

# Circelation 2005

## Risk

An artistic evaluation  
by

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## INTRODUCTION

1.0 In October 2004 I began to research the subject of 'Playing On The Edge – Risk & Challenge in Popular Performance'. On discovering that the theme of Circelation 2005 was to be Risk, I contacted Chenine Bhatena with a view to observing/being involved. She subsequently invited me to undertake the Artistic Evaluation of Circelation 2005. Subsequent to that I was asked to curate the soirees – providing topics and facilitating discussion.

### 1.2 Context

Circelation was set up by Chenine Bhatena and Leila Jancovich. In 2000 there was a pilot series of workshops in Sheffield. In 2001 there was a second-stage pilot, following up the relationship established between practitioners and tutors in the previous year. This occurred in London and Bristol. In 2004 Circelation was held in Leeds laying the ground for the succeeding one in 2005.

It defines itself as ' a professional development programme for circus artists/performers and circus directors looking to develop and improve their skills and knowledge in the creation of new and innovative collaborative work'. Chenine is interested in creating a journey of challenges so that "people are asked to work in areas unfamiliar to them, not staying in those areas they are comfortable with".

The project is supported by the Arts Council of England because, as an arts development agency, it encourages "opening up new possibilities to artists at various stages in their career and shifting their perceptions as to what circus could be and what theatre can be".

(David Micklem) Alison Andrews and Roanne Jerwood from the Yorkshire Branch of the Arts Council have been particularly supportive.

### 1.3 The Brief

- \* To provide an artistic evaluation of the whole project and of the individual workshops
- \* To assess the benefit of Circelation to the development of British contemporary circus
- \* To provide feedback for the producers of Circelation in order to inform decision making for future courses
- \* To provide text material for a planned DVD on Circelation
- \* To provide text material for a possible DVD on Risk

Additionally

- \* Appropriate sections could be used as feedback for individual tutors

\* Some participants requested to receive sections relating to the research on Risk

#### 1.4 Limitations

Because all but one of the workshops was held concurrently with another it was not possible to attend all the workshops all of the time. In general, where possible, I would try to attend the tutor-led sections and move to the concurrent workshop during devising sections. This enabled me to have an idea of the progression of the workshop but inevitably, I missed some key moments. However I was able to gather accounts of these moments through interviews with participants.

#### 1.5 Sources of evidence

Apart from direct observation the other means of collecting evidence were

- 1) the two questionnaires – the Entry Questionnaire, designed to ascertain why participants had come - and the Exit Questionnaire designed to ascertain what they had got out of it. As is often the case information from questionnaires was incomplete both in terms of questions unanswered and non-returned forms.
- 2) The interviews – video-recorded, one-to-one interviews with all tutors, the producer, some participants and with David Micklem from the ACE.
- 3) Notes & recordings from the soiree discussions.

## 2: THE COURSES

### The weekend workshops

#### 2.1 Pascualito

Pascualito fully embraced the subject of risk, by bravely taking the risk to improvise his workshop. After an initial discussion with the participants to identify personal limitations he set up a series of physical tasks to challenge participants, thus helping them to become more aware of their limitations and giving them the opportunity to surmount them. These tasks were either in response to particular fears, such as jumping from a roof beam or tackled more general limitations such as trusting a ball thrower to narrowly miss their partner or for juggling pairs to remove all, or nearly all, their clothes. These tasks were sometimes accompanied by watching relevant sections of video from the work of *Archaos* or Pascualito's own company, *treteaux du coeur volant*. These videos, accompanied by relevant stories, resulted in an increased understanding of a style of work with very different criteria to that familiar to most participants (for example, entertainment value not being the top priority). The

videos also raised Pascualito's status so that the participants were more willing to follow his lead when he became actively engaged in the evening discussions, encouraging them to engage with an analytical process that was clearly unfamiliar to many. Although the improvised approach was appropriate to the theme and admirable as an idea, the lack of a wide repertoire of teaching material meant that the limited time was not employed as usefully as it could have been, leading to energy dropping and participants not feeling that they had been challenged enough. However, in the context of the theme, there is value in including such an anarchic, independent practitioner whose work is not derivative of the conventional streams of theatre and dance culture. As a person who has taken much greater personal, professional and artistic risks than most teachers he was an inspiration for his lower threshold of inhibition and greater openness.

## 2.2 Steve Tiplady

By contrast Steve Tiplady's workshop was not devised or adapted to fit in with the theme of risk but followed a tried and tested format. This is not to say that the participants did not take risks. There were two basic principles – giving focus and getting the object to breathe. The method was to take found objects that do not offer obvious ways of being animated, to explore their possibilities and then setting up abstract interactions between, for example, a short log and a drinking straw. This was followed by the construction of human puppets out of newspaper that were animated by their creators with the assistance of one or two others. This activity was very valuable as a way to increase awareness and sensitivity of others and to learn when are appropriate moments to support or initiate. Some of the participants were surprised by how much the material that manifested itself was dark (sexual, violent). The improvisational exercises were interspersed with technical instruction as well as an introduction to new possibilities; such as puppets relating to the animators and materials that can be used with an overhead projector to make shadow effects. The weekend finished with a presentation of devised pieces which, whatever their level of achievement, demonstrated openings into new directions. The primary risk for most participants was to work with objects that do not have obvious potential for expressive movement and then to present this work to others. The second challenge was to let go of directing the puppets but to allow them to 'lead' into actions or situations that seemed 'right'. For some there was a risk of revealing material that seemed to emanate from the subconscious. There was also an element of artistic risk as participants tried new methods and new combinations. Self-consciousness disappeared as it

became unnecessary in the total focus on manipulation of the objects. The participants all felt the level of challenge was about right except for one who found it too challenging.

### 2.3 Terry O'Connor

Due to a last minute cancellation of a group-booking, Terry had a smaller than expected group to work with (6 participants with additionally two members of the Circelation team present for half the time). This made for a more intimate group, which was useful for some of the riskier parts of the course, but meant that the improvisations, which needed a large group, could only be watched by Terry and therefore compromised her proposed working method of identifying, with others, which moments were interesting to observe. This is especially important because a key element of her work is compositional – the arrangement of disconnected activities, creating an effect that is either comical or disturbing or both. However the concept was nevertheless understood, helped by watching sections of videos of Forced Entertainment's work and by half the group watching the other. The group improvisations were important to develop group awareness both in terms of use of space, of timing and also in terms of harmonising or contrasting activities.

One of the most useful elements that circus performers could take away from this course was the opening up of greater possibilities of attitude to the spectators. The work is interested in challenging expectations and conventions, exploring the limits of possibility with an audience by, for example, including long periods with very little happening. Unlike much circus there is little interest in being approved by the audience and no interest in virtuosity. In contrast to much contemporary circus there is no interest in employing a physical language; naturalistic acting is used, with the performers being themselves and only playing at a role, in a more extreme version of John Wright's Brechtian approach to character. This gives the performers freedom to drop a scene and comment on the piece they are playing. The perceptions of the public are also played with, by deliberately being ambivalent so, for example, the course included an exercise that used compliments, without making it clear whether these were real or ironic. Risk was referred to frequently and opportunities for risk-taking were provided in the form of, for example, revealing personal information or offending co-performers. Terry was interested in demonstrating "the possibilities of taking things to extremes rather than going there" of showing "the kinds of risks that *could* be taken".

This was a very practical, enjoyable introduction to the work of Forced Entertainment which is perceived as being 'difficult' or

'intellectual' by many circus performers so it is regrettable that only half the participants (3) were circus practitioners.

#### 2.4 Liam Steel

Liam's approach to using risk was interestingly very similar to Terry O'Connor's despite the differences in their style. Both believe that risk-taking is important for the rehearsal process but that there should be no element of unpredictability in performance. In terms of Liam's work this is because there is a possibility of serious injury if there are any minor deviations from the precise choreography and timing. On the first day he introduced the idea that presenting real physical danger creates a strong effect on the audience that can be then linked metaphorically to an abstract image of emotional danger. In terms of circus, he finds it more emotionally engaging when performers fail in public than when they succeed. So his aim was to create this emotional engagement by having other kinds of potential failure.

Participants held, balanced and manoeuvred glasses of water while moving through awkward positions thus creating a real tension in the spectators. Like Debra Batton he worked from both the starting point of the preconceived idea and also the starting point of the physical action. So, for example, participants took the simple physical task of shaking isolated parts of the body to see what effect they created with different people – illness, sexuality, anger. Similarly taking a task of one partner sitting on another as they rolled across the floor suggested different kinds of oppressive relationships. Taking the other starting point, participants were asked to recount a true story of a time they felt very vulnerable and then, in small groups, to create an abstract physical image that captured the essence of the particular experience, incorporating objects, sounds and positions from the real story. Ways were suggested of how to amplify the effect. This process is extremely useful for those wanting to create theatre out of material provided by circus technique, which obviously offers many opportunities of creating an effect of danger or risk.

The final afternoon focussed on using text and its natural rhythm as an aid to synchronising movements and providing a natural timing to choreography.



## THE FIVE-DAY COURSES

### 2.5 Debra Batton

Debra Batton's five days focussed primarily on developing the creative abilities of performers. Her extensive experience in the roles of performer, Artistic Coordinator and Artistic Director have been within the context of team creation so her approach is to provide performers with the skills they need to participate fully in a collaborative creative process.

The course included some introduction of techniques that were new to most participants – supported jumps, Contact Dance moves, counter-weight systems etc, but the main focus was on devising. The starting points for this were either what was suggested when playing with physical tasks or a poetic stimulation, in this case the cartoons of Loenig. Pieces were devised as solos, incorporating personal material, as duos, working on relationships and as trios, exploring the possibilities of counter-weight systems. Most of this material was presented as a collection of thirty separate pieces on the final afternoon. Participants were able to take greater risks because of the supportive atmosphere that was nurtured on the first day through only allowing positive feedback. This enabled them to take greater risks on the second day when they were asked to incorporate personal material into their solos. This was not intended as a therapy but in order “to go deeply inside the self to explore something. Great performers bring something of themselves to the work”.

One of the most important aspects of the course was the training in how to give feedback - to be very precise, concise and honest. A key moment occurred at the end of the second day when they were asked to give *only* negative feedback – this was difficult for many but encouraged a higher quality of critique for the rest of the week. Whilst initially encouraging participants to try to employ an abstract language of physicality, Debra then encouraged them to make the images more accessible by clarifying to the audience where the action took place, who was doing it and what the actions are. Once they had found material they were asked to develop it further by pushing/adding to the physicality, by raising the level of performance intensity and by strengthening the statement/provocation/content. The final showing revealed some moments of a perfect marriage between the physical mechanics and the dramatic action, where the physicality is not just a metaphorical language but enhances the meaning of a moment. It would have been interesting to explore and develop this aspect further in the last two days rather than following the wishes of the group to acquire more physical technique.

## 2.6 John Wright

This course was attended by three directors each working with a trio (one group of four) of performers with whom they had varying degrees of previous contact. One director had never met any of her performers before the first day. The directors remained almost entirely outside the produced piece of performance. John Wright's approach was to give the directors a method for generating material and to provide strategies for engaging the performers in the creative process. He began by identifying with the directors the resources that were on offer – the people, their skills, the equipment and the 'text' (which included ideas, themes, music etc as well as written text). He was a little disappointed that the directors did not bring along more concrete proposals because this meant that much of the very limited time available was spent searching for a theme rather than working on the theme. Unlike Rose English he saw his main task was to enable the directors and performers to acquire ways and means of generating material rather than exploring subject matter.

He spent the first three mornings establishing his criteria, suggesting working methods and considering the possibilities and problems offered by circus technique within a theatrical context. This work served the dual purpose of giving the directors suggestions for approaching their task and of helping the performers understand the process, thus empowering them to contribute to the work. Some of the exercises are applicable to all devised theatre work – e.g. ways to generate ideas but most went to the heart of the key problems faced by those working on the integration of circus techniques within a theatrical context. These include how to use voice in the midst of extreme physical exertion, where to place words within a move, how to deal with the, often awkward, switch of focus the performer needs to accomplish from acting an illusion to the reality of accomplishing difficult moves, how to maintain a simple, human 'reality' whilst working with the enlarged, metaphorical movement style of circus, how to play a character (a term often misunderstood within circus) and even how to give interest to the, often boring, action of climbing a rope. He also looked at the possibilities that circus offers theatre – its enlarged spatial possibilities, its actuality (happening in the here and now), the images offered by the equipment and techniques. He also showed how to justify the large moves through extremes of emotion and how to arrive at disturbing or comic effects when juxtaposing banal scenes with spectacular moves.

