

A support scheme
for emerging creators of contemporary circus in Europe



Think Circus!

ROUND-TABLE

The body at work

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CIRCUS WRITINGS

Circus constantly raises the question of the body, of its writings and of its engagements: what is the acrobatic body, the juggled body, the acted body? How to define the boundaries of performance and risk? To work one's body, to write it, to say it... All these questions come to nourish a reflection on the circus languages and their intermixing. How to envisage the notion of technique? How to engage one's body physically and creatively on a daily basis? What is the dramaturgy that is inherent in the acrobatic act? What are the relations to bodies and identities involved in the work of the circus arts work?

Presentation of the speakers

Kitt Johnson

Kitt Johnson is a choreographer, dancer, and artistic director of the X-Act company in Denmark and former athlete. She worked with a lot of circus artists and for several circus companies as a performer. Her work is physically engaged and she leads a reflexion on the body: its mutations, its limits. She was jury member of CircusNext 2015-2016 and has followed, as a mentor, several artists in their creative and physical work during the support phase of the project.

Sebastian Kann

Sebastian Kann is a circus artist and graduated from the Montreal circus school. He is also a young researcher: his Master thesis in Theatre studies at Utrecht University is entitled "Taking back the technical: Contemporary circus dramaturgy beyond the logic of mimesis". Currently, he is continuing his theoretical research, as well as working as a dramaturge in circus and dance contexts.

Satchie Noro

Satchie Noro is a dance and circus artist. In 2002, she created the company Furinkaï, a place for research, encounter, choreographic creations, performances, interdisciplinary installations (dance, circus, music, construction, photography...). Satchie Noro's work mixes genres, interrogates the media, the place of the body and its engagement.

Magali Sizorn

Magali Sizorn is a University lecturer and researcher at the University of Rouen where she teaches in the Department of Sciences and technics of physical and sport activities. She is also co-responsible of the Master's degree "Development of cultural audiences" at the Department of Letters and Human Sciences. She carries out researches on the transformation of artistic activities and cultural practices that are usually called "popular" (mainly circus, street art, fairs). She released a book untitled *Trapézistes. Ethnosociologie d'un cirque en mouvement* (Rennes PUR) in 2013 and she recently took part in "Anthologies des arts du cirque" (CNAC/BNF): cirque-cnac.bnf.fr

Alexander Vantournhout

Alexander Vantournhout studied contemporary dance at PARTS, Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker's school, and single cyr wheel and acrobatics at ESAC (Ecole Supérieure des Arts du Cirque, Brussels). Alexander has created a couple of solos including *Caprices* (2014), a choreographic solo to the music of Sciarrino, *ANECKXANDER* (created in 2015, 203-2014 CircusNext laureate) and *Raphael* (2017) both co-created with Bauke Lievens. He teaches regularly at Danscentrum Jette, ESAC and ACAPA (Academy for Circus and Performance Art, Tilburg, NL). From 2017 to 2021, Alexander will be long-term residence artist at Vooruit, Gent (BE).

Introduction

Magali Sizorn

I will first thank the organizers because I think it is quite valuable that professional artists, researchers and academic researchers in particular can dialogue in these moments that are ultimately relatively rare. Thank you! My English is particularly bad I would speak in French but everyone can of course speak in the language that is most comfortable, French or English.

We will now discuss more specifically the question of the body at work, we had a little talk about the relationship to work and crafts this morning, we will continue to discuss about this. Before starting, I will quickly introduce the artists and then everyone can specify, and talk a little more specifically about his work (see biographies above).

I would like to start with an excerpt from a book by the sociologist and colleague Thierry Pillon: "In the gesture, work reveals its most hidden part. Completed, it does not give access to the slow learning of which it is the product, it also leaves on the margin the intuitive part of knowledge of things, materials, objects, tools committed to its success. To grasp its richness, it is necessary to detail the phases, the rhythms, to insist on the failures as much as on the successes, to emphasize the forms of perception that it implies. Although fragmentary in the testimonies, the descriptions of gesture, of movement, of sensible disposition carry the stake of a recognition on the part of the creation in the labor work".

You will ask me what is the relationship with what interests us. This is an excerpt from a book entitled "The body at work" on the body work of workers. This morning, the craft industry was much talked about, as well as the dimension of "doing". This is a way of reminding us that Circus artists do not have the monopoly of the body, or in any case that this body dimension can be questioned elsewhere, and that we can also go through a few detours to question the specificity of the work of the body of circus artists.

I would like to invite you, as Thierry Pillon did with regard to the work and the body of the workers, to take an interest in the sense of detail and gesture, including in the daily repetition, in which you sometimes return to a routine, probably necessary, and how you move your routines to potentially reach a form of creativity, and a creativity at the service of an artistic approach.

This obviously raises a fundamental difference with the work of the workers and with the question of the craft industry, recalled this morning, which does not refer a coquetry but to a will to reintroduce in the artistic work a valorization of the gesture, of "doing" "The" doing well "that can also be found in the artisanal work.

