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Social & Production Research

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**Report : #3**

**Title:** “Stressed Out”

**Author:** Thomas Vaccaro

**Appears in this video:** Thomas Vaccaro, Justin Dale (Camera)

[Check-in Video](#)

[Curated Floor Video](#)

[Performance video](#)

**Observed Safety Plan:** April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021 for Film/Productions (Approval Peterborough Public Health)

**Distribution:** PACA Archive, YouTube & Facebook (Thomas personal accounts)  
PACA Board of Directors, Ali Webb, Canada Council of the Arts

**Keywords:**

**Status:**

- Resolved**
- Unresolved**
- Continuing Research**

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**Summary:** Coinciding with the filming of the Circus Dreamland movie, new technological applications were tested in the Market Hall, combining high production elements with innovative artistic catharsis. Author of the report, Thomas Vaccaro, beta tests these applications for the purpose of implementing a wider program that can have high impact on participants mental health while simultaneously creating stunning and introspective visual art.

**Background Information:** The goal of this prototype project is to provide a safe, comfortable means for the participant to experience artistic catharsis. Catharsis, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary is:

*“The process of releasing, and thereby providing relief from, strong or repressed emotions.”*

In the context of social circus, catharsis is the ultimate goal to be reached by participants in their personal growth as they go through the program. The methods explored in this project is different from traditional social circus presentation insofar as it focuses on one particular issue at a time, with one participant at a time. In this manner, it allows for a more personal approach to the final expression of the participant, and deeper introspection into their own psyche, interests, and conflicts while simultaneously facilitating the creation of artistic performance. Thomas Vaccaro volunteers as the test subject for this methodology, and outlines his findings and results in this report. The general process from start to finish is as follows:

1. Participants integrate and have a check-in process with each other, or just themselves depending on workshop numbers. This is an uninterrupted period of time where they express what is going on in their lives to the rest of the group, or video audience. It is important that this process is uninterrupted for each participant and everyone gets to say their piece; this ensures communication of things that might not be otherwise easy to talk about. Everyone gets the chance to express their feelings and what they are going through. In this case, the check-in is video recorded.
2. The participant selects a song for themselves to animate within the set for the week. If the song was selected in particular relationship to their check-in as having a relevant or pertinent meaning to their current life obstacles, catharsis is more likely.
3. The space is prepared in advance for the participant, configured for filming, projection, and music. Stationary cameras are established on an X-axis (flat plane) and Y-Axis (ceiling plane.) These stationary cameras collect simultaneous footage of the participant executing three instances of their song in the space throughout the week. There is also a third, free-moving roaming camera (dubbed camera Q) that is operated by another participant in the program, depending on availability of personnel.
4. The participant has awareness of their desired resolution, and aims to have their performance reach that goal. The end video of all three iterations are compiled on top of each other in a layered performance.
5. To punctuate the experience, the participants have a “check-out” in the same medium as their check-in. Their final video is also available for them to provide commentary on the experience from start to finish. This gives the opportunity to vocalize the journey, and contrast their feelings from when they first began the process.

**Stage Configuration: (pictured below.)**

For this project The Market Hall Performing Arts Centre was equipped with the following equipment:

- White Vinyl Dance Floor (projectable)
- Two Projector's; Projector X (projected to back screen) Projector Y (Projected from ceiling to the dance floor.) (These two items were purchased by PACA for use in the Circus Dreamland movie.)
- 2 Side Stage Lights for illuminating subjects in dark
- Black UV canon's for highlighting
- Aerial Silks (for cutting stage light direction and adding scene aesthetic.)

The set configuration in use during the filming of this prototype project was also part of the simultaneous PACA projects, Circus Dreamland: The Movie, and the [Mentorship Set Design process with James Spremo-Bain](#). As PACA is committed to continuing its partnership with Mr. Spremo-Bain into the future, it is safe to surmise that moving forward the Peterborough Academy of Circus Arts will always have a working "set" in existence that can be filmed upon, even if this space is not necessarily inside the Market Hall Performing Arts Centre.



## Methodology: Personal Account. Thomas on “Stressed Out.” Step 1 – The Check-in

I should iterate here that I historically can be very open about my feelings. Expressing them to myself, my loved ones, an audience; this is something that I historically almost never struggled with as an artist, and I viewed sharing of these feelings as a necessity with regards to how I react with and engage the world. “Authenticity” is the word my research partner for the week used to describe my approach to art, and above all, that is what I strive for in the works that I create. I like to draw honest, visceral answers from within as I explore my feelings and undertake their delivery as my personal duty to share with the world so that if my findings, resolutions, or process can be beneficial to others, then the experiencing of these difficult emotions will not have been in vain and will have had a benevolent purpose.

All this in mind, whether it be because of the global climate saturated by The Pandemic, The rapid changing circumstances of my life as I embraced my new role as a father, dealing with the demand of an increased workload as artistic director, or some combination thereof; Many of the feelings I was experiencing when this project began were foreign and difficult to vocalize. In fact, it was not until I recorded the [Check-in Video](#) that I even heard for myself the first time what I was going through, which was filmed at the beginning of the week.