John spent the afternoon sessions observing the directors working in order that he could offer support, either through one-to-one mentoring or through provision of relevant exercises on the following morning. For all the directors the most important shift came when they

began to really listen to their performers rather than to merely instruct or choreograph them, to share the questions so that they don't have to come up with all the answers. It is likely that this shift will produce long term results although it took about half the week for the directors to fully come to terms with the process.

### 2.7 Rose English

Rose English worked with a smaller number of people than John Wright – two duos and one trio with the director taking a major role in the performance in all three cases. This was practically necessary because of the small numbers but also because the kind of work that Rose encourages has to be done by the person from whom the performative acts derive. The performers who were not directors all had a close, long standing relationship with their directors and were thus able to make a significant contribution to the work. Because of the small size of the group it was possible to use everyone to make a contribution to all three pieces using a method whereby if someone gave positive feedback about a particular aspect of a piece they would be invited to replicate this aspect themselves. This had the twofold result of allowing the directors to see how others saw what they had presented and to offer a progression.

Rose English's approach is perhaps the most challenging for many circus artists and clearly all of them found it very rewarding. Although Rose has an affection for the world of circus she was not particularly concerned with integrating circus techniques, indeed, either because of choice or circumstance all of the performer-artists that Rose worked with ended up hardly using their skills and equipment. She was more concerned with identifying themes that were close to the hearts of the performer-artists and encouraging them to explore, deepen and express them. Rose uses an intuitive approach that sees significance in coincidence or unexpected happenings, which might be quite major, such as equipment not materialising, or quite minor such as the quality of a gesture. Once these themes had been identified and ideas were formed they were then invited to take the risk of revealing this quite personal material with performative actions.

Like much of this area of work there is an aspect of working with personal issues and sharing this with sympathetic observers rather than making work that is *for* the public. Many of them felt they achieved a much more intense and rewarding performance in front of others within their tight group, who had acquired an understanding of the significance of the performative acts, rather than in front of the more general audience on the final afternoon. As with much of this area of work there is an element of the ritual witnessed by the initiated

who can appreciate the symbolism. This leaves open the question of how they transfer this method into their normal working practice but crucially draws them closer to creating work that has more artistic integrity and further away from ideas that are selected in terms of marketability.

The work produced was not intended for the wider public and it was probably not appropriate to do so but the performer-artists had the experience of pushing their own personal boundaries and of becoming more confident in using their inner world as a source of ideas. This focus on deepening the interior of the work is to be welcomed in an art-form that tends to become preoccupied with form rather than substance. The challenge will be for these artists to find ways of translating this initial stage of creation into work that can be appreciated by a wider public.

## 2.8 A comparison between the teaching/directing approaches of Rose English and John Wright.

### Similarities

Creating a safe place to take risk. - fostering group support.  
Engaging the active participation in devising of whole group.  
Having a clarity of intention combined with a search/struggle in how to express it.

### Differences

Of speed, quantity of material produced - J.W. generates more material that is then pared down, R.E. searches for the essence via a process of adaption/synthesis.  
Of criteria. J.W. - "Never be boring", R.E. less concerned about need to keep audience happy - may need to go through boring stage in order to explore more thoroughly.  
Feedback - R.E. focuses on the positive, J.W. also encourages 'discipline' and 'rigour' which raises the stakes of risk.  
The biggest difference is that for J.W., performer is 'playing at' role/action (Brechtian), standing apart from the material. For R.E., the performer is wholeheartedly 'inside' the work, or even, *is* the work; it is as much for the performer as it is for the public. J.W. is concerned with the 'How' - directing, combinations, use of voice etc. R.E. was more concerned in the 'What'. J.W.'s group take away a toolkit, for direct application. R.E.'s take away an artistic/personal breakthrough, in which the application is of less concern.  
For the Circelation Director's week J.W. focussed more on how to lead/direct a group whereas R.E. focussed more on developing a specific artistic idea.

## 2.9 General feedback from the Questionnaires

By collating all the answers from the Questionnaires it is possible to conclude some general statements about the Circelation 2005 group of practitioners. The collated responses are in Appendix 7.2 below.

### From the Entry Questionnaire – Reasons for attending Circelation 2005:

Unsurprisingly the prime consideration for attending Circelation is for self-improvement firstly by improving professional abilities and secondly to develop as individuals. Who the tutors are is a secondary consideration. The content – the integration of circus-theatre and the theme of Risk is the third consideration. Also important are professional networking and personal companionship. Gaining prestige and testing your own abilities are not important reasons (although the latter may have been affected by the over-formal wording of the question - 'Measuring self against own ideals').

Additional reasons given which seem significant are:

- 1) Small groups (duos & trios) can refresh their practice and see each other in a different light as they responded differently and in surprising ways (to their collaborators) when working with new tasks or new people. This is significantly important in a sector where many small groups work collectively and may establish working relationships and expectations of each other that become fixed and limited if unchallenged.
- 2) Exploration - both in terms of new areas of work and also in pushing existing work further.
- 3) 'Because I'm at Circus Space'. A student who is part of a block-booking of a bigger course will have a different level of engagement from individual practitioners who have selected a particular course. The lower level of motivation has a detrimental effect on the others on that course and this type of arrangement is not to be recommended.

## From the Exit Questionnaires –

### (a) Ways practitioners benefit from Circelation

- Sharing – of perceptions, of ideas, sharing play
- Networking and making possible collaborative connections
- Inspiration and new ideas
- Thoughtfulness – including understanding of processes, especially devising processes.
- Truthfulness
- Confidence
- New practice – e.g.s using text, new ways to devise
- Widened horizons and a sense of what different areas have in common
- Actual material generated that can be used as starting point for new work

### (b) Key learning moments

These were mainly to do with gaining new insight either into self-knowledge (e.g how they respond to failure) or into practice/process (e.g.s finding the essence of a dramatic situation or the relationship between the content and the physicality). To lesser extent the key learning moments were to do with new techniques including how to give feedback.

## 2.10 Feedback on the individual courses

This feedback is derived from the Entry and Exit Questionnaires. By collating the information from all the courses it was possible to establish norms for Circelation 2005. What follows is the anomalies to these norms, ie what was distinctive about the feedback for each course. The full responses to each course are in Appendix 7.2 below.

### 2.10.1 Pascualito

Pascualito's group were younger than for the other course with many being current students. The entry questionnaire showed that they were mainly intending to develop their professional skills and did not consider the development of their personal skills that important. The Exit Questionnaire revealed that they had been surprised at their own limitations and lack of self-knowledge. They had assumed that the course was only about physical risk. They were new to thinking in other terms and were not sure about the practical application of what they had learned/experienced. However they appreciated coming into contact with other practitioners and being exposed to new ways of thinking about performing. They enjoyed meeting Pascualito but had

doubts about the amount of video-watching involved; 40% did not feel challenged enough by the course. As a younger group they were not very worried about having their actions misconstrued, but very worried about 'being uncool' and quite worried about 'exposing secret desires/phobias'.

#### 2.10.2 Steve Tiplady

By contrast Steve's group were more thoughtful about risk, noticing the barriers to working with others and venturing into taboo subjects. They appreciated learning lots of new techniques and experimenting/devising with new people. Their most enjoyable moments were watching other people's work. They felt very different from Pascualito's group and slightly intimidated by them.

#### 2.10.3 Terry O'Connor

The group attending Terry O'Connor's course were unusual in that they considered 'Learning about the integration of circus & theatre' to be fairly important whereas the 'Development of professional skills' to be less important. This was a small tight group who felt that they learned more about theory than practice, that the risks they were taking were more subtle than the spectacularly physical. A third did not feel challenged enough by the course. Unusually this group considered 'being out of control' the most risky issue and 'being unattractive' was also important but they were not much concerned with 'having actions misconstrued'.

#### 2.10.4 Liam Steel

Participants found Liam's workshop fairly intense. They found most useful his transformation of technical/physical action into a metaphorical image, for example, by presenting emotional pain through physical pain, distilling a relationship to an essential physical image. They also came to appreciate the way in which the audience can be affected by apparent physical risk or by the physical discomfort suffered by performers. This can be uncomfortable to watch and thus make the work more effective. In this course-group pain/physical discomfort was identified as the biggest risk. The incident with the trapeze (see Issues For The Future 1a below) was commented as being the most powerful either because participants were angry about it or because they were annoyed about other participants getting angry.

#### 2.10.5 Deborah Batton

From the Entry Questionnaire it is clear that few were attracted to this particular course because they knew of Deborah's work but more

because they were interested in the integration of circus and theatre. All felt they had taken risks and all felt challenged except for one who enthusiastically wanted 'more, more, more'. Much of the feedback was about how much the group trust had been built up. This group was much more cohesive than those on the other courses, perhaps because of the longer time than the weekends and not being subdivided as in the directors week, but also because of the amount of exposing solo and duo work. They felt they had taken many risks and had had the time and space to fail. They particularly appreciated learning about different ways to give feedback, different ways to devise and the introduction to new techniques. They also liked the way that Deborah worked out the order of the final presentation with the rest of the group.

#### 2.10.6 John Wright

John's group was more diverse than the other course groups with a perhaps 20% who were performers unfamiliar/ new to devising. All of them appreciated the methods and processes of devising that were opened up for them. They enjoyed the games immensely. Many said they found the risk-taking both scary and liberating. For some it was a difficult process, not everyone achieved a sense of success and had a sense of uncertainty/confusion. The trainee-directors encountered problems as John asked them to share the responsibility for the ideas more than they had anticipated and he also asked them to work faster than they were prepared to do.

#### 2.10.7 Rose English

More than any other group these participants were attending Circlation in order to work with the specific tutor. They appreciated Rose's care, reassurance and encouragement. They enjoyed the intuitive approach and the process of going deeper into their ideas and revealing themselves in an open, honest and sincere way.



### 3: THE SOIREES

In the review of the previous year's Circelation it was concluded that the discussions were problematic because (a) they were perceived to be too formal so that not everyone engaged with them and (b) the timing was wrong - participants wanted to go off to their evening meal at the end of a long day of workshop. Therefore it was decided for 2005 to experiment with holding the discussions during the evening meals and to find ways to engage everyone. In order to make the situation less intimidating for less confident speakers the group was divided into groups of four or five at each table and encouraged to sit with people they knew less well. A topic was framed as a question or questions to be discussed in these smaller groups during the meal and at the end a speaker or two from each table would feedback in a plenary session, summarising the conversations that had been held. There was a little resistance to this process from a few participants who preferred to use the time to socialise with existing friends or their tutor. There is also a substantial number of circus practitioners who are unfamiliar with open-ended discussion of this sort and do not attach much value to it. However the majority welcomed the discussions and they provided a means of getting to understand and appreciate unfamiliar kinds of work.

The change of format enabled a freer discussion and more people could become engaged in the first stage. The plenary sessions suffered from the need to record the discussions by means of a large microphone which tended to make people feel they were giving a formal speech. Also, because many participants were unfamiliar with academic methods of developing an argument, the plenary sessions tended to produce a survey of views rather than enabling deeper discussion. However one visiting observer (Alison Andrews from ACE) remarked on how refreshing it was to be in an artistic discussion that did not have to reach firm conclusions and allowed for many voices to be heard and appreciated.

Personally I feel that it is essential for the advancement of the artform that practitioners become more articulate about why, how and where they do their work in order to counter-balance the emphasis on techniques.

Aural feedback on the soirees generally concluded that they were a very positive part of the courses although there were doubts expressed on their frequency; it was felt that there should only be two during the week workshops and one at weekends. However, eating together was seen as being very valuable for networking so perhaps

there should be one 'discussion-free' meal in each of the week courses.

It is essential with these soirees that a balance is struck between informality/accessible language and the need to have structure and discipline to the discussions. In the first appendix to this report is a list of questions at each evening with some noted responses. It is envisaged that a full transcription of the soirees will be produced but this has, as yet, not been accomplished.

#### 4: RISK

Circelation 2005 has been a remarkably unique opportunity to investigate attitudes to risk within the British contemporary circus scene. Although it is too early in my research to draw definite conclusions what follows is some lines of enquiry that have been opened up by the different sources of evidence from Circelation 2005.

