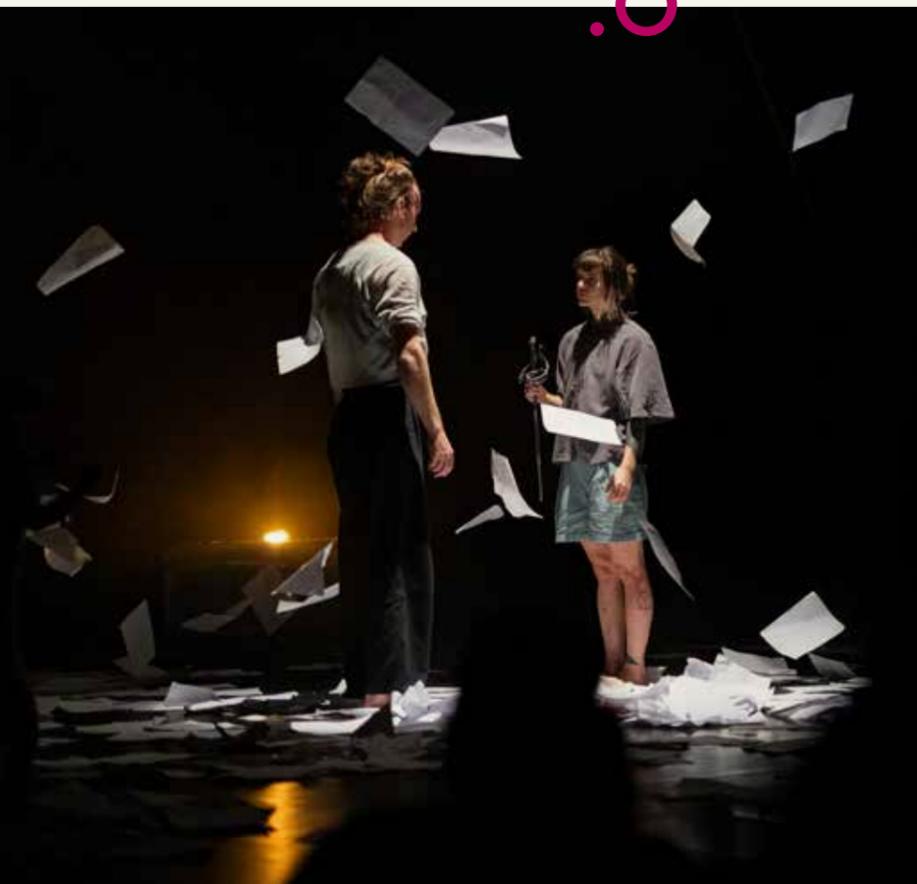


SOME THOUGHTS



I explore in this article a selection of works that are part of the German circus arts landscape. My main purpose is to provide answers to some questions that are raised by more and more people involved in the circus sector in Germany and beyond. Over the last ten years or so, several works have been associated with a so-called “contemporary German circus”. What are these projects? Who are the artists and teams who lead them? What are their approaches and how can we talk about them?

In the following pages, I share a series of thoughts resulting from an analysis of eight shows presented as part of an event in Berlin, Zirkus ONstage-Pro festival, held from 2nd to 4th November 2023. These projects played at Pfefferberg Theater and Pfefferwerk: the first place has a frontal set-up, while the other has a malleable set-up to welcome other scenographic configurations. Among the projects programmed are Responsive Round by Klub Girko (2020), Brace for impact by Knot on Hands (2020), Dear Doubts by Revue Regret (2021), René by Sinking

Sideways (2021), I Was Told. by Kathrin Wagner (2022), The Trace of the Snail by the Lemon Press Collective (2023) and Kaleiding by Lily&Janick (2023). These creations have been selected as part of the Zirkus ON creation programme since 2019. Also the festival began with a work in progress of UN FIL QUI DÉFILE, a project led by Theresa Kuhn and supported by Le Palc and Zirkus ON as part of their residency exchanges.

These shows are mostly directed by artists whose structures and companies were founded between 2017 and 2022. Most of these works are the first opportunity for their authors to work within a subsidised performing arts network. Yet many of these artists have previous artistic experience in one or more segments of the performing arts market, notably through collaborations with companies. Whether or not they have attended a circus school, all of them have already created one or more short forms such as an act.

“Contemporary circus in and from Germany” is the main guideline of this programming and justifies the missions of Zirkus ON. Each year, this creation programme facilitates the production of three selected projects over a period of two years through various forms of support. With this festival, Zirkus ON completes this support for artists and artistic teams by aiming to build another bridge between contemporary circus creation and performing arts distribution network.