This round table on the body at work will not be able to embrace everything. The question of risk is an entry that has been widely explored in circus work, but the boundaries of performance and risk may again be questioned. We will be more interested in the circus in the way of daily engaging one's body physically and creatively. Obviously the question of writing will arise: what could be a dramaturgy inherent to the artistic act?

To begin, I would like you to tell us about your relationship to physical commitment, your own commitment to exploring limits and what limits. Agathe Dumont spoke about moving virtuosity: what meaning does it have for you?

S. Kann: If I understand it right, the question is about my relationship personally to physical labor / work / virtuosity. Well, I did a lot of it at school. I did aerial hoop and contortion at school and got injured pretty fast – it is normal. When I got injured, I started thinking that I felt like I wanted this, but it also felt like my body did not want this. I wondered where did this sort of desires come from, how did they intersect and contradict. At the moment, I have to say most of my physical practice looked more like dancing. I guess if I had to talk about crossing borders, challenging limits, the limit I am more interested in is the limit beyond which we say this is no longer a circus trick. That's more the limit I'm interested in. I don't really feel the limit of my healthy body like touching.

A. Vantournhout: If I can bounce back to the previous reading and maybe guide this discussion, what has not been elaborated so much is what we've been analyzing with Squarehead Productions: Everything has been analyzed from the circus technique, and it is quite crazy. We are sitting here at Think Circus!. Juggling has not been analyzed and I think it can not be considered as juggling, or that the technique can not be expanded. I think it's very dangerous that we should be nice for this conversation – just the body alone. For me, circus is a relationship to an object, even though I start from the body. In ANECKXANDER I started from my disproportions, and actually during my whole work, the relationship to the object, even though it's a research question, slipped away from my hands. For example, in ANECKXANDER I wanted to research the subject "prosthetics" but in the end I was discussing the disproportions of my neck or identity. Then in Raphael I asked myself what was the subject of that body, which is lying there dead on stage. Again, it actually did not talk about the body anymore, or like it started about the object. The meanings or the meanings somehow shifted, but that was not intentionally. I think this relationship to the object is a nice topic to discuss on.

S. Kann: I'm just going to make a small precision: I think that sometimes the word "object" is confusing, because circus can often be also interacting with environment, so I think "objects/environment". For me, objects are creating an environment. The word "environment" has been more useful recently. I'm thinking about the work of Aurélien Bory for example, or even Stachie Noro's work, where the object is so large that it functions more effectively like an environment than like what we would think of as an object, which sounds like something that I can pick up.

S. Noro: For me, movement, the commitment of the body, has been something present for a long time. My father is Japanese, he was an aikido master, and hardly spoke at home. The language I first learned, I think, was a body language, seeing my father evolve in his dojo and teach his students. From there, I went into high-level ballet until I was 16 at the Berlin Opera. There, everything collapsed. 10 years of intensive practice at 30 hours of classical dance per week, to be in the perfection of the movement, to always try to exceed the limits. I'm talking about collapsing because I realized that I knew how to do these things to the millimeter, and finally I was unable to create anything. I was asked to improvise but I was liquefying on the spot – improvise what, how? I learned, finally. I was in Berlin right then, just after the fall of the wall. These are the spaces that gave me this way of creating, by going to places that were emptied, in East Berlin. We were in basements, abandoned factories, in all sorts of places. These places were so full of history, that it allowed me to renew my body, my practice with another partner. Then I went to improvisation, contemporary dance. I went back to France and discovered the circus arts. One day, I entered a big circus tent, it was the circus school of Nanterre, directed at the time by Michel Novak, with all these trapezes, these ropes, these masts ... and the object.

I was 26, I discovered that we could learn late this technique that seemed so specific, specialized, high level. And there, I saw people of all ages, of all levels practice on trapezes, ropes.

I saw this relationship with this partner, the search for his balance with respect to an object, recreate spaces. I discovered autonomy, because when one is alone on an object, sometimes at 4 meters high, one is obliged to be conscious, to have a very acute awareness of one's body, and to make one with himself. We are not in a ballet corps where we have to be the "body" of ballet, but here we have a unity between space, body and object, which gives a sort of "uncompromising" and implacable "oneself" that I can find in Aikido and martial arts. We are here, in time, in space, and with ourselves. The autonomy of the self in relation to its practice, which unfortunately we learn very little in dance, is a very present thing in the circus. I was fortunate to have Professor Wilfride Piollet who taught me to work on my own, which is very rare in classical dance, because classical dance rarely exists without an institution.

K. Johnson: First of all, I would like to say that I consider mind and body as inseparable. I cannot speak about physical body. So when I use the word "body", for me it's both mind and body. I started as a 800m runner and I was training intensively since I was 11 to 24. Then I discovered dance and I spent like 5-6 years trying to recreate, rethink a new body on top of the body that I had before. It was a radical change, different qualities demanded, different ways of thinking, I thought. After some years, I realized that actually it's all about the same. There are not a lot of differences and the basic bodies (because I don't think that we just consist of one body) are all the same, regarding what we do. I found that in the arts fields specifically, and actually in the circus field, where I've been teaching quite a lot for the last 20 years, there is a little bit of a lack of recognition of how you have to nurse all the bodies of the body in order to create a sustainable body. In order to create an artist that actually grows old, and is able to mature artistically which is often lost, also in the dance field, because people stop too early now. I would like to list the bodies that I work with. It can be argued that some of the bodies actually correlate so much that it maybe should be just one, but I like to discuss and develop this topic.