##### 4.1 Different types of risk –

- a) Personal – Rejection
  - By looking stupid or
  - Looking or behaving unattractively
  - Being a failure and losing self esteem
  - Seeming rude or uncaring
  - Exposing secret phobias or desires
  - Having actions misconstrued
  - Being out of control
  
- b) Pain
  - Physical
  - Psychological - Guilt
  
- c) Loss of opportunity (finance related e.g. commercial risk), (injury related) of social/professional status, of security, of self-esteem
  
- d) Artistic
  - New styles, techniques
  - New combinations
  - Going into the unknown

## 4.2 Recurring or interesting comments on Risk from Questionnaires

- Safe environment makes both artistic risk & personal risk easier
- Something that one person finds risky may not be risky to another – for some talking in public is fearful
- 'Accept failure, no problem, do it anyway' - lightening the consequences, lowering the stakes
- Self-consciousness diminishes especially if engaged in play/ or difficult/new tasks
- Let go of what you are good at (difficult for circus practitioners)
- Importance of comfort zones
- Risk taking may mean doing less
- Honesty is biggest risk
- Experience of risk – 'Buzz', adrenalin

1) From the Exit Questionnaires it is clear that for this group of people, being a failure and losing status is the biggest issue – without comparatives at this stage it is impossible to say whether this is universally the case or is just so in this sector. It may be, however, that the traditional circus format of attempting a task/feat is so strongly embedded within circus culture that success /failure will always be major issue for circus artists. It would be useful to compare this group with, for example, contemporary theatre practitioners or visual artists where there may be more a culture of learning by trial and error and therefore failure would not be regarded with such fear. It would also be interesting to compare with those involved in clowning because, although they attempt to make people laugh and may fail, they nevertheless work with failure. Evidently further research is required.

2) Physical risk – For this group approximately 70 circus-related practitioners pain/physical discomfort is much less of an issue than one might expect for those who work in a comparatively physically dangerous art form. Early on in this year's Circelation it became clear early on that aerialists do not regard their work as dangerous; it is the public who perceive it as such.

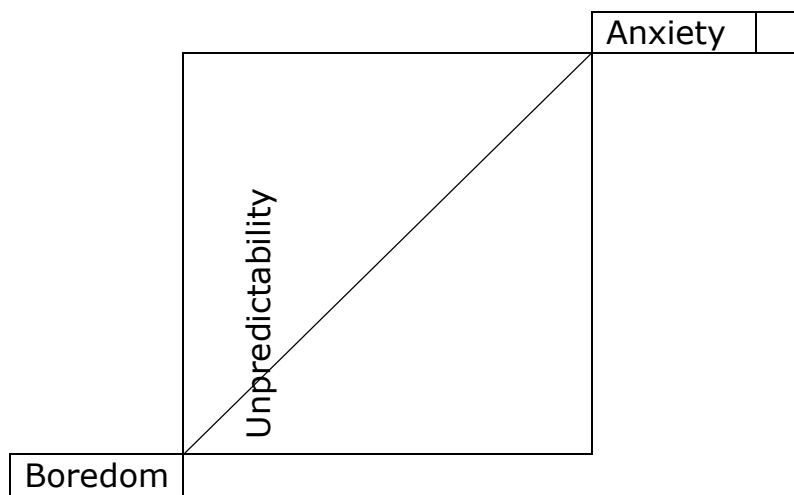
3) As with dangerous sports, risk-taking activity alongside a group of unfamiliar faces rapidly develops a sense of community as strengths and weaknesses of individuals are exposed. Taking personal risks rapidly removes any pretences. This sense of community can be a great support to participants and provide encouragement to take further risks. Some tutors developed this aspect by requiring observers to be actively involved so that they remained just as much 'on the line'

as the actors. The sense of community helps to lower the stakes to the point where the consequences of failure are minimal. The danger with this progression may be a removal of rigorous critique – the group accepts the results of any attempt uncritically.

4) Risk taking can be seen as a means to an end – the greater the benefits of a successful outcome, the more people will be prepared to take risks. However the evidence suggests that it is the *experience* of risk-taking that is the attraction and the outcome less important. Risk-taking is most enjoyable if there is just the right amount of challenge/stress – too little and it is not exciting enough, too much and the person begins to operate ineffectively as the stress locks up their freedom to operate. Different participants experience activities at different degrees of challenge/stress. The challenge for a tutor is to maintain the balance between boredom and anxiety for as many participants as possible. Activities that are completely new to everyone (e.g. Deborah Batton’s use of counter-balance harness work) is one way to engage everyone. Incrementally adding new challenges/tasks, layered over a previous task is also effective to maintain this balance.

4.3 Experience of Risk There appear to be two factors which affect the experience of risk – the degree of unpredictability and the amount at stake.

What is at stake? This needs to be viewed not just as a matter of what may be lost but also what can be gained, in order to explain why people put themselves through high risks situations?



What is at stake –personal, professional, financial etc

The experience of risk will vary more by what is at stake than the nature of the risk activity. For example the same performance will be experienced differently in front of different audiences - other artists/teachers/family/strangers. Similarly the experience will be affected by the degree of predictability /familiarity with the situation - new shows, new venues, amount of variables (e.g the difference between street theatre and indoor theatre). A further factor is what might be termed 'mitigating circumstances' - other things happening in the lives of the individuals - the amount of stress experienced will differ, for example, by whether individuals are enjoying the security of a new loving relationship or the insecurities of a break-up. Clearly all these factors require further research and have wider implications than the performing arts.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Choice of Theme

Over the years Circelation has increased the amount of emphasis on a theme. This is a very positive move as it provides cohesion to whole and reinforces a sense of identification for the participants. The theme of Risk was an excellent choice because

- 1) It is an open one - it covers many areas, about attitudes to work as much as methods, it is not style-specific (appropriate to dance & puppetry as well as circus) and can be approached in terms of the technical, physical, the artistic and the conceptual.
- 2) Although public perception of circus is of it being 'risky' the reality is that it is fairly safe both physically and artistically. So Risk as a subject is a good vehicle for opening up new possibilities. Those who consider themselves as risk-takers because of the public perception are induced to explore more truly risky areas of work.
- 3) It is timely to focus on Risk; the influence of corporate work on contemporary circus is tending to make it more mainstream - practitioners are required to produce work that has wide appeal, is not challenging and has a focus on production values rather than a core idea. It is a culture that sacrifices the authentic voice of the artist for the light entertainment of middle-management. It is risk averse.

## 5.2 Choice of Tutors

The tutors were selected because either they were known as teachers or because the company they work for was known. It was very positive that the artforms that combine with circus the most easily were represented ( dance, physical theatre, experimental theatre and puppetry).

For puppetry it might have been more beneficial to have invited a tutor who works on a larger scale, possibly outdoors, perhaps with more connections with scenography/visual design/ equipment design in order to make a more obvious connection with to circus, in order to avoid attracting predominantly puppeteers to a puppetry course.

It would be useful if the tutors from outside the circus sector can adapt their normal workshop to fit with the theme and to be appropriate for circus practitioners.

It is also important that the tutors are experienced as teachers, not just performers/artists. A role could be found for performers/artists talking about their work, perhaps by showing videos during one of the soirees. But it is also important that the tutors are *also* creative artists. A balance must be struck that, with one exception, was achieved.

## 5.3 Type of participants

If Circelation is to be effective in developing the contemporary circus sector then it must be attracting as many existing /emerging artists from the sector as possible. Although it is largely successful in doing so, it is also true that practitioners who are not involved in circus are accepted on the courses in order to make them more viable.

From the feedback it is clear that generally the participants found it interesting and useful to meet different kinds of artists. However there is a danger that if there are too many participants who are outside the circus sector the courses will be weakened; in some cases tutors were designing their courses assuming a level of technique that was not there.

The second point is that, as befitting the predominant image of contemporary circus, there was a predominance of dancer-aerialists. There were some acrobats but very few whose main discipline was manipulation or equilibristics. There is a tendency to assume that manipulation & equilibristic techniques are less easily integrated with theatre but arguably it is therefore even more important to research and develop ways that they can. Largely it is more a matter of

changing approaches to these techniques as they tend to attract practitioners with a more mechanistic approach to producing work.

Despite extensive advertising it was disappointing that hardly any participants came from the South West where there is the largest cluster of circus practitioners outside London. There may be many reasons for this (e.g. many were not aware of the possibility of being funded to do Circelation). However, given the number that attended who were from Yorkshire it would appear that location is one of the factors. In the future it may be an idea to have supplementary courses in other cities (as occurred in 2001) in order to spread the benefit nationwide.

#### 5.4 What Is the Value of Circelation?

There can be little doubt from the Exit Questionnaires that the experience of Circelation has been of value and in some cases of enormous value. The value is a mixture of five elements.

- 1) Inspiration – practitioners felt energised and motivated to go on to develop their own work away from the course.
- 2) Creative Technique – practitioners felt empowered to identify useful starting points for creation and better informed on ways to connect physical technique with image.
- 3) Exploration – as well as achieving tangible results, practitioners appreciated the experience of being led into exploration without any fixed goals. This will help them to develop new ideas through the open-ended, goal-less route of play.
- 4) Sharing – by becoming better informed on other peoples work and through the sharing of problems and possibilities an active working community was created. This can help to counter-balance some of the culture of competition inherent in the wider circus community.
- 5) Research - Circelation provides a unique opportunity to examine a theme within the given context of contemporary circus practice. This can be useful for the sector itself but also has wider implications; in this case on the nature of artistic and other kinds of risk.

### 5.5 Does Circelation achieve the right balance between Workshop and Laboratory?

Practitioners need to come away with an increased knowledge and understanding. However, as stated previously, the courses are a unique opportunity for tutors and practitioners to explore unknown territory in this new hybrid of circus and theatre in its widest sense. Is the right place to do this? It is useful (and exciting) for all to feel involved in an open-ended process of exploration and to foster this attitude rather than just delivering existing skills and techniques. This dilemma was very apparent in the final week when the trainee directors (and their mentors) were aware of the need to produce a piece for the final showing. Being forced to make artistic decisions, selecting and editing are all part of the artistic process and time management very much part of the director's role, however with such a short amount of time the exploration process (effectively three or four half-days) was severely truncated. A deeper level of exploration had occurred in the Deborah Batton workshop.

A particular company can, of course, conduct their own phase of Research and Development but these are usually aimed at (eventually) producing a new show and therefore are goal-orientated rather than open-ended. Also it is hard for particular companies (as with individuals) to be aware of their own limitations and therefore hard for them to go into very unknown areas with the aim of developing the art form itself. So there may be place for an 'advanced Circelation' for a selected (invited?) group of practitioners to work with an invited tutor to research a particular area of contemporary circus practice.

### 5.6 Does Circelation achieve everything it could?

Given the limitations of time and financial resources the answer to this question is probably 'yes'!

Ideally more space could be devoted to research of the art-form both in terms of

- research into methods of integrating circus technique and theatre in its widest sense i.e. laboratory time within the workshops
- more thorough collection of attitudes, opinions and backgrounds to get an even more clear picture of the sector

In the Directors week it would be useful to give slightly more formal instruction on how to direct e.g. identifying the (sometimes conflicting) roles that a director might be called upon to play – producer, friend, mentor, tour manager etc.



It would be very useful to develop video showings or presentations of key artists in order to inform younger performers. For example many are not aware of the ground-breaking work done by Archaos. It would also be useful for newer companies to present their work.

## 6 ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

### 6.1 Practical

#### a) Equipment and Health & Safety

It was not clear who was responsible for the safety of equipment. In one case an old trapeze with frayed ropes was used. Because it was already up in the space, tutors assumed that it had been 'approved' by Circelation technical staff. These staff assumed that tutors would be able to assess the suitability of use of equipment which they were not.

#### b) Riggers/ technical staff

It needs to be made clear to tutors what is the role of the technical assistant. – are they there to do only technical work or can they, for example, be sent off to do photocopying or buy small props. If they take part in the workshop for brief episodes this should not be prioritised over practical duties. In one case a rigger took part in a devising session and from then on was 'locked in' to the rest of the course because they became part of the created material.

### 6.2 Developing the Network

In the questionnaires practitioners frequently referred to the value of meeting new people, forming alliances and discussing possible collaborations.

Participants could be better informed about the e-group that has been set up and could be explained the potential of it to post news of their developing projects, place requests for personnel or sharing equipment. Ideally they could log-in to the Circelation website themselves to post their own information and use blogging. Obviously it will be helpful if this website is linked in to the existing Total Theatre website and a Circus Arts Forum website but is distinct from them so that there is a tighter focus on practitioners who will have had the personal contact through working together and who are likely to share a desire to explore new territory within contemporary circus.

