Introduction: Circus and Its Others[1]

Karen Fricker and Hayley Malouin

As befits a performance studies project, Circus and Its Others was sparked by a post-show lobby conversation between colleagues. At the 2014 Montréal Complètement Cirque Festival (MCC), Karen Fricker—one of the authors of this introduction—commented to Charles Batson and L. Patrick Leroux that she found one of its productions dismayingly heteronormative.[2] Charles said he'd reacted differently, because he finds circus always-already queer. Because circus is—historically through to the present day—an occasion for the presentation of exceptional bodies doing extraordinary things, and because he always views circus through what he calls (in his contribution to this special issue) "reparative-reading lenses" (163), Charles saw the potential for nonnormative expression in the show's inherently unusual nature, even if some of its representations were normatively heterosexist. Difference, Charles effectively argued, was in the show's DNA, because it was circus.

That conversation lasted well into the evening—and has extended into a vibrant inquiry that, nearly four years on, continues to expand in terms of reference, scope, and nuance. The questions we started to debate about a single production turned into an ongoing scholarly dialogue touching on many aspects of the field of contemporary circus: To what extent and in what ways is circus always-already different, and *about* difference? How does the mainstreaming of circus in our era affect its status as a haven for the different, the outsider? What is happening to circus's historic status as a site for the celebration and exploitation of differences, from stagings of exceptional performing bodies to the display of "freakery," in the context of the increased mainstream popularity of the genre? In what ways are contemporary circus artists and companies embracing and exploiting (or not) difference in their practice? In our observation, such questions were not yet being asked in an organized and comprehensive way in the burgeoning world of contemporary circus research in which the three of us are active participants.

Charles and Karen named the project Circus and Its Others (a title and terminology that, as this introduction goes on, we will prod and problematize) and piloted it in a Study Day at Concordia University in November 2014 under the aegis of the Montreal Working Group on Circus Research, a vibrant bilingual project bringing together international scholars, circus artists, and circus producers, of which Patrick is founding director. At the Study Day some two dozen established and emerging scholars from Canada, the US, France, and Australia mapped out key questions and areas of focus. Following on from this, Karen and Charles organized a panel on Gender and Queerness in Contemporary Circus at the 2015 conference of the Association for Canadian Studies in the United States (ACSUS), and the project took a major step forward with an international conference (funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada) held in Montreal in July 2016, in partnership with that year's MCC Festival.

Karen Fricker is an associate professor of dramatic arts at Brock University and a theatre critic at the *Toronto Star*. In addition to contemporary circus, her areas of research include the original stage work of Robert Lepage, the Eurovision Song Contest, and the evolution of theatre criticism in the digital age. **Hayley Rose Malouin** is the web editor for *alt.theatre*, a professional Canadian theatre magazine examining the intersections of politics, cultural diversity, social activism, and the stage. She writes and teaches theatre criticism and holds a master's degree in studies in comparative literature and art.

The subject matter of that 2015 ACSUS panel reflects Karen and Charles's particular interests and stakes in these questions: Karen's in the ways in which contemporary circus is extending or problematizing conceptions of feminine and masculine, and in the capacity of circus to destabilize traditionally gendered hierarchies; and Charles's in the particular ways in which queerness and so-called freakery intersect with contemporary circus practices. These became two of the five main areas of inquiry in the Montreal conference and the present issue, and the response and interests of colleagues shape the other three: the ways in which spaces, bodies, and objects in circus may be figured as other, or as normalized and regulated; questions of mobility and location in the context of an ever-more globalized field; and the relationship between social and professional circus practices.[3] The twenty-three articles assembled here are grouped in these five areas of focus and in most instances reflect reworked versions of presentations from the 2016 conference.

How Did Circus Become Other? Locating Our Inquiry

A number of characteristics are understood to differentiate contemporary circus from the traditional form best known to North American audiences through Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's big top spectacles. Leroux shorthands these distinctions as "narrative-driven, animal-free" (2016, 3). Contemporary circus tends to create a thematic or narrative premise for a spectacle rather than using the episodic, ringmaster-narrated format familiar from the traditional form. Design, music, sound, choreography, and technology may all be employed to create a distinctive aesthetic. Reflecting increased collaboration with artists from related creative fields, contemporary circus productions may play in theatre and dance venues (and may also still appear under a big top, as is the case with some of Cirque du Soleil's shows). And yes, most contemporary circus does not include nonhuman animals, an exception being large-scale equestrian spectacles including those of the Quebec-based company Cavalia, as Ante Ursic discusses in this issue.

In the context of this inquiry into the relationship of alterity to contemporary circus, however, another look at this historical trajectory is called for, in order to cast light on a crucial question: the origins and continuity of the understanding of circus as inherently subversive. The Scotland-based literature scholar Helen Stoddart identifies the repeated literary and filmic trope of circus as "a site of myth, fantasy, symbol and therefore removed from or outside the world, history and reality" (2001, 178). Tracing the history of this understanding is problematized, Stoddart argues, by the unreliability of documentation of circus, given that "fans of the circus" have "with very few exceptions to date . . . constituted its principal historians, so that circus history and circus mythology have become very much entwined" (1–2). Traditional circus was premised on the display of the extraordinary, be it the exceptional skills, artistry, and risk-taking of aerialists, acrobats, and jugglers; the fearlessness of animal-tamers; or the distance from the spectators' own identities and experience of the human and animal so-called oddities in sideshow freak acts. Moving from town to town, setting up tents under the cover of night, and leaving the way they came, nineteenth-century travelling circuses offered themselves up in alluring opposition to normative, sedentary society; the circus itself, as a living, moving network, provided a peeking glance at a seemingly vastly different system of socialization, at an "other" way of life. As American historian Janet M. Davis has argued, circus artists promoted this understanding: they "consciously felt they were a breed apart from society" and "embraced cultural diversity within this international, multiracial 'travelling town'" (2002, 10). Davis further argues, however, that circus did not exist in opposition to the mainstream culture of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century United States but reflected conceptions of that culture

as "a modern industrial society and world power" (10), as circuses exploited the expanding network of railroads to bring entertainment to communities across the country.

This myth of circus as a site and set of activities removed from the world thus works to reinforce normative social systems by reflecting those systems back through what Davis calls the circus's offer of "metaphysical entertainment" (2002, xii). The circus as a perceived "self-contained universe of rings" (xii) and the very myth of the circus as "other" are rendered central to the understanding and constitution of the "same"—that is, to the constitution of these normative systems of socialization. In this context, we see circus emulating certain carnivalesque qualities articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin, particularly that of the carnival—or circus—as "the second life of the people," an all-encompassing eruption of festivity and feast which marked and celebrated "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" (1968, 9–10). In this way, the carnival invokes a shared anti-hierarchical temporality gleefully resistant to the rigidity of a totalizing class structure—nevertheless a temporary destabilization, as the inevitable reinstatement of state order and official time looms ever-present. However temporary, and however tied to existing structures and hierarchies, circus, like carnival, produces an "otherly" space where audiences participate in and experience difference. Contemporary circus, while no longer necessarily positioned at the literal fringes of society, emerges from this otherly sensation, from an otherness both consciously and unconsciously conveyed.

While noting these important continuities between traditional and contemporary circuses, and at the same time acknowledging significant differences between the two in terms of artistic and aesthetic ideals and their respective socio-cultural milieux, there remains a recurring problematic: these variously conceptualized "others" in relation to mainstream ideologies. Traditional, contemporary, or somewhere betwixt and between, questions of difference persist—not just about the quality of difference evoked by circus, but about circus's role as a refuge to the different, the other. While the conception of traditional circus as such a refuge is indeed a myth—one that works to erase oppression and exploitation in both historical and contemporary settings—the circus's profound impact on normative culture's constitution and self-identification as such means that this myth both functions in society and is societally manifested. Thus, the questions posed by the Circus and Its Others project work to simultaneously respond to contemporary circus's inheritance of these myths of alterity and to move across and through this traditional/contemporary continuum.

Contemporary circus research is a scholarly field in emergence, responding to a burgeoning field of practice. As noted by Stoddart above, before the early 2000s the amount of serious scholarly consideration of circus in the English language was limited. Toronto-based French studies scholar Paul Bouissac pioneered a semiotic approach to reading circus performances in books and articles published in the 1970s through to the 2010s. Stoddart's *Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation* (2000) and Davis's *The Circus Age: Culture & Society under the American Big Top* (2002) broke ground in their consideration of mythologization of circus in other art forms and the gendered and raced nature of circus labour, respectively. Australian theatre scholar Peta Tait's *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance* (2005) is a landmark in the field, offering the first substantial scholarly consideration of contemporary circus companies (treating the work of Cirque du Soleil, Archaos, and Circus Oz), and focusing on performances of embodied gender in trapeze and other aerial acts. More recently Tait and the Australian circus artist/scholar Katie Lavers co-edited *The Routledge Circus Reader* (2016), a welcome and robust (626-page) addition to the field, featuring thirty-five articles treating circus from aesthetic, historical, representational, socio-political, and industrial perspectives.

The Circus and Its Others project has its roots in the fertile milieu of circus practice and research in Montreal, the city which has been, since the 1980s, the centre of circus activity worldwide (see Jacob 2016). Given that the Quebec government has funded arts and culture since the 1950s as part of the project of national "identity formation" (Leslie and Rantisi 2016, 231), a particular concern of Quebec circus research has been the links between national identity and circus performances. As Leroux has argued, the roots of circus in Quebec do not run particularly deep, and the Quebec circus "brand" melds together a number of outside influences: "French *nouveau cirque*, Soviet-inspired elite acrobat training, and American entrepreneurship and showmanship." The paradoxical result is a circus that "sometimes comes across as blandly 'global,' without local flavour, to audiences seated in front of its presentations of assumed cultural neutrality" (2016, 8). Jennifer Harvie and Erin Hurley made an important early contribution to this line of argument with their 1999 article "States of Play: Locating Quebec in the Performances of Ex Machina, Robert Lepage, and Cirque du Soleil" in which they identified a deep "ambivalence towards their Québec location" (300) in the attitudes and producing strategies of these globally successful arts organizations.[4] Soleil's distinctive "performance codes, which include fantastical costumes, masked or heavily made-up performers, acts of technical virtuosity, world-beat language written in an Esperanto-like language and the gibberish of . . . 'speaking' clown characters" (312) allow its work to travel easily between markets. The company consistently promoted itself as coming from an "imagi-nation" (309) rather than a specific place while at the same benefiting considerably from start-up government funding; Harvie and Hurley criticized this as a "disavowal of nationality" in favour of a "corporate and aesthetic [identity that is] homogeneous and unified" (314). Hurley went on to call Soleil "a national stealth-figure whose work does not fit into the generally accepted criteria for inclusion in national theatre history" (2011, 14).

Questions of dis-location and the performance of national identity were also at the centre of "Le Québec à Las Vegas," a special issue of the Quebec theatre studies journal *L'annuaire théâtrale* edited by Leroux in 2008, which considered the success and high profile of productions by Soleil, Robert Lepage, and Céline Dion in the de-facto capital of American live popular entertainment. Also appearing that year (in *Globe* 11.2) was Hurley's "Les Corps multiples de Cirque du Soleil," an exploration of bodily exceptionalism in Soleil's performances which has proved highly generative for the present study, given her compelling argument that "all circus bodies are tainted with the residue of the sideshow freak body" (2016, 134). Hurley's rigorous taxonomy of the different, layered ways bodies signify in circus performance undergirds a number of contributions to this issue. An English-language translation of that article (as "The Multiple Bodies of Cirque du Soleil") features in Leroux and Batson's 2016 collection *Cirque Global: Quebec's Expanding Circus Boundaries*, the first book-length study of contemporary Quebec circus. While understandably focused on Soleil (eight of fifteen articles treat the company and its productions), chapters also cast welcome light on another of Quebec's "big three" circus organizations, in Batson's "Les 7 doigts de la main and their Cirque: Origins, Resistances, Intimacies"; on the history of Quebec circus, in particular its relationship to United States practices and touring networks (articles by Leroux and Julie Boudreault); and on the historic links between Quebec circus and that of the once-and-again powerhouse circus nation, China (Tracy Y. Zhang's "The Chinese Connection: The Transnational Origins of Québécois Circus Arts").

Also clearly on display in *Cirque Global* is the welcome, growing interdisciplinarity of contemporary circus studies, something that also features strongly in the present issue. Offering another perspective on the question of Cirque du Soleil's relationship to location, cultural geographers Deborah Leslie and Norma M. Rantisi's article considers the company as "place-specific" (2016, 223) and explores the exchange of resource and influence between Montreal and its circus industries.

An article by Sylvain Lafortune, Jon Burtt, and Patrice Aubertin, all circus educators, puts the focus on high-performance training, while communications scholar Isabelle Mahy explores the "Tug-of-War between Artists and Managers" at Cirque du Soleil. Theatre scholar Jennifer Beth Spiegel's consideration of the place of street-based alternative circus practices in the 2012 Quebec Spring protest movement opens up questions of circus in sites beyond tents and venues, which many articles in the present issue extend. Of particular interest to readers who may not be circus-conversant is *Cirque Global*'s final chapter, a "Glossary of Circus Terms" by the National Circus School's librarian Anna-Karyna Barlati, usefully illustrated with photographs.

Introduction of Our Approach; Chasing the Other

It is reflective of the emerging nature of the field of circus studies that the majority of presenters at the 2016 Circus and Its Others conference—and contributors to this issue—are graduate students, in many cases presenting arguments in process that form part of MA and doctoral projects. Some of them are circus artists-turned-scholars, and a number of other participant/contributors are circus professionals offering their perspective from within the field. The structure of the issue responds to this: Each section was led editorially by a mid-career scholar (Karen, Patrick, Charles, Michael Eigtved, and David Fancy) and each features one or two full-length essays which anchor the section,[5] followed by three or four shorter pieces responding to a guiding question about the section theme. This approach was important from the beginning of this process, as it reflects and continues the commitment to dialogue so vital when bringing together work from various professional and academic worlds.

Throughout the conference and the editing of this special issue, we as editors have found ourselves consistently confronted by the centrality, and yet elusiveness, of the concepts of Other and otherness to our project. As we engaged with the authors and each other about these contributions, more and more questions presented themselves; another and another—an other and an other—emerged, giving rise to new connections and pathways of thought. To name something as other is arguably to fix it as such, and we are aware of the constant danger of objectifying and instrumentalizing that which we are attempting to locate and celebrate on its own terms and in its specificities. Our grounding in cultural materialism also reminds us that today's emergent is tomorrow's dominant (see Williams 1977); we time-stamp this publication in the era in which, as *New York Times* theatre writer Charles Isherwood put it (2014) and Charles Batson reminds us in his contribution here, "being a freak is practically the new normal." Subcultures are thriving in this globalized, neoliberal contemporary cultural moment;[6] individuals and communities of interest are finding their voice and mobilizing via mainstream and social media and other technologies of travel and communication. Movements such as Black Lives Matter are bringing the concerns of marginalized communities into the spotlight. Otherness, arguably, has gained a certain chic—but that is not making systemic injustice, inequity, and prejudice go away. This inquiry is responding to and doubtless part of this current interest in and celebration of difference as a positive disrupter of cultural norms. At the same time we work to keep socio-economic-material realities in our sights, and some of the research published here offers evidence of conditions of ongoing bias and inequity. The male domination of high-performance circus academies and institutions and the perpetuation of traditional gender roles in circus training, documented in Alisan Funk's article for this issue, reflect the patriarchal hierarchies of modern Western societies. As Olga Sorzano cautions in her contribution, the dominant narrative of social circus threatens to efface the contributions of individuals, organizations, and movements from the Global South, extending Western conceptions

of civilization and art-making that sideline and devalue the non-European. The previous lack of recognition for professional disabled circus artists who Katrina Carter writes back into the historical record here reflects the reality of lack of societal recognition for the other-than-able-bodied.

We invite you as readers, then, to consider the complexities of the elusive concept of otherness as you read the articles that follow, and which we introduce here now in each of their respective sections, led by the question which guided each group.

Gender and Difference in Contemporary Circus

Section Editor: *Karen Fricker*

Guiding question: *How are the circus practices you engage with as scholars and/or practitioners problematizing and/or extending conceptions of masculinity, and where within this might ideas of the female and the feminine emerge or be silenced?*

In "Gender Asymmetry and Circus Education," Alisan Funk presents her research on the gendered socialization of students "into the cultural, interpersonal, and professional behaviours of the contemporary circus market" (19). As this behavioural education is interwoven into the set of artistic and professional skills taught to students at circus school, "gender-based differential treatment has long-term repercussions on how circus performers will develop networks and professional environments," even when unintentionally or unconsciously imparted (19). One of Funk's central findings is the bottlenecking of female participation in circus activities as the students mature. While the majority of recreational circus students identify as female, Western circus schools have a majority of male graduates. Funk thus examines what occurs throughout the education process that causes the number of female participants to dwindle. She identifies a particular "creative masculinity" (27), encouraged during education and proliferated in the professional field, in which male circus artists develop close working relationships with other men, collaborating and forming companies with little to no female presence. Conversely, Funk describes the experiences of female artists, who are encouraged during their education into "static poses" (26) and solo acts dependent on intricate or expensive apparatuses, which serve to further alienate women from the possibility of collaboration in the professional realm, where funding and rehearsal and performance space can be scarce.

Given the gendered narratives interwoven throughout contemporary circus's increasing emphasis on thematic complexity and dramaturgical nuance, Funk's research is both essential and incendiary. Her meticulous analysis of gender disparity in circus education and its subsequent impact on employment provides vital context for the analyses of gender representation in this section and others. Let the findings of this article reverberate throughout the publication and circus studies more broadly. Make no mistake: Funk demonstrates that "a performer's gender is used as a proxy for aptitude," toward disciplines, ability, and worth (25).

This interplay of gender and discipline continues throughout Marion Guyez's "Carriers, Those Seeming Heroes: Might They Be But Ordinary Humans?" in which she explores the absence of women altogether in some contemporary circus. An underlying theme of Guyez's work is the efficacy and ethics of auto-theory and -fiction. She begins by auto-theorizing herself as an academic and circus artist, describing how both her sex and her gender—which she deftly differentiates—affect her work as an artist, an academic, and a woman. Guyez describes herself adjusting and readjusting her posture, "disequilibrium after disequilibrium," inviting us to read this "posture" as her navigation of the "powers of patriarchal and heteronormative domination that cut through the

circus (like the rest of society)" (36). This feminist auto-theory frames her subsequent analysis of the Swedish production *Undermän,* an acrobatic show about three male hand-to-hand carriers who have lost their female (artistic and romantic) partners. The absence of these female flyers, and the sense of loss this entails, acts as the focal point of *Undermän's* narrative, accentuated by semi-personal monologues from all three male performers. In *Undermän,* Guyez writes, the image of the heroic male carrier, veritably stiff with "virile masculinity," is undone to a certain extent. The three carriers, *sans* flyers, stage "a complex masculinity," in which they alternate between carrier and flyer in a climactic trio routine (38). The fluidity of this moment reveals a fragile nonheroism, a profound—and profoundly male—humanity.

One has to wonder, however—as Guyez does in her conclusion—about the deliberate invisibility of the female flyers and girlfriends, as it is doubtlessly their absence that enables this complex masculinity to emerge. Given that *Undermän* overtly blurs the line between the artistic and personal relationships of these undermen and their "overwomen" in the performance context, it is implied that a similar process in the so-called real world would elicit a similar anti-heroic masculine emergence. *Undermän* "eclipses the women and flyers, whose traces disappear," Guyez writes. Do women have to disappear without a trace for masculine sensitivity to be cultivated? "What happens to the flyers after the breakup?" (41). These questions about the absence of women become all the more pertinent in light of Funk's research on gender disparity in circus education and employment, but it is also important to note (and celebrate) Guyez's account of an emerging trend of circus groups featuring only women performers.

In "Cavalia's *Odysseo*: A Biopolitical Myth at Work," Ante Ursic proposes an "unworking" of modern circus. Drawing on the thought of Foucault and Nancy, Ursic explores "the spectacle of the biopolitical regime" in circus performances, concerned with stagings of discipline, docile, highly trained bodies (44). This modern circus, he writes, has served as "an apparatus of verification" in which the prevailing discourse of human exceptionalism dominates (44). In this narrative, the white, male, heterosexual body is superior to all others, which are in comparison feminized, racialized, exoticized, animalized. Ursic chooses *Odysseo,* Canadian company Cavalia's horse-human show depicting feats of profound equestrian virtuosity, as the centrepiece for his investigation of circassian[7] biopolitical myth. Through his analysis, Ursic finds ample evidence of this humanist narrative of (masculine) exceptionalism. He identifies the role of the horse performer as a key element, noting that horses have served as a crucial medium in both establishing a Western vision of masculinity and femininity and in producing an imperialist narrative of Western dominance. Ursic analyzes the nonhuman performer in relation to *Odysseo's* nonwhite performers—racialized, animalized, and in positions of overt subjugation to the predominantly white horseback riders.

Importantly, Ursic does not single out *Odysseo* as an exception to the myth-making of contemporary circuses. On the contrary: the major players in contemporary circus—the biggest, of course, being Cirque du Soleil—are constantly striving to create and evoke mythic qualities in their shows. These myths, Ursic writes, "are always in correspondence with a Western vision of humanity" (49). As a result, nonwhite and nonhuman performers—implicated with one another through processes of racist animalization—are the eternal "others" of these myths. In his final paragraphs Ursic urges the circus community to "become inoperative," and for its members to hold themselves accountable for "our complicity and participation in the mythation of the biopolitical regime" (49). As with so many contributors to this publication, Ursic holds a privileged position as both a circus scholar and artist; his call, then, for artists to acknowledge and resist their own role in reproducing "ableist,

animalizing, racializing, feminizing, and exoticizing practices" speaks across discursive and disciplinary borders.

Ursic's gauntlet in hand, we move to drag and gender subversion in Kristy Seymour's "*Briefs*: Bending Gender in Australian Contemporary Circus," taking Australia's queer burlesque circus collective Briefs Factory as her subject. She explores Briefs Factory's particular brand of gender subversion and play, which hinges on, firstly, parodic depictions of overly masculine imagery and physiques (the men are ripped, and the costumes are, as their name suggests, decidedly *brief*) and, secondly, fluid "transverse representations of gendered bodies" (53). Tropes of burlesque are in heavy use here, and the male body acts as a site of challenging and subverting its own supremacy, dragging gender and *dragging* itself.

In light of Briefs Factory's mostly male casts,[8] Funk's research on the lasting professional effects of gendered circus education could give a reader pause. Whatever other subversive work they may be doing, Briefs Factory can nonetheless be seen as reproducing and benefitting from the very same kind of "creative masculinity" that alienates women in circus. With these two factors existing side by side—the parodic teasing of traditional gender roles and this systemic and overtly gendered form of exclusive collaboration—one has to wonder which has the greater impact on an audience. Funk's research makes it clear that the kind of masculine camaraderie that contributes to the popularity of male troupes has a clear impact on the lives and livelihoods of circus artists outside the ring. In the face of their own—ultimately inescapable—masculinity and the biopolitical myth of Western male supremacy Ursic outlines in his article, is *Briefs'* subversive power all too brief? Nevertheless, and as Seymour demonstrates, *Briefs'* commitment to juggling celebratory fun, fluidic expression, and humour that "punches up" at dominant ideas of gender creates a space in which one can imagine such circassian subversions having a lasting effect, using the bodies of men to un-work the image and myth of the Western man—in circus, and elsewhere.

Reading Circus Bodies and Signs

Section Editor: Michael Eigtved

Guiding question: *How, in the circus practices you engage with as scholars and/or as practitioners, are spaces, objects, and the body-as-object regulated, regulatory, and/or Othered?*

This section provides semiotic and theatrical readings of circus productions, raising questions about the readability of circus bodies in relation to objects, apparatuses (both circus and socio-political), and one another. Michael Eigtved's "From Civilization to Regulation: Airports, Circus (Bodies), and the Battle over Control" takes the 2015 Danish production *Airport* as its subject matter, evoking French anthropologist Marc Augé's idea of "non-places" in his examination of the production's depiction of regulation, control, and freedom in an airport setting. The "port" in *Airport* serves as such a contradictory nonplace—both a site for supposed take-off and of seemingly limitless suspension—and the machine against which the circus bodies coded as "other" rage. Yet it is vital to problematize, and Eigtved does, this idea of circus as the lively, uncontainable, dissident force that disrupts the cold impersonality of globalized spaces and globalized life. Eigtved's reading prompts consideration of how the others that make up the cast of *Airport* conceptualize their resistance to the very site they work so hard to manufacture onstage. Perhaps the unproblematized assumption of the take-off-as-conclusion that closes out *Airport*—as if indeed such regulation stops once our feet leave the ground—supposes an escape from globalized mechanisms of control and observation that, while impossible in the quotidian, can be conceived by the alterity of circus bodies. While one might

wonder about the political efficacy of imagining a dismantling of systems of control through these circus bodies, Eigtved's reading demonstrates that the circus body can function as a distinct kind of signifier, inviting new readings of the surrounding world.

To speak of signifiers, Veronika Štefanová's short piece "In Search of the Dramatic Composition: A Contemporary Circus Performance as a Structure of Signs" makes a case for the use of theatrical semiotic inquiry when engaging in circus analysis, a process that is taken up by Eigtved and Franziska Trapp in this issue. Interestingly, rather than simply folding circus discourse into a larger theatrical framework, Štefanová stresses that the theatre and its critical tools must be made the "other" of circus studies. While semiotics no doubt has its limits in the face of the at-times overwhelming alterity of certain bodies and actions in circus—and might constitute a particular kind of de-barbing semiotic recapture—Štefanová's careful work enables a conceptualization of circus both in proximity to theatre and dance and decidedly different from them, decidedly *other*—and in so doing perhaps even inviting theatre semiotics to other itself.

Taking up this task, Trapp provides a semiotic reading of Claudio Stellato's *L'autre* in "Disrupting the Binary of Otherness." Here, Trapp explores the circus performer's body in relation to onstage objects, as well as the attributing of "reality, unreality, animality, abnormality, humanity, normality, and freakery to both me and the other" (76). The fluidity she identifies between subject-hood and object-hood in *L'autre* gestures to a larger question of the body-as-object in circus. If one's body can be squeezed into furniture, hung and swung from like lighting fixtures, and thrown about like cargo, what happens to one's singularity, to one's consciousness?

Similar queries emerge through Marcos Nery's "The Acrobat-Body: The *Other* Body." The hyphen Nery inserts in "acrobat-body" invites a fruitful engagement with the body of the circus acrobat as simultaneously subject and object. He stresses that the acrobat-body is not identical to the body *of* the acrobat, rooted in notions of strength, agility, risk, etc.; rather, acrobat-body is a concept that "allows [him] to signal the tensions between the artistic fields that interact in the interdisciplinary training of the performer" (78). The acrobat-body inhabits a deterritorializing space, a space of profound alterity, in which it is possible to imagine an understanding of the world "that begins as much from difference as from myself" (81). Can the notion of the acrobat-body perhaps assuage some of the anxieties prompted by the uneasy blurring of subject and object Trapp identifies in *L'autre?* Here we bump up against what might be a limitation—or limiting power—of semiotic inquiry: if the acrobat-body is not the body of the acrobat, but instead an idealized yet resolutely corporeal expression of alterity and deterritorialization, how can we read it as the signifier of a quotidian signified?

Aastha Gandhi's tracing of the complex and shifting dynamic of otherness in Indian circus points to another other—or, rather, Mother. "From Postcolonial to Neoliberal: Identifying the 'Other' Body in Indian Circus" explores the body of the Indian female circus artist under colonial rule and early postcolonialism of the early twentieth century, as well as under contemporary conditions of neoliberalism and globalization. The quasi-mythic figure of Mother India—which Gandhi identifies as a key element of the nationalistic narrative emerging during and after colonial rule—finds a home in Indian circus, where traditional dance and acrobatic skill commingle. Gandhi's historical analysis closes on a somewhat ironic note, as the globalization of artistic practice in the post-postcolonial, neoliberal moment has brought increasing numbers of international circus artists to India, relegating local female performers to roles of lesser prowess and skill. A curious theme throughout Gandhi's work is the unique relationship between whiteness and otherness in the context of colonial India.

She alludes to the near-exoticization of whiteness, a process that renders the body of the white circus performer as a kind of "other," even as the colonial context relies upon the universal equivalent of whiteness proposed by Frantz Fanon and invoked by Gandhi in this publication.

Here, the assumption that might otherwise weave its way through this issue is cautioned: "other" is not wholly synonymous with the outcast, the marginalized. Indeed, as we see in Eigtved's work on *Airport,* systems of control are all too well equipped to produce otherness to their benefit. How might we read *these* bodies, these sinister others?

Location, Locatedness, and Mobility

Section Editor: *L. Patrick Leroux*

Guiding question: *What is the relationship between location, mobility, and economic factors (from artist precarity to various forms of subsidy) in the circus practices you engage with as scholars and/or practitioners?*

In this section, contributors explore the roles of location, place, and movement in circus discourse. Elena Kreusch and Ilaria Bessone grapple with the uniquely nomadic lifestyles of so many circus artists, as well as the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of such a transient life under neoliberalism. In her article "Contemporary Circus Mobilities," Kreusch draws on interviews with Europe-based circus performers, exploring how mobility intersects with factors of location, geopolitical privilege, and economic precarity. A key element of Kreusch's point of departure is the distinction drawn between the "sedentarism" (93) characteristic of middle-class Western and Eurocentric life and the compulsory mobility of contemporary circus artists. Whereas the traditional circus model of past centuries mirrors a familial structure, with children being initiated into both circus skills and way of life at an early age, the majority of contemporary circus artists in the European context come from middle-class, and therefore sedentary, backgrounds and only interact with the transient nature of much circus work upon leaving school. Kreusch identifies and problematizes the "nostalgic and outdated travel and freedom narratives," which stylize circus life as "a counter-model to the corporate world and highly regimented 'office jobs'" (97). The circus artist, caught up in this dynamic, is coded as a "mobile other," the lived experiences and economic precarity of whom seem to be in "direct opposition to romanticized ideas of mobility [and] alternative lifestyles" (95).

Economic precarity in the neoliberal moment traces a worried line through Bessone's article "Contemporary Circus Careers: Labour Relations and Normative Selfhood in the Neoliberal Scenario." Here, Bessone argues that the economic and existential precarity resulting from the status of artistic labour in a neoliberal framework is emphasized in the case of contemporary circus. In light of Kreusch's exploration of nostalgic circus narratives, and despite the historical precarity of artistic work reaching far back in time, Bessone's claim that circus is paradigmatic of contemporary generalized economic insecurity gathers new weight. One might question the role of both these mobile circus others and the narratives of freedom produced around them in the regulation of the so-called "normies" inhabiting those office jobs, those service jobs. Might the sedentary but still precariously employed also be an other? For whom are these tales of freedom spun?

Magali Sizorn's article "What a Beard Can Do: Performative Frames and Public Tastes" sheds some light on these questions of narrative by exploring social participation in and identification with art and performance. Drawing on research questionnaires and interviews of attendees of the 2008

Automne en Normandie festival conducted by a team including herself, Sizorn examines the processes of alienation and identification undergone by festivalgoers. She identifies two productions in particular—the neoclassical ballet *Blanche Neige* (Snow White); and *L'éloge du Poil* (In Praise of Hair), reminiscent of fairground sideshows and traditional circus—that function as artistic barometers interviewees either identified their artistic tastes with or distanced themselves from. Jeanne Mordoj, *L'éloge du Poil's* star and one of several bearded ladies encountered in this issue,[9] emerges as a curious figure. Mordoj's beard plays with notions of the real (particularly as the beard *n'est pas une vraie barbe*—Mordoj herself is clean-shaven), performing "the gap between the appearance and the meaning" (106). Sizorn's work evokes questions of audience positionality—of their locatedness and, perhaps, their mobility. What does it mean for an audience to fall into this gap between appearance and meaning? Sizorn's analysis of public taste—and, specifically, a public taste for strangeness—works toward this question of audience locatedness by examining both *how* and *where* difference is perceived.

From autumn in Normandy to meeting in St. Louis: Jessica Hentoff, artistic director of Circus Harmony, a social circus organization based in Missouri, documents its work in "A Modern Version of Running Away and Joining the Circus: From Inner City to around the World," as well as the journey of one participant, Sidney "Iking" Bateman, from social circus to training at the National Circus School in Montreal and performing with Cirque du Soleil. Questions of location and privilege are raised here; while, as Kreusch expounds in her article, the location of available work has an impact on the life and career of practising circus artists, Hentoff reminds us that location also plays a role in dictating who even gets to take a stab *at* such tenuous work. Iking's is a success story, a success Hentoff understandably leans into in her piece, but one may query whether such a success is contingent on the *non*-success of his peers. Might a drive towards the romanticization of professional employment and acclaim work to reify binaries between social and professional circus? (The work of Sorzano and others in the section on social circus, and of Funk on the limited demographics of those entering circus education in the section on gender and difference, informs these concerns.)

Nevertheless, in the context of this section on locatedness and mobility, Hentoff's narration of the economic obstacles facing low-income youth receiving rigorous circus training and employment opportunities contextualizes the mobility of the circus artists explored in Kreusch's article. Does the comparative *im*mobility so often characteristic of low-income existence automatically bar people living in poverty from entering the world (or, indeed, the industry) of circus "proper"? Further, how can we celebrate achievements in the so-called professional circuit of those who have "come up through the ranks" of social circus, so to speak, without reifying the binary between them? Hentoff's narrative—and Iking's—provides ample ground in which to dig deeper into such questions.

Is Social Circus the Other of Professional Circus?

Section Editor: *David Fancy*

Guiding question: *If we accept that a binary exists within contemporary circus between professional and social circus, with professional circus inhabiting a position of power and authority, what are the implications of this from both sides of the binary, and can we envision a way out of this binary thinking?*

Articles in this section explore the contentious divide between social and professional circus practices, calling into question the borders drawn and maintained between the professional realm—inhabited, generally speaking, by thin, largely white, able-bodied performers—and the realm of social circus, which focuses on teaching circus fundamentals to marginalized communities at little to no

cost to participants. The robustness of the field of social circus and the debates within it were made manifest at the 2016 Montreal conference in a lunchtime panel discussion featuring seven presentations by scholars, artists, professionals, and trainers. In response, we commissioned not one but two full-length articles for the section as well as three shorter pieces.

When we conceived of the question that shaped the session and provides this section's title, we were aware of the hierarchization that exists within circus fields, with professional circus considered more prestigious and valuable than social circus practices. Olga Sorzano's contribution to the conference made clear that even more was at stake, in that the largely Western and Eurocentric realm of social circus appropriates its official narrative from Latin American initiatives to fight socio-political and cultural barriers imposed on low-income youth and communities—barriers which, Sorzano writes, are in part caused by the very Western and Eurocentric ideas of art and aesthetics that relegate social circus to a rung below professional circus. It felt imperative to provide Sorzano the full space of a longer piece to articulate her argument so as to intervene into what was in danger of cohering into an incomplete and inaccurate historical record, one that links social circus's origins to Cirque du Monde, the humanitarian arm of Cirque du Soleil (and therefore to the Global North). Sorzano combats this by documenting this "parallel history" (116) of social circus—an alternative circus movement in 1990s Latin America in which "young people living in difficult circumstances" were trained in circus skills with the goal of them being integrated "into society beyond a mere recreational or psychological tool," thus resisting a social work model in which those receiving the training were "depicted as potential victims or problematic entities in need of help" (118). Sorzano rigorously articulates the numerous factors which "diminish the real impact that social circus is having in breaking down cultural and political barriers and balancing the unequal global structures that resulted in the rise of the Western empire" (123).

This work of mapping and (re)making histories extends throughout all the articles in this section. Amy Cohen, executive director of the American Youth Circus Organization, writes about its ongoing Social Circus Initiative, a three-year plan to generate research that testifies to the efficacy of social circus, with the goal of "mobilizing the growth of social circus in the US" (135). As does Sorzano's, Cohen's article reveals the deep engagement/entanglement in social circus activities of Cirque du Soleil, which instigated and funded the Social Circus Initiative. Along the way—and read in light of Sorzano's research this is particularly significant—the Social Circus Initiative addressed a discrepancy amongst those involved in social circus in the US about exactly what the "social circus" classification meant, specifically, whether those participating in such activities needed to be disadvantaged. The Initiative clarified that American social circus is "a social change intervention that uses the circus arts as a tool for fostering the personal and social development of identified 'at risk' individuals" (135). This dovetails with Sorzano's account of Western-led understandings of the field as being focused not on professionalization but on doing social good. Cohen's article provides further information that complicates such an understanding, however. Because of the limited funding for professional arts in the US in comparison to "the educational and therapeutic realms," social circus offers a more viable career for Americans interested in the circus arts than does work as a professional circus performer—a fact that in its way offers a challenge to the binary that grants higher esteem and status to professional over social circus work. When viewed through this lens, so-called professional circus becomes the "other" in a hierarchy of possible viable employment.

Katrina Carter echoes concerns of in/visibility similar to Sorzano's in "Freaks No More: Rehistoricizing Disabled Circus Artists." While Carter does not deal with social circus per se, her historical work uncovers a similar parallel history of disabled circus performers whose pioneering

contributions to the professional field have been dismissed or ignored, so that the work of contemporary disabled circus artists is likely to be assumed part of a social circus practice, or heralded as pioneering. Touching on some of the histories, language, and conceptual work that shapes the freak and queer section of this publication, Carter demonstrates how the work of professional disabled circus artists in the past has been kept out of the historical record because they destabilized the received understanding of where such artists "belonged" in circus—that is, displayed in sideshows as freaks. Acknowledging this centuries-old tradition of professional disabled circus artists has the potential, Carter argues, to "realign and re-legitimize disabled circus practitioners within today's circus, not merely as social participants, but as artists" (141–42).

Bodily exceptionalism is also very much the focus of Shay Erlich's contribution, which comes in the form of a manifesto calling for a *Cyborg Circus Show* in which disabled and circus bodies come together in celebration of their shared existence "within or beyond normative bounds of 'humanity'" (149). Erlich calls on Haraway's conception of the cyborg as the human body mediated via technology to theorize their own experience as a hard of hearing, diabetic person dependent on an insulin pump for survival, who has found that entering the circus world offers a certain "liberation from bodily limitations"—but also a site of continued limitation of possibility and discrimination given the celebration (perhaps, Erlich hints, fetishization) of extreme physical virtuosity in this milieu. Via the utopic *Cyborg Circus Show* Erlich imaginatively moves beyond these barriers to consider ways in which "the juxtaposition of disabled cyborgs and über-abled circus performers can create opportunities for new partnerships and understandings" (149).

