

Fragments of the History of Contemporary Circus in Sweden 1990-2010

By Camilla Damkjaer and Kiki Muukkonen

Introduction

Here we are, writing about the history of contemporary circus in Sweden, as it started before we even set foot in Stockholm for the first time. Somehow this is typical of contemporary circus: its history is never national, though we frequently write it in those terms, it is international: moving individuals, shared influences, international circus communities. It is impossible to write the history of contemporary Swedish circus, except, perhaps, in a geographical sense: the circus events and circus related activities that have taken place in Sweden.

But already here we have to make a reservation: we have tried to find out about activities and events that took place in Sweden, but as most of the people we have interviewed have been based in Stockholm, it is inevitable that the capital takes the focus, despite our intentions.

Once we have set the geographical frame, we also have to adjust the time frame: with focus on the time between 1990-2010. It was in the 1990s that contemporary circus started to take off in Sweden, and yet we have tried to suggest threads that go well back into the 1980s and 1970s. However, the text is also written with the outlook of 2010, thus focusing on the discussions, facts and events that seem important to the current situation. In a few years we would probably have made other choices.

There are other frames too: as none of us were part of the events as contemporary circus started, and as the information of these processes so far have only been transmitted orally, we decided to base this article on interviews. We selected a small number of people who we believe to have been important to the development of contemporary circus in Sweden, but who represent different angles and aspects of the circus environment: **Claes Karlsson** (producer at Kulturhuset and Stockholm Water festival, who brought international circus to Sweden in the beginning of the 90's) (CK), **Tilde Björfors** (founder and artistic director of Cirkus Cirkör) (TB), **P. Nalle Laanela** (founder of Swedish Clowns Without Borders) (NL), **Seved Bornehed** (one of the first directors of the Circus High School in Gävle) (SB), **Thorsten Andreassen** (artist and part of Gycklargruppen, an early example of what would today have been called new circus) (TA) and **Ivar Heckscher** (former director of Cirkus Cirkös higher education for circus artists Cirkuspiloterna and of the circus education at The

University of Dance and Circus.). We are very grateful for their participation. And of course: many more people could have been interviewed. It is impossible to do justice to all the individuals who have been part of this history, but already this little material exceeds what we can possibly enter into this article and we have already had to make very hard choices.

As these interviews confirmed there is no “History” of new and contemporary circus in Sweden. Instead there are a number of stories that have been told and retold and still are told and retold. Stories that in themselves differ, not only as to the facts and circumstances, but also as to their genre: individual life stories, anecdotes and myths. For even in such a short time as new/contemporary/ circus has been on the agenda in Sweden, it has managed to create its own myths.

In this article we decided to expose some of these stories and myths; they are in themselves part of the ongoing history of new and contemporary circus. We want to give an impression of this cacophony of voices, and the stories that intertwine, coincide or divert. In due time “History” will do its work and select these voices and stories, and leave only a few. But here we are more interested in trying to recreate the complexity of stories and discourses as they come together in the complex web of time. In a certain sense, this is too ambitious as well, and what we can make appear here will only be fragments for further exploration.

Therefore we have decided to keep the fragments from the interviews in a very raw form, letting the individual voices speak, with our intervention mostly concerned with selection, cutting, pasting and gluing. Our work in this article is to make the glue that holds together all the fragmented stories. However, a lot is lost in translation: from words spoken in everyday language, transcribed into text, translated into English, and then cut and pasted. However, we have tried to let characteristics of oral discourse shine through even in the text, as an example of how these stories and histories have been and are still transmitted.

However, with the cutting and pasting we have also left an irreducible trace in the text, one that has to do with choices of fragments, where to cut them and what to cut out. This text is not fictional, but it is the product of many textual strategies. Hopefully, it is a text that acknowledges its own impact on the way these histories are written. To quote one of the persons we interviewed: “I am hopeless with years and dates. So none of what I say will be correct, I normally just make it up.” (NL)

During the interviews another mechanism became obvious: how as listeners and readers we try to connect our own stories and trajectories to the ones being told. Suddenly we realized that even if we were not even living in Stockholm of that time, even our own stories were actually related to the ones we were listening to: through individuals, related activities,

geographical places that we have later come to know, performances that we had seen although in different cities. We hope that you as a reader will start spinning your own connections, adding your own stories.

– 1990

It is always hard to know where to start. Depending on the terminology and perspective you pick, the history of contemporary circus in Sweden could start at very different places. But among the people we interviewed some common historical reference points appeared. One is the Swedish street theatre group that worked at a time when the term “new circus” did not exist in Sweden: Jordcirkus.¹

Between Archaos in Stockholm 1990 and Jordcirkus there is a thread of inspiration. And Tilde Björfors believes Jordcirkus to be the grandmother and grandfather of Cirkör. Also in their way of working and living, they were very circus-like (IH).

One precursor that I find interesting is Jordcirkus, as they came into being through the same kind of inspiration as Circus Oz, Archaos etc, starting from street theatre. It was political theatre-circus. In other countries it developed into new circus, but in Sweden it diminished or went toward theatre. Thereby Sweden’s possibility to join the international new circus movement, that occurred with for example Circus Oz in Australia and Archaos in France, disappeared. (TB)

Another group mentioned as an important inspiration, is Variété Vaudevill²:

Variété Vaudevill has been influential and trend-setting in circus and variety. None of them were equilibrists, they worked with characters and in beautiful ways made fun of the vaudevill genre and the circus disciplines. It is difficult to define exactly how they have been important for the development of new circus, but in contrast to traditional circus they developed a more comical style. (TA)

Here, the stories are already complicated by the meanders of terminologies. Though we now term the French theatre groups working with circus at the time “cirque nouveau”, new circus was not a term used in Sweden in the 70s and 80s, even if there might have been affinities. Seved Bornehed expresses it like this:

¹ A Swedish street theatre group active in the 70s. Among the members were Marika Lagercrantz, Chris Torch and others.

² A Swedish variety group formed in the early 80s, that actively toured Sweden with summer shows for about 15 years. They are still active.

What is called new circus today is exactly what we did then in the 70s. Then it was called inventive theatre, but it is exactly the same. One example is Cirque Invisible. I brought the students to see one of their performances (at the end of the 80s) and a student came over: “you know, this is new circus”. But what Invisible does is exactly in the style of what was done at theatre festivals in Copenhagen and Amsterdam in the 70s and the beginning of the 80s (SB).

International influences of course came from France, but also from Canada, the USA, and Denmark:

(...) the Dell’Arte school in the USA, in California, it was a school in the spirit of physical comedy. After that I came back to Sweden. A lot of Swedish artists have been there, (...) a lot of now Swedish traditions come from there.(...) There were more and more physical theatre links in Sweden at the time. The Italian and the eastern traditions started to meet in Stockholm. (NL)

(...) so I went to California where I saw the great inspirers, the professional street artists that travelled all around the world. (...) This meeting sowed the seeds to how I wanted to develop my way to work. (...) One of the strongest influences was the, at that time, new Canadian circus group performing in a big top: Cirque du Soleil. I was completely knocked out by them. I saw my own dream, this was the first time I saw circus as I had it pictured in my own head, how I wanted to see it (...) using commedia, that was so anti-circus (...) and the music was specially composed. I bought the music on tape and I played it in our training space until it was totally worn out. (TA)

I wanted more, so I went to a school in Copenhagen called “Artist- och Teaterskolan”.(...) I experienced The Festival of Fools in Denmark. (...) Then I went to Paris to go to circus school. When I returned home to Stockholm I realized that I knew more than the teachers in Stockholm did. (SB)

The story of new and contemporary circus cannot be isolated from the whole field of the performing arts, especially in a genre that in itself is prone to transgressions.