### 6.3 Collecting Information

The filling in of questionnaires is not a popular task, particularly at the end of a full workshop. However the information collected can provide a powerful insight into the development of the sector. It would therefore be beneficial to timetable in a period that gives proper, unhurried time for this process. Ideally someone would be on hand to answer questions about the questions, this would necessitate all participants being in the same space for the questionnaires. In order to get a true picture it is important for all participants to complete all parts of all questionnaires; in many cases participants did not see that there were two sides to the questionnaire. At the end of the courses many were anxious to exchange contact information with other workshop members, a task that could easily have been provided and distributed by the administration by that stage. A contact list was provided but this was incomplete and not available until after the end of the courses.

### 6.4 Research

Given that these 70 practitioners are key to the development of a sector that is being prioritised by the ACE, Circelation seems a great opportunity to do a more thorough study in future, in order to better inform policy-making in this important sector. This research could be done both in terms of **personnel data** and **artistic research**.

**Personnel data:**

- (a) patterns of work, ideal timing of courses, economic circumstances
- (b) previous types of training – gaps, desires
- (c) geographical spread – gaps, opportunities

**Artistic research:** Unlike mainstream theatre and Live Art/Experimental Theatre, the Circus/Street Arts sector suffers from lack of articulation of its practice. As indicated in the section on Risk above, there are many artistic issues that have been raised by Circelation 2005 that deserve more in-depth study. Other issues include

- (a) the role(s) of the director within the circus sector
- (b) how to use voice/musical instruments within this sector
- (c) how to use text with circus technique
- (d) the interaction between the closed, targeted nature of circus feats and the open-ended, playful nature of artistic creation
- (e) the interaction of the dramatic tension of theatrical illusion and the actual dramatic tension of circus technique (by implication the difference between acting and performing)

## 7 APPENDICES

### 7.1 Soiree Questions

Soiree 1 Is it good to take real risk in performance (as opposed to simulated risk)? What does it bring to the performance (a) for the performers (b) for the audience?

Is audience seen as v. perceptive, do they see what is going on better than the performers? Or can they be duped?

Originality doesn't exist but uniqueness is possible,  
Creating real (true) drama – Olympics

Confused use of the term 'theatre' and 'ego'.

Soiree 2 Risk taking is good in creative process but what are the social, cultural constraints we face in making a product.? How much do let them affect your decisions when making work?

Different attitudes to nudity in France, Spain, Argentina to N. Europe & America.

J. Wrights 'Skinless' - burlesque style so laugh & cry.

Punch & Judy attitude to child abuse

Who is show to? Is it preaching to converted – low risk

Problems of going against expectations of one company's style –e.g. Peepolykus

What is target audience/venue? Can't avoid having one.

Being more established makes it safer, but this is dangerous for the art.

Are we just talking about commercial risk?

Soiree 3 Experience of Risk from audience perspective; What is the most risk-taking show you have seen? What were the precise moments of risk? What effect did it have on you? Have you seen anything that went too far?

Vagina Monologues

David Hare's play on Israel/ Palestine

Leo Bassi

Acrobat

Wim Vanderkeybus – Blush

Complicite's - 3 Lives of Lucie Chabrol

Fuera Del Baus

Nigel Charnock's Macbeth (Fred& Rose West)

Body exhibition and 'Dr Death' presentation  
Forced Entertainment  
DV8 – Daydreams of Monochrome Men  
Birdbrain – Australian Dance Theatre  
Franco B  
Frantic Assembly – Peepshow  
Shunt  
Circus of Horrors  
A show in a cave  
Sally – comedienne, hanging herself by hooks  
Skinless – John Wright  
Legs on the Wall – All Of Me  
Gecko  
Jonathon Kay  
Howard Barker – moral & intellectual risk

Soiree 4 (a) What moments have you felt most at risk this week? What was at stake – gain or loss?

- (b) Has the focus on risk been useful? How? – i.e. in what ways will it affect your future work?  
(c) What do you think about these soirees?

- (a) Solos, exposing self, humiliation, health of pregnant Lena, physical risk in supported trio barrel roles, fear of guilt of causing harm to another  
(b) Can gain confidence having crossed over obstacle, a positive effects even if experiment goes tits up - at least attempt had been made  
(c) Good, tiredness an issue

Soiree 5 – Most circus has simulated risk but little other risk. Why? What would you like to see?

Skateboarder circus  
Motorcycle stunts  
Technical simulated risk alternated with real risk sections  
Acrobat – less pretty  
Opera with circus  
Community show with disabled  
Combination of Forced Entertainment style with circus, confounding expectations, challenging form, ambivalence – Leo Bassi, mixture of performative act with circus?  
Circus with mentally handicapped  
Street walkabout combined with circus – carnival.  
Challenge

Harder to challenge, confront when performers are distant to public as often are in circus

Terry & Liam: Risk belongs in the rehearsal room. Unpredictability in performance can be life-threatening.

Amount of necessary repetitive practice in circus can kill risk taking, closed system not about experimenting but perfecting.

Make work that is either 'commercial' OR for its own sake.

Archaos - mis-direction, not appearing to care about audience

Soiree 6 Throwing out a challenge to the audience is risky (professional, commercial, personal) so why do it? Should we do it? If so, how? Think about question in terms of choice of form, of content, of making statements or asking questions.

Pushing the edge – Jamie Quarrell story of playfully blocking door so people can't escape – some play game, some get upset, some angry certainly uncomfortableness, humming suggested it was playful – necessary to have a rapport before you can start to push them.

Target the audience. They have got to want to play. They like controls – limits, guidelines to play.

Promenade & site-specific is challenge and makes it easier to challenge because less expectations, less warnings necessary.

Must be spark of mutual pleasure – 'this is gonna be fun'. Need to power on despite all.

Need to challenge people out of their comfort zone. Need to empower them. Use the pack (communitas) to get people to go further. Include audience in.

It is elitist to challenge, didactic.

A disempowered public doesn't need more challenge.

Mainstream society may be challenging the artist.

Thought provoking rather than wow factor

Challenging work = poverty for artists

Ambiguity – working on many levels – more active interpretation from audience

Work that has personal relevance

Shock tactics are not necessarily challenging

Social, political, personal issues

More a question of what are you opening up to the audience than didactic

We are in culture of competitiveness of shock, mounting the stakes

Are we facilitators, opening up questions, or communicators, making statements?

Soiree 7 – What kind of circus work would you like to see that you are not seeing? Think in terms of scale, location, themes, ingredients.

Dream

Physical theatre mixed with classical theatre

Music & circus – musical circus artists

Joy & beauty

Kites

More/better administrators

Audience feeding into show

Responsibility of artists to help public understand/access their work, to explain different criteria

Invoking the Divine

Show on an oil rig

People should take responsibility for own actions rather litigation culture

Black circus, Working women's circus, Disabled circus (Archaos performer)

Carnavalesque surround circus – underneath, above, all around.

All clown circus – aerialists too. Slapstick taken to extremes.

Boal type spectactors, audience inclusion

Mixing styles – more thoroughly combined training

Dialogue, text

Raise quality

Soiree 8 - What is the key thing you have learned this week?

Being lost on stage is OK

Audience is playful

Not to try to 'succeed' – less pressure

Rapid devising is possible and good

Anything can go in any order (montage-ing material)

Believing in self – own material, self as source

Riggers – if they are part of creative process they can understand better and make contribution from their expertise.

Not being able to hide behind 'stuff' – props, equipment, materials

John's group finding useful tools and being nudged into shifting their process

Rose's group about confirming, reassuring

Using the group to create

Not being afraid of Unknown, using it.

## 7.2 Questionnaires Collated

This collates all the prioritisations of all 7 courses. The written responses have been so as to include all the main themes to each question and also to provide some of the more interesting/unusual responses.

### ENTRY QUESTIONNAIRE

#### **Reasons for choosing to do Circelation (highest priority 9)**

	Tutors initials:	P	ST	DB	TO'C	JW	RE	Av
1 (266) Development of professional skills (e.g. ability to devise, direct etc)		9	9	8	6	8	8	8
2 (251) Development of personal skills (e.g. trusting own abilities, trusting others etc)		3	8	7	7	9	7	6.8
3 (229) Working with specific admired teachers		7	7	5	8	6	9	7
4 (208) Learning integration circus-theatre		8	4	9	9	4	5	6.5
4 (208) Working on the subject of Risk		5	5	6	3	7	3	6
6 (193) Being active in circus-theatre network		6	6	4	4	3	4	4.5
7 (174) Friendship, companionship		4	3	3	5	5	6	4.3
8 (126) Measuring self against own ideals		2	2	2	2	2	2	2
9 (65) Gaining prestige being on the course		1	1	1	1	1	1	1

#### **Any other reason? Please specify**

- 'To give myself permission to continue to explore circus within Arts wider sphere'
- 'Developing practice with a collaborator'
- 'Feeling safe & supported by the tutor and group to do things and explore things that I have never done before'
- 'Fun'
- 'Because I'm at Circus Space'
- 'Develop a working practice with a collaborator'

#### **3) Did you consider yourself a risk-taker?**

**(a) as compared to other circus/theatre practitioners**

18 Yes/ 4 No

**(b) as compared with wider society**

32 Yes/ 2 No

## EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE

### **During the course have you had the experience of taking risks?**

54Yes/ 5 No

#### **If so, what did you notice about it?**

'That one can take risks as long as they trust themselves and their riggers'

'Risk – all the fears I have been carrying – worried what my peers will think about me!!! As an artist one should, I think, connect to the thing that is greater than them i.e. the Divine and surrender their fears and not worry about what other people will think, but to be true to the creative process for yourself and not worry about outside thing. Real artists just stay in the place of unknown and creates, be vulnerable, honest and open take risks'

'That risk is possible when attended by comfort, care, reassurance from fellow artist'

'The exhilarating pleasure and excitement of taking risks in a safe environment'

'where my boundaries lay. How much I was prepared to push them'

'it has a very definite physical effect – boundaries of what is risky is always moving – it becomes normalised very fast'

'some of them were more fruitful than others but all the real risks were worth it'

'It is easier to take risks with puppets than as an actor/physical performer. This course pushed me to experiment with objects /images outside of traditional narrative, to see puppetry differently'

'It is very hard to push beyond that invisible barrier'

'Risk is working in a new group of people'

'That the risk always feels bigger beforehand, than once you actually done it, when you realise that it wasn't such a big thing'

'Felt the fear – did scare me deeply, but I enjoyed having pushed through it and growth'

'It's hard – you are aware of the risk /opportunity when it's there but don't take it. Why?'

'The devastating effect of making an ass of yourself, or even the possibility'

'That it's not as bad as I thought. Once you know the group trust yourself to go further'

'Coming up against resistances and being encouraged/pushed to overcome them'



'It is an excellent way of stepping out of your comfort zone and accept the fact that it is absolutely fine to fail sometimes'

'There are many different kinds of risk, physical, emotional, personal, professional'

'Insights – The risks I cannot see are the ones I would like to keep exploring. Helpful to have someone else support you in seeing where these'

'It was easier to than I thought! Things I thought might be terrifying were made easier in the very comfortable group atmosphere'

'It had a massive emotional impact –I was reeling for ages Angry Grief'

'It pushed my boundaries & forced me out of my comfort zone & made me aware of weaknesses I might have in performing'

'in the more contact-improvisation based work I was not able to let go of my control and go for the risks. This really stopped the flow and made the exercise very difficult'

'Liberating feeling – can help you move on artistically and get out of ruts'

'How to add emotional content to performance which gives the audience/ performer a sense of risk'

'Makes me feel very vulnerable and nervous but at the same time gives me a buzz like I hadn't experienced for a long time'

'That it initially fills me with fear but is an extremely liberating experience'

'It's better to try and fail than not try at all!'

'Edgy, uncomfortable, exhilarating'

'That the risks you had decided to take weren't that risky and the real risks became apparent of their own accord'

'Pleasant if supported and celebrated, unpleasant if not'

'It can be very scary. It can put you out of your depth'

### **Are there other things you have learnt about risk?**

'go over your limits, know when you have to stop'

'How my analysis of consequence affects my risk-taking'

'That I thought I had not too many limits...but I do'

'It draws people's attention'

'Reminds me that risk is about generosity and the interaction between the imagination of the individuals'

'I'm good at pretending to myself I'm taking a risk'

'It doesn't have to be frightening'

'To challenge, risk taking is difficult, not just about doing difficult circus skills but also performance contexts and issues that are taboo'

' Taking a bigger risk within the performance most of the time works better (but I'm not sure if that is always true about taking bigger risks with 'technical' circus skills)'

'It gives an edge to the work'

'something that I might not find risky may be a huge risk to others. Think I will pay more attention to this when watching performances'

'Accept failure, no problem, just do it again'

'Risk is undervalued, it now seems more core to creative practice and will encourage me to take more risks in future'

'Through taking risks you discover new things about yourself that wouldn't come out otherwise'

'That risk can be where you least expected it'

'I've learnt more about where my personal comfort zones are. I know what kind of feedback I like to receive'

'Value of emotional risk to audience'

'When risk was taken just for the sake of it, it didn't actually bring anything more to the performance'

'Simple ways of getting audience to feel on edge or uneasy etc.'