To analyse these works, I drew up observations based on my aesthetic experience of each of these works at the festival. I also used several analysis grids developed in the academic field of circus studies and, more broadly, in the performing arts. I also took a comprehensive approach to enrich my analyses by considering different forms of discourse by the programmed artists. Whether these discourses exist in their show or in different types of documentation such as dossiers and websites, I pay attention to the meanings they give to their acts as well as the reasons they give to justify the interest of their staging.

I provide below some information that characterises the programmed projects, their authors, and the teams with whom they work. Then I focus more deeply on the artistic tools they draw on, in order to detail how these authors experiment with and propose circus-specific gestures. In this way, this selection of works of Zirkus ON appears to already provide several answers to the questions raised above about what characterises German contemporary circus.

A STATE OF THE ART OF THE CONTEMPORARY GERMAN CIRCUS

Several observations can be drawn from the backgrounds of the authors and the ways they develop their projects. Firstly, these teams and their productions have both a German and an international dimension. Furthermore, two main trends emerge regarding how the authorship is shared. On the one hand, there is a diversity of positions with regards to the names used to characterise the dramaturgical functions of each team member. On the other hand, many of these creations are collective and the performers combine the functions of author and director; they could therefore be considered “on-stage authors”, to use Marion Cousin’s expression, or even circographers, to borrow that neologism used by Maroussia Diaz Verbèke and Alexander Vantournhout. Moreover, their approaches are singular in terms of the richness of the languages and skills they use; and these skills are not exclusively related to circus. Lastly, it is worth noting that these teams endeavour to make their project accessible to a wide audience, without deviating from their artistic intentions.

GERMAN AND EUROPEAN AUTHORS

One or more members of each circus team on the programme were born in Germany, and often started their circus training in that country. Those who subsequently continued their higher education in this field studied at establishments abroad. Many of them have met during their studies abroad the other members of their artistic team, who come from other countries close to Germany. Former students at Dutch circus schools are particularly well represented. Five of the eight artistic teams completed their studies at Codarts University in Rotterdam (2015-2022), while another team was educated at Fontys, the Tilburg School of Fine and Performing Arts. As for Theresa

◀
Revue Regret
“Dear Doubts”
© Kolja Huneck

▼
René
© Kolja Huneck

Kuhn, she trained as a circus artist in England (Circomedia, Bristol) and France (National Center for Circus Arts, Châlons-en-Champagne). Even Kathrin Wagner, a self-taught juggler, has been partly trained abroad.

Many of these artists are based in Germany, where they have also set up their own structures, which are often associations. Almost all of them develop the production and distribution of their works through transnational partnerships with Germany. The foreign partners involved are mainly located in Western Europe. In addition, the members of these teams have collaborators in common, most of whom are based in, or at least work mainly between Germany and neighbouring countries.

The recognition of these artists can also be measured in several ways at German and European level. The support provided by Zirkus ON through its accompaniment missions is already a major catalyst for the identification of their artistic projects within and beyond Germany. Some of the artists selected in the realm of Zirkus ON’s first editions have already performed at renowned festivals in other countries and even on the European scale. Several artists are also renowned for their involvement in other initiatives. These include initiatives that address issues specific to the circus from a feminist perspective. Some of them are involved in the German organisation Initiative Feministischer Circus. Jakob Jacobsson, co-founder of the company Revue Regret, is also known for his pioneering statistical study “Strength in Numbers: The 34%”, which highlights the lack of representation and parity from a gendered point of view in the circus milieu, mainly in Europe.



SMALL AND WELL-SUPPORTED TEAMS

Given the distribution of the works programmed, the creative teams are quite small: the number of performers varies from one to three, and most of the time they are the main authors of the project. *UN FIL QUI DÉFILE* is a special example in terms of authorship because the initiator of this project, Theresa Kuhn, recently decided to share the stage direction with French circographer Maroussia Diaz Verbèke.

However, almost all the teams have several collaborators and, more specifically, one or more people involved in dramaturgical aspects of the works, in addition to the mentors assigned by Zirkus ON. A variety of denominations attest to the diversity of names used to highlight the dramaturgical function of each of these people. They share some responsibilities relating to the staging (or circography) of the works, without necessarily having to make decisions. Some teams use the word "dramaturgy" or at least the adjective "dramaturgical" to qualify the nature of their role. Other artists use expressions that are still based on a similar perspective, but which leaves leeway for inter-

pretation regarding the forms and methods that such a dramaturgical function can take. These include "complicit eye" [regard complice], "outside feedback", "artistic advice", "creative advice", "artistic guidance", "punctual collaborator" [collaborateur ponctuel], or even "coach". Some of the formulations also tend to refer to the dramaturgical materials on which these people work, by referring to choreography, for example ("choreographic assistance").