Though the flow of guest performances became more pronounced and influential at the beginning of the 1990s, there were actually guest performances by new circus companies even earlier.

What most people forget was that the first new circus was seen in Sweden in 1982. It was the French group Cirque Aligre. (...) New circus was not a concept by then, but it was more like an offspring from Artaud and the theories of the theatre of cruelty. (...) They had been invited by a Swedish theatre group, Teater Schahrazad (...) but the meeting between the two groups became a clash of cultures, as it is evident from the documentary film that was made [by filmer Erik M Nilsson]. You can see the French circus group with some tough macho men, in the meeting with some pale, intellectual and faint-hearted Swedish theatre people. What I remember is when the French put on boxing gloves and throw some over to the Swedish saying: “now we are going to fight”. The Swedish don’t understand a thing, and the French reply: “but that is what we are

here for!” The confusion is complete, with protests and verbal confrontations, and due to chaos the whole seminar is ended after a few hours. (CK)

But this was not the end of the story:

What was so challenging about it, was their complete lack of respect. A family audience had been gathered because they had read there would be circus, and out came circus madmen who started attacking people with whips, throwing old ladies up into the air. People were screaming and the children terrified. They shouted in French and maltreated the audience in the foyer. The show started in that atmosphere, but then it became a burlesque and romantic show. They stuffed rats into each other’s mouths and used so much fire that the fire brigade came in the middle of the performance. When I thought it had calmed down a bit, and the fire brigade was on its way out, an enormous flame occurred on stage. Those who had stayed on – many had left – loved it and it was hilarious. The day after the show was shut down by the fire brigade. It was very dramatic and my first contact with new circus, without actually knowing it. They themselves said that circus as an art form was anti-intellectual and based in some kind of realness. They thought that it was “the real stuff down to the roots”. (CK)

During the first part of the 80s the stories are mostly silent, the material of the myth is somehow less strong, even if circus related activities were going on.

There were evening courses in acrobatics. Often quite basic acrobatics for the stage (...) It was great fun. There was a group of people in Stockholm that worked really intensively. After a while we started our own group and found another studio. (...) In the 80s I started giving my own classes. (SB)

Despite the fact that new circus was still not a prevalent terminology, groups that would today be placed within that field, were formed. Amongst them were....

(...) a group called Something Else. It was Lars Demian, Ika Nord och Peter Snow, all three from street culture, they met when working on the street in Paris. (...) Something Else was contemporary with the movement in France, what they did resembled Cirque Plume. They became a cult phenomena, they were really something else and you couldn’t define them. They were the first group I saw that I would say was new circus. And this was already in 1985. I was extremely inspired by them, and felt related to them since they like me came from the street. All new circus in those years came from street artists, f.ex the founders of Cirque du Soleil were street artists, and the movement in France was from the street as well.(...) Something Else, like Plume and Archaos, wanted to do something more. Gycklargruppen started some years later, when this movement had already started, and we also had this quest to do something more than just show cool tricks. (TA)

...and Gycklargruppen:

In 1987 we founded Gycklargruppen. To begin with we were seven: Seven Bornehed, Bert Gradin, Per Dahlström, Manne Klintberg, Fredrik Sanabria, Hans Nyberg [and Thorsten Andreassen]. We were told that they were closing Scenstudion, where we used to rehearse. (...) All of us needed rehearsal time. So on the 17th of October 1987 we decided that if we started an organisation, it would be easier for us to find a space and the money to make it work. (...) We were three small constellations, and we had no thoughts of building a group. It came from the fact that Södra Bergens Balalaika Grupp [with whom they shared the studio], used to have Wednesday pubs after their rehearsals and we were often hanging along. Then the idea came up: "Damn, we ought to do something together!". (...)

We did *Gyckelspel* in the spring of 1988, it must have been. That was what brought us together as a group. And that production was bought by Folkparkerna [a network of venues all over Sweden] and we did a summer tour. During that summer we started writing our first show *Nattvarieté*. (...) We performed for quite little people, and only at the last performance the critics from Aftonbladet and Dagens Nyheter came and it was well received. (...) So we moved the show to Mosebacke, and it became a success. (...) *Nattvarieté* was the performance that showed us the form of how Gycklargruppen would come to work. (...) We used different circus disciplines, but we worked more in a variety form. But in contrast to the classical variety (...) we worked strongly with characters and the conflicts in between them. (...) And what became a characteristic of Gycklargruppen was the open interactive contact with the audience. (...) But I would not say that we were a new circus group, we were something else, we were Gycklargruppen, working more in the variety tradition. (TA)

At the end of the 90s another initiative was taken, whose origins seem far from the acrobatics and jester context in Stockholm: the circus high school in Gävle, that was founded 1988. According to the school's home page it was Seved Bornehed (who at that time was also an artist in Gycklargruppen) who founded it, but he himself explains:

It had been started by a politician in Gävle. Gävle is an old circus city. In the 40s many circuses had their winter quarters in Gävle, as it was in the middle of Sweden. It was a politician enthusiastic about circus who had taken the initiative. The daughter of the director of Furuviksbanan [a venue outside of Gävle] was asked to lead it but it did not work out and she left, so they needed someone else immediately. At first I said no, but then they wanted to shut the whole thing down, so in the end I accepted. (SB)

1990-1999

Now we are getting into the time span that this article is supposed to deal with, after following a few threads later back. During this time, other individual stories have prepared themselves for entering into this one:

I was told that I would never become an actor as my Swedish was not within the norms. So I started doing physical theatre, and became interested in the international language beyond words. I was 18 or 19. Right after high school I went to Canada where I did improvisation and dance at the university and a clown teacher asked if I wanted to do courses with her. At the time I did not really know what clown was. (NL)

But before these stories begin unfolding themselves we need to look at the importance of the international new circus performances brought to Sweden in the beginning of the 1990s:

My next meeting with new circus was more for real, with Archaos, whom we brought here in cooperation with Copenhagen and KIT. It was *The Last Show on Earth*, their breakthrough. We put it up at Gärdet in a circus tent for 5-600 people. Rumours quickly spread about the group. It was in August 1990. There is a connection to Cirque Aligre. It was another aesthetics. It built more on rock music, toughness and leather, a kind of petrol romantics that was fantastic. It was much more playful and poetic, and the aggression was not directed towards the audience, even though the aggression was there. It felt as if it was enough for the experience that you were sitting close to chain saws, motorbikes and cars that came into this tiny tent in a way that made the audience feel exposed and excited at the same time. It was a game that felt as if it was on life and death. And there was reason to be a bit frightened. The whole week things happened: people got hit by things, clothes were destroyed, people were pushed, and the artists got hurt themselves. One of them got his hand driven over by a car and we had to call an ambulance. It became like a small cult event in itself. (CK)

Archaos attracted a lot of people to their show also the following year at Långholmen:

It was *Metal Clown* at Långholmen in 1991. It was in a tent for 1400 persons, and the success simply continued. During those two weeks 35 000 people came to see it, and people called like mad. It was enormous. This was cult. To describe it as new circus came only later. It was not a genre yet. In France they were talking about “cirque nouveau”, but here we had no name yet. At the press conference of Stockholm Water Festival³ people only wanted to hear about Archaos' new show. (CK)

³ Stockholm Water Festival (in Swedish Vattenfestivalen) was a city fest held every August in Stockholm between years 1990 and 1999.