First of all, there is the basic body, the one we take care of on a daily basis: that means nutrition, how you restore your body, how you get rest enough, and it's how you do your basic training. As a performer of whatever field, you need to have a basic stamina, upon which you can build your technical body. This should never be neglected. I often see it in the circus schools: when the students start to move into the highly specialized technical field, they start to neglect the basic body and this is where injuries start occurring. The technical body is of course discipline-specific.

There is also the imaginative body, but we could also call it the utopic body, because this is the body that reaches far beyond the borders of the possible. It stretches the borders of the possible by reaching into the utopia. I think this is necessary to have this body in a good shape to be an artist.

There is the expressive body, I usually distinguish between the performative and the expressive body. The expressive body is how you are able to actually breach what is going on your inside, in your imagination, in your inside intention, how you colour this to the audience, whereas the performative body is the body that is able to be on stage, to be aware and "juggle" with the co-performers, the space, the light, the sound, the object, the apparatus. The performative body is the body that carries the whole thing and supervises it.

There is the conceptual body, which is in a way a very intellectual body that is able to think of new ways, or to define very strict concepts to imply them on all the other bodies and to closely observe what is the impact, what is the outcome, the process.

Then, there is the historical body because we all result of history, of the past, both genetically and epi-genetically, but also because of the experiences, the trainings, the way we ate, everything we did before the results you have here and this moment we active in the process of creating our future body. Everything we do have a consequence which brings us to our conservative body.

There is also the conservative body. We are physiologically designed, our sensual nervous system is designed to make economical pathways, to create habits that we use, and to spend as little energy as possible in executing things. I think that we are conservative by nature, and that this can be very anti-productive in an artistic process, but when it comes to setting things and performing, we need this ability, because it serves us very well. But we always have, in a research, to be very aware that we don't fall back down into this conservative body that allows us just to reproduce what we know because this is what we like.

That brings me to the political body because I think we all have in a way a duty to also try to find out what kind of roles our body plays in society, what kind of role we did chose ourselves, what kind of role was imposed on us, and what kind of stand point we take in this game, which might bring forward an activist body.

I think all this bodies together have a chance to create a sustainable body. Once they are mapped, they acknowledge for their power, their potentials, there weaknesses. Then we know how to nurse them horizontally, exchanging, gathering new information, and vertically going to depth with what we learn, what we know. So this is what I learnt from the path, training sports, dance and circus. Once it is nourished, I think it's also a great feel for writings, in the sense that you, as a singular performer, get much broader feels to stand on.

M. Sizorn: I would like to invite you to get to the heart of the matter, in the concrete: how do you live, including politically, a body (a kind of alter ego body), that sometimes in training you have necessarily put at a distance to shape it, to work it, perhaps brutally sometimes? How do you re-inhabit this body sometimes deliberately put at a distance?

A. Vantournhout: I was just thinking maybe rebounding back like in that sense we can see the technical body, I think in circus it's a very important notion. Basically, the body in circus is heavily trained: a repetitive practice will change my body.

So we could say that the body changes a little bit into a freak, a conscious freak, because the person has decided to have this repetitive practice. I think this is a very interesting topic to start from. For example, a female body that would do Chinese pole, it is already quite a statement, and the body will change. I think the political body and/or the politics often enter between the friction of who this person is and the object.

Sandrine Juglair, for example, made a beautiful proposition where she is kind of dealing with her very masculine body, and addresses a very interesting topic of politics of the body. Somehow it is dazzling if she is female or male, unfortunately we enter to this binary sense of gender but I think this technical body is something really specific for circus and a very interesting thing to start from. It was also the case for me in ANECKXANDER. Another thing I wanted to approach is the utopic body: I think circus is not about a utopic body. Circus is about possibilities, so it's a bit like what Satchie was saying, considering that in circus we always are as one. A circus artist never thinks while doing. It's always a plan, it's not a utopia. It's a plan and it's an executed plan. From the audience point of view we might see utopia. For example if we see a tight wire artist like Philippe Petit on the high towers, we see a utopia. The meaning is constructed, but for him it's actually risk. It's a calculated risk, he has done this over repetitive practice. The danger is with the audience, not with the tight wire artist himself. An artist executes risk and a spectator sees danger. I think in this sense we are not in utopia, or not in potentialities, we are in possibilities and there with it we are constructing a performance, an act, or something like that.

S. Kann: I think you know what I'm going to say because Alexander and I have been having this argument for like 2 years. I improvise on an aerial apparatus, so I find it hard when Alexander says that circus is planning, and that circus is possibilities and not potentialities, and it's not contingency. It's just hard to hear when you have an improvisational practice.

