities are melting pots of cultures, organisations and activities. Cities can create both monstrous realities and unthinkable dreams. Challenges and opportunities go hand in hand. Not surprisingly, cities have always been magnets for creative people.

On the other hand, one can notice a kind of conformist reality in urban artistic processes.

Communities reproduce dominant artistic practices, and the same group of cultural participants is being addressed time after time. In search of artistic innovation we often must look to the periphery – whether that be the edge of a city; in-between spaces like shopping malls or highways (what the French anthropologist Marc Augé calls 'non-places'); or the edges of culture, gender and behaviour.

Innovation from the margins

In the theatre and dance fields, creation tends to be centred in big cities. In circus and street arts, however, one can see the picture is more mixed, with creation centres like La Cascade in Bourg-Saint-Andéol (a French village with a population of around 7500), Latitude 50 in Belgium's remote village of Marchin (fewer than 5000 inhabitants), or Dommelhof in Pelt (a non-urban community in Flanders with 33,000 inhabitants).

There are many reasons for this distribution, including the lower level of infrastructure and professionalisation in the field, but we can also see that street arts and circus are fundamentally looking for venues outside of national theatres, opera houses and other cultural temples. Their stage is outside such walls, and indeed there's a certain school of street arts driven by the desire to reach new audiences and increase cultural participation

– to 'bring culture to the people'. Following this mission, many residency spaces in areas with little access to culture have created special audience and outreach programmes.

For the artists themselves, one of the benefits of creating on the periphery is the availability and affordability of creation space, but residencies in peripheral spaces can also provide mental space. Artists are pulled away from the urban rat race. Indeed, the arts field can be very competitive, if not brutal. In the periphery there is physical and mental space to focus and interiorise. This can be very helpful at a certain stage of a creation process. One can imagine that in the stage of brainstorming and inspiration, nothing beats the lively environment of a city. However, in the stage of transforming ideas into images and movements, in the stage of composition and dramaturgy, remote residencies can be very

useful as artistic boltholes. Artists often praise the efficient progress they made in this kind of remote residency. Everything is focused on the artistic work. No time for diversion.

Because of their remoteness these residencies can also be 'safe spaces'. Artists are welcomed in a warm and forgiving environment. Space for failure is created. A critical eye is always there, but residents are shielded from the instantaneous, direct critique typical in a crowded and competitive urban arts network.

Sometimes these residency spaces, as in the case of Kate and Liam on Inis Oírr, also act as a source of inspiration. Creations can be made for a specific location, as has been the case for the latest editions of the Belgian circus festival Theater op de Markt in Dommelhof. With each edition a new artistic director is invited to create a circus show in the woods surrounding Dommelhof with students from the Dutch circus school ACaPA. A couple of weeks before the festival, the director and the students plan and create a show on the spot, making use of the trees, hills and character of the landscape. This interwovenness between space, artists – and, come the performance, audiences – has proven to be magic.

So residencies in peripheral locations can be inspirational and safe contexts that provide physical and mental space. But creation in these locations should not be romanticised. Indeed, these spaces also come with challenges. Paradoxes in remote residency spaces include isolation versus engagement, financial needs versus artistic commitment, and production versus presentation.



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A balance of interests

Every artistic creation is inherently a fragile process which cannot, at a certain phase, endure external pressures. Indeed, a creation process not only demands inspiration and ideas, it also requires a form of isolation and loneliness. Separated from the usual urban artistic network, creation in remote spaces can be very lonely. For some artists this isolation comes with a certain weight and pressure: the loneliness can be overwhelming. For others it has proven to be just the right context for their artistic work to flourish. This isolation can become problematic for the residency space itself on the level of strategy and communications: while isolation can work very well for the individual creation process of an artist, it can also lead to a lack of local support and engagement. If artists work in complete isolation, remote residency spaces risk becoming like isolated greenhouses for artistic products presented elsewhere. Artistic creation, in both urban and rural contexts, can be very antisocial.

And yet these peripheral areas can really benefit from audience interaction. Not only because of lower cultural participation levels, but also because local support is needed to maintain these spaces and to legitimise their public funding. The challenge, then, is for residency spaces in these locations to develop audience engagement programmes which gently introduce audiences within the fragile creation processes of artists. In the worst scenario this paradox of isolation versus engagement can degenerate into work disconnected from the world. In the best scenario it results in locally supported artistic innovation.

The second paradox pits the need for financial resources against artistic commitment.

We live in a reality in which circus and street arts companies are forced to find a lot of co-producers to finance a new production – and residencies come along with this, as every co-producer wants to bind a new creation to their organisation. In this system is there a risk that a residency in a remote space is taken not for its resonance with an artistic process but purely as a financial and pragmatic choice?

This is a relevant question, but points towards a necessary trade-off. The advantage of the current system of multiple residencies is that it creates a very broad network for new creations. The combined backing of all these spaces guarantees that the work will be supported, promoted and presented. It more or less prevents the creation of artistic work in which no one is interested. Another advantage is that residency spaces like to build up long-term relations with certain artists. It is much more interesting to start on an artistic path that will last several years than it is to support a lot of short-term projects.

In the worst scenario, the tension between financial needs and artistic commitment results in a random selection of artists seeking resources. In the best scenario it leads to long-term relationships with carefully selected artists whose work is profoundly supported.

The final paradox then is between production and presentation. A lot of the more important residency spaces in street arts and circus have a role in both creation and presentation.

In other industries this merging of production and presentation (or consumption) is actual-

ly rather rare. Rural areas especially act as producers of goods which are consumed by inhabitants of urban areas. Think of the production of water, food, nature, recreation activities, and so on. Rural areas are often product and service deliverers for urban areas.

In the arts field, parallels can be drawn to this classic pattern. The main stages for the consumption of art are situated in cities. Artists might paint or make sculptures in remote areas, but their work will be sold in urban galleries. In the field of circus and street arts, however, spaces follow a dual function, helping emerging talents to make their first creations while also being nodes in an international network of presentation. This mechanism brings a certain centralisation of power – with a handful of large actors deciding what is worth producing and what is worth presenting – but serves to continually introduce new artists into the field.

Paradoxes such as these are useful models for thinking about the decision-making that underlies creative processes, but, as with our urban-rural distinction, we needn't make a choice for one side or the other. We might talk forever about whether a creation is taking place in an urban context or a rural one, or about the relative merits of focused introversion versus extroverted engagement, but it is in the constant swinging between such positions, and in the acceptance of their conflicts, that creativity can flourish.



Gert Nulens is the director of Provinciaal Domein Dommelhof. Dommelhof has five creation spaces and hosts around 400 resident artists each year.

 www.dommelhof.be

WORKING THE LAND

Putting a spotlight on two projects working with country landscapes, we interview Spain's Reinaldo Ribeiro and producer Kim Tilbrook from the UK.



INTERVIEW: REINALDO RIBEIRO, COLECTIVO LAMAJARA



Reinaldo Ribeiro was born in Brazil and is one of the three core members of Colectivo Lamajara, an organization of artists who share a concern about body language and its possibilities of expression. It is formed by emerging artists, dancers and collaborators from other artistic disciplines.

www.colectivolamajara.com

Your performance *Labranza* is inspired by the way farmers move and work. How did you develop the project?

In 2016 the core members of the collective – myself, Paloma Hurtado, and Daniel Rosado – had a first residency at Centro Coreografico La Gomera in the Canary Islands. Our idea was to start a process through an experience of farming rather than from what we thought we knew about agriculture from books and films. So we found a farmer on this little island and we worked with him over fifteen days – in the mornings we were in the field, digging, ploughing, carrying equipment and animals, and then during the afternoons we'd put our physical experiences into dance and movement. That was the start of *Labranza*.

And it was very interesting because it showed how similar the lives of the dancer and the farmer can be. The big thing is the routine, the physical routine – you do the same thing for years and it transforms the body. The other point in common is the perception of time and space. Of course these are very important concepts in contemporary dance, you work a lot with these ideas. For the farmer also there are cycles of nature, seasonality, weather that impose a certain rhythm and modulate the work. We investigated these commonalities to look at the relationship between man and field, body and dancer...

There were three of us in the creation process, and each was drawn to a different aspect. Daniel, he was very interested in games and in the social life between the farmers, the stories they would tell us. Paloma was very interested in the hard work – the planting, the carrying, the physical labour. In the end I think the performance has a little of each of these interests and they form its different layers. One thing we decided though was that we would keep the movement simple; so it's not a free interpretation of movements you find in farming, it's more like enacting them to bring the truth of this movement to the public and to bring the landscape of the countryside to the geography of the body.

When you performed in FiraTàrrrega the festival bussed audiences out of the city to a nearby farm. How has it been finding places to perform the work?

Mostly we've performed in dance festivals and sometimes in city festas. I think at the start we thought we'd perform the project more than we have, but the response from festivals here in Spain is often that they love the project but don't have the space for it. Tàrrrega is really a special case. When we talk to others it's hard to make them understand that *Labranza* could be in a city's park, or in front of a village church... There are many possibilities, but it takes a little imagination on the part of the presenter. We also had some push back from the contemporary dance world. At least in the

beginning we had some criticism that what we were doing in the performance was too literal – that the movement, and the costumes, were too literal. But this was the idea for us – to be onstage as three people working, not dancing – and in the end I think people saw that there was a genuineness to it.

If those are the challenges, what have been the benefits of working in a rural setting?

When a creation process puts us in contact with open spaces, with nature, we can forget everything. In the city, in a way, there is a lot of weight from what you see and hear; it's hard to be focused on your work and you can begin to doubt it. There's a lot of feedback that comes too early in the process, and suddenly you find you're creating not from the desire to say something but because you want to be part of an inner circle that judges your work to be contemporary. Being in relative isolation gives you the possibility to be very honest.

Now it's the way we want to work. Our next project, *Vulkano*, will follow a similar process – but this time, we're going deeper into the earth...



INTERVIEW: KIM TILBROOK, LIFE CYCLES AND LANDSCAPES



Kim Tilbrook was the project manager for Life Cycles and Landscapes, and is a director of Red Herring Productions. Activate are producing a publication about the project, *Wayfaring – Reflecting on Life Cycles & Landscapes*, which will be available online at <https://activateperformingarts.org.uk>

How did the Life Cycles and Landscapes project come about?

It started as a partnership between Activate Performing Arts in Dorset and the company And Now (artists Mandy Dike and Ben Rigby), who were commissioned to make a new piece of landscape art called *Wayfaring*. The initial idea was to create something around the Icknield Way – an ancient route, or collection of different paths, that runs along the ‘chalk spine’ from Norfolk to Dorset and dates back to the time before Britain was an island. They’ve found artefacts all along the Way from the people who used to walk the route, and so one of the themes of the project was migration and the movement of people. Another aim of Life Cycles and Landscapes was to develop the partnership with the National Association of AONBs (‘Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty’ which safeguard significant parts of the UK countryside). We wanted to find a model for working together which could deliver on our artistic aims but also address the core aims of bodies that guard and manage natural landscapes. For them it’s all about getting different kinds of people into the landscape, having them see it in new ways, giving them a sense of ownership...

At each of the project’s four locations there was a local arts festival or organisation as a partner alongside an AONB partner and any other bodies with responsibility for the landscape. Usually those responsibilities would overlap in various ways, with private estates and government trusts. Our partnership meetings would have up to 24 people in them.

People might think that working in rural areas is a way to escape having to chase permissions...

Absolutely not! It took two years to put everything in place. There were times when we thought to ourselves, ‘There *must* be a quicker way’, but actually you need that amount of relationship building and working through red tape – especially when you’re working with non-arts organisations.

Nonetheless, this kind of landscape work is something that’s been growing. One of the aims of Life Cycles and Landscapes was to ensure that all the AONBs we worked with put an arts provision into their next five-year strategic plan – and they’ve done that to varying extents.

Landscape art has a lot to draw on in terms of a site’s heritage, but does this richness create any problems in the creative process?

The sites do have their own weight of history, and in a way it’s difficult to deviate from it. The site can be so strong that as soon as you put a performance in it you get a feeling of an ancient ritual. So you go into a landscape and start to create something and it immediately takes on a life of its own.

The other side of heritage sites is that it’s complicated to work there because you’re dealing with multiple layers of protection. Maiden Castle, one of the sites where we performed *Wayfaring*, is a hillfort. For thousands of years people have gathered, celebrated, and built fires there. Then it was designated as a scheduled monument, which means you can’t dig into the ground and you can’t light a fire or have large pyros

on the site because the ash would mess up the carbon dating. So the site becomes frozen in time, and no new layers are added to a place where human beings have gathered for centuries.

It’s an interesting conversation – how to balance protection with active use and contemporary meaning – and it’s one that’s becoming really present in the heritage world.

What advice would you have for artists wanting to work in this field?

Start very small. You don’t want to do a £50,000 project straight away. Instead look for a small project with a landscape partner that can build up your understanding of how the sector operates – and, of course, of how to work in landscapes and get audiences there.

The collaborations can be challenging, but both sides will find there are new audiences up for grabs. We got walkers and people who go into the countryside who wouldn’t usually be interested in art. Our partners got arts audiences who might not spend a lot of time in the countryside.

Then, finally, find somewhere that inspires you. It’s not just a question of having a performance or artwork that you want to put somewhere; it’s about going to a place, being inspired by its uniqueness and then responding accordingly.

IMAGINING FRESH STREET

BY MARY PATERSON

Rousseau wrote that it is the imagination that enlarges the space of what is possible (for better or for worse) and nourishes our desires by giving us ‘the hope of satisfying them’. Tasked with following the three days of the FRESH STREET seminar to think about the possibilities – and the uncomfortable truths – of public space, writer and curator Mary Paterson invites us turn our gaze to the horizon.

Imagine: the mouth of the River Corrib, where Europe’s fastest flowing river rushes into the Atlantic Ocean. Here, on the west coast of Ireland, students, families and dog walkers stroll briskly towards the sound of the sea. The wind is so strong it whips the words from your tongue; you can’t be sure if you’ve spoken, or if you’re listening to the singing of the sky.

This is the Claddagh Basin, Galway. It’s a site of communal happiness and communal sadness, says Ulla Hokkanen, the director of Galway Community Circus (GCC), as we walk alongside the hiss of the river. These grassy banks are where the people of Galway come to celebrate, and to remember; these turbulent waters reflect the lives of the city, and sometimes take them too. In 2014, Galway’s Mayor called for nets to be installed beneath the river’s bridges in order to deter suicides. But on the days we visit, the place is filled with students drinking to mark the end of term, gazing towards the impossible horizon.

This nexus of meanings is why Hokkanen has chosen the Claddagh Basin as the site for *Wires Crossed*, a 72-hour spectacle of community river crossings conceived by GCC and the Ecole de Cirque du Bruxelles, which will take place in 2020. For three continuous days, residents of Galway will walk across the rapids on a tightwire: a real and symbolic journey which hopes to both represent and repair the mental health crisis affecting the town. Each crossing is a personal achievement as well as part of a large-scale event that stretches beyond any individual’s capacity. This is, then, a literal bridge over troubled waters: a community gathering that makes public the private struggles of all involved, and cheers everyone on to succeed.



© Declan Colohan, *Wires Crossed*

Wires Crossed is also one of the flagship events of Galway 2020: a year of events to celebrate Galway’s tenure as European Capital of Culture. Accessible, engaging and wordlessly profound, this project epitomises many of the aims of the wider programme as expressed by the 2020 organisers: ‘creating new ways of thinking, new ways of working’. Building on the myriad meanings of Galway’s landscape, it is also rooted in the life and soul of the city – ‘authentically of Galway’. As Helen Marriage, artistic director of Galway 2020, says, there is already an abundance of street arts in this city; the 2020 programme is simply an invitation to make these artists and organisations known to ever bigger audiences.

This is the context and the setting for FRESH STREET#3, in which people from around the world meet to talk about the life and work of street arts. We are gathered to imagine the future, as well as to reflect on the past; to think about how to survive, as well as how to dream. We meet not only in Galway, where we are treated to a preview of *Wires Crossed*

(amongst many other things); but also take a day-long trip to the island of Inis Oírr.

Conceived for the opportunity of Galway 2020, *Wires Crossed* is also subject to the pressures placed on street arts in an international context. The expectation for Capital of Culture status is that it inspires culture-led economic regeneration. ‘Citizens can take part in the year-long activities and play a larger role in their region’s development and cultural expression’ says the European Commission, which has been running the European Capital of Culture project as a European Union initiative since 1985. ‘Being a European Capital of Culture brings fresh life to these regions, boosting their cultural, economic and social development.’ A Capital of Culture’s events are meant to appeal to everyone who lives here already, and also to enact a radical transformation from the status quo.

Who, then, is this art for? Who decides what it is meant to achieve? And how do artists, producers and audiences interact with these pressures on their own terms?

Imagine: a conversation with someone who is no longer here. A message from someone you love. The unsaid and the unsayable, unfolding into your lap, perhaps, brushing insistently against your skin.

In a conference session on the creative process, Didacienne Nibagwire from the Ishyo Arts Centre in Rwanda invites us all to write a letter to someone who is not here. This, she says, is where her creative process comes from: imagined conversations with absent friends. She describes the way this practice began – when, as a child, she missed her family, who had been killed in the genocide in Rwanda. Sitting in a lecture theatre in Galway, it is hard to imagine that type of absence, or that type of pain. I write a letter to a relative who has dementia, and then I stop, because it is making me cry.

Nobody does anything in the street in Rwanda, Nibagwire tells us: people don't eat in the street, don't kiss in the street. Terrible things have happened in these public spaces. Memories hang like fog, dampening people's movements. The performances that Ishyo Arts Centre stages on the streets of Kigali, then, are not just a matter of making things happen in public space but also of making public space happen. They are an attempt to start real conversations about things no one should have to imagine. In this way, they perform a similar double function to *Wires Crossed*: part representation, part act of repair. And, just like *Wires Crossed*, they are works of art that speak of and with an audience integral to their location.

Nibagwire's presentation is an important reminder, too, that street arts are not always vehicles for positive emotions. We might frequently use the language of 'fun' and 'tourism' to communicate about street arts to funders, policymakers and commercial interests. But

the connection between art and public space is relevant to every aspect of civic life.

During the same conference session, Mike Leahy from Spraoi International Street Arts Festival in Waterford City, Ireland, says he started making street arts because he was bored. In relation to the context Nibagwire has just described, his admission raises a laugh – but it's just as serious, and just as profound. The boredom of young people signifies a failure of the social contract; as Leahy describes it: nothing happened in his town, and he had no hopes for the future.

When Jean-Jacques Rousseau first described 'the social contract', in the eighteenth century, he was arguing against enslavement, aristocracy and the unequal application of the law. His utopian ideal was a society in which everyone shares equal rights and responsibilities, agreed by consensus and governed by direct democratic principle. Rousseau was writing 30 years before the French Revolution, when people still believed in the Divine Right of Kings; a century before Europeans called a halt to their slave trade; and longer still until the right to vote would be extended to a universal franchise. His ideas seem extraordinarily prescient, now. But they also prove that it is possible to think differently, that radical ideas will reach further than you can imagine.

When Leahy began turning his boredom into art, however, he was not enacting an ideal version of society – he was simply expressing himself. For years, Leahy says, the art he made wasn't even very good – he was learning on the job, with no person, no perfect form, to teach him. Similarly, Nibagwire's letters to her family were born from her private grief. In very different ways, they are both describing an intimate transformation of personal experiences into social



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impact. Social impact is often lionised – or instrumentalised – as the outcome of public art, but it always starts with a meaningful engagement on a private level. Just as a social contract must be based on the consent of everyone involved, so the collective impact of a work of art derives from its effective impact on the individual.

Indeed, Rousseau's near-contemporary, the philosopher Immanuel Kant, argued that the primary purpose of art is to prove that other people are real. We all travel through life, Kant said, assuming that the people we rub shoulders with in the street share a consciousness similar to our own. It is only when we are in the presence of great works of art that we know they do. To meet a work of art, said Kant, is also to meet the intention of the artist(s). Or, more specifically, to meet the artist in the intersubjective (that is, in the zone where two private people meet) discovery of their intention: to speak to the past together, to soothe a wound together, to find an echo for the nameless things you feel.

Imagine: a dry stone wall perched on a cliff's edge, the salty spit of the sea rising from the rocks below. Two figures explore the wall in silence: moving in front and behind, balancing weather-worn stones on its shallow shelves, shaping their own bodies into the sharp edges of the rock.

We are on the island of Inis Oírr, a two-hour boat trip into the Atlantic, watching a work in progress by jugglers Kate Boschetti and Liam Wilson. This is an island marked by movement, and walls. The movement of people from these islands across the wild sea to North America is the stuff of story and song, but there is a more profound movement stitched into the landscape of Inis Oírr, too. The ground has a limestone base, which makes it impossible to farm, so each field on the island is man-made. Hundreds of closely packed, dry stone walls cover Inis Oírr like tightly written spells. The first farmers moved sand and seaweed into these tidy pockets, and today this palimpsest sustains the island's current wave of movement – tourism.

Boschetti and Wilson have built a new wall on a bare piece of land overlooking the ocean. Alone, against the green-grey sea, the wall represents place and displacement at the same time. Its materials and shapes are unique to Inis Oírr; but the wall has been built out of context – displaced from a tool of survival into an aesthetic idea.

Unlike Hokkanen, Nibagwire or Leahy, Boschetti and Wilson have not spent years living in the site of their latest work. They are visitors to this place: artists in residence at Áras Éanna ('the most westerly arts centre in Europe,' says its director, Dara McGee), who have been exploring the remote island for a month. If *Wires Crossed* is imbued with symbol and metaphor, then, Boschetti and Wilson's work is more concerned with vision and form. And yet in this way it, too, is rooted in the earth. Asked if they could see this work being performed elsewhere, they both laugh: not unless they could take the rocks with them!

At one point the artists disappear behind the wall, and a tiny bird flies straight into the sky, as if on cue. The crowd laughs. In the Q&A that follows, we describe this extraordinary

coincidence to the artists, but they didn't see it – they were facing the other direction. Part of the gift of this performance, then, is an attention of looking – an attention that exceeds the intention of the artists, even while it reads their intentions in unintended ways.

Relocating Kant's intersubjective encounter into the sensations of a body, the contemporary philosopher Brian Massumi describes the experience of art as a type of atten-

cends most language and cultural barriers – you don't need a particular kind of education to intuit the relationships between objects and bodies, here. Watching these jugglers in this rural setting, I am reminded of modernist painting of the twentieth century – abstract forms based on the land, the sea, the sky. Like a Piet Mondrian grid, Boschetti and Wilson explore the limits of how we understand the real world. Throwing and catching these unforgiving rocks, they



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tion. Art happens, he says, when you sense meaning but you have not yet decided what anything means. Massumi describes the 'aesthetic realm' as a moment of potential, in which more than one thing can be true at the same time. The bird in Boschetti and Wilson's performance is a function for the work of art, as well as (unintentionally) a function of it. The bird's flight connects the artwork to the natural laws of the land, and the artwork transforms the natural movement into something else: a strange cameo, perhaps. The bird, in other words, means something and nothing at the same time.