I'm very grateful that Claes Karlsson took the amazing shows of Archaos, as well as later Cirque Plume and Cirque Ici, to Stockholm Water Festival. It was of enormous importance. They were inspirational injections, and it was so cool to see that Sweden woke up to this art and entertainment form. They were sold out, it became cult. I believe that Claes Karlsson's taking of these groups here, together with the work done by Gycklargruppen, in many aspects paved the way for Cirkus Cirkör. (TA)

It was the last of their big shows. I lived at Långholmen at that time, so we were hanging out with Archaos quite a lot. I think I saw the show two or three times. And I was amazed that one of the artists was Swedish! Ingela Hinas, who would later become artistic leader of the first version of Cirkuspiloterna and also came to play an important role in the development of new circus in Sweden. It was my first encounter with new circus, but it was not here that I got the imperative: "this is what I have to do". At the time I was involved in Grotowsky theatre. (...) But we started dreaming of a project." (TB)

But not everyone was impressed:

The cultural elite that never went to circus, all of them came with their berets and scarves. They came, watched and "oohhhh, soo fantastic". And I just thought it was crap. Fun ideas, like cutlets being thrown at each other, chain saws and PANG. It was fun, but they were no good artists. But the cultural elite: "wow, this is the future: cirque nouveau!" (...) I think they got more attention that they deserved. (SB)

Stockholm Water Festival presented international circus shows almost every summer during the 1990s. This was important not only as an inspiration, but also for opening the eyes of cultural Sweden, to the phenomenon of new circus.

At the same time, other stories are beginning to unfold. One of them concerns Tilde Björfors' meeting with contemporary circus in Paris in the beginning of the 90s.

During three years I spent a lot of time in Paris, I took part of workshops at the Peking Opera at Theatre du Soleil, and at the same time that I worked at Orienteatern in Sweden. In Paris I met Nordic circus artists who opened up their world of French circus life for me, I saw a lot of performances, there were open stages and I found out that there were university level educations for this art form. And it was here the dreams were born to bring this art form to Sweden and change the cultural life here. But the artists didn't want to move to Sweden, because there was no arena for them there, Sweden was not a circus country. (...) So in March 1994 we decided we had to do something to make the dream come true. We organised a festival at Orienteatern, *Orion-yrán*, as a deliberate action: we invited a large number of young artists, like Siri Hamari, Helena Kågemark, Jacob Westin, Niklas Lingren, Henrik Agger, Minh Tam Kaplan, some of the musicians that later became Uрга, and many more. We were about

200 people and the roof went off completely. (...) By some of these people a collective was formed, that became the first artists of Cirkus Cirkör. (TB)

A lot of the artists who gathered around Cirkör brought their references from French new circus, many were trained in the circus school in Gävle and were then further trained at Fratellini and Chalon. Some came from the mime education of the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Art and Stanislaw Brosowski`s teaching. Others had their background at Göglerskolen in Denmark (that later became AFUK). Yet others were educated and inspired by Theatre de Complicité, Mario Gonzales, Lecoque, Philippe Gaulier. Cirque du Soleil was in this time far from what the artists gathering in Sweden were reaching for, they rather wanted to do something completely different from that. (TB)

The stories of these years are both parallel and overlap, Swedish artists working abroad, others starting to work with new circus in Sweden:

In Sweden I started working as a clown, I worked with Jan Unestam, we were called “Sing a song – de jojokande fakirclownerna” and we were dressed as Indians doing fakir-tricks and after each trick we were singing in the traditional Swedish jojok-style. (...) And at that time we had also heard of the first Cirkör show at Orienteatern [Orion-yrån], which was the first thing they did, for only one evening.(...) All I know is that Henrik Agger walked around with a flower spray which blew fire, there were lots of people doing crazy thing. I just got some kind of piece of paper about it. I did not know what it was... and Janne and I were working so we didn` t see it. (NL)

During that time, as I was working as an actress at Orienteatern, Cirque Invisible was invited there. It became a success and a Christmas tradition to bring them there. I think the first year was 1995. (...) And even before Cirkör started, Lars Rudolfsson [the founder of Orienteatern], who like me had a passion for circus, had made a collaboration with a traditional circus at Orienteatern. Im sad I didn` t see it. (TB)

An important space in the myth of the establishment of new circus in Sweden is the establishment of Cirkus Cirkör and the waves that created, with for instance the establishment of the first circus educations in Stockholm. But this of course did not happen without setbacks:

We decided we wanted to do something, and I tried to get people to come here, but they answered, ”but there is nowhere to train here, no street culture” – this was something that shocked people, that here you were driven away if you performed in the streets, it was forbidden and considered as begging (...) At first the artists thought it was great, because it meant that the streets were empty and

waiting for them, but they soon discovered that the audience was not at all used to street performances. (TB)

We wanted to do total art, or new circus as the meeting between the arts. We wanted everyone to have equal part in the process – including the costume designer, light designer and all. It was a bit naive and not quite possible. Especially as we wanted to do the best performance on earth and change Swedish cultural life. But Orienteatern, who hosted us, went bankrupt and lots of people left. We almost gave up. But some of us decided to hold on to the dream, and Claes Karlsson was kind enough to invite us as an unseen act to the Stockholm Water Festival. Claes was really one of the first official people to support us. (TB)

This performance, *Skapelsen*, at Stockholm Water festival, was Cirkus Cirkör's first performance.

And that is when they started looking for artists. (...) That is when Janne came one day and said that he had met Tilde and had been asked if he could be part of a performance at Stockholm Water Festival. (NL)

Or perhaps it was like this:

Janne and Nalle got to hear about us, and Janne called and said “ahh, I have heard that you are doing a performance – can we come for an audition”. Then I got to see the place where they were working, Teater Avalon, where Nalle was lying on a bed of nails...Janne had just started doing unicycle and swallowing swords. So they entered the group. Nalle was a grande madame on stilts who gave birth to everything. (TB)

Stockholm Water Festival became a breakthrough:

So we played at Stockholm Water Festival. So did Varieté Vauduvill, they performed their first contemporary circus performance. And Circus Oz performed at “Cirkus” [a great building for shows and performances in Stockholm]. Someone who did voluntary work at the festival brought Circus Oz to our rehearsal. They fell quite in love with us, probably as we reminded them of how they were when they were young. So we saw all their performances, they saw all ours, and they sent their audience to ours as well. And what happened was also, even those first years, that when we performed lots of people wanted to start practising circus, so a lot of hang-arounds started grouping around us. Circus Oz also sent an agent from the Toolwood festival in München, and so they booked us for the following year. And that is actually why we continued. It is actually thanks to Circus Oz that Cirkus Cirkör exists. The international circus family. (TB)

From here the stories that make up the history of Cirkör would need their own article, just as any of these stories could deserve. But let us stay with this development a bit further: Cirkör managed to continue, started activities for children and training for professionals, they created and toured shows, they got funding from the Swedish Arts Council, and an environment around new circus began to form and scattered individuals that had been interested now had somewhere to address themselves.

