

Dear everybody who is here today,

My name is Tim Behren, I live in Cologne-Germany. I am co-founder and part of the board of directors of the network Initiative Neuer Zirkus – in short INZ. In order to organize this network meeting we support the Tanztage Potsdam.

I am a circus artist. I began as an acrobat at the ESAC in Brussels, then pretty early discovered the world of dance. Today I practice mostly as a choreographer and my work is dedicated to the meeting points of circus and dance.

So I am very happy to speak today at this dance festival about circus.

I wanna start talking about the Initiative Neuer Zirkus and why it was founded.

The INZ was founded as a gemeinnütziger Verein in 2011 in Cologne – which is now five years ago.

By then it was a group of circus activists from different fields coming together (Artists, producers, agents, institutions).

From the beginning the main goal was to give the new circus in Germany a face. We wanted to be visible as artists and producers, striving for recognition of the new circus as an artform and creating a network of exchange and discussion.

So we started discussing, about what new circus might be. We did that in the form of a „Stammtisch Neuer Zirkus“ in Cologne which then expanded to similar discussions in Berlin, Hamburg and Munich. These are today the main cities of our network.

Soon we realized that the discussions got stuck because we kept talking most of the time about what new circus is not.

Rather than to explore what the new circus is or could be.

Maybe this obstacle was necessary as there was a big need at that moment, mainly among the artists, to separate new circus from traditional or boulevard circus.

It now reminds me of a sentence of Maksim Komaro, one of the main actors of the Finnish new circus scene. He supposedly has said about Germany that you might first have to kill your father, before you can build up a new circus scene.

He was obviously talking about the traditional circus scene which is strongly developed with its family circuses and the variétés. They are the main employers for circus artists in Germany.

I am glad that a different strategy found its way. Not at least thanks to „Netzwerk Zirkus“ in Berlin with its attempt to see circus as a cultural heritage and to dialogue about circus in all its facets.

During these discussion rounds I got the feeling that we won't find the core of new circus by talking and talking. It has to be defined by the artists and their actual works on stage. So, we decided to focus on the existing companies and started a brochure asking them about their work and their perspective on circus.

So – in 2014 we created this publication with companies that are touring with evening-filling stage shows. At that moment we were in contact with 18 companies. Street circus was not considered yet.

It's high time to make a new one. There are plenty of new groups, festivals and locations arising. Very good times for the new circus in Germany – that is also why we are all here.

That was the first part of my speech here. The second part I wanna talk out of my personal experience and perspective of an artist being located between circus and dance.

I wanna share 5 thoughts, which could be an impulse for further discussion.

I will formulate them a bit sharp to hopefully provoke a little. I start with an abstract thought to become then more and more concrete.

1. Circus is unchoreographable. Each circus-discipline brings its own timing, rhythm, its own preparation and training routines and its inherent topics. All attempts to choreograph circus from an exterior dance perspective will fail. I think making a circus piece without talking about circus will fail; making a circus piece about one circus discipline without considering its inherent topics will fail. In this context failing for me means, that circus remains decoration and has no necessity to exist for what is told on stage in this moment.
But – the choreographic gaze on circus can be a very rich tool in detecting the inherent topics lying underneath a circus discipline. That can be a wonderful artistic perspective on the circus arts.

To make a concrete example and coming to thought Nr. 2:

2. In 2014 the established german dancefestival Tanz im August programmed the choreographer Alessandro Sciarroni with his piece “Untitled_I will be there when you die”. I saw it a few months later at tanzhaus nrw in Düsseldorf.
We see 4 jugglers with clubs in trendy daily-life clothes entering an empty, very clean and in white designed stage. And what basically happens throughout the whole piece is – we watch these jugglers doing their training routine by throwing their objects in the air. This all happens in a highly formalized way. They are all standing frontal to the audience on different spots in space, like they would stand in a big training hall each for themselves, but being arranged in the same direction. The piece starts in total silence and the jugglers all start throwing one club each in varying patterns and rhythms, increasing the number of clubs throughout the piece.
They just do what they do – they throw and catch, without “adding” anything in terms of being present. It brings the focus to the sound of their actions and bodies and to the different rhythms of their catches and throws. During the whole piece we watch these 4 men juggling, ending with one of them mastering to keep 5 clubs in the air for a very long while.

For me it was a fascinating piece about, concentration, rules, discipline, human dedication and loneliness. It became a kind of hypnotic meditation.
And basically it was a piece about juggling – in other words it was talking about circus.
3. A little anecdote about some daily life fights between circus artists and choreographers during a creation process. It happened to me during piece where I worked as an acrobat for a german choreographer. It was a nouveau cirque production with 3 acrobats and 2 dancers. Being three acrobats in this piece, we were highly motivated to offer her a three-man-high, for circus acrobats it's a basic figure, a classic. Three people building a kind of tower by standing on each others shoulders.
But as we had not been working together before, we had to spend some moments of training this figure, before being able to present it to the choreographer.
But we were not given time for training during the rehearsal process, because she couldn't imagine this “trick” interesting for the topic of the piece.
So what did we do – we spent time training after rehearsals. After a few days we were able to present it to her. And surprisingly – she really liked the image of it and it found its way into the piece.
4. The same german choreographer was giving a very nice and simple answer to the question how to describe the difference between dancers and circus artists in this creation process. She said “We are all interested in the same thing – in movement. Circus artists and dancers just approach it from different perspectives.”
5. Especially these different perspectives on movement, on the body and on space is for me the soilent ground of merging or opposing dance and circus.

Dancers and circus artists both work with a very specific notion of space. Dance spreads on the horizontal level, circus opens up to a verticality.

While circus work creates very compact and strengthfull bodies, dance works highly detailed with isolations in the body. Dancers are trained to incorporate many different qualities of movement in their body.

Working as a circus artist means putting yourself constantly at risk – Physically (acrobats, aerialists) or mentally (jugglers, unicyclists, clowns). This quality is rare and to this roughness many contemporary choreographers of the dance world are attracted to.

I think the exchange with dance is very fruitful and opens for both sides new perspectives.

For the development of contemporary circus we need more authors and directors out of the circus field.

Beside choreographers choreographing circus, we need circus directors directing circus, especially in Germany.

Thank you very much for your attention and I wish you all a wonderful festival and many inspiring discussions during this network meeting.