Check-in Video Content	Time Reference (Accompanying Video)
Introduction: Discussing completion of the set	0:00-1:00
Introducing Song for the week: Twenty-one Pilots. Discussing why this song was picked.	1:00-1:56
Discussing a terminal diagnosis in my family; How that will shape the work I need to do to take care of four children.	1:56-3:20
Artistic Practice in the Pandemic. Not making Any art personally. Facilitating the space so others can create art during pandemic. Feelings of having “given up” being an artist.”	3:20-3:39
Survivor’s Guilt. Feeling guilt many artists lost their place and space of practice during the pandemic, and I was able to sustain and operate a safe, public health approved operation. Deciding to use that power responsibly.	3:39-4:20
Affirmations, telling myself I am a different kind of artist now. That I am on the right track and I will be okay.	4:31-5:10
Closing Thoughts: The Date, my goals, and positive affirmations. Things I would say to myself if I were one of my kids.	5:10-7:12

## Selected Song: “Stressed Out” By Twenty-One Pilots – Lyrics

*“I wish I found some better sounds no one's ever heard  
I wish I had a better voice that sang some better words  
I wish I found some chords in an order that is new  
I wish I didn't have to rhyme every time I sang*

*I was told when I get older all my fears would shrink  
But now I'm insecure and I care what people think*

*My name's 'Blurryface' and I care what you think  
My name's 'Blurryface' and I care what you think*

*Wish we could turn back time, to the good old days  
When our momma sang us to sleep but now we're stressed out (oh)  
Wish we could turn back time (oh), to the good old days (oh)  
When our momma sang us to sleep but now we're stressed out*

*We're stressed out*

*Sometimes a certain smell will take me back to when I was young  
How come I'm never able to identify where it's coming from  
I'd make a candle out of it if I ever found it  
Try to sell it, never sell out of it, I'd probably only sell one*

*It'd be to my brother, 'cause we have the same nose  
Same clothes homegrown a stone's throw from a creek we used to roam  
But it would remind us of when nothing really mattered  
Out of student loans and tree-house homes we all would take the latter*

*We used to play pretend, give each other different names  
We would build a rocket ship and then we'd fly it far away  
Used to dream of outer space but now they're laughing at our face  
Saying, "Wake up, you need to make money."  
Yeah”*

### **Methodology: Personal Account, Thomas on “Stressed Out.” Step 2 – “Editing The Projected Video.”**

Following the completion of the check-in video and my song selection, I began to curate the content of the video that would be projected on the floor during my session. The Process took roughly 3 hours. For this process, I listened to the song and looked up YouTube images that matched the lyrics, feelings, or general flow of the song. The song itself had an overall longing for days of the past, when responsibilities were less, and made an abundance of references to outer space and money, so those types of images I gravitated to with my selection in general.

There was also a palpable sense of reluctance for living in the present and tending to obligations of adulthood. For these images, I focused on painful images to convey the harsh reality I am sure every adult feels at some point in their life. An inability to stop working, lest their life come completely undone, and yet a brazen surrender and acceptance in the perpetuity of their situation.

I included a moment from my own check-in video (5:10) where I visually appeared to an outside audience, the most “stressed out,” (my hands clasp my face) in order to resonate visually with the audio and images being projected.

The song contained many references to a “mama,” so I selected Rei Ayanami from Neon Genesis Evangelion emerging angelically from the Earth as my caring, maternal figure. In the series, she is the reincarnate of the mother of all human life. This image I saw as a child at age 14, and it has stayed with me through the years as one of the most beautiful images I can consciously recall ever seeing. As the song makes references to feelings of being “taken back to when I was young,” The cosmos aesthetic of this image fit into the piece personally, in conjunction to the many references within the song about outer space.

To my own comic delight, I was amused that somebody on YouTube had taken the time to upload visuals of nothing but money flying through the air... Even more delighted, was somebody had filmed a Canadian version of throwing twenties on a table somewhere. This gave an air of comedy in a piece that was otherwise on the darker side of things for moments when the song referenced money.

### **Methodology: Personal Account, Thomas on “Stressed Out.” Step 3- Setting Up The Hall**

This Particular video was filmed from two camera perspectives. A stationary camera which did not change positions for the duration of the week, and a closer camera that was operated by Justin Dale. These camera’s collected simultaneous footage that would be blended together, while projector lit the floor with music video I curated earlier in the week.

### **Methodology: Personal Account, Thomas on “Stressed Out.” Step 4 – Awareness of The Desired Resolution.**

**(Note on Health During Filming:** On June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021, Two weeks prior to the video shoot, I suffered a fall down the stairs at home. I was concussed, and received 4 stitches. As I write this report, (July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021) I am still recovering with whiplash. I had the expectation that this would subdue my performance somewhat. Moreover, as I have been focused on work as an artistic director for The Peterborough Academy of Circus Arts, and less as an active training artist, a lot of my skills had become less polished in the months of isolation brought on by the pandemic.)