And that is when we after hard work got one of the wings of Medborgarhuset [an activity house in Stockholm]. (...) That is when we started open training, circus courses, invited guest performances and arranged open stage once a month. We started working to create a circus education, as the need was larger than the number of professional artists that existed. Gävle circus high school existed, but those who had been there went abroad to continue their education and never came back again. We got EU money for starting the education Cirkuspiloterna for one and a half year. (...) We had three different educations: circus artists, circus producers, circus directors. (...) Everything went so fast, and we worked 24 hours a day. We did so many things at once. (TB)

We were also at Medborgarhuset. It was during the first Cirkuspiloterna year, where I officially did the direction program, except that I had no teacher. (...) It was also a lot of questions: how do we run this as a business, and do good for the society, how do you do educations. And I was interested in all of that, and being in the middle of all of that suited me. (...) There was also a producer education. There were graphic designers, photographers. So these art forms mingled. (NL)

But other things are happening as well. P. Nalle Laanela goes to Paris, a trip that will eventually take him to Sarajevo and towards the establishment of Swedish Clowns Without Borders.

I decided to go to Lecoque's school, to reunite with that tradition, before he got too old. (...) It is very different schools. The Italian physical theatre, and what we in Sweden believe to be physical theatre. I am allergic to Grotowski. It is a none-audience directed art form. (...) The Italian tradition is very based on the audience, as in commedia dell'arte, clown, buffon, that world. (...) So it was Lecoque. And the last year of Lecoque that was when I went to Sarajevo (...) That was 1996. (NL)

It is a short trip, which becomes a long story, with all the narrative suspense needed for such an event as the creation of an organization:

When we drove it into Sarajevo, on these huge two lane roads, all the houses on both sides were bombed and resembled cheeses with holes in them, it was a very macabre feeling. (...) I had no clue where to go, where to sleep. And the story goes like this: you get out into this and of course it is only German marks that work, no money, there are no banks, nowhere to live. And that is when I see a Doctors Without Borders car and start running after it. I try to follow it, it goes around a corner, I try to run with all my clown equipment, and suddenly it is gone. But then I see it again outside the Doctors Without Borders building. I go to the office, introduce myself: "Hello I am a clown, I am here to work. Do you know where I should go?" She says "Wait a minute", makes a telephone call, and 15 min later twelve girls come around and pick me up, and make it possible for me to perform. (...) I performed for 4000-6000 people in two weeks. We performed in classrooms, with 200 or 300 children in each room. (...)

I was performing in the street in front of the mosque when suddenly a couple of Spaniards came along, and they suddenly started interacting with my show. At first I was a bit surprised but then I let them in as they were more fun than I was, and after that we took a beer and they told me that they were called Payassos Sin Fronteras, Clowns Without Borders. That was my first meeting with them. The love for travelling, the love for meeting people, the love for performing meant that it was clear that this was what we wanted to do. (...)

What was good for Clowns Without Borders, was that we had advantage of the fact that there were already creative forces within the world of artists. Clownen Manne [a famous Swedish clown] had a video cassette from Spanish Clowns Without Borders, he gave it to me, and it circulated. Tilde really created out of nothing, a vacuum. (...) So for me it was easier to come back, and Clowns Without Borders could ride that wave. Often we did some gig, took money for it, and used all the money to go somewhere. So quite a lot we managed to get the minimum of resources and that was how it worked during the first years before we employed Kenneth [the manager of Clowns Without Borders Sweden]. (...) Clowns Without Borders was not an organisation with four employees, but an idea. (NL)

During these years, it seems at it was very much about doing as much as possible despite very small organisations.

After touring *På* and *Ur Kaos*, shows in the same spirit as *Skapelsen*, we wanted to try something else and expand our boundaries. We decided to collaborate with the music video director Jonas Åkerlund. We did the show *SuperCirkör* underneath Västerbron [a big Stockholm bridge]. We clothed the whole bridge, had a huge screen, and lots of seats, and the artists lived in wagons and had a bar. Today I do not understand how it was possible. But we made ends meet. And the students from Cirkuspiloterna were in it. (...) But also how we invaded the city – the artists were everywhere, and even we from the office were out advertising in super hero costumes. We had sponsorship for mopeds so we had

those everywhere. It was quite special. At the premier it was raining cats and dogs in the morning, and everything was flooded under the stage where all the electric wires were. We even had motorbikes, DJ and a lot of music. (...) I think we scared part of our habitual audience away, but we got a new and other kind of audience as well. (TB)

Meantime Gycklargruppen had continued creating cross-over shows and had been invited to the bigger and finer venues of Stockholm.

One driving force for us was to be accepted in the fine theatres. 1991 we were invited to make a variety show for Dramaten [the Swedish Royal Dramatic Theatre], and *Aftonvarieté* became a huge success there. (...) 1992 we did *Pippi Långstrump*, and then several variety and circusy shows in different constellations at Dramaten. (...) In 1995 we put up *Hugo Berns Underbara Universum* at Berns Salonger [a commercial venue in Stockholm city]. This was the most expensive show in the history of both Gycklargruppen and Berns. (...) We never got dependent of public funding, we managed to support ourselves, mainly by commercial events. (...) So we never needed to be politically correct. (TA)

After many years of working Gycklargruppen sought new ways and new expressions:

Hugo Berns Underbara Universum was too surrealistic for the Swedish audience, it took a while for the audience to understand it. But cultural professionals and the newspapers loved this show. (...) In 1998 we put up *Pathelin*, the world's oldest fars and a dramatic text. We had to take acting classes to make it. (...) Cirkör grew quickly, and in 1998 Jonas Åkerlund directed *SuperCirkör* which made a great success. At that point Gycklargruppen had been big for about 10 years. We had been practically alone on the market with our form, and it was quite natural that there would emerge a new large group. (TA)

During the second half of the 90s new circus constellations started to emerge, f.ex Sirqus Alfon and the companies Circus Arts, Clownen Brinner, Zin-Lit, Fan-Atticks and Circus Le Fou that were created out of students of the first Cirkuspiloterna.

Ingela Hinas was the first director of the pilots. She was educated at Chalon [in France], she had been performing with Archaos. She and Sara Sandqvist together with Wille Christiani started Circus Arts. (...) During the first year, the links to Nacka [in western Stockholm] was also created. (...) That is where the first pilot performances were made, and Circus Arts did a performance there the year after called *Denk – Welcome to this world*. (NL)

Small and big circus performances are being shown in Stockholm. Some of which we still find the traces. Some of which we have mentioned in the time line. But probably some that

are never mentioned and that will never make it into the history books and not even into this article.