A. Vantournhout: Let's say it is contingency, but it is of course a sort of improvisation and it is depending on disciplines, on how much improvisation you have, or depending on the moment... That's the definition of virtuosity: there is no space between me and the form. In a trick, there is no space to think about the next trick unless you are very virtuosic. There is a tiny gap, so the expression is very difficult in a trick. Virtuosity is also a two key-mark but it doesn't allow much improvisation in the moment.

K. Johnson: When I speak about utopia, I think it's a very important body to have, as part of your creation. It's a much earlier place in the process than where you are talking from now, it's maybe closely connected to the development of the concepts that are actually there. You have the utopic "courage" to reach beyond, so this lies way before the point that you are speaking from, because on the place where you meet the audience, of course you are not utopic, this is not where you have your focal point.

S. Kann: When you said "utopic body", I immediately thought "critical body", which is maybe a way of saying it in the negative. I think it's really appropriate now to talk about the "utopic body" instead of the "critical body", especially seeing the way that the mega critical way of thinking about art and culture in general in the 90s has exhausted itself. I really appreciated this "utopic body" as a positive way of thinking about challenging norms. But I see a conflict between the way I guess both of you are thinking about technique and virtuosity, as something separate from daily practice. For me, a whole cultural performance is of course technical and also virtuosic, and the definition of virtuosity has more to do with a performance in front of people that moves from a position of knowing toward something unknown, or something that doesn't produce primarily material results, but that produces only itself, so it's like a performative action. I think that we interfere with the utopic body and the idea of challenging norms when we instate this difference between the technics of

everyday life and technics that are special, or that are in a way untouchable, because the utopic body seems to want to break these boundaries and push them.

K. Johnson: For sure, this is what it's there for! Sometimes it succeeds, sometimes it doesn't succeed.

M. Sizorn: I think we have here definitions of variable geometry of virtuosity, which refer to frames that are not the same, so the definitions do not meet. I think you are talking about almost the same thing: the opening of possibilities from body possibilities, which we will then reinvest in different contexts.

I will come back to how you work. How do you work on a daily basis this material at the service of this opening of possibilities? How do you put yourself back to the job, to this possible alienating constraint of the technique to open?

S. Noro: I have had an intensive physical practice for 35 years, and my practice is in perpetual motion, it readjusts constantly, according to the plays I play. From one week to another, I do not have the same training. I do not train like when I was 20 years old. Twenty years ago, I did not understand why people were lying on the ground to warm up, it was something totally incomprehensible to me. Now, I can not start a show if I did not lie down. In fact, I work a lot on the breathing, to find in the movement, and in the repetitive movement, my breathing inside that, and my breathing with the audience, with the space around me, with the object. But I need that to have a training. There is a training for me who is more muscular: doing aerial, I can not afford not to be trained to be 6m high. I am therefore obliged to have a muscular training. Beside that, I must constantly restore vitality to my body. The goal is actually to find breathing in the technique to erase the technique, so that the movement exists outside the technique.

A. Vantournhout: I have a similar approach in a sense like the technician as such tries to dissolve. I'm searching for the physical connotations of the technique. It's something known, that if you are mainly doing contortion, you are going to talk about schizophrenia or difficult mental experiences: that's the physical connotation. If you are doing partner acrobatics, it's often love or a competition relationship. I think I'm really interested in these physical connotations, and then for each creation, in how I investigate a new discipline with my body. I'm researching what this physical connotation could be. I think they are not endless, they are in a certain direction, and I can counter-direct the physical connotation or I can work with it, and also in a relation with my body. Is my body suitable? Does it have a sort of natural distance from the physical connotations? If I did Chinese pole, I would have real troubles, but still if I did Chinese pole, it would mean that I'm very manly, masculine and forceful though my body is not that at all. So I think this is an interesting friction with the discipline.

K. Johnson: Well, I'm not a circus artist but I still have my practice. I'm still performing, and what I do is very physical. But growing older with your practice is also for me parallel: what I need gets much more refined and detailed. On a daily basis I ask myself what I need. It can be very different: from the "fast/slow" exercise - running up and down hills at different speeds, to just lying on the floor, wriggling toes and fingers... This is what I need. But I think getting close to your daily needs is also a way to keep yourself away from injuries, because your body knows what it needs.

S. Kann: I agree: I also have found myself more and more training my sensation, and trying really hard to listen to what exactly my body needs. I've also been experimenting with a period of "disobedience", where I've been sometimes doing nothing for a while, which would have been inconceivable 5 or 4 years ago. But to a certain extent I felt like almost directly after school I arrived to a body that was no longer functional, and I needed time to rebuild it.

I'm still a little bit in that period. After school it was like less and less activities. Now I've been doing something radically different for a while, and my plan is to pick it back up again this summer, but I'll let you know how that goes!

M. Sizorn: In spite of the will not to separate the body from the mind, we reintroduce a distancing by speaking of "my body", the physical possibilities of "my body". It is clear that the discourse is a form of distance, a small step aside with his body that could look, work, improve.