This moment inspires a gentle piece of performance on the part of the audience, too: laughing at the surprise, we perform ourselves as a united crowd, all sharing the same thought about the impossibility of the bird.

If art works through modes of attention, then this type of physical performance could be described as art with a universal appeal. Juggling is an international form that trans-

neither submit to nature nor dominate it. Instead, they play at the edges, push at the borders, toy with the balance of power.

As the applause dies down for Boschetti and Wilson a group of schoolchildren, who had crept into the audience part way through, begin to sing. The FRESH STREET crowd turns to enjoy this new show, a demonstration of spontaneous island life – both responding to the inspiration of the visitors and displaying their own artistic heritage. Well, not quite. 'That's a school group visiting from the mainland,' McGee tells us as we reflect on the afternoon in the courtyard of his art centre. 'They saw an opportunity to make a few Euros.' Public space is never quite what you imagine. Or rather, it is everything that you imagine, and many things besides.

Imagine: a body lying in the doorway in an upmarket part of town. Inside, the building is filled with works of art, drinks and canapés. Outside, visitors make small talk and rattle their statement jewellery. Periodically, people step over the body to move in and out.

In his keynote speech, Jay Pather, a curator and professor of art in public space in South Africa, shows photographs of an artist lying

as the reactionary forces that will be flung in their way. (Note that Rousseau's book on democratic equality was banned in Paris, and ceremoniously burnt in Geneva, shortly after its publication.)

To illustrate his approach, Pather shows us a photograph of Cape Town from the air. On one side, the wealthy white suburbs: detached villas, lush lawns and swimming pools. On the other side, the townships filled

The mention of human rights has a particular resonance in the South African context, in which the historic wealth of the white elite was accrued via a brutally racist apartheid regime. 25 years since the system was dismantled, politically, there have been no financial reparations for black South Africans. The resulting economic segregation fits perfectly the shape that apartheid left (or did not in fact leave) behind. This twisted situation is, indeed, what members of the South African shack-dweller's movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo, mean when they describe their living conditions as 'the unjustified breach of the promise of a "better life"' – a social contract that is not so much broken, as based on a pernicious and cruel lie.

Pather's aim, then, is not just to change what happens in Cape Town, but to change the entire way the city is imagined. As well as infection he talks about 'resistance' and 'pushing back.' From a European perspective, it's interesting to note this subtle difference in tone. In Europe, we tend to talk about healing and repair. Marriage, for example, describes art in public space as innately democratic, because it takes place in spaces that belong to everyone. The implication is that there is an ideal communal psyche – a democracy, or a social contract – to which we all belong.

Imagine: a young girl reaches out a hand to touch the face of a giant puppet, its skin the same colour as hers.

'You cannot imagine,' Pather says, straying for a moment from his academically paced speech, 'how it feels for a black or brown South African to see yourself represented like this.'

For some, the nature of belonging is always in question.



© Galway 2020, *Imramh: The Ship of Destiny* by Luxe

in the doorway of an art gallery during a private view. She is wrapped in blankets, stretched across the threshold, and almost completely ignored by the wealthy art goers who attend the event. As an image, it is both shocking and familiar. The sight of poverty cheek by jowl with wealth is present in most large cities, although 'sight' is perhaps the wrong word. So naturalised is the modern, urban cityscape to homeless people, beggars, street dwellers, that the presence of them as people is barely seen at all.

Or rather, it depends on who is looking. Pather's work troubles the nature of public space in South Africa in order to make people look at the overlooked, and in order for the overlooked to return the gaze. One of his festivals uses the metaphor of 'infection' to curate art in public space across Cape Town. It's a powerful word that signifies the rapid spread of new ideas, as well

with poor, black workers: shanty towns built from metal and dust. He describes the latter as labour camps, housing manual workers for the suburban elites. The difference in living standards, then, is not a mistake but a strategy: the townships are an asset exploited by and for the dominant class. This is why Pather's festivals draw audiences through disparate territories, beginning, for example, at the transport points that deposit commuters into their working day, and threading into the squares and avenues built with very different kinds of people in mind. In this way, his work echoes global movements based on the 'right to the city' – a concept of resistance to the capitalisation of urban space, as developed by the philosopher Henri Lefebvre. As the geographer David Harvey has put it, 'the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is ... one of the most precious and yet neglected of our human rights'.

Imagine: a torrent of tongues, as fast as a river. A language you don't speak. Words you can't understand.

Of course, the historic wealth of Europe is based on the same brutal racism as South African apartheid: apartheid was, indeed, a European idea. At the borders of Europe, now, there are camps of displaced people, prevented from entering one of the richest regions of the world by policies of violent exclusion, outsourced to unaccountable enforcers. Many immigrants who do enter Europe are trafficked into modern slavery, and many more are kept in poverty or detention. When we talk about our public spaces, then, what kinds of public are we talking about? What kinds of spaces do we mean?

FRESH STREET#3 coincided with the 2019 European Parliament elections – a vote happening simultaneously across all 28 EU member states. This huge, democratic process is a moment of reimagining on a continental scale. At the time of meeting for FRESH STREET#3, we don't yet know the results of the elections, but we could pe-

haps guess at the sharpness of the divide. When the votes are counted, they will show a huge surge in representation for far-right, nationalist parties – like the German *Alternative für Deutschland* or the Flemish separatists *Vlaams Belang* – who campaigned on the basis of national pride, protectionism and immigration controls. And yet there is also a widespread surge for Green parties, committed to international collaboration in the face of climate change. Half of the EU's population, in other words, is voting for borders, and the other half for bridges. The moderate consensus that has dominated the EU for forty years has lost its security.

What are we trying to repair? What are we trying to return (to)? Where do we think we are going?

In his plenary session for FRESH STREET, the Italian anthropologist Paolo Apolito makes a moving case for how difference can be understood within a larger whole. His solution, articulated in Italian to a largely English-speaking audience, is jazz. Jazz is an art form that depends on disharmony as

much as harmony, on improvisation as much as practice. 'Change is always happening,' said the trumpeter Maynard Ferguson. 'That's one of the wonderful things about jazz music.' Crucially, Apolito's metaphor is not for multiculturalism – the failed experiment in which cultures live side by side, without acknowledging the need to adapt to a different context. Instead, he advocates for a consensus in which difference is not a matter of exclusion, but a principle for taking part.

What kind of borders are we protecting?

By speaking in Italian, Apolito is also making the point that homogeneity does not need to be the basis for understanding. His performance lecture is an effective demonstration of transnationalist ideals. But as we dance out of the lecture hall behind a band of musicians, I wonder if this is too much like easy listening.

What might it mean to infect our cities?
What might it mean to make space?



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Imagine: a group of visitors still tired from their journeys, orientating themselves to a strange city. For now, its streets still seem tangled, its landmarks unknown. Everyone is given a lamp to hold, and then we follow the sound of music. Somewhere up ahead there is a single person, dressed in white, her body twisting and flowing in a deep, slow dance.

In this moment of anticipation – Galway perched on the edge of European Capital of Culture, the EU perched on the edge of a new parliament – it feels strange to be absorbed into LUXE's parade *Imramh – The Ship of Destiny*, as it moves slowly through the streets of Galway. It is one thing to sympathise with the politics of art in public spaces, but quite another to put your body inside the work of art, and to feel it happening to you.

I watch in silence, alone in a collection of strangers. Suddenly, the dancer makes way for a huge parade of glowing boats – and now, a dreamlike flotilla moves gloriously through the town. The sun has set, the lamp in my hand reflects the glow of the procession, people come out of pubs to take pictures, and I realise that I am no longer a stranger: I have become part of the body of this parade. It is an uncomfortable sensation: to be watched by people who constitute an audience, and whose gaze constitutes me as a performer. The route is slow and I have no idea where we are going. In this moment of exposure, I'm acutely aware of all the shifting parts of my

identity: as a woman, a tourist, an outsider, an Englishwoman in Ireland, a Jew in Europe. My identities rattle like costume jewellery. I don't know what to do with my hands.

Is this a form of consent, or participation? How do we know the difference?

Eventually, I relax into a moment I don't fully understand. The music flows through me and I know I 'pass' as someone who has a right to be here. In this moment of not-yet-meaning, I am alive to impossible truths: I do and do not belong. There are some things that I cannot imagine, and other things I don't want to.

My experience of public space is inextricably linked to my relative wealth, relative whiteness, relative education, relative age, and relative freedom of movement. My methods of understanding public space are drawn from Eurocentric world views. The ambivalence I feel inside a celebration of another community's public spaces is also the ambivalence inherent in these world views, as they are instrumentalised in the service of financial growth: am I 'authentically of Galway', or part of its 'cultural, economic and social development'?

Perhaps what Apolito is really saying, is that as well as listening to jazz, we need to commit fully to the improvisation of it: moment to moment, one to one, personal to political. This would reconcile the attention required

from art, with the criticality required in public space. It would reconcile the rights we have to the city, with the responsibilities we have to each other, including the others who are not being seen. And when I say reconcile, of course, I mean hold, uncomfortably like a series of spiky truths.

Here is a series of spiky truths.

Europe is built on place and displacement; movement and walls.

There are exclusion zones filled with bodies at the borders of our wealth.

Our belonging is based on an imbalance of power.

The artist Orlagh De Bhaldraithe walks onto a stage with flowers in her hair. 'I have a vision,' she says, 'of a day of global art and activism.' Her words come at the start of FRESH STREET but echo through all its experiences.

Imagine: a parade of lights visible from one side of the water to the other.

Imagine: the sounds of harmonies and disharmonies rising above the waves.

Imagine: a tight wire stretching across the rapids.

Imagine: public space is all things you imagine, and many more besides.

How far out is the horizon?



Mary Paterson is a writer and curator who works between performance, literature and visual art. Her ongoing projects include *Something Other* and *The Department of Feminist Conversations*.

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GALWAY

From island calm to city hustle – the final day of FRESH STREET returned the delegation to Galway for a programme focused on art in urban spaces.

In the morning, following a working breakfast hosted by Ireland's Creative Europe Desk and a plenary discussion delving into the mysteries of the creative process, the group split. Half went to visit the studios of street arts heavyweights and parade maestros Macnas, in Fisheries Field; half to Claddagh Basin, the point where the River Corrib flows out into the ocean, to visit the site of *Wires Crossed*, a unique project conceived

by Galway Community Circus and École de Cirque de Bruxelles under Galway 2020.

The afternoon programme then played out in the lecture hall, seminar rooms, canteen, and long, long corridors of NUI Galway's Concourse Building, with smaller breakout groups tasked with getting into the nitty-gritty of creation and production in the street arts field. After that, a plenary session

with a hint of music, performances by Studio Eclipse and Maleta Company, and a last dance at Galway Rowing Club.

Reports of the day's sessions are given here, with accompanying interviews that extend the themes. But first a view from the inside, as local artist James Riordan gives a loving portrait of his rain-lashed hometown...



© Declan Colohan, *One Sink Two Float* by Studio Eclipse

JAMES RIORDAN, GAILLIMH ABÚ

Described by Irish poet W.B. Yeats as the 'Venice of the West', Galway has long had a cultural reputation that belies its small size. Playwright, performer and local boy James Riordan takes a look at what draws artists to the city's windswept streets, and what drives the work they make there.

The wet, wild, west of Ireland is not known for its blue skies and balmy sunshine. Oliver Cromwell, the English head of state, went as far as saying 'To hell or to Connacht' during a break between Empire expansion and Irish oppression. Charming. That was 1650, and in the time since, thankfully, things have changed in Galway, Connacht's capital city. Wander down the cobbled streets on any weekend from March to November and, far from hell, there'll be some festival or other in full swing, the buskers belting out Irish tunes, the devilment in the air palpable.

With its face to the Atlantic wind and its heart in the Irish language and music, the art made in this place is deeply of this place. From the influence of a large international artistic community who've long been falling for Galway's charms, to its designation as the only bilingual city in the country, through the barren landscapes of Connemara and the fiery myths and folklore of the Celts and pagans, what's created here has a deep sense of place running through it.

The energy of a place's community is a good starting point when looking at the influence a place has on its art. The street theatre scene in Galway is dominated by Macnas, and the company's loyal team of creatives based in and around the city. They are renowned for their big outdoor shows, 10-foot puppets, and hundreds-strong street parades at dusk. Working within a procession style allows the company of passionate makers, performers and technicians to overwhelm masses of spectators, sailors and giants passing them by as in a dream. The format conjures up travelling theatre troupes that would have passed this way in times gone by, and with Macnas (meaning 'joyful abandonment'), audiences experience wild energies, ideas and images



© Declan Colohan, Macnas

all seamlessly stitched together and driven by a dedicated team of artists. It hits you like a wave from the nearby seashore; you hear it first, allow it to wash over you, and feel it long after the final fire barrel has been extinguished.

Thematically they take much from the mythical and their work is often directly inspired by local stories and characters. Take their 2017 offering, *Port na bPucaí*, which was steeped in West of Irishness. A procession of life as seen through the eyes of an old Aran Islands fisherman who is being summoned back to the sea, it featured troupes of keening ancestors and tortured hermit crab men, with ballerina Tern birds brought to life by a local ballet company. Indeed, the majority of the performers are local, loyal and happy to give their time, a big reason why the company is so successful and continues to root itself here.

As Noeline Kavanagh, artistic director of Macnas, puts it: 'Landscape gives us ener-

gies, mood, memories, fault lines, thought lines, and is a great place to draw characters out of. It's like they appear. There's an epicness to the landscape and an epicness to making work on the street, and the dynamism between them is a really key connection.'

With annual audiences of over 100,000, and livestreaming to millions internationally, Macnas's ability to connect with and maintain their international audiences comes from keeping a sense of the company's roots, and from staying anchored in the community who work hard to create magic time and again. It could be performed in Beijing or Moscow, but the work is still made in a small field beside the Galway Rowing Club with the same core group of people.

The social issues facing a place often demand the attention of its makers and creators, and as the next generation detach themselves from physical spaces in favour

of electronic landscapes, another staple of Galway's street scene is a beautiful counterpoint. Galway Community Circus, started in 2002 and now with 650 weekly users in their social circus programme, is in symbiosis with its community and the issues that face it.

Ulla Hokkanen, the company's executive creative director, says: 'Our organisation is what it is only because it's based in Galway. I think Galway is a unique place with a special community feel; it has a certain feeling of isolation, being on the Atlantic Ocean, and yet also a feeling of being very connected to the rest of the World. Galway is an international multicultural city that attracts many "blow-ins" – and this is very true at Galway Community Circus (GCC).' The word Community is key to their name, and the outreach they do in schools, bringing an artistic, inclusive endeavour into the lives of many teenagers in the area, has a hugely positive effect on addressing issues like social isolation. The circus is aware of its deepening responsibilities and is acting accordingly.

Wires Crossed, GCC's Galway European Capital of Culture 2020 project will see 400 people from all walks of life cross the Claddagh Basin, and Galway's River Corrib, on a tightrope. This funambulistic project is about mental well-being, and is deliberately located by a river that has long been associated with suicide. It aspires to reinfuse life, hope and courage into landscapes carrying great sadness and to restore balance within the community. Following a huge call-out, GCC started running workshops in 2018. Everyone was welcome, and the project has created a new community, teaching new skills while raising awareness of a troubling local and national issue.

The sprawling, rocky landscape of Connemara and the long stretch of Atlantic Ocean that borders Galway with the Aran Islands dotting the horizon are visceral sights that capture the imagination of many of the artists here, just as the streets of Paris or lights of Tokyo have done for artists there. Art is not created in a vacuum and is always made somewhere.



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Turas Theatre Collective are a young street theatre company, based in the West of Ireland, whose first show, *Remnants*, was shown on Inis Oírr during FRESH STREET. Debbie Wright, co-founder of Turas Theatre Collective, notes: 'As a theatre practitioner living and working in Galway and the County, the landscape has a huge impact on the performance work that I create. I use strong tableau imagery that reflects the Atlantic Ocean, the Irish landscape, and the ebb and flow of nature and her emotions. This wildness and beauty is a constant inspiration for my work.'

Created from shared experiences in the refugee camps of Greece while working with Clowns Without Borders, and with strong themes of displacement and migration, *Remnants* has echoes of the Irish story of the 19th and 20th centuries, when crippling famines and economic depressions pushed people onto boats in search of better prospects in Britain, the US, and further afield. The West of Ireland suffered most from such emigration as it was historically poorer and more rural, and Galway now has one of the few Irish-speaking communities left in Ireland. Work inspired by Gaelic and the history of the people who spoke it is therefore common here.

I set up Brú Theatre in early 2018 after years spent working abroad, and as a *gael-*

góir I've always wanted to create work that showcases the beauty of the language and its traditions while remaining accessible to those who don't speak it. In the last year we've made outdoor, Irish language and site-specific performances in direct response to the old Irish speaking fishing communities of Galway. Red-haired women, foxes, pigs and feathers are all charged symbols in the old superstitions of the fishing communities, and we've taken these as a launching point in making pieces exploring loss, longing, and the livelihoods of those who have come before. We recently toured a site-specific show for small cottages with open fires, blending Sean Nós (traditional, acapella lamenting) and Basel mask work to tell the story of an old woman who waits for her fisherman to come home. The piece has been supported by the local councils, and having support for work inspired by the language of a place it's made in is vital for it to continue.

However, it's not all rosy in these parts. With a handful of underfunded theatres, a stagnant visual arts scene, and no dedicated concert venue, exhibition hall or rehearsal space for independent theatre-makers, the rise of Galway's status as the cultural capital of Ireland was unexpected. As a percentage of GDP, Ireland has one of the lowest rates of arts funding in Europe, and Dublin often tempts artists away with more com-

mercial opportunities. Galway European Capital of Culture 2020 is on the way but the attitude from the arts community has been mixed thus far, and the wide divide between established and emerging artists also adds to the challenges of sustainable careers in the arts here.

How do we as artists feel a sense of belonging to a place? The landscapes and long-ingrained traditions start to permeate. The communities that converge, converse, and create work ripe with references to the bricks and mortar, the sand and skies of a place, help to build an artistic language. Galway is small, and the weather can be determinedly damp. And yet the passion for making art in and of this place burns on. It is a place where people want to be, a sense that it is much more than the sum of its parts. There is something in the air here, a wildness to the Atlantic winds that creeps under the door and into the work. The rain may fall sideways occasionally, but the fire doesn't flinch.



© Mark Loudon, *Imramh: The Ship of Destiny* by Luxe



James Riordan is the artistic director of the Galway-based Brú Theatre. He is from Galway and trained at LISPA (London) and the APT (Berlin).

He is a performance director for Macnas and an Artist in Residence with Business to Arts. He is a participant on Creative Europe's Make a Move, an ASSITEJ Next Generation participant in 2019, and will be collaborating with Darren O'Donnell of Mammalian Diving Reflex in creating a new theatrical sport for Baboró 2020.

🌐 www.brutheatre.com

ONLY CONNECT

BREAKOUT SESSION I: MAKING CONNECTIONS

FACILITATED BY

Mike Ribalta, Head of Professionals, Fira Tarrega (Spain)
Tanja Ruiter, Co-Director, HH Producties (The Netherlands)

PANELLISTS

Julia Von Wild, Programmer, Tête-à-Tête Rastatt (Germany)
Jerzy Zoń, Director of Theatre KTO and Krakow's International Street Theatre Festival (Poland)

In the arts, connections between artists, producers and other stakeholders are vital not just to selling work but to making it. Conversations influence the ideas and concepts that underpin a project in its early stages. Professional connections bring resources and financing during production. And networks help artists to sell their work, sometimes before it is even finished – a situation that places the emphasis on reputation, trust and prior relationships. The question of this session was whether such a system works well, and how it could be improved.

The national and the international

Contributions from across the floor noted that there are significant variations between territories, and that the ease of making connections is affected by the scale and level of development of a country's street arts sector. Smaller scenes were generally thought to be easier in terms of establishing connections and communication, and to operate more as communities than competitive environments – even if they had fewer available resources. Larger scenes were considered harder to access, and in danger of perpetuating an 'in crowd' of those possessing the knowledge and relationships needed to make work.

However, national networks are only one piece of the puzzle. Most artists will have to work internationally in order to make a living, and session participants pointed out that international networking remains easier



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for professionals to finance and schedule. Most formalised networks are also run by and for professional bodies, raising the question of which connections really bear

on what work gets made: links between artists and promoters, or between promoters and other promoters who trade tips and recommendations?

Blurring the lines



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With contributions from across the floor, the conversation soon ran up against the tensions created by the perceived hierarchy between producers/programmers and artists. This is a common debate and one characterised by some fatigue on both sides: among artists, who don't feel they're being listened to; and among programmers and festival organisers, who are struggling to maintain their own operations, and who are frustrated by the 'us' and 'them' attitude (especially when some directors are artists themselves). Perhaps both sides would like to view things as a partnership, but the question is how to make that partnership fair and effective when there is an inequality of re-

sources, when selection processes create a natural hierarchy, and when professional and economic risks are not always fully shared.

Invited to propose ways to start to untangle this knot of problems, session participants pointed to the need to 'blur' the lines between different actors by involving producers and audiences at earlier stages of the creative process. One suggestion was to encourage festivals to support emerging work with projects similar to NEST – New Emerging Street Theatre, an initiative of Spraoi festival and ISACS which offers mentoring to new Irish street arts companies along with the opportunity to present early-stage work to a festival audience. The value of such schemes is that they create a supportive and nurturing environment – one where the audience understands that what they are seeing is a work in progress, and artists can get feedback on new material.