'That in retrospect you regret not taking more!!'

'Let go of what you know you are good at (especially hard for circus performers!).'

'That it is a multi-faceted thing. You do it & you choose it'

' Sometimes it is difficult to identify what risk is and how to take it'

'No'

'Some risk is more interesting and focussed because an element of control or safety reassures'

'Risk means failing and failure is liberating. We can choose risk in any tiny moment – it is about seeing & choosing to take risks in each moment. We have power than we think to do this. Workshops are a good place to take those risks'

'It's an exciting place to be'

'Done in a safe environment I can achieve so much more than I thought possible. Taking risks is an invaluable aspect of creating work that is touching and real'

'sometimes you don't realise you are taking one'

'often risk is doing less rather than more'

'Risk is challenge. And it must be embraced or don't bother'

'To trust the process & others & self to see you through'

'That my very existence involves much courage & risk'

'Physical risk, pain etc are not nearly as fear inducing as being unprepared or risking failure'

'As an artist I like taking risks physically pushing the boundaries. It's a place of excitement, adrenalin'

'Not to fear to go deep, to be honest & sincere – people respond well to that'

'Nothing is so risky as it seems before you do it – Butterflies have got the alarm call all wrong!'

### **How will this benefit your future work?**

'push me to defend and create my own performances, and try to express my political and social ideas on them'

'to think more about risk , but not in the sense of being dangerous, more in the sense of discover new risks and jump'

'well just thinking about all of that when you need to perform. Challenge yourself. Try to do something new'

'It will allow me to see risks more clearly and either work towards, inside or through them'

'being conscious about myself and being true'

'to look at the roots of risk rather than it's issue only (where it comes from)'

'I don't know, we'll see'

'not much'

'As a high-risk physical performer it is beneficial to re-experience stillness'

'will try to be more honest'

'I think it is good to explore risk and go through the barrier even if what comes out is crap'

'Loads of ideas and techniques for devising'

'To take a risky subject or issue and portray through any performances that I do – Push myself to go places that are uncomfortable/hard to do'

'It just helps me categorise/think about the concept in a new way'

'Better confidence and growing as a performer'

'Massive changes I felt. New directions. Now I'm not so frightened to use my voice and use characterisation'

'Gained new physical skill and techniques (mental & physical). Now feel I have more power to challenge and listen to myself & question my processes'

'Incorporate new skills, be more ambitious in scope & outlook and the creative of new work. Collaborate with partners who push you further'

'Keep me questioning – when am I going with my strength and possibly not challenging myself and when am I going with weaknesses – testing things'

'Greater courage gives a bigger range of possible places to go'

'Finding new characters within, having great feedback (either positive or negative) and honest'

'I can use the performance techniques taught in my work'

'I think a better awareness of how to emphasise the feeling of risk to the audience to make them empathise with the performer/situation will be very interesting to play with (when that is the effect you want)'

'It's a reminder of a way in which to get to authentic performance'

'Try to think how to apply what I learnt to my work – consider how you want the audience to feel'

'It will help me to know what areas of risk that excite and exhilarate me'

'Insight into how to concentrate/distil a story and then how to physicalise it'

'It will help me to take risks at less obvious levels & more subtle ways and to be freer and more at ease on stage'

'A great opportunity to stretch participating wings and get a fresh perspective on my own work'

'More awareness of how performers work or put themselves on the line'

'I respect myself more consciously and demand the same of others'

'I have gained more insight into devising theatre. Working with others & allowing time & space to create work'

'It has just started a new hunger and a drive'

'In creating performance, concentrating on what is there, rather than what I think should be there'

'It will enable me to work at different pace, try things I am not confident with and trust myself as a performer'

'I feel it has opened up a whole range of new ideas about the process of creation'

'It has given me the courage to pursue even further my gut feeling about what performance is all about'

'This course have given me the space to show a piece of work that I've always dreamed to create but have been afraid to do; exploring the Divine and having it in my work'

'Will hold the risk factor close to my heart'

**In what other ways will the experience of CircElation benefit your future work?**

'Getting to meet other circus professionals and see what they are doing'

'Meeting very interesting people with different experiences and conceptions of how to use risk in work'

'thoughtfulness, truthfulness, and the delight in sharing play without the force of over-dynamic egos'

'lots of ideas. Thank you everyone'

'not to feel constrained by age'

'collaborative aspect; confidence – inspiring'

'Inspire me to do workshops with children/adults'

'Being able to direct puppetry work more confidently'

'Learnt new tools in how to devise work. some new technical skills and also better techniques or explorations that I will 'copy'/use when teaching workshops myself'

'Contact with other performers/riggers/potential collaboration'

'Greater knowledge of dance & movement. Different ways to approach the devising process'

'I discovered simple and effective ways of devising performance. This has been one of the most valuable aspects of the week'

'It gives me a network of people to talk to/receive feedback from and possibly get work from'

'Growing as a performer'

'Refreshing ideas for workshops; getting to material creating pieces'

'Influence my teacher training at college, try out some exercises on students there'

'Working more with text, at least in the devising of new work (not necessarily in the actual performance'

'A further sense of common places between different performance forms'

'Keeps me in contact with other practitioners & experience an array of professional approaches'

'Widened horizons of what is possible. Introduced new skills'

'Having worked with a big variety of people will hopefully reduce my ego'

'I will keep working on the material generated'

'I hope the Arts Council ladies liked my work and this could benefit me when I apply for money to create next project. Other peers will talk about my work and this may lead to work'

**Was the course too challenging, about right or not challenging enough?**

**(circle one)** Too challenging: 1, About right: 44, Not Challenging enough:9

**Which do you prefer - watching risk-takers or taking risks yourself? (circle one)**

Watching: 4, Taking risks: 32, Both:11

**What were the key learning moments for you?**

'When they asked me my fears I couldn't answer because I didn't know. I was working for years like that so I stopped before many of my own limits. Now I will take more risks'

'Stripping down for the juggling and reflecting on the experience'

'Taking risks with my taboo'

'Realising that the sharing/showing of my fear is a bigger risk for me than nearly any physical challenge'

'Being allowed to be dull and to be really observant'

'watching others show great ideas. Trying out and not feeling totally shit and judged!  
People seemed to like what I did -nice!'

'learning to move and cooperate with others without verbal communication'

'Animating a totally inanimate object (a log). Watching so many magical moments unfold'

'Improvisation techniques with objects, making them breathe'

'puppetry is very clown like, they have a lovely sensitivity & naivety'

'Everyday was a journey - impossible to choose'

'New feedback techniques'

'Working with other skilled practitioners from other areas. Taking leaps of faith in physicality'

'Learning to give negative feedback clearly'

'Being rigorous'

'In duets by getting the physical and the content together. Compromising for directing with other performers'

'Learning about how to portray emotion by thinking of a physical movement to portray an emotion - e.g. walking on glass to portray murder, gun -fights etc.'

'Finding the essence in a situation'

'trying to understand how less can be more. (Trying to) understand when to separate physical movement from text or action, physical tools to build or find characters etc. (lots!).'

'Even 'experienced' people can still learn loads. We can talk to each other'

'Walking up walls, playing with rhythm & text, Discovering new things & ideas to incorporate in future work'

'Dealing with a situation I was extremely uncomfortable with and its aftermath'

'Being real in the moment, it's simple and obvious but not always easy when climbing around on circus equipment'

'failing but trying again'

'Flashes of inspiration during improvisations/'play' sessions...both in my own work & watching other people'

'Getting through the bad days with support and realising it wasn't all about me'

' "If it doesn't work change it" '

'Surviving disappointments & frustrations. Gaining strengths. Working with others in unknown territories'

'Observing the other participants & myself feeling allowed to explore theatrically very personal experiences and being supported by the tutor of the group'

'On Monday when my dancers, collaborator, circus equipment didn't show up so I was standing in a place of 'unknow' very risky, nothing to hide behind. Meeting and being mentored by Rose. Every second was risk and full of learning for me. Thursday improvisation, shedding my layers. Sharing the fear I felt'

**Briefly describe the most enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating)?**

'Evening discussion most interesting'

'Some of the exercises that made the group laugh had a real group feeling were a lot of fun. Being helped to jump from the roof beam was cool as well.'

'Being half naked'

'When people push themselves and broke their own limits'

'Our group with Rose , so supportive and nurturing to go beyond my fears'

'watching manipulators work together and overcome limitations, making the movement feasible/believable'

'watching a fight between a leopard print cushion cover and a plastic storage box lid turn into a beautiful assimilation'

'Car scene with two puppets – with sound effects and commentary/conversation – (Hilarious)'

'Working with five people on one puppet scene – a huge amount of generosity'

'the end show (watching) singing in performance (doing)'

'Watching my usual performance partners doing something completely different'

'Performing either improvised or rehearsed scenes. Also physical experience of struggling for balance whilst trying to play'

'when some of the technical movements became a theatrical moment'

'Watching a performance really take off'

'God, there were so many!'

'Performing my solo for the first time was great fun!'

'When my solo piece fell into a place where it felt like it worked'



'Lots of different exercises that didn't feel like anything....then through simple directions something very clear was suddenly created. Those moments of transformation were great'

'Being together, the camaraderie, the fellowship'

'Being honest about people and hearing honesty'

'Witnessing moments of beauty and openness in others performances'

'Seeing good friend do things that I'd never seen'

'Watching the performance about plastic surgery'

**What was the least enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating) (within the sessions)?**

'not expressing myself enough during discussion times'

'at the beginning when people felt awkward and couldn't quite trust and relax into the exercises'

'seeing how I'd not accepted an offer in a sketch'

'there wasn't a moment I didn't enjoy'

'Doing the solo the second time when we got negative feedback. And working with a very unfocussed performer'

'having to accept some decisions about a performance'

'Feeling completely STUCK with my duet partner, not being able to find common ground or a connection'

'Sometimes watching people taking risks or going very far with something is uncomfortable'

'I don't think there were any. The negative feedback session was challenging – but amazingly useful!'

'failing'

'when being part in an exercise and feeling that too much was going on for something interesting to come out of it'

'Seeing my new friends in pain/scared'

'watching a pair getting really frustrated about failing during an exercise (but it was useful too)'

'Feeling like I didn't know/understand what our director wanted to show at certain times. That was frightening but didn't last long'

'Feeling like our work wasn't any good'

'Mobile phone disturbing performance'

'Having to sing in an exercise!'