My health in combination with the negative message of the song was actually starting to wear on my emotional state throughout the week. I would watch my test sessions and find my mood, movement, and performance to be less than up to my usual standards. I rehearsed the video and the song two times, and I realized if things stayed the way they did, I might not achieve the cathartic result I wanted. This caused me to ask myself:

What did I want?

I realized the answers were back in my original check-in video... So I watched it again... This time ignoring the negative things outlining my situation, and paying attention to the most positive, encouraging, constructive things I said, where I seemed to be giving myself a pep-talk, as though I were one of my children.

*“And I’m so lucky that I’m in a job doing what I love, surrounded by people who are so loving and caring. To make the best circus school Ontario has. Be more proud of yourself. Go easy on yourself. I know you’re doing good. I know you’re stressed out. It’s okay to be stressed out. But take a little time and look at where you are. Appreciate what you have. Do the right thing. It’s all important.”*

I realized as I heard myself saying these things that THIS was the message that had to go into my video somehow. This is what I needed to hear in order to reach the catharsis that I wanted, and it dawned on me that the video I curated to be projected on the floor was incomplete. In order to be a truly personal experience, a guided tour from my current situation to the resolution I was seeking, I needed to bring in my own voice saying to myself the things I needed to believe and hear the most... I spliced this audio from my check-in video, and placed it at the beginning of the curated projector video... For visuals to accompany this new audio introduction, I overlaid a video of myself from October of 2019, before the pandemic hit. A time when I was in my prime, and at the top of my performance game. **Thus the curated video for this project was updated.**

I somehow knew that in order for the experience to have symmetry, the outro needed an update as well, so I selected a song that always made me feel calm about things, “Everything Will be Alright” by The Killers. I listened to this song on repeat when my grandmother passed away years ago, and it was like I could imagine her telling me things would be alright... the images to accompany this selected audio was swirling clouds. The curated video was thus complete, and I had one day left to perform the piece. For the first time throughout the entire week, I felt ready.

**The Performance:** June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021 was the day my performance was filmed. I had been updating the curated video, and nobody had seen it up to that point but me. Justin Dale, PACA’s special guest artist for the week, was ready at the camera. I plugged my computer in and **started the video on the floor.** I remember hearing myself speak in the new introduction from the catwalk, and automatically and calmly, began to walk to my start position. I knew precisely how long it would take me to reach the stage floor. I calmly descended the two flights of stairs, and to where my cyr wheel was waiting for me. I picked it up right on cue as the music began, and what happened next was an out of body experience.

My injury seemed to be turned off, or placed somewhere else for the next several minutes. I was still aware of it in the distance, but my body was moving with such precision and control that I knew, deep down, I would be alright. I stayed within the boundaries of the projected floor, my body moved in-time with the beats, and I subconsciously synced myself to the moving images that I had curated without even seeing them. As the song came to a close, I knew, I had done it. I had performed, and I had created art. I ended with a slam of my cyr wheel, and allowed myself to rest to my outro song... Everything would be alright.... I was out of breath, but it was okay to

relax... I gave myself this time at the end, the feeling of accomplishment... I remember sitting up, and not being sure if I was going to cry from happiness or not... I decided to just smile... and I even remember saying out loud, to no one in particular, perhaps an awed Justin, but mostly myself: "I'm alright."

**Methodology: Personal Account, Thomas on "Stressed Out." Step 5 – The Check-Out**

The different camera perspectives for "Stressed Out" were collected and edited together, overlaid with the curated projection video. Watching myself perform for the first time was a very different experience from performing it. At a glance, I could not tell I was injured, nor did it seem like I was "stressed out." It was also different from watching a typical video performance in the sense that the entire space seemed to be animated along with me, thanks to the projections, and it made watching a much more surreal experience. Also evident was my relaxation and relief at the end when the song was complete.

**Closing Thoughts:** I believe this multi-faceted methodology of achieving catharsis can be widely adapted and applied to spearhead a new age of video performance and artistic presentation. Some of these filming/projection methods have already found their way into the production of Circus Dreamland, to great effect, and even still many subtle nuances have yet to be explored.

I would be most fascinated to see projects like this last a longer duration, where participants create multiple video's that perhaps tell a story, whether personal like a video diary, or narrative like a production. The limitations of a set that is projectable in a space that can be fully interacted with is something that has not yet been tested to its fullest extent, and I recommend The Peterborough Academy of Circus Arts use this report and its material to support the application of Research Grants and Production Grants to explore these concepts further and use their findings for social and artistic benefit.

**Follow Up**

- Release Report and Video's accompanying it to The Board of Directors, the Public, and Ali Webb.
- Use report as support material for Canada Council, Circus Arts Curator Grants to secure more advanced technology, software, and opportunities for innovative, educational experiences.

<b>Budget</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Budget Sourced</b>
Justin Dale Mentorship – Project 1 of 3	\$266.67 (of \$800)	PACA Professional Development Budget
Thomas – Filming @ \$25/hour x4	\$100.00	PACA Archival Budget
Thomas – Director, Author, & Editor for report. \$25.00/hour x8 editing, & writing	\$200.00	PACA Archival Budget



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