



THIS IS NOT A CIRCUS

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THIRD STATE OF DUTCH CIRCUS

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for the third [THIS IS NOT A CIRCUS](#) festival,
organized by [TENT](#) and Theater Bellevue in Amsterdam

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ENGLISH

My dear fellow circus enthusiast,

I wish for you not to be afraid, not to be afraid to express yourself; I wish you the courage to stand in front of a crowd of fellow monkeys and be the unique silly monkey that you are. Because I believe that was the message of our circus ancestors: that the unusual is something worth seeing, that the unusual has something to tell and teach us, if we're willing to listen. As I see it, we, the circus people, are the advocates of the unusual. We argue in favor of the peculiar, the weird, the freaky and other underappreciated characteristics of the humankind. Yes, in our past we have looked beyond our own species in search of the exotic and the impressive, but I feel that in recent years we have come to terms with our nature in a way that we recognise that we are already pretty weird enough. I wish that the circus continues to provide a space where people can marvel and contemplate those oh so human peculiarities.

I wish that we continue to create parties and celebrations for the otherwise uncelebrated, be that under the massive plastic cloths of a tent, or within the huge brick walls of a theater, or underneath the blinding rays of the sun where you can find us trying to catch our precious objects in an attempt to keep the show going, or where you can find them sliding around in the rain, not subduing to the forces of the weather but adapting, adapting, always adapting.

I wish for you to continue to evolve this mentality of adaptation, the mental acrobatics that you are able to do, maybe as a consequence of your physical acrobatics, who knows. The origin of this mentality, I sometimes think, is just that circus people really really like problems. Cause isn't that what we so often end up doing: to voluntarily place ourselves in ridiculously complicated situations where the risks sometimes so obviously outweigh the benefits. And in that moment, with the humbleness only a madman could bring up in that sort of situation, we try to make the impossible possible. I applaud this mentality, this madness which for some people might just come across as pure stupidity. And yes, there is another side to the coin, in our enchantment with the heat of the moment we could risk losing sight of the long term; unconsciously trading a sustainable future for a thrill in the present. I wish for you to be able to look in the mirror and to see your reflection clearly, recognising your strengths and weaknesses and in doing so being able to move on with acceptance and awareness of yourself.

I wish for you to continue to develop your practice of collective effort. I believe the circus to be a great place to learn about cooperation, interdependence, safety, and responsibility. Because what addresses it more concretely than the circus, what addresses it more eloquently than the practice of partner acrobatics, the moment the flyer takes off and the base generously pushes, they create something that transcends each of their individual capabilities, each responsible for their own movement but striving for a common goal and as the flyer leaves the hands of the base, the base instantly becomes a caretaker, a safety net, how much more concrete and tangible can it get?

I wish for you to continue to develop your practice of safety, on a very practical level when rigging, spotting, double and triple checking, but also on a more abstract level: in the work environments you help to create, in your communication to your peers and in the so easily to be forgotten relationship to yourself. Ask yourself: how am I currently rigged? Am I a sturdy, flexible and reliable structure right now? Or is my working load limit approaching the minimum breaking point? Should I maybe due to wear and tear have





one of my carabiners replaced? Or should I ask someone else to hold the rope for a moment? Or maybe I can replace my Triple Fisherman's Knot topped with an Alpine Butterfly for a simple eight-figure knot as I am really just overdoing it. Excuse me for the cheap metaphors, but I think you understand what I mean: the answers are already present in our practice, we just need to see them, read them, and learn from them. And it's important because we can't create safety for others without being safe ourselves.

And as you look around you, I wish for you to see people that have a lot, a lot, a lot more in common than not. Nevertheless, the differences matter and I wish for the diversity of the field to shine through each of you, but it is in the recognition of a commonality between us that we find our base for cooperation, our common practice. I ask you: what do you want this common practice to be like? I like to think of it this way: we are writing this big cook book together, for which everyone is contributing their own recipes with unique flavors and ingredients and yes, some recipes are very close to each other, like someone might make a pasta Cacio e Pèpè by adding first the Cacio and then the "Pèpè and someone else might switch it around and add first the Pèpè and then the Cacio. Now whatever one you believe to be the right one, the beautiful thing is that we are allowed to break the rules, we are allowed to change the recipes, that is part of the deal. We might change them just because we are curious, or because we have wild fantasies, or just because we are not the kind of people that are good at following recipes. Whatever the reason is, I wish for you to embark on a journey of discovery because it is only through searching and experimenting that we can find the next Pasta Bolognese, or the next French Fries or the next oh so sweet Meringue. At the same time it's great that some of you are still trying to perfect the classic recipes, we don't all need to invent a vegan, sugar-free, gluten free, high protein bread. I wish for you to recognise how great it is that we are all on our own cooking trips, how great it is that our cookbook is growing and becoming more and more diverse. I personally couldn't be happier that each of you is doing the work you are doing, because that allows me to do something else.

I also wish for you to recognise that there are roots to our practice and that it is important to know what those are, because everything that we are doing now comes out of those origins and it would be arrogant to think otherwise. Whatever you may think of where you come from, the fact is that you come from it and to deny that is to deny a part of yourself and I wish for you to be able to accept yourself in your totality. Now these are big words, and one has to be careful with big words and honestly, I'm hesitant in using them. Of course, there are nuances to be made, recipes that we shouldn't make or even write down, but I wish for you and for me the courage to use our voices. To not subdue to the fear of being wrong, of saying something stupid and on the other side I wish for you and me to be tolerant towards each other, to offer a compassionate ear to the person in front of you because it's in the extreme conviction of our beliefs that we stop to listen and to question and where we start to silence the other.

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