

## **Proposal**

### ***Circus as Dialogue***

#### **Doctoral positions in Performative and Mediated Practices - specialising in Choreography**

### **Description and research questions**

The project *Circus as Dialogue* raises the issue of meaning-making in performing arts by initiating a shift of leitmotiv from spectacle to other situation-making in the practice of circus art. In this project, I propose that new insights can be gained by looking at circus art through notions of dialogue. I will investigate how I can transform dispositions toward circus by taking circus into liminal states of practice to foster the emergence of incipient conversational territories, spaces and moments. These new territories, spaces and moments can be fertile zones for other than spectacle based situation-making in circus art. I will visit dialogical concepts and strategies rooted in other performing art forms as well as dialogical principles from other domains. This project will engage the four profile areas at the interdisciplinary research environment of Uniarts, contributing to and benefiting from shared perspectives on the issues of meaning-making in performing arts and the role of art/artists in society.

How can circus be constructed, processed and experienced as an open-ended, multi-voiced and dialogical whole?

This question and others that will arise through the process will be investigated into, according to notions of dialogue as a theoretical framework for how knowledge can be acquired in different modes and on different levels in circus art. This framework will highlight the role of interaction and contexts, as well as the semiotic mediation and the contribution of the « other » (Linell, 2009) in and through circus art. By exploring the circus utterances through notions of dialogue, I aim to develop new understandings of the art form and investigate the event of circus beyond its function as spectacle.

Particular attention will be given to dialogue as a collaborative process between artists and between artists and audience as well as with artifacts and environment, to explore co-authored, co-produced meaning-makings and new channels of communication. The project will contribute to increase abilities and develop tools for dialogical processes as a method of artistic research in circus art/performing arts in the different phases of composition (directing, choreography, creation), performance (education, training, interpretation), and presentation (form, genre, context). The outcomes will be articulated as methods and theories that can support the development of a dialogical approach to circus art. The research is expected to learn more about the notions, conditions, and characters of dialogical exchanges and esthetics in contemporary circus art and to develop abilities for collaborative process and dialogue through circus art.

### **Procedure and methodologies**

I will research from a choreograph/circus designer perspective and as a reflective practitioner to unfold how circus can be constructed as open-ended, multi-vocally processed and experienced as a dialogical whole. Through artistic practice, I will proceed to the elaboration of a circus installation as a platform for exploring the relations between components involve in circus; human, artifact and environment. This will be a context to locate existing and enable new type of dialogues in the practice of circus. This circus installation will be conceptualized as a nomadic, transformable and responsive environmental system to test and negotiate a range of applications, associated processes, and variations of notions of dialogue. I will investigate this nomadic circus environment into different spaces and through different contexts of practice that remain open to differentiated levels of contingency and indeterminacy and yet allow us to take creative risks that are embedded in safe practice. I will turn to other practices concerned with dialogue as bridging practices and seek for new, existing or unexpected linkages (Hermans, Gieser 2011). I will be visiting dialogical concepts and strategies rooted in and derived from, e.g., electronic art, installation art, interactive art in conjunction with dialogical principles and ideas from other domains, e.g., linguistics, literature, sound and music computing, and mechatronics.

One could say that interactive art's main specificity resides in the quality of proposed "situations" and the "other's" involvement in the process. Interactive art addresses the art form as a process in which the finality comes secondary to a process integrating the participation of the viewer. Based on this, circus art can learn from such perspective and has much to explore regarding strategies for the situation making and negotiation of roles in its praxis. Interactive art will be a source of methods for examining for example responsivity, mutuality, interdependency in circus performance.

In installation art, as in circus art, the relation to the matter is inherent to the practice. The matter (people, artifact, and environment) are in-situ, in real-time and in real-space. It is relevant to this research to invest circus settings that could happen somewhere in the inter-world between life and art, controlled environment and unpredicted situation, pre-decided event and un-decided finality.

"The Dialogic Imagination" (Bakhtin, 1981) in electronic art enables us to think about notions of alterity in a larger sense (Kac, 1999). This means that dialogic electronic art undermines emphasis on visuality to give precedence instead to interrelationship and connectivity. The notions of alterity, polyvocality, and open-ended processes are discussed in the contemporary sphere of electroacoustic and in some other niches of audio, visual and media arts. These notions can be referred to in the context of the circus, but they require a closer look at how they can occur into the specificities of the praxis and a thorough analysis of their impacts.

An important element of the project is that practice-based research in circus combined with interactive technologies will be a method to explore the real-time relationship between the people, artifacts, and environment. In the continuation of my previous projects, where I used the sonification as a method to capture the sonic gestures with an aim to enhance expression of the performer, I will increasingly make use of wireless inertial sensors, as well as experimenting with a range of different motion tracking systems. These technologies will, in turn, provide with tools to explore different notions of dialogue through kinesthetic, visual, auditory feedback. From a circus perspective, the possibility of embodying different modalities in different manners opens up to new ranges of dynamics, textures of movement, and understandings of the discipline.