A similar vision of disabled and circus bodies mingling in a performance is realized in section editor David Fancy's full-length article. It takes as its jumping-off point his participation in the *Recounting Huronia* project, which used different forms of creative work, including circus, to assist survivors of the infamous Huronia residential facility for people with intellectual disabilities to "re-tell their experiences of institutionalization on their own terms" (152). Engaging deeply with the thought of Deleuze and Guattari, Fancy suggests that bringing together the "shared genealogies of disability and circus" might cast new light on and assist in disrupting binaries such as ab/normal, aesthetic/political, and mainstream/social circus. Working with Hurley's work on circus bodies, as do so many of this issue's authors, Fancy challenges (in a similar vein to Ursic, mentioned above) any rigid historicization which would distinguish the exceptionally trained and skilled circus bodies of today from born-different bodies displayed in sideshows: "the so-called freak, the exceptional body no matter its provenance, has been adeptly captured and capitalized upon from Barnum to [Cirque du Soleil founder Guy] Laliberté via cultivation of exotification and various subtle or unsubtle forms of minoritization that allow a ticket-buying public to be both alarmed but ultimately comforted by their own putative normativity" (156). Fancy, in essence, "freaks" the professional/social circus binary and proposes, in its place, a circus studies Body without Organs—a "postidentarian body . . . not reducible or recuperable to discourses of autonomy, self-governance, and separation" (152)—in which the very concept of Others that somehow belong to circus via the "Its" in our project title would become obsolete. Thought about in such post-identitarian, non-binary terms, Fancy asserts, circus is always already its others.

Freak and Queer

Section Editor: *Charles R. Batson*

Guiding question: *How are contemporary circus practices exploding or extending the stigmas around conceptions of freak and queer?*

A key concept in David Fancy's article is that of "enfreakment"—the processes of thought, feeling, and activity through which the "figure of the 'freak'" appears, processes that Fancy associates with "mythologizations and minoritizations" (151). Freaks aren't born but imagined: they represent whatever mainstream society considers nonnormative; they are whatever the mainstream is currently constructing as Other, which produces and secures its so-called normality. The exploration of such processes is at the heart of the issue's final section, the format of which section editor Charles Batson and its three writers have, appropriately, enfreaked. "Let's do this queerly," was Batson's invitation to his graduate student cowriters, who each wrote 3,200–3,800-word pieces around which Batson wraps his introductions-cum-essay-cum-musings on the elusiveness of the queer. Each of the pieces examines "the risks of the queer circus arts," and each in its way comes at the question which is so much at the heart of this inquiry overall: If freakishness is "'the new normal,' can we say that the freak is still freakish, that the queer is still queer?" (166). Here Batson explicates the position with which we began this introduction: invoking Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, he presents himself as a reparative reader, always seeking out ways in which a cultural text "could, through meanings proffered in vocabularies of affect, offer sustenance even to readers not avowedly sustained by the culture surrounding that text," as when he finds queerness in a circus performance thanks to "the very non-commonplace of the spectacle, even as gender roles and gendered expressions . . . repeat heterosexist codes from beyond the stage" (163–64). The task he sets himself here is to use those lenses to "look critically for and at contemporary circus's queer shapes, figures, and impulses." He does so by way of discussions of Jean Cocteau's essay "Le numéro Barbette" and contemporary queer writer Mark Franko's response to it; contemporary French transgender artist Phia Ménard's performance *P.P.P.*; and the 2014 Montreal queer-themed cabaret circus show *Les Précieuses des nuits de Montréal*, which by his reckoning and remarkably, is one of the few queer circus shows ever to be staged in that city.

All of the offerings in the section engage with the notion of queer as a doing rather than a being, and each of the three shorter contributions hinges around the verbing (if you will) of certain key nouns: grotesquing, burlesquing, inviting. Hayley Malouin's contribution, "Queer Hatchings: Carnival Time and the Grotesque in Circus Amok," analyzes the work of that New York-based queer circus company, arguing that it engages with the grotesque as a subversive strategy of socio-political commentary. Circus Amok's strategies of the grotesque start (but far from end) with the self-performance of the company's artistic director Jennifer Miller, a woman with a beard, whose reappropriation of this sideshow figure as the ringmaster is a carnivalesque inversion demonstrating the monstrosity not of Miller but "of the normative society" (168) which would so marginalize and objectify someone/s on account of their perceived difference (readers can encounter Miller in her video introduction to this special issue). As Malouin carefully argues, we must be cautious not to equate queer and grotesque but rather see them as engaged in a mutually informing and generative process of always-becoming. This is a delicate balance that, in Malouin's argument, Circus Amok achieves through its use of "'queer celebratory spectacle'" which "prevents both apathetic cynicism and the seemingly inevitable marginalization of the grotesque body" (174).

As does Malouin, Kelly Richmond explores performative additions to circus which provide the capacity for a critique of the normative. For Richmond, that performative addition arrives very specifically in the Australian troupe Circa's production *Wunderkammer* in the form of "flashing talons of a pair of high heels suspended in a dark abyss" (177). Following Butler, Richmond argues that Circa burlesques circus by using "exaggerated theatricality" to "critique . . . sexual norms," as when its performer Freyja Edney, wearing those cherry-red talon heels, steps into the mouth of her acrobatic partner, a gesture "loaded with meanings that tie together and burst apart gender, desirability, arousal, agency, and circus" (177). A queering and burlesquing is achieved of the "illusion of ease" which Stoddart argues is at the basis of circus artistry (2000, 175): feminine sexuality and the woman as the object-to-be-looked-at are disrupted by the act of Edney giving her weight, dangerously, to her partner through that step.

Richmond finds much to (queerly) celebrate in Circa's practices, full as they are of kinky, carnivalesque inversions. The affect of their performance "offer[s] a way of desiring against the revealed normativity of circus" (182) and presents itself as a kind of queer utopia. Taylor Zajdlik evokes another utopic encounter with queerness and circus in his narrative of viewing Circus Sessions II, a 2016 workshop and performance in Toronto that threw him "into an unfamiliar state of re-evaluation" (187). Zajdlik, a newcomer to circus and to queer studies, discovered them hand-in-hand at the Sessions, which revealed to him the "possibilities of showcasing the performativity, potentiality, and malleability of the human form, especially relating to gender." Zajdlik focuses in particular on a duet by two men, Roy Gomez Cruz and Yuri Ruzhyev, which, "by calling out and undermining strict gender positions through the use of drag, makeup, and camp performance . . . challenged heteronormative gender roles by displaying the possibility of the erasure of fixed physical difference." What Zajdlik celebrates in his account is not only the skill and inventiveness of the performers but the "sense of community" between them and with their audience, into which he felt invited and welcomed, which further "made the show's transgressive themes reverberate and resound" (190).

The Future of Others

As we complete the editing of this special issue, planning is well underway for the second international Circus and Its Others conference, to be held in August 2018 in Prague, hosted by Cirqueon (an umbrella organization for the support and development of contemporary circus in the Czech Republic) and Charles University and in the context of the Letní Letná circus festival. The response to the Prague call for papers was considerable—nearly double the number of submissions to that for the Montreal conference just two years earlier. While we framed this call around the five subject areas articulated in this issue, it is possible that the themes and foci of the Prague event will be different, in response to the ideas, experiences, and provocations brought forward by those stepping forward to participate. Another publication, likely an edited volume, will result from that conference, and several bids are being fielded for a 2020 conference.

More others, different others. Clearly, this inquiry has struck a nerve and provided a means for interested scholars, artists, and producers to bring their research and concerns about the location, identifications, and problematics of alterity in contemporary circus together with those who understand the stakes involved. Given these stakes and the fast-moving nature of the field, we cannot predict what the inquiry will look like in the years to come.

It's a fitting unknowingness, as these uncategorizable others continue to evade capture. The fear with projects such as this is that the discomfort prompted by this unknowability will nudge it further and further towards one or another understanding of the others explored in this issue and the project more broadly. The reductive comfort of such a gesture lurks ever-present, just the (if you'll permit us) "other side" of these others, waiting to capture, to reduce, to stratify. As circus research continues to expand as a discipline, and as an interweaving community of scholars and artists, the question of who remains outside becomes more and more pressing. An insistence on plurality—*others,* not other—is thus imperative moving forward. Not the other, but the *others* of, in, about circus.

Notes

1. We would like to thank two anonymous peer reviewers for their very productive comments on this introduction, and on all the articles in the issue.

2. MCC is the first North American international festival dedicated to circus arts. It was founded in 2010 by TOHU, a permanent in-the-round venue dedicated to contemporary circus, in partnership with the circus companies Cirque du Soleil, Cirque Éloize, and les 7 Doigts de la Main, and the national circus network En Piste.

3. This terminology is glossed and problematized extensively in the articles that follow, but for the present, we can understand social circus as the use of the circus arts in the context of social justice, education, and empowerment of at-risk populations; and professional circus as that performed for ticket-buying audiences by trained, paid artists.

4. Lepage is the artistic director of Ex Machina, a not-for-profit multidisciplinary company based in Quebec City.

5. The exception is "Location, Locatedness, Mobility." An unexpected last-minute problem led to the longer contribution to this section not being submitted.

6. By neoliberalism, we refer to "the revived form of liberalism which thrived first in Britain in the seventeenth century and which recognizes and prioritizes the individual's right to seek self-fulfilment and to do so in conditions unrestricted by state-instituted regulations, such as the requirements to play appropriate taxes, to heed trade restrictions or to observe employment laws pertaining to hiring, firing, and paying workers" (Harvie 2013, 12). Articles by Bessone, Kreusch, and Gandhi in this issue are particularly focused on the effects of neoliberal capitalism on circus practices and practitioners.

7. We intend *circassian* here to mean "of the circus." This usage derives from the French *circassien*, which has become a familiar term in Francophone circus studies, in both its adjectival form and as a noun to indicate a person who works in the circus. The word *circassien* appears fourteen times in the online resource "les arts du cirque"—a shared project between the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Centre national des arts du Cirque, also in France. *Circassien* started to appear with increasing frequency in North American Francophone circus studies after 2000: Marie-Christine Lesage and Dominique Lafon titled the introduction to a special issue (32, 2002) of the peer-reviewed journal *L'annuaire théâtrale*, about the relationship of circus to theatricality, "Aspects théâtraux, culturels et historiques de l'univers circassien"; and Erin Hurley uses the term in her seminal article "Les corps multiples du Cirque du Soleil," in *Globe 11.2* (2008). The title of a 2018 article by Luke Hallgarten on the website *The Circus Diaries* proclaims "Long Live the Circassian" and defines the term as "Noun: circassian; plural noun: circassians. 1. A person whose primary activity or profession is circus"—an indication that the term is migrating into English usage. It is also important to note that the word *Circassian* refers, in its *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, to "a group of mainly Sunni Muslim peoples of north-western Caucasus," and that people from Circassia are implicated in the now-discredited practice, from the heyday of modern circus, of the display of human bodies deemed "other" by the white mainstream. As Robert Bogdan argues in "Race, Showmen, Disability, and the Freak Show," "Circassian Beauties"—

attractive women wearing "flowing garments, and teased, frizzled, bushy, dark hair," who may or may not actually have been from Circassia—were commonplace in American freak shows of the 1880s, having first been introduced as human exhibitions by P. T. Barnum in his American Museum Hall of Human Curiosities in 1864 (2014, 200, 201). Future research might further explore the connection of this historic display of othered bodies to the terms *circassian/ien*, which are gaining increasing purchase in contemporary circus practice and studies.

8. While Briefs Factory made its name with cabaret shows featuring male performers in drag, as of early 2018 the creative collective includes the cabaret artist Yana Alana (the alter ego of female singer Sara Ward), and Hot Brown Honey, a cabaret/dance ensemble of Indigenous women and women of colour (see briefsfactory.com and Smith 2017).

9. See also Malouin's "Queer Hatchings: Carnival Time and the Grotesque in Circus Amok" in this issue which includes discussion of the bearded performer Jennifer Miller.

References

Adams, Rachel. 2001. *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imaginary*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1968. *Rabelais and His World*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Bogdan, Robert. 2014. "Race, Showmen, Disability, and the Freak Show." In *The Invention of Race: Scientific and Popular Representations*, edited by Nicolas Bancel, Thomas David, and Dominic Thomas, 195–208. New York: Routledge.

Bouissac, Paul. 1976. *Circus and Culture: A Semiotic Approach*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Davis, Janet. 2002. *The Circus Age: Culture and Society Under the American Big Top*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Hallgarten, Luke. 2018. "Long Live the Circassian." *The Circus Diaries*, March 18, 2018. https://www.thecircusdiaries.com/2018/03/18/long-live-the-circassian/.

Harvie, Jen. 2013. *Fair Play—Art, Performance, and Neoliberalism*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Harvie, Jennifer, and Erin Hurley. 1999. "States of Play: Locating Québec in the Performances of Robert Lepage, Ex Machina, and the Cirque du Soleil." *Theatre Journal* 51 (3): 299–315. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25068678.

Hurley, Erin. 2011. *National Performance. Representing Quebec from Expo 67 to Céline Dion*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Isherwood, Charles. 2014. "United by Life, Divided by Dreams." *New York Times*, November 17.

Jacob, Pascal. 2016. "The Québécois Circus in the Concert of Nations: Exchange and Transversality." Translated by Tiffany Templeton. In *Cirque Global: Quebec's Expanding Circus Boundaries*, edited by L. Patrick Leroux and Charles R. Batson, 25–35. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Leroux, L. Patrick. 2016. "Reinventing Tradition, Building a Field: Québec Circus and its Scholarship." In *Cirque Global: Quebec's Expanding Circus Boundaries*, 3–21.

Leslie, Deborah, and Norma M. Rantisi. 2016. "Creativity and Place in the Evolution of a Cultural Industry: The Case of Cirque du Soleil." In *Cirque Global: Quebec's Expanding Circus Boundaries*, 223–39.

Montréal Complètement Cirque. 2017. "About." Last modified December 8, 2017. https://montrealcompletementcirque.com/en/about/.

Smith, Janet. 2017. "Hot Brown Honey Women Finally Take Centre Stage to Smash Stereotypes." *The Georgia Strait*, December 17. https://www.straight.com/arts/1011811/hot-brown-honey-women-finally-take-centre-stage-smash-stereotypes.

Stoddart, Helen. 2001. *Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gender Asymmetry and Circus Education

Alisan Funk

The relatively recent global rise of professionalizing circus schools has both reflected and created the evolving landscape of contemporary circus performance. Many types of circus education exist today and can be found in most countries around the world. While students attend professionalizing circus schools to develop an artistic vocabulary, they also learn career management and become socialized into the norms of the circus industry.[1] A list of these schools can be found on the European Federation of Circus Schools' website,[2] along with other types of circus programs worldwide (European Federation of Professional Circus Schools 2008a). This paper discusses asymmetrical gender treatment in circus schools where graduates obtain both an academic diploma and the competencies to begin a professional career in circus arts.

While attending circus school, students are being socialized into the cultural, interpersonal, and professional behaviours of the contemporary circus market (Herman 2009). The behaviours students learn in circus school will influence how they pursue work and behave in professional settings. These behaviours will inform their expectations regarding peers, employers, and other artists. Even when unintentional, therefore, gender-based differential treatment has long-term repercussions on how circus performers will develop networks and professional environments.

There are several key ways in which gender stereotypes affect circus education. One of these is gender ratios; many of the most competitive[3] Western (European and North American) circus schools have a majority of male graduates even though most recreational circus students identify as female (Salaméro 2009; Davis and Agans 2014). Second, gender-based divisions in discipline choice affect employment opportunity and income potential (Garcia 2011; Cordier 2007). Finally, gender-differentiated teaching strategies seem to be reproducing stereotypical gender roles regarding risk management, which in turn influences how a student pursues technical development of their skills (Legendre 2014; Lafollie 2015).

This paper summarizes the rise of professionalizing circus schools and explores key critiques levied at circus educational systems through the lens of gender equality. I then expand the scope of investigation to consider, from the perspective of circus schools, what factors might predicate gender disparity in circus education. In conclusion, I explore what actions can be taken by circus schools, circus students, and the circus community to favour gender parity.

A Brief Overview of Circus Education

Public access to circus training is relatively new; circus has traditionally been a closed community (Achard 2001). Until recently, the primary predictor for working in the circus was being born into a circus family. Formal circus education arrived in the Western hemisphere, from the Eastern Bloc, near the end of the Cold War when the first two European schools opened in 1974 (Vitali and Goudard 2009; Leroux 2014). Currently, many countries offer accredited, professional circus

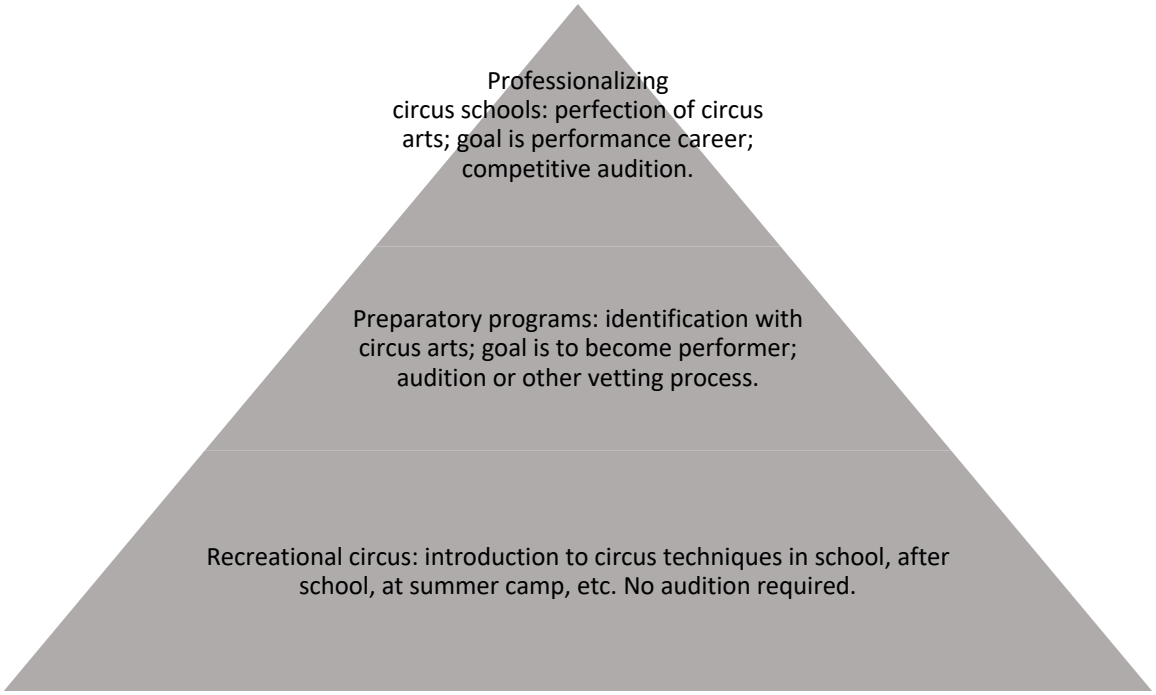
Alisan Funk is a Montreal circus coach, performer, and creator currently pursuing her PhD in education at McGill University. She has an MA from Concordia studying circus education and works as a research assistant on multiple projects examining technical and creative aspects of circus, theatre, and physical literacy.

education, including degree-granting circus schools for undergraduate and higher education (European Federation of Professional Circus Schools 2008a). These schools have comprehensive full-time programs that generally last three years and are dedicated to preparing their students for entry into the professional performance market. The curriculum is devised to both meet core academic requirements and instruct the necessary artistic and physical skills to pursue a circus career as a performing artist. Courses at circus schools include circus techniques, acrobatics, flexibility and physical preparation, dance, theatre, creation workshops, improvisation, music, circus history, career management, and often stage techniques like costume and makeup (Funk 2017). Most circus artists entering the market learn their trade within these types of programs, though schools are not the only way to become a professional performer.[4] Thanks to structured programs like these, data is increasingly available about circus education.

An argument can be made that, by providing a creative crucible for artistic exploration, circus schools were a key progenitor of the contemporary circus movement. Although the firmly established image of tents, animals, clowns, and sequins may still come to mind when one hears the word *circus*, contemporary circus is characterized by a rise in human-centred shows with an artistic focus including emotional nuance, narrative arc, and cross-disciplinarity with dance, theatre, and music. Currently, contemporary and traditional styles exist side-by-side and share many similarities, including the types of activities that are considered circus. Because of the nature of contract work, circus artists are likely to perform in both traditional and contemporary circus contexts during their career, as well as cabaret, theatre, and street performance scenarios. The research presented here addresses contemporary circus education, which is strongly correlated with contemporary circus performance and rejection of the aesthetic, racialized, and gendered roles that typify traditional circus.

Some countries, like France, have well-established, formal trajectories for circus education, traversing all stages of talent development, from the early years to professionalization (Bloom and Sosniak 1985). In the West, France is regarded as the gold standard for circus education because healthy funding, ample educational trajectories, and social support have led to a thriving and diverse circus culture (Coudert 2013; European Federation of Professional Circus Schools 2008b). French researchers have therefore provided essential foundational studies of circus arts, which in turn provide the critical first steps toward further investigation of contemporary circus internationally.

In other countries, students participate in recreational courses until they are able to audition for an accredited school, either in their own country or another one. The educational channel toward a circus career is pyramidal in structure, both regarding the number of programs available and the number of students in those programs.



This pyramid starts with recreational classes, ideally at the primary and middle school ages.[5] When the student decides to pursue a career in circus, they audition for preparatory or preprofessional schools, which provide focused training, generally associated with the early high school (secondary) years. Finally, auditions for the relatively few professional schools narrow the field into those who enter directly into the job market. Because circus schools strongly favour solo or small group acts, they often have a 1:1 or 1:2 student-to-instructor ratio, and the average size of graduating classes from the five most internationally-known programs between the years 2010–17 is only eighteen students.[6] The audition process to access accredited circus schools is highly competitive.

Implicit and Explicit Learning in Circus Schools

Circus school curricula can be weighed and understood through models proposed by curriculum theorists (Langlois 2014; Funk 2017). Eisner describes the explicit curriculum as "an educational menu of sorts; [the school] advertises what it is prepared to provide" (Eisner 2002, 88). Circus schools teach the tools of the trade and also socialize students into the interpersonal and professional behaviours of contemporary circus. While each program has unique qualities, students will experience many of the same learning categories. Circus technique is a priority: all of these schools teach both focused work in specific disciplines and general circus knowledge, usually with an acrobatic base. Other performance techniques like dance, theatre, music, and voice are usually part of the curriculum. Beyond performance disciplines, students have coursework in career management, training hygiene, entrepreneurship, and core academic courses like philosophy, languages, and art history (Funk 2017).

Circus students learn techniques and tools for their future career through both formal (explicit) and informal (implicit) knowledge pathways (Legendre 2014; Langlois 2014). The explicit/formal curriculum is the sum of courses, content, and objectives written in the curriculum for a program. The implicit curriculum defines everything students learn *in addition* to the explicit content described

by a school. This implicit, or hidden, curriculum "socializes [students] to values that are a part of the structure of those places" (Eisner 2002, 88). It is through these values that circus students learn about their career and professional behaviour.

Amanda Langlois conducted the first curricular research on circus schools in North America through interviews with graduates of Montreal's École nationale de cirque (ENC). Seven professional performers, one male and one female from the major circus disciplinary domains of Aerial Acrobatics, Ground Acrobatics, Balance, and one male graduate from Juggling (about which more will be written later), voiced their perceptions of the ENC curriculum, their expectations, and how it related to their careers. Among the many insightful themes that surfaced, Langlois observed that graduates experienced building a new "circus family" while at school (Langlois 2014, 91). This "family" consisted of their peers and, most often, their primary technique coach, and established both an emotional support system in a fragile profession and a network of qualified peers who became sources of performance work. Langlois describes this process as "embracing circus life," which includes learning and "abiding by unspoken rules" (the implicit curriculum) and "developing a circus identity" wherein the students describe defining themselves against both traditional circus and other performing arts through their education (60). These sustained interactions with their primary coach regarding aesthetic decisions, risk management, and gender roles serve as modes of informal knowledge transmission. Investigating asymmetrical gender expectations and experiences, transmitted through the implicit curriculum, provides a platform for educators to evaluate and assess not what schools teach, but rather what students learn.

Evidence of Gender Asymmetry in Circus Schools

Some examples of differential gender expectations are glaring while others are more subtle. For instance, Montreal's ENC graduated its first, and only, female juggling specialist in 2016 (Langlois 2014; "École Nationale de Cirque | National Circus School" 2016). With an average of twenty-four students per year graduating from the ENC, whose mission purports innovation in contemporary circus, the fact of only one female juggler in over thirty years begs inquiry into the implicit gender norms being transmitted through the audition and education process. It seems impossible that there could be an explanation other than an industry desire to preserve stereotypical roles for female and male artists.

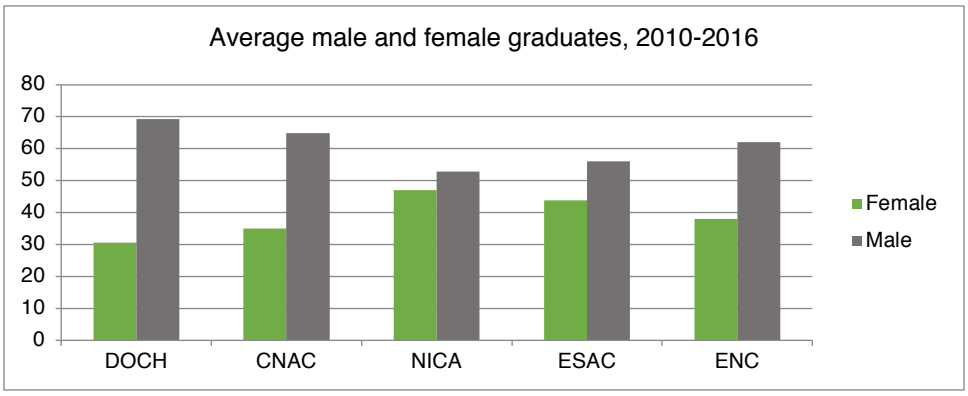
At first glance, this type of evidence makes it easy to criticize circus schools. Yet there is much more complexity than first meets the eye. As evidence of gender asymmetry comes to light, then, we must be encouraged to consider implicit student, administrative, and structural reinforcement of that asymmetry so that explicit, and more conscious, choices can be pursued in the future. Taking into consideration the goals and constraints of professionalizing circus programs offers one pathway toward discovering potential solutions.

Gender Ratio

The most visible form of gender asymmetry within circus programs is the significantly greater percentage of male students. All circus programs with a goal of forming/supporting professional circus artists have an audition and application process. Although each school has variations, criteria for entry globally consider physical fitness, anatomical structure, performance ability, artistic ability, creative ability, personality, student goals, and completion of prerequisite academic work. And while each school has certain differentiating characteristics, one striking similarity among all

professionalizing circus programs is the consistently higher rate of male graduates. Researchers found that both the student and staff populations of preparatory and professional circus schools in France were 70 percent male (Salaméro 2009, 411; Cordier 2007, 88). Emilie Salaméro notes that the CNAC graduating classes had between zero and 32 percent female artists from 1989, with 2006 representing the only year where female students outnumbered male students (411). Unsurprisingly, analysis of working circus artists in France showed 70 percent male representation and a negligible number of women in creative, production, and artistic direction roles (Salaméro and Haschar-Noé 2008, 95).

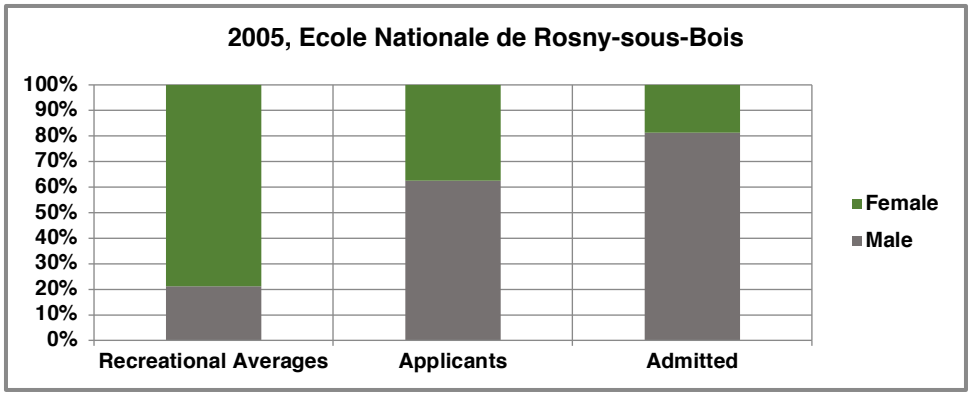
Average gender ratios from 2010–16 for graduates in five of the most competitive circus schools worldwide show a similar pattern. Overall, graduates are 60 percent male, which, while not quite as extreme as the earlier French graduate numbers, is still exclusively weighted toward male graduates.



Data from respective school websites and available Internet data gathered by A. Funk in March 2017.

How to account for this disparity? Are there simply fewer female students interested in circus arts? Multiple authors have noted a majority of female practitioners in recreational circus programs, anywhere from 60 to 90 percent of the student population (Salaméro 2009; Davis and Agans 2014). It seems likely that the interested population exists, which points to a blockage somewhere between recreational interest and career aspirations.

Research from France suggests the on-site audition as the key bottleneck moment. Salaméro gives the example of the ENACR's 2005 class: female hopefuls made up 33.6 percent of applicants and 37.6 percent of those selected for auditions but were only 18.7 percent of accepted students (2009, 415). By comparison, 66.4 percent of the initial applicants were male and 81.2 percent of the admissions. These rates are one example from one school for one year; however, they seem to mirror the stages where female matriculation drops away. At the very least, more research would help to better understand these statistics or clarify if this pattern is being challenged.



Source: Salaméro (2009).

What possible reason, other than discrimination, could account for this pattern? Although each school develops its own curriculum, culture, and networks, there are many commonalities between professionalizing circus schools in the Western hemisphere. Circus schools take seriously their responsibility to their students; they accept students who have the capacity to complete the program and go on to a professional career in circus arts. For this reason, they consider the student who enters the school, the artist who will graduate, and the industry that they will be entering. In the rapidly changing circus industry, circus educators are tasked with considering available work while simultaneously predicting how to provide their students with the tools to create an as-yet-unknown future of circus performance. Educators also know that working in circus is emotionally and physically demanding; their graduates must be resilient, autonomous, perseverant, and skilled in order to maintain job opportunities (Funk 2017).

It seems reasonable, then, that circus schools would value physically and psychologically healthy students who have attributes enabling technical multidisciplinarity and the ability to collaborate. Circus schools therefore select candidates who present as able to learn the physical, artistic, and psychological qualities necessary to earn work opportunities in a precarious career. These tools will likely include the ability to compellingly perform more than one circus technique, knowledge of injury prevention and healthy training practices, and, functionally, a body which learns effectively, retains information, and is not prone to injury. The student's history of movement, as well as their genetic attributes, will play a role in how they manage physical risk during the acquisition of circus techniques.

It seems unlikely that circus schools assume that female students *as a category* are less likely to achieve the necessary curricular and professional requirements. After all, there have been many successful female artists, creators, and directors. Outside of circus, there are also many examples of accomplished female gymnasts, skaters, divers, and athletes. Therefore, we must look elsewhere for roadblocks to more egalitarian representation in circus schools.

Gendered Discipline Choice

Most circus artists choose a specific discipline for their specialization. These disciplines come with years (sometimes centuries) of assumptions and habits about what type of body should perform them and how gender can be encoded into the performance of that discipline. Pioneering circus scholar Peta Tait, in her excellent treatise on gender in the traditional circus, observes that stylized costumes and hyperstereotypical movement flourishes evolved in order to communicate gender to spectators; the triple somersault on flying trapeze has no gender, and the body which accomplishes it

must be strong, flexible, and have appropriate proportions for the catcher, regardless of gender (Tait 2005). Therefore, performers project their attributes through costume choice and their "*style*," the way that they pose, wave, and interact with the audience while on the flying platforms. Aesthetic gendered affectations have been an integral part of circus spectacles and are often continued to this day, with female aerialists emphasizing flexibility and male aerialists emphasizing strength positions.

Marine Cordier further describes gendered performance in the traditional circus by revealing how male bodies are aesthetically coded to demonstrate "heroic" strength and risk-taking while female artists are encouraged toward showcasing their "supposed grace and natural flexibility" (2007, 80).[7] She also notes that female artists were guided toward solo work, for instance contortion, while male performers were often part of a troupe, such as Flying Trapeze or teeterboard. Male and female performers were thereby encouraged into different disciplines. Additionally, within certain circus disciplines, individual tricks evolved to be read as masculine or feminine and are still dominantly performed by those genders in a traditional show. To illustrate, in many flying trapeze performances the female flyer will perform an inverted split under the bar before being caught, a trick rarely done by male performers. It is a relatively easy trick for professional performers, in an industry where flexibility is regularly trained, therefore the only real difference when choosing the trick is gender. While contemporary circus ostensibly does not ascribe to these gender stereotypes and in fact many performers and companies actively challenge them, discipline choice remains surprisingly gendered.

The traditionally established "gender"[8] of circus apparatus and tricks is still being implicitly transmitted within circus schools. In Langlois' study, one male student remarked that he "didn't know aerials [was] a gay thing until I moved here" (2014, 99). In this case, because aerial disciplines[9] were considered by his peers and educators to be a feminine discipline, his interest in performing an aerial discipline was perceived as feminizing him. Performing aerials was therefore seen as "gay," despite having no relationship to his sexuality. Aesthetic traditions like this are implicitly taught in a variety of ways, both by students and circus teachers. Students from the ENC described an emphasis on their physical appearance as "an unspoken rule" learned while at school through observations that "those who were better looking tended to be favoured by the school, and employed more often" (98).

More subtle, however, is the way a performer's gender is used as a proxy for aptitude toward specific disciplines. Marie-Carmen Garcia observes that both coaches and students in circus school believe that male and female students "naturally" have different specialties. Through a series of interviews, Garcia finds that

> For coaches, physicality has different importance depending upon the sex of the students. While dexterity and muscularity appear as "workable" (for "masculine" disciplines or those connoted as "neutral"), weight and size are seen as permanent (being small is an asset for many "feminine" disciplines). (2011, 90)[10]

The male student's "muscularity" can be trained into a variety of potential disciplines while the female student's size predisposes her to be encouraged into specific disciplines. If the female student is small, she will become a *flyer*, lifted in a hand-to-hand act or tossed about as the only female member of a banquine,[11] swinging trapeze, teeterboard, or similarly acrobatic troupe. If she is not small, not portable, she will be encouraged toward a preconceived idea of a feminine solo discipline, not toward being the *lifter*, nor toward the diversity of acrobatic and object manipulation disciplines.

Gendered assumptions about stamina and performance longevity are also present in the circus community. Some administrators in my 2017 study of Quebec circus schools spoke of male peers still performing acrobatics in their fifties while female peers had long since stopped that type of career. While they acknowledged that performers must have "luck" and good "training hygiene," there was tacit awareness that differential gender experiences will impact each student's career trajectory (Funk 2017).

Furthermore, discipline choice affects the type of injuries a performer is likely to accrue. Reciprocally, surveying injuries can tell the researcher what type of discipline an artist is practising. Investigations of injuries in circus schools are sparse. Those which exist, however, show consistently lower rates of injury than would be expected when based on sports models (Shrier et al. 2009; Hamilton 2009). In circus school studies, "results indicated that there is no gender-based difference in the overall rate of injury" (Munro 2014, 253). However, reports from both schools and professional artists indicate that "there are gender specific differences as to the location of injuries" (Wanke et al. 2012, 153). The consistently "higher rates of hip injuries" in female students reinforces observations of gendered discipline choices. The NICA students are again replicating an emphasis on flexibility and static poses for female students and dynamic, powerful, acrobatic skill sets for male students,

> with many more females undertaking extreme contortion and flexibility training during their time at NICA compared to males. . . . Although not exclusively, male students often undertake specialty training that places high loads on the lower arm (e.g., handstands, straps, Chinese pole, and base work in adagio). Male students will typically engage in more training activities and specialties that place high loads on the ankle, such as tetaboard [sic], tumbling, and high-impact landings. (Munro 2014, 239)

Although the injuries for one sex are not more severe than for the other, they demonstrate quantitatively that male and female students are still pursuing traditionally gendered discipline choices. It is less clear whether the origin of these choices lies with the students or with the teachers.

Employment Ramifications

Naturalizing an anatomical divide between "male" and "female" expertise disguises real financial and career consequences which have a lasting impact on female presence and income in the workforce. Discipline choice predicts future training and working environments for contemporary circus performers because the technical needs of the equipment influence whether the act will be hired by restricting when and where an artist can train to maintain or develop their specialty. This is because, when training, an aerial apparatus requires a space with adequate height, a sound structure for rigging, a means of accessing the rigging points and adjusting the height of the equipment, and mats to place under the equipment during training. The artist may also require a spotting line,[12] which entails additional rigging and a qualified person to *pull* the spotting line. These spaces can be expensive to rent, complicated to access, and have limited availability, whereas a juggler can generally train fundamental elements in any space or outside, reducing expense and scheduling constraints.

These expenses can carry forward into the work environment: in order to incorporate rigged equipment, a show must be able to provide consistent, safe rigging points, hire a head rigger to ensure safety, and only work with venues that meet the requirements. As contemporary circus leaves circus-specific locations such as tents, artists and producers must negotiate for venues able to

accommodate complex rigging needs. These venues are often large and established, and therefore expensive to rent and potentially less amenable to experimental work. Easier then, perhaps, to avoid complex rigging and not hire the expensive solo act, reducing work opportunities for the heavily female disciplines. Discipline choice therefore directly impacts earning potential because:

A. Female students are often encouraged into solo disciplines with heavy equipment requirements such as aerial work and tight-wire.
B. These disciplines are more complicated to rig and therefore more expensive to train, which increases the cost of maintaining performance readiness.
C. Those same reasons make these disciplines more difficult to employ because not every venue can accommodate the requirements nor every show has the budget to transport equipment and hire appropriate technical support.
D. These factors conspire to leave female artists with fewer net earnings.