I would like to continue on this question by asking you what game of distancing, non-distancing, reappropriation you operate in this dialogue with your body. To go a little further, we could also talk about the game between the artifice and the authentic, how far we go in the reality of the act. Do you introduce a form of artificiality into the interpretation, into a game of truth or almost truth?

K. Johnson: First of all, I think the language does not always serve the thinking. We need to reinvent how we speak about these things - that's not efficient enough. I question very much the authentic, if it's really here with us or not. I really question it: I don't have the answer. Sometimes I feel that we move authentically, or that we don't, that we reproduce habits or what we think it looks like to move when you move authentically... So in a way, when I do my creations, I'm actually not so concerned about this question. I'm more concerned about if the result of my work is equivalent to my attention, whatever that is.

S. Kann: I think what often gets lost when we talk about authenticity, is the idea that if I'm moving while feeling sad, then the audience is going to get a feeling of sadness, as if it was directly zoomed out of my body.

There is always this layer of mediation, so if you have a feeling of sadness, it could very well be that I'm not feeling sad at all. Sometimes artists get off stage and say that a show was terrible, but the audience didn't notice, or you can feel like it was a great show and the director will come up and say

« Not so good ». Of course it can disconnect between how you are feeling and how it looks, which doesn't mean that we can't use somatic technics, technics based on sensations. I think that is missing in circus, that introducing sensation within circus training will also prevent a lot of injuries, but we have to also be aware that even if I am thinking about my intestine, I'm not performing intestinality. I could use the technic in order to create a certain image, but I don't think there is a direct link between my imagination, my sensations, and what my body projects.

M. Sizorn: How does all this work when you work with others? How is the question of the transmission of a committed gesture made with partners, with young artists that you advise? What does it mean to push the body of the other within certain limits, for example in the show Raphael?

A. Vantournhout: I think if I work with other people, the first thing to make clear with them is maybe what it signifies, what their practice would be. I think as a practitioner of circus, because I identify so much with what I'm doing, that it's very hard to see what I'm expressing. We can see this for example in juggling, which has a sort of community and almost a dressing style. It's just a stupid example to say that people have a sort of constructed identity around their discipline. If I'm working with someone, I try to say what it expresses. Then, particularly in my personal practice, it starts from a totally different angle, that would be just a very formal research, almost a conceptual question: what can an object be? It's very restraint. Facing a confrontation is very interesting in circus, or maybe in performance (which is close), unlike other art forms. Circus could be defined like that, facing a difficult issue whether it's together (maybe with two people balancing on top of each other). I think facing a confrontation, and how you actually collaborate with your partner to face a danger or a challenge, is actually an interesting starting point to group people. Very often, when we see a circus performance, we see solos next to each other. How can we escape that? Maybe having a sort of common ground?

I think this is very important. That's why group performances in circus are also sometimes so autobiographical...

S. Kann: I agree that it often gets very autobiographical. I think another interesting thing about circus is this tendency to want to put your best trick in. You are kind of circulating between different performances and different groups, kind of retaining your brand. I think the way circus artists function, sort of circulating brands, adding value to other people's performances and then leaving with more value, is a little bit problematic. I've been trying, not with my own work, but working as a dramaturge with artists, sharing choreography and practices, choreographing each other... For example, one of the artists would make a rope number and the other artist would perform it to the best of her ability. There is a way in which the technique gets lower, but we are not so concerned with the heights or with the individual performers adding value to themselves through showing how good they are. So I think that this element of making things in common, and also of alienating the material from yourself as a body, is key to moving away from the always « talking about myself » aspect of circus performances.

A. Vantournhout: I think a big evolution in circus could be this common language. We lack terminology. Also within the disciplines there should be a sort of language like we see in the Laban notation where we just write, and we could transcribe the trick from one person to another. The disconnection between the choreography or the act with the performer will be soon an important evolution in circus. I think it will also benefit the readability of what has been performed to just see one's tricks performed by someone else.

S. Kann: We are just scoring in general as a practice something we don't do, so like for example writing down and figuring out different technics of writing down our choreographies. I think it's essential for this communication but I would be against the project of creating one language. I would be interested in encouraging the

the practice of discovering a multiplicity of scoring techniques that are specific to the kinds of work we are doing in that moment.

M. Sizorn: Kitt, can you tell us about the work you do with circus artists as a mentor, how do you work with them to "move" them?

K. Johnson: Well, I work with people on different levels. On one hand, I would do physical training, and stretching with the youngest in order to make their body fit, to make detailed at the same time as they get really strong and to learn them to stretch with relaxation elements. I do not know how it is in European schools, but I do not agree with the way the Scandinavian schools teach to stretch, because there is too much effort inside, and students do not benefit from the relaxation, the weight, and the breath within the body. On the other hand, people creating shows ask me to be a third eye, an outside eye, to work on their performance. I try my best to be really open and ask questions more than anything else, not imposing my own taste, or the decisions I would make if I were in there position. I try to ask a lot of questions to make them more conscious of their choices. I think all choices can be right, if they are informed choices. The more formed you are, the more crazy choices you can make, so I try to help them to do that. In between this, there is all the improvisation and composition work. When I was a mentor for CircusNext, I had to try to make the Circus Katoen company analyze the problems in the way they trained and give a proposal of how they could train with the problems that occurred physically in their work.