It feels important to speak of *Comedy of Wars* [a Circus Arts/Clowns Without Borders show], but I cannot be bothered. It was the first thinking new circus performance in Sweden. It was an artistic product made for an audience in order to make an impression. Not just a lot of circus artists... The first Cirkör performances were based on this first crazy energy, not on the handicraft of directing. (...) But after a while the audience had already seen that, the audience started knowing the form. The problem was that the audience was beginning to be educated. The first time you see something amazing it is amazing just as it is, but the level is heightened all the time. (NL)

And if we could have included also the school performances the list would have been much longer.

The student production *Miss Lyckad* is in my point of view one of the best new circus shows created in this country, and moreover, it was profitable and toured internationally. (IH)

Which leads us to another chapter: The establishment of circus educations. But first: the moving of most circus activities in Stockholm to Botkyrka.

We started looking for something new. It was quite complicated with the division between state, city and communities, and everything fell between the chairs. Besides that, the [Stockholm] city had decided that there should be a culture house but had not dedicated any money for it, had no employees, so it was we who filled out the culture house and even paid the rent for it. They started a youth reception, for which they gave lots of money, but the kids did not go there, they came to us. So it became unsustainable. We started looking for a community where we could be, and which wanted circus as a force for change, and which wanted all parts, both circus for children, circus education, different circus groups etc. (...)

We found Botkyrka quite quickly and with them we did an application for "ytterstadssatsningen"⁴. But just before that we were very close to moving to Malmö. Botkyrka has traditionally worked a lot with culture, but the timing was a possibility to apply for money. And they were negotiating with Riksteatern, who had too much space. So we made an application which included Cirkuspiloterna, the circus hall and we got it! And the first thing we did was to start the circus high school, in 2000. And in 2000 we also moved Cirkuspiloterna, even if the buildings were not ready. So the students were moving between spaces, and they kept walking and walking. It took at least 6 months before the spaces were ready. For many years we were living in building transitions. (TB)

⁴ A 90's funding for projects directed towards heightening the status of distant suburbs, working against segregation.

The circus high school in Gävle had been started independently of the later developments in Stockholm, but now Stockholm was catching up: in 1997 Cirkus Cirkör started Cirkuspiloterna through European funding. The circus high school in Botkyrka was started 2000 as a cooperation between the municipality of Botkyrka and Cirkus Cirkör. And in 2000 Cirkuspiloterna became a three year professional education program.

Maksim Komaro from Finland was our first juggling teacher, Alexander Gavrilov from Russia taught equilibrism and Jan Rosén was head of acrobatics. They were all driving forces in developing a higher technical standard of training at Cirkuspiloterna. (TB)

The big difference between Cirkuspiloterna and the high school was the fact that the pilots got individual teaching. (...) Those that got the least teaching were the jugglers. The education in Botkyrka has been known for producing some of the world's best jugglers which is interesting. A long row of interesting jugglers come from The University of Dance and from Cirkuspiloterna. I think it is due to the atmosphere there; it is one of the most free circus educations in the world. Things are done in a way so that the students feel that they do their own stuff and not their teachers'. The most common in circus educations seems to be that there are teachers with very strong ideas about what these students are good at or for. We constantly pushed for having the student directing the teacher, and not the teacher directing the student. There will be no new circus if all students are educated for the kind of thing that is in the head of old circus people. (...) The artistic teachers did not come from the circus world, but more from a freedomly 1968 way of thinking, they supported the individualistic part and high demands upon that. (IH)

But now we are well into another narrative strategy: folding time through resumé, recollecting the events of several years into just a few minutes of speech, a single paragraph. And in this fold of time several circus educations are held together, Cirkuspiloterna and the education that finally in 2005 took over and made the circus education permanent: the circus program at The University of Dance (from 2010 renamed to The University of Dance and Circus). And then we are well into a whole lot of other historical meanders and the two-thousands.

1999-2009:

The two-thousands, where should we start... the decade that passed like a snap of the fingers. The tempo of the decade is partly due to the fact that a lot happened for the art of circus in Sweden: performances, cooperation with big venues, international tours, gatherings, conferences, transformations, research, the emerging of new groups.

Now in 2010, when we are approaching what we believe to be the first conference on artistic research in circus in Sweden, it seems that the 2000s was the decade with festivals and conferences, but actually the first conference in Sweden seems to have been already 1998 in Medborgarhuset:

1998 we also did “VOLT”, a big international circus seminar or meeting, where we invited all our circus friends (...) the circus international circus environment came to support us in our work to establish contemporary circus as an art form. And we had several guest performances, and the minister of culture came and inaugurated the whole thing. We wanted to promote new circus, and I think that was one of the reasons we later got money for “ytterstadssatsningen”. (TB)

But several other important gatherings and events were to follow: in 2001 a conference on new circus organized by Riksteatern, and in 2002 Gothenburg Dance and Theatre Festival besides of presenting international well-renowned shows with James Thierré, Collectif AOC and Cahin-caha, arranged a seminar with the title “ How new is new circus?” And in 2003 the first international Swedish circus festival was introduced, a co-operation project between Cirkus Cirkör, Riksteatern and the municipality of Botkyrka.

In 2003 we did Subörb. (...) The 7 Fingers with their first show *The Loft*, Jérôme Thomas, *Throat* and another performance with John Paul Zaccarini, and Jani Nuutinen had his one man performance, Jay Gilligan made two performances, we had a juggling convention, we had Happy Sideshow from Australia, we had a circus camp, and also spoken word and a lot of break dance, international groups. (...) You could see the best but also try for yourself. All this for ten days. 37.000 visitors. Our attempt was to show the whole scale of new circus, the whole scale of what you can do with new circus. That it is a larger form of art than just one expression, or just Cirkus Cirkör, and that is what Subörb did. And for Botkyrka it was important – a lot of people came from Stockholm to Botkyrka, and at the same time it was very local. I think we could have continued forever. (...) It took six months for Cirkörs employees to recover. (...) But it was very good for the art form. (TB)

More was to come later in this decade: in 2005 another Subörb festival; more international circus shows presented in Gothenburg during the years; in 2009 Subcase, the first Swedish circus fairs, was organised by the cultural center Subtopia (which was inaugurated in Botkyrka in 2002.) In 2009 a showcase was arranged by a new organisation, Manegen – Federation for circus, variety and street performance, when no less than 20 different companies and their performances were presented at the Nordic Fringe Festival in Eskilstuna. This shows that the structuring around circus has become stronger and reveals the emerging

of several Swedish circus companies. But let us stay at the beginning of the 2000s for a while and look at what happened on the level of Swedish new circus performances.

