



## **SLOW THINKING**

### **SESSION #1: CIRCUS AT A DISTANCE**

**Wednesday 21 April 2020**

Circus has remained relevant for over 250 years because of its ability to adapt, change and innovate.

Session One in the Slow Thinking series took place in response to the Covid-19 crisis, but also in response to a growing interest in digital practice as a potential tool for artistic innovation and the opportunities that new technologies offer for reaching new audiences and creative partners.

The conversation included a cross section of Circus artists, producers and educators and began with a few provocations offered by guests from other sectors and specialisms on key challenges, ideas and initiatives.

Below is a summary of the conversation, the full video's and transcripts are available [http://upswing.org.uk/about\\_us/slow-thinking-an-invitation/](http://upswing.org.uk/about_us/slow-thinking-an-invitation/)

### **CONTRIBUTORS**

This session included contributions and provocations from: Kate Hartoch, Circus City Festival; Amelia Cavallo, Quiplash; Charlie Wheeler, NetFLIPS; Mark Morreau, Cinematographer and Digital Artist; Rapael Herault and Summer Hubbard; and Joe Fearn, CircusMASH.

### **KEY THEMES & IDEAS**

During Session 1, key themes and ideas emerged:

- Is 'digital circus' a new genre? If so, what constitutes quality in that space? Can Circus only really exist in the live space?
- How do we prepare artists of the future? Should technology be part of the programme?
- How do we keep making new work if we cannot be in the room together?
- How do we balance the need to act quickly with the need to maintain quality and control of the output?

## SUMMARY POINTS

### Access

- Lockdown has democratised culture, streaming 'live' art into our homes. This has removed geographical or ticket-pricing barriers as well as physical limitations, such as transport.
- The current situation has however raised new barriers for Disabled people in the rush for organisations to programme work online.
- We need to continue to ask ourselves who is in the space and look for new ways to embed access in our thinking, planning and delivery.
- There are additional challenges around 'digital poverty' where access to a computer or broadband limits who can access and participate in culture.

### Community

- Circus is more than what we see on stage. There is a need for people to connect and support others.
- The youth circus sector is connected to its community and the juggling community is connected around the world. There is real strength and power in this.
- What are the possibilities of producing renegade juggling shows on zoom, or 'drive-in' shows that you watch from your car as modelled in Germany?
- How are we continuing to train the next generation and what are we training them for? It may be that emerging Circus artists will need to consider creation on digital platforms in parallel with the development of live performance. There may need to be more consideration of the relationship between digital platform and live platform.

### Live-ness

- There is a need to recreate or retain the suspension of disbelief of Circus in these new forms and formats to keep the 'essence' of the artform.

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- How do we capture the effort - the sweat / tension / suspense - that live circus has? As we look to incorporate technology, we need to ensure performance remains risky and exciting to watch.

## Quality

- If this situation is long term, how do we address the issue of quality?
- How do we stay fresh and continue to make new work so as we don't get stuck on a loop watching old material?
- For smaller companies, quality of online offers feels like an added financial pressure. There needs to be some examination of the difference between quality of content vs quality of technology.
- How do we get back to the live performance embracing the 'new normal' of social distancing?

**These ideas all take circus further. They do not detract from the past but develop the art form into the future, embracing the developing technology to enhance existing connections or create new ones so as circus continues to offer an alternative reality.**