Following this idea, the role of festivals was a particular talking point. While artists generally want festivals to step up and play a more active role in facilitating their ability to research and create work, in many cases these festivals are operating within larger cultural policy frameworks that place a greater focus on the audience. And some programmers themselves see the audience as the ones who ultimately enable creative work – through their economic contribution, and through a willingness to accept risks in festival programming. The audience

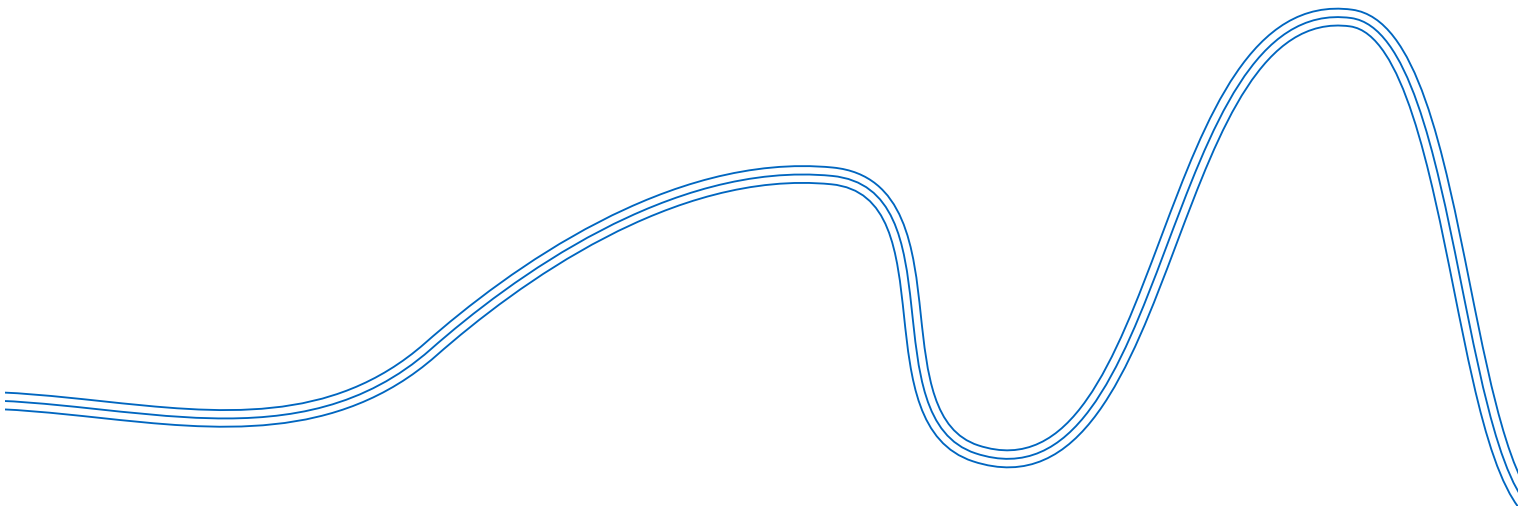
is their first responsibility, not the development of the artist or art form. In light of this, a widely held view was that artists should be outgoing in their search for connections, and look outside of festivals and more traditional receiving venues. One suggestion was to investigate universities, some of whom can play a role in mentoring and supporting local, emerging artists. Even if some of them don't have money, universities – partly as a result of staff cuts – often have space.

Bringing out some optimistic notes, the session nonetheless aired familiar grievances. Put simply: it is very difficult to survive as an artist; it is very difficult to run a festival. Creating and maintaining connections under such pressure presents an enduring challenge.

Links & Recommendations

🌐 [NEST](#)

● Ása Richardsdóttir and Lene Bang Henningsen's guide for artists, *It Starts with a Conversation*: www.itstartswithaconversation.org





INTERVIEW: NULLO FACCHINI, CANTABILE 2



Nullo Facchini started working professionally with theatre from 1981 as director assistant at Teatro Nucleo in Italy. In 1983 he founded his own company called Cantabile 2, based in Denmark and which he still directs today.

You've said that when you founded Waves in 1987 it was mostly a way to create professional connections for your artistic company, Cantabile 2...

Yes, in '87, but that was an exception. We were a young company, new to Copenhagen, and we had the idea of using the festival as a networking event and an excuse to meet other companies. It was meant to be a one-off. Then in 1990 we were invited to move from Copenhagen to Vordingborg and become a regional theatre. The city, with a population of 14,000, had a 600-seat theatre that was barely being used.

In Denmark, most regional theatres have to deliver a certain number of shows or reach a certain size of audience. We knew that with the kinds of performance we were doing we wouldn't achieve the same numbers, so we revived Waves as a way of bringing in thousands of people in the week of the festival. That way we'd have total freedom for the rest of the year.

But in our first year we saw that this was a city that was not used to going to the theatre. We were presenting shows, but to empty seats. The solution, in 1991, was to take some of our work onto the streets – and this totally transformed our relationship to the city.

Today, Waves welcomes 20,000-25,000 people over one week, which in a city of 14,000 is a good audience. My model was always the Mediterranean style of festival. I'm Italian myself, and in Italy there is an unwritten rule that you do theatre festivals in small villages, because in a big city they will disappear. In Vordingborg every human being – every dog and every cat – knows that the festival is going on, and this gives them a sense of ownership.

Waves doesn't exist as a separate legal entity, but is instead an activity, or an artistic production, of Cantabile 2. Why organise it this way?

In my opinion it has several advantages, but the main thing is we retain artistic control of the festival. We have a free hand in the same way as we do on any performance. There is no external influence, and this also allows us to maintain a continuity. I've been the artistic director of the festival since it began, and so I have a very precise understanding of what the city has seen, what it's seen enough of, how we can renew ourselves...

Are there any difficulties that come with this dual role as a festival and artistic company?

When I meet other artistic companies I can feel sometimes that it's very present in their minds: we are the colleagues who run a festival. This bothers me a little – the moment when I think I'm talking to a colleague and suddenly realise they are trying to sell me a show.

In international meetings like IETM or CINARS we are careful to hide on our material that Waves even exists. We go as artists and to meet other artists or producers, but the moment people discover we have a festival it totally changes the perspective of the conversation. I can understand why it happens. It's probably the only downside of having a festival.

At the same time you used to have an open application process where artists could apply to Waves via your website...

That was part of a European project, led by a Belgian partner. There were some criteria: the companies had to be young, working in non-verbal forms and keeping to a low budget. Every year a jury of six festival directors would choose three shows to programme. So we had an application form on our website, and would get around 2000 applications each time. We did it for six years, and in fact it was very interesting – we would find people we'd never heard of. So it felt good and precious; we were really discovering young talent. But the work of viewing all the videos became too much.

That project doesn't exist anymore, but of course we still receive thousands of emails every year from groups wanting to come to Waves. We have a form reply asking for short trailers and saying we can't guarantee that we'll be able to watch them, but sometimes it happens that there's a last-minute cancellation and we jump into a hundred of these applications and find a replacement.

Links & Recommendations

 [Waves Festival](#)

TRUST ME

BREAKOUT SESSION II: RED TAPE

FACILITATED BY	Jens Frimann Hansen, Director of Passage Festival (Denmark)
PANELLISTS	Sho Shibata, Executive Producer, Stopgap Dance Company (UK) Dagmara Gumkowska, Teatr Śląski (Poland) Matthias Rettner, General Director, PAN.OPTIKUM (Germany)

‘Red tape hits the street arts hard.’ Opening the discussion Jens Frimann Hansen, the director of Denmark’s Passage festival, sketched out the state of play. Compared with more established arts, street theatre is not surrounded by conventions, traditions and institutions to protect and define it. It is an art form that must define itself – within the public space, at the moment of performance – and is often rooted in qualities of surprise, luck and spontaneity. Does excessive bureaucracy take away this immediacy? Does it cut the thread to the origins of street arts in a rebellious counterculture? Does it protect, and, if so, who does it protect?

A personal touch

Dagmara Gumkowska, a manager of international collaboration projects, spoke of her experience working in Poland, where laws concerning the use of public space are comparatively underdeveloped. This can provide freedom for artists, but also ‘gives the authorities a lot of space to make decisions’ and places power in the hands of individuals. Among panellists and others in the room, this was seen to be something of a trade-off. As personal relationships, and trust, build up over time, certain barriers can be bypassed. Trust acts like an informal accreditation, flexible in

the actions it enables but with no ‘portability’ (the confidence of one official won’t necessarily bring the support of another, and especially won’t carry to other countries). One participant, suggesting the Italian situation is similar to Poland, described reliance on trust as a ‘medieval relationship’.

An absence of formal channels can also make it difficult to know who to communicate with. Gumkowska described the trail of permissions needed to organise an event in Poland: city council, blue light services (police, ambulance,

fire), and then property owners. In the case of a project at a railway station, different aspects of the site – the building, the track, the land it rested on – had all been sold off to different companies as part of a privatisation process.

As a final point, Gumkowska drew a distinction between smaller cities and the larger ones who pay more attention to their public image, and put a focus on interesting projects and on high quality work. Among smaller cities, it ‘often doesn’t matter what you organise – and the safer the better’.

Hidden motives

Among all panellists – and a number of session participants – the UK was noted as a country with especially stringent rules for health and safety.

Sho Shibata, executive producer of Stopgap Dance Company, described how

his work often put him in conflict with visa offices as he worked to get international artists into the UK, or UK artists elsewhere in the world. Stopgap’s 2017 piece *The Road* was commissioned by the British Council in Sub-Saharan Africa and given seed funding in order to invite one artist

from Uganda, Oscar Ssenyonga, and two from Kenya, Silvester Barasa and Joseph Kanyenje, to come to the UK and collaborate with two of Stopgap’s dancers. The British Council explained that the visa application process for Uganda and Kenya would be the same, and in fact both would

be processed by the same office in South Africa.

The applications were submitted at the same time, to the same office, but the Kenyan artists received their visas and the Ugandan artist was turned down. The authorities said that they were concerned that if the Ugandan artist was granted a visa there was a risk he would go missing in the UK. Two further applications were rejected: first with the explanation that there wasn't significant proof of income to qualify

Ssenyonga as an artist, then that receipts produced in response were not genuine.

Such experiences highlight that a process that is supposedly objective, or at least legalistic, can be guided by hidden agendas. In the UK, anti-immigration policies spread outward from the Home Office, and ultimately affect who can come into the country and who cannot.

Applying with the same artists to work for five days in the Netherlands – by invitation

of Holland Dance Festival – Stopgap secured visas without trouble. However, the R&D in the Netherlands, with four artists already advanced in the creation and the other only able to follow the early stages digitally, created an imbalance in their starting points, created friction in the process, and took the momentum out of the project. Stopgap had had plans for the future, including a UK tour. But looking at the state of its development, and at the likely prospect of further visa issues, the project was shelved.

The price of experience

When Matthias Rettner first started to work with the German company PAN.OPTIKUM a contract was one and a half pages and a tech rider fit on a single sheet. Both are now substantially larger, but, says Rettner, 'it is only experience'. The company has bulked out its paperwork to avoid repeating the same misunderstandings and to clear the way for concentrating on artistic work.

This is, of course, the other side of the story: regulations increase because of accidents, and what we think of as red tape is often the aftermath of serious and sometimes fatal errors. Rettner gave the example of the 2000 Enschede fireworks disaster, which saw the massive explosion of a pyrotechnics factory in the Netherlands. In the years after, the use of pyrotechnics, which had previously been simple, was tightly regulated.

Regulation becomes bureaucracy when a law loses its original purpose, but still takes time and costs money for those who must follow it. Rettner points out as well that regulation is 'a great business', and while the

health and safety industry has grown large and far-reaching, individual health and safety managers vary in their competence. 'Don't feel secure just because you have one.'

In highlighting the practical reality faced by companies, Rettner gave a small tour of some of the latest health and safety laws spreading across Europe: how an object higher than 5m, or with a surface area of more than 100 m², is classed as a portable building, and needs expensive technical approval before it can be used in public space; or how the NC90 certifications (1090-2 and 1090-3) covering respectively steel and aluminium welding, are becoming a widespread (and quite expensive) requirement.

Of course, these rules also exist to prevent dangerous oversights. And so Rettner has settled on a pragmatic view: whatever the regulation, find a way to deal with it. Often this means taking an individual approach. Rettner advised that when handling international shipping, for instance, it can be best to avoid larger providers. With smaller ope-

rations it's possible to oversee things personally – to go to the harbour and ensure that equipment is unloaded as needed, and tackle problems that may arise.

In the end, this personal approach would seem to be inescapable. Whether artists operate by the contract or the handshake, whether authorised by certificate or reputation, they frequently find themselves in the grey areas outside, and beyond, the red tape.

Links & Recommendations

- 🌐 [Stopgap Dance Company](#)
- 🌐 [Aktionstheater PAN.OPTIKUM](#)
- [Organiser un événement artistique dans l'espace public](#)



INTERVIEW: SHO SHIBATA, STOPGAP DANCE COMPANY



After completing a degree in philosophy and social psychology at the LSE (London), Sho worked at the Arts Council England, South East and joined Stopgap Dance Company in 2008 to manage touring, outreach and dance development projects. He began producing Stopgap's outdoor productions in 2009 and he is now the executive producer of the company.

Policy and regulation have been instrumental in improving diversity in the arts. Are such laws and regulations viewed as 'red tape' or has the industry accepted them?

I think in many ways the regulations and policies surrounding inclusion have been very welcomed in the arts. In the outdoor arts touring circuit in the UK there's been a lot of emphasis on making festivals accessible to disabled audiences and disabled performers, so I think there's been some good work being done on this front. The programming and the commissioning has also been very inclusive. In the UK, this kind of work has come in partly as a result of the Equality Act that the government put in place about a decade ago.

But at the same time there are still quite a lot of loopholes and you do get people paying lip service to the idea of accessibility. They probably wouldn't admit it, but some organisations do the bare minimum to make things more accessible.

Education is a big example of that. If you look at higher education in the dance sector it's still quite traditionalist. Even when you look at youth schools the syllabus is still very balletic, and is sort of educating everybody to try to pursue this idea of a perfect shape and perfect body that someone set, subjectively, well over a century ago. In the 21st century that's a very outdated idea, and yet it's still fundamental in basic dance education. And obviously it's very, very inaccessible for disabled people. A lot of the circus and theatre schools may well say the same on their side – you can see there's a lack of disabled people coming through the education system in those sectors.

So the mainstream is still very uninclusive, and that's an example of the legislation being ignored. Everything is supposed to be equal access, but in practice organisations like dance conservatories and schools can still effectively exclude disabled people. There's a disconnect between what it says in law and policy and what happens in practice, and that filters out into the wider arts sector and society as a whole.

There are also some grey areas in the wording of various laws...

Yeah, there are some massive grey areas, which tend to force these very time-consuming negotiation processes. With Stopgap we've sometimes been able to use that to our advantage because we're an organisation with staff who can keep at it. But a lot of disabled people who are working on a freelance basis just can't pursue things in the same way.

Many funding bodies want to encourage diversity, and some do it directly by making it a condition of subvention. How do you feel about this top-down approach?

Well, I think companies like Stopgap are definitely beneficiaries of it because it's opened a lot of doors for us as an inclusive company working with disabled and non-disabled artists, and made more programmers want to work with us. Perhaps they only did it because they had to tick a box, but that's still a way in. So I'm all for it because we know we can deliver.

And in the UK, I think the Arts Council's long-term strategy has worked. I think the UK might be the only country in the entire world where there are multiple inclusive diverse or-

ganisations thriving in the industry. When you look at England and Scotland, there are lots of us – both regularly funded organisations and smaller projects. You don't see that kind of breadth and strength anywhere else, and I think it's because the Arts Council made diversity a priority a long time ago.

If regulation is a top-down, legalistic approach, what are some initiatives in this area that start from the bottom-up?

Well, I think in some ways the top-down approach is there because the initial pressure came from the community, and from various civil rights movements stretching back for decades.

But I think the community has also responded to show that it's possible for disabled people to become excellent dancers – and for people of all backgrounds to become excellent artists – if they're given the right investment and support and opportunities. I think the UK is kind of a beacon of proof that equal opportunities, when done correctly and well, will bear results. But I think there's still a long way to go. There are little pockets of organisations doing the work, but I think until the whole landscape really shifts we still have a long way to go in making inclusivity the norm.

Links & Recommendations

- 🌐 [Stopgap Dance Company](#)
- 🌐 [OutdoorArtsUK Access Toolkit](#)

LEARNING ON AND OFF THE STREET

BREAKOUT SESSION III: EDUCATION

FACILITATED BY

Bruno Costa, Co-director of Bússola (Portugal)

PANELLISTS

Marie Yvonne Capdeville, Choreographer, Graduate of FAI-AR – Formation supérieure d'art en espace public (France)

Dr Niamh NicGhabhann, Assistant Dean of Research, University of Limerick (Ireland)

There is little formalised education for the street arts, and some like it that way: 'You have to learn the street on the street.' For others, education programmes are valuable crucibles of experimentation and exchange. But as this breakout session underlined, the involvement of the education sector is not limited to practical training. Through its research activities and analysis, and by leveraging weighty connections to other institutions and policymakers, the sector has a role to play in promoting street arts within a larger cultural field.

The street arts bookshelf

For Dr Niamh NicGhabhann, Assistant Dean of Research at University of Limerick and course director for its MA in Festive Arts, the education sector can contribute on three levels.

First, it can bring a greater sense of the 'deep roots' of arts performed in public space. NicGhabhann pointed to examples like *com-media dell'arte*, medieval mystery plays, travelling circuses, travelling musicians, and street performance in fairs and markets as forms that have been 'absolutely central' to cultural experience, but remain under-represented in academic literature. Research activities can be part of a wider effort to 'give street arts back its history' within a canon of academic theory.

At the second level, academia can provide evidence-based data and research on the impact of street arts. Studies that focus on the audience experience, or on the audience demographics that street arts reaches, provide a strong base from which to lobby policymakers and funding bodies.

Finally, at the third level, the education sector can create opportunities for 'creative



© Declan Colohan, *Wires Crossed*

practice research' – a mode of research where the artist thinks and investigates through their own artistic work rather than having that work examined by an external commentator.

Each of these three levels of work drive in the same direction: as several participants

in the session pointed out, anyone studying street arts currently has to do it through the lens of other disciplines. 'You go to so many shelves because there is no street arts shelf. You go to architecture, you go to urban theory or theatre studies, sociology, anthropology... [street arts] is still in the process of being formed.'

A changing form

Street arts' lack of visibility in research fields is reflected in the wider arts sector, and, ultimately, in the work that's programmed into venues and festivals. On this note, some session participants expressed anxiety that street arts are being pushed aside by dance, circus and visual arts companies moving into the outdoor space (whether driven by a legitimate desire to work in this area, or by the search for new funding opportunities). Unlike the street arts, these other sectors have dedicated systems of practical educa-

tion that start at a young age and take students all the way to higher education.

But if the feeling of being muscled out, or of losing a tradition, was in the air, then it was complicated by a general feeling that street arts is less of a defined form and more an 'approach' or a 'process'. If that's the case, then what exactly is being pushed aside?

Marie Yvonne Capdeville, a recent graduate of the French school FAI-AR, explained that she sees the school as not so much offering

a training to become a certain type of practitioner as hosting an open-ended process that cultivates a 'reflection about yourself and your approach to your discipline'.

In her own view, she accepts the openness of the street arts field but makes a personal distinction between street arts and creation in public space: street arts play on the street or in the public square; creation in public space can play in any public location not dedicated to performance (hospitals, galleries, churches, etc.).

Education everywhere

What might be missing from practical education, or what to work on in the future? For Capdeville, it is the notion of a 'precise dramaturgy of public space', and training on how to 'read' space. NicGhabhann linked this to the idea of exploring a 'philosophy of space' that considers the relationship we have to space and which we experience constantly in our day to day lives: 'Where do I feel safe, where do I feel connected, where do I feel rushed? How do I sense or understand this space that I'm in?'

Several participants proposed that education could take place outside of schools, perhaps in festival contexts, though one festival producer explained that she had 'no power' to decide on the inclusion of education activities, and that the money for the festival came from the local city, which was focused on impact for audiences and not on artistic development. As such, the responsibility perhaps rests on individuals: as one participant said, it should be up to those lucky enough to have received education to find ways to share it.

Links & Recommendations

- 🌐 [FAI-AR](#)
- 🌐 [MA in Festive Arts, University of Limerick](#)



INTERVIEW: JEAN-SÉBASTIEN STEIL, FAI-AR



Jean-Sébastien Steil is the director of FAI-AR, the high school for artistic creation in public space. He's also the president of apCAR, the organisation in charge of managing the Cité des arts de la rue, in Marseille. From 2003 to 2011, as the coordinator of the new INSITU European network, he impulsed artistic and cultural partnerships all over Europe and in the Mediterranean area.

FAI-AR is developing an online course, *Create in Public Space*. Why?

There is a lack of analytical content and documentary resources in the field of creation in public space. There's also a lack of visibility at the professional level and among arts students and general audiences. Producing a free, bilingual MOOC seemed to us to be a way to share our knowledge and, at the same time, to give visibility to artists working in this field.

The course itself will be structured in three chapters, each with its own theme. First, Scenography: how to work with a space that is not a stage, art gallery, black box, or white cube. Second, Dramaturgy: how the space itself and what goes on there affects the artistic proposal. And finally, The Audience: how to understand the audience as a transformative factor in street arts, and how to build immersive or participative pieces.

Some artists feel that the street arts can only be learned on the street...

When FAI-AR was created there was an older generation of artists who said, 'Street arts doesn't need its own university, its own academy, because we learned everything from experience.'

For me, it's true that we can't teach people how to be artists in public space. We can't tell them what to do, or what they should say in the street. Instead it's a question of teaching them to be free in the way that they create.

We don't teach street arts as if it were a field of definite knowledge. It's not a defined discipline in the way that classical music, or playing the violin, or ballet is. For me, street

arts is not a discipline. It's a path to a different kind of artistic expression. In terms of skills, you can work with theatre, dance, music, digital arts, everything. But what we know is that when we move art outdoors something happens to transform it. That transformation is what education can address: it teaches us to use the urban space not as another kind of theatre stage, but to take a more difficult, more complex, more interesting approach in creating work in relation with the city and the audience.

We have to be aware of how art transforms space and how space transforms art, and that is something that can be taught and analysed. And it's better for us to learn from the experience of 30 years of street arts creation, so that the new generation can avoid making the same mistakes...

The street arts education sector has remained comparatively small. What's your hope for its future?

For me, we don't necessarily need a lot of schools, because the professional network dedicated to our field is quite small. And at the European scale we don't need hundreds of specialised artists; instead we need to inform and stimulate artists from other fields.

In France, street arts became a specialism. Now it's a kind of family, a tribe. This generation from the 70s and 80s, they all know each other, they think and consider themselves like a family. Then when you look to another country, like the Netherlands, there isn't that same history of structuring a specialised cultural sector. It's more flexible, less defined. Contemporary artists create their work in art galleries but sometimes they can make site-specific pieces. It all depends on

the project, the meaning, the message, and the intention of the artist – not on their professional specialisation.

My hope is that more artists, from every field, will become interested in the possibilities and opportunities of creating in public space, and that theatres will catch on to programming this work – something which is already happening, with more and more outdoor and rural projects.

And thinking of the future, I always keep in mind that public space is political space, and that art in public space is linked to collective issues. In France this year we've had the *gilets jaunes* movement. The yellow jacket was a symbol, a costume, a kind of scenography. For me artists can speak to people's anxieties, their common worries about social problems, migration, the climate. The artist has to be linked to reality, to the problems of the world, and working in public space is a way to be close to that.