'Feeling dismissed and invisible in sessions'

'I very much enjoyed all what was presented to me, including my moments of being confused'

**Were you able to lose or diminish self-consciousness? During what activities?**

'Yes – giving over responsibility (to a paper puppet)'

'I was able to increase focus on the external'

'The focus activities, learning to create breath in the puppet, losing yourself in the puppets movement'

'When I am focussing on other things I lose self-consciousness when the thing that I am doing is more important than the performance – it's a by-product'

'sometimes- brief moments on stage'

'Yes during Pilobolus work, in harness work'

'Yes, after performing the solos'

'Yes, during harness flying'

'during the solo'

'The activity I think I felt the clearest change about self-consciousness was regarding standing outside of the action and try to help to direct people's work (on the sessions where I didn't take part physically). I first felt a bit nervous about imposing my thoughts but at the same time realised that you won't get anywhere directing something half-hearted, so tried to be more brave'

'Task based. When focus is specific & creativity a by-product'

'yes, especially when having to use my voice, which I'm not used to'

'Yes, by trusting the group'

'Yes, through most activities actually. It was most liberating working with people I don't know'

'Yes – most – the more we did the safer I felt'

'Some play activities and active rehearsals'

' games were brilliant. I found myself doing the most stupid things utterly genuinely'

'The skipping rope game & the exercises in which performers were asked to physically represent one emotion whilst verbalising the opposite'

'I'm not very self-conscious and just go for it'

'In performance'

### **Types of Risk**

**Which of the following is an issue for you? Please prioritise by putting a number between 1 and 10 before each type of risk.**

	P	ST	DB	TO'C	LS	JW	RE	Av
1 (340) Being a failure and losing status	10	8	10	8	9	10	9	9.1
2 (281) Having actions misconstrued	2	10	9	3	6	8	10	6.86
3 (278) Seeming rude or uncaring	8	9	7	8	8	6	8	7.7
4 (256) Looking stupid	6	5	8	5	5	9	7	6.42
5 (245.5) Being out of control	1	4	6	10	7	7	5	5.7
6 (236.5) Exposing secret phobias/desires	9	7	3	2	4	5	6	5.13
7 (215) Pain/physical discomfort	4	3	5	1	10	3	2	4
8 (208) Going into the unknown	4	6	4	6	3	1	3	3.86
9 (183) Looking physically unattractive	5	2	2	9	2	4	2	3.7
10(158.5) Being uncool	8	2	1	4	1	2	4	3.14

### **Any other types of risk that is an issue for you?**

'solo voice'

'showing vulnerability and being hurt by people, people being aggressive or talking behind my back'

'Something about leaving family behind'

'Overcoming laziness – it's attractive to not try'

'The major one for me on this project was to go into a rehearsal process with very little idea of what I wanted to achieve. It was a deliberate tactic and part of the process of looking at risk'

### 7.3 Questionnaires from individual courses

#### Pascualito Questionnaires

Please prioritise according to importance by placing a number between 1 and 10 before each reason (1 is highest priority):

- 15 Development of professional skills (eg ability to devise, direct etc)
- 18 Learning about integration of circus and theatre
- 22 Working with admired teachers/directors
- 24 Being an active member of circus-theatre network
- 29 Working on the subject of Risk
- 29 Friendship, companionship
- 30 Development of personal skills (eg trusting own abilities, trusting others etc)
- 45 Measuring self against own ideals
- 59 Gaining prestige of having been on the course.

**Any other reason? Please specify**

.....'Fun' ..... 'Because I'm at Circus Space' ....

**3) Did you consider yourself a risk-taker?**

**(a) as compared to other circus/theatre practitioners**

2 Yes/ 4 No

**(b) as compared with wider society 4 Yes/1 No**

Pascualito Exit Questionnaire

**During the course have you had the experience of taking risks?**

7 Yes/ 2No

**If so, what did you notice about it?**

‘more psychological risk than physical, the course makes me think where are my limits and push far away’

‘feel brave’

‘where my boundaries lay. How much I was prepared to push them’

‘discovered my limits and push it’

‘it has a very definite physical effect – boundaries of what is risky is always moving – it becomes normalised very fast’

‘that risk can be within, in a hidden place and is about exploring limits and foundation [depth?]

‘ I like it’

‘it’s good to have done it’

**Are there other things you have learnt about risk?**

‘risk is in your mind’

‘go over your limits, know when you have to stop’

‘How my analysis of consequence affects my risk-taking’

‘That I thought I had not too many limits...but I do’

‘It draws peoples attention’

**How will this benefit your future work?**

‘push me to defend and create my own performances, and try to express my political and social ideas on them’

‘to think more about risk , but not in the sense of being dangerous, more in the sense of discover new risks and jump’

‘well just thinking about all of that when you need to perform. Challenge yourself. Try to do something new’

‘It will allow me to see risks more clearly and either work towards, inside or through them’

‘being conscious about myself and being true’

‘to look at the roots of risk rather than it’s issue only (where it comes from)’

‘I don’t know, we’ll see’

‘not much’

**In what other ways will the experience of CircElation benefit your future work?**

‘To meet someone like Pascualito is a pleasure and I find things similar to me’

‘Getting to meet other circus professionals and see what they are doing’

‘In making a decision and go for it...Living is a risk..that we have to take’

‘Meeting very interesting people with different experiences and conceptions of how to use risk in work’

‘having met other performers, directors, challenging the skills, ego, fears’

‘meeting other professionals’

‘knowledge of other people’

‘I don’t know’

**Was the course too challenging, about right or not challenging enough?**

5 about right, 3 not challenging enough

**Which do you prefer - watching risk-takers or taking risks yourself?**

1 watching, 7 taking risks, 1 both

**What were the key learning moments for you?**

‘when they asked me my fears I couldn’t answer because I didn’t know. I was working for years like that so I stopped before many of my own limits. Now I will take more risks’

‘stripping down for the juggling and reflecting on the experience’

‘taking risks with my taboo’

‘create a performance within a space. Analysis of what is risk.’

‘realising that the sharing/showing of my fear is a bigger risk for me than nearly any physical challenge’

‘learned little, not sure at this moment. Might come to me later’

**Briefly describe the most enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating)?**

‘evening discussion most interesting’

‘meeting Pascualito’

‘Some of the exercises that made the group laugh had a real group feeling were a lot of fun. Being helped to jump from the roof beam was cool as well.’

‘being half naked’

‘when people push themselves and broke their own limits’

**What was the least enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating) (within the sessions)?**

‘I enjoyed all the workshop’

‘not expressing myself enough during discussion times’

‘at the beginning when people felt awkward and couldn’t quite trust and relax into the exercises’

**Were you able to lose or diminish self-consciousness? During what activities?**

‘During a lot of the activities. Despite feeling very self-conscious whilst stripped down I did diminish my self-consciousness during the process’

**Types of Risk**

**Which of the following is an issue for you? Please prioritise by putting a number between 1 and 10 before each type of risk.**

**(1 is highest priority)**

20 Being a failure and losing (professional/personal) status

36 Looking physically unattractive

36 Exposing secret phobias or desires

40 Being uncool

40 Pain/physical discomfort

41 Seeming rude or uncaring Looking stupid

42 Going into the unknown

50 Having actions misconstrued

55 Being out of control



Steve Tiplady Questionnaires

Entry Questionnaire

You may have many reasons for choosing to do Circelation. How important are these to you? Please prioritise according to importance by placing a number between 1 and 10 before each reason (1 is highest priority):

- 9            Development of professional skills (eg ability to devise, direct etc)
- 11           Development of personal skills (eg trusting own abilities, trusting others etc)
- 15           Working with admired teachers/directors
- 17           Being an active member of circus-theatre network
- 23           Working on the subject of Risk
- 25           Learning about integration of circus and theatre
- 29           Friendship, companionship
- 31           Measuring self against own ideals
- 38           Gaining prestige of having been on the course.

.....           Any other reason? Please specify.....

**3) Did you consider yourself a risk-taker?**

**(a) as compared to other circus/theatre practitioners**

2 Yes 2 No, 2 both

**(b) as compared with wider society**

6 Yes 0No

## Steve Tiplady Exit Questionnaire

### **During the course have you had the experience of taking risks?**

8Yes 1 No

### **If so, what did you notice about it?**

‘subtle risks that take time to emerge –not the break-your-neck type of physical risk but one that depends on integrity and the belief in play’

‘some of them were more fruitful than others but all the real risks were worth it’

‘It is easier to take risks with puppets than as an actor/physical performer. This course pushed me to experiment with objects /images outside of traditional narrative, to see puppetry differently’

‘It is very hard to push beyond that invisible barrier’

‘Tested my abilities of puppetry’

‘Risk is working in a new group of people’

‘It was a very secure environment – no risk’

### **Are there other things you have learnt about risk?**

‘Reminds me that risk is about generosity and the interaction between the imagination of the individuals’

‘I’m good at pretending to myself I’m taking a risk’

‘It doesn’t have to be frightening’

‘To challenge, risk taking is difficult, not just about doing difficult circus skills but also performance contexts and issues that are taboo’

‘Yes, the research done in America re. mountain climbing’

‘I don’t like working by myself’

### **How will this benefit your future work?**

‘As a high-risk physical performer it is beneficial to re-experience stillness’

‘will try to be more honest’

‘lots of new techniques to work with in devising puppet shows’

‘I think it is good to explore risk and go through the barrier even if what comes out is crap’

‘Loads of ideas and techniques for devising’

‘To take a risky subject or issue and portray through any performances that I do –Push myself to go places that are uncomfortable/hard to do’

‘It just helps me categorise/think about the concept in a new way’

‘create solo but probably with a director’

**In what other ways will the experience of CircElation benefit your future work?**

‘thoughtfulness, truthfulness, and the delight in sharing play without the force of over-dynamic egos’

‘lots of ideas. Thank you everyone’

‘not to feel constrained by age’

‘collaborative aspect; confidence – inspiring’

‘Inspire me to do workshops with children/adults’

‘Being able to direct puppetry work more confidently’

‘Meeting people Seeing new ideas resonate with familiar ones’

**Was the course too challenging, about right or not challenging enough?** 8 About right, 1 Too challenging

**Which do you prefer - watching risk-takers or taking risks yourself?** 3 Watching, 2 Taking, 3 Both

‘taking risks is essential but harder for me’

**What were the key learning moments for you?**

‘Being allowed to be dull and to be really observant’

‘watching others show great ideas. Trying out and not feeling totally shit and judged! People seemed to like what I did –nice!’

‘working with other puppeteers manipulating the same object – learning to move and cooperate with others without verbal communication’

‘Animating a totally inanimate object (a log). Watching so many magical moments unfold’

‘Improvisation techniques with objects, making them breathe’

‘When Steve directed our pieces’

‘puppetry is very clown like, they have a lovely sensitivity & naivety’

**Briefly describe the most enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating)?**

‘observing puppets, communicate & and feel’

‘participating in a [particular, specified] sketch’

‘watching manipulators work together and overcome limitations, making the movement feasible/believable’

‘watching a fight between a leopard print cushion cover and a plastic storage box lid turn into a beautiful assimilation’

‘Car scene with two puppets – with sound effects and commentary/conversation – (Hilarious)’

‘Working with five people on one puppet scene – a huge amount of generosity’

**What was the least enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating) (within the sessions)?**

‘Pascualito’s warm-up’

‘seeing how I’d not accepted an offer in a sketch’

‘there wasn’t a moment I didn’t enjoy’

‘Performing my object was odd,? Felt uncomfortable’

‘...I would have liked more opportunity to talk about what we had done’

**Were you able to lose or diminish self-consciousness? During what activities?**

‘Yes – giving over responsibility to a paper puppet’

‘I was able to increase focus on the external’

‘The focus activities, learning to create breath in the puppet, losing yourself in the puppets movement’

‘Yes... apart from group warm-ups it was strange working with the other group who had such a different energy’

‘Task based. Wher focus is specific & creativity a by-product’

**Types of Risk**

**Which of the following is an issue for you. Please proritise by putting a number between 1 and 10 before each type of risk.**

- 24.5 Exposing secret phobias or desires
- 26 Seeming rude or uncaring
- 29 Having actions misconstrued
- 32 Being out of control
- 36 Being a failure and losing (professional/personal) status
- 42 Looking stupid
- 46 Going into the unknown
- 49 Looking physically unattractive
- 54 Pain/physical discomfort
- 60 Being uncool

Terry O'Connor Entry Questionnaires

Entry Questionnaire

**You may have many reasons for choosing to do Circelation. How important are these to you? Please prioritise according to importance by placing a number between 1 and 10 before each reason (1 is highest priority):**

- 21      Learning about integration of circus and theatre
- 21      Working with admired teachers/directors
- 20      Development of personal skills (eg trusting own abilities, trusting others etc)
- 20      Development of professional skills (eg ability to devise, direct etc)
- 19      Friendship, companionship
- 17      Being an active member of circus-theatre network
- 14      Working on the subject of Risk
- 13      Measuring self against own ideals
- 9        Gaining prestige of having been on the course.

**Any other reason? Please specify** ..... 'To work on flexibility within a group setting through to audience' [high priority]

3) Did you consider yourself a risk-taker?

(a) as compared to other circus/theatre practitioners      Yes/No

(b) as compared with wider society      Yes/No

## Terry O'Connor Exit Questionnaire

### **During the course have you had the experience of taking risks?**

5 Yes/ 1 No

'The weekend offered v. interesting insights but not sufficient pressure to take risks – Too nice!'