Therefore, even if a solo juggler and solo aerialist are paid the same, the aerialist must spend more money for quotidian training expenses, functionally reducing their income.

A cursory glance at contemporary circus companies shows that within majority male casts, the lone female soloist is still far too frequent.[13] And while it is nearly impossible to find all-female troupes, the preponderance of all-male and male-dominated troupes persists.[14] In addition to the asymmetrical gender make-up of circus schools, a shift in methods for act and show creation may also be a contributing factor (Cordier 2007, 83).

Small-group collective creation has become the staple of creative instruction within circus schools and a common methodology for generating material in professional shows. This deviates from a more traditional focus on a hierarchical ordering of tricks for maximum audience impact. Collective creation is usually centred on acrobatic research and creation, seen in shows such as Barely Methodical Troupe's *Bromance*, Casus' *Kneedeep,* and Throw2Catch's *Made in Kouglistan.* Three factors contribute to troupes born of collective creation skewing male: peer groups, "creative masculinity" (Cordier 2007, 83), and economic considerations. First, the emphasis on "collective" posits the method as enabling equal contributions from all participants, yet "collective" creation is very difficult to accomplish on a solo apparatus. Because female artists tend to be encouraged toward solo disciplines, and solo disciplines are more frequently discluded, fewer female artists find themselves participating in collective creations.

Second, participant selection and inclusion remains asymmetrically gendered because male students create troupes with their friends, who are likely also male (because the female students have been pushed toward solo disciplines). Cordier describes the competitive, artistic masculinity of these male-dominated collectives as a function of "creative masculinity":

> Creative masculinity describes the way in which male collectives produce and promote their work, defining themselves against gender assignments . . . it remains a domain which asserts the superiority of men over women, to the extent that works by women are not valued in the same way as the products of male collectives. (Cordier 2007, 93)[15]

Finally, because equipment-heavy solo disciplines (again, the disciplines chosen by most female performers) cost more in time (rigging) and resources (renting space), thereby limiting rehearsal and

performance venues, they are less likely to be included in small acrobatic collectives. This feedback loop often leaves solo artists to be freelance, independently contracted participants in a group show, and therefore not part of the collective or the creation.

While it is logical that a group of (dominantly male) tumblers would avoid the limitations of rigging and create a show with minimal technical needs to better enhance training and performance opportunities, the unexamined assumption of masculine and feminine disciplines, once again, replicates cultural and traditional gender divisions. Because female soloists often specialize on apparatuses that are therefore difficult to train, complicated to hire, and come with more cost, their presence in the circus industry is effectively diminished. Thus, through the implicit curriculum transmitted by coaches and administrators, reinforcing gender-specific discipline choices, circus schools exert significant influence on the gender representation of performers in the circus industry.

Gendered Teaching Strategies

As the number of circus schools increases, so do the specialized factors that differentiate schools from their peers. In France, although every program has coexisting acrobatic and artistic education, circus schools differentiate themselves through a curricular emphasis on artistic, creative, or technical specialization (Salaméro and Haschar-Noé 2012). Drawing from their interviews with students and circus coaches, Salaméro and Haschar-Noé observe that within school communities, the athleticism of acrobatics techniques, like tumbling and partner acrobatics, is perceived as masculine, while artistic knowledge, such as dance and theatre, is seen as "feminine" (2008, 96). In contemporary circus performance and the rhetoric of circus school mission statements, artistry and technique are described as both important and interrelated (Funk 2017). Yet close observers note that in practice, the implicit curriculum in circus schools values athleticism over artistry (Salaméro and Haschar-Noé 2008, 2012).

An asymmetrical attitude toward supposed "feminine" disciplines is the result; interviewed students indicated that disciplines perceived as "feminine" were less respected by the staff and male students (Salaméro and Haschar-Noé 2008, 95). This attitude began with dance classes but extended to aerial circus disciplines as well. Salaméro also notes that in the CNAC and its sister school ENACR, where acrobatics is prioritized during the audition process, male students outnumber female students compared to other professionalizing schools (2009, 413). Furthermore, a study of risk transmission in French circus education found that only 39 percent of the staff was female, additionally noting that female staff were dominantly responsible for techniques considered to be more artistic than athletic, like dance and theatre, while the male staff taught techniques with high acrobatic skill (Legendre 2016, 120). This division of labour reinforces the gendered perception of athletic and artistic domains and perhaps represents implicitly biased hiring practices.

Discussions of risk and danger, once taboo among circus performers, are increasingly the subject of study. Beginning with Goudard's analyses of the European circus industry, which included a strong critique of the dearth of institutionalized frameworks for risk assessment and risk management (Goudard 2005, 2010), a variety of authors have investigated how risk is introduced during circus education (Lafollie 2015; Legendre 2014, 2016).

Sociologists including Garcia, Salaméro, and Lafollie have noted that within French circus schools male and female students are taught subtly different values regarding risk assessment and risk management. Legendre (2014) explored the transmission of risk assessment knowledge in

professionalizing French circus programs. Among many fascinating nuances, she noticed that male and female students were differently encouraged regarding physical risk. Legendre reports that coaches perceived the female students to be weaker, to learn more slowly, and to require more encouragement than the male students. They used these perceived differences to justify different strategies toward male and female students. When hesitant, the male students were encouraged to complete a risky technique, being told "Go ahead, do it, you've got this!" while female students were told to self-evaluate for readiness: "If you feel ready, then you do it, but if you don't feel it, don't do it" (Legendre 2014, 11).[16] However, a female student described how the instruction to "feel" if she was ready brought her to focus on her fear. She realized that she had to ignore her fear in order to progress and had to instead listen to the instructions given to her male peers. A coach's external knowledge of performance readiness teaches students how to assess their own internal readiness; the coach teaches both the technique and what it feels like to be prepared to complete the high-skill movement. The informal, implicit transmission of asymmetrical risk management strategies could therefore have a lasting impact on the type of work and the type of creation opportunities female students undertake.

The assumption that male performers are stronger, and therefore more physical, may also have an impact on expectations for academic and core curriculum content. In my study, staff from both schools divided students between physical and creative expertise. One circus coach struggled to find the right words to explain the difference, eventually saying that "there are two types of artists, you have artist-artists, and then there are technicians" (Funk 2017).[17] Although these divisions were never gendered in the discussion, coaches related that they had heard rumours about gender differences in academic learning attitudes. They were told the male students were more difficult to teach because they fall asleep in class more than female students. Even though female students also slept in class, they were generally considered better at academic work. Is it possible that because male students are implicitly perceived as more physical, there is an equivalent assumption that they are not interested in academic content? Are the teachers subconsciously assuming that the male students are more physically active and therefore justifying their lack of academic engagement? Investigation of asymmetrical expectations in academic engagement could shed light on pockets of gender discrepancies and the tacit reinforcements present within the circus school curricula.

Reframing the Problem of Gender Asymmetry in Circus Education

The first, and simplest, barrier is gender parity in circus schools. We have already seen that this should be possible—the large, international female majority in recreational circus represents a broad candidate pool. It also seems likely that circus schools will accept qualified candidates. Perhaps, then, it is appropriate to rephrase the pivotal question from "Why do circus schools accept so few female applicants?" to "Why are so few female applicants prepared for the circus school audition process?" Framing the question this way shifts our focus to factors that limit female involvement even before the bottleneck of professionalizing schools. Although this does not reframe the implicit asymmetrical education within schools, it does enable circus educators and practitioners to reflect on the complex ways that gender asymmetry is perpetuated within the recreational and preparatory community. However, professionalizing circus schools also have a responsibility to reflect on their habits and stereotypes in order to uncover the ways they are perpetuating or challenging gender divisions.

Physical Development

Physical attributes are individual and diverse; however, the global differences in physical development between boys and girls must be taken into consideration. In competitive sports like gymnastics and figure skating, which require paired athleticism and artistry, many female acrobats begin rigorous training at an early age and reach peak competitive levels in their teen years. Their male counterparts peak somewhat later. At the 2012 London Olympics, the average age for the artistic acrobats, calculated from the average ages for trampoline, aerobic and acrobatic skills, was 23.35 for men and 20.95 for women (International Gymnastics Federation 2017).

It is possible that the differences in the average ages for competitive strength and skills are different for men and women, and that those differences could have an impact on the audition process for circus schools. Although they are ostensibly close together, the difference between 23.35 and 20.95 is significant when considering entry into professionalizing circus programs. If competitive gymnastics age ranges are a proxy for peak skill and stamina, male students auditioning for postsecondary circus programs are expected to peak after they leave, while female students are likely entering their prime stamina at the tail-end of school. It seems natural that a circus program, intent on developing maximum healthy training, would favour the opportunity to intervene well before a student body's anticipated peak ability.

Of course, this does not prohibit female circus performance; instead, it suggests earlier formalized instruction would increase female readiness for postsecondary programs. In fact, girls auditioning from comprehensive preprofessional training programs would have an advantage because they would have more of the requisite neuromuscular patterning already in place to undertake the rigours of superior circus training. The standard educational system is a preliminary structural barrier for competent auditionees. In response to this, several schools have created preparatory circus programs for committed secondary students. France has six preparatory schools whose programs last between one and two years and whose supposed goal is to ready students for the two superior programs, and both Quebec schools offer an intensive circus program for local students. From this perspective, it might be interesting to explore what type of training successful female applicants to these schools completed: specialized preprofessional circus programs, gymnastics, dance, or other activity types.

The fact of different developmental rates may have a significant influence on the other discrepancies in gender treatment. The coaches who described the male body as workable may have been accurately reflecting age-related development potential. Perhaps this also accounts for female artists being encouraged into solo disciplines. Multidisciplinarity requires more time-on-task hours to perfect technique. Because many schools still use the marking-post of an *act*,[18] students must achieve adequate skill to graduate with approximately seven minutes worth of employable circus. With the time constraints of a three-year program, coaches may be effectively supporting female artists by aiding them in choosing a discipline for which their body is more suited, and where they can focus on their relationship to the apparatus without further complicating it with another person's body.

Developmental differences, however, should not enable deferral to gender stereotypes. Encouragement toward a solo discipline may give a student more time to focus on a specialty, but there is no reason that a female body is inherently more suited to aerials than juggling. The dearth of female jugglers worldwide indicates that strongly gendered ideas are still guiding student and coach choices of equipment.

Preparatory Training

Students in many locations do not have access to an accredited secondary circus program, but many have local recreational circus programs. Frequently, these programs have intensive programs for committed students, including thorough training and performance opportunities. With so many female students in recreational circus, why aren't more ready for rigorous circus school auditions? One possibility is that recreational circus educators are not teaching broad foundational skills, and instead enabling narrow skill training. Another possibility is that without national and international gatherings, recreational students are not exposed to rigorous expectations. In sport, both of the above problems are solved using competitions. In gymnastics, for instance, qualified coaches identify youth perseverance early. That student subsequently pursues a clear progression of skills designed to prepare their body for high-skill performance. Competitions enable gymnastics students to meet other students pursuing similar goals and regularly assess themselves against peers through competition.

I am not suggesting that circus emulate a competitive model, a scenario which undermines the collaborative individuality of circus performance and subsequent improvements in confidence, motor competence, and a reduced gender gap with regard to physical literacy (Kiez 2015). But because circus is not competitive, students rarely have an opportunity to gain perspective on their skill level in relation to their peer group. From the program standpoint, there may not be an incentive for students to increase their acrobatic ability, physical strength conditioning, and flexibility, and learn diverse skills across circus disciplines. Far easier, and more enjoyable, to let a student learn a new trick in their preferred discipline. And while the student may well become competent in the aerial fabric, their overall physical integrity is more important for circus school auditions. After all, schools are looking for students who will learn and grow in new ways; they are not casting a show.

If recreational programs are not preparing their students for the audition process with adequate foundational skills, then this majority female population of circus students is not getting quality training. Worse, they may be receiving biomechanically inappropriate training that effectively prevents their body from being well prepared. Injury, improper technique, lack of multidiscipline training, and recreational pacing may all provide insurmountable barriers for these circus students. It is unfortunate when a passionate student arrives at school auditions only to find themselves without competitive strength and flexibility after years of intensive training in a circus program. Perhaps recreational coaches need more training to support the development of future circus professionals so that students who have grown up doing circus can be comprehensively educated ahead of the audition process.

Intervention Possibilities for Professionalizing Circus Schools

Do professionalizing circus schools have a responsibility to support gender parity in circus arts? Each program must be responsible for answering the above question, at the very least. As seen above, there are many factors influencing auditionee readiness for circus programs, but circus schools themselves also have a role. For those programs whose goal is balanced gender representation, focusing on certain explicit and implicit learning environments could help identify the means for better integration.

The first intervention zone for each program is to explore which challenges may be unique to female students. Salaméro (2009) noticed a weaker retention rate of female students in French professionalizing circus programs. An investigation into the factors that lead female students to leave school might influence both acceptance and support strategies during the duration of the program. Are these students leaving because of an injury? If so, where are the intervention points for catching injury risk? Are students getting work and dropping out early? Are there financial or social pressures? Or are they choosing another career during the program? Schools must be prepared to recognize and intervene across these potential risk zones.

Coaches, usually hired for their technical prowess, might be encouraged to take workshops on teaching multiple coping strategies, to offset psychological stress. Socially, encouragement of cross-gender collaborative projects could be considered an obligation, both to facilitate future professional networks and also to habituate the students to creating work with people outside their friend group.

We must also consider who chooses to audition for circus programs and how they found out about the opportunity. What are their reasons for pursuing circus? What are their impressions of the industry and expectations of the educational process? If gender parity is important to circus programs, these programs might follow up their discovery of which female applicants are most likely to pass the audition process with active recruitment of these young women.

Conclusion

The issue of gender representation in professional circus and circus education is complex and nuanced. Circus schools take many factors into account when auditioning future students. Among these, physical and emotional health seem to be highly valued because those traits increase multidisciplinarity and collaboration—which are in turn highly prized abilities in contemporary circus performance (Funk 2017). While this priority should not be compromised because it could endanger the very career it ostensibly prepares students for, investigating why there are so few female graduates from professional schools is critical if the circus community would like to see more diverse gender representation in the professional circus world.

Circus schools are in an excellent position to positively influence the professional gender equilibrium by becoming more inclusive of diverse performers across multiple disciplines. By undertaking internal research in their programs to understand who is auditioning for their program, what their background training is, and what challenges they face once in the program, schools can work toward creating an environment that optimizes healthy bodies learning healthy physical and psychological skills. Outside the schools themselves, it is incumbent upon recreational teachers to understand the requirements and rigour of superior circus programs, whose aim is to prepare students for professional work. Through better awareness of the demands of professional circus, recreational programs can better prepare circus enthusiasts for entry into a professional training school.

Notes

1. In this paper, the term "circus school" indicates an academically accredited circus program and the word "professionalizing" indicates circus programs that prepare performers to enter the professional circus performance market. Many recreational programs refer to themselves as "circus schools," while some "professionalizing" programs are not academically accredited.

2. http://www/fedec.eu.

3. At the time of publication, several schools within the circus industry are consistently perceived to offer the highest calibre of postsecondary circus education and have correspondingly competitive audition processes: École nationale de cirque (ENC) in Montreal, Canada; Le Centre national des arts du cirque (CNAC) in Châlons-en-Champagne, France; École supérieur des arts du cirque (ESAC) in Brussels, Belgium; the School of Dance and Circus (DOCH) in Stockholm, Sweden; and National Institute of Circus Arts (NICA) in Melbourne, Australia. In part, this is due to their longevity and in part to the types of work their students pursue. However, many students pursue education and succeed in their goals through other professionalizing circus schools and programs.

4. In this paper, I will not address entry into the circus profession through apprenticeship, private coaching, or other viable pathways outside of accredited programs.

5. Many recreational programs exist for students of all ages interested in circus activity. The American Youth Circus Organization (http://www.americanyouthcircus.org) and the European Circus Organization (http://www.eyco.org) websites can guide interested parties toward local possibilities.

6 Author's calculation from Internet sources about the DOCH, CNAC, NICA, ESAC, and ENC, March 2017.

7. "Aux hommes, les démonstrations de force et d'adresse et les prises de risque les plus spectaculaires; aux femmes, les disciplines aériennes ou acrobatiques davantage centrées sur l'expression de leur grâce et de leur souplesse réputées naturelles." All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

8. In this context, I have placed "gender" in quotation marks to indicate that there is no actual gender; it is a continuation of arbitrarily ascribed masculinity or femininity.

9. The text does not specify the type of aerial work, but Langlois includes aerial hoop (cerceau) and aerial silks (tissu, fabric) as the participants' primary or secondary disciplines.

10. "La corporéité revêt, pour les formateurs, une importance différente selon le sexe des élèves. En effet, si la dextérité et la musculature apparaissent comme pouvant être 'travaillées' (pour des disciplines 'masculines' ou connotées comme 'neutres'), la corpulence et la taille (être petite est considéré comme un atout pour nombre de disciplines 'féminines') sont perçues comme permanentes."

11. Also called *adagio*. *Adagio* is a circus discipline which has a group of people (bases) launching a few smaller acrobats (flyers) into various flips and balances.

12. A spotting line is a rope which is attached to a performer's waist-harness at one end and, through a series of pulleys, held by a qualified professional at the other end (either a coach, rigger, or otherwise knowledgable individual). In performances such as handbalance on a stack of chairs or swinging trapeze, the artist usually has a spotting line in case of accident, though the line does not assist with their actual performance.

13. Some examples of the lone female aerialist from Quebec: the long-touring *Traces* by the 7 fingers; both shows by Flip FabriQue, *Barbu* by Cirque Alphonse (where the second female character is a pasties-wearing mud-wrestling magician's assistant); and *Made in Kouglistan* by Throw2Catch.

14. Some examples of male-dominated or exclusively male troupes that have performed at Montreal's international circus festival: Machine de Cirque (Quebec), *The Elephant in the Room* by Cirque le Roux (France), *Kneedeep* by Causus Circus (Australia), *Bromance* by the Barely Methodical Troupe (UK), *Entre deux eaux* by La Barbotte (Quebec), and *A Simple Space* by Gravity and Other Myths (Australia).

15. "La masculinité créatrice désignerait ainsi la capacité des collectifs masculins à produire et faire valoir leur travail, tout en se démarquant des assignations de genre, . . . Elle demeure cependant un ressort de la supériorité des hommes sur les femmes, dans la mesure où les œuvres de celles-ci ne sont pas reconnues au même titre que le produit du collectif masculin, qui est lui valorisé." My translation to English.

16. "Pour la prise de risque, un garçon on peut lui dire: "Mais vas-y c'est bon, fais-le, t'es capable," tout ça. Et une fille, on peut lui dire: "Si tu l'sens, tu l'fais mais si tu l'sens pas, tu l'fais pas." My translation to English.

17. "Il y a deux types d'artistes, t'as les artiste-artistes, pis t'as les techniciens."

18. Otherwise known as a circus *number*. If you visualize a wire-walker's entire presentation, that would be considered their *act*. The performer usually owns their *act* and can hire it out to different shows, cabarets, and organizations.

References

Achard, Jan-Rok. 2001. "Pères, maîtres et professeurs." In *Avant-garde, cirque! Les Arts de la piste en révolution*, edited by Jean-Michel Guy, 201–9. Paris: Les Éditions Autrement.

Bloom, Benjamin Samuel, and Lauren A. Sosniak. 1985. *Developing Talent in Young People*. Ballantine Books.

Cordier, Marine. 2007. "Corps en suspens: les genres à l'épreuve dans le cirque contemporain." *Cahiers du genre* 1 (42): 79–100.

Coudert, Emilie. 2013. "De la formation à l'insertion professionnelle dans le cirque Contemporain." Unpublished master's thesis, Université de Marne-la-Vallée, France.

Davis, Jacqueline L, and Jennifer P. Agans. 2014. "The Results Are IN! From the Circus & ME: AYCO Youth Circus Study." In *American Circus Educator Conference*, 90. Montreal.

"École Nationale de Cirque | National Circus School." 2016. http://ecolenationaledecirque.ca/fr.

Eisner, Elliot. 2002. "The Three Curricula That All Schools Teach." In *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, 3rd ed., 87–107. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

European Federation of Professional Circus Schools. 2008a. "Directory of Circus Training Organisations: Europe and beyond." FEDEC. http://www.fedec.net.

———. 2008b. "The Circus Artist Today—Analysis of the Key Competencies: What Type of Training Is Needed Today for What Type of Artist and in What Field of Activity?" FEDEC. http://www.fedec.eu/en/.

Funk, Alisan. 2017. "Circus Education in Québec: Balancing Academic and Kinaesthetic Learning Objectives through an Artistic Lens. Unpublished master's thesis, Concordia University.

Garcia, Marie-Carmen. 2011. *Artistes de cirque contemporain* (Contemporary Circus Artists). Paris: La Dispute.

Goudard, Philippe. 2005. "Arts du cirque, arts du risque: instabilité et déséquilibre dans et hors la piste." Unpublished PhD diss., Montpellier 3. http://www.theses.fr/2005MON30017.

———. 2010. *Le cirque entre l'élan et la chute: une esthétique du risque*. Paris: Editions Espaces 34.

Hamilton, Gavin M. 2009. "An Analysis of Injury Definitions and Risk of Subsequent Injury in Cirque Du Soleil Performers." Calgary: University of Calgary.

Herman, Zita. 2009. "Analysis of Key Skills of Young Professional Circus Artists." Brussels: European Federation of Professional Circus Schools. http://www.fedec.eu/en/.

International Gymnastics Federation. 2017. "FAQ." http://www.fig-gymnastics.com/site/page/view?id=679.

Kiez, Tia K. M. 2015. "The Impact of Circus Arts Instruction on the Physical Literacy of Children in Grades 4 and 5." Winnipeg: University of Manitoba.

Lafollie, Delphine. 2015. "Les dimensions personnelles de gestion du risque d'étudiants en écoles supérieures de cirque: une étude exploratoire." *eJournal de La Recherche Sur l'Intervention En Education Physique et Sportive* 35.

Langlois, Amanda Jade. 2014. "Post-Secondary Circus School Graduates' Perspectives of

Curriculum." Unpublished master's thesis, McGill University, Canada.
Legendre, Florence. 2014. "La transmission de la gestion du risque dans les écoles supérieures de cirque en France." *SociologieS*, March. Association internationales des sociologues de langue française (AISLF). http://sociologies.revues.org/4554.
———. 2016. "Devenir artiste de cirque: L'apprentissage du risque." *La Découverte* 2 (36): 115–31.
Leroux, L. Patrick. 2014. "North-South Circus Circulations: Where Québécois and American Circus Cultures Meet." *Quebec Studies* 58:3–24. doi:10.3828/qs.2014.16.
Munro, David. 2014. "Injury Patterns and Rates amongst Students at the National Institute of Circus Arts: An Observational Study." *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 29 (4): 235–40. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25433261.
Salaméro, Émilie. 2009. "Devenir artiste de cirque aujourd'hui: espace des écoles et socialisation professionnelle." Unpublished PhD diss., l'Université de Toulouse III, France.
Salaméro, Émilie, and Nadine Haschar-Noé. 2008. "Les frontières entre le sport et l'art à l'épreuve des écoles professionnelles de cirque." *Staps* 82 (4): 85–99. doi:10.3917/sta.082.0085.
———. 2012. "De l'institutionnalisation d'une forme culturelle à la structuration de l'espace de formation professionnelle: le cas du cirque en France." *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie* 49 (2): 151–72.
Shrier, Ian, Willem H. Meeuwisse, Gordon O. Matheson, Kristin Wingfield, Russell J. Steele, François Prince, James Hanley, and Michael Montanaro. 2009. "Injury Patterns and Injury Rates in the Circus Arts: An Analysis of 5 Years of Data from Cirque Du Soleil." *American Journal of Sports Medicine* 37 (6): 1143–49.
Tait, Peta. 2005. *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance*. London: Routledge
Vitali, Josiane, and Philippe Goudard. 2009. "Intérêt de l'analyse de situations pour le developpement professionel des pratiques dites 'd'amateurs' dans les arts du cirque en France." 21e colloque de l'ADMEE-Europe, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, January.
Wanke, Eileen M., Moira McCormack, Franziska Koch, Alice Wanke, and David Groneberg. 2012. "Acute Injuries in Student Circus Artists with Regard to Gender Specific Differences." *Asian Journal of Sports Medicine* 3 (3): 153–60.

Carriers, Those Seeming Heroes: Might They Be But Ordinary Humans?

Marion Guyez
Translated by Sunita Nigam

Being a (Dis)equilibrist

I am an equilibrist. Installed on my hands or at my desk, I seek out instability, disequilibrium, the feeling of being set off-kilter. I adjust and recentre the weight of my body and of thought, of limbs and ideas. I reevaluate my posture, surprise myself in metamorphosis.

Gender, when one is balanced on one's hands, matters little: it will require patience and conviction to find the lightness of the body suspended on the palm of a single hand (and to stay there), strength and flexibility to resist the tremors of the descent into square angles, inventiveness to play with the fulcrums of the upside-down body, with their instability and disequilibrium.

Sex, when one is balanced on one's hands, matters more than gender: having a perfect forward split while you have your period, and as a costume, a delicate top and a simple white bottom. Fearing a leak despite your careful precautions. Ignoring the pain. Performing as on other days. Not letting anything show.

But the handbalancer is also human. And although she is determined to be more at ease on her anterior limbs than her inferior ones, she surely explores most deeply the plasticity of the human species. She escapes neither the assignations and stereotypes associated with sex and gender nor the powers of patriarchal and heteronormative domination that cut through the circus (like the rest of society). Whether she conforms to, resists, or is subjected to the violence of gender norms, these norms influence the artistic and academic trajectory of the female artist/academic who, disequilibrium after disequilibrium, adjusts and readjusts her posture as an equilibrist, as a woman, as an artist, and as a researcher. It is for this reason that I am attentive to the place of women and to the manner in which gender is performed in my artistic work (namely within La Compagnie d'Elles[1]), as much as gender studies and queer studies are important epistemological tools for my academic work. What place do circus stages leave for men? For women? How do they represent men, women, gender, and sexuality? Do they reproduce stereotypes or, on the contrary, do they seek to deconstruct and trouble them? These are some of the questions I investigate here, starting with an analysis of the show *Undermän*,[2] written and directed with subtlety by the Swedish acrobat Olle Strandberg in 2011.

Marion Guyez is a circus artist with a PhD in the performing arts. She is the co-director of the circus company Compagnie d'Elles. Her doctoral thesis examined the hybridization of acrobatics and textuality in contemporary circus scenes. She is the author of numerous publications on circus aesthetics and gender and street art. She teaches at the University of Toulouse Jean-Jaurès. **Sunita Nigam** is a PhD candidate in performance studies at McGill University. Her dissertation is about the role of performance in urban placemaking in Mexico City, New York, and Montreal from the Mexico '68 Olympics to the contemporary burlesque revival.

Marion Guyez in *Inacheveux*. Photo by Cie d'Elles © Photolosa.

Love Stories and Great Feats

Hand-to-hand is a "demanding acrobatic discipline performed by two or more acrobats on the ground in which the base executes various moves involving strength, balance, elevation and flexibility by carrying the flyer on the hands" (Barlati 2016, 300). In order to reach the highest levels of virtuosity, professional mixed duos are often composed of a massive "carrier" or "base" (a man) and a slim (but no less strong) woman "flyer," who balances on the hands of the carrier. The extraordinary exploits and risks performed in hand-to-hand endow these acrobats with a heroic quality. As the semiotician Paul Bouissac reminds us regarding the performance of great feats, the "life which asserts itself at the end of the act has added value of having triumphed over a major challenge through which the subject has acquired a heroic status" (2016, 39). In a certain sense, the work of the carrier, who literally holds the life of his partner in his hands, consists of saving the life of his flyer at every turn: "You can't fall / You won't fall," sing the carriers in *Undermän*. This job, which demands great responsibility and physical strength, accentuates the image of the carrier as possessing a virile masculinity, free of fault or fragility.

This type of duo executes numerous dynamic and highly impressive numbers. Whether or not the duo forms a couple outside of their professional relationship, the discipline of hand-to-hand lends itself to the *mise en scène* of heteronormative seduction games, sensual choreographies, and love stories. Certain duos use humour to stage the difficulties of living and working together. The carriers of *Undermän* treat an issue more rarely touched on in the circus, namely the separation of these couples-duos.

"I'm Just a Man, an Underman" (*Undermän*)

Undermän—or "carrier" in Swedish—is an acrobatic and narrative documentary show performed by Mattias Andersson, Peter Åberg, and Matias Salmenaho that tells the story of three carriers (who share the stage with a musician, Andreas Tengblad). All three carriers have broken up with their girlfriends, who were also their hand-to-hand partners. In order to overcome the personal and professional difficulties related to their separations, the three friends collaborate on a show without women/flyers. In addition to performing acrobatic sequences, the three performers take turns speaking in short monologues. They also play music and sing about their loves lost in folk rock ballads. Though the performers are Swedish, they speak in English.[3] Many questions arise from this documentary show about the activity of the carrier: How do you go on living after a breakup? How do you go on working without your partner? How do you create a hand-to-hand show without flyers? The last question serves as both an acrobatic challenge and a narrative device. *Undermän* foregrounds the carriers and, in the process, seeks to reveal the fragile and sensitive sides of these acrobatic heavyweights who are usually portrayed in terms of their strength and virility. The show seizes on and shifts one of the leitmotifs of the mise-en-scène of mixed hand-to-hand duos, namely the heteronormative sentimental register, taking advantage of the absence of flyers to stage a more complex masculinity. Might carriers, those seeming heroes, be but ordinary humans after all?

Let us look at how the absence of female flyers in this men-only show enables us to think about the visibility of the role of carriers and flyers in mixed hand-to-hand duos, and to interrogate the representations of sex and gender in hand-to-hand more broadly.

Mattias Andersson (foreground) in *Undermän*. Photo by Mats Bäcker.

Acrobatic Autofiction

"I loved her so much," begins the prologue in which a man tells a love story: his own, that of a hand-to-hand carrier.[4] He stands at the centre of the stage, facing the public, and recounts in the first person the story of his relationship. The feel of the first date, the complicity, the joys, the imperfections, up until the moment when this beautiful story turned into a nightmare. He then relates the cruelty of hand-to-hand: "I couldn't even touch her without falling apart. And then we were, twice a night in front of thousands of Americans, doing nothing else than touching each other on stage."

While the tone is confessional, the story troubles the relationship between autobiography and fiction. The fact that the narrator uses references to cinema and the performing arts to relate his personal story contributes to its fictionalization. The way in which the story is narrated further contributes to this process. This is what makes *Undermän* an autofiction. Certain anecdotes show how personal and artistic identity mix in the carrier's real life, as on the beach in Brazil where the couple-duo performs acrobatic lifts for fun: "We did classic moves, like the *Dirty Dancing* one. The crowd on the beach applauded." He compares his life several times to a film. He imagines: "I think that if my life were to be turned into a movie, this would be the part where everything is pretty and shiny." He runs through the romantic steps of his professional dislocations: "Paris," "Italy." The "big dream" of the duo—"to go to Las Vegas one day"—becomes a reality, making their lives even

more like a movie. But this dream ends in disaster: no more companion, no more work partner. "So in a way, here I am," he concludes. A banal love story.

At the end of the prologue, varied numbers follow one another,[5] separated by three short monologues, confessions of each of the performers. In what follows I turn to the progression of these three lift numbers.

Matias Salmenaho, Peter Åberg, and Mattias Andersson in *Undermän*. Photo by Mats Bäcker.

After the Breakup: Carrying

If the prologue exposes the underside of the life of these hand-to-hand duos, the acrobatic part of the show takes us behind the scenes of acrobatic exploits. The carriers of *Undermän* thus compose a first number from a series of exercises specific to the training of the carrier. In the absence of flyers, the three carriers maintain their physical condition with the help of weights, staging pure demonstrations of strength. The weights (a standard training tool for carriers) take the place of the women, implicitly highlighting the reification of the person who is carried. The absence of flyers in this number, which is a succession of classic *tours de force*, shifts the gaze toward the bodies of the carriers (and asks us to look at their competencies as strong, muscular, and virile men).

Next, Mattias Andersson soberly performs a solo version of a classic sensual hand-to-hand number, in which he executes the movements with precision. He manipulates an invisible flyer, while a follow spot ironically seeks to illuminate empty space. The presence of the flyer is spectral, but her absence highlights the role and the movements of the carrier: his anchoring to the ground, his precision, his concentration, the attention of his gaze to the body he manipulates by tracing an incongruous choreography.

Finally, in the third number, the three carriers change postures, transforming into flyers themselves and performing a number as a trio. While all-male acrobatic lift trios are common, the passage from carrier to flyer isn't so obvious. Strandberg explains this transformation in an interview: "How do you support someone who actually weighs twice as much as your partner? Now you're going to be the flyer and not the base and you're going to have to trust that this person under you can lift you even though you weigh like 90 kilos" (2011). This number symbolizes the strength of the new bonds of friendship forged through the affective reconstruction the performers have undergone together. Romantic tribulations are forgotten; even memories of the women flyers are erased. These men are ready for new human adventures: they thus invite the audience (men and women) to change places in the auditorium so that they find themselves sitting among strangers for the end of the show and take advantage of this opportunity for new encounters with the people sitting near them.

Situating itself in the fragile time that follows a breakup, *Undermän* astutely appropriates one of the leitmotifs of hand-to-hand performances, namely romantic relationships. This show pays homage to the place and the job of the carrier, shedding light on the qualities and the competencies involved in their work. It carefully eludes the cliché that would represent the carrier as a strong man. Without minimizing the exploits carriers accomplish (nor escaping a hegemonic heteronormativity), the show works to put on display the fragile, sensitive, and sentimental parts of an ordinary masculinity whose strength resides as much in fraternity as in muscle mass. From reequilibrium to disequilibrium, the show eclipses the women and flyers, whose traces disappear, little by little. One question thus hangs over the performance: what happens to the flyers after the breakup?

Undermän does not resolve this question, but perhaps circus creations featuring exclusively women performers, which have become more and more common in recent years (Groupe Bekkrell, Naga Collective, the Collective du Biphasées, Portés de femmes, Gynoïdes Project, the Femmes de Crobatie, etc.) respond to it indirectly. We must, therefore, as we are trying to do in our creations at Compagnie d'Elles (which include both mixed and all-women performances), take charge of the way in which women and gender are represented in the circus.

Notes

1. La Compagnie d'Elles, based in Toulouse (France), creates experimental, feminist circus productions (adaptation of texts to the circus context, site-specific acrobatic performances, etc.).

2. Seen at Festival Circa in Auch, France in 2011.

3. Here I am referring to the performance I saw in France.

4. This citation and the following ones are taken from the production.

5. Hand to hand, but also juggling and Cyr wheel.

References

Barlati, Anna-Karyna. 2016. "Glossary of Circus Terms." Translated by Susan Kelly. In *Cirque Global. Quebec's Expanding Circus Boundaries*, edited by L. Patrick Leroux and Charles R. Batson, 294–307. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Bouissac, Paul. 2016. "The Staging of Action." In *The Routledge Circus Studies Reader*, edited by Peta Tait and Katie Lavers, 37–49. Abingdon: Routledge.

Strandberg, Olle. 2011. "*Undermän*." By John Ellingsworth. *Sideshow*, October 22, 2011.

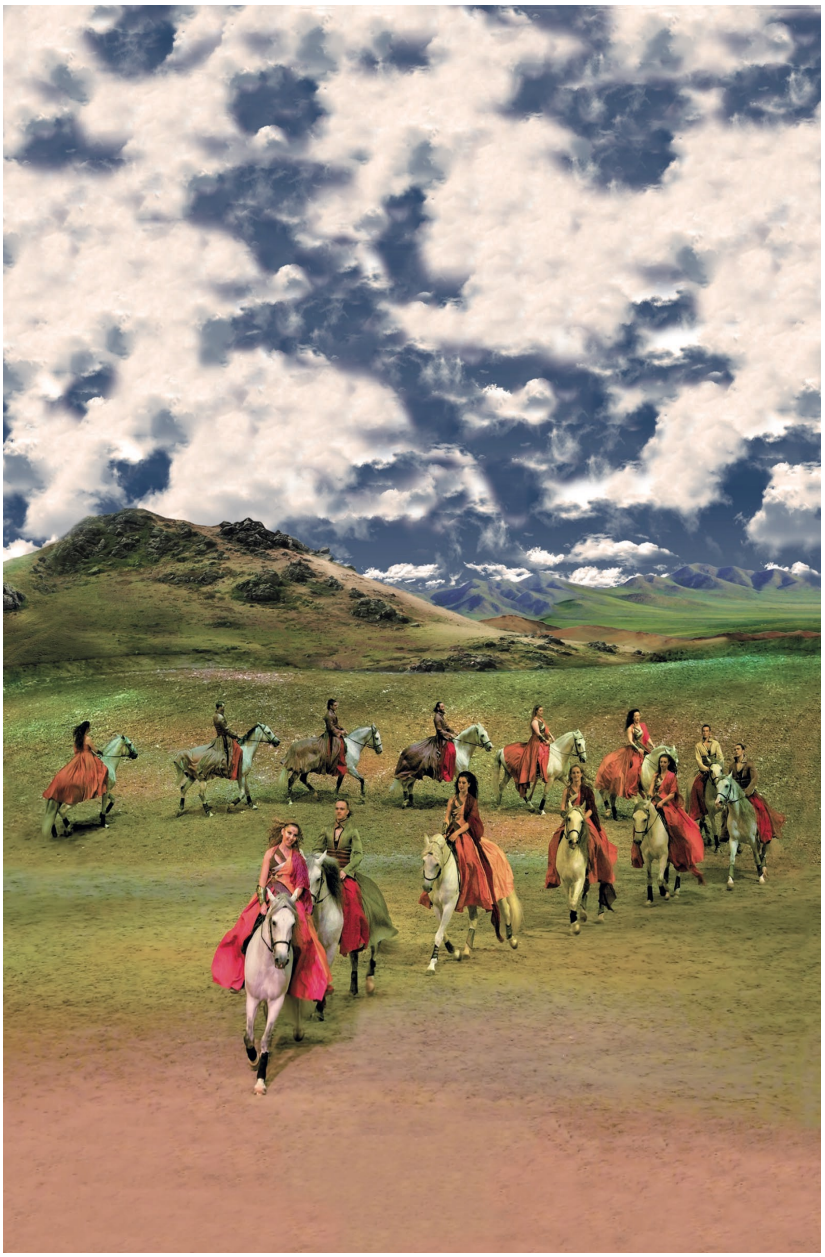
Cavalia's *Odysseo*—A Biopolitical Myth at Work

Ante Ursić

The Canadian circus enterprise Cavalia, founded in 2003 by Normand Latourelle, is known for its emphasis on equestrian virtuosity in its shows. *Odysseo*, Cavalia's second production, opened in 2011 and has toured through North America ever since. As of August 4, 2017, according to its online press kit, *Odysseo* had been performed more than 1300 times and seen by more than two million people.[1] It is a show of superlatives: one of the largest touring big top shows in the world, the stage alone is 17,500 square feet. A huge projection wall, three times the size of an IMAX cinema screen, serves as a backdrop on which ever-changing landscapes are projected. 10,000 tons of earth and stones are transported to each set to create a kind of hilly, natural terrain. In front of the spectator's eye what the press kit describes as a "world of dreams and fantasy" takes form and shape. This immense stage, together with the projections and idiosyncratic lighting design, conjure a sense of unbound nature. *Odysseo*'s horse and human performers appear to traverse forests, dunes, savannahs, and mountainscapes. Toward the big finale, even a lake is created. To produce this stunning effect 40,000 gallons of water are pumped each performance onto the stage.