In 2000 we did *TRIX* in cooperation with Orientteatern, with Lars Rudolfsson as director. And you could say that this performance was our international breakthrough, or at least even if we had been out before, we experienced it this way. We played at Parc de la Villette for a long time and at the finer venues. It was with the band Uрга. The problem with *Trix* was that it was a bit too big to tour at many venues in Sweden, so the international market became more important. (TB)

Seen from the point of view of the artists, and not the companies, something else is beginning to happen:

Then a period started when a lot of new circus entered the ordinary theatres, both theatre and opera and musicals, both smaller and larger stages. This was after 2002/2003. It is hard to say whether it was because of *Romeo och Julia*, that we created in collaboration with the Dramaten. It was one of the greatest public successes there for many years. Or maybe it was because we were entering the theatre showcases. In the beginning it was only us, but for every year I recognized more circus related shows were there. You could really see the difference. People started realizing the possibilities of using circus at the theatre. I don't know if we can take on the honour of that. But it meant that the artists suddenly had much more working opportunities and possibilities in the institutions. But even before *Romeo och Julia* for instance Gycklargruppen had been participating in *Pippi Långstrump* at Dramaten. Some have continued in that direction. (TB)

These working opportunities have to do with a tendency that concerned aesthetic choices and the relation between the performing arts. From the beginning new circus was in Sweden defined as the meeting between circus, theatre and dance, as a cross-over genre. And these kinds of cross-overs were pursued also in cooperation with different theatres:

At some point around here we [Cirkör] started to realize that we had to think further ahead. Even though *TRIX* made a international success it was hard to make it through. The funding from the Arts Council was not much when you are working with a large tour. Therefore we were looking for cooperations, and at the same time it was fun to go to Dramaten. Dramaten is the national stage, a national stage belongs to everyone, and therefore also to new circus we thought. (TB)

This strategy lead to a number of Cirkus Cirkör performances that spread the knowledge of new circus to a wide audience (2002 *Romeo and Juliet*, 2005 *The Little Mermaid*, 2006

Momo). These performances were examining the narrative potential of circus, and the potential of circus in narrative performances.

With Katrine [Wiedeman, one of the directors of *The little Mermaid*] it was a kind of research in narrating that we were doing. There are some sequences where I believe we succeeded in narrating through circus, and could do that much more strongly than in text. (TB)

At the end of 2000's the variety of aesthetic choices possible in circus is evident even in Sweden, not least because of the circus educations and the subsequent growing number of artists and companies. But though the development of educations has been important, it has in no way been calm.

What was the agenda at Cirkuspiloterna? From the beginning it actually was: how should we make this become sustainable? The pilots was a temporary project. When I came in [2002] the attempt to make it into a university education had already fallen apart once. The University of Film, Radio, Television and Theatre⁵, Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts⁶, The University of Dance⁷, and the Swedish School of Sports and Health Sciences planned to go together and reserve some of their places for circus. But the project fell apart for reasons that others know better than I. (...) At the end Kari Sylwan at the University of Dance said, "if no one else takes it, then I will." She was the director at the time. (IH)

But the turns were many:

The idea was that the pilots should be closed in order to become a university level education. But suddenly... Well, the university level attempts have taken many turns. Malmö University was the first to be interested, after that several universities and academies were supposed to go together to do it, then Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts wanted it, but then that plan fell too. They wanted to do one more report, and at that point The University of Dance jumped in and wanted to take it. However, they did not get the budget, or were not satisfied with the suggested economy, so they changed their minds again, and there we were and everything was crisis. We worked like hell in order to get the pilots to survive until another education could be created. Stockholm

⁵ From the 1st of July 2011 The University of Film, Radio, Television and Theatre and Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts will fusion into one University. The name of it has not yet been decided by the government, but the suggested name is: Stockholms Dramatiska Högskola.

⁶ See note above.

⁷ At the time we are discussing, this was the name of The University of Dance. From the 1st of January 2010 there has been a change of names: Dans- och Cirkushögskolan, The University of Dance and Circus, thus integrating circus even into the name.

Academy of Dramatic Arts came in again, until The University of Dance blamed them for doing so (...) And then it finally became The University of Dance. (TB)

The moving of the circus education to The University of Dance meant many changes, not only to the education itself, but also to the circus environment as such, the aesthetic agendas, and to the Swedish art scene.

When Cirkuspiloterna was transformed into a university education, it got a much clearer form. We had course plans at the pilots, but we did not stick to them strictly, and we could change them if we wanted to. The University of Dance is regulated by law. (...) It was not quite easy to get into that culture. On one hand it has given stability to the education, and on the other hand it has softened the university world and taught them that things that happen do happen. And then we will just have to readjust the suit if necessary. (...) The education is much more secure for the students now. It does not cost anything, they get everything (...) and there is a contact to the other art universities. (IH)

Parallel to the circus education at The University of Dance, Clowns Without Borders has been pursuing their own needs and have started educations directed towards physical comedy in development projects in countries and areas in crisis.

It quickly became obvious that in Sweden we produce seven-minutes artists, who often are not educated to do things in curious environments. We produce acrobats who cannot do anything without a tumbling floor. And it does not help Clowns Without Borders. So we have the feeling that there are a lot of artists, but then when we want to go out into the world and start asking who can go then it is suddenly only three. So first we had the passion to do it: how do you actually educate artists? And second we had the need within the organisation. Finally Vårdingeby folkhögskola [a folk high school south of Stockholm] made it all possible, and of course we said yes. (NL)

This education ran twice at the folk high school in Vårdinge, in 2008 and in 2009. From September 2009 Clowns Without Borders in cooperation with The Academy of Dramatic Arts has organized a one year Masters education called "Laughter Without Borders". This education will continue one more year from January 2011, this time with international students.

At the end of the 2000s the variety of Swedish circus is evident. Circus is performed in many different venues and spaces, it draws on all the performing arts and it employs a multitude of different aesthetics. From street shows, to full length performances, to clowning in refugee

camps, to events, to variety, to magic shows, to... During the 2000s a number of new companies have been established and a growing number of individual artists are working in different constellations. Success night variety show *Salong Giraff* is frequently being performed at Orienteatern, Folkoperan and Parkteatern, starting out in 2004 as an open stage initiative by a group of circus artists. Lars Rudolfsson at Orienteatern continues to work with circus and directed the well reviewed show *Fusk* in 2006, in cooperation with the Danish circus company The Royal Bones. New Swedish companies are formed in this decade, like f.ex Naked Ape, Ruby Rose, Swebounce, Cirkus Saga and Idiots Savants. A couple of students from the pilots move to Ystad to create the company Zin-Lit and initiating a circus high school of southern Sweden. In Östersund in northern Sweden a winter acrobatics high school is opened. Artists like Johan Wellton and Henry Bronett create circus shows together with live symphony orchestras. When the first circus class of University of Dance graduates, again new companies are created by the students, like Kollektiv Vifira and Celso y Frana.

This diversity that has come with the developing of different initiatives was evident for instance at Subcase 2009 and in the Nordic Fringe Festival the same year. And we must not forget something very important: Manegen – Federation for circus, variety and street performance, a national organisation representing Swedish circus artists and companies was formed in 2008-2009, as the first of its kind in Sweden. The Swedish Arts Council granted Manegen funds to build the federation in order to “support the development for the artistic practitioners, among other things to disseminate the art form, to create more jobs and in developing national and international collaborations” (quote from the official document of the decision of the Arts Council). Already in 2009 local units of Manegen were initiated in Malmö and Norrköping.