A. Vantournhout: Having been myself a pedagogue, I think there is an interesting thing: I also see a sort of weird concept of having circus training often alone. You warm up, you have a collective warm up, and then you have your personal training on your discipline, alone or with two or three people. Actually, I think they should almost be reversed. Because if you do not need a long of course, you can practice your discipline in group, and I think that circus could enormously benefit from that.

But circus artists actually never work on getting conscious of their morphology, of how their bodies are proportioned, where their strengths are, or for example knowing where is which muscle. Actually, people do not know the strongest points of their body. But still, all the later training is individualized. It is maybe a radical example, but actually in China, teachers check your body and decide the discipline for you. Because someone has long arms, he/she is more suitable for that, or because his/her point of gravity is lower, this person will be a tight-wire artist. I think nowadays in circus school, students are absolutely not conscious of this, and at the same time, they try for virtuosic excellence. But if you are a boxer and have short arms, you will never be a good boxer. You just have to have it in mind before you start boxing: maybe you want to try something else. And that is all. Circus artists sometimes do not have the body able fit to do a trick, and still they try three hundred times without actually knowing their specificity and also training with that specificity.

S. Kann: In Montreal, teachers do tell you what to do with your body, so we can say that this is not only a non-western practice. But in Montreal, I would say even more radically than in circus schools in Europe, your all track is individualized. There is never even a group warm up or anything. And you are always placed with people of your ability. In a way, that is a very clearly hierarchy, so you know if you are in the most flexible group or the least one by looking around you. I think that the problem is less that some people are trying to do some techniques that are not fit for their body, than the fact that there is a hierarchy of desirability of tricks. So the fact that within each discipline, there is like a clear normative development of what is better and what is less good, is creating these "traffic jams" between the specific body and the practice that they desire. I think the solution is not telling people what to do based on their body type, but eliminating the scale of desirability between different kinds of technical expression.

M. Sizorn: So you're suggesting a provocatively normative, selective, sporty model that we would refer people to according to their abilities. It would therefore not be a matter of opening the possibilities from the potentialities of an individual on an X or Y apparatus, but of restricting the use of an object according to more or less adapted bodies.

A. Vantournhout: I might have been misunderstood, so I am not advocating at all for physical excellence in any sort. These young people are 18 years old: they just want to move, they want to do crazy difficult tricks. I think it is not a bad thing to make them conscious about their body. We cannot decide for them, if they want to do this discipline or this (and I think it is also a lovely thing to do to jump on a teeterboard, even if you maybe do not have the perfect body type for it). But I think it is just to make them aware and conscious that there is also another way. There is not a hierarchy of levels. Unfortunately, in circus schools, or even in circus, we are still thinking in levels, or about doing better or going higher. That is what circus used to be, and traditional circus was maybe better in that. In contemporary circus, the virtuosity level is lowering. I think we have to escape that a little bit, and still being investigating in technique, but in a different way, more expending rather than touching the limits.

S. Noro: I think that the diversity of teachers' teaching is also important. I did not go through a "normal" circus school, institutional. I have always chosen my teachers and I have had hundreds of teachers (with main professors obviously). It is true that this diversity, the way everyone teaches, brings their own experience and looks at the body of the person, is interesting. Everyone looks differently at a person's body. It enriches the way we see ourselves and how we find different possibilities. I was surprised that there is very little collective training in the circus, that everything is done individually, and that there are practically no teachers in certain disciplines. For example, in the aerials in the school where I was, there was only one teacher, who came from gymnastics.

I have the feeling that the generation who is there and who has more has this desire to transmit, whereas before, when I arrived fifteen years ago, I was looked at saying "Oh, the dancer, what is she come here? She should stay in the dance!" We feel that there is a need to share this knowledge and a need to transmit. Before, an artist could say that her face had been stolen from her, and now this report exists less. I also think it's defining itself. The classical dance has centuries, it has been defined in a hundred well-framed movements and from there choreographed all these pieces. But the circus is in perpetual movement, and that's what I'm passionate about: all these different writings and different circus disciplines, all these possible, to try to allow permeability, to meet people, not to segregate... I think that acrobatics should not be taught only by gymnastics teachers. We see a lot of this kind of phenomenon in schools, which forms a single method and is ultimately not often adapted to certain bodies, and lack of listening. I think that more than going to direct a person, to accompany an artist would rather be to listen to the potential of this person and to try to develop it, not only in a discipline, but to try to accompany the best way possible. I think there is a question of listening which must be very present in the support and accompaniment of the circus artist.

S. Kann: I agree with the idea that we should be listening to our students and what the students need. But I "cut" on something you said before and you repeated again about circus being a sort of space of possibility and acceptance. I think that often, that way of speaking arises a pretty strong conservatism. Among my peers, I see lots of experimentation, but I do not see that in the shows that are programmed, I do not see that in the work that becomes institutionally supported, and I do not necessarily see that in circus schools students. That is something that happens in a way afterwards. I had this experience when I was teaching at Codarts: I had this idea that I was going to remain open to what the students wanted and really leave everything available and really try to help them do what they wanted to do best.