DESIRE FOR ACCESSIBILITY AND SINGULARITY

Various performance conditions are proposed for the creations; they are designed to be performed in different types of venues and stage configurations. Some companies, like *Revue Regret*, even call for performances in less conventional venues, such as cathedrals. Although most of the shows performed indoors, some teams have also conceived them to be performed outdoors. *UN FIL QUI DÉFILE* was presented indoors, but this creation is planned to be shown outdoors, and could possibly be adapted for

a circus tent. In addition, the shows are mainly long format, except for *Brace for Impact*, which lasts thirty minutes. The audience capacities and age limits also differ.

While one out of every two shows are designed to be performed frontally, some authors also consider performing them in other stage arrangements. A few works adopt scenographies that aim to explode the space of points of view—to use Johann Le Guillerm's expression: in this sense, they call into play contradictory points of view where the spectator's attention revolves around a central focus. Among the stage configurations presented include bi-frontal (*Kaleiding*), quadri-frontal (*René*) and circular (*Responsive Round*, *UN FIL QUI DÉFILE*). Some frontal performances also break down the fourth wall that separates the stage from the audience, inviting one or more spectators to move around temporarily (*I Was Told* and *Dear Doubts*), or even to join the artists on stage (*The Trace of the Snail*). Most of the scenographies reflect the artists' choices to favour economy of means. The shows often begin with empty spaces, or at least with a small quantity of props and materials. However, each of these works differs in the way the performers gradually occupy these spaces. Furthermore, many teams use second-hand objects, as well as costumes that look like clothes worn in everyday life (streetwear, workwear, sportswear, etc.).

In the end, it should be noted that each of these works develops its approach by using also dramaturgical tools and materials that are common to other artistic fields, or even specific to them. What may constitute forms of rapprochement, appropriation or even borrowing from artistic fields other than the circus leads us to not reduce these works to the circus disciplines used by their creators. Even though the following part is dedicated to their specifically circus-related means, I would like to emphasise the richness and singularity of each artist's career path, as well as the diversity of the skills they mobilise.

A WIDE RANGE OF WAYS OF MAKING CIRCUS

The authors distinguish themselves by their artistic intentions and approaches, but many of their practices relate to what has made or is making circus nowadays. Indeed, these practices are codified in the sense that we can relate them to our collective imagination and to the history of the circus. These artists not only work according to these codes, but also subvert them in different ways to

develop the coherence of their approaches. Whether their physical techniques or some of their equipment and props are considered, the multidisciplinary aspect of circus is brought to light through this selection of works. Hence it represents a panorama of circus practices: acrobatics and juggling are particularly representative, and several teams combine various circus practices in the same work.

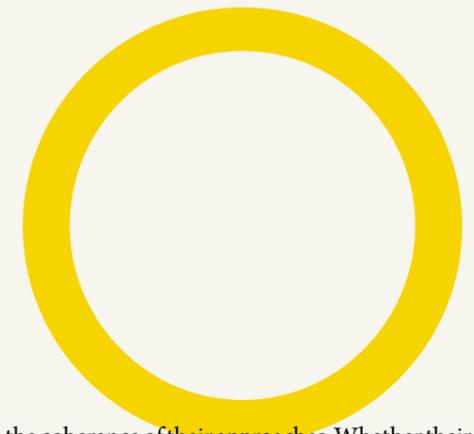
The following paragraphs look at the way each work uses circus to investigate humankind. Each subsection refers to phenomena whose mechanisms are addressed by circus gestures, and the perceptive frameworks that such gestures generate. The first section focuses on works that show relationships between bodies through one or more perspectives. The second deals with two shows that explore the power of human and nonhuman entities to act. The final section includes several works based on human reactions such as regret, doubt, love, anger, fear and shame. These artists use circus to understand what is at stake in the expression of these emotions; in doing so, they stage processes of understanding, (re)awareness and even possible reconstruction.

EXPLORING HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Developing relaxed forms of acrobatic three-person lifts

In *Brace for Impact*, *Knot on Hands* uses acrobatic lifts to present different forms of relationships. Britt Timmermans, Mario Kunzi and Tijs Bastiaens portray their relationships in more cautious, harmonious and natural ways. More specifically, they compose movement phrases following a horizontal as well as a vertical direction. In this way, their lifts still depend on their respective bodies' relationship to gravity, while allowing each of the three acrobats to evolve in different ways and positions as pushers and flyers.