### **If so, what did you notice about it?**

'Emotional risk'

'Insights – The risks I cannot see are the ones I would like to keep exploring. Helpful to have someone else support you in seeing where these are – Terry outlined a whole array of areas of risk – everywhere at every level – which was inspiring & liberating. Though needed longer to explore them'

'That I put myself what other people consider risky in various ways'

'I felt safe to perform'

'It was easier to than I thought! Things I thought might be terrifying were made easier in the very comfortable group atmosphere'

'That I was supported by the group, that the small size of group, support of tutor & conditions (i.e. room size) helped'

### **Are there other things you have learnt about risk?**

'That it is a multi-faceted thing. You do it & you choose it'

' Sometimes it is difficult to identify what risk is and how to take it'

'No'

'Some risk is more interesting and focussed because an element of control or safety reassures'

'Learnt more in theory than practice. Risk means failing and failure is liberating. We can choose risk in any tiny moment – it is about seeing & choosing to take risks in each moment. We have power than we think to do this. Workshops are a good place to take those risks'

### **How will this benefit your future work?**

‘It will help me to take risks at less obvious levels & more subtle ways and to be freer and more at ease on stage’

‘A great opportunity to stretch participating wings and get a fresh perspective on my own work’

‘More awareness of how performers work or put themselves on the line’

‘Hopefully I will be more open to taking risk. Something that seems like a risk in your head may not be when you try it on stage – equally if it is a risk & you will give it to the audience, they can enjoy/benefit from it ever more’

‘Go into project that I am developing. Research & development & workshops that I deliver’

### **In what other ways will the experience of CircElation benefit your future work?**

‘I have met people that I have seen around but never talked to’

‘Networking’

‘A further sense of common places between different performance forms’

‘Keeps me in contact with other practitioners & experience an array of professional approaches’

**Was the course too challenging, about right or not challenging enough?** 4 about right, 2 not challenging enough

‘I wanted more concentration (& more physicality). Want to be held immediately to account for challenging myself more ( Was interesting to hear Terry speak & videos and know this was important but one isn’t taking risks’

‘Could do with being a bit faster paced’

**Which do you prefer - watching risk-takers or taking risks yourself?** 1 watching , 1 taking, 3 both

### **What were the key learning moments for you?**

‘The difference between being asked to go a long way and pushing oneself within a structure – in the running exercises’

‘Some sentences (phrases) that gave me the light’



**Briefly describe the most enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating)?**

‘Doing a group impro where we working with each other’

‘Being honest about people and hearing honesty’

**What was the least enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating) (within the sessions)?**

‘Too much talking’

‘When I was tired’

‘Dance Sunday Warm-up dance was more Grotowski than Martha Graham’

**Were you able to lose or diminish self-consciousness? During what activities?**

‘Yes, by trusting the group’

‘Yes, through most activities actually. It was most liberating working with people I don’t know’

‘Yes – most – the more we did the safer I felt’

**Types of Risk**

**Which of the following is an issue for you. Please proritise by putting a number between 1 and 10 before each type of risk.**

- 27 Being out of control
- 21 Looking physically unattractive
- 20 Being a failure and losing (professional/personal) status
- 20 Seeming rude or uncaring
- 19 Going into the unknown
- 18 Looking stupid
- 17 Being uncool
- 16 Having actions misconstrued
- 15 Exposing secret phobias or desires
- 12 Pain/physical discomfort

Liam Steel Questionnaires

Entry Questionnaires went missing

Exit Questionnaire

**During the course have you had the experience of taking risks?**

8 Yes/ 0 No

**If so, what did you notice about it?**

‘It had a massive emotional impact –I was reeling for ages Angry Grief’

‘It pushed my boundaries & forced me out of my comfort zone & made me aware of weaknesses I might have in performing’

‘Makes you overcome fears, Push you somewhere you might not rake yourself normally’

‘It was scary. I felt exposed, vulnerable’

‘in the more contact-improvisation based work I was not able to let go of my control and go for the risks. This really stopped the flow and made the exercise very difficult’

‘Liberating feeling – can help you move on artistically and get out of ruts’

‘How to add emotional content to performance which gives the audience/ performer a sense of risk’

‘Makes me feel very vulnerable and nervous but at the same time gives me a buzz like I hadn’t experienced for a long time’

**Are there other things you have learnt about risk?**

‘Value of emotional risk to audience’

‘When risk was taken just for the sake of it, it didn’t actually bring anything more to the performance’

‘Simple ways of getting audience to feel on edge or uneasy etc.’

‘That in retrospect you regret not taking more!!’

‘Let go of what you know you are good at (especially hard for circus performers!)’

### **How will this benefit your future work?**

‘I can use the performance techniques taught in my work’

‘I think a better awareness of how to emphasise the feeling of risk to the audience to make them empathise with the performer/situation will be very interesting to play with (when that is the effect you want)’

‘It’s a reminder of a way in which to get to authentic performance’

‘Try to think how to apply what I learnt to my work – consider how you want the audience to feel’

‘It will help me to know what areas of risk that excite and exhilarate me’

‘Insight into how to concentrate/distil a story and then how to physicalise it’

‘It will introduce new techniques to the way I already work. It gives me new tools for devising performance’

### **In what other ways will the experience of CircElation benefit your future work?**

‘It gives me a network of people to talk to/receive feedback from and possibly get work from’

‘Growing as a performer’

‘Refreshing ideas for workshops; getting to material creating pieces’

‘Influence my teacher training at college, try out some exercises on students there’

‘Collaboration opportunities hopefully & the development of new ideas to innovate creative process’

‘Working more with text, at least in the devising of new work(not necessarily in the actual performance’

**Was the course too challenging, about right or not challenging enough?** ‘Very challenging!’

‘too challenging in one aspect – improvisation of ‘contact’ dance on a trapeze with no mat, 1 spotter for 2 airborne people, 1 of whom was holding a pint glass’

5 About right, 1 not challenging enough

**Which do you prefer - watching risk-takers or taking risks yourself?** 7 taking risks, 1 both

### **What were the key learning moments for you?**

‘Learning about how to portray emotion by thinking of a physical movement to portray an emotion – e.g. walking on glass to portray murder, gun –fights etc.’

‘Finding the essence in a situation’

‘trying to understand how less can be more. (Trying to) understand when to separate physical movement from text or action, physical tools to build or find characters etc. (lots!)’

‘Even ‘experienced’ people can still learn loads. We can talk to each other’

‘Refreshing the mind with devising or starting points – useful exercises’

‘Walking up walls, playing with rhythm & text,. Discovering new things & ideas to incorporate in future work’

‘Dealing with a situation I was extremely uncomfortable with and its aftermath’

‘The introduction of objects in our exercises’

### **Briefly describe the most enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating)?**

‘making the text based duo and watching people portray an emotion through physicality’

‘Contact improvisation. Watching Liam’s video of his work – i.e. seeing the end product of the types of work we are doing’

‘Lots of different exercises that didn’t feel like anything...then through simple directions from Liam something very clear was suddenly created. Those moments of transformation were great’

‘Being together, the camaraderie, the fellowship’

‘Watching moments evolve out of simple exercises’

‘the last presentations which were based on rhythm and text’

### **What was the least enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating) (within the sessions)?**

‘Having a participant freak out after we did an exercise on a trapeze’

‘A session between two students on a trapeze trying to do too much and killing the possibility of any story or relation reading. Similar when being part in an exercise and feeling that too much was going on for something interesting to come out of it’

‘Seeing my new friends in pain/scared’

‘Watching two people get on a not very safe looking trapeze (ropes are tattered and not thick enough’

‘Coping with the aftermath of doing ‘contact’ doubles trapeze’

‘watching a pair getting really frustrated about failing during an exercise (but it was useful too)’

**Were you able to lose or diminish self-consciousness? During what activities?**

‘one side of an argument - shouting’

‘yes, especially when having to use my voice, which I’m not used to’

#### Types of Risk

**Which of the following is an issue for you. Please proritise by putting a number between 1 and 10 before each type of risk.**

- 52 Pain/physical discomfort
- 50 Being a failure and losing (professional/personal) status
- 49 Seeming rude or uncaring
- 45 Being out of control
- 38 Having actions misconstrued
- 37 Looking stupid
- 37 Exposing secret phobias or desires
- 35 Going into the unknown
- 23 Looking physically unattractive
- 16.5 Being uncool

**Any other types of risk that is an issue for you?**

‘Something about leaving family behind’



## DEBORAH BATTON Exit Questionnaire

During the course have you had the experience of taking risks?

13 Yes/ 0 No

### **If so, what did you notice about it?**

‘That the risk always feels bigger beforehand, than once you actually done it, when you realise that it wasn’t such a big thing’

‘Felt the fear – did scare me deeply, but I enjoyed having pushed through it and growth’

‘The fear of taking risks! Could experience humiliation/doubt if fail – but with very supportive you want to take the risk!’

‘Adrenaline rush, feeling of achievement, acquisition of new skills, desire to learn more & take more risks’

‘It’s hard – you are aware of the risk /opportunity when it’s there but don’t take it. Why?’

‘The devastating effect of making an ass of yourself, or even the possibility’

‘That it’s not as bad as I thought. Once you know the group trust yourself to go further’

‘Coming up against resistances and being encouraged/pushed to overcome them’

‘It is an excellent way of stepping out of your comfort zone and accept the fact that it is absolutely fine to fail sometimes’

‘Pushing me to some limits, but quite smoothly as people were kind’

‘There are many different kinds of risk, physical, emotional, personal, professional’

### **Are there other things you have learnt about risk?**

‘ Taking a bigger risk within the performance most of the time works better (but I’m not sure if that is always true about taking bigger risks with ‘technical’ circus skills)’

‘It gives an edge to the work’

‘something that I might not find risky may be a huge risk to others. Think I will pay more attention to this when watching performances’

‘That it can be something to aspire towards’

‘Accept failure, no problem, just do it again’

‘Risk is undervalued, it now seems more core to creative practice and will encourage me to take more risks in future’

‘Through taking risks you discover new things about yourself that wouldn’t come out otherwise’

‘That risk can be where you least expected it’

‘I’ve learnt more about where my personal comfort zones are. I know what kind of feedback I like to receive’

### **How will this benefit your future work?**

‘Better confidence and growing as a performer’

‘Massive changes I felt. New directions. Now I’m not so frightened to use my voice and use characterisation’

‘Gained new physical skill and techniques (mental & physical). Now feel I have more power to challenge and listen to myself & question my processes’

‘Incorporate new skills, be more ambitious in scope & outlook and the creative of new work. Collaborate with partners who push you further’

‘Keep me questioning – when am I going with my strength and possibly not challenging myself and when am I going with weaknesses – testing things’

‘Greater courage gives a bigger range of possible places to go’

‘Through having learnt to take both physical risks and in devising’

‘It will help me to explore new areas of performance and feel more confident about them’

‘Finding new characters within, having great feedback (either positive or negative) and honest’

‘I feel like I can begin to incorporate these issues of risk into my work in the future’

### **In what other ways will the experience of CircElation benefit your future work?**

‘Learnt new tools in how to devise work. some new technical skills and also better techniques or explorations that I will ‘copy’/use when teaching workshops myself’

‘It feels fantastic to learn from Debra. She’s supercool. I’ve learnt so much from her, not only skills but in whole ethos’



‘met great new people/contacts’

‘Contact with other performers/riggers/potential collaboration’

‘Greater knowledge of dance & movement. Different ways to approach the devising process’

‘Through Debra’s work I discovered simple and effective ways of devising performance. This has been one of the most valuable aspects of the week’

‘It will help in networking also and meet new people for collaboration’

‘I feel like I have a greater network of people I can ask about my work to get feedback’

**Was the course too challenging, about right or not challenging enough?** 11 About right, 1 Not Challenging enough - ‘more,more’

**Which do you prefer - watching risk-takers or taking risks yourself?** 7 taking risks, 3 Both

**What were the key learning moments for you?**

‘Tools for devising (i.e. doing something physical, audience putting random words to it, then using these words to create a ‘who, where, what’)

‘Everyday was a journey - impossible to choose’

‘New feedback techniques’

‘Working with other skilled practitioners from other areas. Learning from an excellent teacher. Taking leaps of faith in physicality’

‘Learning to give negative feedback clearly’

‘Being rigorous’

‘Feedback times!’

‘In duets by getting the physical and the content together. Compromising for directing with other performers’

**Briefly describe the most enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating)?**

‘learning new physical vocabulary. Watching peoples pieces on Friday afternoon’

‘the end show (watching) singing in performance (doing)

‘Watching my usual performance partners doing something completely different’

‘Performing either improvised or rehearsed scenes. Also physical experience of struggling for balance whilst trying to play’

‘when some of the technical movements became a theatrical moment’

‘Watching a performance really take off’

‘God, there were so many!’

‘Performing my solo for the first time was great fun!’