In her seminal essay "Teddy Bear Patriarchy—Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York, 1908–1936" Donna Haraway describes the peculiar performativity of the dioramas of mammals displayed in the African Hall in the American History Museum of Natural History. Haraway suggests that the stuffed mammals are staged in such a fashion that the museum visitor experiences "a moment of origin where nature and culture, private and public, profane and sacred meet—a moment of incarnation in the encounter of man and animal" (1989, 29). Attending *Odysseo* in San Francisco in 2015, I could observe how *Odysseo*'s elaborate scenography and human-horse choreography operates on a similar register as those dioramas in the African Hall. The show succeeds in mesmerizing its audience. And indeed, I too was highly entertained by its elaborate stagecraft: the agility and virtuosity of its human and animal performers combined with spectacular projections and scenography. However, one should be careful not to be easily transfixed by such an extraordinary display of human and animal feats and technological splendour. Rather, a critical rumination discloses a conservative sentiment at the core of *Odysseo*. Numerous moments in the show are charged with heteronormative and racially discriminatory meanings, which are mediated through the human-horse encounter. To elaborate further, it might be worthwhile to look at the origins of modern circus, a history inseparable from the human-horse relationship.

Ante Ursić's professional career has been as a performer and choreographer in the field of contemporary circus. He performed with companies such as Cirque du Soleil, Circus Roncalli and Tiger Lilies Circus. Ante received a master's in performance studies at NYU. At UC Davis, he is a PhD candidate in performance studies with emphases in practice-as-research, critical theory, and science and technology studies. Currently, Ante is investigating the animal-human relationship in traditional and contemporary circus.



Scene from *Odysseo*. Photo by Dan Harper.

Philip Astley (1742–1814) is widely regarded as having founded modern circus when he opened his riding school in London on April 6, 1768. Initially intended as a school for teaching horse riding skills, Astley's enterprise expanded into a display of masterful horsemanship, giving birth to the modern circus we know today (Kotar and Gessler 2011, 9). In its earliest phase, the acts were primarily horse-centred, but they were already beginning to diverge. Comical horse acts as well as cross-animal feats such as monkeys riding horses were performed soon after the school's first documented performance on May 6 of the same year. The program grew more and more diverse, and by 1775, the season opened "with a great variety of new Men, and feats of Horsemanship, and Activity, in a manner beyond conception" (14), meaning that feats of other human and animal performers had been integrated into the program, displaying what later became the four main circus disciplines: animal feats, acrobatics, equilibristics, and juggling. It is salient to note that the modern

circus appeared at the end of the eighteenth century—precisely at the time when, according to Foucault, the biopolitical regime, focusing on macro- and micro-management of the life of the population, started to replace the sovereign regime. The sovereign regime displays death as a spectacle; it is a "gloomy festival of punishment" (Foucault [1978] 1995, 8). I suggest we consider modern circus as the spectacle of the biopolitical regime, because it is concerned with the theatrical staging of a festival of life through disciplined, docile, obedient, and trained bodies.[2] Further, I would like to foreground that modern circus, far from being an apolitical performing art form, has served as an apparatus of verification: it verifies, centre stage, the dominant prevailing discourse of human exceptionalism (the genre of Man).[3] In this political fiction, the white, male, heterosexual body is superior to other subjects in relation to it, which are feminized, exoticized, and racialized. Moreover, the horse performer requires particular attention, because it has served as a crucial medium to establish the Western notions of masculinity, femininity, and racial and class superiority.

In Astley's modern circus, one could witness the *techniques of the body* that entangled the ideal vision of an honourable, respectable man with his relationship to the horse. Marcel Mauss's definition of techniques of the body as a physiological, psychological, and sociological assemblage emphasizes that these techniques are not just assembled by the individual alone, but through education, through the society to which s/he belongs and the place s/he occupies within this society. The body is the first object of manipulation and therefore also the first object that is rendered into a shape that correlates to the hegemonic order (Mauss 1973, 76). Monica Mattfeld (2014) stresses the importance of the horse as a crucial agent in establishing a sense of British superiority. In Astley's circus, an idealized male body that governed both himself and others was promoted as an exemplary image of masculinity. The horse was an important point of orientation for British citizens towards a more righteous and honorable expression of masculinity (which was in essence British). This exemplary masculine body was connected to the rider's relationship with the horse; on the one hand, the rider was superior to the horse, but on the other, the rider was dependent on the horse, as masculine strength and relative superiority were constituted by it (Mattfeld 2014, 25). As in the case of a patriarch who conducts a family business or a monarch who conducts a nation, dominance is dependent on a successful management of subordinates. Hence the still-often-used phrasing to describe someone getting into a dominant position of power: to take the reins. However, what is important to stress here is that domination, preferably, was not executed with brute force. Rather, the contrary was the case: a new understanding of British superiority was tied up with an understanding of a higher grade of civility in comparison to the native population of British colonial territories, but also to other colonial powers. Horse-human entanglements, expressed in equestrian craftsmanship, offered a way to embody the ideology of the time, and in circus and hippodramas the possibility to dramatically stage it. The emergence of modern circus offered this visceral experience for London's populace and assisted in the crafting of a new sense of British self (Mattfield 2014, 23–24). In short, modern circus, as a mode of performance has through its particular staging of horse-human entanglements participated in the representation and propagation of superior forms of masculinity, representations that have often been bound up with the discourse around nation, national belonging and nationalism.[4]

Because horseback riding was intrinsically connected to masculinity, it is no wonder that the appearance of the female horseback rider in the nineteenth century, launched by the establishment of the bourgeoisie, was at first a disturbing sight (Weil 1999, 5). She was seen as a disruption to the established order of man-horse relationship. Additionally, the woman-horse relationship was often sexualized: the horse became a rival to man, as it displaced him as the source for sexual enjoyment (5). Of course, this intimate woman-horse relationship had to be controlled. Hence, *en amazon*

describes a riding style in which the female rider sits "with their legs tightly together on one side" (10), making the mount and dismount dependent on external and in this case male help, while at the same time reducing the contact, most importantly the genital contact, with the horse (10).

However, the newly appearing woman-horse relationship was not only strictly policed, but also sanctioned. Therefore, imagery of the female rider oscillated between two positions. On one hand riding was regarded as a tool to enhance woman's virtue: her interaction with the horse reflected her higher social standing. Here, we are entering the discourse of race and eugenics. Animal studies scholar Kari Weil suggests that for these women "riding brought out their very 'nature' as women of good breeding" (1999, 31). Indeed, this outlook is intertwined with the emergence of the purebred horse. Stud books (breeding registries that trace the genealogy of pedigree purebreds considered to be suitable to reproduce) served as evidence that racial purity exists, that it must be protected, and further, that it can be engineered. The establishment of the category of purebred is inseparable from the discourse around race, sexuality, and reproduction. It comes as little surprise that the bourgeois rider only mounts a horse worthy of his/her nature, that is, a purebred. In contradiction to this, another discourse existed simultaneously: female riders were considered to disfigure their natural feminine traits in becoming more like men or like the animal. In contrast to the first discourse, which enhanced female purity, the latter diminished it and was seen as a breach of her social position (31).

I suggest having these specific histories in mind—in which the horse served as a medium to carve out certain, albeit sometimes contradicting, understandings of masculinity and femininity in Western cultures—when considering Cavalia's *Odysseo*. Indeed this contemporary spectacle perpetuates the notion in which the horse is entangled in the construction of an ideal, pure, and noble subject: on *Odysseo*'s website a whole section is dedicated to the different horse breeds performing in the show. The noble and chivalrous appearance of some of the human performers works in conjunction with the horse performers, which are needed to construct a fantasy of a knightly primordial self and a noble sense of the humans' sexuality. It is as if the horse gives them culture, masculinity, and femininity, which seem to be purified from the carnal, the animalistic. The horse serves as a medium for sexual sublimation. This does not mean that *Odysseo* is without any erotics: to the contrary, it is full of displays of heteronormative erotics. Countless versions of the same heterosexual coupling are channelled through the horse, be it literally though the numerous horse acts or figuratively as on a horse carousel pole act. In this act, for example, a life-sized carousel drops to the stage and four couples display their agility and dexterity on it. In this scene, *Odysseo* shifts suddenly to the present, communicated through the mechanical apparatus and the casual, modern-day clothes of the performers. Unsurprisingly, gender roles uphold norms: while men show off with their physical fitness, by flexing their muscles and presenting different planks on the poles, women display their flexibility, which means, in this case, to do numerous versions of the same split.[5]

Odysseo's Carousel Act. Photo by Dan Harper.

Still, one has to acknowledge that *Odysseo* has made some progress with regard to gender equality, as has society at large. No woman seems to be in need of male help to mount her horse. Women also participate in previously male-dominated horse riding skills such as Cossack riding. However, this does not mean that female sexuality is completely vacant of hints of animality, or that the horse is not feminized. In one of the last scenes of the show, female performers promenade alongside the slow plod of their neighing partners. The scene is telling because the horses' manes uncannily resemble the hairstyle of their female companions. The coiffure of both, horse and woman, shows how femininity is still in close relation to animality, but also how the horse is feminized, being subjected to Western beauty standards.[6]

Additionally, while gender difference no longer prevents some performers from mounting a horse nor mastering a certain horseback riding technique, it arouses curiosity that *Odysseo*'s black performers are barred from access to the horse. For the white performers it seems all too natural to be on the horse; as I argued above, their cultural identity, which carries a certain noble essence, is in fact constituted through the horse. In contrast to this, the black performers' "natural" place is on the ground. *Odysseo* is not stingy in employing well-known racial stereotypes. While the horse and aerial scenes are accompanied by dramatic neoclassical tunes, including the playing of violins and opera voices, the black performers' working tune is shaped by the rhythm of djembe drums, to which they enthusiastically perform, barefooted and bare-chested, their impressive floor acrobatics.

The group of Guinean acrobats performing in the show are exclusively male. However, they conjure a different form of masculinity than that of the male horse riders: a raw, even untamed excess of prowess, agility, flexibility, and sturdiness is displayed through their athletic feats. But this excess

seems never to match the nobility of the riders, which is presented in controlled and aestheticized movements in conjunction with the horse. Rather, the black performers' masculinity is paradoxically presented at a higher intensity but at the same time inferior to their white male counterparts. They cannot control their overabundance; they cannot master their masculine drives. It is here where it seems that the horse serves as a transitional object, which makes it possible for the white riders to display a masculinity of a higher degree. Whiteness has overcome its animality through the engagement and control of the horse which, one might argue, is the animal within Man.

Lastly, the masculinity of the black performer is devoid of any sexuality. While white performers engage in heterosexual coupling via the display of equestrian skills or aerial acrobatics, the black performer is, even though hypermasculine, somehow asexual at the same time. The heterosexual encounter on stage is reserved for white subjects only. Is the hypermasculinity of the black body only permitted because it does not breach the racial division and because there is no danger of its reproduction? *Odysseo* seems to suggest that what can and should be reproduced is whiteness, which is, in essence, knightly and noble, and superior to blackness.

Processes of animalization are inseparable from the discourse around race and by extension the history of forced labour (slavery).[7] In *Odysseo*, racial division is enacted through an endorsement of a specific kinesthetic order: only the horse body and the black body parade an excess of movement, agitation, and physical strength. While the black bodies and the horses are constantly moving, the white equestrians are distinguished by moving as little as possible. The rider lets the horse move. The master's task is to initiate, to control, and to surveil movement. Not moving, or moving sparingly, is the privilege of the white body in *Odysseo*. But not moving is also the privilege of a predominately white audience who comes to see the show, and who can afford to pay between 50 and 240 US dollars—before taxes—for a seat. This contrasts strongly with the local labour force (ushers, popcorn, and beverage vendors), who, in my observation when viewing the show in San Francisco, were mostly black. It is quite unsettling to realize how the hierarchical and racial difference on stage mirrors the economic difference in the tent. As of August 4, 2017, on the website indeed.com, where employees can share their experience with their employer, Cavalia receives overall good reviews. Interestingly enough though, what is complained about most is that one has to stand for long periods while working for them. The seated position is a position of privilege.

I suggest that in *Odysseo*'s big top tent, the audience is invited to encounter their primordial cultural self. The show conjures up a knightly past, a paradise lost. The riders appear in a garment resembling a melange of attire from antiquity and medieval times. In this fantasy world, certain humans are again friends with horses, with nature, reestablishing an assumed bond that has been dissolving since we entered industrialization. *Odysseo* (in correspondence with the Odysseus story) stages for its audience a symbolic, and at the same time nostalgic, homecoming. It is interesting to note, though, that this lost union of nature and culture (a state presumably eclipsed by the advancement of technology) is artificially produced through the newest scenographic technologies. What is produced is an origin story in which the white, male, middle-class, heteronormative subject is at its centre. The white subject is the one who controls, who traverses different landscapes, who masters different apparatuses—be it the horse or the various kinds of circus equipment. The white performers move with grace and elegance through different scenes. The black performers do what the white imaginary believes they do best: they ecstatically dance, sing, and tumble to the sound of West African tunes.

To further describe the cultural work done by *Odysseo* and to situate it in a social-political frame, I turn now to Jean Luc Nancy's concept of *mythation* and once more to Michel Foucault's notion of *biopolitics*. In his book *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy argues that myth is a self-foundational enterprise. Community relates back to a mythic foundation, and through a mythic origin, it founds itself (1991, 45). Differently put, Nancy seems to suggest that the main function of myth is to produce a communal origin, an essence, a structure of identification. He writes, "humanity is represented on the stage of myth" (45). I find the correlation between stage and myth suggestive. Mythation might be understood as staging, or maybe even as dramatic actualization of the myth for the members of the community. *Odysseo* is exactly that: a staging of the myth of a specific vision of humanity, in which the white, male, heteronormative subject, i.e., Western Man, holds the reins in his hand. Further, through the process of mythation, the community becomes one with the founding story of the communal myth. It becomes a communion. Myth produces affective states that help the members of the community identify with their origins. It is this affective labour which *Odysseo* masters perfectly, and which, in my opinion, explains its success.

Further, mythation and its actualization belong to the realm of *oeuvre*, which translates as work. Work here seems to be associated with the social stratification of bodies, positions, and assignments. A "work" then is not a process of something which is constantly changing or developing, but rather the setting and staging of a mythic script (Nancy 1991, 46). The French term *mise en oeuvre* (setting to work) correlates here with *mise en scène* (setting on stage). A myth set to work is the successful rendering of a certain discourse, a logos, into a community. Mythation appears to be this: a myth set to work. Importantly, for Nancy, the community that is produced through a myth set to work is a community as a work. He states: "Community understood as a work or through its works would presuppose that the common being, as such, be objectifiable and producible (in sites, persons, buildings, discourses, institutions, symbols: in short, in subjects" (31). Further, Nancy differentiates between community and communion. A communion is a community produced by a mythation. A community is always in danger of becoming a communion (i.e., a stratified community). Hence, the political gesture of a community is to be aware of this danger and to labour against this tendency, by "unworking itself" (31). Hence, for Nancy, an inoperative community is the countermovement to communion.

I further suggest that modern circus is the spectacle of what Foucault calls the biopolitical regime, a new epistemological regime which replaced the older sovereign regime. While the latter "takes life and lets live," the former is a mode of power which "fosters life or disallows it" ([1978] 1990, 138). Perhaps we can consider modern circus as mythation of a new myth for this new epistemological regime.[8] Modern circus has been complicit in the promotion of biopolitical concepts of race, sexuality, and (dis)ability. Further, it is a spectacle in which this new humanity has been displayed, verified, and celebrated.

Nancy's notion of mythation and Foucault's notion of biopolitics help us to understand the cultural work that *Odysseo* is doing. The show displays an abundance of life. However, life in biopolitical terms is not measured equally, but is strictly hierarchical. The excess of the black body (quantity) contrasts with the knightly moderation of the white body (quality). And let's be reminded that in the biopolitical regime the reproduction of the population and therefore heteronormative coupling becomes an issue of highest importance. As I elaborated earlier, questions of reproduction adhere to a racial grid, in which white life is fostered and black life too often disallowed.

I want to stress that Cavalia's *Odysseo* is not just an exception of circus as myth but an example of what can be observed in the vast majority of contemporary large-scale productions. In addition to Cavalia, the shows by the Quebec-based circus company Cirque du Soleil are further lucid and at the same time disturbing examples of this kind of contemporary, biopolitical mythation. One has just to read the short description of shows with titles such as *Mystère*, *Totem*, and *Quidam* (Latin for "a certain one"*)* to see that these shows aspire to create a myth. These myths are always in correspondence with a Western vision of humanity as elaborated above. What fascinates me about *Odysseo* is how its particular mythation carries over a specific, very troubling history of horse-human relationship into the present.

In conclusion, I caution against the tendency toward an establishment of binaries between the notions of traditional and new or "contemporary" circus, as has become familiar in circus studies today. Such binaries often work reductively in dichotomies such as good/bad, nonart/art, low art/high art, animal/human. Rather, I deploy modern circus as a term that refers to a mode of expression which has participated in the mythation of this new vision/version of humanity since its inauguration at the end of the eighteenth century by Philip Astley. I argue, in keeping with Foucault's ideas, that the modern circus is the spectacle of the biopolitical regime and displays a spectacle of life executed through disciplined, trained body-machines, spanning both sides of the traditional/new circus divide. Modern circus serves as an apparatus of verification, as it verifies centre stage the dominant prevailing discourse of Western Man.

Modern circus is a work, and circus artists are considered to be diligent workers—craftsmen, rather than critical artists. As a circus artist myself, I have observed that we absorb this notion with a certain pride. In contrast to the actor, "we" don't fake it, "we" don't pretend: "we" simply are. Additionally, circus artists are always at the limit of their bodily capacity. But don't the limits which circus artists embody in their techniques constitute the core/centre of the biopolitical paradigm, today intrinsically linked to neoliberalism, and therefore often reproduce dominant cultural beliefs?[9] I urge the circus community to become inoperative. "We" should take the risk to expose ourselves, to start a process of sharing, to account and be accountable for our complicity and participation in the mythation of the biopolitical regime; that is, in reproducing ableist, animalizing, racializing, feminizing, and exoticizing practices. Modern circus proclaims to be a performance practice for the community. But as with *Odysseo*, what is too often proclaimed through modern circus is a communion, a community as work which stratifies bodies into specific positions, places, and assignments. To truly hold up to its promise of a communitarian art practice, modern circus has to start unworking itself, finally.

Notes

1. Subsequent details about the performance are taken from the online press kit.

2. I am aware that this is a grand claim which needs further elaboration. However, the parameters of my contribution here allow me only to gesture towards this claim. Foucault readers know that the disciplinary regime is not replaced by the biopolitical regime, but subsumed under it. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault shifts the terminology from discipline to anatomo-politics.

3. I am drawing on Foucault who states that "knowledge . . . is like a language whose every word has been examined and every relation verified" ([1970] 2002, 96). Hence, the knowledge of a superior form of humanity, which is regarded to be rational, and therefore can rightfully dominate what is deemed to be irrational or sub-rational, must be verified as well. Wynter calls this superior status the genre of Man. The

genre of Man is intrinsically linked to the white, liberal, heteronormative subject. People of colour, considered to be nonhuman, or not-yet-fully-human, are ontologically excluded from the genre of Man (Wynter 2003, 257–337).

4. For more detailed accounts of how masculinity is produced through the horse-human relationship see Donna Landry's *Noble Brutes* (2008) and Monica Mattfeld's *Becoming Centaur* (2016). Peta Tait gives us insightful accounts of the ways wild animal performers have been framed in a traditional circus setting to produce a "range of fanciful masculinities" (2012, 42). Further, wild animals stand in for the inhabitants of their geographical origins, that is for the colonized. For more see Peta Tait's *Wild and Dangerous Performances* (2012).

5. A plank denotes a gymnastic exercise and figure. In advanced plank positions, the body is projected horizontally outward, in a flag-like fashion. The artist is only holding onto the pole with his/her hands.

6. It is important to understand that the horse is not a stable signifier but carries multiple, sometimes contradictory meanings simultaneously. The same horse can be feminized, as shown above, but also masculinized and/or racialized depending on the context.

7. For more on this topic see Alexander G. Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus* (2014).

8. I caution against prematurely distinguishing between traditional, new, and contemporary circus practices. Often these differentiations follow a chronological understanding of time coupled with a progress-driven account of (circus) history. For me, the term modern circus encompasses all current circus genres and suggests that today's circus is still complicit in the production, justification, and verification of the genre of Man. However, this does not mean that circus practitioners have not engaged with their practices in subversive and critical ways. On the contrary, as Deleuze and Guattari show us ([1972] 1977), any apparatus is transversed with lines of flight that produce destabilizing or deterritorializing tendencies.

9. Foucault stresses the intersection of neoliberalism and biopolitics. He suggests that Western capitalism transformed into an enterprise society marked by fierce albeit controlled competition after World War Two. Foucault dubs the new subject produced by this latest form of power "homo œconomicus" (2008, 147).

References

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. (1972) 1977. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by R. Hurley, M. Seem, and H. Lane. New York: Penguin.

Foucault, Michel. (1970) 2002. *The Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. Translated by Alan Sheridan-Smith. New York: Routledge Classics.

———. (1978) 1990. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books.

———. (1978) 1995. *Discipline and Punish—The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Routledge Classics. New York: Random House.

———. 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics—Lectures at the Collège de France 1878–1979*. Translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Picador.

Haraway, Donna. 1989. *Primate Vision—Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Science*. New York: Routledge.

Kotar, S. L., and J. E. Gessler. 2011. *The Rise of the American Circus, 1716–1899*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Landry, Donna. 2008. *Noble Brutes: How Eastern Horses Transformed English Culture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Mattfeld, Monica. 2014. "'Undaunted all he views': The Gibraltar Charger, Astley's Amphitheatre and Masculine Performance." *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37 (1): 19–37.

———. 2016. *Becoming Centaur—Eighteenth-Century Masculinity and English Horsemanship*.

University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
Mauss, Marcel. 1973. "Techniques of the Body." *Economy and Society* 2 (1): 70–78. Translated by Ben Brewster.
Nancy, Jean-Luc. 1991. *The Inoperative Community*. Edited by Peter Connor. Translated by Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
Tait, Peta. 2012. *Wild and Dangerous Performances—Animals, Emotions, Circus*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Weheliye, Alexander G. 2014. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Weil, Kari. 1999. "Purebreds and Amazons: Saying Things with Horses in Late-Nineteenth-Century France." *Differences—A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11(1): 1–37.
Wynter, Sylvia. "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument." *The New Centennial Review* 3 (3): 257–337.

Briefs: Bending Gender in Australian Contemporary Circus

Kristy Seymour

This paper is an excerpt from an in-depth body of work that I developed as part of my doctoral thesis, "Bodies, Spatiality and Temporality in Australian Contemporary Circus." In the thesis, I explore the implications of subversive performances of gender in Australian contemporary circus. What I offer here is a small insight into how Australian contemporary circus artists utilize gender performativity to articulate political and social views within their creative work, with the openly queer[1] male burlesque circus collective Briefs Factory as the example. I focus in particular on its founding member Mark Winmill, a well-respected aerial artist who has worked in the Australian contemporary circus sector since the mid-1990s. In order to identify the nature of Winmill's performances of gender, it is important first for us to comprehend where and how his performances take place within the context of the Briefs Factory.

In their own words: "*Briefs* is an all-male sharp shootin' cabaret of burlesque with balls, high-flying circus bandits and savage gender offenders" (briefsfactory.com).[2] Using circus to explore what masculinity can mean in contemporary society, in any given performance their work explores concepts of the macho, drag, the fluidity of the male form, the quirky, and the queer. Solo acts sit alongside large group acts in a format that sees the chaos of slapstick physical clowning presented alongside dynamic and graceful aerial performance. This may seem like a heavy task for any ensemble to deliver, but the format of the work and their use of chaos and audience interaction enable the artists to delve into multiple concepts within a one-hour show. Reviews of the work acknowledge its impact on the circus sector and its ability to critique contemporary society. Spunde observes, for example, that this is

> an all-male troupe but from the opening sequence, which presents a manly take on the classically feminine burlesque feather fan act, the show does away with any sense of conventional gender. The result is not so much androgynous as it is a space where masculinity and femininity are both dialled up to full volume, each equally celebrated and parodied. While *Briefs* sometimes slaps you in the face with its outré sexuality, its overall impact is positively energising. (Spunde 2016)

A *Briefs* show is delivered as a cabaret speakeasy, and the spatiality of this format allows political agendas to flow alongside lighter moments that celebrate pop culture icons such as Grace Jones. *Briefs'* flexibility and fluidity of delivery reflects the fluidity of gender performance that emerges in every act within the work. Provocations on gender norms are at the forefront: as the ensemble challenges established notions of masculinity and femininity within their work, they are also challenging a heteronormative, patriarchal society. The cast performs both in and out of drag throughout the show, and the blurring of traditional expectations of gender performance is apparent in both the costuming (not only within a drag context) and also the choreography, which ranges in

Kristy Seymour, PhD, is a circus artist and emerging scholar with over eighteen years' experience in the Australian circus sector. Seymour's Circus Stars school is solely dedicated to children with autism and was the focus of her honours research and her 2017 TEDx Talk. Kristy recently completed her doctorate, "Bodies, Temporality and Spatiality in Australian Contemporary Circus," at Griffith University Gold Coast.

its stylization from parodies of overtly masculine movements to more transverse representations of gendered bodies.

What is refreshing about *Briefs* is the collective's ability to subvert and challenge their own masculinity without invoking a binary of oppositional gender roles. The performance of drag in this instance uses displays or tropes of femininity as weapons of social power and diversity, unlike some traditional drag performances which can at times borderline on parody or caricature of an overly sexualized concept of *female*. Rather, *Briefs* marries traits of female and male. An example of this is the closing act where the entire cast of very muscular men sport various styles of the traditionally female sequined Lycra leotard. Some of the artists are in full drag makeup, while others are not. The male body is openly celebrated and not hidden or disguised as female in this scene: it is presented in juxtaposition to the sequins and Lycra.

Briefs Factory challenges its audience in the use of the body as a mechanism for social expression, a political voice, and a means to provoke thought through the physical aesthetic of circus. This allows Winmill to use his body and his artform to express his stance on current pressing issues within Australian society, such as the treatment of refugees and marriage equality. As he holds the audience's attention with a perfect hula hoop four split[3] at high pace, or as he is participating in an acrobatic human pyramid, randomly, unexpectedly, Winmill shouts out his views. There is no knowing when this might occur in any performance. This is an interesting artistic choice considering that more often than not, circus artists do not speak on stage. Moreover, not only does he choose to speak, he chooses to shout. Winmill's presence on stage and the brash nature of his performances have become well-known within the Australian sector. His distinctness as an artist brings to mind Judith Butler's observation that "one is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries" (Butler 1988, 521).

Winmill *does* his body—or performs his identity, sexuality, and gender—in diverse other ways throughout a *Briefs* show. A trapeze artist and acrobat who was also crowned 2011 King of Burlesque by the Burlesque Hall of Fame in Las Vegas, his aerial performance displays his physical strength and muscle definition, showcasing his traditionally masculine attributes while at the same time emphasizing grace, flexibility, and fluidity—traits usually associated with being feminine. He takes preconceived ideas of gender and repackages them so that the audience is presented with a mix of beauty, strength, and brattish humour. His aerial birdbath trapeze act effectively demonstrates the concept of gender fluidity while teasingly drenching the front row in water. This act sees Winmill present his dynamic and fast-paced static trapeze skills in such a way that although we can see the broadness of his shoulders and the definition of his muscles as he works through his act, we are also taken by his fluidity of movement, graceful extension of the lines of his body, and perfectly pointed toes. Winmill's trapeze act defies a binary of gendered bodies, combining grace, strength, and control in a way that has become his signature style.

Mark Winmill. Image provided by and reproduced with the permission of Hamish McCormick, Carnival Cinema.

Later in the show, he also performs as an alter ego drag character, Nadiah Comminatcha—a failed Olympic gymnast, and the fictional evil twin sister of the famous Romanian champion Nadia Comaneci. Nadiah is rude, aggressive, and loud, sporting a fabulous lime green sequined bikini and frenetically manipulating hula hoops while teetering on high heels. Winmill's performance of Nadiah is vastly different from the aerial birdbath in its depiction of the body and gender tropes. Nadiah is anything but ladylike, despite the feminine attire. Butler explains how gender can become unstuck:

> When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one. (Butler 1990, 6)

This aptly describes the affective terrains of gender traversed in a *Briefs* show. Winmill's performance of gender is whatever it needs to be at any given time. He easily switches from chaotic Nadiah to graceful trapeze artist. His performance of identity is a multiplicity of the characters he embodies on stage, as Deleuze and Guattari argue: "thus each individual is an infinite multiplicity, and the whole

of Nature is a multiplicity of perfectly individuated multiplicities" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 254). In thinking this way, we can then consider that Winmill's performance identity is a multiplicity of the characters he presents onstage. Winmill extends this concept to confront stereotypes of gendered bodies, in a tradition of aerial artistry that extends back to the nineteenth century, as Tait notes:

> Ambidexterity is extended to gender. Certainly males and females in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century aerial troupes did demonstrate similar muscular actions working as flyers and catcher. Gender identity was functionally ambidextrous in the act's physicality. (Tait 2005, 30)

Mark Winmill as Nadiah. Image provided by and reproduced with the permission of Hamish McCormick, Carnival Cinema.

Briefs Factory have created a niche signature style that is provocative and political. Their eccentricity is part of their appeal, making them stand out among the more choreographic contemporary circus companies on the international touring circuit. While their politicized and gender-queer content might seem risky from a commercial perspective, they have nonetheless toured their work consistently since 2010. The nature of their approach, however, does appear to minimize if not completely rule out the possibility of government funding.[4] Their work has polarized critics, but the group has in some cases made negative response work to their advantage, as founding member Natano Fa'anana explains:

> We had some pretty dismal reviews in the early days of touring *Briefs*. A review of our first tour to Adelaide said something like "At best it was a progressive high school musical . . . only worth 2 stars." As a collective, we thought, great, that's awesome, let's share that review on our social media and parody it. And we sold out

> that season anyway. So the audience is saying something completely different to the high art reviewers! Another review we received in Edinburgh referred to us as "Feckless cock prancers." Which we thought was hilarious so we went and had bags made with that printed on them and sold them at the shows. We made merchandise out of the bad reviews. (Fa'anana 2014)

The Briefs Factory artists take negative responses from critics and turn them into publicity, more art, and even an alternative funding stream, another example of their playfully subversive tactics.

The freedom of creative expression that Briefs Factory provides its artists makes an important contribution to maintaining a voice for social freedom, challenging the conservative political climate in Australia. In the run-up to the nationwide referendum on marriage equality in November 2017, some of those campaigning for a no vote worked to instil fear around gender fluidity and nonbinary representations of gender. Briefs Factory, on tour in London, UK, responded by holding a peaceful demonstration after one of their performances involving over five hundred people in "a show of support for equal marriage and equal love," thus raising international awareness about the Australian vote and its implications. "In true *Briefs* style we are going to make noise, even if we're on the other side of the globe," said performer Thomas Worrell (underbellyfestival.com 2017). In their performances as well as their offstage activism, the Briefs Factory collective celebrates diversity and the acceptance of gender difference in contemporary society.

Notes

1. The Briefs Factory collective use the term queer to describe their work as openly embracing themes of homosexuality and sexual ambiguity.

2. Briefs Factory is the name of the collective; its shows include *Briefs, Briefs: The Second Coming*, *Club Briefs*, and *Briefs: Close Encounters*.

3. A hula hoop split is when the circus artist manipulates several hula hoops (in this instance four) across separate sections of their body, spinning them independently of each other at the same time.

4. The Briefs Factory openly refer in their shows to obstacles they have encountered in their attempts to acquire government funding.

References

Briefs Factory. 2017. www.briefsfactory.com.

Butler, Judith. 1988. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40 (4): 519–31.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Fa'anana, Natano. 2014. Interview with Kristy Seymour. Brisbane, Australia, June 26, 2014.

Spunde, Niki. 2016. "Briefs/Briefs Factory." *Australian Stage*, December 14, 2016. www.australianstage.com.au.

Tait, Peta. 2005. *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance*. New York: Routledge.

Underbelly Festival. 2017. "EQUAL LOVE: Briefs Demonstrate for Australian Equal Marriage." September 8, 2016. http://www.underbellyfestival.com/blog/equal-love-briefs-demonstrate-for-australian-equal-marriage.

From Civilization to Regulation: Airports, Circus (Bodies), and the Battle over Control

Michael Eigtved

Copenhagen, Fall 2015

A well-dressed woman appears on stage, walking energetically, pulling a wheeled suitcase, looking around as if she is seeking something. Her moving forward is abruptly set on hold by a man, an official, wearing a green neon vest, quickly pulling out red cordons from stands. Suddenly she finds herself fenced in, trapped in a minute square delimitated by the cordons. More people with suitcases and trolleys appear and form a line behind her, for what the loudspeakers, with the significant, reverberating sound of a PA system, announce as "check-in." A man in the line is standing intimidatingly close to her, pushing his suitcase almost aggressively against her trolley, as they move step by step. More people appear: there is a hustle and a bustle, a man casually opens a big suitcase, perhaps to check something, and from the inside, a female contortionist in a short dress surprisingly rolls out. Immediately she begins to do fast somersaults, twists and shakes, backflips, and other acrobatic movements. A battery of drums raises the sound to a crescendo, the pulse is pounding, the people on stage swarm around, then the check-in counter "opens." The performance Airport *has begun.*

The Performance

Airport played at Theatre Republique, in Copenhagen, Denmark in November 2015. It was written and directed by Kristjàn Ingimarsson and performed by Neander, a company founded by Ingimarsson in 1998.[1] The performance is conceived as an exposure of how extremely quickly humans adapt to even rather radical measures of control and governing systems, and the effects these systems can have on them. The five artists in the company are trained in both physical theatre and circus, so the performance *also* explores how—in a public context such as a departure hall—an exceptional use of the body and of radical strategies for dealing with situations in public spaces can overcome or even subvert the many points of restraint and limitation which constitute the experience of arriving at, waiting at, and consequently taking over—at least symbolically—an airport.

Airports are what French anthropologist Marc Augé has labelled "non-places,[2] and they also represent a paradox: at one time a starting point for travelling, the potential individual pursuit of goals, and the crossing of borders of all kinds; and at the same time a place where you are kept on hold, submit yourself to the utmost regulation and de-individualization, where the archaic dream of flying, of defying gravity, and being united with the elements of nature is realized through high technologies, extreme modernization, and the division of all kinds of labour (Augé 1995, 52). This paradox is what is essentially up for discussion when the sharp, hard, linear, and rational frameworks of modern airports are contested by an "other," that is: by humans, circus artists, who neither physically nor mentally surrender themselves to this logic, and who possess the skills and will to take up the challenge of navigating around the risk of dehumanization and societal control in these non-places.

Michael Eigtved is associate professor of theatre and performance studies at the University of Copenhagen and has published widely about popular theatre, musicals, stand-up comedy, circus, and variety. He is associated with the Academy of Modern Circus in Copenhagen as a teacher and researcher.

The following will attempt to trace the implications of spectatorship, participation, and late modernity on our perception of social relations, as they are—according to the just-mentioned paradox—set at play in *Airport*. With the support of Zygmunt Bauman's conception of liquid modernity (2000), Jacques Rancière's writings on the emancipated spectator (2009), and the concept of a performance's potential transformative power as put forward most recently by the German theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008), the article will investigate how the experience of a performance which is based on both circus skills and theatrical structures may provide the jumping-off point for a rethinking of the mechanisms at work in the everyday experience and understanding of airports.

Airport is a performance in ten sections, following (at least in principle) the dramaturgy of travelling by plane: queuing, luggage handling, security, lounging, cancellation and waiting, drinking and partying, shopping and consuming, and finally flying. In each section, the performers use different kinds of extraordinary social behaviour, bodily skills, and symbolic actions to question the accepted rules of conduct in these (social) situations and within the framework of an airport as a community as well as a regulated environment. The overall impression is a performance emphasizing the many, often unconscious or at least internalized, limitations to which you must submit yourself in order to gain access to flying: a performance which uses excess, caricature, and grotesque enlargements of behavioural patterns to demonstrate alternative ways of coping with these limitations.

In the first scene, following the opening, it is luggage handling we witness. In a sort of "behind the scenes," the suitcases are being handled (as roughly as we sometimes imagine they are) by people on a scaffold construction as a symbolic representation of the luggage belts and transportation mechanisms we never see as passengers. The luggage handlers work rhythmically and in synchrony, choreographed—albeit seemingly loosely—throwing the items from one to another, just escaping the falling weights, yelling and growling. Like a big symbiotic organism, the performers pump the luggage through the system, obviously with a physical capacity most of us do not possess.