On the one hand, the performers extend the range of body parts that can be used to grip and land during an acrobatic lift. Besides feet, hands, shoulders and the ground, other body parts such as the thighs, hips and torso are being used as new gripping areas and landing bases. On the other hand, while they still sometimes throw someone into the air by throwing them off, they also sometimes retain a form of connection during certain lift sequences: the flyer still has to deal with gravity, but the codified gestures of the lifts are more often intermingled with other



ordinary gestures, such as walking. When they are working on the limits of balance between them, the equilibrium is challenged and then restored in different ways with two or three people. This variation in weight distribution creates a tension and a constraint enabling them to compose lifts that reveal different relationships. Therefore, it is possible to speak of horizontality in two senses: they can extend the perimeter of their movement area around a vertical axis, and they tend to highlight each one. The use of this other axis gave me a different appreciation of the virtuosity of their movements: their pace is often slower, and they experience other ways of occupying the stage.

Their tripartite relationship can thus take on several states. Possibility like staying connected is a first one: a highlight of the show is a kind of culbuto –three acrobats move around a centre, intertwined with each other. Also, when they walk together, one of them can still be lifted by their partners by one hand and one foot, playing with centrifugal force. In addition, a flyer only needs to contort an arm slightly to continue a lift by tipping over onto a partner's back or arm. The second relational state that can be felt in their lifts raises doubts about the possibility of its achievement, but it nonetheless happens. For example, Britt Timmermans carries her two male partners alone. The last relational state plays with the impossibility of moving forward with a lift once the distribution of balance seems to have reached a threshold. A position like the bridge is a relevant pattern: while Britt Timmermans balances on the shoulders of her partners, with her feet on one and her hands on the other, she is still the link that holds them together without making their structure waver. They remain in the same position, standing or lying down, and they can turn on themselves for example.

REINCARNATING AN ACROBATIC PATTERN OVER TIME AND WITH JOY

Sinking Sideways presents René as a playful and joyful way for two acrobats to work together and overcome their physical limitations. Based on the simple principle of bouncing, they repeat the candlestick, an acrobatic trick used in various fields (circus, dance, gymnastics, etc.) and well-known for its elementary movement mechanics. It consists in tipping the body so that it reaches an inverted position: the bounce occurs when the body finds another state of balance, upside down, being supported mainly by the back of the neck, while the feet point towards the sky.

Xenia Bannuscher and Dries Vanwalle test their powers of endurance to the full, play with the audience's attention to expand a movement pattern that is initially easy to grasp. To do this, they use acrodance –in other words they work on their acrobatics on the floor in a choreographic way. From the beginning of the show, they repeat candlesticks for a few minutes, facing each other on the same line in the middle of the stage. A system of counts helps them to keep pace with each movement. The repetitive music that accompanies them also acts as a metronome, starting with a simple signal.