The creating of Manegen is a historical statement for the development of circus in Sweden, it is an acceptance of circus, variety and street performance as performing arts forms. (...) Manegen must work for new platforms and also for raising the awareness of the audience. That was clear in the Nordic Fringe Festival, so many people came who had never seen anything like it. (...) We have a huge amount of work to do around the country. I think we need to get out in the country-side, and put up performances in the middle of nowhere and meet the Swedish audience. (TA)

Moreover, in 2009 the Swedish Arts Grants Committe (Konstnärsnämnden) granted funds for developing a network for circus artists in western Sweden, the so called “Mötesplats

nycirkus”. From 2008 and on, The University of Dance, as well as the House of Dance in Stockholm, frequently offer circus artists residencies for development work. In February 2010 a new house for circus training and presenting shows, “Karavan”, was inaugurated in Malmö. Other new training spaces were opened, f.ex. by Circus Le Fou in Nacka in western Stockholm. In November 2009 the municipality of Botkyrka announced that Subtopia receives funding to develop a venue for presenting circus, the so called “Hangaren” in Botkyrka.

But in the middle of this diversity, this multitude of inspirations and aesthetics, there has been a strong tendency and will to maintain the specificity of circus, to the point that within the circus environment, many no longer talk of “new circus”, but choose to call it just “circus”.

We have changed our definition of new circus. To begin with we had to explain that new circus was the meeting between circus, theatre and dance – and that still happens. But there is a base in circus which is different from other arts. (...) The discipline skills, the individual work, the relation to choreography... (...) The fight about the move has probably been the best that could happen to new circus. It has made us fight a lot internally and externally, which has led to a situation where we really can consider it as an art form on its own. (TB)

I think it is a huge step in the development that we have recently decided that circus is circus, not something else. It is not the meeting between different art forms. Circus can cooperate with different art forms, but it is something in itself. That is not the way it was, when I came to the circus education, but that is the way we talk about it now. Circus does not exist in order to show something else, but in order to show itself. It is revelatory art form and not an illustrative art form. (...) I think this is the most important: that the circus has climbed out of the children’s shoes and put on a pair of own shoes. (IH)

Not everybody agrees on leaving the “new” word, though:

There is an ongoing discussion that we should leave “new circus” behind us and just call it “circus”. In a way I think that is good, but it is still too early to do so. New circus is still *new* circus, it is still in process and innovation, and the traditional circus still exists, many of the small circuses still look exactly like they did 50 years ago. (TA)

2010 - ?

Where will circus in Sweden go in the future, what are the challenges that we are facing at the moment? We asked our interviewees to look into the crystal ball...

One of the first challenges will be the moving of the circus program at The University of Dance and Circus, from Botkyrka to central Stockholm. This decision has been quite disputed, and it is difficult to say what consequences and what effects it will have for the circus development.

If everything goes as it should with the moving, it will be an expansion, the art form will get bigger feet. There will be more of everything. This could mean that the artists will get more space in the circus hall, that Subtopia could become a real production center, and that is good. It has to become a production center. (...) There might be other educational activities in Botkyrka. For instance a preparatory school, or an education of directors, technicians and producers. Another idea could be complementary courses for professionals. (IH)

And what about the aesthetic developments?

When we started (...) we had to start from scratch. New circus was a new art form. We had never seen anything like it before, it was the first time these artforms were cross-fertilized. The young artists that come up today have a rich flora to take inspiration from. What they lack, and need, is the skills to grasp a dramaturgy, and to create one themselves. (TA)

And now our fight is beginning to work: we can take those two worlds, the technical knowledge and the artistic knowledge, and put them together. For me that is new circus. And then we are talking the last three months. It comes from Walter Ferrero taking over the education [at the University of Dance and Circus], the creating of Manegen and some kind of welcoming, and suddenly those worlds begin to meet again. (...) And it is first now that I have begun to feel that it is changing. It is only now that it is beginning to be clear that this is actually an art form, not a training culture. We still have no links to all the circus environments in Sweden. But now they begin coming. (NL)

In the future I think we can expect circus, and circus formulated in different ways. (...) So I dare not say exactly where that will take us. But I think it is important that it happens, and that it can take the time it needs. What I also find is that we are back on track (...) Formulating what the art in the art is. Because that has not been done. And it has not been possible until now. (TB)

That feeling that something new has to happen all the time... You can ask yourself if something new ever will happen, and then it happens in the transcending, in something that was not possible to predict. Maybe it is there, around the corner and nobody knows what it is. (...) And there is a possibility in this genre, that it is not yet so well defined. (...) This still rather undefined form could contain an embryo to something completely different. (CK)

Must we draw borders between variety, circus, new circus? I think it is much more important to say: what happens to the performing arts? How come that even theatre performances contain both dancers and circus artist? What is it that

the audience seeks in the performing arts? It is evident that we do not seek the perfect. Rather we seek the living, the inspirational. That is what the audience wants and needs in this rigid world. Physical presentation has a huge advantage: it is alive. And it is through physical presentation, through risk, that circus is, and then it becomes even more stimulating to the audience. I do not like the limitations. (...) The art form has changed too little the last 20 years. Much more could have happened. Circus can make a continuation. I expect much more than what has been done. It could be more sensational, without being an art of sensation. (IH)

A Time Line with Holes and Flaws – Completely Incomplete:

1980s:

Evening courses in acrobatics, clown, stage acrobatics at “Studieförbundet”

1982: Cirque Aligre presented by Kulturhuset Stockholm

1982: Varieté Vaudevill is formed

1985: Something Else performs in Stockholm

1987: Gycklargruppen is formed

1988: Gycklargruppen: *Gyckelspel*

1989: Gycklargruppen: *Nattvarieté*

1988: The circus high school in Gävle is founded

1990s:

1990: Archaos presented by Kulturhuset: *The Last Show on Earth*

1991: Archaos presented by Stockholm Water Festival: *Metal Clown*

1991-96: Gycklargruppen performs at Royal Dramatic Theatre: *Aftonvarieté* and other shows

1993: GOSH! presented by Stockholm Water Festival

1994: Cirque Plume presented by Stockholm Water Festival: *Toile*

1994: Orionteatern: *Orion-Yran*

1994: Cirque Invisible first of many guest performances at Orionteatern (95, 97, 99, 01, 05)

1994-97: Gycklargruppen tours Sweden with *Unplugged*

1995: Cirkus Scott: *Cirkusprinsessan*

1995: Circus Oz presented by Stockholm Water Festival

1995: Cirkus Cirkör presented by Stockholm Water Festival: *Skapelsen*

1995: Gycklargruppen at Berns Salonger: *Hugo Berns Underbara Universum*

1995-96: Open stage for new circus at Teater Pero, Stockholm

1996: Que-Cir-Que presented by Gothenburg Dance and Theatre Festival

1996: Cirkus Cirkör tours in Sweden and Europe with *Ur Kaos*

1996: Cirkus Cirkör organizes summer training at Kulturhuset – 40 000 visitors

1996: P.Nalle Laanela meets the Spanish Clowns Without Borders in Sarajevo

1997: Cirkus Cirkör tours Sweden with *På*

1997: Que Cir Que presented by Stockholm Water Festival

1997: Varieté Vaudevill and Cirkus Cirkör for the first time get funding support from The Swedish Arts Council

1997: Cirkus Cirkör and other artists move into Medborgarhuset in Stockholm. Open training and circus courses are started, open stage once a month.