Next, we follow the person guiding the planes on the taxi and take-off process using fluorescent sticks, who also possesses a capacity most of us only dream of. The powers invested in his sticks to direct, control, and send the plane off in a blast almost seem to stream out of his body as he poses—with the sound of the roaring airplanes to accompany him—and then "throws," brakes, and slides the imaginary, enormous steel bodies on their journey.[3]

As a contrast to this demonstration of man-and-machine symbiosis, the next scene takes place in the familiar situation of a body search in the security check. The female person that is searched, however, is—as are most of us—ticklish. The security officer's invasion of her personal sphere is made impossible, as she over and over again breaks into a giggle, lowers her arms, and thus through her natural reaction to the unnatural intimacy of the security official, offers us a mirror of the anxiety one could have when facing that exact procedure, often half public, and always uncomfortable. But where most people would have suppressed the urge to giggle, and let the idea of securing travellers control the bodily reaction, here we witness another approach, one of giving in to the laughter, which eventually leads to the official having to give up the project, and the woman is allowed unsearched into the departure area.

The next threes scenes slip almost seamlessly into one another, working up a steady crescendo in sound levels as well as the activities on stage. First, a group of people cram together in the lounge area, trying to get private things done: rearranging stuff in suitcases, taking photographs, changing

clothes, all centred around a too-small table with not enough chairs or space, leaving them to crawl under the table or lie on top of it. The strange paradox of the density of people during rush hour in the airport (beyond check-in there is nothing to rush about, after all) is presented as a weird interim situation, in which everybody at one time becomes extremely aware of each other and at the same time has no contact. This limbo-like scenario is emphasized in the next sequence, where the loudspeakers announce a delay, and a time-has-stopped attitude takes over. A man with a ponytail, and what appear to be bones made of rubber, embodies the feeling of having to stay put but simply being unable to feel comfortable in any position. Literally, he lies, balances, twists, and curls himself on the sofa, at one point upside down like a bored child, at another trying to balance something on his nose while keeping his body balanced on the top of the seats. But the eventual postponing and cancellation of the departure prompts a new approach to an unplanned stay in the airport. Techno music starts pounding, and the action is again led by the woman who appeared from the suitcase; hyper-energetic, dancing, raving, and jumping she draws everybody with her in a tumbling, drunk parade including airport personnel and flight attendants. Everybody gives in to the party vibe, dragging decorations from the airport inventory to form a symbolic palm grove resembling the now-even-more distant destination for the flight, and culminating with the stewardess dancing electric boogie moves to trance music. The situation slowly breaks all the rules of the airport, subverting all systems, and total disruption of order is the final result.

The idea of depersonalizing the flight attendant (through robot movements) carries on in the next section, as the commercial side of airports becomes the focus. The structures of the airport as marketplace and temple of tax-free commercialism are dissolved as the group of people, now in slow motion, grab a mannequin from a fashion shop and split it into the arms, legs, torso, and head. Each person carries a piece, lifting them up and holding them back again in the shape of a body, now letting the mannequin "fly" above their heads. The other body is virtually carried around, alternately separated and gathered again.

As the flying sequences die out and the party lights are dimmed, out of the darkness comes a person lying on the lower shelf of a luggage trolley, arms spread out; the sliding movement of the cart allows us to get a feeling of the lightness of a person gliding through the air. More trolleys with bodies in perfect balance slide onto the stage, performing what becomes the grand finale: an air ballet of circus bodies, where the creative use of the trolleys appears to abolish gravity and allows the performers finally to take flight.

Projection, Identification, Transformation, and the Circus Body

Historically there has, within cultural studies and related lines of research, been some opposition between projection and identification as two ways to understand how an audience, a consumer, or just a human being might engage with cultural products in which the presentation of physical actions is the main element. The psychology of audiencing has often been divided into one of these two positions: either you do (more or less literally) something yourself—bodily, that is—or you submit yourself to the experience in the sense that you imagine yourself in somebody else's place. Either you project yourself into something, participating in the production of the experience on a direct level, or you mirror the action in your mind, and try to get an idea of what more physically active participants must be experiencing.

But the last two decades has seen a steadily growing interest in combining the two positions into a third way of investigating how to be present at a performance. This contributes to ongoing efforts to understand the experience of live performance as an exchange between bodily actions and reactions, and the psychological processes during, as well as intellectual reflections after, the event. It is encapsulated in an understanding of the event as embedded in late modernity as a historical period as well as conditions for living, inspired by the concept of liquid modernity coined by British-Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 3). Within this conceptualization, late modernity is characterized by an absence of stable structures. Under these conditions, self-positioning at a performance involves awareness of one's own bodily presence, experience of the performance on a sensual level, and intellectual reflection on the performance's meaning. This self-positioning becomes a way to face the challenge of navigating in a world with few solid landmarks: we use events such as the performance in question as a means of anchoring ourselves. It also links to thinking about spectatorship put forward by Jacques Rancière (2009), which replaces the idea of viewing a performance with the radical notion of participation. In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière states: "'Good' theatre is one that uses its separated reality in order to abolish it" (2009, 7). As with Rancière, the aim in this article is to investigate how the participating audience may use a performance like *Airport* to examine and potentially transform their understanding of social behaviour and control mechanisms by becoming aware of the inherent similarities between the performance's symbolic presentation and actual circumstances in airports. Or, as Rancière puts it, the awareness is that of the constituting oppositions: "the network of presuppositions, the set of equivalences and oppositions, that underpin their possibilities; equivalences between theatrical audience and community, gaze and passivity, exteriority and separation, mediation and simulacrum; oppositions between the collective and the individual, the image and living reality, activity and passivity, self-ownership and alienation" (7).

Basically, the performance *Airport* maintains a playful, entertaining attitude from both performers and audience, and not a modernist, artful one. My focus is therefore not as much on the aesthetics of the performance as it is on the actions in it seen as a way of engaging entertainingly with serious problems. Play and entertainment can, according to the Danish cultural studies scholar Martin Zerlang and along the above-mentioned dualism of identification and projection, be conceived of as *mirroring* or *throwing*, two contrasting albeit indivisible sides of the same cultural element (Zerlang 1989, 18).[4] The mirror (image), the pleasure of recognizing ourselves or situations we have experienced, is one side. Most entertaining performances emphasize recognizability over abstraction, and the possibility of relatively easy recognition of places, people, and situations is also the scenic strategy of *Airport*. This is combined with an element of joy, when confusion (as when, before the PA system announces the check-in, we are not sure what the empty stage is representing) becomes surprise and relief when we can attribute the elements and actions on stage to a unifying concept (when the voice sounds and all the elements fall into place), or the other way around: apparently ordinary situations evolve into unpredictable ones and back.

The other side is throwing, as in throwing yourself into the performance, here not in the sense of the previous (historical) understanding of physical doing as actually participating in the show itself, but rather the understanding of affective participation in which one might not be actively walking out onto the stage oneself, but one is nonetheless actively physically responsive to what's happening on it. In *Airport* we are invited to participate in the action through our (bodily) readiness to react to the actions and situations on stage. The classic "ooh and ahh," the "wow effect" of circus is one prominent mode of reacting. But as Australian circus researcher Peta Tait points out, "while it is possible to claim a spectrum of jolts, gasps, contractions and sighs in the perception of circus

bodies, the extent of their arousal and interpretive significance for an individual spectator remains open-ended" (Tait 2005, 143). To be submitted to the immediate affect is no doubt an important element in the overall experience, and even one that is sought after and appreciated. This therefore makes up one very important half of the pleasure, or as Tait puts it, "the immediacy of visceral experience contributes to the reception . . . and therefore also invariably accompanies the perception of a body's cultural identity" (143). Which in this context might translate into the notion that as you viscerally respond to the performance, you are also inevitably noting the ways in which the bodies in the performance are coded (e.g. gender, ethnicity, ability).

The scenic presentation and immediacy of bodily reactions evoke the possibility of the previously mentioned combination of experiences, consisting of both the "wow" and a reflection on the cultural significance of the actions involved. For instance, when the contortionist rolls out of the suitcase, at first we are just surprised, but soon after it crosses your mind: "How could she get (and fit) in there?" At the same time, our own bodily experience of curling up tells us that it is an extreme achievement, requiring extreme control over one's muscles. So we throw our experiences with our own bodies into the experience of the opening sequence, which invites a reflection on our ability to manoeuvre in a restrained space, and ultimately where we find these spaces physically as well as mentally in our lives.

It is thus in the exchange between the two types of experience and attitude that value is rooted. Zerlang sums it up as follows: "Play and entertainment can . . . be divided into types through the opposition between throwing or projecting part of yourself onto something else and mirroring or identifying yourself with something else" (Zerlang 1989, 18). He identifies four different basic elements in entertainment, four types: fighting, gaming, masking, and vertigo. They are all based in the relationship between oneself and the other, drawing on psychology and social relations theory. Zerlang writes: "Since it is the same mechanism, you can do a model of entertainment that would otherwise dissolve in the in the swarm of forms. There is a system of play in amusement. It can be played in four modes. You can out play the other like in sports, but you can also play another like in theatre or movies. You can play on the other like in gambling, but you can also play with your identity like in the roller coaster of the amusement park" (18).

In *Airport* all four of these are present, although with a strong emphasis on masking and vertigo. Through the theatricality of the performance, the use of characters (masks), dramaturgy, and staging, acting becomes the predominant element, though the performers time and time again contradict this and through circus skills transform their function on stage into a different mode of experience.

In this mode, vertigo is often a vital element, firstly because there are a lot of flying acrobatics involved—leaps and jumping, throws and rolling (even on the luggage trolleys, as all kids long to do). Many situations also develop more surprisingly, because the actions break away from ordinary (airport) behaviour and dissolve into energetic or poetic abstractions, which may leave the audience slightly dizzy and overwhelmed. Projection and identification are possible on a number of levels, and the experience of the performance gets its power from the complexity of strategies it involves, engaging both bodily reactions and intellectual reflection.

In this sense, *Airport* becomes a terrific showcase for the ways in which the understanding of theatrical performances as experience has evolved in recent years. American theatre scholar Marvin Carlson boils it down to the change from the notion of a work of art to an event. In the introduction to Erika Fischer-Lichte's *The Transformative Power of Performance*, Carlson states that as an

audience at a performance we are in "a situation in which we have an experience which causes us to gain a new, refreshed comprehension of our own situation of being in the world. [One that] engages the full activity of the human being as an embodied mind" (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 7). When investigated along those lines, *Airport* offers an understanding of the situation experienced by the woman queuing for check-in, but that is maybe not the point. The attraction in which audiences perhaps are equally interested is the possibility of engaging fully in an experience, which enables renewed understanding of our own conditions and sparks reactions to living in late modernity. In the following, I will try to trace these possibilities in *Airport*.

Circus and Civilization: A History of "the Individual"

The first challenge presented in the performance, the lining up, is in many ways an emblem of civilization. You must suppress all your instincts and urges to succumb to the principle of queuing. Or in other words: you must behave as civilized. On civilization and entertainment, Zerlang notes the following: "Civilisation consists of an exchange of symbols: you trade instead of rob, fights are settled in court, punishment is no longer primarily mutilation of the body, but rather moral improvement of the spirit. . . . The entertainment industry had a civilising effect for two reasons: Firstly it taught people to put themselves in an idol's place: identification. And secondly it taught them to transfer their own conflicts to others: projection" (Zerlang 1989, 132).

I propose that the performance *Airport* acts within this system of symbolic exchange, as do most performing arts. But—and this is my point of interest—while symbolic exchange *per se* was the hallmark of civilization processes, what is now called for is performative action to handle the discussion of the *backside* of civilization as it evolved into modernity: frustration, anxiety, and the unbearable suppression of bodily energies. We are presented with actions that we both bodily identify with, and upon which we project our conflict with the process of civilizing.

German philosopher Walter Benjamin, according to Zerlang, has called circus "a sociological nature reserve" (1989, 141). This is, however, a reserve where nature must obey modern man for *social* reasons. After having conquered animals and learned to exploit their potential, for instance by *riding* a horse and thus obtaining speed far beyond human capacity, he or she, when becoming civilized, dismounts the horse. Instead—in circus—he or she shows how, from a distance (with oral commands, signs, lashes of the whip, etc.), they can control the animal, in principle without any other purpose than exactly that: symbolically showing they can, and in that process presenting him or herself as an admirable individual for the audience to identify with. The presentation of trained animals in the traditional circus is part domestication and part anthropomorphizing: by making the animals perform in as close a relation to humans as possible, and making them appear to have human qualities (like putting the dogs to bed, etc.), the sovereignty of man over animals is transformed into a question of civilization.

In *Airport*, this element from traditional circus is challenged through reversal, since it is the un-tamed and perhaps even un-tameable individuals who take over. Gone are the animals, as they often are in contemporary circus. Instead, humans, acting in their place, take on the role the control of animals had occupied in traditional circus. Amid the hypercivilization depicted in the performance by the infrastructures of an airport, we are confronted with civilization's "other." We then, in a way, can have a double mirroring: we can identify with the ideal behaviour which the situations in principle call for, and we can certainly feel an urge to identify with these individual "others" in the sense that

they offer to act in a way which we are unable to dare (or are physically not fit to) do. On one level, the whole experience of being present at *Airport* thus offers a negotiation of our own individuality, and this, according to Bauman, is exactly what liquid modernity is about:

> Casting members as individuals is the trademark of modern society. That casting, however, was not a one-off act: it is an activity re-enacted daily. Modern society exists in its incessant activity of "individualizing" as much as the activities of individuals consist in the daily reshaping and renegotiating of the mutual entanglements called "society." Neither of the two partners stays put for long. And so the meaning of "individualization" keeps changing, taking up ever new shapes—as the accumulated results of its past history undermined inherited rules, set new behavioural precepts and turn out ever new stakes of the game. (Bauman 2000, 31)

This is what *Airport*—and performance as such—might enact: taking a role in the undermining of rules that seem so firm and unchangeable, governing how we as individuals may act in public space, in order to ease the burden of civilization.

The meaning of "other" has in *Airport* moved from being, in traditional circus, part of a genre that worked as a showcase for the *control* of "others" (wild animals, materials, race and gender, gravity, or mentality) toward a concept that—when used about artists—challenges the same control from within. Through uninhibited movements, the possibility of liberating the body from physical restraints, and the blurring of borders, all of which are hallmarks of circus, the performers present "others" with whom we can identify. The problem in late modernity is not how to be civilized, but how to react to the structures civilization has produced and which now have become an obstacle. From being the controlling instance, admired by the audience for the degree to which the trainer managed to control an animal, we now admire the individuals who, as a result of self-discipline (i.e., years of training their body) are able to evict control.

Circus Bodies and the Un-controlled Extraordinary

Airport takes circus skills and circus bodies as described by Tait and uses them to handle situations from everyday life. In *Airport*, the reference to contemporary circus is made obvious, and this referential system allows the radical mirroring and opposition of what according to French circus historian Hugues Hotier was the scope of traditional circus: to make the extraordinary available only within a realm clearly separated from everyday life—and under control (1995, 95). In the performance, and set in the framework of the familiar—for most of us—airport, bodily actions take us to a certain level of identification. Tait writes on this kind of experience with regard to aerial acts, but I think the basic idea of this exceptional, phenomenological moment also applies to some of the actions in *Airport*:

> Spectators might be attracted to athletic movements that are physically familiar, whether it is sport, or dance or aerial movement. Conversely, they might be bodily drawn to watch unfamiliar extremes. Comments by performers and spectators imply that a body in action can create sensory spaces that momentarily enter "opaque zones." (Tait 2005, 147)

So what *Airport* offers is a moment where the spectators at one time symbolically refer their understanding of the performance to an airport, and at the same time, through the experience of the actions presented to them, can enter that special zone where the idea of how to behave in the airport is transformed.

In *The Transformative Power of Theatre*, Fischer-Lichte argues that, because of the performativity involved, it is not merely symbolic acts we experience when going to the theatre or circus, but the possible reestablishment of reality—in a transformed way (2008, 7). Setting off from J. L. Austin's idea of the performative act of speaking, where things do actually transform due to the performing of a speech act (the model example is baptizing, where the child literally transforms into someone with a name in the instant the priest says it out loud for the congregation), and linking to gender theories by Judith Butler and anthropologies of performance by Richard Schechner, Fischer-Lichte arrives at an understanding of performance as a place where in the mere utterance, the performative action holds the potential of transforming the audience. By offering the experience of another person embodying specific ways of acting and handling of a specific situation, a potential for transformation of one's own way of acting is constituted, since reality is indeed in this line of thinking equal to how you act, rather than to a given norm or standard. Although Fischer-Lichte writes about performing identity and gender in a more general sense, her ideas can, I think, be applied to this instance I have pursued:

> individuals alone do not control the processes of embodiment; they are not free to choose what possibilities to embody, or which identity to adopt. Neither are they wholly determined by society. While society might attempt to enforce the embodiment of certain possibilities by punishing deviation, it cannot generally prevent individuals from pursuing them (27).[5]

Here in *Airport*, we witness precisely the battle between civilized behaviour and the potential punishment for the deviation from it, and the liberating and potentially transformative power of another approach to embodiment and behaviour in the restricting framework of the airport.

This analysis of *Airport* has tried to justify a view of its performance as an example of a historical development from understanding circus as part of a civilization project (a reservation for the un-fit as well as the extraordinary as mere sensation), toward seeing circus and the trained circus artist as the impetus for possible experiences of optimism and liberation. The concept of the other in this sense has come to represent a possible way of dealing with the limitations and frustrations of modern life by back-flipping the meaning of oppositions like ordinary-unusual, normal-exceptional, or possible-impossible.

Notes

1. A 3:19 min. video excerpt from the live performance is at https://vimeo.com/146642006. This article is based on the author's experience of the performance on November 15, 2015, during its first run at Republique Theatre in Copenhagen.

2. In his groundbreaking book, Augé describes airports, highways, railway stations, etc. as places for transit, commerce, and leisure, but which are defined in his theory by their lack of historical continuity (1995, 52).

3. The recorded performance soundscape is composed as a flow of music, real sound, effects and noises, carefully designed to both reflect and drive the actions on stage.

4. This and subsequent translations from the Danish are the author's.

5. Translation from the German the author's.

References

Augé, Marc. 1995. *Non-Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. London: Verso.
Bauman, Zygmunt. (2000) 2012. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Fischer-Lichte, Erika. 2008. *The Transformative Power of Performance*. London: Routledge.
Fischer-Lichte, Erika, and Jens Roselt. 2001. "Attraktion des Augenblicks—Aufführung, Performance, Performativ und Performativität als Theatrewissenschaftliche Begriffe." In *Paragrana*, Band 10, Heft 1.
Guy, Jean Michel. 1998. "La Transformation du Cirque." In *Theatre Aujourdhui 7*. Paris: CNDP.
Hotier, Hugues. 1995. *Cirque, Communication, Culture*. Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux.
Iser, Wolfgang. (1974) 1990. *The Implied Reader*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
McCauley, Gay. 2000. *Space in Performance*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
Ranciere, Jacques. 2009. *The Emancipated Spectator*. London: Verso.
Sauter, Willmar. 2000. *The Theatrical Event*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
———. 2006. *Eventness. A Concept of the Theatrical Event*. Stockholm: STUTS.
Tait, Peta. 2005. *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance*. London: Routledge.
Zerlang, Martin. 1989. *Underholdningens Historie*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.

In Search of the Dramatic Composition: A Contemporary Circus Performance as a Structure of Signs

Veronika Štefanová

Circus scholars have long debated the issue of performance analysis, that is, how to analyze contemporary circus performances in the absence of an actual circus-specific framework. However, while contemporary circus itself—being a rather young discipline—may be said to lack a traditional framework or approach, it may well benefit from the utilization of approaches used elsewhere. This analysis thus picks one specific Other as a logical starting point: the well-documented and minutely explored world of theatre.

Is it possible to analyze a contemporary circus performance in the same way as a theatre performance? In an attempt to provide an answer to this question, I am proposing a basic framework derived primarily from Czech theatre theory based on presemiotic and semiotic studies. In my previous work (Štefanová 2016) I have extensively examined the work of leading Czech theatre theorists of the 1930s and 1940s, specifically the precursor of Czech theatre semiotics, Otakar Zich, and members of the Prague Linguistic Circle, which I believe forms a framework applicable to the analysis of all performing arts—including contemporary circus. Since I understand contemporary circus production as a form of dramatic art (i.e., not unlike a theatrical production), I employ theories which make use of the theatre sign system and theories which perceive the theatrical—and thus also contemporary circus—production as a structure comprised of individual components. A contemporary circus performance, like a theatre performance, does not necessarily require scenography or music. However, since each of these components reinforces the other, the overall communicative function of the performance thus grows as a result of their mutual interconnection. In a contemporary circus performance, the communicative function of the movement component (i.e., the circus arts element) is strengthened by virtue of the existence of the remaining components. As raw circus movement is thus transformed and stylized, it becomes removed from its original raw form and produces certain associations in the viewer. All components making up the contemporary circus performance may be perceived as assuming the role of signs, in accordance with the writings of theatre scholar Petr Bogatyrev: "in the course of the play things on the stage that play the part of theatrical signs acquire special features, qualities and attributes that they do not have in real life. Things in the theatre, like the actor himself, are transformed" (1938, 101).

Clearly, the Prague Linguistic Circle of the 1930s primarily focused on theatre and not on the as yet nonexistent genre of contemporary circus; however, a contemporary circus performance may be seen as resembling a theatre performance. In fact, it may be viewed as a synthesis of circus and theatre aesthetics, which do not exist in parallel but must function continuously and simultaneously for the contemporary circus work to achieve its full meaning. Theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte argues that "when multiple sign systems are involved in the creation of a complex sign, the meaning of the complex sign does not arise from a simple sum of meanings of the individual signs, but rather from the relationships between them" (1993, 21).[1]

Veronika Štefanová holds a PhD from Charles University in Prague, where she has explored contemporary circus as a dramatic art. She is in charge of the library, documentation and research section at CIRQUEON, the umbrella organization for the support and development of contemporary circus in the Czech Republic.

From the perspective of theatre theory, a contemporary circus performance may be said to include theatre and circus components coexisting within a dramatic composition, a complex structure determined by dramaturgical and directorial concepts. The dramatic composition in turn determines the organization of individual components within the work. While contemporary circus does share many components with theatre (scenography, light, sound, text), it also includes a component which is unique to the genre, namely the circus arts. When these circus arts, including gymnastics, acrobatics, and juggling, are viewed within the context of the dramatic composition, the circus component of a given performance is infused with additional meaning. In his study *The Mobility of the Theatrical Sign* (1940), theatre scholar and director Jindřich Honzl writes:

> The whole of stage reality—the dramatist's words, the actor's performances, the stage lighting—all these represent other realities. . . . Otakar Zich expressed this view in *The Aesthetics of Dramatic Art* when he stated that "dramatic art is an art of images and this holds in absolutely every respect." (129)

The circus component, which frequently constitutes the dominant aspect of a contemporary circus performance, requires the presence of a circus artist. Such an artist's performance on the stage may be described as a physiological expression, but, as in the case of dance and theatre, the expression is also psychological. Like a mime, theatre actor, or dancer, the circus artist uses movement to create a stage metaphor, which is, as theatre director Emil František Burian sums up,

> anything that, emanating from the stage, evokes the idea of something different from what it really is. A stage metaphor uses one reality to hide another reality in the spectator's imagination. This imagined reality is often very different from or the complete opposite of the reality that is being performed. (Burian 1937, 499)

In dramatic genres, these stage metaphors—signs—constitute the very building blocks of each genre's sign system, that is, the code employed in communication with the audience. While circus acts may be considered as signs, meaning may also be conveyed by the elements comprising these acts. An artistic or circus act may be broken down into individual figures, which are subject to the rules of a given circus discipline; the figure itself may be further subdivided into separate physical movements, which are also capable of assuming meaning.

The transformation of physical movement into meaningful signs within the context of a dramatic situation is mediated by the circus artist. This process produces a specific character, and, in subsequent interaction with the audience, creates a dramatis persona. Following Zich's theorization of these terms (1986, 42–48), in a theatre context, the audience may be said to perceive a live actor acting on stage (signifier) but in effect experiences a dramatis persona (signified); the same concept may be applied to some narrative contemporary circus performances featuring circus artists who—like actors in the world of theatre—may likewise become dramatis personae engaging in dramatic situations.

In order to test the validity of this theatre-based approach, let us analyze a brief dramatic situation from *La Putyka* (2009), the first major performance by the Czech contemporary circus company Cirk La Putyka. One of the first scenes includes three characters: an innkeeper played by an actor and two barflies portrayed by circus artists. The innkeeper brings the patrons only one pint of beer instead of the expected two, and a subsequent session of hand-to-hand acrobatics portrays the resulting conflict. In my perspective, in the same way that the creators of the performance do not

wish to showcase acrobatic numbers for their own sake, they also specifically focus on suppressing the very material used in the construction of individual acts, that is, the performers' bodies, by employing bulky costumes and masks: performers playing the role of pub patrons are dressed in stuffed leotards which deform their bodies to resemble chubby old men.

Petr Horníček and Jiří Weissmann in *La Putyka*. Photo by Martin Faltus.

Furthermore, the creators of *La Putyka*—Martin Kukučka, Lukáš Trpišovský and Rostislav Novák, all directors with theatre experience—were looking for a way to utilize circus disciplines to create a complex performance capable of communicating content based on a defined environment and designated set of situations. As Novak mentions in an interview (Štefanová 2014), they turned to contemporary circus as an experimental platform which would serve as a springboard for providing new images within the dramatic arts context. They had to learn how to transform circus arts (movement material) into the language of theatre. The creators first had to understand the laws of circus artistry in order to start interlinking them with additional ingredients essential for the final form of the stage work. The goal was to transform movement into a meaningful sign on stage. The resulting interlinking of significant and simultaneously physically extreme movement—belonging to either one or more artistic techniques—led to the development of larger and more complex choreographic structures which make up the imagined reality of *La Putyka*.

Left to right: Petr Horníček, Anna Schmidtmajerová, Vojtěch Fülep, Rostislav Novák, and Jiří Weissmann in *La Putyka*. Photo by Martin Faltus.

La Putyka may be subject to a theatre-based semiotic analysis specifically because performers—by virtue of becoming characters and interacting with the audience—are thus transformed into dramatis personae. On the other hand, this approach is not suitable for analyzing, for example, Cirk La Putyka's later performance entitled *Black Black Woods* (dir. Linda Kapetanea and Josef Fruček 2016). Dramatis personae are absent here: father and son Rostislav Novák Sr. and Jr. are present as just that: father and son. Moreover, not only are there no characters, but there are also no distinct stage metaphors: more or less all movement and actions seem to be self-contained. While *Black Black Woods* is something of an exception in the body of work produced by Cirk La Putyka, semiotic analysis clearly constitutes a method that cannot be indiscriminately applied to all contemporary circus performances in a meaningful way.

In contemporary circus productions that adopt narrative, responsibility for creating meaningful work that presents to the audience some other reality rests with the director. A contemporary circus director must be able to engage in analytical and synthetic thinking about circus movement while also being capable of combining—from a directing and dramaturgical point of view—the full range of meanings created by individuals with respect to space and other artists.

As the director is responsible for assembling the dramatic composition of a performance on the basis of his or her dramaturgical and directorial concept which dictates how and why individual components—including the circus component—are represented within a work, the theories discussed here are suitable for analyzing contemporary circus performances conceived and developed by a director, an approach generally utilized in the world of theatre.

Note

1. Translation from Czech by David Konečný.

References

Bogatyrev, Petr. 2016. "Theatrical Signs." In *Theatre Theory Reader. Prague School Writings*, edited by David Drozd, 9–114. Prague: Karolinum Press.

Burian, Emil František. 2016. "The Stage Metaphor." In *Theatre Theory Reader. Prague School Writings*, edited by David Drozd, 499–500. Prague: Karolinum Press.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika. 1993. "Znakový jazyk divadla: K problému generování divadelního významu." *Divadelní revue* 10 (2): 18–30.

Honzl, Jindřich. 2016. "The Mobility of the Theatrical Sign." In *Theatre Theory Reader. Prague School Writings,* edited by David Drozd, 129–46. Prague: Karolinum Press.

Štefanová, Veronika. 2014. "Rostislav Novák on Risk." Translated by David Konecny. *Sideshow Circusmagazine*. http://sideshow-circusmagazine.com/magazine/deconstructions/rostislav-novak-risk>.

———. 2016. *Contemporary Circus as a Dramatic Art. From Contemporary Circus Performance Analysis to its Aesthetic Discourse.* PhD diss., Charles University.

Disrupting the Binary of Otherness—A Semiotic Reading of the Performance *L'autre* by Claudio Stellato

Franziska Trapp

Black. The lights are slowly illuminating the stage—a black box created by a black dance floor and opaque flats on the side and back walls. A red carpet, half rolled, lies on the ground. The base plate of a wooden cabinet is visible in the background. A darkly dressed, barefooted man enters the lit space, slowly walking forward. His head is to one side, appearing snapped off at the front. On his shoulders, an old chest of drawers is balancing. Silence. No sounds are audible. The man stops walking, standing still. Suddenly the red carpet unfolds without obvious human intervention. The man turns to one side so that his profile is visible. He slowly bends his knees and begins lowering himself. His hands are touching the floor, his body turns to an all-fours position. Stretching his legs back, he slowly positions his body, spread-eagle, on the ground. With his hands, he places two feet of the chest of drawers on the ground, its upper part staying connected to his shoulders. Silence.

"*The Other* is the craziness we carry inside, it is confusion and instinct, twisted logic and genuine feelings, a child in an adult's body" (Festival Novog Cirkusa 2012).

The contemporary circus performance *L'autre*,[1] created in 2008 by Claudio Stellato and his partner Martin Firket, was promoted by the above quotation at the 2012 Festival Novog Cirkusa in Croatia. What is presented on stage is the interaction between an artistic body and three pieces of furniture: a red carpet, an old chest of drawers, and a cabinet, which move without obvious external forms of propulsion. The performance takes place in a black box. Only at the ending is music used. Everything happens in silence. Some of the noise created by the action is amplified with the help of speakers. The auditorium is completely dark. Eleven clear lights and four floodlights are used to draw attention to what happens on stage.

Claudio Stellato in *L'Autre*. Photo credit: Cie Claudio Stellato.

Franziska Trapp is the founder of the research project Zirkus | Wissenschaft at the University of Münster and organizer of the international conferences "Semiotics of the Circus" (2015) and "UpSideDown – Circus and Space" (2017). She has worked for various circus productions, such as the *Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain*, and completed the *Certificate en Dramaturgie Circassienne* (CNAC, ESAC).

Given its title, *L'autre* obviously contributes to discourse about otherness, and an objection could be made that it might be redundant to analyze the performance with regard to the topic of difference. The structuralist approach chosen for this paper, however, "is less interested in interpreting what . . . works mean. . . . [I am interested] in explaining *how* they can mean what they mean; that is, in showing what implicit rules and conventions are operating in a given work" (Baldick 2001, 320). This paper aims to show how within the circus performance *L'autre* the construction of otherness is based on the repetition and adoption of conventional conceptions of otherness. I explore in what ways the production simultaneously manages to subvert and overcome commonplace binaries such as "self" and "other" through its semantic structure.

The theoretical basis for this performance analysis lies in the structuralist assumption that "the elements composing any cultural phenomenon . . . are similarly 'relational': that is, they have meaning only by virtue of their contrasts with other elements of the system, especially in binary oppositions of paired opposites" (Baldick 2001, 320). Within this understanding, texts[2] are able to produce equivalences that are independent of conventional cultural equivalences through the formation of parallelism, comparisons, metaphors, and other contiguous procedures. They are thereby—to a limited extent—able to create their own paradigm, which can in turn become part of a culture (Baßler 2007, 359). "Structuralist analysis seeks the underlying system . . . that governs individual utterances or instances. In formulating the laws by which elements of such a system are combined, it distinguishes between sets of interchangeable units (paradigms) and sequences of such units in combination (syntagms), thereby outlining a basic 'syntax' of human culture" (Baldick 2001, 320). Thus, by using structuralist methods of analysis, it is this paper's objective to explain how the performance *L'autre* functions.

Interpretation

At first glance, circus seems a genre in which spoken or written natural language tends to play a subordinate role. Looking at circus performances more precisely, it is clear that this assessment is only partly true—at least it is seldom found in the strict interpretation of "narrating without language" in which "a story unknown to the appreciator is evoked by the purely sensory, non-semantic resources of image or sound" (Ryan 2009, 272). Performances usually have a language-based title to suggest a narrative interpretation. Furthermore, descriptions in program booklets and advertising materials give the performances their first thematic classification. This is the case in the performance under discussion: its title *L'autre* provides paratextual framing. Automatically, we not only classify the pieces of furniture as objects but also assume that they are the other. We complete the information of what we actually see according to certain cultural patterns and thus form our idea of the performance's overall topic (Baßler 2011).

In the following, I would like to focus on three main conventional concepts of otherness with which the performance engages: a concept of otherness in which someone portrays oneself at the centre of focus and the other as the outside; a classification of the other as mysterious and foreign; and the use of attributes of otherness such as animality, abnormality, and freakery. How do these concepts dominate the process of meaning-generation? In what way does the performance deal with culturally established paradigms, and through what means are these paradigms transcended?

Proscenium Stage and Spatial Objects

The concept of otherness in which someone portrays themselves at the centre of focus and the other as the outside is established by the opposition inside and outside created at two levels: on the level of the relationship between stage and spectators, and on the stage itself. In the

performance under discussion, a proscenium stage, framed by black curtains, is used: on a technical level this choice makes the magic illusions possible and on a semantic level it creates a distance between the spectators and the actions on stage. Dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster proclaims:

> The proscenium theatre emphasizes the separation of audience and performance by situating the action on stage in a different realm from that of the viewers. The architecture delineates the functional role for viewers—as observers who sit facing in one direction toward the stage—and for performers—as residents of the framed, boslike structure on the stage. (1986, 60–61)

The theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte goes even further by attributing a political dimension to the proscenium performance space, explaining that it identifies the spectator as "an indiscreet observer who penetrates more or less unjustifiably the sphere of the actor" (1983, 141). This effect, which is attributed to proscenium stages in general, is enhanced by the special lighting used in *L'autre*. By focusing spotlights on the actor and furniture while leaving the surrounding area in the dark, the view of the spectator is mediated. She is looking from the outside to the "inside" of what is happening. With regard to the discourse of otherness, the choice of a proscenium stage therefore obtains a semantic meaning: the artist is portrayed at the centre of focus and the other, the audience, at the outside—and vice versa.

Fischer-Lichte continues: due to the use of a proscenium space, the auditorium is no longer a place of the public life of society. It becomes a "projection screen for the inwardness of the individual viewer" (Fischer-Lichte 1983, 141). Thereby, with regard to the performance space used in *L'autre,* the establishment of the opposition inside/outside not only focuses on the concept of the other as the outside but also marks the other as an inner difference within the self. On a metaphorical level, it thereby makes visual what the programmers of the Festival Novog Cirkusa describe in their marketing of the production: "The artist incarnates himself, but also 'the other'; the conscious 'me' and the subconscious, imaginary 'me', coexisting in the same body" (Festival Novog Cirkusa, 2012).

The double reading of the concept of otherness, the inside/outside and me/inner-me, is repeated through the scenography onstage. The old chest of drawers and the cabinet are illuminated indirectly so that the three-dimensionality and the spatial depth of the furniture are underlined. The actor repeatedly disappears in the pieces of furniture—sometimes completely, sometimes with body parts visible on the outside. The performance creates an imaginary reminiscent of Russian nesting dolls: the audience is looking from the outside into the proscenium stage, into the spatial furniture—both in terms of observing the other, but also in looking into the inside of the self.

New Magic, Clarity, and Lighting

New Magic is a primary procedure by which *L'autre* generates meaning. The art form emerged in 2002. Despite using the repertory of gestured codes and conventions of modern magic (e.g., the manipulation of cards, coins or cigarettes, the act of sawing a woman into half, or magic runes), the aim of new magicians is to "free the discipline from its familiar and formal limits" (Jacob 2010, 4). It thereby makes use of traditional techniques but changes the way of presentation. New Magic transforms the stage reality itself: "*New magic* plays with the real within the real: that is to say, within the same space-time offered by perception. Images no longer correspond with an illusionist act. They make up a proper order to reality" (Navarro in Bordenave 2010, 5).

L'autre uses this principle as a main dramaturgical strategy. Despite creating a magical, fictional universe, it continuously underlines the ordinariness and thereby the reality of the setting by incorporating standard furniture and discreet dark grey costumes, and by reducing "artificial" sounds to a minimum (noises created by the action itself are amplified with the help of speakers but songs are only used at the very end). Therefore, the performance repeats signs that underline the reality of what is happening while consistently creating images of unreality. The ordinary characteristics are also attributed to the "invisible" spaces around the stage: for a few seconds, bright lighting is used to illuminate the surroundings to reinforce the impression that there is nothing to animate the moving object—"There is no magic happening. What you see is real!" With this bright light, the seeming reality reinforces the unreal events: the moving furniture, the flying cabinet, the breathing carpet are staged as being real and unreal at the same time. By using the repetition of equivalences and oppositions, the performance builds its own paradigm: the other is classified as being mysterious and foreign. But these characteristics are also ascribed to the opponent of the other: the self or, within this understanding, the real.

