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I am Katrina (aka Tina) Carter. I run [Airhedz Aerial Training](#), based in Kent in the UK. Thanks to the LUTSF I travelled to Canada earlier this year to assist Erin Ball on her second Amputee Circus Camp. We aimed to share skills, knowledge and experiences of adaptive aerial and circus practice with each other and the participants. This report shares a little of what we did, why we did it, and what we hope to do next.

Background Information



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Erin Ball (www.kingstoncircusarts.com) and I met in early 2018 at the [Circus Sessions](#) programme run by Femmes du Feu. We had mutual friends and collaborators, knew of each other's work in adaptive and accessible aerial, and on meeting were compelled to find a way to work and learn together. The timing of her second Amputee Circus Camp (#Camputee2019) was perfect. I asked if I could visit; she asked if I would assist her; I managed to raise travel funds from LUTSF to make it possible.

Reasons for the Project

I have been teaching, consulting, choreographing, and researching Accessible Aerial for many years and my PhD, [*Suspending Conventions: How 'disabled aerialists' are challenging aesthetic and methodological practices in 21st Century aerial\(ism\)*](#), is one of the only academic documents on the subject. Like most of us working in this field, I am non-disabled. Meeting Erin, a bilateral amputee who was an aerialist prior to her accident, and learning about her professional and personal perspectives, was enlightening. For numerous political, social and personal reasons, aerial has been inaccessible to many disabled people across the world. Erin was the first disabled aerialist I met who had pushed beyond introductory level aerial. She works professionally as a performer and trainer, has her own studio, and guides others into how to teach accessibly; I knew I would be able to learn so much from her. We also got on well, so that was a bonus! I felt that Erin's proficiency in adapting aerial to suit her changed body would be a way to show us all how aerial (and life generally) can be made accessible to more people, if we allow ourselves to be open to new possibilities.

The Project

Owing to last minute hiccups, plans were modified, and I spent the first two days of my trip in Toronto before heading onto Kingston. I met up with blind writer, Alex Bulmer (www.alexbulmer.co.uk/), spending a

few hours discussing the politics of Audio Description (AD), and how it can be included into the body of creative work rather than sit as a separate entity on top of it. My article, [Exposing the Implicit: AD for Aerial Action, Identity, and Storytelling](#), explores the introduction of AD into a circus module at East 15 Acting School where I attempted to do this with the students' aerial solos.



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Erin and I were keen to use AD in our work, and as #Camputee2019 would lead to two public performances, we were already planning to incorporate it into the work from the start. Meeting with Alex helped secure ideas of how to begin. During the process we asked the participants to write a few key words to identify themselves, and most included something about their limb difference. This was spoken by each performer just before they presented their piece. During the show, Erin and Tally (one of the camputees) also gave live description of the action.

The #Camputee2019 training programme ran over five days, Monday to Friday. The training itself involved exploring aerial equipment including suspended wheelchairs, acro-balance, hula hoop, clown-skits and improvisation to music. Participants chose what to focus on, and Erin and I met before and after each session to plan and discuss the activities. We co-led the workshops and were assisted in the space by other members of her teaching staff. Although everyone participating had a limb difference, uniting them in one common sense, there were naturally huge other differences that needed to be accommodated. Some people used wheelchairs, others prosthetic limbs. A few communicated via ASL (which we also included where possible) and several participants were born with shorter fingers, or no hands. Furthermore, some people had significant circus or aerial experience while others were still new to it. As teachers there was a lot to consider. As participants there was a lot to learn, energy to expend, pain to endure, panic to struggle through.



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We had a public sharing in Erin's studio on the Saturday evening, then drove to Toronto early Sunday morning to participate in the Contemporary Circus Showcase. We had a strict ten-minute maximum for our piece, and it was a stressful journey to pull all we had created into that tight frame. Nonetheless, the piece was made, rehearsed, shown and appreciated concluding in a dramatic explosion of confetti that has become Erin's signature – usually blasting out from her prostheses!

Timetable

I set out on 19th June; met with Alex on 20th; travelled to Kingston on 21st where I stayed with Erin's wonderful mother. The weekend was spent meeting with Erin, chatting and planning and training together. The camp ran from 24th to 30th June leaving a day off on Monday 1st July. This was great timing as it was Canada Day, so I had an opportunity to experience some of the 'real life' outside of the circus camp. On Tuesday 2nd July I was invited to teach private and group classes for Erin's teachers, campmates who had remained a few days longer, and visiting aerial enthusiasts. On concluding the workshop, I caught the flight home... to rest and reflect!

What's next?

Erin and I worked very well together. We found our collaboration to be mutually beneficial and she has already asked me to return next year for #Camputee2020. Before then however, I am keen to host her in the UK, so we are currently working out how best to do that. She offers a teacher training programme for aerial tutors, and I plan to run this through Airhedz Aerial Training in the winter of 2019. We aim to offer a bursary to a tutor with a limb difference, and invite local people with limb differences to participate in an afternoon of aerial taster session. If successful, I hope to then be able to run regular sessions for people with limb differences as part of my Airhedz programme.

To read more from Erin's perspective, visit <https://circustalk.com/news/adaptive-circus-arts-at-camputee-2019-with-erin-ball> for an interview with Erin Ball.