Links & Recommendations

🌐 [Create in Public Space](#)

THE CHANGING CITY

BREAKOUT SESSION IV : URBAN ENVIRONMENT

FACILITATED BY

Angus MacKechnie, Executive Director, OutdoorArtsUK (UK)

PANELLISTS

Giulia Cantaluppi, PhD in Territorial Planning and Public Policy,
Iuav University of Venice (Italy)

Kevin Leyden, Professor of Political Science and Sociology

National University of Ireland, Galway (Ireland)

Eleanor Barrett, Director, The Brick Box (UK)

Introducing the session, Angus MacKechnie, the executive director of OutdoorArtsUK, described the spaces he cycles through on the way into work: Battersea Square (a place to eat); Knightsbridge and Eaton square (surrounded by fantastic architecture and containing beautiful spaces – but all privately owned); Hyde Park (home to many a historic statue) and Speakers' Corner (since the 19th Century a free stage for anyone who wants to address the public); Bloomsbury and Brunswick Square (encased by social housing from the 70s, now gentrified and commercialised); finally arriving at work on Charlton Street (at the centre of commuter London, and a diverse area with a large Muslim community). All of these spaces could be called 'the city centre', and yet they represent a massive diversity of use, design, ownership and access. As much as they are social spaces, they are places for commemoration, protest and demonstration; as much as they are places to meet and work, they are sites of occupation, celebration and dissent. How can we work in, and with, these spaces?

Planned use

While acknowledging that the uses and identities of spaces can be complex and unpredictable, Kevin Leyden, a Professor of Political Science and Sociology at the National University of Ireland, opened his presentation by reminding that built environments are made 'for humans by humans', and as a result are the products of planning, design, public policy, and, ultimately, politics.

In recent years, he explained, there has also been a shift in urban planning. While traditionally most city centre environments were designed for mixed-use and pedestrian traffic, over the last 60 years urban planning has recentred itself around roads and automobiles, bringing with it segregated areas like office and industrial parks. This trend lessens opportunities for conversation and

social interaction – the lifeblood of culture and creative work – and brings a number of other negative externalities, such as pollution, expensive travel, and impacts on health.

What is required, in Kevin's view, is for city leaders to connect us to arts and culture in the places we live, and to create public spaces which are beneficial for the people, the community and the environment. This is partly about good design and planning, but also requires changes in laws and regulations to encourage funding and policies that enable arts and culture.

The subject of urban planning prompted a number of comments on car use, with one session participant pointing to the example of Athenry – an Irish town that has a beauti-

ful 13th century castle and public square surrounded by cars (making it 'the finest medieval car park in Europe'). Residents want to pedestrianise the area, but businesses want cars to bring in commerce. This friction between business and social interests is common, but can manifest in different ways. Another participant gave the example of Venice: cars aren't a problem, but tourists are. Spaces are flooded with people, and yet they are not 'social' spaces for local residents – an extreme case that highlights the importance of balance in designing urban spaces, and of involving communities in decisions about their use.

The urban village

Eleanor Barrett, co-director of The Brick Box, spoke on the value of involving local residents in regeneration projects. From 2013-2016, Brick Box worked with Newham Council's regeneration team to create projects under a motorway flyover in Canning Town – an otherwise derelict patch of land at the heart of what was considered to be a 'problem' area of the city. When Brick Box started the project the police were against them going into a space that was considered unsafe.

Undeterred, they worked with the community for three months in the lead-up to their first project, A13 Green, which saw the space under the flyover transformed into an 'urban village green' every Friday night for ten weeks. Residents from all walks of life came out to claim the space – and made it their own. It was a temporary event with a lasting impact. The project proved not only that people can be trusted (the safety concerns of the local authorities were unfounded) but that communities will work together and step up to reclaim the spaces around them.



© Temporiuso.net, MADE in MAGE

Brick Box has since moved out of London and into Bradford, with the idea of working outside of institutional circles. Its activities now include the Bradford Spaces Service, an initiative to open empty city centre spaces to creative, charitable projects. In 2018, Brick Box organised Bradford Bubble Up, a three-day water-themed fes-

tival which put street theatre, breakdancing and music into the public space, and transformed an unusually steep road into a 100m waterslide. The event was well received, and the local Business Improvement District will now host the slide every summer...

Reclaiming the space

Finally, Giulia Cantaluppi presented Temporiuso.net, a Milan-based collective of architects, urban planners, activists and researchers that works to reopen, and make available for cultural use, abandoned or disused spaces – from defunct railway lines and old terminals, to unfinished constructions, ex-industrial sites and empty offices. In most cases organisations receive space rent-free, but are asked to develop a business plan that demonstrates they can cover extra costs (including utilities), while generating activities that give back to the life of the city.

One Temporiuso.net project, Palazzina 7, redeveloped Milan's former general market – a plaza space bordered by old Liberty buildings that had lain abandoned for 20

years. In the redevelopment, the ground floor was given over to local associations and artisans, while the first floor was allocated for student accommodation, with residents sharing responsibility for maintenance. This mixed-use format ultimately supported co-working spaces, a time bank for local organisations, and an apartment for students. The outside space, open to the public, was transformed with gardens and spaces for activities and relaxation. Another Temporiuso.net project, MADE in MAGE, opened a new incubator space at the ex-industrial site Magazzini Generali Falck, accommodating 35 companies and young creators working in fashion and sustainable design. What was planned as a temporary project became a permanent arrangement,

and helped to turn the political tide in Milan: the local government has become more interested in supporting schemes that can attract young people back to the city and persuade them to make their home there.

Links & Recommendations

- 🌐 [OutdoorArtsUK](#)
- 🌐 [The Brick Box](#)
- 🌐 [Temporiuso](#)



INTERVIEW: HEBA EL-CHEIKH, MAHATAT FOR CONTEMPORARY ART



Heba El-Cheikh is an outdoor art producer and cultural manager. In 2011, She co-founded Mahatat for Contemporary Art. Through arts in public spaces and community arts projects, she aims at decentralizing art to make it accessible and meaningful to all.

Mahatat has organised a number of projects, such as City Shadows in Port Said, that work in abandoned spaces. What's it like to undertake this work in Egypt?

In the case of City Shadows, we'd been working in Port Said for a year, giving workshops and organising labs for emerging artists, when we had the opportunity to do some research into this idea of reviving abandoned spaces.

Port Said is a very old city with a unique history; the architecture is very rich. It has an old-world atmosphere but is also a big, cosmopolitan city. We walked around looking at the old buildings and hotels and the housing built for all the engineers who used to work on the Suez Canal. The city has a lot of Italian and French influences, with these beautiful wooden balconies everywhere, and so the first thing you think is, 'Oh, wow – it would be great to take one of these old palaces or cinemas and turn it into a space.' But the reality is that in Egypt this is almost impossible, or you'd have to be a big investor to do it.

So what happened is we scouted out the city and found a derelict backyard between three buildings. It wasn't really owned by anyone – it was on the borderline of three properties, at the back of an old historic villa. It was a non-place, full of trash. It was on the margins. That's where we worked.

To be in public space in Egypt we work on the borderline of a lot of things – what is public and what is not, what is permitted and what is not. When people give us a wondering look and ask what we're doing, their

confusion is a good thing – it means we can be in public space. We're not a political demonstration, or a film shoot, or anything else that's recognised and regulated...

A lot of projects that work with abandoned spaces, or in urban space more generally, don't last long. How do you feel about this temporary quality?

Working in public space, I agree its ephemeral. With a one-off project you never know what will come from it. But we never claimed that our work would have a big impact; at most we say that we're an audience's first experience of live, artistic performance, and that this experience is important.

In one neighbourhood we did an upcycling project because there were a lot of workshops in the area and it's full of raw material. You can walk on the street and find tonnes of wood and plastic.

So we did this workshop with local people and built a big sculpture. And it was good and bad – people didn't understand the point of the sculpture, but at the same time it helped to clean the neighbourhood up a bit, and we put in some upcycled benches. So it changed, slightly, the public space.

But after two or three weeks the sculpture was completely gone. Some people thought it was a success – that this sculpture lasted three weeks, it's a sign of success. Some said that, no, it's a failure because it's gone. This was the conversation.

In another neighbourhood, Ezbet Khairallah, we talked with local people and partners and ended up making a community art space – a whole theatre built from upcycled

materials. We didn't go to the area thinking we would make a theatre; we just wanted to do something for the public space.

The stage is still there. Afterward we never claimed it was ours by putting a sign up, because if we did it would be broken the next day, or we would be blackmailed to pay money for maintenance. And I'm very open to the idea that the stage will be pulled down at some point because people need the wood. It's fine if this is what happens, but for now it's still there.

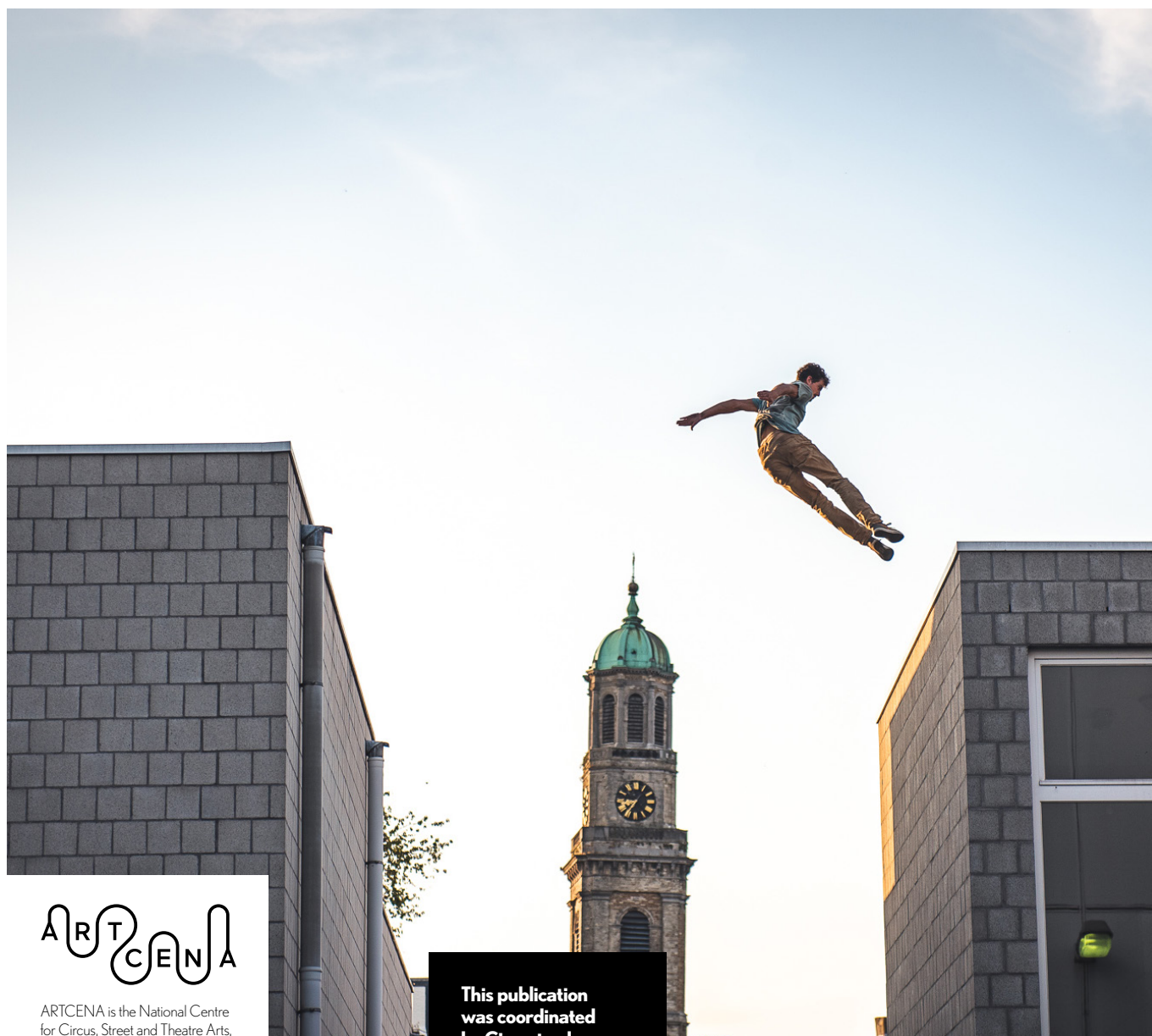
This is an impact, but we didn't plan it. We don't have power over people and don't know how they'll react to our artistic interventions. I was really glad to know the stage is still there and the project is a success, but at the same time I don't claim that I know everything about this area, that I can live there myself, that I can claim we change any lives. A project *might* change lives, but the claiming itself is where the problems start.

Links & Recommendations

🌐 [Mahatat for Contemporary Art](#)

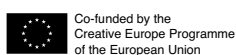
FRESH
SEMINARS

FRESH STREET #4



ARTCENA

ARTCENA is the National Centre for Circus, Street and Theatre Arts, created by the French Ministry of Culture. It coordinates Circostrada and has a permanent seat on its Steering Committee. It works closely with sector professionals and offers them publications and multimedia resources through its digital platform. It develops mentoring, training, tools and services to help them in their daily practices. It provides support to contemporary creation through national programmes and encourages international development of these three sectors.



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European Network
Circus and Street Arts

Since 2003, Circostrada Network has been working to develop and structure the fields of circus and street arts in Europe and beyond. With more than 120 members from over 35 countries, it helps building a sustainable future for these sectors by empowering cultural players through activities in observation and research, professional exchanges, advocacy, capacity-building and information.



FOREWORD

WHAT DID WE HAVE IN MIND?

After a grand edition in Galway in May 2019, in partnership with ISACS and the European Capital of Culture – the members of the Circostrada workgroup led by FNAS and engaged in the development of this event, agreed on a common curatorial theme for the fourth edition of FRESH STREET: the Space in Between. The idea was to go to Turin, in Italy, and explore the dual nature of the city, both royal and industrial, and to think about the “Space in Between” as the place where art may find its inspirational matter to build bridges between “opposing riverbanks”. In a world torn between conflicting views and positions – where dialogue becomes asymmetrical, power-laden or even disappears – what role should street arts play today? This was our starting point.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE MEANTIME?

In March 2020 – as Covid-19 started to become an integral part of lives – we felt torn between bewilderment and bitterness at first, and then slowly came to accept the fact that a physical and experiential event in the “Mediterranean Europe” would not be possible as we initially imagined, especially if we wanted to ensure a timely and appropriate preparation and guarantee the best possible equity of access. Was the “Space in Between” still a meaningful theme to investigate though? More than ever! The current pandemic had highlighted existing fragilities and barriers, while questioning the role of (art in) the public space. Meanwhile, we had to redefine our identities in order to survive and thrive, establishing new ways of connecting and creating multiple ways to support and involve artists and cultural professionals, whether locally or globally.

WHAT CAN WE DO NOW?

Although no one, yet, is able to fully grasp the effects of the emotional vacuum in human and social relations, caused by the ever-so-present physical distancing, we can at least try and regard this moment in history as a chance for reshuffling the cards and shaking up certainties. The “Space in Between” can then become an opportunity to pause and investigate the key role that creation in the public space might hold in the cohesion processes and well-being of communities and citizens; we can also take a step back to reflect on our practices, our professional and individual realities, before rushing to return to the “world as we knew it before”, without even so much as asking ourselves the question: what matters now? The “Space in Between” is certainly an uncomfortable area filled with doubts and uncertainties, but it could also be a beam of light in a dark night leading us towards a more inclusive, diverse, sustainable and fairer future. It really depends on how we are able to adjust our focus and how we can put that ability to spark further investigation and new creativity. What role should street arts play tomorrow?



The FNAS team in Turin, Italy. © FNAS

FRESH STREET #4 IN A NUTSHELL

OVER **300** PARTICIPANTS

43 COUNTRIES FROM **6** CONTINENTS

4 DAYS OF WEBINAR

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9 SPEAKERS

ONLINE

A big thanks to

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Additional note



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

KEYNOTE	126
Art at the Heart of Life – Interview with Vida Cerkenik Bren by John Ellingsworth	
THE SPACE BETWEEN NATURE AND CULTURE	130
● FOOD FOR THOUGHTS	130
Performing After a Plague: A Provocation in Three Acts – By Jay Jordan	
● ARTISTIC VIEW	136
On Country – Interview with Jacob Boehme by Pippa Bailey	
INCLUSION THROUGH ART	139
● FOOD FOR THOUGHTS	139
The Message of the Medium – By Anand Rajaram	
● ARTISTIC VIEW	143
Walls of Stories – Interview with Aravani Art Project collective by Arundhati Ghosh	
ALLOWING A PUBLIC SPACE FOR SOLIDARITY AND CREATION	147
● FOOD FOR THOUGHTS	147
Artistic Practice, Radical Care – By Roselle Pineda	
● ARTISTIC VIEW	151
Public Space, Private Lives – Interview with Azadeh Ganjeh by Sepehr Sharifzadeh	
FRESH STREET EXPERIENCE	154
From In-between to Alternative Space – By Luisa Carnelli and Elettra Zuliani	

ART AT THE HEART OF LIFE



Interview with Vida Cerkenik Bren by John Ellingsworth

In the last year the (street) art world has found itself caught in a period of immobility, separation and reflection – but where does it go now?

Theatre Director, outdoor artist and FRESH STREET keynote speaker Vida Cerkenik Bren on street arts in the interim.

A simple one: what is the space between?

The space between? I don't know what that is but I know I like it! [chuckling] I like to be in between – between work and leisure, between the public and the private, between countries, between political stances, between opposing world views. Where things either haven't yet been defined or labelled or where they are in transition. That is where you will generally find the truth – somewhere in between.

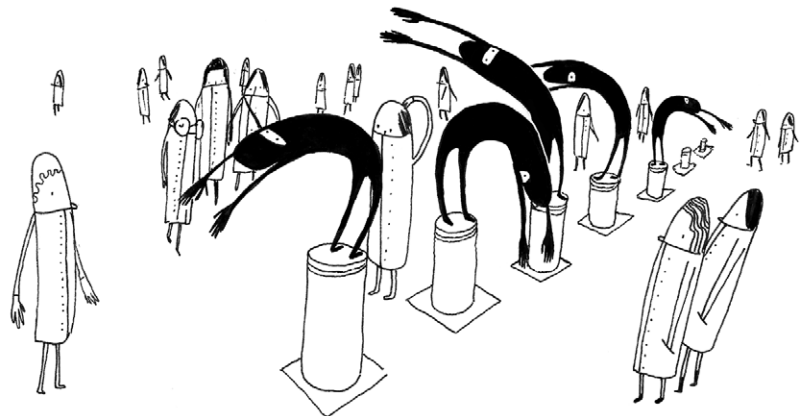
In your book *Why Don't We Do It in the Road* you talk about circles and squares as symbols for passive observation and active participation, and give the computer screen as an example of a square – something passive. Has your view on this shifted at all, given that the digital world currently feels like our most active public space?

The square and the circle are metaphors and as such shouldn't be taken too literally. You are right, the computer can be an intermediary in communication and interaction, enabling active participation. However, it can also be a medium for one-way presentation. My view of the digital world has in fact changed somewhat in Covid times; I regularly find myself staring at the screen, mentally

and emotionally immersed in the interaction that is taking place 'live' via Zoom. Most of all, I get the sense that I am with all those people on the screen, that we are all together somewhere in some between space rather than scattered around the globe. Just yesterday I received a phone call in the middle of one of these conferences. A friend asked me: "Where are you?" and I immediately blurted out: "On Zoom!" rather than "At home" or "In the office" as one might have expected. If we conceive the digital world as actual space (as our physical location while we are staring at the screen or even when we are offline and someone else is reading a post on our wall or liking our tinder profile...),

then my analogy with the square and the circle doesn't work. In that case, the computer or smart phone are not frames but entry points into another world. A world that we can be part of, not merely as observers but as participants. A world that is just as chaotic, real and infinite as any other world.

Street arts can take place anywhere, so why not online. Exhibiting your work online has many advantages, the most obvious being that anyone can attend regardless of his or her current location which is a huge benefit. Being able to access audiences around the globe with no jet lag, without compromising our families and other relationships, without



© Illustration by Robin Klengel from *Why Don't We Do It in the Road*

polluting the planet... It all sounds great. But there is also a downside. If we get too used to this new normality where the digital world is our most active public space, as you put it, we may soon end up having no body and no cheese (if nobody has a body, no one will be left to eat the cheese [chuckling]). Joking aside, it's been more than ten years since I was on tour in South Korea where I watched passers-by wearing masks, passengers on the metro staring at screens, couples on park benches looking at their phones instead of looking at one another. Covid is making the discomfort with physical contact and proximity even worse.

I consider street arts and live arts as an attempt to be creative and think about art in a different way, meaning in terms other than curtain up, art happens, curtain down, applause. In street arts, the line between the work of art and the rest of the world is not that clear; a live work of art is part of life as is the web nowadays. How to adapt to this situation is largely a personal question. Anyone who is drawn to digital media should definitely follow their intuition; particularly projects that manage to combine both the street and the web in a simple and natural way (thereby taking advantage of the entire 'increased' public space) are very promising. But there are also many analogue channels that are Covid-safe. Now is also a good time for advocacy, networking and reflection. However, if someone needs a break, there is nothing wrong with that. Sabbaticals are an essential part of any creative career, process or relationship. In fact, I have noticed that the Covid pandemic has given many of my acquaintances and co-workers around the world a real opportunity to take a much needed break from working too much, from stress, hyperproduction, economic nomadism, etc. They had to be locked down so they could realise that they had been caught up in a rat race and they were finally able to take some time off, knowing that they will not be missing out on anything.

It is of course possible to be too open to change, but as I see it people are generally more likely to be too afraid of change, particularly radical change. (And now is the time to dive deep.) Fear of the unknown, laziness or habit often leave us stuck in our old ways. The pandemic has shown us that change is

possible (when it is the only option), both at the individual and the collective level; it has also highlighted certain global crises that we as a society need to take on as soon as possible. I hope we will use this opportunity and change things now!

You touched in your talk on how street artists always have to negotiate with audiences and the public. How might these negotiations change in the near future?

I consider the tension between the work of art and the environment as a key ingredient; it is what gives street arts their impact. The negotiation between the street artist and the users of public space is a dance, a seduction, a quest for a new or different purpose; it is a request for meaning, for something more. A street performance, an intervention in public space, graffiti on a façade, a concert on a bus can all turn the tedium of our daily lives into a game of pursuit for hidden meanings, invisible connotations and sense (as well as senselessness).