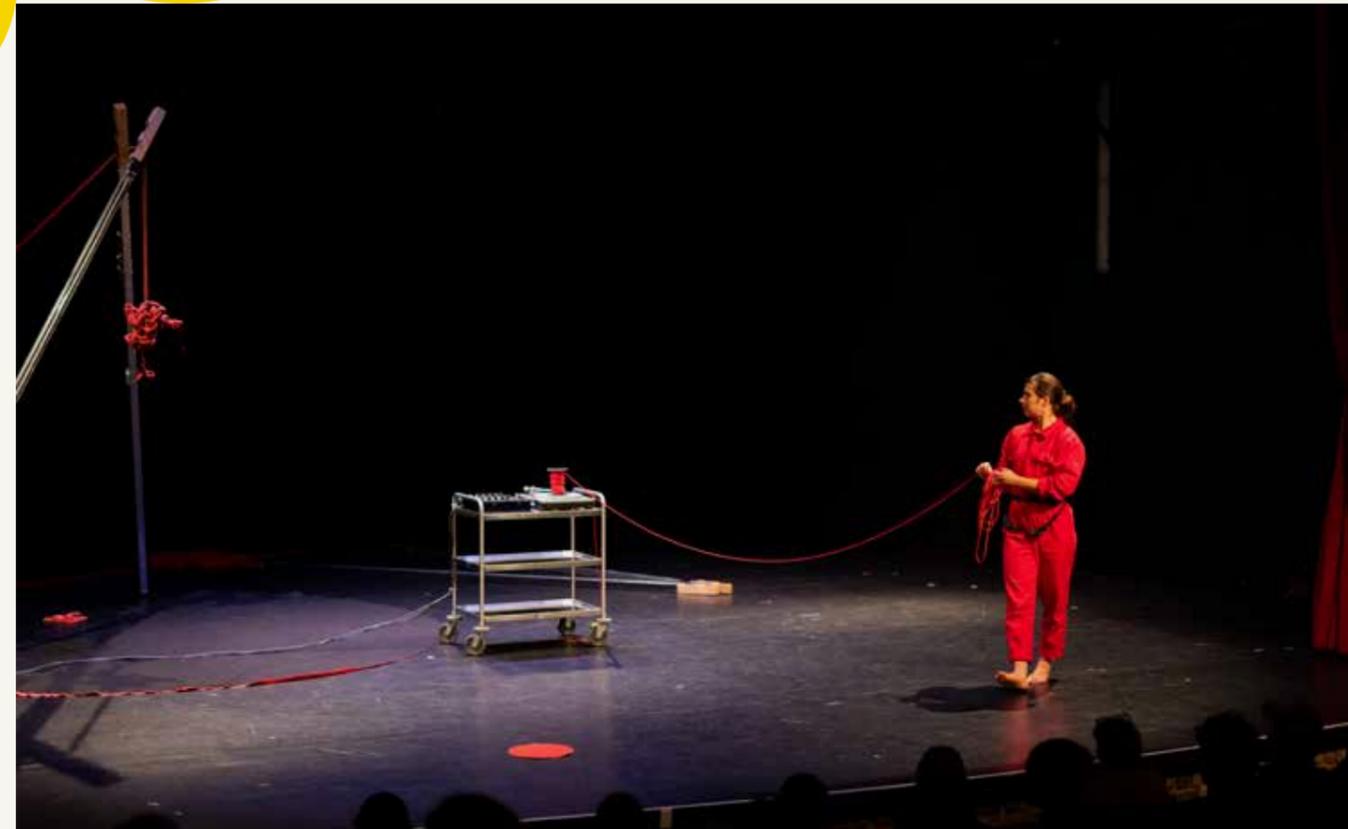
The repetition of candlesticks gradually shifts the original central axis to rotate around the stage like two hands on a clock. An increasingly detailed set of acrobatic and mechanical movements is then progressively executed as if it were a new score of movements. Whereas these gestures were aimed at reproducing the candlestick pattern, they seem desincarnated: they are no longer based on the visual cues that would lead us to perceive an acrobatic –and therefore circus– practice. The performers also add other gestural variations to this initial pattern, be it before, during or after a candlestick, while occupying wider areas of the stage. These include rolls, jumps, throws and rotations of the body, as well as slides of the hands on the floor and other focused movements of limbs such as the legs. The music is progressively enriched by sound patterns previously recorded or produced live by the two performers as they tap their limbs (elbows, palms, heels, soles ...) to the floor.

Despite their breathlessness, Xenia Bannuscher and Dries Vanwalle also tend to emphasise the enjoyment they get from performing this physical score. They gradually open up their attention and, more particularly, their eyes. From the second half of the show, they exchange a few smiles and grimaces to let each other know how tired they are. They then glance at some of the spectators in their field of view. One of the last moments of the show is an opportunity for them to open even more to the audience by going around the stage, looking in the eye more spectators and still doing candlesticks.

Composing a different world with the reflections of acrobatic and dance lifts

In Kaleiding Lily Schlinker and Janick Kremer use mirrors as a prism to follow their acrobatic duo. The floor is made up of this material, and it enables them to support

Theresa Kuhn
"UN FIL QUI DÉFILE"
© Kolja Huneck



each other and move independently. In this assemblage of mirrors, the path of Lily&Janick portrays the experience of deconstructing a perfect world. The fact that one of the mirrors on the floor is (virtually) broken by the impact of a landing leads to a "point of no return." Each mirror is manually set aside until the world they live in is reduced to a single fragment that no longer fits into a small beam of light.

Using mirrors has many aesthetic effects, as much for acrobatic practice as for the conditions in which Lily&Janick evolve as protagonists. Mirrors are ambivalent: on the one hand, their surfaces seem solid, radiant and a perfect reflector; on the other, they can also appear cold, fragile, and slippery, as well as getting some smudges quickly. Whether wearing flesh-coloured costumes or tracksuits, the two acrobats play with most of these contradictory qualities. The world of Kaleiding seems utopian at first sight, because of the sense of perfection generated by the scenography and the behaviour of the performers. From the beginning of the show, they are posed relaxed and at peace, balancing on themselves, and more precisely on

their double reflected in the mirrors. There is a temporary doubt about who is supporting the other. More broadly, the performers often pose in the first part of the show in ways that suggest associations more akin to a sibling relationship than a love partnership.

