

Qualification Test

Application to Master's Programme in Contemporary Circus Arts starting Autumn 2024

Read the article, which is a text from the course Research Design in Circus, and reflect over “What do you understand from the text” and “How could it be useful for your practice. If not, explain why?”

Writing Practices

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When circus undergraduates complain about having to write I offer them the opportunity to draw instead. I acknowledge that a) writing may not be the most appropriate reflective or documentative tool for their process and that b) they may come to circus school precisely because of a shame felt in being academically (that is to say verbally and in the written word) below par. They rarely take me up on my offer and hand in dull, factual accounts of the process that offer no insight into the journey. A journey could be something like: where it has led them, what discoveries they made, what shiny new tools they found along the way, how they got lost in woods by taking a wrong path and where it might go in the future etc...Writing is the dominant paradigm and even when given an escape clause they won't take it, they will merely suffer the drudgery of having “to do this goddam paper so I can get my marks and get back to doing handstands.”

If the paradigm will not change then maybe it is the form of the writing that must bend a little to the specificities of the craft. In any case, I am currently drawing a funding application to the Arts Council to research alternative models. Of course, it's a prank, but it would be funnier if they gave me the money.

The artistic process unearths all kinds of knowledges that are not recorded, or at least visible in the artefact. Writing is one way of mopping them up – not only as a form of documentation but as a way of actually forming them into useable and shareable tools or even concepts. Writing is a sense-making where perhaps practice is all about affect or sensation or intuition and improvisation. It allows us to communicate processes or “creatings”¹ that, could be transferrable to other fields of action or enquiry. Articulating your practice within another field can expose common ground or even create (break) new ground.

Writing however shouldn't merely be thought of as something for others who are not circus crafts-people, or physical performers or even artists. It is also a tool for concretizing discovery and giving reflection a positive form. It can be used for translation (in which you lose some things but gain others – the metaphor is a way of exposing potential) or as a mediator between two unlikely things that you want to combine. It can be used as a method of bringing the affectual practice into cognitive terms which can then be folded back into the physical body of the work.

¹ For an extended discussion on “creatings”, “createds”, and “creatures” see Peter Hallward's “Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation.” Verso, 2006.

Writing can also form part of the body of the work. It need not be merely a supplement, appendix or footnote but can be an artistic artefact in its own right.

In your choice of writing style you are also choosing an epistemological position from which to speak about your work. You may, however, need to throw a few styles together to get the flavour or tone appropriate for your work. Perhaps theory in the academic style is not enough. Perhaps memoir needs to sit alongside it. Or fiction. Or pictures.

Below is a short list, by no means complete, of suggestions. Play with them and see what each one does to your way of writing about your project, for your project, within your project. Throw them together and see what hybrids occur.

Memoir – this differs from autobiography, which details a chronology of the writer’s entire life, in that it focusses on one aspect – either a period of time, or a specific theme – circus for example. We will discuss in a later module the differences with genealogy. Since we never speak from an abstracted position this may help ground theorizing in a specific context/life-world.

Fiction – whether true or not, fiction creates a world, in the same way that circus does. Circus omits some things and focusses on others in order to define its world. Science Fiction and Fantasy can also be speculative philosophy – Utopic or Dystopic scenarios can be political or social critique.

Theory – a rigorously referenced text citing previous thinkers and their ideas in connection with your questions and propositions.

Creative non-fiction – playfully factual, playing with the facts, working with the facts. Sticking to the facts is (supposed to be) journalism or reportage.

If you want examples of these, or texts about these forms, that are relevant to your project, then just ask me.

Could we go further? How about these?

Graphic – Nick Sousanis recently produced his doctoral dissertation as a graphic novel:
<http://spinweaveandcut.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Sousanis-Unflattening-Excerpt.pdf>

Manifesto – From the short and concise poetics of Yvonne Rainer’s “No” Manifesto, to the sweeping, turbulent poetics of “The Communist Manifesto”, to diatribe of Valerie Solanas’ “SCUM Manifesto”. There is power in the statement, if we are clear on whether it is polemic, based on intuition or faith etc...Some polemics can be highly rigorous theoretical constructs, others are passionately personal propositions based only on opinion.

Dialogue – have a conversation with a respondent – circus, the environment etc... – or give yourself a self-interview.

Some questions about where writing sits with your circus practice:

Is it a parallel practice?

Is it a part of the actual work?

Is it for reflection or documentation?

Is it for exposition?

Is for developing novel aspects of the process?

Good luck. Have fun responding. Fun is serious.