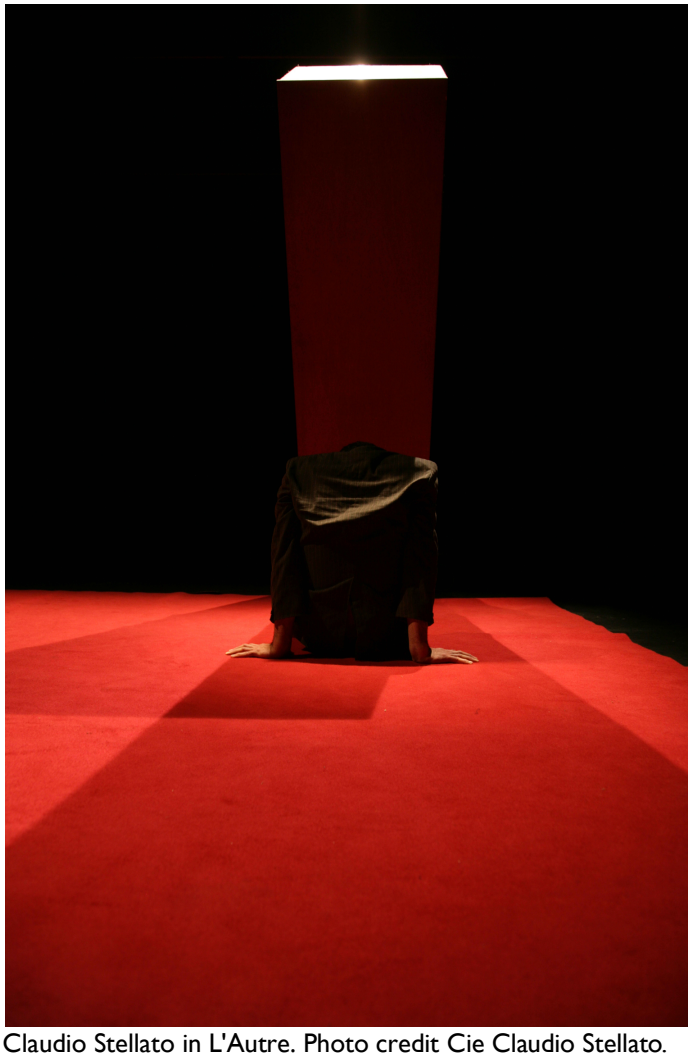
One-Minute Sculptures, Movement, and Sound

The objects used in the performance are attributed with characteristics of living things such as movement and respiration. The red carpet seems to advance to the side of the playing space independently; the rhythmical opening and closing of the old chest of drawers is reminiscent of inhalation and exhalation. The pieces of furniture are staged not as inanimate objects, but as animated subjects. The artist creates sculptures through their interactions with the furniture that last for some seconds due to the slowness of the movement. With these sculptures, which pose opposition to the living traits of the furniture, the performance makes visible attributes of otherness that are often present in everyday concepts and thus culturally established: animality, abnormality, and freakery. Body and object together create animal-like shapes which can be easily decoded, as they are directly referring to familiar images from the spectators' reality. In this picture, for example, the performer trapped in the chest of drawers with the moving legs outside is reminiscent of a crab trying to move forward. The link between animality and otherness is reinforced by the use of acoustic signs. Sounds as consequences of activity—the breathing of the artist, his scratching and grating on the wooden furniture—are not avoided, but highlighted by their repetition and volume.

Claudio Stellato in *L'Autre*. Photo credit: Cie Claudio Stellato.

Furthermore, the interaction of the body with the object creates images that reference a concept of otherness connected with Hurley's thesis that "all circus bodies are stained with the residue of the sideshow freak body" (Hurley 2016, 134). While using elements of New Magic and

contortion, the performance visually demonstrates two of the categories of freakery distinguished by Hurley: the "born freak" and the "made freak" (134). According to Hurley, "with the contortionist, the connection to freaks, particularly 'born freaks,' intensifies. . . . The contortionist . . . is naturally physically prodigious, even if this prodigality is not quite so immediately visible as the born freak's" (134). *L'autre* not only presents a born freak by using elements of contortion, but goes even further by creating images of a head separated from the body or a torso separated from the legs using elements of New Magic. Such simulation of natural exceptionality in a *mise en scène* is, according to Hurley, classified as the faked freak, "who use[s] combinations of costume, *mise en scène*, and makeup to trick audiences into believing . . . [she is a] freak" (134). Within this procedure, the performance is self-referential to its own genre, in the sense that it is picking up emblems of traditional circus. The images created remind one of the famous trick of sawing a woman in half, which alludes to the disciplinary heritage of magic, the "*modern magic*" (Jacob 2010, 4).



Claudio Stellato in L'Autre. Photo credit Cie Claudio Stellato.

During the performance, the focus is on the (moving) objects and the fusion between object and body, not on the artist himself—save for the ending where the represented figure shows facial expression for the first time. Due to the change of facial expression from neutral and object-like to reflective, astounded, and human-like, the staged character acquires human traits. From the position of this ending moment, the performance thereby achieves narrative consistency.

Border Crossing: The Performance's Narrative Structure

Before closing this paper, I would like to delve deeper into this narrativity present in *L'autre*. In what way is the performance narrating the other? It seems to be classifiable as a "texture"—a text that does not possess any coherent structure, that cannot be paraphrased and is therefore incomprehensible, that refers to its technique or form (Baßler 1994, 13). Looking at it more closely, one realizes that the minimal condition of narrative—a change of state, the existence of an event, the "shifting of a persona across the borders of a semantic field" (Lotman 1977, 233)—is realized. At the end of the performance, the artist leaves the stage, goes into the void. *Black. A man in a suit takes a bow. Black. A man in a suit takes a bow. Black. Two men in suits take a bow.* At this point, the performance not only explicitly shows that there is a second person manipulating the objects, but also, on the textual level, shifts the constitutive order established in its first section. While at the beginning the semantic space[3] of otherness was defined by the binary opposition "me" and "the other object," it is now (due to the emergence of a second person who looks like the first) defined as a complex relationship between "me," "the other me," "the other object," and "the other subject." This transformation can be classified as a meta-event "which involves not only the passage of the protagonist from the first to the second subset as a result of his boundary crossing, but also the modification of the entire field, the world order itself" (Hühn 2013, 13) With this "restitutive structure" (Martinez and Scheffel 2012, 158), the performance reinforces its definition of otherness which breaks with the conventional binary conception.

Claudio Stellato in L'Autre. Photo credit: Cie Claudio Stellato.

Conclusion

L'autre undermines culturally established concepts, frames, and scripts of the other by disrupting the boundaries between self and other, between object and subject, and by attributing reality, unreality, animality, abnormality, humanity, normality, and freakery to both me and the other. The performance adopts culturally established frames and scripts, and at the same time overcomes common binary oppositions. As a contemporary circus performance, its meaning is based on "the circus's historic status as a site for the celebration and exploitation of differences, from the staging of exceptional bodies to the display of 'freakery'" (Circus and Its Others 2015); at the same time, it significantly exceeds its heritage. Through its structure and substance, *The Other* simultaneously others and de-others the other.

Notes

1. French for "other."

2. This article is based on a broad definition of "text" based on the thesis that we are able to treat all kinds of cultural representations as texts. "By singling out syntagmatic and paradigmatic bonds . . . we can discern semiotic objects in these arts, systems constructed on the model of languages. Inasmuch as man's consciousness is a linguistic consciousness, all types of models erected as supersstructures on that consciousness—and art among them—can be defined as secondary modeling systems. Thus art can be described as a sort of secondary language, and the work of art as a text in that language" (Lotman 1977, 9).

3. Space is "the sum total of homogeneous objects (phenomena, states, functions, figures, variable meanings, and so on), between which relations exist which are similar to normal spatial relations (continuity, distance and so on)" (Lotman 1977, 217).

References

Baldick, Chris. 2001. "Structuralism." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, edited by Chris Baldick. Oxford: Oxford University Press. http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-1093.

Bapler, Moritz. 1994. "Die Entdeckung der Textur." Berlin: De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110916591.

Baßler, Moritz. 2007. "Kontexte." In *Handbuch Literaturwissenschaft. Gegenstände und Grundbegriffe,* edited by Thomas Anz, 355–60. Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler.

———. 2011. "Populärer Realismus." In *Kommunikation im Populären. Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf ein ganzheitliches Phänomen,* edited by Roger Lüdeke, 91–103. Bielefeld: Transcript.

Bordenave, Julie. 2010. "An Ability to Infinitely Transform the World." *La Strada. Le magazine de la création Hors les Murs* 16:5–6.

Circus and Its Others. 2015. "Call for Papers." http://horslesmurs.fr/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Circus-and-its-Others-CFP-MCC-2016-1.pdf.

Festival Novog Circusa. 2012. "Claudio Stellato. L'autre. The Other." http://www.cirkus.hr/claudio-stellato-lautre-the-other/?lang=en.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika. 1983. *Semiotik des Theaters. Eine Einführung. Band I. Das System der theatralischen Zeichen.* Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.

Foster, Susan Leigh. *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hühn, Peter. 2013. "Event and Eventfulness." *Living Handbook of Narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University. http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/event-and-eventfulness.

Hurley, Erin. 2016. "The Multiple Bodies of Cirque du Soleil." In *Cirque Global. Quebec's Expanding Circus Boundaries*, edited by L. Patrick Leroux and Charles R. Batson, 122–39. Montréal and Kingston: McGill University Press.

Jacob, Pascal. 2010. "Five Thousand Years of Enchantment. A Few Historical Landmarks to Understand the Context That Has Led Up to New Magic. *La Strada. Le magazine de la création Hors les Murs. Magie Nouvelle. Un art contemporain* 16, 2–4.

Lotman, Jurij. 1977. *The Structure of the Artistic Text*. Michigan: University of Michigan.

Martinez, Matias, and Michael Scheffel. 2012. *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie*. Munich: C. H. Beck.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. 2009. "Narration in Various Media." In *Handbook of Narratology*, edited by Peter Hühn, 263–81. Berlin: De Gruyter.

The Acrobat-Body: The *Other* Body

Marcos Nery
Translated by Sunita Nigam

This short article aims to start a conversation around how, in the circus practices one engages with as a scholar and/or practitioner, spaces, objects, and the *body-as-object*, are *regulated, regulatory, and Othered.* I thus propose as a starting point a discussion of the "acrobat-body," a concept that lies at the heart of my doctoral research, which I undertook jointly at the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM) and the University of Sao Paulo (Brazil).

I begin by unpacking the concept of the "acrobat-body." I arrived at the idea of the acrobat-body through the creative process I undertook during my doctoral dissertation, in which I was able to reflect on and experiment with the acrobat-body as an embodied practice.[1] In using the term "acrobat-body," I do not mean only the "acrobatic body," which is rooted in notions of strength, flexibility, agility, balance, daring, and risk that belong to the circus arts. The "acrobat-body" comes out of the notion of the acrobatic body but draws on the notions of the "interartistic"[2] and "*orchesality*."[3] The prefix *inter*, included in my understanding of the acrobat-body, allows me to signal the tensions between the artistic fields that interact in the interdisciplinary training of the performer.

Marcos Nery and Ivanie Aubin-Malo in *Mythe-jeux de refus*. Photo by Helena Vallès.

Marcos Nery is a performer, a teacher, and a PhD candidate in research-creation at UQAM, where his research centres on the expressive movements of bodies on stage (*le corps scénique*). Having received interdisciplinary training in theatre and the circus arts, he has worked as a performer in a number of shows in Brazil and Canada. **Sunita Nigam** is a PhD candidate in performance studies at McGill University. Her dissertation is about the role of performance in urban placemaking in Mexico City, New York, and Montreal from the Mexico '68 Olympics to the contemporary burlesque revival.

With the concept of the acrobat-body, I seek a type of performing body (*corps scénique*) that has its own *modus operandi*, with the goal of experimenting with new expressive qualities through the artistic process. The acrobat-body uses movement to express its own poetics. In fact, it is the body's tendency toward expressive movement that links to the larger concepts of my doctoral research: the notion of the acrobatic body; the expressive biomechanical principles of Vsevolod Emilievitch Meyerhold; and Michel Bernard's notion of dancing corporality.

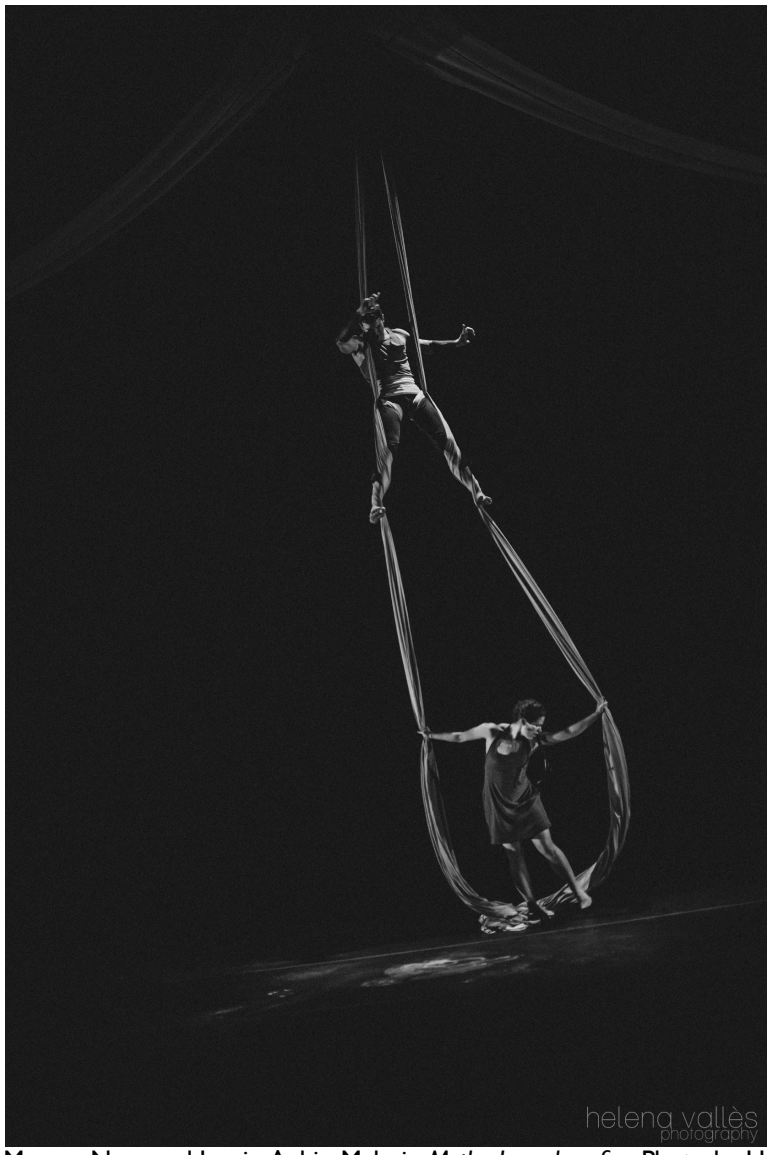
To help to grasp the concept of the "acrobat-body" as I develop it in my doctoral research, I begin with the notion of the acrobatic body. The acrobat is the individual who collapses the borders of her body with strength and agility, who dares to transcend the ordinary human condition. Its territory is also marked by risk; in addition, the acrobatic arts arise through changes in the equilibrium of the body, which stimulate the actions of the acrobat. According to Goudard (2005), the circus performer learns to master "through *figures* or *postures*, a disequilibrium in which [she] has deliberately placed herself" (146). The author affirms that the adaptation of the artist to instability and to disequilibrium suggests that circus depends upon an aesthetics of risk. In this context, training in the circus arts has the ultimate goal of creating an artistic work in which gestural virtuosity is a means of external expression of the psychic interior of the artist. This is a question of the transformation of technique into a medium of expression, which, according to Goudard (2005), "resides in the resolution of a situation of deliberately created disequilibrium by a motor project" (147).[4] The latter is resolved by a prowess[5] that affirms itself as a means of expression. In fact, circus arts are the instrument of prowess. In other words, the circus arts are modelled, borrowed, transformed, costumed, exercised, and produced with the aim of performing spectacular acts of virtuosity.

The acrobatic body, which serves as a fundamental pillar of the acrobat-body, cannot be dissociated from the notion of *znak otkaz* (In Russian: a sign of refusal). The *otkaz* can generally be understood as the inverse action of the one we wish to perform, and which further reveals the expressivity of our actions. It is one of the principles associated with the rhythmic movement phrases elaborated in the biomechanical research of the Russian director and pedagogue Vsevolod E. Meyerhold (1874–1940).[6] Meyerhold's nonmimetic work, which privileges bodily postures of change, is related to the context of political-artistic resistance that emerged in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. Meyerhold's biomechanics attribute to the actor a knowledge of her body as material and propose that the actor employ rigorous forms allowing for the imprecise, blurred, and aestheticized gestures that were being developed in dance studios in Moscow in his time. Meyerhold's actor undergoes rigorous training through an intense sport and physical culture practice, in which she must become mindful of each part of her body for maximum expressivity. The *otkaz* is an essential principle for Meyerhold. It allows for movement control and increases physical expressivity: "the actor who does not master the 'sign of refusal' is like one who does not know how to respond rapidly to being called by name, or to use a trampoline for jumping" (Chaves 2001, 162).

Marcos Nery and Ivanie Aubin-Malo in *Mythe-jeux de refus*. Photo by Helena Vallès.

The third and final notion that I add to the concept of the acrobat-body is Michel Bernard's notion of "dancing corporeality." The whole of Bernard's research is like one long, minutely detailed essay that deconstructs the traditional idea of the "body" that is perceived to be "substantial and homogeneous, unitary and organic" (Bernard 2002, 523). The concept of corporeality is used to designate the "enmeshed material functioning of our sensory system" (Bernard 2001a, 87) which takes over during the creative act, since the creative act ensues from the work of a material and dynamic network which is unstable and comprised of interwoven and contrasting interferences of intensities. In this context, Bernard conceives the idea of a dancing corporeality governed by a dynamic of sensorial interweavings. In his definition of dancing corporeality, he proposes four essential variables: 1) a "dynamic of infinite metamorphosis"; 2) the "paradoxical and random game of construction and deconstruction . . . or . . . (un)weaving of temporality"; 3) a "stubborn defiance of terrestrial gravity"; and 4) an "auto-affective or auto-reflexive drive" (82).

These three notions articulate and interweave themselves while revealing the links, the relations, the connections, and at the same time, the gaps, the differences, and the heterogeneity between them. I thus emphasize the interartistic body. An interartistic approach allows me to bring together these three notions in my development of the "acrobat-body." According to Lesage (2008), these practices "bring into play encounters, dialogues, and oppositional tensions between artistic languages marked by otherness, inside of an event that brings them together without confusing them" (22). The bringing together of different kinds of corporealities using an interartistic method allows for a diversification of the body "into infinity" (Bernard 2012, 533) and creates the conditions for intercorporeality—that is, for relations between different kinds of corporeality. The deterritorialization that occurs by bringing corporealities into interaction tends to dissolve their traditional limits and engenders expressive qualities particular to performance research. In this way, the languages of the circus, theatre, and dance weave through the body in search of expression.



Marcos Nery and Ivanie Aubin-Malo in *Mythe-Jeux de refus*. Photo by Helena Vallès.

The notion of alterity then intersects with that of the interartistic and reveals the process of intercorporeality that is the condition of the acrobat-body. According to Todorov (1982), the sense of existing isn't possible without the Other and without the perspective of the Other, for "others are also me" (11). This allows for an understanding of the world from a distinct point of view that begins as much from difference as from myself. The concept of the body, here, develops from the process of intercorporealities that recognize the Other, that clothe themselves in the Other, and in this way, become the Other. Within this context, through the notion of alterity, the constitutive corporealities of the acrobat-body necessarily offer themselves up as "the result or the effect of a process of differentiation which operates not only in the totality of the living and material world, but more radically, in the temporality that inhabits and affects them" (Bernard 2001b, 8). Bernard (2001b) maintains that the nature of bodily expression presupposes the energetic constitution of a dynamic of refusal. It also involves a process of immanent differentiation awoken by an autoaffective drive that seeks to relive the presence of the object of desire in the self and, thus, to achieve a hurried and fictional satisfaction. In other words, "expressivity does not function except

through the radical alterity of a simulative process" (23) in which corporeality continually feeds itself through its own movement, through its acrobatic figures and its gestures.

The acrobat-body must therefore be understood as a condition of tension, "of vectors of constant change" (Laplatine and Nouss 2008, 102), which can not be resolved, closed, or limited in a single artistic experience. The acrobat-body follows the flux of the dynamism of becoming, since "what we are proceeds directly from what our bodies can do" (Sennett 2010, 388). Through practice over time, the artist develops a set of competencies. The development of physical competencies also allows for the development of the work of reflection, analysis, and imagination, as "maturity requires time; we durably gain possession of a competency" (395). It is within these conditions that the acrobat-body can exist.

Notes

1. I completed a research-creation degree in the doctoral program in artistic creation at UQAM, where I had the opportunity to develop the creation process for *Mythe-jeux de refus* in 2016. This performance was narrated and danced by two performers. We moved through ten tableaux inspired by First Nations cultures in Brazil and Quebec. We sought to incarnate different points of view that intersected in games of duality and otherness in which the spirit world came together with the worlds of animals, beings, and things. *Mythe-jeux de refus* used an interartistic process in which aerial circus devices created connections between the earth and the sky. https://vimeo.com/259771068.

2. The term "interartistic" is used to denote the dynamic of convergence and confrontation between languages of the stage (*langages scéniques*). Lesage (2008) explains her preference for this term to "interdisciplinary." She affirms that the notion of discipline, in the context of modernity, is associated with the idea of rules, norms, and borders that delimit an artistic field.

3. Michel Bernard, researcher in the fields of physical education and dance with a focus on philosophical and anthropological approaches to the body, borrows the word from the Greek *orkhêstikê,* "the arts which concern dance."

4. "Motor project," here, refers to the work achieved through bodily motion.

5. Prowess is a remarkable action, an exploit, a performance. According to Goudard (2005), "the sequence of figures allows for the realization of prowess and necessitates the development of specific language. A number is formed by the assemblage of exploits" (110).

6. The steps of the action cycle, according to Meyerhold, can be understood in terms of their expressive principles: *otkaz, possil*, *tormoz, totchka*. The *otkaz* is the sign of refusal and is a movement that manifests itself in its inverse image of the action, which prepares the actor for the execution of the action (*possil*). So as not to interrupt the action, the principle of *tormoz* (in English, brakes) allows for the direction and the precision of the action towards its completion. The final point of the action is called *totchka*.

References

Bernard, Michel. 2001a. *De la création chorégraphique*. Paris: Centre National de la danse.

Bernard, Michel. 2001b. "L'altérité originaire ou les mirages fondateurs de l'identité." *Portée* 29 (2): 7–24. doi:10.7202/030622ar.

Bernard, Michel. 2002. "De la corporéité fictionnaire." *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 4 (222): 523–34.

Chaves, Yedda Carvalho. 2001. *A Biomecânica como princípio constitutivo da arte do ator*. Master's thesis, École de Communication et Arts de l'Université de São Paulo, São Paulo.

Goudard, Philippe. 2005. *Arts du Cirque, arts du risque: instabilité et déséquilibre dans et hors la piste*. Lille: Diffusion ANRT.

Laplantine, François, and Alexis Nouss. 2008. *Le métissage: un exposé pour comprendre: un essai pour réfléchir*. Paris: Téraèdre.

Lesage, Marie-Christine. 2008. "L'interartistique: une dynamique de la complexité." *Revue d'études théâtrales: Théâtre et interdisciplinarité* no. 13, 11–26.

Picon-Vallin, Beatrice. 2004. *Meyerhold* (Vol. 17). Paris: CNRS Éditions.

Sennett, Richard. 2010. *Ce que sait la main: la culture de l'artisanat*. Translated by P. E. Dauzat. Paris: Albin Michel.

Thais, Maria. 2009. *Na cena do Dr. Dapertutto: poética e pedagogia em V. E. Meyerhold: 1911 a 1916*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.

Todorov, Tzvetan. 1982. *La conquête de l'Amérique*. Paris: Éditions du seuil.

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. 2002. "O nativo relativo." *Manai* no. 8: 113–48.

From Postcolonial to Neoliberal: Identifying the "Other" Body in Indian Circus

Aastha Gandhi

This article is part of my ongoing doctoral research work, *A Critical History of Indian Circus, Performers and Performance Acts: Negotiations with Popularity, State and Laws (1947–2015)*, which aims to map a history of circus practices in postcolonial India and view them within a larger field of cultural practices. As part of my research I am focusing on creating an inventory of circuses in recent times and closely studying how acts, historically and in the contemporary repertoire, have been affected by changing state policies and laws.[1]

In this article I identify the different performative codes, reception, and subsequent discourse built around the multiracial bodies present in Indian circuses across different periods. From Russians and Europeans in the twentieth century to Africans, Mongolians, Eastern Europeans, and other Asians in the twenty-first, the presence of bodies of different ethnicities in Indian circus has been a major factor in its rise and acceptance as a popular form. Taking the two key historical moments of Indian circus—its growth in the early twentieth century and its deterioration from the late twentieth century until the present, when racial differences in the circus arena are not only recorded but become prominent in the larger cultural discourse—I look at the presence of the white woman's body and read it vis-à-vis the nonwhite local body, marking two perspectives to view the gendered body under nationalism/postcolonialism and globalization/neoliberalism and studying what becomes the "othered," objectified, and regulated body in these socio-political contexts. The objective is to understand the popularity of these performers through race discourse and other kinds of exoticization. Here, I explore how racialized bodies are received and how racial characteristics are perceived in the relatively new context of globalization. Circus in India has over the last decade become a site for heated negotiations between the "local" and the "other," with Indian artists losing their ground in the circus. This article aims to engage with these dynamics between circus bodies.

Key Historical Moment I: The Colonial and Early Postcolonial Period

Circus is one of the few popular performance genres in India where bodies of different ethnicities have performed and shared the same platform since the late nineteenth century. Beginning in the 1880s, circus in India included Russian and European performers who would stay on annual contracts or own and run circuses, train Indian artists, and later sell off their circuses to Indian managers. Guiseppe Chiarini's *Royal Italian Circus* was the first circus to travel to India in the late nineteenth century (Champad 2013, 1), while artists from Russia, Hungary, Italy, and other European countries, as well as Syria, performed in Indian circuses in the early twentieth century (Sinha 1984, 35–40). As there was a constant flux in circus forms from both Europe and Asia, and various distinct forms from within Europe itself, one cannot necessarily say that the circus was introduced to India by the British, despite Britain's colonial presence, or indeed that there was a singular form of circus that moved across India in that period. Travelling circus companies from

Aastha Gandhi is a research scholar currently pursuing a PhD in the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her doctoral research is on Indian circus: its history and performance, and its negotiation with laws. She is also a practising lawyer.

Europe employed the local Indian artists, martial artists, gymnasts, and practitioners of other popular art forms contractually in their troupes, further complicating any sense of originary influence.

The October Revolution of 1917 influenced the thought process of Indian intellectuals in our own freedom struggle and, consequently, Indo-Russian cultural bonds strengthened deeply throughout the 1930s. After Indian independence, these bonds were further strengthened with the establishment of the Indo-Soviet Cultural Society in 1952. Months-of-friendship programs were organized, where artists from both nations came together (Chopra 2008). In the 1980s, the increased influx of Russian artists in Indian circuses can be seen as a consequence of growing relations between the two countries, primarily under the patronage of the Indian state and its support of the circus. This period marks an important connection between the socialist revolution of a Western nation and colonial nations such as India looking for alternative political and cultural ideologies.

Early- to mid-twentieth-century Indian circus established a strong foothold as a popular cultural form. Though it is not unusual for a circus audience to be aware of a range of performers prominently marked by multiracial, ethnically varied features, it is important to note that Indian circus has included a large number of white performers since the introduction of circus to the colony. It thus became important during India's nationalist phase that Indian women performers emerged and were perceived to be as strong and powerful as their white counterparts. According to Satyadev Sinha, Indian women entered the circus under the influence of European women and were immensely lauded for their daring acts (Sinha 1984, 41),[2] placing Indian and international women performers on the same pedestal.

The first Bengali circus had two women performers, whose acts were hailed as transformative (Basu 1936, 35): Sushila Sundari, who performed an act with Royal Bengal tigers, and Kumudini, who excelled in equestrian acts.

Sushila Sundari posing with tiger. Photo source: https://www.telegraphindia.com/1141130/jsp/calcutta/story_19100412.jsp.

Avada Bai, the wife of Vishnupanth Chhatre, performed with ferocious animals and served as a trainer to new women entrants in circus. Tara Bai managed and travelled with her own circus from 1920–25 and, with her powerful acts and stunts such as lifting heavy stones tied to her long tresses

and stopping a car running at high speed, her popularity outgrew that of her male compatriots. Champad notes that the popularity of these female acts placed the Indian and international women performers on equal footing in terms of skill; the Indian bodies were now seen as "equally strong" as the white bodies and the Indian performer acquired a certain equality and self-identification (Champad 2013, 19).

Historically, performers in circus, particularly female performers, have been understood as breaking barriers and pushing the limits of gender codes (Tait 2010, 3). The nationalist thought that pervaded India in the early 1940s personified the feminine body as the mother figure or the ideal wife in popular culture. This new image of the Indian woman was constructed with nationalism as its main objective, designating the inner, sacred, spiritual world as a female domain, whereas all that was material, outer, and profane became the area of maleness. The nationalist idea aimed at combining and realizing both the areas effectively, "with cultivation of material techniques of modern western civilization while retaining and strengthening the distinctive spiritual essence of national culture" (Chatterjee 2006, 238). The homebound woman became the representative of all that was ritual, spiritual, and religious, relegating her to the codes of traditional patriarchy—but with a new role to play in solidarity with the nation's struggle to assert its nationalist image. The boundaries of home and the world were flexible only to the extent that her nationalist-coded femininity was not threatened. This process operated on the principle of making modernity consistent with the nationalist project: a dancer on the public stage was situated in the role of mother or goddess, which served to erase her sexual self in the world outside the home. While these artists continued to be marginalized in society, Hindu women were presented in popular culture as icons of Mother India, as evidenced by images of these women artists taming tigers. The training of the tigers involved both discipline and empathy. However, it is the perception that they were tamed through mind/body/relational acumen that gave this dynamic between female trainer and tiger its distinct character under the colonial/postcolonial paradigm. In *Bangalir Circus*, Basu notes that the "new" Indian circus was seen as evolving out of a new nationalist movement in the aftermath of the Bengal partition and protests of 1905 (1936, 41). He cites the November 25, 1901 issue of the newspaper the *Englishman* edited by J. H. Stocqueler (1801–86): "What impresses the observer the most are the performances of Miss Sushila and the two Royal Bengal tigers. Hindu women are notoriously most timid but in the person of Sushila, there is one who with the utmost fearlessness, enters the den of the two apparently savage beasts without either whip or any other defensive appliance."

The visual dominion of these women over tigers thus epitomizes a particular image of Mother India and is emblematic of the maternal roles imposed on women within this nationalist narrative.

Key Historical Moment II: The Globalized/Neoliberal Period

In 1998, the use of animal performers in the circus including tigers, panthers, leopards, monkeys, and bears was banned in India. The interviews I have conducted with circus managers revealed that the circus has lost a major percentage of child audiences: children, who once made up 65–75% of the audience, had dwindled to 30% by 2007 (Bahadur interview 2016). A 2006 petition by the nongovernmental organization Bachpan Bachao Andolan initiated a debate around child performers' vulnerability and exploitation. It petitioned the Supreme Court of India to ban the employment of children under eighteen years of age in circuses. The judgment was delivered in 2011 by the Apex Court putting a ban on the employment of children in circuses under various laws of child labour, exploitation, and trafficking (Supreme Court of India 2011). With this landmark ban on child labour,

the circus started to lose Indian artists as well. It is crucial to see this judgment within a larger scenario of neoliberalism and the recently proposed modification to the child labour laws, which aims to allow children to work in "family enterprises." This modification, made in 2015, allows for children below the age of fourteen to work in select "non-hazardous" family enterprises, with two major areas specified. First, a child may help "his family or family enterprises, which is other than any hazardous occupation . . . after his school hours or during vacations," and second, a child may work "as an artist in an audio-visual entertainment industry, including advertisement, films, TV serials or any such other entertainment or sports activities except the circus" (Chauhan 2015). Importantly, the circus is singled out as the only field where children cannot be employed, although the amendment concedes to children performing in the prospering film and television media business. While there are obvious differences in terms of amateur and professional demands, and a child working in circus cannot hope to be employed only in after-school hours, my observations and surveys of the last ten years (Indian television began producing television reflective of international reality-based talent shows around 2005)[3] reveal that there are also strong class differences between the two; the middle class dominates the audio-visual media, while circuses recruit from the poorest demographics.

With this ban on local child labour, Indian circuses have sought out international artists and have found access to them because of neoliberal policies that enable employment across borders—but now they do not just come from Europe or Russia.[4] A gamut of international artists has begun to find work in Indian circuses on a contract basis, from Mongolia, Eastern Europe, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Vietnam, Kenya, and Ethiopia. My field work and interviews with Indian circuses over the last three years have revealed that this employment varies from season to season and depends on what individual circuses can afford; a circus with better infrastructural support might employ Mongolian and East European performers in the high season, whereas African performers are usually present throughout the year in mid- and high-profile circuses. Regarding Indian performers, the interviews and data collection with circuses further revealed that artists generally come from areas with the greatest rates of poverty: Jharkhand, the Northeast, and Nepal.

This diversity of performer bodies is not without its repercussions. As these international artists permeate local performance spaces, the role of Indian women performers is further diminished and marginalized. This loss is felt not only in terms of economic precarity and social insecurity but also technique and rigour. Khushi and Sita, two female circus artists from Nepal interviewed as part of this ongoing research, joined the Great Apollo Circus at the age of 15–16 and later got married to other artists in the circus. Khushi says, "We don't practise every day. It's only when we feel the need or [are concerned about] not being able to perform well that we go to practise in the ring" (Khushi interview, Great Apollo Circus, Chandigarh, 2016).

Contesting and Constructing Perspectives of the Body

Thus, we can argue that the previous notion of white and black performers being on equal footing is overturned in the contemporary scenario. We see the reentry, overt publicity, and celebration of white and international performers and techniques in Indian circus, whereas the Indian woman performer is marginalized, with only a few symbolic remains on the stage, occupying roles such as cyclists, gun-shooters, junior dancers, hula-hoopers, silk-robe dancers, and presenters of dog and bird shows. While these Indian performers, whose acts constitute only a few manoeuvres and can end abruptly, cannot hold the attention of the audience for long due to their limited skills, the

international performers, with their honed skills and lithe bodies, take centre stage and become the "star performers." It is only the older generation of Indian performers who display skills that keep the audience captivated and perform effective solo acts; the younger generation, with their reduced skills, mostly perform in groups or duets.

Young Indian artists perform at Raymon Circus, New Delhi, December 2015. Photo by Aastha Gandhi.

Older artist performing solo act in Raymon Circus, New Delhi, December 2015. Photo by Aastha Gandhi.

Given the previously established distinction within the Indian nationalist narrative of private female spaces and public male spaces, Indian women performers also face social and economic obstacles in the public—and therefore male—circus ring. As demonstrated by my interviews with Khushi and Sita, Indian women performers' technique is also deteriorating. Circus owners are of the opinion that white circus artists and agile international gymnasts hold the audience's attention better than Indian performers (Bhattacharya 2007). Nadeem, a talent agent with Ajanta Circus in Kolkata, elaborates in a phone interview, "Indian artists don't maintain themselves. International artists pay to learn at those schools, therefore they maintain themselves to earn that money" (Nadeem interview 2016). Thus, there does seem to be a drastic difference between the level of expertise and skill of international artists and Indian artists; in any case, it is Vietnamese, Mongolian, and Eastern European artists, not Indian or Nepalese artists, who are contractually employed during the high season and attract large audiences.

Mongolian artist performing at Great Royal Circus, New Delhi, 2015. Photo by Bishnupriya Dutt.

It can be argued that the instability articulated above is a major factor in the hierarchy of performer bodies and skills present in contemporary Indian circus, but it is not clear if this factor is related to technical skill alone or whether either colonial or postcolonial desire is at play—although the lasting social, economic, and political impact of colonialism suggests the latter. Regardless, it can be seen that, while historically both Indian and non-Indian artists have held space within Indian circus, under the conditions of neoliberal precarity one has more or less replaced the other. Circus artists find that they need to make themselves a profitable commodity—either as an object of sexual desire or visceral feeling, holding audience's attention through unexpected displays of athletic skill.

There are two perspectives through which female performing bodies in the Indian circus are received: as desirable or visceral. Through this first perspective, the body of the Indian circus performer is exoticized. The primary emotion driving spectator association with this body is supposedly that of desire; it is both understood and expected that audiences make an association with the performer by desiring her. The performer is scantily clad in provocative attire; her movements are meant to arouse sexual desire, and the audience becomes a voyeur to this display of the body (Tait 2010, 84). There is a clear distinction between the reception of the performing bodies of Asian and Indian women by male audiences during circus shows. The Indian body becomes the objectified "available" body whereas the "white" (that is, non-Indian) body of the East Asian performer is much desired yet unattainable and unavailable. This can be understood through what Fanon calls the universal equivalent of whiteness, where even if the body is non-English or non-European, the closer this body is to "white" the more unattainable it is to the colonized (Fanon 1952). Indeed, one can see the same dynamic of this "whiteness" and the "colonized" in Indian audiences' reception of Mongolian, Vietnamese, Chinese, or Russian dancers, who are not necessarily "white" yet are perceived similarly.

This is not to say that whiteness does not also invite a certain fetishizing voyeurism. The proliferation of East European and white Central Asian women in Indian mass culture—in

enterprises such as Bollywood, private parties, wedding receptions etc., where whiteness is valued and fetishized—does suggest that the white female body is coded as "exotic." This fetishization of whiteness may also proliferate throughout the circus, in which colonial desire is interwoven into the spectacle. However, one might question how this exoticized whiteness is coded differently than the exotic body of the Indian woman performer. The historical presence of white women and the convention of whiteness in Indian circus is apparent, but the relationship of whiteness to colonial discourse, particularly in the Indian context, means that the white female body—sexualized though it may be—still connotes supremacy and superiority. The Indian female body is not granted such privilege. The exoticization of *her* body is entangled in the same process of marginalization mentioned above, in which both skill and beauty are dismissed as lesser than her white counterparts.

Second, the circus body can be viewed as the visceral body. The primary emotion underlying the viewing of this body by the spectator is empathy (Tait 2010, 146), which, according to Tait, "demands reciprocating bodily awareness from spectators during live performance," leading to an emotional or affective response in the spectator where their bodies, through sensorial reception, almost try to catch the performer's body in air, evoking the feeling of nearly touching it (141). Tait reads this as a "cultural transaction" (148), a "visceral encounter with an ambiguous body [which] bends pre-existing patterns of body to body (or bodies' physical exchange) and is potentially disruptive of hierarchical patterning" (150).