It is through the circus practice that I will use and develop different artistic materials, versions of the circus installation/ environment, devices, equipment, tactics, strategies, and methods, as tools and processes to enable a circus constructed, processed and experienced as an open-ended, multi-voiced and dialogical whole.

The concept of dialogical art practice is derived from the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin who argued that the work of art can be viewed as a kind of conversation; a locus of differing meanings, interpretations, and points of view. Bakhtin's ideas from "The Dialogic Imagination" and earlier work – answerability, dialogue, monologism, polyphony, and unfinalizability, to name but a few – not only offer scholars categories for aesthetics, but also for analyzing visual art and performing arts. The philosophical language developed by Mikhail Bakhtin offers a set of questions to query circus art.

In this project, the ideas of a circus that can operate beyond its function of spectacle imply a convergence of notions about interaction, language, and situation. The ideas of Per Linell (linguistic, sense-making), Mikhail Bakhtin (the dialogic imagination), J. J. Gibson (affordance), Karl E. Weick (loose coupling, sense-making), Donna Haraway (situated knowledges), Hubert Hermans (dialogical self), Pauline Oliveros (deep listening), Guy Debord (situationist), George Herbert Mead (interactionism), Martin Buber (dialogical existence) are sources that are at this time anticipated to be consulted as theoretical references.

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**Implementation**

I will conduct a series of cyclical development phases involving circus performers from the four families of circus disciplines: aerial acrobatics, floor acrobatics, balance, and manipulation. The experimentations will comprehend exercises in composition, performance, and presentation. The research will be carried out at the multidisciplinary research environment of Stockholm University of the Arts combined with:

- The sound and music computing group parts of the Media Technology and Interaction Design department, Royal Institute of Technology.
- The Prototype Center parts of the Machine Design department, Royal Institute of Technology.
- The Research Division in Mechatronics and Embedded Control Systems parts of the Machine Design department, Royal Institute of Technology.
- Kristofferscenen and Museum of Performing Arts in Stockholm are expected to be hosting the project at specific moments.

The studies will involve collaborative processes with circus practitioners, experts in human and circus rigging/settings/equipments, researchers in computer science and mechatronics, artists from interactive arts, installation art and electronic/media art and with an adviser expert in linguistics.

With the researchers in mechatronics and embedded control systems, I will focus on the development of methods and tools for model-based design, development of mechatronics systems embedded in the circus equipment, props, and wearable devices. With the sound and music computing team, I will focus on sound in interaction and the representation of data (interactive sonification) as communication of information with sound, and other modalities for human-machine interaction in circus art. The contribution of an expert in linguistic will provide with a dialogical critical perspective to the studies. With the experts in circus art, interactive art, installation art and electronic/media art, I will expand the use of motion data tracking and explore the coupling with other modalities in the elaboration of the responsive circus environment. With the circus performers, I will experiment this potential in different spaces and through different contexts of circus practice. Each department/institution/venues and each participant will provide the expertise and basic resources for the project.

**Preliminary schedule**

Preliminary timeplan	2019 Main Focus	2020 Main Focus	2021 Main Focus	2022 Main Focus
January	Start Plan Management	Exposition 2 Research week Uniarts _25% Presentation	Exposition 4 Research week Uniarts _50% Presentation	Exposition 4 Research week Uniarts _75% Presentation
February-March	Discursive activities and development	Discursive activities and development	Discursive activities and development	Discursive activities and development
April	Laboratory 1	Laboratory 4	Laboratory 7	Laboratory 10
May-August	Discursive activities and development	Discursive activities and development	Discursive activities and development	Discursive activities and development
September	Laboratory 2	Laboratory 5	Laboratory 8	Laboratory 11
October	Exposition 1 Alliances & commonalities	Exposition 3	Exposition 5	Discursive activities and development
November	Discursive activities and development	Discursive activities and development	Discursive activities and development	Discursive activities and development
December	Laboratory 3	Laboratory 6	Laboratory 9	Exam

I plan for the process and findings to be visible through the physical exploration of a responsive circus environment, and through the literature, artifacts, visual material that the project will generate. Assessment and evaluation involving discursive and dissemination activities such as courses offered as part of the programme, discussion, observation, reflection, lecture, exposition and documentation, will be conceived as horizontal activities along the whole duration of the project, providing at specific milestones, feedback and overall directives and revisions.

### **Existing knowledge and experience within contemporary circus**

Within contemporary circus, there is a growing need to define and explore the specificities of circus art. The tools for « designing » circus are multiple and draw from the whole field of performing arts, and yet the circus artistic practice poses specific questions regarding individual, cultural, social and political implications. The Nouveau Cirque (New Circus/ Contemporary Circus) has opened up to a more artistic and sociopolitical engagement, attempting to give sense–political and aesthetic–to the circus act beyond its own spectacle. (Leroux, 2016).