Despite this harmony, reality appears distorted because our visual cues are disturbed by the symmetries created between the performers' bodies facing each other, and their own reflections. Mirrors have a noteworthy quality: their surface extends the verticality inherent in lifts, between an upper world (the real one) and a lower world (the one reflected in the mirror). For instance, while performing a headstand, the performers can look down at us from above, in other words they can point their gaze in the direction of a mirror and have it reflected at the audience. A lift forming a human tower can even partly escape from the frame of the mirror (and therefore the lower world). This permanent symmetry sometimes generates kaleidoscopic effects that are additional to the symmetries created by the echo of the gestures of the two performers when they synchronise in the upper world.

In parallel to these aesthetic effects, Lily&Janick also combine acrobatic and dance lifts. The quality of their movements and poses can at times refer to both circus and dance codes. While the circus gesture of carrying each other is maintained throughout Kaleiding, Lily&Janick also draw on their dance skills to compose their duet moves, showing an ambiguous and fragile relationship. Some lifts may still display a certain virtuosity, but sometimes many of them seem to be based on a more balanced distribution of forces between the two partners and their roles of pusher and flyer. These roles are often reversed, particularly when Lily Schlinker carries Janick Kremer. For example, other body parts such as shoulders and toes are mobilised to dehierarchise their roles: the performers thus appear to be collaborating in a playful way that involves less risk-taking. Several lifts are performed more carefully, such as when Lily Schlinker does a headstand on one hand of Janick Kremer, while holding his other hand.

EXAMINING HUMAN AND NONHUMAN AGENCY

Being guided by a bamboo

Klub Girko explores in Responsive Round the agency of bamboo by interacting with the audience. Moritz Grenz and Josef Stiller begin the performance sitting next to spectators in a circular arrangement of rows of chairs, and set bamboo in motion, making it an acting element in the process. In other words, not only is this plant at the centre of attention, but it also enables most of the actions to happen and evolve. Two main qualities of bamboo are brought to light and co-produced by both the performers and part of the audience.

One of bamboo's qualities is its ability to resound. A wide range of sounds are produced by haptic interaction with bamboo. These sounds are amplified and natural; some even seem artificial or at least modified because their source is recorded and reproduced live. Indeed, there are wireless microphones in each bamboo, and Moritz Grenz modulates the sounds with the help of a pad. He plays with the volume, speed, and echo of the sounds. As a result, any bamboo is perceived during the show as a multi-instrument whose sounds are relatively difficult to predict.

Juggleability [jonglabilité] of each bamboo gradually appears as their second quality and is expressed through different forms of juggling. Even if at first sight bamboo

does not look like a standard juggling object, its use by Josef Stiller reveals increasingly codified juggling gestures that involve two types of support. On the one hand, Josef Stiller uses certain body parts such as his feet, head, hands, and lower back to balance one or several bamboos. The floor also becomes a support: from the start of the show, audience members in the first row are asked to move the long object from one hand to the other; then Josef Stiller also juggles three bamboos on his own by sliding one end of each bamboo onto the floor and throwing and catching the other ends in the air. Moreover, he balances the three bamboos on the floor, he intervenes briefly with his hand to quickly bring them up to their suspension point, and even moves them around the stage. In doing so, familiar juggling patterns are introduced in situations where everyone can act so that the actions can go on.

Although no one speaks during the performance, Josef Stiller uses means of communication based on body language. Whether he is seated in the audience or standing at centre stage, he plays with his eyes to create visual contact with the audience, for example before dropping (or not) the bamboo so that it can be caught. In this way, the audience's reflexes are challenged, as is their role in determining the progression of the show. Their role is all the more important that they can sometimes prevent the drop of a bamboo.

When it all comes down to a red thread

Theresa Kuhn's aim in UN FIL QUI DÉFILE is to create a variety of relationships, following "an adventure into the unknown in all directions", to use her words. As soon as the show begins, she brings a variety of materials onto the stage, using them for different purposes and behaving in a disorganized fashion. Nevertheless, what makes sense in her work has much to do with the circus imagery. Theresa Kuhn draws on its codified references, as well as elements more specifically related to her main apparatus, the flexible still wire rope.

The emblematic colour of circus, red, is present on her costume, on the carpets and circular accessories and on the ribbons projected into the air. Also, Theresa Kuhn uses a multitude of wires with different functions. There is the microphone wire to address the audience, and the



EXPERIMENTING WITH THE POWER OF AFFECTS

Dealing with regrets from a circus perspective

Dear Doubts by Lisa Chudalla and Jakob Jacobsson deals with an emotional redaction related to past acts and behaviours: regret. To facilitate the projection of the audience's subjectivity into their performance, they distort the reality depicted on stage by composing different kinds of actions that blend circus practices. These practices are rooted in the history of circus and some of its past aesthetics. Some can now be considered part of everyday life, such as tattooing, while other practices involve the use of tools that have abstract forms. Consequently, these practices can be associated with different ritual or psychological uses.