Of course, then they decided to do the most conservative things possible, because what they wanted was the most normal or the least out there. So I was sitting there with this idea that I was being a super progressive teacher and of course it revealed my agenda when I went in. I wanted to create a space for avant-garde circus and it turned into a space for the most commercial possible product. So then, what do you do? You are trying to gently coerce people into being experimental, which never really works. But I think that it has to do with the kinds of works that they see. I think that it begins in some ways with the institutions and the theaters deciding to program more experimental works, because then it affects the desires of the students who are coming to watch the work. So when you, as a conscientious pedagogue, provide a sort of open space, that space becomes the space of utopian, critic or something, and not that space that reproduces the same tropes.

K. Johnson: All this talk about the market brings me to what I did not manage to comment on yesterday. First of all, I think it is a wrong angle. You cannot use the measures that you use for normal professions in art professions. You cannot look at the market, trying to identify which kind of parameters is needed for artists to be employed, then go to the schools and say "You have to make sure that these parameters are fulfilled in order for us to continue funding you.". This is not art education and you kill the art if you create artists who are educated to serve a certain market. I also think it is a misinterpretation of market and audiences because I think that most tax payers know the difference between entertainment and art. With art, they want to be surprised, they do not want consensus. So we have to educate young students and artists, who are actually able to shake the box. I think this is what people actually like, and might not know before they see it.

M. Sizorn: This refers to the opening of possibilities that also passes through the eyes of the spectators or future students, who must learn to play with conventions to get out, while

reproducing the same conventions, because they are so internalized that they imagine that's what you expected of them, whereas you just expected them to play with them.

Questions & Answers

J-M. Guy: We still use the word "body" as if it were obvious in itself. Although Kitt reminded at the beginning that she did not differentiate between "body" and "mind", I would still like to recall the work, among others, absolutely fundamental of the anthropologist Philippe Descola, which reminds us that the body is never in our Western culture, that any of the six forms we give to our interiority as Westerners. The three best-known forms are those that we inherited until Freud, the body, the soul and the spirit, then Freud added the ego, the superego and the id, which allow us to say our body. I heard there was the word "soma" which is a new label for our body, but the body is only one of the notions by which we feel the need to name our interiority. In other civilizations, Descola shows us, this notion simply does not exist. I think it is becoming time to look at other non-Western ways of looking at the body, to avoid the almost constant ambiguities I've heard in a lot of speeches.

I would like, if it is possible, that Kitt specifies his notion of intellectual body. Could she consider that the skeleton is one of those possible intellectual bodies?

K. Johnson: When I was 13 years old, I had a new trainer. In elite sports at that time, it was very fashionable to work on psychological training, so we did a lot of meditation training, on the skeleton. We started to train and work physically on the skeleton. We tried to train, and I think it worked, to put my focus when I was running into the skeleton, so that I would be present in that tissue in my body. I would not be present in my breath or in my muscles. And I improved my times immensely after doing this shift. So yes, the skeleton can for sure be intelligent. And I think the body does not

exist without the physicality of the rest. I totally agree that the words that are found or not found to speak about it are very poor. And I have not found the words to speak about it. That is why the sort of short cuts to it is to say that when I speak about the body, I also include the mind, the emotions, the psychology, the spirit, everything, because it is intertwined. But the language is not correct enough yet.

A. Rosenfeld Szelwar: Thanks to Kitt for speaking about emotions, because I feel that during today's day, dedicated to artistic creation, this is the first time I hear the word "emotion". We evoked the body as creator, and the physical capacities, which for me include the emotions, which are motors of creation. Beyond that, you talk about a body in its movement capabilities. I would have liked to know if for this body, which is powerful and flexible at the same time, its incapacities would not be also a creative motor? In a second time, would these disabilities, which give emotions, since we are confronted with difficulties, would they not also create a new creative language?

S. Noro: I did not talk about emotion because we talked about the commitment of the body, but my entire journey is marked only emotions: the feeling of the body, things, and disabilities obviously. I fell from 5 meters high once so I had to readapt a lot of things in my practice. In my career, during shows, on 10 shows there may be 3 where I do not hurt, but 7 where there is always something: an injury, a fatigue. It is constantly restoring me, lying on the ground, and find my breath, to put a kind of page to zero and revitalize this body by transforming it constantly. I have been in this intensive practice for 35 years, I am only transforming. Transforming in relation to what I discover, encounter, emotions, injuries, collapses too. All of this nourishes creation, it's one of the things that drives people.