Circus art as a form of communication is a multimodal discourse (Bouissac, 2012) highly perpetrated for the sake of risk and exploit. The need to provide for the safety and to optimize virtuosity calls for contexts of practice (hyper-controlled environments) that offer significant limitations to the mechanisms of composition, performance, and presentation in circus art. The event of circus performance as spectacle is a vehicle of display that follows and imposes a logic based on practicality and finality leading, among other intricacies, to the staticity of its forms, processes, and structures resulting in gaps and boundaries between its components.

The genres in contemporary circus art are multiple, an aspect they all have in common is that circus is deployed as spectacle. Circus approaches, genres, and esthetics are diversified and yet mainly presented in a monologic form and that even if, in some case, the event may be dialogically motivated, processed or structured to some extent.

I think it is important for the development of contemporary circus to acknowledge the differences between monologic and dialogic forms and to recognize the latter as an occasion to learn about conversational possibilities in the practice of circus art. This research will be the case for an innovative approach to circus arts by exploring the notions, conditions, and characters of dialogical exchanges and aesthetics in contemporary circus art.

Interactive technologies to explore notions of dialogue in circus art offer multiple possibilities. In the case of circus, a significant improvement in the creation of interactive sonic systems is that it allows composers, choreographers, and performers to work simultaneously and in a logic of dialogue rather than a philosophy of services. To modulate the elements by means of the body is an exciting new concept of the body as interface. It can generate new esthetics and can support various type of dialogue, e.g., inner, human-to-human, human-to-environment, human-to-machine. The complexity of virtuosic body movements is substantial while researching circus, to decodify the action and enable sonic and visual translation through interactive technologies can open gates for a chain of responses and feedbacks that can inform the performers, the viewer's experience and transform the circus in its forms, processes, and structures.

### **Motivation**

This research will be the case for innovative approaches that can extend theories and analyses, aesthetics and performative practices in the context of artistic research in circus art/ performing arts. The research is relevant to me as a vehicle to develop new critical frameworks and new aesthetic paradigm in contemporary circus art. To ensure the growth and the sustainability of contemporary circus, it appears to me essential to revise the traditional and contemporary foundations and the utility of the art form.

This project is a continuation of my previous research Gynoïdes Project (2010-2014), Sound of Circus 2014 to 2016, Hidden Circus (2017-2018) where one of the main focus has been to study different modes of interaction in circus art for the enhancement of the artistic expression. The movement of the circus performers was transformed into sound via motion capture technology based on wearable sensors. This was done using interactive sonification that is the auditory equivalent of scientific visualization. Among other findings, the studies demonstrated that the use of interactive technological tools in circus is a way to add new channels of communication between performer and audience. The increased connection between audience and the performer pointed towards many new interesting ways to include interactive technologies in circus

performance. (Robitaille et al. 2014) With this project proposal, I want to push further these previous findings by exploring the transition from a circus of self-sense expression to a one dialogically motivated.

By exploring the notions of dialogue through the artistic practice of circus, I want to generate circumstances that enable affordances as a strategy for the circus gestures to migrate from the status of the embodiment of thoughts (technical display) to the visibility of an intention. In other words, I want to develop tools for articulation and for bridging the gap between intention and action in circus art, thus transmuting from spectacle to new potential collective experiences and realities.

With this project, I will engage the four profile areas at the interdisciplinary research environment at Uniarts. I expect to be active in the research milieu as well as contributing to lecturing across campus. A Ph.D. position will be an opportunity to increase my abilities as researchers, to dedicate the time needed for this project proposal and concretely contribute to the necessary structuration of circus art. It is indeed an exciting time for the development of circus art in Sweden and widely in the world.

The research project *Circus as Dialogue* is motivated by a wish to better understand the circus art form and challenge my practice. It is also motivated by an imminent need to acquire and promote the acquisition of new knowledge about dialogue through performing arts. This ambition is based on the belief that dialogue is a necessary competence to develop when it comes to collectively better maneuver the global societal challenges that await us.

### Preliminary Budget

Preliminary Budget Sek.	2019	2020	2021	2022
Fee artists	33 000	33 000	33 000	33 000
Fee collaborators	40 000	40 000	40 000	40 000
Material circus	15 000	10 000	10 000	10 000
Material electronic- sound, light	15 000	10 000	10 000	10 000
Documentation/ exposition	7 000	7 000	7 000	22 000
Total/Year	110 000	100 000	100 000	115 000
Total	425 000			

Note: In addition, I am the recipiency of various awarded grants from different cultural government agencies, a total amount of 600 000 Sek so far, could be injected into the project.

### References

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