Through this lens, and conversely to the exoticizing perspective articulated above, the performing body is seen to be breaking gender codes, existing in a nonsexualized space where "the spectator might be attracted to the athletic movement that is physically familiar. Whether it is sport, dance, or aerial movement, the body is not seen as an object of desire. Conversely, the audience might be bodily drawn to watch unfamiliar extremes" (Tait 2016, 305). Tait refers to this as experiencing the "physicality, viscerality and tactility of the bodies" (Tait 2010, 141). In the context of Indian circus, this visceral perspective can enable resistance to the exoticization of the Indian woman performer by emphasizing her display of real athletic force; the athletic body of the agile dancer transgresses her limits in a manner that resists objectifying sexualization and "othering." The visceral body of the Indian woman performer thus enables her to slip out of the racist hierarchies that permeate this culture of the circus—even if only momentarily.

Despite these potentially liberating qualities of the visceral body, however, the question remains: in the globalized neoliberal context, in which white performer bodies are consistently prioritized over Indian performer bodies, can the Indian female body ever function as wholly visceral, eschewing the patterns of exoticization that both sexualize the body and diminish its skill? In the colonial and early postcolonial period of Indian circus, even though a hierarchy no doubt existed between whites and nonwhites, Indian women artists held their own protected space in the circus ring. Within the nationalist agenda, they had a specific and important role, hailed as the local (brown) body depicting the mighty "Mother India"—a role that could not be matched by the foreign white body. In the contemporary neoliberal period, international employment laws and policies are modified in such a way that local performers lose more and more ground. Racialized viewing practices of exoticizing the local Indian body have only augmented such hierarchies. Given this current precarity, the Indian woman performer may feel she is required to build upon these fetishistic ideals of sexual desire to hold on to her job. What role, then, can the Indian woman performer play in this globalized field? If neoliberalism encourages the proliferation of whiteness throughout contemporary Indian circus to the near exclusion or marginalization of Indian performers, what resistance might the marginalized female Indian body engage in to combat this pervasive whiteness?

Notes

1. This essay develops from another essay coauthored by the author and Bishnupriya Dutt (Gandhi and Dutt 2017).

2. All the quotes from this book have been translated from Hindi to English by the author.

3. Shows like *Indian Idol* marked a boom in talent shows and gave rise to other such local versions. Season One of *Indian Idol*, created by Simon Fuller, started airing on Sony TV in India in 2004–2005 and was followed by six subsequent seasons, including two seasons of *Indian Idol Junior*, over the decade. *India's Got Talent*, part of the global *Britain's Got Talent* franchise, which represented a cooperative effort between Colors and Britain's FremantleMedia, premiered on Indian Television in 2009.

4. Russia's position as either a European or Asian country is contentious, as vast parts of the former Soviet Union are located within Asia. National identities can thus be somewhat fluid, and citizens of Asian former-Soviet countries may be referred to or refer to themselves as "Russian."

References

Basu, Abanindra Krishna. 1343 [Bengali Year] 1936. *Bangalir Circus* (Bengalis' Circus). Calcutta: Publicity Studio.

Bhattacharya, Chandrima S. 2007. "Great Indian Shorts & Skin Circus—Exit Children with the Lions, Enter Voyeurs with Ravishing Gymnasts." *Telegraph*, January 14, 2007. http://www.telegraphindia.com/1070114/asp/frontpage/story_7260813.asp.

Champad, Sreedharan. 2013. *An Album of the Big Tops—History of Indian Circus*. Houston: Strategic Book Publishing.

Chatterjee, Partha. 2006. "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question." In *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, edited by K. Sangari and S. Vaid, 233–53. Delhi: Zubaan.

Chauhan, Chetan. 2015. "Govt. Planning to Relax Laws to Allow Children below Age 14 to Work in Select Family Businesses." *Hindustan Times*, April 8, 2015. http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/govt-planning-to-relax-laws-to-allow-children-below-age-14-to-work-in-select-family-businesses/story-KUFkLSVT0gXwkWHjH3UL9J.html

Chopra, V. D., ed. 2008. *Significance of the Indo-Russian Relations in the 21st Century*. New Delhi: Kalpaz.

Das, Saumitra. 2014. "Travels of the Big Top." *Telegraph*, November 30, 2014. http://www.telegraphindia.com/1141130/jsp/calcutta/story_19100412.jsp#.V4aWYPl97IU

Fanon, Frantz. 1952. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press.

Gandhi, Aastha, and Bishnupriya Dutt. 2017. "Laws and Marginalised Bodies: Sex Trafficking, Child Labour and Circus as a Site of Negotiations." In *Gendered Citizenship: Manifestations and Performance,* edited by Bishnupriya Dutt, Janelle Reinelt, and Shrinkhla Sahai, 291–308. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

"How Indian Circuses Are Reeling under the Court Ban on Animals." 2013. *Firstpost*, May 17, 2013. http://www.firstpost.com/living/how-indian-circuses-are-reeling-under-the-court-ban-on-animals-791703.html.

Nisha, P. R. 2014. "Folding the Tent: Kerela Circus Academy." *Economic and Political Weekly* 49 (2). http://www.epw.in/journal/2014/2/web-exclusives/folding-tent-kerala-circus-academy.html#.

Sinha, Satyadev N. 1984. *Circus ka Anokha Sansaar*. Delhi: Arya Prakashan Mandal.

Skidmore, James. 2014. "Defying Death: Children in Indian Circus." In *Entertaining Children: Participation of Youth in the Entertainment Industry*, edited by G. Arrighi and V. Emeljanow, 219–33. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Supreme Court of India. 2011. *Bachpan Bachao Andolan v. Union of India and Others*. Writ Petition (C) 51 of 2006. https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1849142/.
Tait, Peta. 2010. *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance*. London: Routledge.
———. 2016. "Ecstasy and Visceral Flesh in Motion." In *The Circus Studies Reader*, edited by Peta Tait and Katie Lavers, 299–312. London: Routledge.

Interviews

Bahadur, Shiv, Manager, Great Apollo Circus (Mani Majra, Chandigarh), interviewed by the author on May 17, 2016.
Khushi, circus artist, interviewed by the author at Great Apollo Circus (Mani Majra, Chandigarh) on May 18, 2016.
Nadeem, circus artists' agent, interviewed by the author by phone on May 12, 2016.
Sita, circus artist, interviewed by the author at Great Apollo Circus (Mani Majra, Chandigarh) on May 18, 2016.

Contemporary Circus Mobilities

Elena Lydia Kreusch

In continuity with earlier circus forms that persist today, the so-called contemporary circus developed in Europe during the mid-1990s. The label "contemporary" refers not only to a change in content, form, and aesthetics but also to a shift in socioeconomic conditions that raises new challenges of production, living conditions, and mobility. One of the major trends that becomes obvious in the contemporary context is the shift from performances in big tops to performances in traditional theatrical venues, consequently impacting mobility patterns and tour volumes.[1] This article, drawing on interviews with six Europe-based circus artists, serves as a first reflection on the particular context of the European Union where mobility is at the heart of contemporary circus practice. The author is interested in how mobility interacts with location and economic factors, what tropes it evokes, and how it contributes to a process of othering. The paper is structured in three sections following three different stages of a circus artist's career: education, creation, and touring.

Circus Education

Contemporary circus artists today are by large majority graduates of higher circus education and often have a middle-class background. It can be assumed therefore that until the age of eighteen most of the artists grew up in fairly sedentary[2] conditions, developing emotional attachments to places, and learning to think of "home" and "family" in a normative way, founded on place-based attitudes about how personal relationships should be conducted. While some of the artists might have regularly attended international circus festivals, conventions, and workshops before, for many studying at a circus school abroad constitutes their first sustained mobility experience.

In 2013 the European Federation of Professional Circus Schools (FEDEC) launched the "ESCALES"[3] project that focuses on mobility experiences of circus students in order to estimate its impact on their level of skills and employability (FEDEC, 2017a). A draft of the "ESCALES Survey"[4] on students' international mobility in circus arts education highlights that a majority of students have been trained "outside their country of origin" (FEDEC 2017b, 14). This finding prompts the question: Why do students decide to attend a school abroad rather than stay in their home country, and how do they decide where to go? While mobility can be understood as an "expression of individual intentions, motivations and plans" (21), my interviews with current circus students have highlighted the impact of factors such as economics, location, reputation, and accessibility on students' decision-making.

The presence or absence of infrastructure at a future student's initial location is certainly the single strongest motivation for studying abroad. For instance, while France offers a dense landscape of circus training facilities at secondary, vocational, and higher education levels, artists who are based in countries such as Austria have no choice but to cross borders in order to attend university-level circus education. Quality of education can have an equally important impact on students' mobility. A school's curriculum and artistic vision, the success of its graduates, and the reputation of current

Elena Lydia Kreusch is a PhD candidate in the Department of Theatre, Film and Media Studies at the University of Vienna and an associated scholar of the research platform "Mobile Cultures and Societies." She works as artistic co-director of the contemporary circus companies KreativKultur (AT) and Squarehead Productions (IRL) and is an arts adviser for the Austrian Cultural Ministry.

(often guest) teachers tend to be crucial: "Today's circus student looks at the world for training opportunities. 'I heard about a teacher in . . . Brussels or Torino or Lomme, Cuba, China, Moscow . . . that I want to study with" (Lehn 2013). Yet, as much as students seem to be willing to move for the right education, there are factors that can limit their mobility.

One important factor is accessibility: for instance, the better a school's reputation, the higher the number of applicants and the more competitive the admissions. Furthermore, eligibility can differ across schools with regard to age, language requirements, skill level, and certified preeducation. Students' nationality and residence permit status determine whether a visa is required and whether or not a move is possible.

Economic factors are equally as important. Living expenses can differ vastly from location to location. Depending on the school's national context and whether it is privately run or associated with a public university, tuition fees can range from free to €10,000 per year. While some circus schools offer scholarships, the Academie Fratellini in Paris is currently one of the few institutions *paying* their students under their apprenticeship program.

We can conclude that students' decision to study abroad is influenced by a mixture of personal motivations, a school's reputation, location, and accessibility, as well as economic factors. However, there seem to be only limited possibilities for students to experience mobility and study exchanges during their two- to four-year education (FEDEC 2017b). This is surprising considering that mobility competencies seem to be a core prerequisite to success in the profession: "A circus performer must be comfortable moving, living in different places, working with people from different cultures, and performing for people with enormously different backgrounds" (Lehn 2013). It therefore seems important to raise the question of schools' responsibility to help students negotiate contradictions between their normative-sedentary upbringing and the everyday mobility of their chosen field. In what way are graduates prepared for the future mobile lifestyle that the profession implies?

Circus Creation

When creating a contemporary circus piece, the questions of how to finance the production and where to rehearse are crucial. My interviews with six Europe-based circus artists highlighted several strategies.

First, many established artists choose to continue touring their existing shows while working on a new artistic creation. While show revenues do not cover the totality of the production costs, it can allow for more income stability, but it might also fragment and slow down the creation process. Other artists choose to immerse themselves fully in a dense creation period. Not touring, these artists solely depend on savings, co-productions, or funding.

When looking for creation support, the choice of where to register a company or where to base oneself as an artist is an important consideration. Many artists from countries that do not provide state funding for circus tend to move to more favourable locations, such as France, where they gain access to a better infrastructure (subsidized training centres, a generous social security system, and a legally recognized *statut d'intermittent de spectacle vivant*, which provides state support between contracts).

Another strategy is to make use of Europe's well-developed network of artistic residencies for circus creation. Spread over a number of different countries, these creation centres offer rehearsal space, mentoring, and financial support. This system allows artists to use mobility as a tool of production, following such resources in order to bring their artistic projects to fruition. Yet artists' agency remains limited. As one of my interviewees remarks,

> My current artistic creation is developed over several countries, implicating collaborators of different disciplines and nationalities. I have to be geographically flexible in order to get funding or to do residencies, find dramaturges to work with, and so on. It all involves a lot of travelling and at the end of the day I don't have that many choices. (Irish circus artist interview, 2013)

When seen in this light, the creation process offers insights into the complex interplay between location, mobility, and economic factors. It becomes clear that a lack of resources and local infrastructure might incite artists to relocate or might even lead to a situation of compulsory mobility. This seems especially the case for emerging artists with little financial means; waiting for a breakthrough, they often depend on their mobility to network and to be seen at the right venues:

> It is actually pretty tiring, especially without having the necessary financial means: I'm constantly on the move, from venue to venue, sleeping on people's couches as I can't afford hotel rooms and spending hours and hours on grant applications, never being able to deny a gig I'm offered no matter what the conditions. (Irish circus artist interview, 2013)

There are also emotional challenges. It seems that deeper contact with the world outside the small theatre universe of technicians and other artists during the creation phase is rare, which can create a feeling of alienation and furthermore has the potential to raise important questions about an artist's role in society:

> I feel like our lives are so disconnected that it is hard for me to find common ground with people that don't live our lifestyle. When I'm on tour I often completely lose sense of time and space because our life rhythm is so different and because we have so little contact with the outside world. (Canadian circus artist interview, 2013)

Circus Touring

When considering circus mobility in the European context, it is important to underline its embeddedness in a broader context of globalization, EU transnationalization, and labour market liberalization; complex mobility realities and work-life arrangements shape the everyday lives of an ever-growing number of people worldwide (Muffels 2005; Lipphardt 2012). This reality seems to be in direct opposition to romanticized ideas of mobility, alternative lifestyles, and the freedom metaphors that are often used by circus artists and audiences alike to refer to circus practice. This ambivalence between the romanticism of "circus life" and the economic reality of market forces was nicely summarized in an interview with an Irish circus artist: "I am free to go wherever I have to be!" (2013).

While they have stable costs such as rent, healthcare, and liability insurance, circus artists tend to

face a high degree of (financial) precarity. Being dependent on irregular income (as is especially true for emerging circus artists and graduates fresh out of school, who might take a while to find their way into the market) increases the pressure to tour frequently, or to find complementary jobs such as teaching or directing.

In order to be able to perform the same show over several years, circus artists must continuously expand their touring networks and renew their audiences. In this regard, the European Union provides "one of the most favorable spaces for mobile artists" (Lipphardt 2012, 112); its varied urban landscapes and density of cultural centres allow for a very efficient touring environment (assuming one has a European passport or work permit).

The contemporary mobility logic follows the demand of festivals and theatre houses rather than geographical imperatives. Efficient and cheap means of transportation such as airplanes allow artists to perform on consecutive days in geographically distant locations. In this case, the artist is practically teleported from one venue to the next without ever really being able to contextualize the move spatially or culturally. Taking this idea to an extreme, one could be argue that contemporary circus artists experience a constant shuttling between airports, train stations, hotel rooms, training facilities, and performing venues, but little else. This necessarily finds its reflection in the artists' subjective experience of their environments and their interaction with and relationship to space: "No matter where I go, I can never really invite anyone to my place. I'm always a guest in temporary places that I don't attach to" (Canadian circus artist interview, 2013).

It seems as though the infrastructure of nonplaces (Augé, 1995) that forms the artists' daily reality isolates them from the societies they are moving through. And while the majority of circus artists keep an apartment somewhere that functions as a point of departure and return, mobile artists are faced with challenges such as: How can one justify and afford to pay rent for an apartment that is inhabited only around 25% of the year? Who will take care of the flat during the long periods of absence? Existentially: how does one learn to feel at home on the move?

Reconciling one's at home and on tour lives becomes a whole lot more complicated when children are involved. Neither funding schemes nor hosting venues seem to consider this challenge in the contemporary mobile logic. A Canadian circus artist said, "My biggest challenge today is to master my family life despite my mobile lifestyle. To balance family life and professional life. I'm not going to lie: it's complicated" (2013).

Similar challenges seem to apply to the maintenance of personal relationships in general:

> When on tour you get to meet a lot of people, but at a certain moment you just get cynical because you have to leave straight away and if you get too attached it doesn't work, and you never know if you will see them again. (Italian circus artist interview, 2013)

Conclusion

Mobility is an important variable throughout key moments of a circus artist's career. This variable appears to be intrinsically intertwined with location and economic factors and has an impact on

artists' relationships to their spatial and social environments, to their artistic practice and, last but not least, to themselves.

The widespread abandoning of the circular performance space coincides with the adaptation of modern scenographies, venues, formats, markets, production logics, and mobility practices of theatre and dance. Yet, despite changing mobility and life conditions, the contemporary circus appears to be affected by a historically evolved exoticization that stylizes artists as "mobile others" and projects cultural expectations onto them that are all too often associated with traditional circus images. An Irish circus artist tells me: "That is probably the most painful thing about always travelling: always having to repeat the same story. My lifestyle is somehow exotic, especially for people who don't move around a lot" (2013).

It seems that in the exoticization of circus artists a central element is a fetishization directly linked to their mobility practices: a double process of projection and concealment through which the mobility lifestyle is being romanticized by the projection of freedom desires, while the underlying material realities are being concealed. At the same time, the artists themselves tend to subscribe to similarly nostalgic and out-dated travel and freedom narratives; here, circus life is stylized as a counter-model to the corporate world and highly regimented "office jobs."

In particular, this freedom metaphor evokes Bourdieu's sense of a "collective illusio" that artists continuously invest in (1990, 66). It can be assumed that this is an essential strategy that enables artists to find lasting fulfilment in their everyday mobility and to overcome emotionally stressful situations: the pressure to be mobile, the emotional costs of hypermobile realities, permanent job insecurity, and financial precariousness, as well as the embeddedness of artistic mobility in unbalanced power relations. While it seems that, in a globalized postmodern society, circus artists (as part of the so-called creative class) are just as much a gear in the system of self-exploitation that fits perfectly into the European Union's neoliberal call for flexibility (geographical, economic, and otherwise), the maintenance of this "ideology of travel," as Alzaga calls it, is evermore important to artists' ability to live their lives in a satisfied way (2007, 52).

When thinking about contemporary circus mobility, however, it is equally important to keep in mind the inherent privilege involved, and how easy it is to "think global" with a European passport. As Homi Bhabha has written: "The globe shrinks for those who own it; for the displaced or the dispossessed, the migrant or refugee, no distance is more awesome than the few feet across borders or frontiers" (1992, 88).

Notes

1. This article in no way wants to promote the assumption that there is only one form of mobility among contemporary circus artists. Rather the author reflects general tendencies of this field, all the while being aware of the complex and nuanced realities that exist beyond these tendencies.

2. See Bogue (2004), Cresswell (2006), and Urry (2007) for reflections on the complex interrelations of sedentarism and mobility, and the sedentary paradigm's connection to agricultural cultivation, the production of the state-nation, and the politics of legibility and control.

3. French for "stop over."

4. This report is set for publication in 2018.

References

Alzaga, Maria. 2007. "The Travelling Lives of Circus Artists. Home and Homelessness in a Nomadic Life." In *Ethnologia Europaea. Journal of European Ethnology* 37 (1–2): 51–56.

Augé, Marc. 1995. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. London/New York: Verso.

Bhabha, Homi. 1992. "Double Visions." *Artforum* 30 (5): 85–89.

Bogue, Ronald. 2004. "Apology for Nomadology." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 6 (2): 169–79.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Cresswell, Tim. 2006. *On the Move. Mobility in the Modern Western World*. London: Routledge.

FEDEC. 2017a. "ESCALES. Analysis of the Different Forms of Mobility." http://www.fedec.eu/en/articles/151-escales#.

FEDEC. 2017b. *ESCALES. Learning by Moving. Survey on Students' International Mobility Practice in Circus Arts Education*. Unpublished manuscript.

Lehn, Donald B. 2013. "Can't Stop Movin'—Circus and Mobility." *Interartive* 55 "Art and Mobility," Barcelona. http://artmobility.interartive.org/cant-stop-movin-donald-b-lehn.

Lipphardt, Anna. 2012. "Artists on the Move. Theoretical Perspectives. Empirical Implications." In *a.RTISTS IN TRANSIT / How to Become an Artist in Residence*, edited by Annette Hollywood and Andreas Schmid, 109–22. Berlin: Internationale Gesellschaft der Bildenden Kunste.

Muffels, Ruud J. A. 2005. "Labour Markets Mobility and Employment Patterns." *Position Paper Workpackage 3: Researching Labour Market Transitions in European Welfare Regimes*. TLM.NET Working Papers No. 2005-04. Amsterdam: SISWO/Social Policy Research.

Urry, John. 2007. *Mobilities*. Cambridge: Cambridge Polity Press.

Contemporary Circus Careers: Labour Relations and Normative Selfhood in the Neoliberal Scenario

Ilaria Bessone

This paper reports and analyzes insights into diverse circus careers against the backdrop of the current neoliberal moment, taking recent developments within the circus world as reflective of contemporary social, economic, and political transformations and disciplinary discourses. It draws on an ethnographic inquiry into the contemporary circus scene in the Italian capital of contemporary circus, Turin. This case study is conceptually grounded in the increasing importance of creative "passionate work" (Arvidsson, Malossi, and Naro 2010, 295) in neoliberal labour relations, and in the neoliberal emphasis of contemporary consumer society on individual responsibility for adequate constructions of identity and subjectivity.

The redefinition of circus as a form of art and a formalized educational path is an ongoing process in Italy, where until very recently circus was associated solely with a family-run form of popular entertainment and a traditional, marginal, and closed community. On the other hand, circus practice has profoundly changed since the amateur and social circus movement started at least twenty years ago, and the practice of circus has been developing "a rich culture and a strong sense among the members of being different from other people" (Hughes 1984, 296). Thus, the research considered circus as both a field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993) under construction and a community of practice (Paechter 2003; Wenger 2010). The data were generated mainly through a year of participant observation of circus spaces in Turin and thirty-nine in-depth interviews with circus practitioners and professionals from different areas (including amateur, artistic, and social circus.)

Within this frame, the term career is employed in Hughes' (1984) sense of process through which a "bundle of activities" (292), values, and skills acquire meaning within specific social and historical contexts. Careers in this sense include personal and professional life, official roles, and images of self and self-identity (Murgia 2006). In this meandering—rather than linear—sense, circus careers represent particularly significant effects of the interplay between subjective and structural elements of social life.

More specifically, the case of contemporary circus becomes paradigmatic of a neoliberal framework in which the status of "art" justifies labour and existential precariousness, highlighting the social role and the symbolic value of artistic professions and practices, and new articulations of art as opposed to—or in compliance with—current notions of work, labour, and leisure. Artistic practices blur symbolic and material needs, aims, and gains, reflecting the reconfiguration of the relation between paid labour and vocation work in the post-Fordist context, in which the capability to transfer subjectivity, emotionality, innovation, creativity, originality, and sociability directly through produced goods and services becomes central to the value of labour, which in turn is "charged with existential aspects" (Chicchi, Savioli, and Turrini 2015, 10).

Ilaria Bessone, circus educator and researcher, earned a PhD in the sociology and methodology of social research from the University of Milan and the University of Turin in 2017. She is responsible for the international relations and research section of AltroCirco, a project dedicated to social circus development in Italy.

I will focus below on a few traits which clarify the relevance of such a conceptual framework and analytical focus, showing how the apparent marginality of the circus case fades in a society in which, in the words of one of my interviewees, "no profession is safe anymore, so the gall I showed in daring [a circus career] became let's say the necessary condition for today's students [no matter in what field], who know that as soon as they'll finish they will have to throw themselves in a jungle and will not have a permanent job" (Emanuele, 36, professional).

First, uncertainty characterizes a labour market in which social capital still counts more than formal, explicit criteria for access and success. Those criteria are underpinned by the construction of a professional social network as well as peculiar factors when forming groups and producing performances, such as strong social ties, artistic affinity, and self-direction. While traditional, travelling and family-run circuses in Italy can be defined as closed and rigid communities of life and work (Caforio 1987), the new market of contemporary circus performers seems to value free association and choice rather than ancestral ties: "a circus in which . . . you choose your own company" (Marco, 36, professional).

While auditions represent the main tool to access the field and operate on the labour market in dance and theatre (Bassetti 2009; Luciano and Bertolini 2011), only a few well-known international companies employ such a method in Italy, where the formalization of the contemporary circus field has only recently started. As well as founding small companies and informal groups, circus artists are employed in dance, theatre, and opera productions, hired by local traditional circuses as seasonal performers, occasionally contracted by the organizers of events and festivals, or self-employed in street work.

Second, the diversification of sources and the constant search for funding represents a common point between circus—in which less than a third of the sources to produce circus shows (local and national) are public institutions (Malerba and Vimercati 2016)—and other performing genres (Bassetti 2009; Luciano and Bertolini 2011). Performing artists operate in a labour market in which short-term and project-based contracts prevail, and the public social security provided is minimal.

Thus, contingent employment and "casual labor" (Menger 1999, 548) still prevails, despite the highly skilled, mobile, and diversified character of artistic jobs, in an artistic sector in which professionalization made possible the "triumph of creative individualism" and maximized the role of risk taking (571). These workers can thus be taken as paradigmatic examples of the importance of individual—rather than systemic—strategies to face career obstacles and seize opportunities.

A third aspect is tied to the ambivalent role of creativity in contemporary society. On the one hand, circus practitioners respond to an artistic notion of creativity, in which the reproducible, commercial value of art production is separated from its unique, symbolic value. On the other, "unicity" has lost its aura (Lavaert and Gielen 2009, 75) in a context in which the imperative of creativity leaks from the aesthetic to the political and the economic fields in general, while an "efficacy imperative" to meet "productivity goals and expectations" (Hurley 2016, 75) determines the artistic as well as the business world. This implies that "unicity" is not only expected of a work of art, but of any kind of experience and product, and that it is underpinned by entangled notions of creativity, innovation, and authenticity. "Acting in one's own authority, being truthful to one's self, achieving congruence between feelings and communication, being distinctive and coherent" (Svejenova 2005, 950) become cornerstones to building creative, "boundaryless" (947) careers in a society in which not only circus artists, but all individuals are considered owners and agents of their trajectories.

In such a context, formal professional artistic training which aims to increase the opportunities of former students to access the labour market (Wilf 2010), insists on the importance of creativity, inventiveness, and originality in building and teaching "methods, with its own handouts" (Luca, 45, school manager) and "systems" (Emanuele, 36, professional) to acquire the skills to "turn the artist's technique into something other than the demonstration of technique" (Luca, 45, school manager), and showing the authenticity and fragility of the artist as a special and unique human being.

Rather than virtuosity and technical skills, these ambivalent notions of creativity and innovation, pulling together rationalization and authenticity claims, determine artistic success. This is, in turn, entangled with economic success, as being creative counts to "sell oneself" in contemporary circus (Garcia 2011, 44)—that is, as market as well as symbolic value. While a shared representation still circulates among artists and practitioners that these are separate, success for professional artists is inseparable from the material—as well as the symbolic—gains drawn from artistic work, so much so that to be part of the artistic professional community, the first requirement is to make a living out of one's practice.

The reasons why circus as a profession is both very attractive and profoundly scary is the inextricable intertwinement of the privilege of freedom, of having "no obligations except the ones you create yourself" and the constant risk of "not making it" (Mara, 25, amateur), and having to resort to intensive and extensive career diversification. Thus, the material gains from circus activities acquire an intrinsic symbolic value.

To make sense of these boundaryless careers, circus artists activate a "defence mechanism against disenchantment" (Menger 2014, 111). The majority of the professional artists interviewed tend to distinguish between the essential and side aspects of their professional choice, and between more and less desired tasks, resigning themselves to the idea that there is an often hidden "business side" to their bodily, creative, and "purely artistic" activity. Emphasis is generally placed on the appreciation of the privilege of having a profession which is also a passion, an opportunity to have fun, meet people, travel, achieve ecstatic states, and gain the admiration of an audience, and of the responsibility to move, share emotions, and communicate relevant and innovative content. The fact that insecurity and precariousness often obscure this mission, forcing performers to extensively and intensively diversify their career and leading to the waste of a great amount of energy and time in these and other strategies of risk management, is either rationally framed as a clever attitude or assumed as a (frustrating and temporary) part of the game.

Defence mechanisms underpin social reproduction thanks to their invisible nature as "taken for granted": not only does the emphasis on creativity and authenticity obscure the economic—and precarious—side of this very same coin, but the latter remains simultaneously an unrecognized (materially, at least) and necessary (if one is to make a living out of his or her art) part of the artist's work. On the other hand, in the neoliberal context, artistic and so-called "ordinary" jobs converge under the social imperatives of creativity and (economic) efficacy to which individuals must respond.

The ideal successful artist does not need to manage risk through the combination of circus work with work in sectors outside the arts or other artistic sectors, or through different activities in the circus sector. However, he/she is also able to dedicate a significant part of his/her career to artistic—as opposed to commercial—production. As we saw above, notions of artistry are

inextricably tied to notions of creativity and authenticity, which imply a higher and deeper investment of the body, the emotions, and the self in labour and commercial settings.

Circus practice implies bodywork that aims to cultivate a fit, healthy, and responsibly looked-after body able to train, create, and perform. It entails emotion work, both the search for the "authentic self" and the staging of "spontaneous, "natural" feeling" (Hochschild 1983, 190). It emphasizes creativity as the attempt to express the "unique nature" of each person, "one's inner voice and impulses," and "the rejection of outside structures and prearranged models for action" (Wilf 2010, 568–69). This both responds to a "cultural anxiety about mass production and mechanical reproduction" (567) and is expected to increase one's opportunities to access and succeed on the labour market. In this sense, contemporary circus careers represent pivotal nodes to look at the entanglements between normative selfhood and material success, and at the new, subtle ways in which these engage our inner selves.

More location-specific insights may be drawn from the above analysis of the Italian case. Significant differences can be highlighted in relation to the cultural politics of other European countries and, on the other hand, the North American business-oriented model. While Italian contemporary circus draws extensively on the French and Belgian aesthetics and professional training models, cultural policies in Italy are far from providing the same kind of favourable bureaucratic, working, and welfare conditions, and the same status to artists and artistic production as these countries. On the contrary, the recent cultural policies in the sector of live performance in Italy have imposed a diversification of activities that only those actors and organizations with enough economic and human resources to operate in very diverse domains can sustain and have resulted in the concentration of funding and political power (Luciano and Bertolini 2011).

Against this backdrop, the only feasible solution for many circus artists is the entertainment market. However, like in other artistic fields, much of commercial art is not considered "real" art. Cirque du Soleil, for instance, is seldom taken as an artistic reference, due to its status as a multinational entertainment company. With such contrasting material and symbolic references, how is Italian contemporary circus to develop? Is artistic development possible when the most important criterion to identify a professional artist is still the ability to survive out of one's activity, rather than the creation of excellent, original, and innovative content? In the current Italian situation, the responsibility to reply still seems to be left to the artists' creativity, which shapes all aspects of their lives, not merely their production.

References

Arvidsson, Adam, Giannino Malossi, and Serpica Naro. 2010. "Passionate Work? Labour Conditions in the Milan Fashion Industry." *Journal for Cultural Research* 14 (3): 295–309.

Bassetti, Chiara. 2009. "La Danza Come Agire Professionale, Corporeo E Artistico. Percorsi E Traiettorie, Saperi E Pretiche Quotidiane Nel Campo Italiano Della Danza." Università degli Studi di Trento.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1993. *The Field of Cultural Production*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Caforio, A. 1987. "Il Circo Come Comunità Di Vita E Di Lavoro." *Studi Di Sociologia* 25 (4): 429–36.

Chicchi, Federico, Marco Savioli, and Mauro Turrini. 2015. "Intermittent Subjectivities. An Inquiry on Decomposition of Labour in the Sector of Leisure." *Munich Personal RePEc Archive*. MPRA Paper No. 63372: 1–17. https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/63372/.

Garcia, Marie-Carmen. 2011. *Artistes de Cirque Contemporain*. Paris: La Dispute.
Hochschild, Arlie R. 1983. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Hughes, Everett C. 1984. *The Sociological Eye*. New Brunswick: Transaction.
Hurley, Erin. 2016. "Performance Services: The Promises of Cirque Du Soleil." In *Cirque Global. Quebec's Expanding Circus Boundaries*, edited by L. Patrick Leroux and Charles Batson, 71–78. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
Lavaert, Sonja, and Pascal Gielen. 2009. "The Dismeasure of Art. An Interview with Paolo Virno." *Open*, no. 17, 72–85.
Luciano, A., and S. Bertolini. 2011. *Incontri Dietro Le Quinte. Imprese E Professionisti Nel Settore Dello Spettacolo*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
Malerba, Filippo, and Gaia Vimercati. 2016. "Censimento Circo Italia Report Finale." http://www.corpievisioni.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CENSIMENTO-CIRCO-ITALIA_REPORT-FINALE.pdf.
Menger, Pierre-Michel. 1999. "Artistic Labor Markets and Careers." *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (1): 541–74.
———. 2014. *The Economics of Creativity. Art and Achievement under Uncertainty*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Murgia, Annalisa. 2006. *Confini, Transizioni, Frammenti. Una Rassegna Della Letteratura Su Carriere Professionali E Differenze Di Genere*. Trento: Università degli Studi di Trento.
Paechter, Carrie. 2003. "Masculinities and Femininities as Communities of Practice." *Women's Studies International Forum* 26 (1): 69–77.
Svejenova, Silviya. 2005. ""The Path with the Heart': Creating the Authentic Career." *Journal of Management Studies* 42 (5): 947–74.
Wenger, E. 2010. "Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems: The Career of a Concept." In *Social Learning Systems and Communities of Practice*, edited by C. Blackmore, 125–43. London: Springer–Verlag/Open University.
Wilf, Eitan. 2010. "Swinging within the Iron Cage: Modernity, Creativity, and Embodied Practice in American Postsecondary Jazz Education." *American Ethnologist* 37 (3): 563–82.

What a Beard Can Do: Performative Frames and Public Tastes

Magali Sizorn
Translated by Sunita Nigam

The demographics of theatre audiences are a frequent object of study; imperatives related to the democratization of culture require cultural establishments that receive public funding to keep records of their audiences (sex, age, income and qualification levels, place of residence). It is to this end that we (Roland, de Vrièse, and Sizorn 2009) conducted a study in 2008 on the attendance of the Automne en Normandie festival which, between 1991 and 2014, offered, in the entire region of upper Normandy, a multidisciplinary program that included companies of international renown. The festival also distinguishes itself by mounting shows in different kinds of spaces: the Rouen Opera House, patrimonial monuments, small-town community halls, and so forth. When in 2008 we were charged with the task of researching the festival's demographics, the artistic orientations of the event had changed: a new openness to the circus was notable, and very high expectations had been set (notably by public financers) with regards to the diversification of the festival's audience, as many considered the festival to be elitist.

The study included a quantitative component (with 1389 questionnaires retrieved). We learned that festival audiences were well versed in cultural and artistic offerings, and had relatively diverse tastes in classic repertoires and popular registers alike (interests which were met by the Festival's diverse programming). The average age of festival attendees was higher than that of the French population (45 years old, compared to 38.7 years old), and the professional categories most highly represented amongst festival-goers were teachers and those working in the sciences (43.8%). Half of the attendees had received a level of education equivalent to or higher than an undergraduate degree (bac +3 in France), and almost one quarter had received a master's degree (bac +5). The average income per household was also relatively high, and even higher than that of the audience members of other festivals studied in the same year (Négrier 2008–2009). Thus, significant social, economic, and cultural disparities between the festival audience and the general population persisted, and the effects of the festival's diversification efforts were only marginally perceptible.

It is with this small margin of improvement in diversification in mind as well as with the way in which members of the public perceived the festival that the qualitative component of the study was conceived. Twenty-four interviews with spectators were conducted. Our analysis of these interviews shows that spectators describe the festival along opposing poles: high culture vs. popular culture; selective programming vs. diversification; reflection vs. entertainment; classic vs. contemporary. Virgil, a high school student, found that the spectators were "rather bourgeois," and he felt "alien" in relation to them. The festival conveys the image of a "reserved" event, and its spectators confirm this reputation: "it's true that there are many people who think it's not for them. It's expensive, it's reserved for certain people, intellectuals, as if we couldn't appreciate it" (Rose).[1] The festival programs and other communication tools actually reflect, according to one spectator, the difficult

Magali Sizorn is an ethno-sociologist and lecturer at the University of Rouen, where she researches the circus, dance, and street arts. She is particularly interested in the transformations of artistic activities over time, and in popular cultural practices, which she analyzes by studying audience reception. **Sunita Nigam** is a PhD candidate in performance studies at McGill University. Her dissertation is about the role of performance in urban placemaking in Mexico City, New York, and Montreal from the Mexico '68 Olympics to the contemporary burlesque revival.

reconciliation between a discourse of openness toward the broad public (the project of the festival's new leadership) and the observation of a certain in-groupness with shows addressed to "people of the theatre world" (Etienne).

An openness to new audiences was accompanied by a diversification of aesthetics and artistic disciplines (to music and dance performances were added theatre and circus shows). While certain spectators applauded efforts to democratize the access to culture in a festival "that had become very elitist" (Ludivine; Roselyne; François) by addressing a "larger public" (Alice), others thought that the festival programming had "lost its lustre" (Etienne) due to an overabundance of choices. Asserting that the festival presented an "elitist vision of things," one spectator named Lucien said he preferred the performances that "sought to be the least demagogic possible without trying to attract the biggest crowds."

Blanche Neige by Angelin Preljocaj. Photo by Jean-Claude Carbonne.

Two shows often cited in the interviews brought out these oppositions, as well as expectations regarding what Automne en Normandie should be: *Blanche Neige* (*Snow White*), by Angelin Preljocaj, and *L'Éloge du Poil* (*In Praise of Hair*) by the BAL/Jeanne Mordoj company. *Blanche Neige*, a ballet of twenty-six dancers with neoclassical gestures set to the music of Gustav Mahler, with costumes designed by Jean-Paul Gaultier, was mounted in a prestigious establishment (the Rouen Opera House). *L'Éloge du Poil*, a more modest production, revived old-time fairground performances with a scenography centred on a bearded woman. It was mounted in a community hall in Gisors (a small city east of Rouen) and at the National Choreographic Centre in Havre, which hosted the show in the context of *La Grande Veillée*—an all-night event with performances, shows, and conferences. The marketing logic, here, was that this format would potentially be more attractive to new and different audiences instead of just to the festival's usual spectators.

"I went to see *L'Éloge du Poil*," recounts Stella.