I have already mentioned the concern that Covid may enhance the fear of physical contact and proximity. This fear hinders eye contact, touch and directness; it makes it difficult to build the trust it takes to turn a group of strangers into a temporary community that becomes the audience of a street performance. No restriction of public gatherings can be good for street arts or the freedom of expression and creativity in general. On the other hand, the joint experience of the pandemic has taught us many things and if we are willing to listen, it can also teach us to be more tolerant, patient and connected. A lot will depend on the final turn of events. On the developments to come, on the rising tension between us citizens, the experts, the media and the governments.

Beyond the obvious advantage of being outdoors, what do you think street arts can bring to the wider arts at the moment? Do you see signs already of institutions changing their thinking?

Street arts put art at the heart of life and put the audience at the heart of this art. They play with the established order of things

to reinvent public space and ways of living together. As such, they have managed to integrate most of the concepts and ideas of 20th century art that still remain a stumbling block for institutional arts. The idea that everyone can be an artist and everything can be art comes to life through street and live arts in a constructive way, not as a depreciation. After university, when I was working as a director in institutional theatres, I felt like a cobbler making shoes exclusively for other cobblers and their closest associates. Can you imagine how absurd that would be? At some point, cultural institutions lost the genuine contact with people, topical issues and the questions of life that are not related to art unless you are an artist. I am convinced that the experience of street artists and live artists can help cultural institutions find new contexts for art and rebuild the harmony between art and life that has been destroyed.

Well, you asked if I have seen any signs of institutions changing their thinking. To some extent, my answer is yes; everyone is aware of the fact that interest in art in its traditional forms is in decline, particularly in younger generations. Calls for public funding are full of phrases like audience development, accessibility, inclusion, participation, active engagement, etc. Meanwhile, street arts are already putting all this into practice. Unfortunately, too few policymakers and heads of cultural institutions are aware of that. They lack information, many of them are prejudiced and, most importantly, they have never experienced street arts in all their diversity and potential for themselves. That is why advocacy is so vital.

What about the possibilities for collaboration between street arts and indoor theatre?

Uncertainty about the future is creating more room for innovation and experiments and driving the search for new prospects in all areas. In light of this, I would think that theatres, although currently closed to the public, are more open to unconventional proposals; not least because their arts managers and directors now have the time to hear them. I suggest we inform them about all the possibilities of performing outdoors

and in non-theatre spaces; we should let them know what has been done, explain the principles of 'site-specific' performances, present the broad variety of techniques for audience participation, etc. Perhaps their curiosity will allow them to see past the usual issues such as 'But what about the weather?' and 'What do we do about the tickets?'. The next step is collaboration; collaboration in creating a joint play, establishing theatre as a ritual and a social gathering.

Like many street artists, you've been around the world. How do you think mobility could change in the future?

What you say is true, as a member of the collective Ljud I would sometimes be on the road for eleven months of the year. Then, after a decade of flying from country to country, from continent to continent, I felt a burning need to get a feel for the distances that usually flashed by miles below my feet. So after we finished the season of 2013 in Seoul, I said goodbye to the team who were leaving for the airport and travelled back home by train and hitchhiking. It took me three weeks to get back and I arrived in Ljubljana on the very day of my mother's birthday. I then decided to spend three months at home – I called this little experiment 'my winter challenge'. It wasn't easy, my vagabond lifestyle left me full of internal turmoil and I was used to being constantly on the move. I felt like time had stopped. Renovation works of the main street of Ljubljana were underway just under my window and since I had the time, I spent many hours sitting on the window sill. At first, it felt like nothing was going on underneath; with time I started noticing minute changes, a process. Workers were digging trenches, laying pipes; pedestrians were put on a detour around the building site; trucks and machinery came and went. One day, trees were delivered and I realised that the holes that had been dug some time ago in two parallel lines along both sides of the street were there for the rows of trees. It then turned out that a tree too many had been delivered or not enough holes had been made. That filled me with such joy! I went down to the street and asked if I could have the extra tree. Since then, I have been

travelling more slowly, leaving openings for unexpected encounters and creative feats without any prior arrangements, contracts or transactions.

Moving from place to place, being on the road and performing on the street or in a circus have always been and always will be related. As a foreigner in a foreign country, it is easier to temporarily change the established order, to attract attention, to put on a veil of mystery, to impress, to inspire, to break and/or expose a taboo. Nevertheless, the pandemic has clearly shown that a lot can happen at home (and/or online); that we have wasted too much time at airports in the past; that it is crucial that we learn to travel less and/or differently (more slowly) not just for the sake of the health of our planet, but also for the sake of ourselves and our own (mental) health. The fact that we have become 'economic nomads' is the result of a void in the funding of local street art productions, of the focus on final results, of the competitive atmosphere at fairs, of the tendency of festivals to select 'hit' productions that are overbooked, of the general undervaluation of (street) arts and much else. Street artists lack opportunities to act more locally, to be engaged in a process and work in the long term and in dialogue with anthropologists, social workers, scientists and local actors. They are also desperate for opportunities to exchange experiences and learn from one another. If policymakers come to realise the potential of street and live arts, all this can change. Vivan Storlund, the author of the book *Widening horizons by mining the wealth of creative thinkers*, dedicated her life's work to the idea of a basic income for artists. In fact, some years ago the collective Ljud already came up with the idea to try to convince the city municipality of Ljubljana to pay us a flat rate for acting not as court jesters but as city jesters – for artistic interactions with the local population, for 'custom made' performances, for spontaneous (re)actions to social, political and human situations in the city. Why shouldn't every city have a street and live arts centre co-funded from the city and national budgets instead of yet another gallery or theatre? Such a centre doesn't require its own exhibition or performance space, it only needs an office

(or not even that, given the current circumstances). Let's take things a step further: why shouldn't every city have two or three such centres or as many as there are galleries and theatres?

Many people have experienced a 'new reality' in the last year or found their perspectives and priorities shifting. Do you think these shifts will be lasting ones?

The pandemic is forcing us to abandon our routines and get out of our comfort zones. We have been compelled to change our habits; many people have had to involuntarily face themselves in the past year. The uncertainty of the future and the frailty of the certainty with which we used to plan it have become blatantly obvious. Every experience teaches us something. Such an attitude towards a difficult situation is good because it allows us to focus on finding the lesson; in addition to making progress, figuring something out also makes us feel good. However, we can only learn from experience if we process, reflect and integrate it; learning only through repetition in the sense of Pavlovian conditioning takes a lot longer.

I personally believe that it is essential to be honest, at least to oneself; if we hide from ourselves behind a false self-image, we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to improve our situation and to grow. The victim mentality is one of the more grandiose illusions that have intensified in the wake of Covid-19, giving rise to a new wild goose chase for culprits. In addition to the feeling of helplessness, fear and anger are also on the rise; perhaps they are rooted in the distant past and have only now been given a chance to surface. On the other hand, many people have come to realise that they can manage without many of the goods being forced upon them by consumerism; the mistrust of politics and politicians keeps growing and we see a new sense of global solidarity starting to emerge. What I am trying to say is that the more personally and honestly we deal with the pandemic and its aftermath, the more permanent the lessons learnt and insight gained will be. The pandemic has flushed out certain societal crises that were previously resonating in the background: the

environmental crisis; the crisis of confidence in politics, the media and experts. I think it has also highlighted a crisis of the arts and cultural institutions; at least as far as I can see, the closure of restaurants and shops seems to have 'hit' citizens much harder than the closure of museums and theatres.

In your book, each chapter ends with a practical exercise for street ninjas. Could you set a special in between exercise for our own street ninjas / FRESH readers?

Gladly.

Dear street ninja / Fresh Street reader,

- 1. Put on a mask (if required)
- 2. Go out.
- 3. Take a stroll across a public space and:
 - a) Try to think of ideas you had had in the past which then felt too small because you thought they wouldn't be backed by festivals/financers or they wouldn't attract crowds.
 - b) Look around and let your imagination run free – imagine a small-scale Covid-proof intervention in space that would surprise you, make you laugh, change your perspective or establish a connection (a writing in chalk; a minute figurine sitting on the edge of a bench; a notebook with a pen as an invitation to exchange notes with strangers;

graffiti of two viruses having a discussion; a statute, a traffic sign or a tree wearing a mask; an invitation to a distance dance, etc.)

- c) Consider what kind of artistic intervention could make people more open to positive change and how art can help us in our personal and collective transformations.
- 4. Put at least one idea into action, however small!



Vida Cerkenik Bren (Slovenia) is a street artist first and foremost and is also the author of 'Why Don't we do it in the Road'. To me this book is like a bible for street arts creation. Everyone should read it. I think we have an amazing opportunity here to present the potential of street arts and to transform attitudes to the same. She can do this. *Vida Cerkenik Bren's book, Why Don't We Do It in the Road, can be downloaded for free in English and Italian at:*

🌐 <https://riote.org/2019/06/21/why-dont-we-do-it-in-the-road/>



John Ellingsworth (UK) works as a writer and editor in the cultural field. As an editor, he has worked on projects and publications for the Swedish Institute, Kulturrådet, IETM, Dansehallerne, the European League of Institutes of the Arts, and Flanders Department of Culture, Youth and Media. He also leads the company MES, which specialises in developing websites with complex information architectures.

🌐 <http://sideshow-circusmagazine.com/>



THE SPACE BETWEEN NATURE AND CULTURE

FOOD FOR THOUGHTS

PERFORMING AFTER A PLAGUE: A PROVOCATION IN THREE ACTS

By Jay Jordan

Nature and its species are often 'themes' for art, but how close are we really looking? Artist and activist Jay Jordan takes the long view – starting 700 years ago – to find the intersections of art, life, nature and culture.

"If fundamental theatre is like the plague, this is not because it is contagious, but because like the plague it is a revelation."

– Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and its Double*, 1938

Act 1: Embody the art of attention

Let us start by putting this journal down, or if you're reading this article online, turn away from the screen and we will try an exercise with your fingers. Pick up an imaginary stringed instrument, imagine it is a medieval lute, hold it, feel its wood, imagine its taut strings. Now imagine you can play this beautiful instrument and try to strut the strings mimicking the gestures of "an emaciated crow pecking at the snow in hope of finding something to eat". If this is too hard, try this time to imitate "the nonchalant flick of a carp's tail" with your fingers.

Was it easy?

These strangely beautiful instructions are from *The Great Treatise on Supreme Sound*, a 14th century handbook for musicians. It taught lute players specific gestures, like

a staccato pluck, by suggesting they copy the movements of animals, the assumption being that it would be totally normal for a musician to have not only seen these animals behaviour up close, but to have spent enough time giving them the deep attention needed to be able to reproduce and embody their gestures.

When was the last time you watched a wild animal coexisting with its habitat?

When was the last time you gave some attention to living beings and bodies that were not human, or rather as philosopher and sleight of hand magician David Abram says, more-than-human?

Now 700 years later most of you reading this will be living in the metropolis and probably

only experience wild animals on your screens or in cages in zoos. In the metropolis, everything is done so that humans only relate to themselves, so that we create ourselves separately from other forms of existence, other forms of life. This human centered logic, this deep separation, is embodied and naturalised in the very fabric of the metropolis, in the concrete and tarmac, powerlines and fiber optics, in the layout of streets, the networks of surveillance cameras, the architecture of the shopping malls, the design of parks, the museum districts – all capturing our body-minds and behaviours 24/7. The Metropolis is what you have when the modernisation process is complete and 'nature' is gone for good, where only 'we' produce and create reality. And that reality is shaped by the urbanists and architects, the planners and managers, the executives and bureaucrats, in the like-

ness of the 'sky is the limit' gods of economic growth. Development and productivity become the only goal.

It's a world without worlds, where we are split from our food sources, from our soil, from our plants and our water. The worlds that sustain our life have become alien, like unknown planets. We have forgotten how to make our shelter, which plants can heal us and which feed us, how to clothe ourselves, what the seasons are, where the wind blows from, to recognise the song of the birds returning at spring time, to know how to find our way home using the north star.

As I finish writing that sentence, I hear the hoot of a brown owl sitting on the oak tree whose branches caress the caravan from which I'm writing. Our home is on a wetlands, the Zad: Zone a Defendre ('zone to defend') of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, where the French government and multinational Vinci once wanted to put an international airport, stretching the grey urban fabric into these fields and forests. But thanks to decades of creative disobedient bodies, including our own, these lands were saved from being sucked dry and covered in concrete. New forms of collective life were built in the way of the developers: beautiful cabins grew out of the mud, farms flourished, pirate radio stations were emitted, bakeries baked bread for hundreds of inhabitants, medicinal herb gardens healed us, and at the centre of the zone we built a full scale working lighthouse exactly where the control tower should have been. The tabloid-like 24-hour French news channel BFMTV even called the Zad "a utopia that might be being realised"! The Zad was a theatre of conflict between the forces of money and the forces of life, a place that took theatre back to its roots, from the Greek, *Theatron* – 'a place where something important happens'.

On the Zad, Art and life, nature and culture, resistance and creation are entangled. Art becomes a discipline of attention, enfolded into the designs of our lives, our gardens, our ways of resisting, the way we build our houses, our rituals to mark the seasons. This life consciously crafted, rather than another style of art? We need "a technique of life, an art of living. We have to create ourselves as



© CIRCA - The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army in action - Edinburgh, 2005

a work of art," claimed philosopher-activist Michel Foucault. "Rather than something specialized or done by experts, couldn't everyone's life become a work of art?" He asked. "Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?"

But one of the most important reasons we were able to protect these lands was because we got to *know* the hedgerows and greenways, the forest and marshlands, the prairies and streams, when the newts mate and the swallows return from Africa, we got to know these lands in the same profound way a dancer knows his body or an acrobat senses her muscles.

When you pay attention to something it becomes sacred. Nothing is created sacred, it's the attention we give to it that renders it so. I don't mean sacred as holy almighty aloof power, but as my friend Starhawk, incredible witch and activist, taught us: immanent sacredness "is not a great something that you bow down to, but what determines your values, what you would take a stand for." When something is sacred it becomes harder to destroy, to pollute, to turn into a resource and you are prepared to put your life into protecting it. The more you inhabit a territory the more it inhabits you.

The owl hoots again, and I'm reminded of the incredibly courageous 19th century abolitionist Harriet Tubman, who used her knowledge of

birds song and of the living world to save so many lives. Tubman escaped from slavery aged 27 and rescued hundreds of escaping slaves by guiding them up what was known as the underground railway, a network of safe houses ferrying slaves to safe haven. She mastered these long dangerous journeys through marshlands and forest, often tracked by dogs sent out by the authorities to sniff them out. She had grown up in the wetlands and had a complex understanding of the landscape, and she would use the call of barred owls to alert the refugees that it was OK, or not OK, to come out of hiding and continue their journey. Her accurate rendition of the sound of the bird blended in with the normal night time sounds, and so created no suspicion. The lives of the freedom seekers were saved.

This is the art of attention; observing and sensing the living world deeply, feeling its pleasures and pains and performing forms of life that open up spaces so that the life of others can continue to thrive. A slave is freed, a wetlands continues to flourish.

Act 2: Desert Nero Culture

The Roman Emperor Nero did not play the lute, but the lyre. The myth claims he played music whilst watching the city of Rome burn. This story was a metaphor for cold, ruthless tyrannical leaders, without feelings, able to watch a disaster from their aloof position of power and caring nothing for those suffering. Not unlike President Trump playing golf whilst the bodies of the poor and the elderly dying of Covid pile up across the US.

For me, this myth has more sense now than it ever did. But Nero does not represent an individual any more, but our entire western idea of art and culture, a culture that until Covid lockdowns, continued business as usual despite a world on fire. Despite 200 species pushed to extinction every day, despite the soils turning to deserts, despite poverty rising faster than the seas, despite a tsunami of mental health issues paralysing young people, despite the far right spreading faster than the forest fires – our culture continues its escape into the same old forms of entertainment. The Roman Empire collapsed, partly due to ecological overstretch, but its strategy of bread and circuses is more alive than ever: keeping the people docile through diversion and distraction never failed.

In the summer of 2018 I was invited to the Aurillac international street theatre festival to give a talk during a professional seminar entitled: 'En marche... en marge... en rade...?', ('On the move... on the fringe... stranded...?'). On the panel was the deputy director of the festival (soon to become director), a couple of writers, and some friends from an outdoor dance company. The seminar was asking key questions about art in public space in this moment of crisis. Despite all the crowd barriers and health and safety restrictions could street art still be radical? Does this festival still make utopian work? Are street arts really challenging the status quo? Do we need a cultural Zad, a zone to defend free expression? Like I always do before accepting any invitation from a cultural institution, I went to the website and looked at its 'partners', a wall of corporate logos greeted me. There

was KPMG: world leaders in accounting – with their speciality of helping their clients, such as big oil companies like Total and Gazprom, numerous arms manufacturers and worse, to find tax havens, little utopias for the rich to avoid sharing their billions. There were local banks and the cherry on the cake: JCDecaux, one of world's largest outdoor advertising companies. Advertising corporations are perhaps the greatest polluters and corporate controllers of public space. As our friends, the art activists at Brandalism, say: "Corporate advertising influences every aspect of our modern lives: from how we feel about ourselves; our bodies; our understandings of gender, race and class; through to our perceptions of others and the world we live in. Advertising doesn't simply sell us products – it shapes our expectations of how meaning should be produced in life."

Key to Nero Culture, is this practice of artwashing. It is the use of art by toxic corporations to clean their public image by associating with progressive culture. The festival itself thus becomes part of the infrastructure of the corporation, a cool PR wing, where openings and cocktail parties can bring new networking opportunities but more importantly where the corporation's violent activities can be forgotten and most importantly forgiven. When we walk through the streets of the festival filled with so much creative joy, no one sees the consequences of the sponsors activities: the art drilling platforms leaking, the flooded villages, the indigenous communities pushed off their expropriated land, the crops failing under the climate chaos, the birds poisoned, the emaciated bodies of the hungry. It's great magic, the art of misdirection.

If our art activism collective, The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, is commissioned or asked to do an action by an institution with sponsors that we find unethical, we normally refuse, not wanting our name and work to be used for artwashing, and always make the refusal public. In some cases we decide to intervene critically, knowing that

its likely to be professional suicide and that we won't be reinvented, but we cannot separate our ethics and our aesthetics, protecting life comes before nourishing our career. In the case of Aurillac I attended because our names were not in the programme (the panellists were invited after the printing) and we thought it was worth opening up the debate at such a key festival.

During the talk I suggested that art could be the most beautiful form of resistance when it becomes a force that recognised the real power of imagination, not as an escape from reality, but as a way to create it. The Zad had taught me how constructing a utopian life against this world, merging the yes and the no, dream and direct action, was the art of the future practiced in the present. 'Direct action', as our friend the anthropologist David Graeber once said, "is ultimately the defiant insistence on acting as if one is already free".

As artists we should desert a culture that lets destructive corporations hide behind the masks of creativity that we carefully construct for them. If we were working in a time of slavery, would we have accepted to do our shows sponsored by the slave trade? Instead of being the fools in the palace, as artists in a time of crisis we should apply our creativity, our expressivity, our playfulness to solutions, not feed the wrecking machines. I had spent 25 years applying what I learnt from theatre and performance to direct action. From recruiting thousands of rebel clowns to recycling hundreds of bikes as tools of street disobedience, from choreographing a carnival of 10,000 masked people taking over London's financial centre to turning a theatre stage into an assembly to decide on the ethics of sabotaging banks, my work has always tried to follow Artaud's call for theatre to be life's double, intense, unmediated and world changing. For me the role of the artist in this war of money against life was always to render rebellion irresistible, to reinvent forms of disobedience, turn our actions into dreams on display, make performance useful again. At the Aurillac festival there was so much knowledge



© Robert Logan - disobedient bike training, COP15 - Copenhagen, 2009

and skill, so much ability to transform public space, tonnes of ways of expressing desire. Yet it felt like it was all caged, in a zoo, actions separate from the real issues at stake, separate from real communities, uprooted from place, ripped from life.

After the talk, I went to see the closing show of the festival, Trans Express' *Cristal Palace*. A crowd of thousands is packed like cattle in between crowd barriers in a town square, above us a monumental chandelier swings from a crane. Acrobats, clowns and musicians adorn it, waltz music becomes techno, the idea is to turn the public space into a ballroom. People stare up into the air, many experience the entire show via their smartphones streaming it, very few dance with the actors in the crowd. The atmosphere is not the wild party announced on the programme. I have been part of collectives that organised large resistance parties in public spaces. 8000 people dancing illegally on a motorway whilst some hidden under giant puppets drill into the tarmac to plant trees. That

was what I called a wild party. As I watch the chandelier rising and falling, like some luxury alien object out of reach of the people, I can't help thinking about the massive forest fires raging that same night in California, Sweden and Indonesia. The spectacle felt so much like the end of a decadent empire.

Of course there are many artists who want to be political, to resist the empire, not just build spectacles for it. But Nero culture makes sure that even they can't materially change anything, that they remain separate from the complexities of designing and choreographing daily life. So we have performances *about* revolutions, acrobatic circus pieces *reflecting* on the apocalypse, a dance show *exploring* migrants drowning, an installation in public space to *speak about* the ravages of debt on the poor, a tightrope show *contemplating* our alienation from the living world. It is a culture which continues to show the world to people, to represent the crisis, make pictures of politics. The audiences love it. Afterwards, those with the

means go to the bars and restaurants with their friends, to discuss and debate the issues that the show unearthed.

"WOW it was so beautiful, so powerful," Andrew says as he pours another glass of wine. "I was so moved," replies Louise, and they begin to talk about the biosphere collapse and the costumes, the special effects, the acting. Isn't this meant to be the pinnacle of their civilisation, the definition of being a good citizen, merging art and democracy, people getting together after a show to debate politics. Isn't that what Ancient Greece was all about?

But it is not political to discuss with a few friends after a show. What was political in Greece was that it was a community (one must not forget that the 'cradle of democracy' excluded women, foreigners and slaves), not individuals which assembled and debated the issues that affected their daily lives directly. The theatre was the place where the community took direct decisions about the running of their lives together and put them into prac-

tice. The show was not a separate thing to contemplate, it was a catalytic part of a long festival combining processions, ceremonies and rituals. Religion, politics and culture was seen as one. There was no word for 'art' as a separate part of life in Ancient Greece.

When Andrew and Louise go to bed after the show that night they feel so good, blessed by culture. But the next morning they go back to work, business as usual. Even in their dreams they cannot imagine that their civilisation, with its ridiculous line

of perpetual progress from Greece to infinity and beyond, is over.

Act 3: After the Plague?



