

focus

RUDI SKOTHEIM JENSEN



Rudi performs
"Curtain Call"
by Charlotte
Engelkes,
Stockholm, 2010.

© BENGT GUSTAFSSON

Uncharted Waters

"As a student studying at ESAC, I researched both directing and choreography, as none of us really knew at the time which would be the most useful to learn. Early on we decided that I should also learn circus skills, as I came untrained and had neither muscles nor stamina to my name. When my fellow students worked on their 'speciality' I would focus on 'metteur en scène'. Some teachers at the school thought me very uninteresting and out of place, but the benefit of being on uncharted waters is that you can experiment a lot. More than anything else there was space for experimenting and researching.

Working on choreographic movements we quickly found the obvious qualities which can be translated from any artform to circus, particularly the opposites of fast/slow, small/large, etcetera. Much began with these thoughts. I started to categorise what circus bodies could communicate – what were the essentials. My work and research later focused on how the discipline could expand and translate into other material and/or situations. In doing so I started looking at tools from other performance artforms, to see what I could add to circus. From dance I took the element of choreography; from theatre, dramaturgy; and

"From dance I took the element of choreography; from theatre, dramaturgy; and then, much later, I added the element of risk [...]"

then, much later, and inspired by Gulko, I added the element of risk – or 'riskography' as I have naively come to call it, the art of where we place the advanced tricks, the greatest risks.

I never found the artforms of dance and circus to be very far apart. The only thing that separates circus from dance is the physical training, but even that distinction seems to blur more and more today. Circus is related closely to gymnastics and to sport, yet is still only an arm's length from ballet. After a certain amount of pirouettes, the audience will always start clapping...

Choreographically, dance is used to working with fluidity and release techniques, while circus often works with duration in strength and suspense. But these two examples are obviously broad: I can argue that some circus disciplines are more technically difficult and harder to endure for an extended period of time, but dance can easily be just as difficult and taxing. So I come back to 'risk', to the element of 'failing', and how circus always involves some feature of risk. It does not need to look like risk to be risk, and circus artists do not literally risk anything, as they are professionally trained in 'Safety', as Jean-Michel Guy puts it. But there is a difference in how dance and circus artists move: whatever the approach, in circus 'safety' is challenged and explored differently.

Myself, I would claim to be a hybrid piece of meat – neither a dance nor a circus body. I was always fascinated by movements and needed to learn them to be able to work within the field. But it was always my mind I preferred to train, and I think my body reflects that. It lacks training, but all the information is accessible and stored up in veins and chunks of bone."

● TEXT COMPILED BY JOHN ELLINGSWORTH

Rudi Skotheim Jensen was the very first student to study circus choreography/direction at the Ecole Supérieure des Arts du Cirque in Belgium. He now works mainly as a director and choreographer on the border between theatre, dance, circus and performance arts. With his own and other companies he has presented work all around Europe.