


FRESH  
SEMINARS

# FRESH CIRCUS#5



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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by John Ellingsworth

CIRCO  
STRADA  
• 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 CIRC*a* – National Pole for Circus – Auch Gers Occitanie were delighted to organise the 5<sup>th</sup> 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 UPI 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 32<sup>nd</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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

OVER **30** COUNTRIES FROM **4** CONTINENTS

**115** SPEAKERS

**3** FULL DAYS OF SEMINAR

**1** CITY

**2** PLENARY SESSIONS

NEAR **80** PROJECTS PRESENTATIONS

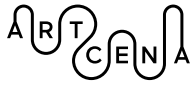
**40** LOCAL VENUES INVOLVED

A FULL ARTISTIC PROGRAMME IN THE FRAME OF CIRCA -  
FESTIVAL OF CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS



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Frédéric Schaffar

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## CAN CIRCUS STIMULATE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

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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.**

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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 Valois<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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

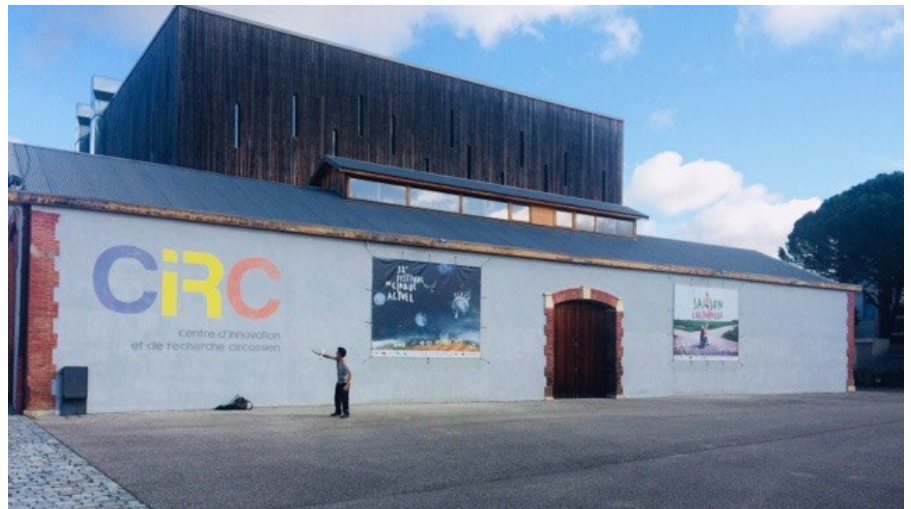
by John Ellingsworth

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 19<sup>th</sup> 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



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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](http://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](http://www.hsingho.wordpress.com)

🌐 [www.tpac-taipei.org](http://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,



© Michel Amado / FiCHO 2019

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

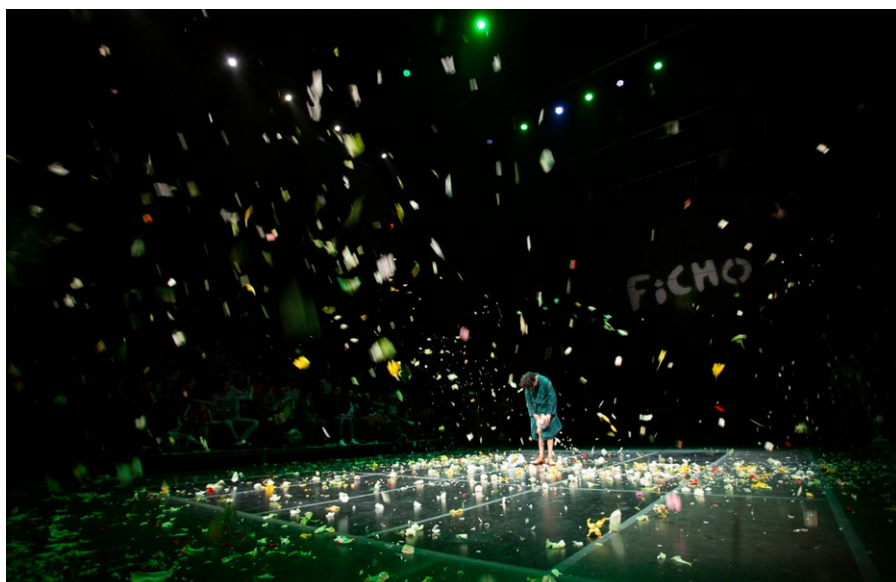
The other inspiration was *teatro de carpa* – 'tent theatre'. It was a style of performance that rose up in Mexico during the 1930s and 40s, a format mixing circus and cabaret, with a lot of comedy acts who over time became famous. The whole style was very Mexican, but at the same time very universal. 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](http://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 CIRCa, 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 murmururation 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 murmururation 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.*



© Patrick Barbier

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

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 research<sup>1</sup>. 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*



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*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

<sup>1</sup> 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,



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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](http://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



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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](http://www.ciexy.com)



Māra Pāvula is the head of strategic development in Riga Circus, producer in festival Re Riga! 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 laureate 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 CIRC*a*, 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, CIRC*a* 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 3<sup>rd</sup> edition in February next year.

 [www.subtopia.se](http://www.subtopia.se)  
 [www.cirkusmania.se](http://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



© Minja Kaukonieni

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](http://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.

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,*

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.



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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

*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,

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](http://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

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On the final day of FRESH CIRCUS, in Cine 32, artists from CIRC*a*'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.

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## JÉRÔME THOMAS: THE ARTIST AS A TOMATO

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'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

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'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>



© Andrea Macchia

## LES FILLES DU RENARD PÂLE: A PLACE FOR LIVING



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'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

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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.

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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 Aleikoum, 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 / 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.