© Jay Jordan - The lighthouse at the ZAD built where they wanted to put the control tower

The Covid-19 virus has been a sudden glitch in the frictionless fiction of the status quo of historical progress, an unexpected yet predicted storm that has combined with all the others to blow everything off course. It's been like a global X-ray machine that has made visible all the deep inequalities of the system and somehow made the scale of this centuries-old explosive cocktail of crises more tangible. The old civilisational model, what we could define as patriarchal Western capitalist modernity, with its binary philosophical foundation in deathly dualisms: mind/body, self/ other, subject/object, nature/culture, matter/spirit, reason/emotion, sentient/non-sentient, female/male, straight/gay, art/life was already crumbling. The blueprint for these destructive binaries was the myth that said 'nature' was the backdrop for the theatre of humanity. A myth that has enabled the extractivist machines to devour human and more-than-human life for profit

everywhere. The virus turned the backdrop into centre stage.

The story for a few centuries was that art not only defined what was human but was civilisation's backbone. André Malraux claimed that without artworks civilisation would crumble "within fifty years", becoming "enslaved to instincts and to elementary dreams". Art turned us away from barbarism. But we know this is a lie; we all know that the officers of the concentration camps went to the opera in the evening after working in the gas chambers, we know that aesthetics and ethics have long been split apart.

The pandemic has certainly been an Anthropause – especially in the spring of 2020 when much of the world's economy shut down. With the consequent lockdowns, human spaces for art and culture and even the bars and restaurants, art's middle class an-

techambers, closed down. We were all forced to reconsider so much. For many in the cultural sector it is as if the world holds its breath, waiting for an after, waiting for a post-pandemic era, dying to get back to normal. As I write, there is a wave of theatre occupations by cultural workers spreading across France, asking for a reopening of their theatres, with the hashtag: #CultureEnDanger. Wars and plagues have a tendency to sabotage prevailing sentiments. Do we really want to return to theatre as normal, in the street or otherwise? Or do we want a shift towards something a lot more adventurous: a culture that turns back towards life, performances that, like ritual, remind us of our ties and our togetherness through mutual transformation.

Leo Tolstoy summarised art as a human activity where someone consciously conveys, by external signs, the feelings they have experienced, and thus infects others with those feelings. But contemporary science increasingly reveals to us what indigenous wisdom has known for so long: that feeling and expression is not the exceptional realm of the human, far from it. From the bower bird who for 50 million years has ground up pigment from fruit pulp seeds and painted his extraordinary bower to perform ritual dances to the humpback whales who rehearse their songs for hours on end, more-than-human beings are freely expressing the joy of being alive, and every cell in our bodies is in some ways doing the same thing, sensing, interpreting and expressing aliveness. Life, from the cells in your eyes to the blue whale in the ocean, is a swarm of entangled sensing and feeling flesh, matter that reveals itself through form.

In a few weeks time, as the spring blossoms in the hedgerows that I see out of my window, a tiny warbler (whose French name, *Hypolaïs polyglotte*, means 'the many tongued harmonious one') will return, with its song that resembles a merger of 90s modern sounds and lo-fi effects from vintage video games. No bigger than my fist it is able to imitate dozens of other birds. It replays samples from species in Europe and Africa, where it winters, into wild mixes. Our civilisation used to say this beautiful song was just an advertising jingle, a soulless soundtrack saying 'come fuck me' or 'fuck off', just another sonic weapon in the battle of biological survival and efficiency. They imagined birds like machines just obeying the dictatorship of DNA, only humans could have souls, and selves, only we could express emotions.

But if the warbler is able to imitate other species, then this mirroring, representing and arranging the replay, suggests to etho-

logists that the bird's behaviour has the ability of abstraction. It experiences that there is self and world and perceives that it can act on this world according to a personal point of view, a sensitive inwardness, a sensing self. Its song isn't a deterministic sequence of cause and effect, but an individual self freely expressing and celebrating its feelings of aliveness.

The civilisational shift that we are living through gorgeously muddles and complexifies every binary: perhaps nature is after all no different from culture, it too is the form that emerges from feeling. "If feeling is a physical force and the expression of this feeling is a physical reality whose meaning motivates organisms to act," writes biologist Andreas Weber, "then we might understand living beings better if we imagine what is happening in the biosphere as, in a way, resembling artistic expression... Art then is no longer what separates humans from na-

ture, but rather it is life's voice fully in us. Its message is that beauty has no function. It is rather the essence of reality."

It is hard to imagine the reality of the world of the writer of instructions for playing the lute, written 700 years ago, which we began this essay with. But it is perhaps even harder to imagine what our descendants might think when they look back at our period in history in 700 years time. If *Homo sapiens* haven't joined the extinction list by then, will they tell stories about a paradigm shift, more profound than the Neolithic and industrial revolutions, when culture turned towards life again and in so doing healed art, put it back together? Perhaps they will sing songs about the artists that deserted the extinction and representation machines, dissolving back into life and becoming real thaumaturges at last – those that reveal the wonders of life.



Jay Jordan (UK) has spent 30 years balancing on the tightrope between art and activism. Infamous for fermenting direct action on bicycles during a climate summit, throwing snowballs at bankers, launching a rebel raft regatta to shut down a power station and refusing to be censored by the BP fossil fuel sponsored Tate Modern, he is labelled as "domestic extremist" by the UK police and a "magician rebellion" by the French press.

He now co-facilitates the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (Labofii) with Isabelle Fremeaux. The Labofii inhabits the ZAD of Notre-dame-des-Landes, where an airport project was abandoned after 50 years of struggle.

Jay Jordan is also the co-founder of Reclaim the Streets and the Clown Army, and co-director/writer of the book/film *Les Sentiers de L'utopie* (La Découverte, 2011).

🌐 <https://labofii.wordpress.com>

ARTISTIC VIEW

ON COUNTRY



Pippa Bailey talks to artist Jacob Boehme about his current project, *Wild Dog*

This piece was written on Wangal Land in the Eora Nation, otherwise known as Sydney. These lands have never been ceded. I pay respect to First Nations Elders and offer solidarity to all Indigenous people in the ongoing struggle for constitutional recognition.

2020 was a devastating year for artists all over the world as the coronavirus pandemic disrupted so much of what we have come to expect as 'normal'. For many, there was already a growing awareness that the way of life we have come to expect is destroying the living world. As an English-Australian 'settler' living on stolen land, the idea of reconnecting with 'the livings' casts a very different shadow when walking alongside artists from the oldest living culture in the world.

We find a moment to yarn via Zoom. The state border between NSW and Victoria is closed again due to a surge in Covid cases, a tiny cluster compared to what is going on in other parts of the world.

Jacob reminds me that he started performing on the streets in the western suburbs of Melbourne as a teenager using physical performance. He later studied puppetry at the Victorian College of the Arts. However, it was his training in dance at NAISDA, the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association, which embedded him in First Nations cultural traditions.

At NAISDA, Jacob learnt traditional performance, connecting dance directly to the place it is from. The students had the benefit of both mainland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers. Through cultural exchange they would learn ceremonies from a specific community throughout

the year and then go to perform it 'on Country'. In this way Jacob learnt a Tiwi Island Creation Ceremony. Preparing to perform on the Tiwi Islands, north of

European context because the ceremony, although it may be built on centuries old traditions, seems more about the achievements of civilisation there rather than carrying a



© The Wild Dog Project

Darwin, the whole community helped to paint up the student's bodies with intricate local designs. The students then performed around a tree, the site of the story, where the dance came from and belonged.

This is what Jacob refers to as ceremonial arts. I fear it doesn't quite translate to the

sense of responsibility in the human relationship to the natural world.

Jacob muses: "Performance in Western street arts has to be big and bold to capture attention and draw people to the show or spectacle. Ceremonial Arts is very different because its purpose is intimate, the

performers are in service to the stories and the place. A Western show is for the audience, but a ceremony is with them, they are playing a crucial part. The deep consideration of place and one's relationship and responsibility to the country, and the stories a country hold, are hugely important."

Wild Dog is Jacob's latest project and likely to be his focus for the next decade. The story of the Dingo is connected to Jacob's bloodlines on the Narangga (Yorke Peninsula) and Kurna (Adelaide) Nations. The story is part of a song line, sometimes known as a dreaming track, that works its way right up through the country from Adelaide to the top of the Northern Territory and over to far North Queensland, traversing over 5000km, where the story appears and reappears in many forms.

"Every Wild Dog song or story that we're tracking has geography. There was a practical natural location directly linked to the story. There is a (body) paint up that is directly linked to that location in that story, and in some cases there are still existing songs and dances that are in a direct relation to that paint up, which is in relation to that story, which is in relationship to that geography."

It is this interconnected relationship between people and other living things shared through story, dance, song and place that sets Indigenous cultures apart. According to Jacob's research, talking to Lore men and women, there are also traces of the Dingo story across other parts of Australia and even amongst Indigenous communities in Papua New Guinea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Vietnam and Southern China, linking to trade routes thousands of years old.

In order to be able to start using this Dingo or Wild Dog story, Jacob had to seek permission from Kurna Elders who will continue to guide and advise the project as it develops. Then in every new Indigenous Country or Nation, and we are talking about dozens of different communities where the song line and story appear, permission must be sought and negotiated with Traditional Owners, Elders and com-



© The Wild Dog Project

munity members, so the story can be told the 'proper way', honouring the people and cultural practices of those places. Dingoes were water diviners and guided ancestors to waterholes and water sources, helping travellers sustain themselves on their journeys. Australia is the driest continent on Earth so this songline is all about survival. In a contemporary context that survival remains a strong imperative for continuing to tell these stories. This is a signifier of Indigenous culture: it crafts people with a humble respect for the past with a sense of liability for the future, very different from the modern artist, preoccupied with their own unique perspective.

First Nations people have proudly fought to maintain their culture despite genocide, violent subjugation and generations of stolen children that enabled colonisers to seize and exploit land, dislocating Indigenous people from Country, identity and sense of belonging. There is a growing awareness that climate change and a crisis of identity in Australia are directly impacted by this history and the ongoing denial of Indigenous knowledges.

"Ancient stories provide clues to what people are responsible for, because humans are not the only creatures reliant on those water sources," Jacob explains. "The ceremonies are there to keep you and the

ecology safe. As an apex predator Dingoes play a vital role in keeping biodiversity in equilibrium."

Jacob enthuses that through *Wild Dog* he is learning much about land and water management, caring for country and layers of different knowledge from agriculture to aquaculture to astrology, as well as how those knowledges have been passed on. The imperative for the project is to explore how this knowledge can continue to be passed on through a mix of ceremonial and contemporary arts, retained through culture. It will connect elders with younger generations. "Technology is likely to play a part, given that is where the mainstream culture is leading us, and we need to make sense of that from an Indigenous perspective."

Wild Dog will be for a wide-ranging audience with information likely to be layered to protect the custodians of the culture. On this journey there are things that even Jacob can't know, because Indigenous cultures have complex systems for knowledge transfer. There are also things he can't know yet, until he has shown that he will act responsibly with the information that he has been entrusted with. "Until I get my black belt, if you want to put it that way," he explains.

"In October, we're bringing nine communities together in Adelaide. That's the start.



Jacob Boehme performing in *Blood On The Dance Floor* © Bryony Jackson

We will be performing a ceremony that exists, recreating a ceremony that may not have existed for a couple of hundred years and turning that into a performance that can be received by the witnesses that show up. These ceremonies need to be accessible at some level to everyone, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Being able to straddle both worlds and honour ceremonial practice is complicated and it will take as long as it takes. That could mean an event taking three days? It won't be bound to a 60 minute 'showtime'."

Jacob and I agree that the spectacle approach to making street art is as seductive as marketing spin and easy to fall into. Ironically, it's even easier when 'ceremony' is increasingly being co-opted for non-Indigenous events. Jacob knows all too well the trap of creating ceremony for the non-Indigenous cultural elite and how this undermines its cultural importance.

Jacob thanks Covid-19 for stalling him. Unable to travel he was in lockdown for al-

most eight months in Melbourne, brewing ideas about how *Wild Dog* and its process will unfold. Covid has stopped him running towards an outcome. Part of the purpose of this work is to revive and enliven knowledge that has been broken. And if that's where the art stands now in this country, reconnecting and deepening its relationship to place, adapting cultural practices to honour old ways, in order to find new pathways ahead, then I think humans here stand half a chance of surviving the ecological emergency.



Jacob Boehme (Australia) is a Melbourne born and raised artist of the Narangga and Kurna Nations, South Australia. He describes himself as a multidisciplinary theatre maker and choreographer, creating work for the stage, screen and festivals. He is working between what we refer to as 'Western' performing arts and his Indigenous cultural heritage. Jacob is an outspoken cultural leader when leadership is in short supply.

For more on Jacob Boehme's work and *Wild Dog* see:

🌐 <https://www.jacobboehme.com.au/about>



Pippa Bailey (Australia) grew up on Wangal Land in Sydney, starting her career as a performer and reporter/producer with SBSTV. Pippa spent many years in the UK. She was Artistic Director for The Museum Of on London's South Bank and also for oh!art @Oxford House; an Associate Director with The World Famous - innovate company of pyrotechnicians and also produced the Total Theatre Awards at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2007-12. She is on the Advisory Board of IETM - International Performing Arts Network and a board member of Theatre Network NSW. Pippa was Director of ChangeFest 19 and is passionate about culture leading on climate action to create a fair and sustainable future.

INCLUSION THROUGH ART

FOOD FOR THOUGHTS

THE MESSAGE OF THE MEDIUM

By Anand Rajaram

In thinking about diversity, inclusion and identity in the art world what can we learn from the forms themselves – from mask and puppetry to clown and virtual reality?
Actor and artist Anand Rajaram on theatre and belief.

OM SHREE MAHAKALIKAYAE NAMAH KALI MA IS THE SUPREME POWER.

Once upon a time an ascetic named Raktabija stood on one leg in a forest, palms together, arms extended upwards, an antenna to the universe, face to the cosmos in meditation, for so long that he became a tree.

The concentrated prayer violently shook celestial abodes. God Shiva offered him a boon if he ceased. Raktabija asked that for every drop of his blood that touched the ground, 100 clones of him would appear, whose spilled blood would also yield clones. The boon was granted. Raktabija became War, his ambitious ignorant ego birthing more ignorance whenever challenged. Soon, this warrior had spawned an army of millions, threatening all creation.

In the celestial sphere, from Goddess Durga's *shakti* (power of life) beamed the divine projection of Kali Ma (Mother). With many arms bearing weapons, Kali Ma engaged simultaneously in multiple battles, while her long tongue caught the blood before it hit the ground to propagate. Rakta-



The Ashta-Matrikas (Kali Ma bottom right) battle copies of the demon Raktabija.

bija and his army were vanquished. Kali Ma defeats ego by using her tongue, which we channel through creative voice, discarding the prison of 'I, body', to swim the ocean of 'we, story'.

We are stories manifested in human form. When we tell stories, we become consciousness birthing life. As we live, we make stories to mark our time. When we die, we live on through the stories we leave.

Stories also cast us in world views that label us the enemy. We temper them when we channel the power of Kali Ma's tongue.

As artists, we are guides via art to a deeper plane to encounter Maya, the illusory nature of reality, the curtain obscuring divine vision, moving from translucence to transparency. As performers, we offer the visceral experience of difficult lessons without risk, awakening wisdom and empathy.

As storytellers, our central job is to create empathic response, provoking the audience to imagine a world it hasn't considered. The problem is, we haven't been challenging audiences, we've been catering to their limited perspective. Yet, our imagination can conjure infinite lives.

In Canada, as in much of the world, we celebrate multiculturalism. What is 'culture'? The colonial definition centres on non-Eurocentrism. So, checkpoints of identity are set up along geographic borders, defining people by broad categories of language, clothing, race, divergence from the dominant Eurocentric paradigm. The 'multi' is all extrinsic markers, how we see each other, not ourselves.

Imagine identical twins, similar in look, socioeconomic status, family dynamic. One twin loves table tennis, the other badminton. Are these not cultural activities? The definition of multiculturalism, then, is pluralistic celebration, the definition of diversity. It could relate to language, race, clothes, but these solely external parameters are narrow and limiting. We are all multicultural because we have free will. As we change the stories projected on us, replace them with our own narratives, we edge closer to immortality. This is the eternal struggle of the marginalised, the crushing ego death of leaving the world ignored as if you never existed.

Through performance we transmute our identity and curate that of others, having audiences not only bear witness to our transformation, but powerfully engage in a suspension of disbelief. We change their perception, present the world anew. After all, empathy shapes our perception. And stories engender all human civilisation.

So if stories liberate, enlighten, teach, emancipate, and guide us, if hearing a variety of perspectives increases our omniscient understanding, why do we struggle with diversity and inclusion? We are multifaceted beings living in an illusory world of stories. The tension of mortality is the most common link between us; that should be the foundation of our identity. But, since we have no control over death, we struggle to control life, wrestling at the heart of the dominant

paradigm against ideological erasure. Who wants to be forgotten?

Our struggle with diversity and inclusion centres around power brokers unwilling or unable to see the problem. Inclusion is complicated. To be included suggests a centre to be brought into. As such, it asks of those outside that centre, 'Where is home?' To be home asking that is very different from having left home responding. To understand this paradigm is to appreciate your sense of home, based in your own identity, is at odds with the dominant paradigm, so to try to bring people into the circle is to reorient home for them, not change the dominant paradigm. It puts the merit on those making the effort towards inclusivity without really recognising the profound challenge of those who are marginalised and must assimilate.

My parents and I were born in India. They'd spent more than a third of their lives there before moving to Canada, maintaining an idealised memory of 'back home', where the ways of the 'old country' were superior to the 'lazy, loose morality' of this new world. Every trip back, the India they knew had dissipated further until they realised India was never their home. They weren't just outsiders in Canada, but disconnected from the daily lives of everyone they'd known for 29 (Amma) and 39 (Appa) years, outsiders to home. Time is the country to which you can never return.

There are many approaches toward inclusion and diversity, all have merits and missteps. The most troubling may be that, as one form of discrimination is replaced by the perception of another, we are sowing the seeds for an embattled future. Resources are still limited, just reallocated. We're swinging the capitalist pendulum, not destroying the metronome.

All effort is progressive, evolution dictates we'll learn to fit in to survive, and there is no one path forward to a better world. I'm thankful so many opportunities now exist for societally disabled, IBPOC (Indigenous, Black and People Of Colour) LGBTQI+ and female-identifying artists because I know this inclusivity will grow our collective consciousness rapidly, jet fuel in the rocket to enlightenment.

My critique is not of any one effort, but the resting on laurels, the perception we are made morally superior by these new policies without addressing how we were morally bankrupt before. This is not to harp on the past, but to realise the best intentions of that earlier age didn't see it's own complicity, then as now breeding roomfuls of elephants. One day they may trumpet war.

For all that institutions may do, much may be gained investing in self-sustainable entrepreneurship. My sense of agency, of empowerment, begins at my creativity. I am the seed, the tree. An environment that nourishes me will reap the benefit of my fruit. Institutional mentorships and apprenticeships are like sitting in the cockpit, never flying. Ending in self-sustaining agency would be achieving the potential of the programme.

A demonstration of our present blinders is that all language around equity and opportunity centre on those identity markers earlier named. What is the identity marker of class, the hashtag? Has it been branded? Co-opted by advertising? Inspired PR campaigns innovating casting and distribution? Do we even have a word that isn't clinical, like 'disenfranchised', dehumanising, like 'homeless', insulting like 'beggar' or 'tramp' or 'hobo'? Why would they not be included in wokeness? Because of survival. Resource allocation. Not Capitalism the system, but capitalism the mindset, which thrives on maintaining the status quo, dominance by wealth.

Class is not centre-stage right now because our blinders are narrow: only so many issues at once. We need to extrapolate from our current conversation centred around our 'wokeness' to ask about the place of class struggle in the larger argument. What we are seeing with affirmative action programmes is inclusivity of marginalised communities across middle/upper class strata, but not a consideration of class divides, the danger being that once we have reached some sense of equity in representation across all other groups, the historically marginalised working class will continue to be marginalised. The question of why we struggle with inclusion and diversity may be answered by looking at who is not currently served by the changes being proposed.

What are the blinders we have in theatre? Well, how actively do we encourage new forms of expression? What styles of performance are disenfranchised from the mainstream and which artist practitioners are thereby economically oppressed?

Thinking of the audience, what modes have they never experienced? Artists working in puppetry, mask, mime, clown, performance art, dance, and other 'non-naturalistic' modalities are theatre incarnate. A play may be made into a film without a radical reimagining, but apart from puppetry, none of these other modes can.

Most artists I know who work exclusively in these modes struggle financially. And yet they continue, committed. With mainstream engagement, theatres developing relationships with these groups and creating presentation opportunities could offer a wider variety of styles, attracting a larger demographic who may not enjoy 'naturalism', but would adore an improvisational mask dance. Non-verbal work would diminish language challenges, reach refugee and immigrant communities. The democratisation of theatre is not only in the body represented on and off-stage, or the class of audience offered discount or free tickets, it's in the breadth of imagination four walls can encompass. And not just the playground of styles curated, but the artists who make their living by them.

Puppetry, mask, mime and clown are theatre incarnate because they invite the imagination in immediately. The performer must make the audience suspend disbelief quickly. If they can do that and maintain it, they are masters of the craft. These forms demonstrate the power of an audience to accept any given circumstance, at least initially. They show that if theatres had cast as diversely before as they are doing now they would've been at the forefront of change, socially relevant and engaged, not struggling to build new audiences. Theatre has the power to shape an audience's belief, so the theatre must first check its own conviction. Does the theatre believe it? Is diversity and inclusion important?

Also, these forms have the ability to transform identity markers. Anyone can play



Augmented Reality Masks © Anand Rajaram

anything in a mask or through a puppet. Declare to the audience you are a penguin and, so long as you believe it, they'll recognise the penguin in themselves. The democratisation of the theatre, and the liberation of both audience and theatre makers, can be found here, in commitment to the act of transcendence beyond perceived reality.

Freedom to mask identity connects these forms and XR, where spectators also abandon their physical reality. Digital theatre creation is not yet financially accessible for all to participate in or watch, but it is close. Besides the significant economic challenges, XR can be the site of a great equalising. XR is the catch-all phrase for AR, augmented reality, VR, virtual reality, and MR, mixed reality. XR combines the visual aesthetic of produced film and the immediacy of live theatre. This new art space sits at the nexus of community building, accessibility, and economic sustainability. XR, a digital form, with digital distribution, worldwide border-free artistic collaborations in a communal Zoom, accessible to all, funded by the crowd, is a wave, coming.

XR is more than just another art form. It demands a different engagement from au-

diences and performers. Audiences watch a Zoom show with their camera and mic off, check their phone, walk away from the computer, make lunch, not restricted as they would be in a theatre. Audiences wearing VR headsets are totally restricted, but unlike in a theatre, no one has dragged them there against their will to be snoring fifteen minutes in.