The show is written in a way that is free from the codes that define the units of the dramaturgy of what is known as the classical circus, such as the acts and the entresort. Due to the variety of elements involved, the show evolves in an organic way. Few clues are provided to literally interpret the information on stage, beyond the one given by a taxidermised fox. This animal is no longer in a cabinet of curiosities, but alongside contemporary circus apparatuses. According to Revue Regret, this fox is both an extension of the performers and the main connection between what happens on and off stage. Some speeches, shared in voice-over, help audience to introspect on what happens. In the following lines I propose to share an interpretation of several actions performed by the bodies on stage that seem to me "parasitised". Indeed, Jakob Jacobsson and Lisa Chudalla appeared to me to be playing not only the role of tormented individuals, but also the effects of a force acting upon them. The metaphorical power of their apparatuses on stage attests to this.

Wwire she unwinds from a reel on a record player to play a voice-over. Finally, the wire is obviously a key material in her apparatus: it enables her to evolve at heights thanks to codified techniques for keeping her balance, be it in a standing position, on her head or even on one shoulder.

The act of literally tinkering with this apparatus plays a major role in the show. Not only does she assemble her metal bars with wires, but she also gradually shifts the support points of the main wire that crosses the stage. Her structure stands in position thanks to the principle of tensegrity, in other words the interplay of the forces of tension and compression that are distributed and balanced within it. However, the stability of this structure is precarious, and has an impact on the way she climbs and stands on it, as well as on her own behaviour, which can be described as clownish for many reasons. While she seems to have carefully followed the instructions of a manual to build this structure, it doesn't look as robust as other models with flexible wires. As a do-it-yourself artist, Theresa Kuhn makes us doubt her confidence and even wonder if the performance is proceeding smoothly from the very first minutes. Although unsuited to the modern world, she seems determined to carry on with her tasks, and takes the opportunity of several digressions to share other uses of the wires by performing a variety of unexpected actions, including a lyrical song.

The show opens with Jakob Jacobsson, hanging on an aerial rope, reading several sheets of paper. Different reactions, such as laughter or disappointment, suggest that he is going through different kinds of regret. However, it is doubtful whether these are his own regrets. Lisa Chudalla, meanwhile, is below him on the ground, gathering these sheets. This verticality between the two performers makes us assume that Jakob Jacobsson represents Lisa Chudalla's unconscious, a phenomenon which might explain why certain ideas escape her and cause her to have doubts. She locks all her papers and Jakob Jacobsson in a trunk, where they scream and then re-emerge. Lisa Chudalla also uses a Cyr wheel while being exposed to stroboscopic flashes; its multiple gyrations seem to symbolise the urgency of asking "what if" –to quote the company. It feels like a moment of recollection, in which time plays a more important role in dealing with our regrets. It can indeed increase the weight of our doubts and make our state more uncertain.

The final part of the show is also an opportunity for Revue Regret to revisit two practices that are historically related to the circus. Lisa Chudalla's sword swallowing is the first highlight of the show after a sequence of manipulation with Jakob Jacobsson. She then sits at the front of the stage and tattoos a line of ink on the bottom of her shin, alongside others already done, as if this mark could be counted with those probably added during previous performances of Dear Doubts. These two scenes reflect the weight of regret we can feel: it can leave its mark on us, or even hurt us, and can often take a long time to consider, even for the rest of our lives.

*Denouncing sexist discrimination
from a juggler's point of view*

In I Was Told. Kathrin Wagner explores the influence of language on the way people perceive themselves and others. She draws on her own experience of gender discrimination as an artist. To do this, she uses two main languages: on the one hand, she juggles rings; on the other, she uses spoken words, in a specific language—English, German or French, depending on the venues.

Juggling is performed in different codified forms, such as throwing and catching a growing number of rings in the air or manipulating them using the floor or her body. Kathrin Wagner, for example, rolls her rings on the stage or blocks them on her elbows, knees, and feet. In this way, she shows juggling in different contexts, such as a com-

mented rehearsal of some of her most difficult tricks, or her act. In doing so, she presents herself as a juggler: she rises to these technical challenges and is thus considered on the same level as any other juggler who has practised this art over a long period of time. At the beginning of the show, she balances a ring on her head for several minutes while inviting the audience to ask her to perform any action while balancing a ring on her forehead. This challenge leads her to perform several tricks that test her mastery of balancing the object: pirouetting and then jumping up and down; standing on and then getting off a chair; singing and dancing. From the bleachers to the stage, she demonstrates her virtuosity by doing various exercises that are a first opportunity for her to interact with the audience.