S. Kann: I think there is something important about what you say: you have described a kind of path, path, where you suffer emotions. I think it's important to clarify this, because all too often,

when we use emotions as a driving force for creation, we feel that it goes from the inside to the outside. The word "emotion" often implies a certain obsession with the self, which erases a little the externality of the circus, the fact that one is always in relation with something, a technique, an object, and also politically with the others. The fact that if you work on my emotion to me, it's not that emotions just come from us. Often this seems like that especially in the creative process. I think that affect is a way of thinking about emotion as something you experience from the outside, and as something of a motor. I find it easier to think of ourselves as channels receiving and giving back content, because with the word "emotion", we fall back into self-expression.

K. Johnson: Speaking about emotion, I think it can be a strong driver. But, speaking from my own experience and my own taste and work also, I prefer to let it self be lived out, dried out in the process of creation, and for it to define a kind of container, a kind of almost simple for it. If I want these emotions to be created and lived by the audience, I should not live it, but I should find the appropriate container for it, which has to be quite dry actually. That is what I usually do.

I want to comment a little bit about this obstacle of weakness or illness, etc.

Many years ago, I did a creation and then I fell ill. I was hospitalized, I was very ill for a year. And I did not know if it would be chronic or not. At that time they did not have any cure for hepatitis. I decided I had a job halfway through this illness, with this piece I created before I got ill, and I decided to perform it. I was totally weak, I had lost about 8 kilos. I was afraid because at that time if it was not cured, it would be chronic and it would turn into cancer. So I was in this state but I decided to perform it. This was one of the best learning processes I have ever had. Because how can you allow your body, which is so transparent, still to be present, at the inch of the shape of it? You are not feeling it out, you habit your way where you just go full-power. How can you still perform it? And how can you perform without being pathetic, you do not want to look like a patient.

That was a really strong learning process.

M. Sizorn: There has been little mention of the report to the public. Maybe we could end up with what this committed body produces and how you think it when writing. Do you have any examples to share? We talked about kinesthetic empathy previously, is that part of the things you think about in writing?

A. Vantournhout: Yes, for me, what is problematic in the circus and in the relation to the body is rather the circular approach. We saw it with Darragh McLoughlin, if we have a space and we consider it rather circular, even if it's frontal, we do not create by drama if we move from the back to the front of the stage. This is the problem of the plurality of points of view. It is even more difficult to put his body on stage, we are less aware of what we express with our body in a circular space. I think it's a little problematic, it's our heritage of Johan Le Guillerm perhaps, even if I love it in minority practices, etc. Reducing the circus to a gathering space around a circular point or space will be problematic to evolve, to really focus on the body itself, because we do not know what we express. The balance of the board is different for each spectator. And if I take the example of ANECKXANDER, the body serves as a scenography. For example, if I make small movements or gestures, I organize my body as an architectural space with the stage, which is of course almost nothing on stage. With a frontal look, we can put the body forward and use it as a scenic space, as scenography, a bit like a broom of the body, but more complex, looking how his body can serve the action that we fact. Maybe in juggling we always face, we always turn, but we can not express more than that, more than the juggling, because we are in circular. Space goes only from the middle to the periphery. Other than that, it's very hard to express things unless you work with the public, involve them, work on proximity.

S.Kann: I think we found like the coronal of where we disagree, because from what I hear from you, it is like frontality is important so that you can have

control over what the show is presenting.

A. Vantournhout: The unconscious circularity or the circularity as a non-artistic conscious choice is a problem, and I truly think that some disciplines like juggling are almost useless to present on a circular stage, because you are dealing with objects that are organized in space, and in a circular environment this is just like a clown, like Jacques Lecoc said "Why is a clown in a circle?". Because you cannot create drama. If you leave out the audience's participation, a clown in a circular environment is actually less beneficial. So on a stage, the clown will actually have more power, he will be able to create more meaning, so I think this a very important thing and we are not enough conscious of it.

S. Kann: I agree with this, I agree that in circus in general we often do a poor job organizing space. It also has to do with our training conditions. In most circus schools that I have seen, everyone is training in the same space, so when you are learning to be an artist, you do not also think about moving outside of your space, or designing a path with true space. Also, people trained in aerial for example, maybe have a vertical space, but when those people start making work that is pluri-disciplinary and you talk about mise en scène, I find that space often gets left behind. I would say there is a certain ideology where meaning is more important than form, which is weird because for me, meaning has form. But I got the impression that the form of the body is somehow beginning to be seen as superficial. There is a tendency in aerial to want to make it about actions and not about form, and I think that we need to understand that this is an ideological choice and not a neutral choice. I think there is also a tendency in circus to acquit good dramaturgy with controls of dramaturgy. We need to also think about how this relates to a relationship toward controlled bodies.

We need to understand that this is also an ideological choice and not a sort of neutral choice. There are many different ways of thinking about what a dramaturgy could be, outside of the

framework of "I know exactly what is going on, and every point, and I know exactly how to being received."

K. Johnson: I think that generally the choices of space should be examined more clearly. I often lack that there is a relationship between the choice of the place, the space, and the concept. That is very habitual to hear "I just need a stage. I just need a manège, whatever it is." Is public space just public space? No, it is not just public space. Everything has an agenda. Stages also have agendas. So I would like very much to see a much closer relationship between a concept and a choice of space, and thereby also a choice of how you relate to audiences.



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