As theatre is an actor's medium (no one to edit between the actor and audience), film a director's medium (in the edit, the power), and TV a writer's medium (the showrunner as storyteller), so XR is a spectator's medium.

Every aspect of an XR show is curated to the spectator experience, not only aesthetic, but duration and platform. The spectator has complete agency. More than this, it's live and dynamic. The spectator can shape their own experience. Actor performance is only one aspect, interactivity is the key. Freedom of the spectator to comment or participate in the show is central. So the performance of the audience is the heart of the planning. The methods of building audience patronage will radically shift, since the subscriber base no longer needs to be geographically local.

The curation of a global audience invites global stories, global collaborators. Each creator/performer brings their own local influences and styles, the emergent performance forms developing as rapidly as TikTok trends. To understand the shift in performance style, we may look to the past, to ancient traditional forms still in practice, like the 250 year-old Kerala art form, *kathakali*, developed from the 2000 year-old *koodiyattam*.

Traditionally it was only performed at night inside temples, the performer's torch the only light, illuminating stunning make-up. The stories, mythic tales of Gods. Comedies, dramas, with morals and a codified gestural vocabulary. The *mudras*, or hand gestures, a kind of sign language, the hands 'speaking' the dialogue as singers sing. The performers don't speak in the show. The costume is spectacular and the face paint takes time to apply. For all the attention to visual presentation, it's curious that there is no focus on the audience sitting in front of them.

I attended a performance, saw people sleeping, walking around, texting, eating, kids playing. The ground beneath the performers' bare feet was laid with only a blanket, covering dirt not cleared of rocks. They didn't mind the pain. The crying baby, ringing cell-phone, immaterial. The low attendance or distracted focus was the least concern. I asked how they weren't troubled by any of that distraction. They said the training is to not consider the audience at all. They'd light the wick at the beginning (connecting to ancestors), then perform for that lamp light, the tradition, and Godhead. I asked if that meant they don't really modulate or vary the perfor-

mance, they said no, they perform for God, the audience invisible.

The essence of this type of performance is selflessness, surrendering to the tradition, performing with no feedback. This is diametrically opposed to Western performance best summed up in the story of Laurence Olivier who asked an actor, "You know why we do this?" then leaned close to their face, "LOOK AT ME LOOK AT ME LOOK AT ME!" The ideological shift in XR for performers from performing live for those physically present to performing for a 'God camera' with none of that live audience feedback is a significant one. It's bound to impact both performance styles and the spectatorship's intimacy and agency. As the advent of film created a new style of 'natural' acting which then impacted the theatre in writing, performance and presentation, the impact of XR on theatre remains to be seen. My belief and assumption is there will be a departure in the theatre from 'naturalism', but replaced by what? My best guess would be more heightened reality, lucid-dream magic realism, based on XR's influence.

The possibilities of the future of theatre post-pandemic will be aided by the development of XR. Though it's an independent art form, not theatre, the act of gathering live (digitally or in person) will be changed. And theatre that integrates AR will for a time be the cutting edge.

XR accomplishes an aspect of what Kali Ma tantric devotees hope to experience, transcendence from the physical realm. The body

and mind are still entwined, but the mind gets trained to see that reality is not immutable; imagine what pure consciousness, liberated from the constraints of the body would feel like.

This makes Kali Ma a Goddess for this age. As social media increases our connectivity, our interactions, emboldens our perspectives, silos our ideologies, in its most destructive state, posts are drops of the blood of Raktabija, armies of followers gathering silently.

The reason we struggle with diversity and inclusion is analogous to a news story about a teenager who invented a cheap way to desalinate water, otherwise a very costly process. He said all the research had been on how to extract the salt from the water. His method began by identifying what the percentage of salt was to water. It was 10%. He thought why focus on the 10%, not the 90%, and added a safe for consumption binding agent to the water to bond with the salt. The salt clumped together and was discarded and this teenager may have solved one of the most pressing issues of our time, water scarcity. If that which makes us different is only 10%, honour that difference, but strategise towards that 90% common ground. That's equality not exceptionalism.

**OM SHREE MAHAKALIKAYEE NAMAH
KALI MA IS THE SUPREME POWER.**

What is supreme power? Ultimate consciousness, complete connection with all sentient beings, outside of time and space. We now have a tool for practicing.



Anand Rajaram (Canada) is an actor, writer, director, puppeteer, mask performer, teacher and performance artist based in Toronto.

🌐 www.anandrajaram.com

ARTISTIC VIEW

WALLS OF STORIES



Interview with Aravani Art Project collective by Arundhati Ghosh

Founded in Bangalore in 2016, Aravani Art Project is a women and trans women art collective that creates colourful — and sometimes gigantic — wall paintings. Arundhati Ghosh speaks to members of the collective about the stories behind and in the artworks.

Arundhati: I've been following the work of Aravani Art Project for many years now, but I'm keen to learn from you how this group came about. How did it happen?

Purushi: So, I was working with the filmmaker Tabitha Breese on a documentary about the transgender community in India and Poornima was part of it. Poornima and I shared a lot of special moments and we became very good friends. We talked about the arts and about this idea of wall painting. I didn't understand much, but had so much trust in her that I invited all my friends from the community one day to paint a wall at KR market in Bangalore. It all unfolded from there; we have built this group on a strong foundation of friendship and trust.

Poornima: Our collective, or I'd like to call it family, has grown organically and has been blessed with connections across the world. TRUST is the most important component of this collective. The people from the transgender community in India form a strong network and once they are aware of the work and its premises, it becomes easier for us to trust each other.

Arundhati: Yes, trust is such an important part of this work, as well as our journeys together, right? So how did you decide to do what you do?



© Aravani Art Project

Poornima: As part of that documentary project, we filmed transgender people answering questions on camera about their life, their joys and sorrows. Off camera, I found time to bond with them and it was effortless! Something about my own mental health and the situation I was in with my personal life allowed me to empathise and heal by listening to their stories of bravery and hope. It felt surreal to me that our society was losing out on learning from these incredible people. After being part of such a project for almost three and a half years, I ex-

perienced extreme guilt and felt the urge to do something for the wellness of the people from the community. I felt so cut off from my own family and friends who were not able to understand the people from this community. I felt a sense of responsibility to do my bit.

Arundhati: What does making art mean to you? How does it make you feel?

Raji: I have always liked art from a young age, but I never thought I would end up painting



© Aravani Art Project

again as a trans woman. As a young boy, my interest in the arts was not something I could pursue. But now art is helping me slowly come out of my depression. I keep thinking of the days I've spent painting large walls in public with all my friends from the collective, or sometimes painting canvases alone at home, it just makes me come alive. I feel peaceful when I create art amidst all the chaos.

Arundhati: I admire the range of stories that I see in your work. What kind of stories do you like telling through the artwork?

Sadhna: In the early stages, our artworks were very focused on colour and shape, just like pieces from an art class, except we were all learning by painting directly on the wall. Our visual style took shape with our first mural in Bangalore. We started by painting faces/portraits of trans people because we felt that it was a face that so-

ciety was shunning. Our work has moved through so many different turns. I love the style and the place we've arrived at. Our art conveys stories of trans people, their rights, what they love, what they have dreamed of, their views on and anecdotes about society, their history, culture, tradition, sometimes their friends, neighbours or allies. We intersperse these with lots of flora, fauna and patterns that are inspired by our beautiful country.

Arundhati: In your work I also see stories of other people who are often marginalised or made invisible in the city. I see daily wage labourers, sanitation workers, bus drivers, construction workers — people who build the city, make it run, and yet have so little claim on it. Also I see the elderly, children, animals and those with disability — again people the city often forgets about.

Poornima: When we initially began our work, we had to create a visual language and most importantly listen to and voice the ideas of the transgender community. Slowly, as we began to gain momentum with our work, we realised that we could move into spaces that involved other communities who are also marginalised. For example: when we chose to paint at Sonagachi in Kolkata, it was clear that we had to collaborate with the women there — sex workers and trans sex workers. Another example would be extending our art-based approach to gender sensitivity to schools. We've collaborated with organisations that work with women who have survived domestic violence, acid attack survivors, people with HIV, and migrant children.

Arundhati: Do you face any challenges to making public work?

Purushi: The challenges with our first wall were internal and concerned the depiction of a trans person. The debate was around the politics of representing a trans woman with or without facial hair. It was an interesting challenge. A lot of times the public look at us with doubt when we are working, or when a wall has just begun. They always look at us in a way that we know is teasing us. By the time we finish the wall their perspective on us changes completely. This gives me immense pride. We've had some problems with the noise, weather and traffic of public space. Sometimes it's tough to block it out and work. A fundamental challenge which is positive is the height and the scope of our work.

Arundhati: Your community is severely marginalised, humiliated, and denied the dignity we all deserve in society. Does being artists change that? Are you still subjected to discrimination? Please share a few stories if you would like to...

Several answer this one: Too many to write down! But as a collective we believe that every small step is important. Being an artist is itself almost to be an outcast in a country such as ours right now. We can all celebrate and feel alone together, perhaps.

Arundhati: May I please share one story that I heard from Poornima which made me so sad and angry at the same time? You had been invited to present your work at a venue, but when you arrived the people at the gate didn't allow you in because you were trans women. You were the special guests and yet socially you were looked down upon. I felt so hurt thinking how hard it must be for you to negotiate all of this and yet work so joyously. When I see the amazing colours in your work, I hope I can learn to do that. Tell me, has making art and being artists changed your lives in any way?

Thara: To be an artist with Aravani has been a great support. Especially during the pandemic, as an artist I have received the support to survive and sail through the difficult times and I am very happy about that. My life as an artist has made me gain respect around my neighbourhood. Everyone knew me and always associated me with begging and sex work; I have stopped almost all of that now. I have a lot more to learn and practise as an artist. But I'm really living a nice life because of art.

Arundhati: Are there also stories of hope where people have embraced you and your work?

Poornima: Whenever we receive a query for a project it's either Sadhna or I who decides what kind of project it is. We often ask them the reason why they would like to work with us, in order to understand their thought process. More often people approach us because of the way our art looks and not because it is a collective of trans and cis people, which is already a moment to celebrate for us.

Arundhati: Is working within corporate or institutional environments different to working on public art out in the open? Do you feel safe in both places?

Aditi: It's not really different. Each has rules and policies. Both have a scope of work,

tasks assigned each day, deadlines to meet. While the corporate spaces are safe, with HR governing the office environment and keeping everyone in check, in public places it's the team who keeps an eye on one another and there are bystanders who sometimes become helpers/saviours. In both cases, one has to keep to herself before anything else.

Arundhati: What have some of the stories been about how the work is accepted and celebrated by people?

Poornima: The sheer fact that we have lived through six years of the collective by working on all kinds of projects that were

commercial, community based, or deeply engaged with the public, including digital media projects, book covers, and almost 60 wall artworks in public spaces, big corporations, schools, hospitals, etc. This is enough proof that we are celebrated for our work, for the people who do it and more.



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Aravani Art Project recently finished a large-scale mural in Bangalore city for the Museum of Art and Photography, and are now working on several projects across Bangalore and Chennai.

🌐 www.aravaniartproject.com



Arundhati Ghosh (India) is the Executive Director at India Foundation for the Arts (IFA). She has 20 years of experience in arts philanthropy. She is a recipient of the Global Fundraiser Award from Resource Alliance, the Chevening Clore Leadership Award, and the Gurukul Scholarship for Leadership and Excellence at the London School of Economics. She speaks and writes on arts and philanthropy for leading Indian and international cultural networks including On the Move, The Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC), Kultura Nova Foundation, among others.

ALLOWING A PUBLIC SPACE FOR SOLIDARITY AND CREATION

FOOD FOR THOUGHTS

ARTISTIC PRACTICE, RADICAL CARE

By Roselle Pineda

The pandemic has intensified inequality and insecurity, but also created a space to rethink our underlying structures. If others are seizing the moment, why can't artists?

Curator and artist Roselle Pineda on communities coming together and the liveable life.

When the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March 2020, the world as we knew it stopped. Many nations went into lockdown and we were forced to confine ourselves to safe spaces. Even then we faced an uncertain future in which, if we survived, most of us would

have to withstand a global economic crisis. It is as if *the wind got up in the night and took our plans away*, as the Chinese proverb goes, and we suddenly found ourselves in a strange moment and space of perennial waiting.

The precarity that the pandemic has hurled us into has forced us to experience two

opposite extremes in time and space – that of standing still, as we become more and more confined to our own little spaces and pockets of time; and that of hypervelocity, as the number of infections and deaths, and the sheer amount of information we discover about the virus, changes at unprecedented speed. A very tangible panic has crept in as the foundation of the current world order, entrenched in accumulated capital, begins to crumble, falling to crush the most vulnerable and marginalised.

Indeed, the pandemic has intensified what Judith Butler in her book *Notes Toward A Performative Theory of Assembly* refers to as the 'falling away' of strongholds and support systems with/in our society. Now more than ever, we are confronted with news of people losing their jobs; with the disenfranchised being stripped of the choice to stay home because their lives depend on a daily wage; with the situation of immigrants, who make up a large percentage of frontline workers in the pandemic, facing an even more precarious situation with regard to their residency statuses; and with the actions of right wing and/or fascist regimes who weaponise the pandemic to suppress dissent and set up more authoritarian



A community garden run by SAKA - Artist Alliance for Genuine Land Reform and Rural Development.
© Courtesy of SAKA

regimes. Truly, as the Argentine philosopher Miguel Benasayag has said, the pandemic has become a 'tyrant's dream'.

In my own country, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has been one of the most unsuccessful leaders in dealing with the pandemic. While he and his lackeys hold on to their seat of power through widespread militarism, his regime has failed to provide a comprehensive plan of action against the pandemic at the same time as it has lead the country into an even more dismal economic state, with COVID-related debt now in the trillions of PH pesos and counting. Worse, he organises his 'combat COVID-19' programmes under a quasi-martial law, crushing debate, dissent, and resistance against the regime. Not only are the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) placed in charge of these civic health programmes, they are also implemented alongside Duterte's counterinsurgency plans and policies. These are characterised by numerous instances of coercion and harassment, as well as by raids and killings of artists, activists, community workers, lawyers, researchers, and others deemed 'dissenters' or 'communist terrorists'.

This worsening situation on the ground calls on us to resist, to gather, to assemble, and to protest against positions of precarity. But how do we protest when the world is at a standstill? Where do we find a space for progressive action when we are in the space in between? How do we gather and forge solidarity when maintaining distance is today's form of solidarity?

Perhaps the radical potential lies in recognising that while precarity is unevenly distributed, it is, unfortunately, still a universal condition. As such, our shared experiences of dispossession could be regarded as points of intersection and solidarity, not only within our local contexts and communities but also globally – a global unity of the dispossessed. The radical potential of the space in between lie in transforming this global unity of the dispossessed into a kind of radical care, realising what Butler describes as an interdependent form of



SAKA community kitchens help to address food insecurity. © Courtesy of SAKA

cohabitation, where one form of life is not in a position of privilege over another and life is 'livable' for all, not just for the privileged few. The radical potential of our creative practice is perhaps to find, as Jacques Rancière puts it in his *Dissensus*, "new ways of making sense of the sensible [and] new configurations between the visible and the invisible [...] between the audible and the inaudible, new distributions of space and time – [and] new bodily capacities". The use of art and performance to reimagine, reframe, reinvent, and find new ways of seeing and doing gives us a potent practice to make sense of our space in between.

The performative body has the polemical potential inherent in its materiality and the way it occupies, carves out and intervenes in spaces, struggling against various forms of invisibility and disenfranchisement to create what Hannah Arendt calls 'spaces of appearances'. Indeed, while performance has been one of the art sectors most affected by the pandemic, it was also one of the first to respond to the 'invisibility' that the pandemic trapped us in by creating artistic productions in and during quarantine. Whether these responses came in the form of montages of ballerinas dancing from home, musicians giving lockdown concerts, or festivals and other performing companies shifting to virtual platforms, they were powerful demonstrations of artistic resilience and the right to present, perform and

appear. They also sparked timely conversations on the precarious situation that the creative sectors faced even before the pandemic. These 'performance practices from home' were not only expressions of the artists' untiring commitment to their craft; they also gave us, the audience, a glimpse of their domestic environments and ways of living. In these documentations of private space made present in the (virtual) public sphere, we have both borne witness to a beautiful archive and deluge of creativity of and from confined spaces, and seen how these confined spaces have taken their toll on performing artists and on all of us.

These conversations, which started quite intimately with artists documenting their lockdown lives, have also taken shape in various virtual gatherings that focus on the economy and ecology of artistic practices, and the power structures that support them. During the international symposium 'Conversations on Curation and Performance in the Time of Halting and Transformation', spearheaded by Performance Curators Initiatives (PCI) and held in October 2020, Canadian dance scholar, curator, and educator Dena Davida spoke of the numerous ongoing meetings happening in North America regarding the future of the performing arts field. Mostly attended by artists, presenters, venue directors, curators, scholars, and programmers, these meetings have discussed a range of concerns, from

raising funds for the most badly affected workers and practitioners in the performing arts field, to the systemic inequality caused by the devaluation and mishandling of public funds and the practice of 'gatekeeping' in their distribution.

Another thread has been the radical transformation of dance and performing arts as a field of study, with dance programmes adapting to the challenges raised by recent social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter, as well as to the aesthetic shifts brought about by the pandemic. All of this debate is held with a view to emerging from the pandemic with a more caring and humane outlook, as well as proposals for restructuring current institutions and support systems in the performing arts.

The PCI 2020 Symposium's recurring provocation to forge a 'curatorship of care' (founded on the Latin term *curare* from which the practice of curation evolved) invokes the inherent relationality of performance by extending the curatorial mandate of 'care for materials' towards 'care for relationships'. Performance has always been a practice of relation, whether that's relating to a perceived audience, to participants within the practice, or even to non-human elements such as space, site, atmosphere and sound. This practice of relation is a potent way to understand, navigate and imagine what a curatorship of care might be like, as well as to think about how this curatorship of care might be transformed into a model of radical care that can expand outside performance practice, forming what Judith Butler writes about as an ethical obligation to care for as well as be responsible for one another.

At FRESH STREET #4, keynote speaker and festival organiser Sepehr Sharifzadeh spoke of the open communication within his own neighbourhood in Tehran to illustrate a kind of model for this ethical obligation to care and be responsible for each other. Sharifzadeh described how neighbours would regularly check in on each other, on how they were doing, on what they needed, even before the pandemic. This practice of caring for thy neighbour has been a widespread phenomenon during the pandemic. We have seen expressions of camaraderie

and support among neighbours, as well as collective action and organising in support of community needs. In the Philippines, for instance, the artist solidarity group SAKA or Sama-samang Artista para sa Kilusang Agraryo ('Artist Alliance for Genuine Land Reform and Rural Development') has focused on the tending of community gardens and community kitchens as a means of collective action against food insecurity in poor, communities that have been badly hit by the pandemic. The current phenomenon of community pantries in the Philippines, started by the artist Patricia Non as a small and simple pantry stocking basic goods such as rice, vegetables, fruits, alcohol, and face

However, these community pantries quickly got on the radar of the fascist Duterte government, and within several days the initiators were 'red-tagged' (labelled as being left-leaning, subversive, communist, or terrorist) by the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, leading to the closure of several community pantries and the profiling and harassment of the people who started them.

In this instance, we could infer that because the current systems in place are corrupt to the core, and indeed staunchly committed to maintaining our positions of precarity and dispossession, the practice of radical care



Maginhawa Community Pantry - one of a growing number across the Philippines. © Maginhawa

masks, along with a sign reading "Magbigay ayon sa kakayahan, kumuha ayon sa pangangailangan", a rough Filipino translation of the famous quote, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" popularised by Karl Marx, has spread like wildfire throughout the whole nation, growing from a single community pantry to about a hundred in the span of a week.

also demands political action. Our ethical obligations towards one another also mean engaging in a struggle for collective rights that will minimise, if not dispel, conditions of precarity for all, whether it be economic, mental, emotional, environmental, or political. As such, radical care must go beyond small communities and beyond our neighbourhoods. As a pastor from Indiana,

Thomas Horrocks, quipped, “loving our neighbours means dismantling the systems that oppress them”.

This point was picked up at FRESH STREET by Chiara Gusmeroli, who underlined the need for an unwavering commitment to act, participate, speak out, negotiate, assemble, and claim the “right to appear”. “Coming together,” she says, is just the beginning; we must “keep together” and “work together” to continue to pressure the powers-that-be. It is our ethical obligation and collective responsibility to struggle in, with, and against precarity.

This call for collective responsibility and the forging of a collective voice is one that is now sounding throughout the world. In the ‘Globe Occupy: Remake the World/Remake the Globe’ event held in Rome, Italy from 14-19 April 2021, over a year after the pandemic was declared, the collective voice of the Art, Entertainment, and Culture Workers’ Network, was loud and clear. Today we say: It’s enough! [...] This stratified and heterogeneous city assembly, today

occupies a public space to strongly affirm the need to rethink a sector, which was in crisis well before the health emergency [...] This is the time to intertwine the struggles, to get out of invisibility, to speak out [...] We do not need to reopen the theaters and cultural spaces, if the conditions to do so, in safety for everyone, do not exist. The indiscriminate so called restart penalizes the most fragile experiences and fuels competition, aggravating an already collapsing system. Choosing between health and work is not a questionable option. We need to structurally rethink the conditions of our lives and our work, giving the possibility to all the subjectivities that exist in the city, to imagine models that are sustainable, based on collaborative bottom up practices, also replicable elsewhere. What we have been experiencing on our skin in recent months is only the inevitable collapse of a system that is unsustainable for all of us, which today concerns those who are more fragile and will soon end up desertifying the entire landscape. We claim the right to a continuous basic income, to a paid and permanent training,

because time of research and study is work. [We] need new social rights and new protections, we need tools against discrimination and inequalities between subjects; a need [for] an access to art and culture for everyone is clearly emerging. We defend the informality of the spaces of artistic and cultural production currently excluded from the financing circuits, and we reiterate the need for a revision of the public financing criteria. From this public place, which lives of a strange combination between public and private, today we take word. Today we enter to go out and we invite you to do it with us, to build a collective discourse in which everyone can recognize themselves and immediately begin to imagine together new paradigms, new statutes, new social rights for precarious, autonomous, intermittent work. We invite single workers, artists, technicians, operators, companies, artistic and cultural institutions, theaters, festivals, research centers, formal and informal spaces to support our struggle.

Let us heed the call. The time is now.