1997: Clownen Brinner/Circus Le Fou: *Nere vid Kanalen*
 1997: Sirqus Alfon is formed
 1997: The education Cirkuspiloterna is started
 1998: Cirkusringarna is started by Cirkus Cirkör, a national network for supporting circus training activities in Sweden
 1998: Circus Arts is formed
 1998: Cirque Ici presented by Stockholm Water Festival and by Gothenburg Dance and Theatre Festival: *Où çà?*
 1998: Cirkus Cirkör presented by Stockholm Water Festival in collaboration with Stockholm Cultural Capital '98: *SuperCirkör*
 1998: (year uncertain – perhaps 1999-2000) Clowns Without Borders/Red Cross: *Comedy of Wars*
 1998: Circus Ethiopia, a group of children and youngsters from a circus education in Ethiopia, presented by Parkteatern in collaboration with Stockholm Cultural Capital '98
 1998: Circus seminar VOLT at Medborgarhuset.
 1998: Cirkus Cirkör in cooperation with Stockholm Cultural Capital '98 invite Nola Rae (GB), JP Zaccarini (GB), Les Frères Kazamarov (France), Variété Barbès (Sweden).
 1999: Circus Arts: *DENK – welcome to this world*
 1999: (year uncertain – perhaps 2000) Circus Arts: *CirXone on the Road*
 1999: Circus Arts moves to Liljeholmen
 1999: Cirkus Cirkör tours in Sweden and Europe with *00.00*

2000s:

2000: Cirkus Cirkör and Cirkuspiloterna move to Botkyrka, into Kulturhuset Rotemannen (later Subtopia)
 2000: Cirque Baroque and Cirque Tsigane presented by Gothenburg Dance and Theatre Festival
 2000: Cirkus Cirkör and S:t:s Botvids high school start the circus high school in Botkyrka
 2000: Cirkus Cirkör: *TRIX* in collaboration with director Lars Rudolfsson, Orienteatern and the band Urga. *TRIX* becomes Cirkus Cirkörs international breakthrough and tours internationally.
 2000: Gycklargruppen at Skillinge Teater and Hamburger Börs: *Gycklargruppen & Nanne Grönvall show*
 2001: Clowns Without Borders moves to Botkyrka
 2001: Cirkus Cirkör's youth group Ung Cirkör is formed
 2001: Conference on new circus at Riksteatern
 2002: Subtopia is inaugurated
 2002: Cirkus Cirkör in cooperation with Royal Dramatic Theatre: *Romeo och Julia*
 2002: Naked Ape is formed
 2002: Variété Habblingbo, a summer circus/variety show in Gotland, starts. It becomes a yearly major public event in Gotland in summer time, still going strong in 2010.
 2002: Collectif AOC, James Thierré and Cahin-Caha presented by Gothenburg Dance and Theatre Festival, which also arranges the seminar “How new is new circus?” with circus researcher/director Jean-Michel Guy from France
 2003: *Miss Lyckad*, a school performance from Cirkuspiloterna tours internationally
 2003: Subörb - Circus and Arts Festival, organized by Cirkus Cirkör, Botkyrka and Riksteatern. Guest performances: The 7 Fingers (Canada), Jérôme Thomas (France), Happy Side Show (Australia). Approximately 35.000 visitors.
 2003: Fan-Atticks is formed

2004: *Salong Giraff* is started as a night variety show at Orienteatern, Folkoperan and Parkteatern. It quickly becomes a success and is still going strong in 2010.

2004: DaFlo Bravefest is started, a small size festival in Dala Floda to be held every summer.

2004: The program of winter acrobatics starts at high schools in Åre and Östersund, in cooperation with Cirkus Cirkör.

2004: Cie Cirque Ueli Hirzel and James Thierré presented by Gothenburg Dance and Theatre Festival

2004: The circus high school in Ystad starts as a cooperation between circus company Zin-Lit and the municipality of Ystad. The education was closed in 2008.

2005: Subörb – Circus and Arts festival, organised by Cirkus Cirkör, Botkyrka kommun, Riksteatern and Subtopia.

2005: Idiots Savants is formed

2005: Cirkus Cirkör in cooperation with Teater Kaleidoskop (Copenhagen): *Havfruen*

2005: Ruby Rose Productions is formed

2005: The circus program is started at The University of Dance, and located in Subtopia.

2005: Tilde Björfors is engaged as guest professor in circus at The University of Dance

2006: The University of Dance decides that the circus program will move to campus in central Stockholm. The move is planned for 2011.

2006: Orienteatern: *Fusk* in cooperation with Royal Bones Company (Denmark)

2006: Cirkus Cirkör in cooperation with Stockholm City Theatre and The University of Dance: *Momo eller kampen om tiden*

2006: Fan-atticks: *I will run away*

2007: New Nordic Circus Network is formed

2007: Johan Wellton at Gävle Teater: *Johan Wellton vs The Symphony Orchestra*

2008: The Circus Year of Botkyrka

2008: Les Colporteurs and Un loup pour l'homme presented by Gothenburg Dance and Theatre Festival

2008: Circus Arts moves to Subtopia

2008: Tilde Björfors receives a research grant for the interdisciplinary project “Circus as transgressor in art and society”

2008: Cirkör Lab is inaugurated

2008: The 7 Fingers presented by The Circus Year of Botkyrka and by Umeå Teaterförening: *Traces*

2008: John-Paul Zaccarini is invited as guest professor in circus at The University of Dance. He directs the student performance *3rd Time Lucky* with the first ever graduates of the circus program.

2008: Kollektiv Vifira and Celso y Frana, are formed by graduating students from The University of Dance

2008: The first theoretical academic course on new circus is held at Stockholm University

2008: Cirkus Cirkör: *Inside Out*, tours in Sweden and internationally. Still going strong in 2010.

2008: Director Åsa Johannisson receives a research grant for project “Beyond and Within” to explore the cross-over of the art forms circus, film and glass blowing

2008: Celso y Frana: *Here begins the story*

2008: Fan-atticks: *Cage*

2008: Manipulation Research Laboratory (MRL) is formed. Jugglers Jay Gilligan, Ben Smalls (Richter), Erik Åberg and Luke Wilson set out to explore the boundaries of juggling

2008: Manegen – Federation for circus, variety and street performance is formed

2008: Johan Wellton at Gävle Teater and Vasateatern: *Variété Royal*

2008: The University of Dance and House of Dance in Stockholm begin to offer circus artists and companies residencies on a regular basis

2008: A network for circus artists in western Sweden is created: Mötesplats Nycirkus

2009: Henry Bronett at Värmlandsoperan: *Circus Opera*

2009: Kollektiv Vifira: *Notariegatan 17B*

2009: Naked Ape: *De la Sprätt*

2009: Circus Le Fou opens a new space for circus courses and training in Nacka.

2009: Subcase Subtopia Circus Fairs, first edition, presents 13 shows with Swedish/Sweden-based companies only

2009: Swedish circus, variety and street performance is showcased by Manegen, more than 20 shows and over 70 artists during four days at Nordic Fringe Festival in Eskilstuna

2009: The one year Masters education “Laughter Without Borders” is started at Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts.

2009: Subtopia receives funding to develop a venue for circus and variety, Hangaren in Botkyrka

2009-10: The 7 Fingers presented by Subtopia and by Umeå Teaterförening: *PSY*

2010: Circus training space and venue Karavan is inaugurated in Malmö

2010: The University of Dance changes its name to The University of Dance and Circus