‘Too many to be specific but I loved the variety’

‘Tamsin giving birth and Joe’s confused assistance. When my solo piece fell into a place where it felt like it worked’

**What was the least enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating) (within the sessions)?**

‘Wednesday when I need to come in later because I was too tired. I then found it hard to find a way into the session, especially as I couldn’t take part in the harness work’

‘Doing the solo the second time when we got negative feedback. And working with a very unfocussed performer’

‘having to accept some decisions about a performance’

‘Feeling completely STUCK with my duet partner, not being able to find common ground or a connection’

‘Sometimes watching people taking risks or going very far with something is uncomfortable’

‘I don’t think there were any. The negative feedback session was challenging – but amazingly useful!’

‘failing’

**Were you able to lose or diminish self-consciousness? During what activities?**

‘Physical’

‘The harness work and the counter-balance duets’

‘When I am focussing on other things I lose self-consciousness when the thing that I am doing is more important than the performance – it’s a by-product’

‘sometimes- brief moments on stage’

‘Yes during Pilobolus work, in harness work’

‘Yes, after performing the solos’

‘Yes, during harness flying’

‘during the solo’

‘The activity I think I felt the clearest change about self-consciousness was regarding standing outside of the action and try to help to direct people’s work (on the sessions where I didn’t take part physically). I first felt a bit nervous about imposing my thoughts but at the same time realised that you won’t get anywhere directing something half-hearted, so tried to be more brave’

### **Types of Risk**

**Which of the following is an issue for you. Please prioritise by putting a number between 1 and 10 before each type of risk.**

- 80 Being a failure and losing (professional/personal) status
- 68 Having actions misconstrued
- 65 Looking stupid
- 55 Seeming rude or uncaring
- 54.5 Being out of control
- 47 Pain/physical discomfort
- 43 Going into the unknown
- 40 Exposing secret phobias or desires
- 35 Looking physically unattractive
- 22 Being uncool

**Any other types of risk that is an issue for you?**

John Wright Questionnaires

**You may have many reasons for choosing to do Circelation. How important are these to you?**

**Please prioritise according to importance by placing a number between 1 and 10 before each reason (1 is highest priority):**

- 85 Development of personal skills (eg trusting own abilities, trusting others etc)
- 75 Development of professional skills (eg ability to devise, direct etc)
- 67 Working on the subject of Risk
- 59 Working with admired teachers/directors
- 54 Friendship, companionship
- 53. Learning about integration of circus and theatre
- 49 Being an active member of circus-theatre network
- 42 Measuring self against own ideals
- 22 Gaining prestige of having been on the course.

**Any other reason? Please specify**

‘Thought it would be interesting and fun’

‘Supporting other theatre practitioners’

‘Exploration, discovery, focus’

**3) Did you consider yourself a risk-taker?**

**(a) as compared to other circus/theatre practitioners**

6 Yes, 4 No

**(b) as compared with wider society** 11 Yes/ 0 No

John Wright Exit Questionnaire

**During the course have you had the experience of taking risks?**

10 Yes 1 No

**If so, what did you notice about it?**

‘It’s bloody scary’

‘That it initially fills me with fear but is an extremely liberating experience’

‘It’s better to try and fail than not try at all!’

‘Liberating’

‘Edgy, uncomfortable, exhilarating’

‘That the risks you had decided to take weren’t that risky and the real risks became apparent of their own accord’

‘It was quite freeing’

‘Pleasant if supported and celebrated, unpleasant if not’

‘It can be very scary. It can put you out of your depth’

**Are there other things you have learnt about risk?**

‘It’s an exciting place to be’

‘Done in a safe environment I can achieve so much more than I thought possible. Taking risks is an invaluable aspect of creating work that is touching and real’

‘sometimes you don’t realise you are taking one’

‘often risk is doing less rather than more’

‘Risk is challenge. And it must be embraced or don’t bother’

‘To trust the process & others & self to see you through’

‘That my very existence involves much courage & risk’

‘Physical risk, pain etc are not nearly as fear inducing as being unprepared or risking failure’

**How will this benefit your future work?**

‘I respect myself more consciously and demand the same of others’

‘I have gained more insight into devising theatre. Working with others & allowing time & space to create work’

‘It has just started a new hunger and a drive’

‘In creating performance, concentrating on what is there, rather than what I think should be there’

‘Increased possibilities’

‘It will enable me to work at different pace, try things I am not confident with and trust myself as a performer’

‘I feel it has opened up a whole range of new ideas about the process of creation’

‘I would not go into a project without having some idea of what I wanted to achieve. It was an experiment. I’m glad I tried it but it’s not for me!’

**In what other ways will the experience of CircElation benefit your future work?**

‘I feel much more free and open. I can’t be specific yet but I’m sure it will really effect how I consider devising new work’

‘Contacts made’

‘Widened horizons of what is possible. Introduced new skills’

‘New confidence, new friends, new direction’

‘Having worked with a big variety of people will hopefully reduce my ego’

‘Not sure! Wait and see!’

‘I will keep working on the material generated’

‘Contacts and connections. Re-inspiration. Time to reflect and make future plans’

‘Networking, working with new performers, seeing other people I might want to work with’

**Was the course too challenging, about right or not challenging enough?** 7 about right  
2 not challenging enough 1 too challenging – ‘but that was because I decided to enter the project with little preparation’

**Which do you prefer - watching risk-takers or taking risks yourself?**

7 taking risks, 2 both

**What were the key learning moments for you?**

‘Being real in the moment, it’s simple and obvious but not always easy when climbing around on circus equipment’

‘failing but trying again’

‘Flashes of inspiration during improvisations/’play’ sessions...both in my own work & watching other people’

‘One to one advice from John Wright. Sharing the creative process with three other opinionated people and watching as the opinions shrank and the piece just grew itself’

‘Getting through the bad days with support and realising it wasn’t all about me’

‘Work with John Wright. Learning how to relate to director I was working with’

‘ “If it doesn’t work change it” ‘

‘Surviving disappointments & frustrations. Gaining strengths. Working with others in unknown territories’

**Briefly describe the most enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating)?**

‘Witnessing moments of beauty and openness in others performances’

‘Having the people in the group watch the work and respond to it. I was worried that it may not work’

‘Watching Rose English’s group risking their hearts’

‘Seeing good friend do things that I’d never seen’

‘John’s workshop playing chasing the hand and ‘I’ve got all the moves’’

‘Watching the incredible variety of the pieces’

‘Watching the performance about plastic surgery’

**What was the least enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating) (within the sessions)?**

‘Feeling like I didn’t know/understand what our director wanted to show at certain times. That was frightening but didn’t last long’

‘Feeling like our work wasn’t any good’

‘Mobile phone disturbing performance’

‘Having to sing in an exercise!’

‘Feeling dismissed and invisible in sessions’

‘ 1 Myself (& my performers) experienced some frustration when John did not wait to see the work we had generated in our afternoon sessions. I believe this came about because John is passionate about directing and wanted to mould the piece we were creating.

2 Seeing John create the sort of surreal montaged scene with such ease

3 Not being able to do this because of 1.!

4 seeing one of my performers become very upset under John’s direction’

**Were you able to lose or diminish self-consciousness? During what activities?**

‘Some play activities and active rehearsals’

‘Diminish – during John’s workshops’

‘More than usual –Just talking out loud!’

‘John’s games were brilliant. I found myself doing the most stupid things utterly genuinely’

‘The skipping rope game & the exercises in which performers were asked to physically represent one emotion whilst verbalising the opposite’



### **Types of Risk**

**Which of the following is an issue for you. Please prioritise by putting a number between 1 and 10 before each type of risk.**

- 56 Being a failure and losing (professional/personal) status
- 45 Looking stupid
- 45 Having actions misconstrued
- 42 Being out of control
- 42 Seeming rude or uncaring
- 36 Exposing secret phobias or desires
- 34 Looking physically unattractive
- 33 Pain/physical discomfort
- 29 Being uncool
- 27 Going into the unknown

**Any other types of risk that is an issue for you?**

‘Overcoming laziness – it’s attractive to not try’

‘The major one for me on this project was to go into a rehearsal process with very little idea of what I wanted to achieve. It was a deliberate tactic and part of the process of looking at risk’

Rose English Questionnaires

**You may have many reasons for choosing to do Circelation. How important are these to you?**

**Please prioritise according to importance by placing a number between 1 and 10 before each reason (10 is highest priority):**

- 34 Working with admired teachers/directors
- 30 Development of professional skills (eg ability to devise, direct etc)
- 26 Development of personal skills (eg trusting own abilities, trusting others etc)
- 26 Friendship, companionship
- 24 Learning about integration of circus and theatre
- 22 Being an active member of circus-theatre network
- 20 Working on the subject of Risk
- 18 Measuring self against own ideals
- 9 Gaining prestige of having been on the course.

**Any other reason? Please specify**

‘To give myself permission to continue to explore circus within Arts wider sphere’

‘Networking with other people in the art field (mix-arts and theatre-circus arts)’

‘Feeling safe & supported by the tutor and group to do things and explore things that I have never done before’

**3) Did you consider yourself a risk-taker?**

**(a) as compared to other circus/theatre practitioners**

4 Yes/ 0 No

**(b) as compared with wider society**

4Yes/ 0 No

Rose English Exit Questionnaire

**During the course have you had the experience of taking risks?**

4Yes/ 0 No

**If so, what did you notice about it?**

‘That one can take risks as long as they trust themselves and their riggers’

‘Risk – all the fears I have been carrying – worried what my peers will think about me!!! As an artist one should, I think, connect to the thing that is greater than them i.e. the Divine and surrender their fears and not worry about what other people will think, but to be true to the creative process for yourself and not worry about outside thing. Real artists just say in the place of unknown and creates, be vulnerable, honest and open take risks’

‘That risk is possible when attended by comfort, care, reassurance from fellow artist’

‘The exhilarating pleasure and excitement of taking risks in a safe environment’

**Are there other things you have learnt about risk?**

‘Yes, it’s good to let go’

‘As an artist I like taking risks physically pushing the boundaries. It’s a place of excitement, adrenalin’

‘Not to fear to go deep, to be honest & sincere – people respond well to that’

‘Nothing is so risky as it seems before you do it – Butterflies have got the alarm call all wrong!’

**How will this benefit your future work?**

‘Keep me at it – higher & higher’

‘It has given me the courage to pursue even further my gut feeling about what performance is all about’

‘This course have given me the space to show a piece of work that I’ve always dreamed to create but have been afraid to do; exploring the Divine and having it in my work’

‘Will hold the risk factor close to my heart’

**In what other ways will the experience of CircElation benefit your future work?**

‘From the knowledge gained throughout the week’

‘I hope the Arts Council ladies liked my work and this could benefit me when I apply for money to create next project. Other peers will talk about my work and this may lead to work’

‘Network expanded’

**Was the course too challenging, about right or not challenging enough? (circle one)**

4 about right

**Which do you prefer - watching risk-takers or taking risks yourself? (circle one)**

3 taking risks, 1 both

**What were the key learning moments for you?**

‘Working with Rose English’

‘Seeing people respond positively’

‘Observing the other participants & myself feeling allowed to explore theatrically very personal experiences and being supported by the tutor of the group’

‘On Monday when my dancers, collaborator, circus equipment didn’t show up so I was standing in a place of ‘unknow’ very risky, nothing to hide behind. Meeting and being mentored by Rose. Every second was risk and full of learning for me. Thursday improvisation, shedding my layers. Sharing the fear I felt’

**Briefly describe the most enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating)?**

‘Our group with Rose , so supportive and nurturing to go beyond my fears’

‘participating and watching co-artists’

‘the double act about plastic surgery’

**What was the least enjoyable moment for you (watching or participating) (within the sessions)?**

‘I very much enjoyed all what was presented to me, including my moments of being confused’

‘When the mobile phone continued to go off during my sharing’

**Were you able to lose or diminish self-consciousness? During what activities?**

'I really tried during my sharing'

'I'm not very self-conscious and just go for it'

'In performance'

**Types of Risk**

**Which of the following is an issue for you. Please prioritise by putting a number between 1 and 10 before each type of risk.**

- 27 Having actions misconstrued
- 23 Being a failure and losing (professional/personal) status
- 23 Seeming rude or uncaring
- 18 Looking stupid
- 17 Exposing secret phobias or desires
- 14 Being out of control
- 12 Being uncool
- 11 Going into the unknown
- 10 Looking physically unattractive
- 7 Pain/physical discomfort

**Any other types of risk that is an issue for you?**

'solo voice'

'showing vulnerability and being hurt by people, people being aggressive or talking behind my back'