Roselle Pineda (The Philippines) is an educator, researcher, curator, dramaturge and cultural worker. She is the founder, artistic director and curator of the Aurora Artist Residency Program and Space (AARPS) and the Performance Curators Initiatives (PCI). She teaches at the Department of Arts Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman; and is currently taking her PhD in Creative Arts on practice-led creative research and community arts at the University of Wollongong, Australia.

🌐 http://wikipacewomen.org/wpworg/en/?page_id=5023

PUBLIC SPACE, PRIVATE LIVES



Interview with Azadeh Ganjeh by Sepehr Sharifzadeh

If the safety of the individual depends on the health of the collective, how does public space (and performance in it) contribute to a cohesive society?

Producer Sepehr Sharifzadeh speaks with the Iranian playwright and director Azadeh Ganjeh, whose work in site-specific and immersive theatre sees public space as a collective extension of private life.

How did you enter this realm of theatre in public space?

I began my education in civil engineering but I was working in theatre even then, while I was studying. There was a general belief that you couldn't live off of art, so on the recommendation of my family I studied civil engineering to have another source of revenue that would allow me to work in art freely, without money as an obstacle or influence. As for public space, I always liked to wander the city. I love the city and I love to be free there – something which, in many ways, is not always possible. But then I discovered that it's possible to perform in the street. Theatre led me to work in urban spaces because it was important for me that theatre reach everyone.



Always passes by you... © Roozbeh Vatankhah

In the early 2000s, performing outdoors was not a common thing to do in Iran. We did have some street theatre, but mainly within the off programmes of larger festivals, and the very spirit of street theatre – political voices – had been taken away from it, making it more or less a pedagogic theatre. We lacked polyphony in our street theatre. By 'we' I mean different parts, or classes, of society. We were able to go to the theatre and there we'd feel somewhat intellectual, feel that we were connected, that we were a collective, but it was a collective that wasn't really growing or bringing in new members.

So I thought both that we had to reach other people, and that we shouldn't limit ourselves to being inside theatres. Going to the street and performing in public places was also very important for me because my work was connected to social issues. I wanted to talk about what is current, what is real, what is happening to everyone.

I also knew that I needed to be in dialogue with people on the street. Not in a one-way communication, where people just receive your message, but through performance

that lets the public cooperate and interact. Then you, the artist, can learn something, and the public in turn can give something to the event. I found the idea of Forum Theatre was very well suited to that. That's why I began my work in community theatre with Forum Theatre. I tried to approach public space very honestly, not trying to manipulate it but being very direct. It's theatre and it needs your collaboration. For me, it was important that we found our voice, and those other participants in different regions of the city, and from across society, found theirs.

**How do you ordinarily find your ideas?
Or how do they come to you as a city
wanderer?**

It always begins with a dilemma, with something that I think we have to talk about. I would say that I mainly work with forbidden memories – events in our sociopolitical history which, for many reasons, are not being discussed. These are collective memories held by many, and yet talking about them, and reminding people of them, is forbidden. By working with these forbidden memories I try to make a collective memory for the city. I feel that we are distracted, that we are shut out from society. We are limited and we're also limiting ourselves.

I also think about how I should reach people, how they can participate, how they can relate through theatre to an issue. And then I think about the form. For example, when I wanted to talk about the issue of polygamy in Iran – as a law had been approved in parliament to say that a man could marry another woman without any consent from his wife – I created the piece *Always passes by you...* I can't know what other people think, so I decided to create an event where people could come and talk freely, to share their personal voices and ideas in regard to those laws, and to share their experiences through the two formats of Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre and Invisible Theatre. So my way of working is that I first think about an issue, and then find a way

to share around it. By thinking through this, and about what kind of collaboration it needs, I find the form, the aesthetic. Is it narrative? Is it dramatic? Is it post-dramatic?

We Iranians love to talk to each other, we love to share. For example, we have this system of shared taxis – private spaces that are also public. They are a very important part of our lives, and so I thought this was a place where we could meet the various parts of society, meet one another, and I decided to create a show there. That became *Un-Permitted Whispers*.

What are the challenges of making, and getting official permission for, theatre in public space in Iran?

I presented my first piece, *Always passes by you...* at the Women's Festival of Theatre in Iran. Even though it was a women's festival, the organisers were surprised having never met a woman leading and managing a show in unconventional spaces. They were saying things like 'we never had a woman perform in the street before – what will happen?' So they had their doubts, but they gave me the permit. For other shows, it has been more difficult. In Iran, public space belongs to many organisations, not to the people. Some have a face: you can go see them, debate, and ask for permission. Others you don't have access to, but then you meet them when you are actually in

the place. So the challenges are not only before the performance but actually during it.

I have funny memories and sad memories, but in the end it worked, and I believe we were the first to start this kind of theatre after the revolution in 1979. It was also not easy as a woman. I remember once the authorities told me they couldn't hold a woman as the responsible person for a performance in the street, and that a man would have to be named, or that we would have to share the credit as co-directors. I didn't accept the co-director option, but in the end one of the actors took the official responsibility.

What is public space for you?

Public space is wherever the public is, wherever there are different voices. It is a place where there is diversity, even if it is sometimes suppressed and there are voices that go unheard: a common space to share with one another in spite of our different lifestyles. There you can find dialogue, insight, shared discourse, as well as memories that no one wants to be documented or archived, the forbidden memories which are condemned to be forgotten and for which I want to make a platform to keep them alive. Public space is an important extension of our private life, although as Iranians there's a big contradiction between our private and public lives. It's important for me to find a compromise between all these paradoxes in the public space, and I believe theatre can help to reunify us with each other within public space.

Does this also relate to collective or societal health? What you do helps people to find common relations and to regain memories. Could we say that theatre in public space can improve mental health?

I think it can, and it's very important when you find your voice. You feel your stories are being listened to, so you feel you are a person – a real person, not a shadow or second-class citizen. Then you feel much better, you are more active, and this activation helps you to become a better citizen, to find hope. It's a very important part of being healthy. It's not a therapy session of course, but it gives you the chance to be the subject, so it gives you power.



Ganjeh's works draw on Forum Theatre to bring societal issues to public space.
Always passes by you... © Roozbeh Vatanikhah

It reminds me of what Gertrude Stein said about Picasso and the connection of French and German artists with nature, while in southern countries like Spain and Italy the connection is more within a social context.

Yes, I believe it's something in our culture to identify ourselves with people, with others around us: with our family, our history, our family history. We are very connected with our roots, our grandparents, everything that makes our identity.

Despite the challenges, is public space part of Iranian cultural identity?

Yes, it is. What has happened in the past is that theatre in public space has been restricted to special sites and events. It is not everywhere, nor open to any subject, and yet we live in public space and act in it. So what I want to do is to destroy restrictions and open new possibilities. During Covid-19, people have not been able to use public space as before and digital platforms have been a very important extension of public space for us Iranians. Even before the pandemic they were very important. It's a very real world for me – an extension of public space which happens at home. We open a laptop and we are inside it; we are



Azadeh Ganjeh and film crew at a performance of *Always passes by you...* © Roozbeh Vatankehah

known and acknowledged, can talk, act, perform, and be seen.

And we let the outside in. I remember during your talk at Re-connect festival you pointed out how digital platforms tend to shift to a kind of Forum theatre or immersive theatre.

I really like immersive theatre and believe that it's meant for public space – or that

when it happens it makes public space. In digital space, it's a challenge, but it's still possible if we believe that being present digitally is real presence. If we limit presence to only the body, then it limits us.

Azadeh Ganjeh was interviewed by Sepehr Sharifzadeh in December 2020.



Azadeh Ganjeh (Iran) was born in 1983 in Tehran. She is a playwright, performance artist and theatre director. She is also an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Performing Arts, Teheran University. Her special interest in theater for development, Public Sphere and Social Theater lead to achieving national and international prizes for her site-specific and immersive theater Productions. Her research interest is focused on cultural mobility theory, theatre for development and democracy, activism in art and new media art. After receiving her BA in Civil Engineering, she earned a Theater directing M.A degree from Tehran Art University and graduated as a Dr. in philosophy from Bern University. Since then, in addition to her carrier in academy, she has taught directing workshops with concentration on site-specific theater, immersive theater, dramaturgy of real and performance art.

🌐 www.azadehganjeh.com



Sepehr Sharifzadeh (Iran) is an independent creative producer, curator, festival maker, and researcher. He started his career in performing arts as a creative writer, puppeteer, clown, and mime. At the age of 24, he co-founded the first International Theatre agency in Iran, aiming to facilitate the cultural exchange between Iran and the International performing arts scene. He has been working as a project coordinator, artistic adviser, and curator with several independent festivals and organizations such as Bozar, The Festival Academy, IETM, Tehran Contemporary Music Festival, Marivan Street theatre festival, Puppet Theater Festival of Tehran-Mobarak, and Fadjr Theater Festival. He is alumni of The Festival Academy where he collaborates as a member of TFA's alumni steering committee. He has co-founded two independent, alternative, and artist-led festivals in Iran including the Micro-theatre and Re-connect online performance festival in light of the Covid19 global pandemic. He recently founded the first online showcase of contemporary Iranian theatre, "New Narratives".

🌐 <https://nhttheatreagency.com>

FRESH STREET EXPERIENCE

FROM IN-BETWEEN TO ALTERNATIVE SPACE

By Luisella Carnelli and Elettra Zuliani

Taking in the entirety of the four-day seminar, the researchers Luisella Carnelli and Elettra Zuliani reflect on the discussions, provocations and questions of FRESH STREET#4.

At the time of writing, we have not yet managed to put the Covid-19 pandemic behind us, and we are still experiencing a period of crisis and great uncertainty. Almost one year since the outbreak of the virus, we have gone through long periods of lockdown, with closed and empty cultural spaces, drastically reduced mobility, and a situation where it is impossible for artists not only to perform but also to research and experiment as they once used to. Now, more than ever, it is clear that the conditions we are living in forbid us to turn back the clock, forcing us to live in a suspended state where what the future holds for us, in a post Covid-19 world, remains blurred. Whatever world will emerge from this health crisis, it will be one traumatised by grief and fear. It will be poorer and preoccupied with the efforts of recovery and reconstruction. It might seem that this is not a time to talk about arts and culture. Nothing could be further from the truth. Arts and culture cannot be a solution to these immense problems, but it is a territory where solutions can be found,



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where trauma can be acknowledged and healed, and where new ways of living can be imagined. Art helps us understand ourselves and others, and shapes how we see the world.

Indeed, the title of the fourth edition of FRESH STREET, 'The space in between',

resonates with the current emphasis on the soothing and curative capacity, the critical and dialectical functions, the supportive and cohesive power of arts and culture in facing the challenges of the present crisis.

The power of art

In reflecting on the role of arts and culture in societies, an international parterre of FRESH STREET speakers – made up of street arts professionals and experts, artists, organisers, producers, researchers, consultants and

fundors – offered varied and multifaceted responses to the matter, taking into consideration art as a form of expression of one's self, as a therapeutic practice to understand and process emotions, as a mirror to societal pro-

blems and struggles that can change people's perspectives on life issues, and as a means for grassroots civic movements to advocate for fairer and more equitable and sustainable societies. Indeed, the role of street arts and

its potential to connect opposing values by transcending and reshaping time and borders is more important than ever before.

“Art can be of use to everybody” was the opening line for Vida Cerkenik Bren, who started her passionate speech by focusing on the use of art. For her, art has a therapeutic capacity and gives concrete shapes to feelings and anxieties, transforming bitterness into humour while also providing room to ponder important issues. For her, art often reminds us of the neglected values of our everyday lives and makes us notice things that we would normally overlook – thus making us shift perspectives. Rebecca Hazlewood’s point of view follows a similar direction: for her, creation is seen as a form of therapy, an outlet for expression and a way of connecting with emotions we cannot process in other ways.

The creative power of the arts to move us emotionally also has a profound connection with social change. Jay Jordan fervently ties the conception of *disobedience* as source of progress to the role of art in the transformation of our culture. From his side, performances that reflect and comment on the current state of



The FRESH STREET nerve centre © FNAS

things are not enough: art has the transformative power to create a space for new forms of disobedience and resistance of the status quo.

The concept of ‘artivism’ – at the intersection between art and activism – pervaded many of the issues raised at the conference.

Arundhati Ghosh’s reflection fiercely underlined the role of arts and creative expression in challenging and changing power relations and in embodying a form of resistance to dominant narratives. Her perspective sees the creative expression as a space fostering diversity, equity and inclusion.

What social challenges may artists, creativity and culture face?

A common thread that marked the whole conference is the essential role played by the arts and by creativity throughout the pandemic and the role that they may have in the recovery phase. Covid-19 has been a tsunami that deeply shook the foundations of our economies, societies and lifestyles. Among the hardest hit by the pandemic, the arts and cultural sector was already structurally fragmented, suffering from a weak economy, poor conditions, and widespread precarious employment. At the same time, in these disastrous circumstances, the health crisis has highlighted the centrality of creativity, arts and culture as a human and social need and its role in reconnecting with individuals in lockdown has been recognised far and wide.

As stated by Vida Cerkenik Bren: “during the pandemic, if artists are able to reach

audiences, individuals could make use of art to overcome fear, loneliness and anger”. This is indeed needed to overcome the traumas caused by deaths and illness, as well as to face the growth of anxiety, depression, suicide rates and domestic violence. Especially during periods of confinement, arts organisations and artists increasingly shaped their cultural contents into a form of social service to ease people’s feeling of isolation, taking over the functions and services usually under the purview of the state and the public sphere. Responding to these emerging challenges, could, as Chiara Gusmaroli puts it, mean the sector creating “moments of inclusiveness for all people and through all the diverse forms of art we know, to give citizens the possibility to cultivate interests and relationships”.

The health crisis, together with the recent dangers of a new authoritarianism, have exposed the considerable risk of growing cultural exclusion. For instance, the practice of social distancing that is slowly taking over from our normal social practices, and the concept of ‘safe space’ which emerged often during the conference, may have effects on artistic practices and on the desire for cultural participation. On the other hand, the economic crisis may lead to a rise in unemployment and poverty, which could limit access to social services and even cultural participation. For the sector, reacting would mean questioning whether the artistic contents are suitable to meet the needs of all audiences and people.

One quality raised in the conference is the ability of arts and culture to make people re-



The team at FNAS, mid-seminar © FNAS

What role for street arts in responding to these new challenges?

Quoting Vida Cerkenik Bren, “street art is innovative in the sense that it responds differently from traditional art to the questions ‘where does art take place?’ and ‘who is art for?’”. While the challenges that the arts and cultural sector is currently facing are many, street arts, in its intrinsic values and practices, may play an important role in the wider sector’s response to the human, relational and social needs in question.

As street arts mainly happen outdoors, in public arenas and in non-traditional settings, it is a form of art able to connect directly with people in a context free of assumptions and prejudices – unlike art exhibited or performed in museums and theatres.

In this sense, street arts expose people of all social strata to artistic and political expressions. Moreover, as in the case of the story of the Aravani Art Project in Bangalore, told by Arundhati Ghosh, a form of art that happens in public places opens up the possibility of giving

voice to the community and to marginalised groups of citizens. As passionately pointed out by Arundhati, bottom-up public art forms use a commons approach to tell the stories that are silenced by dominant narratives. Echoing the words of Dounia Benslimane, “in this polarised world, socially engaged art is a solution to inclusion and diversity”.

Street arts can also play a role in reinventing urban spaces and reconnecting our everyday life to our environment. As mentioned by Rebecca Hazlewood “our digital and urban lifestyles are impacting on our physical and mental well-being and concern is mounting on how we value the living world”. Street arts can be a powerful tool to reflect on the experience of urban life and to provide the audience with an alternative vision of the world at play within the everyday setting, inviting citizens to take an active role in re-socialising public spaces and acting as a catalyst for social and ecological change.

flect on current circumstances and change perspectives and narratives. In this sense, a further challenge is to reflect on the environment and on the ecological sustainability of our species. In this sense, in the words of Rebecca Hazlewood, the arts are called on “to tackle the climate and ecological crisis with urgency, where all have a role to play” in order to change our environmental behaviour and foster initiatives and processes that can “ensure that everyone has access to green spaces even in urban areas, to reinvent urban spaces and to build a sense of community around the topic”.

Although they are becoming more and more widely recognised, street arts are historically and predominantly an independent form of art that does not pander to the demands of an industry or public, but rather develops honest reflections that challenge peoples’ preconceptions. In this sense, street arts are far from the neoliberal logics of some forms of art and of the creative industries. On this point, the story lucidly told by Jay Jordan in the form of 10 lessons learned as an artist and activist (“for a live art that lives and lets live”) vividly narrates the journey from a form of art that reflects and comments on the present to a form of art that shows other kinds of possible reality and that is able to transform cultures and habits. The pandemic gave us an unprecedented break from the norm to reflect on artistic practice and is, from Jordan’s point of view, an unmissable opportunity to decide whether or not to change our practices, habits, goals and cultures.

Towards the future

“There can be no return to normal because normal was the problem in the first place.”
– Graffiti in Hong Kong

While there is currently an animated debate on how to navigate the complexity of the present environment, much less discussion is taking place about what world we want,

what we say no to, what we no longer accept. Although artists are unable to produce a vaccine, they must fully serve a social role, through their art, by providing connection,

comfort, and well-being for individuals, and can lay the foundations for new community-based processes.

In this context, street arts can be a suitable microcosm in which to tackle this debate and launch a more radical approach that goes against the tide. This exceptional period in time offers us the opportunity to make a radical change of direction. The street arts can be seen as a space to facilitate the connection between people beyond

time and borders, and to remind people of how creativity enables a comprehensive understanding of differing histories and cultures. Thus, street arts must constantly consider their social and public role, by being an artistic expression that offers a tolerant worldview, capable of seeing the value of diversity and marginalised voices.

In this unprecedented time, new issues emerge with great urgency: how to give relevance and voice to this sector? How to create

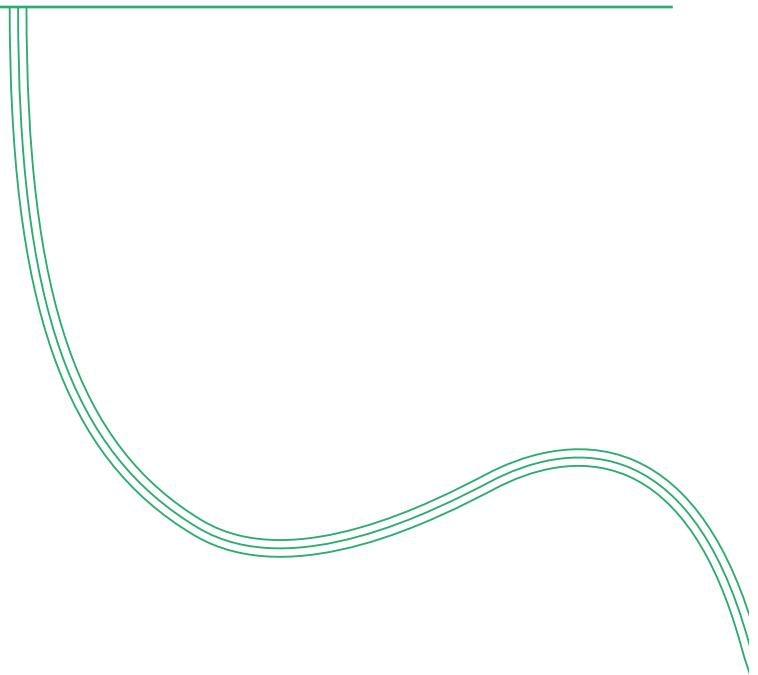
the proper conditions for independent artists to keep on their research paths? How to give stability to the many artists and street workers who are not usually detected or who cannot be counted? How to underline the social impact street arts can generate by preserving the artistic value of the creation? How to enable the conditions to open an arena for clear and democratic dialogue among the street arts and other sectors?



Luisella Carnelli (Italy) has a PhD in Theory and History of Theatre and a Masters in Entrepreneurship of Performing Arts. Since 2005 she has worked as a senior researcher and consultant at Fondazione Fitzcarraldo and at the Cultural Observatory of Piedmont. She carries out studies and research designed to investigate the crucial aspects of creativity, production, organisation, evaluation, consumption of culture, management of cultural organisations and co-creative processes focused on active participation. She particularly deals with the analysis of cultural behaviours and cultural project evaluation, with a primary focus on audience engagement and participatory approaches in performing arts. She is involved as a researcher and trainer in EU Projects related to participatory/co-creative practices, studying the impacts on the artists, organisations and communities involved in them (ADESTE project, CONNECT, BeSpectACTive! 1+2, Dancing Museums, Empowering Dance, Adeste+).



Elettra Zuliani (Italy) graduated in Innovation and Organisation of Culture and the Arts at the University of Bologna (Italy). Since 2016, she has been Programme Assistant for ArtLab, a national cross-sectorial, multi-stakeholder platform and event dedicated to innovation in cultural policies, programmes and practices. This experience has allowed her to develop a considerable knowledge of the cultural and creative world, enhancing her competences in the field, thanks to the many relations with the primary stakeholders of the platform: policymakers, directors of many national and European cultural institutions, and individual cultural operators. She has approached the world of research with particular attention to the topic of participation and audience engagement and is now involved in the EU project BeSpectACTive!2 as a researcher and trainer.



ABOUT CIRCOSTRADA & ARTCENA



Circostrada is the European Network for contemporary circus and outdoor arts.

Created in 2003 with the core mission of furthering the development, empowerment and recognition of these fields at European and international levels, over the years the network has become an important anchoring point for its members and a key interlocutor in the dialogue with cultural policy makers across Europe.

In a few words, Circostrada is:

- A community of contemporary circus and outdoor arts professionals linked together by common values and aspirations, who advocate for greater recognition and more structured cultural policies.
- The voice and reference network of contemporary circus and outdoor arts in Europe.
- A group of passionate and committed individuals who meet several times a year at the network's events.
- A network dedicated to its members, engaged in facilitating the exchange of experiences, knowledge, and good practices at European and international levels.
- A digital resource platform that provides thematic publications, observation tools and news on contemporary circus and outdoor arts, available to all free of charge in English and French.

🌐 www.circostrada.org

ARTCENA is the National Centre for Circus, Street Arts and Theatre.

Created by the French Ministry of Culture, ARTCENA is a national rallying point that aims to strengthen the foundation and growth of circus, street and theatre arts. Keeping an open attitude and lively outlook, it works closely with sector professionals while also addressing the needs of teachers, students and researchers.

It coordinates Circostrada and has a permanent seat on its Steering Committee. ARTCENA works towards its missions in three main areas: sharing of knowledge and resources through a digital platform; supporting professionals via mentoring and training; promoting and strengthening the circus, street arts and theatre fields by carrying out international development projects.

🌐 www.artcena.fr

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