As she progressively intertwines her speeches with juggling, she tends to raise a paradox concerning her situation as a woman juggler. Indeed, she works in a specific milieu: juggling –and more broadly those of circus and spectacle. From a technical point of view, all the skills mentioned above do not seem to justify considering her gender identity. This is why her addresses to the public and her poems spoken help her to put into words the emotions she feels about sexist judgements and behaviour towards her. In her experience as a juggler, these forms of sexist discrimination have had a significant impact on her self-confidence and self-esteem. This is why she encourages herself in her speeches to accept and even love her personal imperfections, so that they do not hinder the way she juggles on stage.

Kathrin Wagner composes sequences of words and juggling to give a point of view based on her situated knowledge which concerns her and other juggling and circus peers. These speeches are sometimes performed while juggling, sometimes without juggling: this dramatic choice depends on the content of the texts that Kathrin Wagner revises regularly. For example, she shares spoken words while sliding her rings around her shoulders. In this situation, juggling and speaking are intrinsically linked, as she systematically repeats her text from the beginning if a ring drops.

*Softening the ways of practising circus
to open up to the world*

The Trace of the Snail by Lemon Press Collective refers to the carapace, a metaphor for the human body and, more broadly, the ways in which people protect themselves against the nuisances of the outside world. Aurélie Tercier

and Mika Schnapper consider the following paradox: the shell that humans put on to protect themselves tends to cut them off from the relationships they might have with other humans who can help them. Daring to soften this shell in a safe environment allows us to envisage an alternative: the intervention of outside help to take care of us. In other words, sharing our vulnerabilities in a caring environment makes us more inclined to ask for help and being accompanied in overcoming our shortcomings.

Using their circus skills, and spoken words that apprehend and even personify fear, shame, and love, they consider several situations in which these feelings can manifest themselves. On the one hand, listening to fear and shame allows us to reconsider our pejorative view of them by giving them more weight. On the other hand, letting love express itself leads us to open up to those who are important to us. Thus, in this work, circus gestures and spoken words are intertwined to illustrate the act of lowering one's guard. These authors expose themselves in scenes where the codification of the gestures they have learned to make is questioned. Sharing words along with these circus gestures makes this approach more explicit on stage.

While juggling and handstand usually involve different rhythms and postures, Aurélie Tercier and Mika Schnapper combine these skills on stage by softening their bodies and states of mind. For instance, they often carry or hold balls with the soles of their feet. More broadly, their movements can be slower at times. As soon as the audience arrives, the two performers appear indistinguishably because they together curl up into a ball. Their two intertwined bodies then are gradually exposed to the outside world by being lit up, and gently embrace each other as they move towards a standing position. One is partly carried by the other and their intimacy is still shown during a sequence of juggling that is partially codified. They softly pass a ball from one hand to the other so that a juggling pattern can be seen. Compared to a usual throw, this ball exchange requires a more insistent accompaniment of the ball from one hand to the other: between the momentum given to it by the thrower and the cushioning it receives on the catcher's side, the object hardly seems to fly at all, but still draws trajectories around their bodies that are still very close together.

In other sequences, in which the two performers are far apart, Lemon Press Collective still shows the beauty and the fear of failing in doing circus as we expect it, but

in a different, softened way. These examples of circus gestures may be less demonstrative, but they are effective to a certain extent because we can still identify a form of juggling.

Mika Schnapper proposes several forms of juggling that appear unsuccessful at first glance, but which they also aim to reincarnate in a form that is to some extent codified. At the same time, the performer uses a microphone to confide a fear of juggling in front of an audience. The performer then improvises a speech about how difficult and uncompromising juggling is. This relationship with their practice has consequences for their level of confidence in what they want to show on stage. When they repeatedly throw balls around their body, attempts are regularly unsuccessful because the balls fall. Even if some of the catches are not completely mastered, some of the trajectories of the balls are clearly outlined, and Mika Schnapper's movements bring out the corporality of a juggler.

After this partially unsuccessful juggling act, Mika Schnapper struggles to pick up all the balls from the ground properly so that they can keep them together in their hands, and so repeats the gesture of picking them up. Then, in another sequence, Mika Schnapper juggles with absent balls; although invisible, they never cease to make us imagine these imaginary balls, as if their presence had been incorporated. Indeed, the only thing left is the body of Mika Schnapper, whose movements leave us with a few of the codified cues of juggling. Even though Mika Schnapper's ability to impress the audience as a juggler is almost concealed, in some ways juggling is still going on: in a way, we are looking at a disincarnated juggling performance.