> I loved it, it was the most beautiful show so far . . . and on top of that I saw it as part of *La Grande Veillé* at the Havre, and it was one or two days after Preljocaj. And Preljocaj, it was, you could feel there was an enormous amount of money, it had big names . . . a big thing, you know! Which I didn't like at all, I think that, well, I'm not at all qualified to say this, but as a spectator, I said to myself, "Okay, okay, that's a big name, it's with Gaultier, there's a ton of money, and voilà." It lost the thing that makes the spectator dream a bit. Whereas *L'Éloge du Poil*, it had fuck-all: there was a girl, a guy, some skeletons. And it was great. An egg! (Stella).

Stella contrasts the modesty of the circus show to the grandiosity of the Preljocaj piece. She distances herself from "legitimate" culture and its signs, even though she enjoys the privilege of significant cultural capital, and even though she is a loyal festival attendee. Others, on the contrary, value the beauty of the ballet dancers and criticize a mixing of arts that contaminates the specificity (the "purity") of texts, techniques, forms, and bodies. What the spectators say of works of art and of corporealities serves as a useful entry into an analysis of their value systems. They are in this way constitutive elements of the frame that structures and organizes the activity of reception, the appreciation of works, and, more generally, of going to the theatre. This activity of "going out" constitutes a form of social participation and the aestheticization of social life.

L'Éloge du poil, created in 2007, was conceived for a small audience—the spectators were seated in a half-circle on wooden bleachers facing the stage. Jeanne Mordoj appears in a yellow skirt suit and a negligee of green silk. She has a feminine and coquettish silhouette and high heels. When she finally lifts the veil that had been hiding her face, she reveals a beard. If the circuses and fairs of the nineteenth century exhibited alterity for its "exoticism," or its "monstrous" difference, the difference presented by Jeanne Mordoj is other: through her beard, she introduces a play with the real; she performs the gap between the appearance and the meaning by introducing an oddity into an image that in every other way conforms to the codes of femininity. She subverts the feminine to question it, thanks to an artifact: her beard. Strong, mobile, and served by a male assistant, this bearded lady reverses the stigma (or rather, the stigmas imbricated in an intersectionality: to be a woman and a bearded woman). By what is here performed in drag (In French, *en travestie*), she confronts today's spectator with what once was presented as a monstrosity. But she does it in the frame of a live performance and not in the frame of everyday life (her beard is artificial). Positioning herself non-normatively, she juggles with eggs, smooth egg yolks that slide along her skin in an absurd sensuality; she ventriloquizes skeletons; she manipulates snail shells like contortionists.

As a figure of strangeness, Jeanne Mordoj ultimately prompts a sort of excavation of our imaginaries. The circus, through its particular contemporary aesthetics, often functions in a reflexive mode, turning back to its own history, its images, and imaginaries, to valorize them, revisit them, place them at a distance, and to transform their meanings and effects. Jeanne Mordoj thus performs a history of fairground exhibitions, and of the transformation of a gaze that is fixed on the other, from the spectacularization of difference to the use of devices that reflexively engage the spectators. By the same token, the spectators are engaged in the work of turning toward the past and to what used to be a spectacle, but also toward an image of female difference produced in a contemporary context. Beyond the question of gender is the question of the perception of differences and the effects of this perception (stigmatization, domination), which is at the centre of Mordoj's project. In spectator responses, we see that performance venues, as well as stagings and artistic disciplines,

affected perceptions of the festival and its attendees. In contrast with audiences of historical entertainments, in which a homogeneous "us" was created through the spectacle of exoticism (Loux 1979), here, it is the perception of differences, including differences in the audience, with which the performance engages. In the responses we collected, we were able to identify two different relationships between the spectators and the artwork. While some spectators valued the artwork's elite status, others were more interested in the aesthetics of popular performance (wooden benches, DIY decor). The valorization of these latter aesthetics (used in more modest venues such as big tops and public spaces) point to a desire for cultural democratization. The selection of shows on offer, as well as the spaces in which the performances took place, formed an important part of the spectator experience. Especially significant for spectators seeking nonexclusive cultural experiences was the physical intimacy created between the members of the audience and between the audience and the performers (Bourdieu 1979). Anne-Claude describes her entrance into the space that hosted *L'Éloge du poil* as follows: "It's a little bit magical because we enter into this sort of storage space, a large box, empty, and then, all of a sudden, we go behind the bleachers and find ourselves in this small little intimate universe; this created a sense of closeness with the rest of the audience." Interestingly (and connected to this desire for closeness), while the quantitative data collected on festival audiences suggested that they were far from demographically diverse, certain spectators had the perception that the publics in fact were diverse. It is as if these spectators projected onto their experience of the festival wishful thinking about more diverse artistic publics, and perhaps, about a more diverse society (Lefevre, Roland, and Femenias 2008). The festival attendees thus invited themselves into the debate about elitism and democratization, or, to put it differently, about access to art.

We know that the development of festival programming responds to a variety of injunctions and constraints (material, political, territorial, artistic . . .). In the context of the Automne en Normandie festival, the goal of broadening the pool of attendees through a diversification of audiences (the festival otherwise has no problem filling its performance spaces) responds to the expectations of sponsors and is part of the political project of the new board of directors. But the diversification strategy adopted by the festival directors reinvests in (and reifies) the opposition between elite and popular culture. The position of "popular" is here occupied by the performance of Jeanne Mordoj, a contemporary circus show that brings into relief views of otherness and its spectacularization in different festival contexts over time. If the data collected in the quantitative survey render particularly visible the difficulty of reaching a so-called broad public, in the values that they mobilize in their survey responses, the festival attendees remind us of the difficult conciliation between artistic excellence (experienced as using an elitist, even aristocratic logic) and cultural objects of general interest (experienced as possessing a more inclusive address and using a democratic logic) (Heinich 2005).

Our study contributes to a sociology of art that begins with the works themselves, and also to a sociology dedicated to a "pragmatics of taste" (Hennion 2004). To take public tastes seriously, one must interrogate what makes spectators like one work as opposed to another, as well as the modalities of their attachments: dramaturgical devices, objects, corporealities, and contexts.

Note

1. Excerpts from interviews with Virgil and Rose, spectators whose names were changed to preserve their anonymity (in Roland, De Vrièse, and Sizorn 2009), as were those of the other spectators quoted here.

References

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1979. *La distinction*. Paris: Minuit.

Dutheil-Pessin, Catherine, and François Ribac. 2017. *La fabrique de la programmation culturelle*. Paris: La Dispute.

Heinich, Nathalie. 2005. *L'élite artiste. Excellence et singularité en régime démocratique*. Paris: Gallimard.

Hennion, Antoine. 2004. "Pragmatics of Taste." In *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Culture*, edited by M. Jacobs and N. Hanrahan, 131–44. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lefevre, Betty, Pascal Roland, and Damien Féménias, eds. 2008. *Un festival sous le regard de ses spectateurs. Viva Cité, le public est dans la rue*. Rouen: Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre.

Loux, Françoise. 1979. *Le corps dans la société traditionnelle*. Paris: Berger-Levrault.

Négrier, Emmanuel, ed. 2008–2009. *Les publics des festivals*. Study for the France Festival Association.

Roland, Pacal, Muriel De Vrièse, and Magali Sizorn. 2009. *Les publics du festival Automne en Normandie*. Master's thesis, Université de Rouen-Normandie.

A Modern Version of Running Away and Joining the Circus: From Inner City to Around the World

Jessica Hentoff

Sidney "Iking" Bateman soaring over his circus troupe-mates. Photo: James Cole, 2007.

Circus has always been about defying the most basic rule we live under: the law of gravity. In circus, humans fly through the air and manipulate objects with powerful disregard of this most basic law. In the branch of circus called social circus, participants defy even more than that. In social circuses like Circus Harmony in the United States, Zip Zap Circus in South Africa, and Phare Circus in Cambodia, any notion of social circus being an outlier, somehow less legitimate than its mainstream professional counterpart, is being turned upside down (circus style) as these social circuses foster innovative new circus artists who also defy society's low expectations of people from their neighbourhoods and backgrounds. This is the story of one of them.

I am the artistic/executive director of Circus Harmony, a nonprofit social circus based in St. Louis, Missouri, USA. I started this work when I founded the St. Louis Arches youth circus troupe in 1989. Circus Harmony is located inside the iconoclastic tourist attraction, City Museum, in downtown St. Louis. We use social circus to help young people overcome not only gravity but also labels and other limitations placed on them by society. We give children the power to define themselves. In circus, you can hang by your toes, or you can't. You can juggle five clubs, or they hit the ground. Where you live doesn't matter. Race doesn't matter. Your parents don't matter. You matter. You can't do a pyramid alone. Even solo acts require support on some level. You have to trust and be responsible

Jessica Hentoff has been teaching and performing circus arts for over forty years. She is the artistic/executive director of Circus Harmony, where she uses circus arts and her vision to build character and community and help children defy gravity, soar with confidence, and leap over social barriers.

for others. Individuals matter. The group matters. By standing on each other's shoulders, they can all reach new heights.

Statistics for youth living in inner-city St. Louis are staggeringly negative. According to an FBI crime report, St. Louis has recently been named the second most violent city in America and the number one city for murders (FOX 2 NOW 2017). Almost 12% of high-schoolers in the city will drop out of school this year. Just under half (40%) of children under 18 live in poverty, 70% of them live in high poverty areas regardless of their families' actual income, and 16% of children are homeless. (Missouri KIDS Count 2017) The most common racial or ethnic group living below the poverty line is African American (Data USA 2017). Feelings of insecurity from high murder rates and poverty are further aggravated by lack of trust in law enforcement. Of numerous high profile cases of young African American men killed by police officers around the country, many have been in St. Louis, spurring reactions of betrayal, fear, and outrage (Byers 2017; Berman, Lowery, and deGrandpre 2017). If you are an urban, St. Louis African American male and you stay in your neighbourhood and avoid getting killed, your future could still be bleak. Your employment options are limited, as represented by the fact that the median income of households with children is low at $33,165 per year (Missouri KIDS Count 2017). High academic standing or sports offer a couple of ways out of these neighbourhoods and out of the cycle, but sports spots are limited, and decent academic standing is hard to achieve in failing schools. The state of St. Louis public schools and their accreditation problems are well documented: they were reaccredited in 2017 after a decade of having this badge of adequacy stripped from them (Taketa 2017).

As described by Cirque du Monde, "social circus is an innovative social intervention approach, which uses the circus arts as a tool for fostering the personal and social development of at-risk individuals" (Lafortune 2013). In this spirit, Circus Harmony creates circus troupes of children from different backgrounds as an approach to addressing the serious social issue of deep-rooted racial/cultural fear and distrust. Circus Harmony students come from both urban and suburban neighbourhoods and a wide variety of socioeconomic and other backgrounds. Being in a circus troupe together, the young people get to know each other and are put in a position of communicating with and trusting each other. They learn that they are more alike than they are different. They create awe-inspiring shows that are presented to the public. The shows demonstrate to people what is possible when we concentrate on what unites us instead of what divides us. Some of the students go on to use circus to take a different path and create a life that takes them totally out of their neighbourhoods and away from the norm of anyone they grew up with. Circus becomes their way out of a neighbourhood where walking to the store can be dangerous and life options are limited. Of Circus Harmony's inner-city students who have used circus arts to change their lives, many even choose not to stay with their families when they come back to St. Louis to visit. They still come home to visit their relatives and, often, have been supporting them from the road. But their sense of family and community is larger now and they stay with other people.

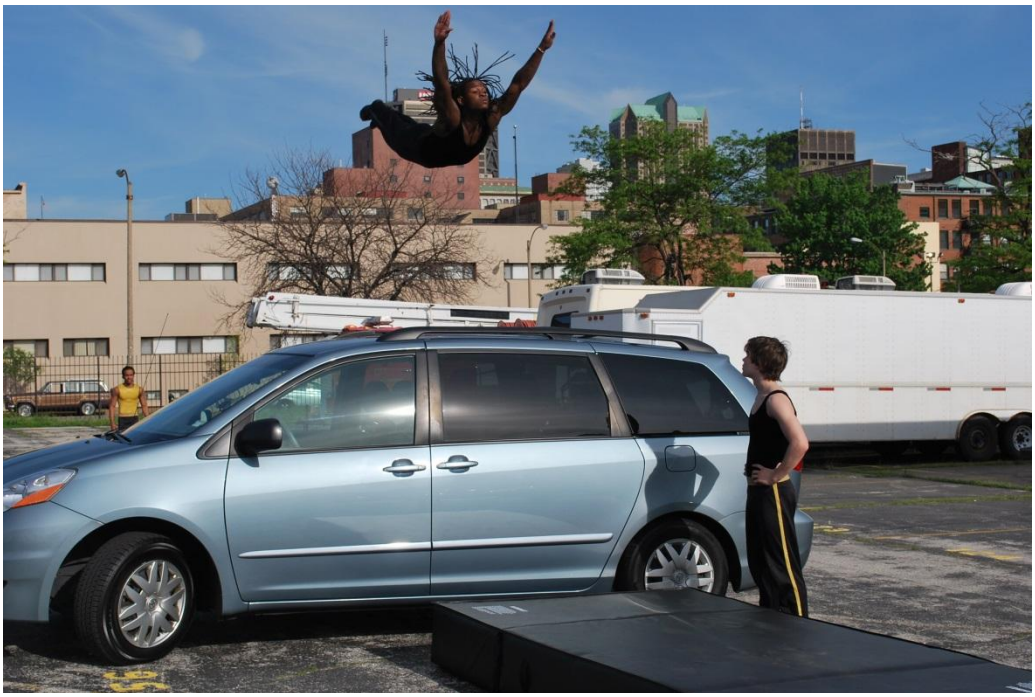
Sidney "Iking" Bateman and Terrance "T-Roc" Robinson. Photo: Jessica Hentoff, 2011.

Certainly part of what defines our work as a social circus has to do with who the participants are. There is no question that when circus classes are offered to people in marginalized situations, they are labelled social circus because the activity is being offered for the reason of giving participants a positive alternative to the personal and social situations they happen to be in. It is meant to go deeper than just teaching someone to juggle. Social circus teaches both circus skills and life skills. Circus Harmony specifically helps and supports young people as they develop in all aspects of their lives: physical, mental, emotional, and social. The intention is for the circus activity to be a bridge to take the participant from one point in their personal and/or social life to another. Increasingly, for some in dire circumstances, it can also create an actual way out of their situation.

Sidney "Iking" Bateman never knew his father. His mother died when he was three and Iking was raised by his illiterate grandmother, who was also raising some of her own children as well as Iking's siblings and some cousins. His home was in one of the worst neighbourhoods in St. Louis, characterized by low income, high crime, low-level public schools, and high unemployment. At the age of fourteen, Iking was the oldest male in his household who was not dead or institutionalized. Through a mentoring program, he was introduced to Circus Harmony. Iking told *Spectacle Magazine*:

> I come from a really troubled neighborhood where there are a lot of gangs and violence and so many negative things and all the odds are really stacked against you. So Circus Harmony gave me a place of comfort because most of the time I didn't feel safe at home. Circus Harmony was basically my escape. Like I was there so much that I didn't have time to run in the streets and hang out with the wrong people because circus consumed so much of my time. It changed my life in so many ways. (Campbell 2017)

Iking was a naturally talented tumbler. At circus, he says, he gained other skills: "I learned how to trust, respect, teamwork, and focus" (Circus Harmony 2015). Most importantly, he was given the opportunity to follow a circus career path and the means to do so. He auditioned and was accepted into the prestigious École Nationale de Cirque (ENC) in Montreal. Numerous members of his St. Louis circus community helped raise the money necessary for him to attend (Circus Harmony 2015).



Sidney "Iking" Bateman soaring over a car. Photo: Jessica Hentoff, 2011.

At Iking's National Circus School graduation show, when he delivered the prescribed short address to the audience before his circus act, this is what he said:

> What do you see when you look at me? Fear? Weakness? A not-so-confident person? No! You see a strong, confident, and fearless young man. I come from a place where values are so screwed up that you don't know right from wrong. A place where any a risk could be the last risk you ever take. I wondered if I should take the risk, leaving behind everything that I was told and start over as a new person. I took that risk and jumped into this new world not knowing what to expect! My work is not just a reflection of myself as a person; it's a reflection of my life. All the pain, the hurt, and the disbelief combined to show you that a bad situation can be recreated into something good. Tonight I will take that risk for me and for you. (Rankin 2014)

After graduation, Iking went on to tour the world for two years alongside Melvin Diggs, another Circus Harmony/ENC graduate, with the Montreal-based contemporary circus company 7 Doigts de la Main (The 7 Fingers). The duo performed an acrobatic hoop diving act they created as their graduation presentation from ENC. It depicts the many doors they had to go through to escape their lives in St. Louis. The soundtrack for the act is an interview with the young men recorded in June of 2014. Iking and Melvin talk about growing up African American in St. Louis and waiting to be the next person killed or arrested. They talk about how people they know could be great, but few people are able to fare better and actually get out of the neighbourhood. It was created prior to Mike Brown being shot in Ferguson, Missouri, later that same summer. The act accompanied by this soundtrack has now been seen from Argentina to Russia, by way of France, Spain, Germany, and Turkey. It was also presented as part of a special show in St. Louis titled *Defying Gravity and Social Injustice* (Hentoff 2017). Circus has helped Iking and Melvin to become accomplished circus artists, serve as role models to other youth and, importantly, support their families in St Louis.

Sidney "Iking" Bateman and Melvin Diggs with the author at the Opening of 7 Doigts de la Main/The 7 Fingers' *Cuisine and Confessions*. Photo: Courtesy Jessica Hentoff, 2014.

Observing Circus Harmony, circus researcher Helizete Da Silva Rodrigues Avrillon wrote,

> To my understanding, the purpose of the social circus is not to transform youth, particularly those in at-risk neighborhoods, into contortionists, clowns, trapeze artists, etc. but to teach life lessons, like Circus Harmony's theme of "teaching the art of life through circus education." From what I have observed, when you give youth the opportunities to develop and become aware of their capacities—both physical and intellectual—and offer them programs that open new doors, giving them the possibility of interacting with society in a

> positive way, they can become contributors to society instead of "social cases" living in at-risk situations. (Da Silva Rodrigues 2011)

Other Circus Harmony graduates have become electricians, schoolteachers or other more mainstream jobs. The life lessons and experiences gained through being part of Circus Harmony's social circus program have helped them to live better lives than many of their neighbourhood peers. They have learned job-readiness, goal-setting, and interpersonal skills. They are confident and comfortable with people of different backgrounds in a variety of settings. They have experienced being valued members of a community, and this has helped them as they move forward as adults.

Through Circus Harmony, Iking took his first plane trip in 2005 to attend an American Youth Circus Festival. In 2007, 2008, and 2010, he was part of a Peace Through Pyramids social circus partnership with a Jewish/Arab youth circus in Israel. Many members of his family have never been out of St. Louis, much less out of the country. Being part of this social circus gave Iking a world perspective he had not had before. In his words, "travelling the world and seeing how big the world is puts everything in perspective" (Circus Harmony 2015). Watching social circus can have a similar impact on audiences. Rabbi Marc Rosenstein of the Galilee Foundation for Value Education, who invited Circus Harmony to Israel, made this observation after a show by the combined troupes of the St. Louis Arches and the Galilee Circus: "I think many who saw the shows felt the same tears in their eyes, maybe out of the feeling one is seeing a vision of something that we all long for . . . the total obliteration of barriers, whether social, economic or gravitational" (Lipsitz 2011).

There is a book about Circus Harmony's Peace Through Pyramids partnership with the Jewish/Arab Galilee Circus in Israel. In English, the title is *Watch Out for Flying Kids*. The book has just been translated into Japanese and is being used in a number of Japanese middle schools. The title in Japan is *Jumping the Wall*. Iking is someone who made it over the wall by jumping through the right hoops. In December of 2017, Iking joined Cirque du Soleil as an acrobatic hoop diver on their show, *Luzia*. In this modern version of the classic story, this young man ran away and joined the circus and found a new home.

References

Berman, Mark, Wesley Lowery, and Andrew deGrandpre. 2017. "Police and Protesters Clash in St. Louis after Former Officer Who Shot Black Driver Acquitted on Murder Charges." *Washington Post*, September 16, 2017. http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/09/15/st-louis-tenses-for-verdict-in-murder-trial-of-former-police-officer.

Byers, Christine. 2017. "St. Louis Police Have Fatally Shot 8 Armed People This Year—The Highest Number in a Decade." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 21, 2017. http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/st-louis-police-have-fatally-shot-armed-people-this-year/.

Campbell, Kim. 2017. "Finding Peace with Circus in Tough Times," *Spectacle Magazine* 6, no. 8, November, 2017. http://spectaclemagazine.com/?page_id=6068.

Circus Harmony. 2015. *Iking's Story*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBUxbars8xI.

Da Silva Rodrigues, Helizete. 2011. "Le cirque social du rire aux larmes.—Espace de médiation et de reconfigurations identitaires et artistiques aux Etats-Unis et au Brésil." PhD diss., Université Lumière, Lyon.

Data USA. 2017. "Poverty by Race & Ethnicity." https://datausa.io/profile/geo/st.-louis-mo/#economy.

FOX 2 NOW Staff Writer. 2017. "St Louis Named 2nd Most Violent City in America." *FOX 2 Now St Louis*, September 27, 2017. http://fox2now.com/2017/09/27/st-louis-named-2nd-most-violent-city-in-america/.

Hentoff, Jessica. 2017. *Defying Gravity and Social Injustice, Nat Hentoff Tribute: Iking Bateman and Melvin Diggs Hoop Diving* (video). https://youtu.be/h6uk9y_8Eik.

Lafortune, Michel. 2013. *Social Circus Trainer's Guide*. Last modified February 25, 2018. https://cirquedumonde.app.box.com/v/all/file/1641578262.

Lipsitz, Alexandra. 2010. *Circus Kids*. Documentary, USA.

Missouri KIDS Count. 2017. "Missouri KIDS Count Data—St. Louis City." http://missourikidscountdata.org/.

Rankin, Diane. 2014. Ecole Nationale du Cirque Graduation Ceremony (Home movie videorecording). Montreal, Canada.

Taketa, Kristen. 2017. "St. Louis Public Schools Fully Accredited Once Again." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* January 11, 2017. http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/education/st-louis-public-schools-fully-accredited-once-again/article_adac0d40-d05b-55e6-9b3d-6d6680509128.html.

Is Social Circus "The Other" of Professional Circus?

Olga Lucía Sorzano

Introduction

Social circus is one of the many categories found today in circus practice. It is commonly located in the contemporary circus world together with the categories of community circus, youth circus, and other sub-genres that materialized after the 1960s. Social circus is broadly understood as a program operating outside the professional and performance circus worlds that uses circus skills as a tool for "assisting" vulnerable populations. An alternative approach is found in Latin America where social circus does not differentiate itself from the professional scene; rather, it is conceived and promoted as a professional option.

Revisiting the official definitions and the origins of social circus yields two crucial insights. First, there is a complex history behind the emergence of this circus category in which Colombia and Latin America have played a more central role than is generally recognized. Second, social circus, according to its official narrative, is a hybrid; it emerged from a combination of approaches involving circus training and peripheral populations around the world. In this process of hybridization, the original meaning of social circus in its accepted Latin American usage was translated into the principles and priorities of funders and stakeholders.

The first part of the essay revisits the official definition of social circus and its historical construction, both of which are associated with Cirque du Monde and what is called community circus in the global North. It later explores the First International Round Table of Circus and Social Work, acknowledged as the occasion where related initiatives from all over the world agreed to use the term "social circus" as a common identifier (Lavers 2016, 509). This meeting indicates that Latin America was the place where the term social circus was first used to denominate this common goal. My revision opens a parallel history in the emergence of social circus and the confluence of forces that gave birth to the way this practice is officially understood. The second part of the essay illustrates the differing uses of the term social circus in Colombia and Britain and the implications of the official narrative on the practice of circus.

I conclude this analysis by opening a debate about whether the issue in question is that of circus professionalization or about issues of distinction between those who are able to make art (according to experts) and those for whom art is seen simply as therapy or a tool of intervention. I further explore the extent to which the social-professional binary works more at the level of narrative, thereby perpetuating the stratification of social practices. The aim is to reflect on the way in which the official narrative of social circus both reproduces and reinforces the hierarchical sociopolitical and cultural structures of power.

This analysis is part of a doctoral research project that analyses the process of recognition of circus as art in the twenty-first century in Britain and Colombia within the disciplines of cultural studies

Olga Lucía Sorzano holds a PhD in culture and creative industries from City University of London, where she is currently a visiting lecturer in the Department of Sociology. Olga's research focuses on circus movements in Colombia and the UK.

and circus studies. The methodology includes semi-structured interviews, textual analysis, political economy, and multi-sited ethnography. On a theoretical level, my approach is particularly guided by the insights of academics working in the interrelated fields of social sciences and global studies, who have brought forward notions such as "connected histories" (Bhambra 2014, 4), "southern theory" (Connell 2007, ix), and "epistemologies of the south" (Sousa-Santos 2016, ix), which call for understandings of the world beyond the Western, Eurocentric theoretical tradition and account for the invisible figures and systems of knowledge marginalized in the construction of modern societies and "the West and the Rest" discourse of power (Hall 1992, 276).

I draw on anonymous interviews with sixty artists, circus administrators, and policymakers in both countries within the traditional and contemporary circus movements.[1] Interviews were extended to relevant figures such as representatives from Cirque du Monde, Cirque Pour Tous, and the directors of Latin American organizations working in social circus. The analysis is complemented by my experience working closely with circus practitioners in both countries for almost a decade, as well as my previous roles as a policymaker and arts manager in Colombia and Britain.

Definitions of Social Circus and the History of the Term

The origins of social circus as a practice are generally attributed to a program initiated by Cirque du Monde, the humanitarian arm of Cirque du Soleil, in partnership with nongovernmental and community organizations around the world (Arrighi 2014, 206). Social circus is explicitly envisioned as separate from the professional world; here, the primary goal is not to learn the circus arts, but rather to assist with participants' personal and social development (Cirque du Soleil 2017). Social circus thus understood encourages the development of self-esteem and prioritizes the acquisition of social skills, artistic expression, and occupational integration over the artistic result (LaFortune and Bouchard 2011, 14).

The beneficiaries of social circus practices include a wide range of population groups: "peripheral youth" (Lobo and Cassoli 2006, 62); "from homeless youth to remote indigenous communities" (Spiegel 2016, 51); and "at-risk youth, homeless populations, or adults living with learning disabilities" (McCaffery 2014, 30). The condition of being "at-risk" is defined as "not taking their place in society as contributing adults, at risk of suffering disenfranchisement through low achievement in education, or as a result of mental or physical health challenges" (Arrighi 2014, 206).

Various attempts have been made to historicize social circus as a practice. Rivard, Bourgeault, and Mercier (2010, 182) point to Latin America in the early 1990s. This assertion is questioned by Bolton (2004, 13), who establishes a direct link between social circus and the community circus of the global North. His claim is supported by earlier attempts to involve vulnerable youth in circus, including Le Grand Magic Circus and the Festival of Fools in the late 1960s, as well as his own work in underprivileged areas of Edinburgh in the 1980s (Bolton 2004, 12–13). More recently, Lavers (2016, 508) highlights Circo de Los Muchachos (Circus of the Boys), a program founded by the Spanish priest Jesus Silva in the 1960s. This program involved the teaching of circus skills to homeless children and youths in fascist Spain. The priest and his Circo de Los Muchachos toured the world in the 1970s, and the program subsequently expanded to various countries in Latin America (see Forero 2014, 33).

Community circus encourages nonprofessional performers to participate in the circus arts by providing community workshops for schoolchildren, disabled people, and other groups (Selwood, Muir, and Moody 1995, 51). The emphasis is on the use of circus arts as a means of self-expression and personal development. A similar movement, referred to as youth circus, emerged alongside community circus and focuses on the needs of young people. Both community and youth circus are defined as mainly recreational and extracurricular activities rather than a method of pursuing professional goals.

In Australia, for instance, social circus and youth circus are analyzed under the broader category of community circus to "indicate a re-imagining and a re-purposing of the circus arts within a social situation other than the professional/commercial entertainment arena" (Arrighi 2014, 200). Youth circus, which provides recreational, extracurricular circus skills training to young people, involves activities programmed in accordance with school terms and the quotidian rhythms of the family (204). More than simply a recreational pursuit of the circus arts, social circus designates "the co-opting of circus skills to an agenda of social change" (206).

These categories are all defined as being outside the professional world. Differences are marked more in terms of the participants' psychological and sociodemographic background. Youth circus is directed at schooling youth with a family unit, while social circus is extended to children and directed at those living in perilous conditions; the first program provides recreation and extracurricular activities, while the second intervenes in the lives of "targeted" groups and supports an agenda of social change.

The First International Round Table of Circus and Social Work, La Seyne-sur-Mer, France, 2002

The early years of the new millennium witnessed crucial moments in the history of contemporary circus. While French scholars debated the repercussions of the institutionalization of the new circus (Wallon 2002, 11), the Arts Council of England reiterated its commitment to the recognition of circus as art and its inclusion in cultural budgets (Hall 2002, 5). At the same time, circus practitioners from the global North and South signed the Charter of the Creation of the United Nations of Social Circus (PRICT 2002, 8) at the First International Round Table of Circus and Social Work, organized by Cirque Pour Tous, the international fundraiser arm of Colombia's NGO Circo Para Todos (Circus for All).

This meeting is credited as the moment when circus organizations from twelve countries agreed to use the term social circus to denominate the pursuit of a common goal of combining "circus and social work to assist young people at risk" (Lavers 2016, 509). Among the participants were the Australian Women's Circus, Cirque du Monde, Circo de Los Muchachos, the Belfast Community Circus (UK), La Fabrik (France), and Latin American representatives Circo Social del Sur (Argentina), Circo del Mundo (Chile), and Circo Para Todos (Colombia), all of which are recognized today as pioneers of social circus. Over the course of the meeting, crucial issues were discussed around social circus, the different terminologies used around the world to denominate circus initiatives, and the distinctive characteristics of their common agendas. At the end of the meeting, a set of principles and common objectives were agreed and endorsed under the charter (PRICTS 2002, 8).

First International Round Table of Circus and Social Work, France, 2002. Photo: PRICTS (2002, 11). Reprinted with permission.

The charter describes circus as an appealing endeavour for disadvantaged groups and an effective way of engaging with these populations while transforming their lives. Rather than envisioning circus "to assist" individuals (Lavers, 2016, 509) with their self-esteem (Cirque du Soleil 2017), circus is linked to education, emancipation, and economic development. The common goal and commitment of the new collective is defined as "the use of circus as a tool for social transformation" (PRICTS 2002, 8).

At the same time, the understanding of social circus as "assisting" was problematized in the meeting. French sociologist Brigitte Bailly drew attention to the terminology used by conventional social work programs, where participants are addressed as objects in an assistance equation, depicted as potential victims or problematic entities in need of help. Such perception leads to a denial of participants' competencies and potential (Bolton 2004, 12). With support from her study on Circo Para Todos Bailly noted: "The logic underlying the project in Cali is different. The participant is not considered a victim or a potential malefactor, but as a student . . . Circus breaks the 'aid' paradigm which prevails in work with 'youth at risk'" (cited in Bolton 2004, 4).

Circo Para Todos offers professional circus training to young people living in difficult circumstances. It was founded in 1995 in Cali by a Colombian and a British circus artist who met in Brazil in the early 1980s. By teaching circus skills at a professional level, Circo Para Todos offers an alternative to the youth to construct a positive future path (CPT 2017). Under this model, circus arts are used to support their social and economic integration into society beyond a mere recreational or psychological tool.

An apparent contradiction can thus be observed when revisiting official descriptions of social circus as an intervention tool for assisting marginal children and youth at risk, along with the common goal defined at La Seyne-sur-Mer. The document and further analysis (e.g., Bolton 2004, 11) evidence the critique raised by Latin American participants in conventional social work programs where participants are portrayed as in need of assistance. By contrast, an alternative approach is suggested in the case of Latin America, as will be further explored in the following section.

Another key discussion at La Seyne-sur-Mer concerned different terms used in the global North and global South to describe similar approaches. Even though the term social circus is adopted and intrinsically accepted in the charter, the proceedings of the meeting recall different terminologies while suggesting "substantive disagreements" to be addressed in future debates, stating:

> The very topic of the meetings gave rise to semantic "contortions." When referring to the same subject, Latin Americans would evoke social circus, where English and Nordic (language) speakers would refer to community circus, as the French (speakers) sought to underline a clear distinction between the artistic dimension and social work. (PRICTS 2002, 3)[2]

Beyond semantic and cultural disputes, the debate held in France touches on several crucial points concerning the construction of social circus and the social-professional divide: first, the hybridization of diverse approaches under a single category called social circus; second, a crucial distinction marked between art and social work. Representatives from Europe, especially France, insisted on separating social from artistic aims; one of the reasons highlighted was that in countries such as France art enjoys a more elevated reputation and attracts more funding than social work. In addition, the combination risks "moralizing art," "depoliticizing social issues," or confounding the roles of the art instructor and social worker (PRICTS 2002, 3).

Such differentiation could be understood in the light of the modern discourse of aesthetics coined during the European Enlightenment, the moment when art was conceived as a supreme and independent realm from other human endeavours (Eagleton 1990, 9; Wolterstorff 2015, 26). These ideas are the product of the specific socioeconomic and political conditions of eighteenth-century Europe, when artists were trying to gain independence from religious and political patronage to exercise their practice (Belfiore and Bennet 2008, 182–83). A discourse promoted by the growing European middle class in their struggle for political hegemony (Eagleton 1990, 3) led to the consolidation of an elitist and inaccessible modern art world (Wolterstorff 2015, 5–16). The new structure was only judged by experts and accessed by those with the taste to appreciate it and the money to buy it (Eagleton 1990, 368).

Circus in Latin America: An Alternative View

Representatives from Cirque Pour Tous and the above-mentioned Latin American organizations were interviewed for this research in order to obtain clarification about the debates that occurred in France. Two previous meetings are reported as the direct antecedents of La Seyne-sur-Mer: the first and second Latin American summits on social circus, organized by Chile's Circo del Mundo in 1998 and Argentina's Circo Social del Sur in 2000. This confirms that the term social circus was in use in the Latin American context before the meeting in France. All of the interview participants concur that resistance to the term social circus was evident at La Seyne-sur-Mer. This debate is still an open one today in contexts where structural disagreements concerning understandings of social circus continue to exist. One interviewee said: "The idea of the meeting in France was to clearly differentiate professional circus from circus with nonprofessional goals; although the contents of the two forms are similar, the European way of naming them at that time was not" (Latin American circus administrator 1).[3]

First Latin American Summit of Social Circus, Chile, 1998. Photos provided by Circo del Mundo (Chile).

While art and social work may be considered separate or mutually exclusive in the European context, this is not the case in Latin America. Analyzing the case of Circo Social del Sur in Argentina, Infantino explains: "many young artists active in the renewal of the circus genre found in social circus an innovative way to combine their artistic interests with their desire to transform inequalities and social problems affecting different social sectors, especially disadvantaged children and young people" (2015, 57).

In the words of the director of Circo Social del Sur:

> We intend to confront the problem of exclusion of certain sectors of society that are often pushed to a relegated cultural life. We bet even more: not only we intend to guarantee access to cultural goods and services but also to the right to produce art in social sectors that otherwise would not have access to it, on an equal standard of opportunities. In this sense, we do not appeal to youth as beneficiaries of social assistance, but rather as producers and actors in artistic events, as creative subjects. (quoted in Infantino 2015, 57).

Again, social and professional components are neither divorced nor considered mutually exclusive in this approach; instead, the aim is to break down the cultural and sociopolitical barriers imposed on low-income groups via circus professionalization. Rather than attending a therapy session to increase self-esteem, participants are approached as capable individuals who aim to learn circus skills and eventually become professional artists like any other circus student. The three Latin American organizations mentioned above offer professional and artistic training, and their participants perform at both professional and artistic levels. These organizations all emerged at different points in the late 1980s, becoming formalized and institutionalized around 1995. All recognize the origins of the movement in Brazil and the work of Intrepida Trupe, a collective of artists performing and providing circus workshops to middle-class and low-income youth in Brazil.

Hector Fabio Cobo and Felicity Simpson, co-founders of Circo Para Todos, were part of Intrepida Trupe. Inspired by their work with the collective, they decided to open a professional circus school in Cali, Cobo's home town. In an interview for this research, Simpson comments how the initiative emerged in a very spontaneous way; at the time, "our aim was not to save the world." The energy, the attitude, and the resilience of the low-income group provided Cobo and Simpson with a more challenging and interesting environment in which to practise circus; as

Simpson adds: "they were not cry babies; they threw themselves into the activities. That was pure joy for both participants and teachers" (quoted in Sorzano 2018, 188).

The Latin American initiatives soon crossed paths with Cirque du Soleil and the Canadian NGO Jeunesse du Monde working in Brazil. The initial involvement of Cirque du Soleil came in the form of benefit galas in the name of Latin American organizations, the provision of circus instructors, and complimentary tickets to Cirque du Soleil shows. Cirque du Monde was born in the midst of that process as a "stakeholder in an emerging alternative trend" (Rivard, Bourgeault, and Mercier 2010, 182). A crucial difference exists between Cirque du Monde, as the so-called initiator of social circus, and Cirque du Soleil as a sponsor of and contributor to initiatives already taking place in South America and other parts of the world. In 2000, Cirque du Monde launched a program for training social circus instructors, which has since been implemented widely across the world in newer organizations that use circus as a tool for education and social agendas.

The movement in Latin America differs from Cirque du Monde's approach in terms of circus professionalization and its understandings of social transformation beyond aid, intervention, and assistance, as well as its preestablished divisions between art, professionalization, and the engagement of peripheral groups. The trend responds to particular forces in the region throughout the 1970s, a decade marked by complex cultural, socioeconomic, and political phenomena in the so-called developing world, which rejected the transplantation and assimilation of Western ideals and models that had characterized the previous two decades.

As Healey explains, in the 1970s the "indigenization of social work" (2008, 82) began in Latin America as a response to traditional models of social work—shaped in Britain and the US in the nineteenth century—that had expanded across the world in the postwar period to counter "underdevelopment" (82). Over the course of the decade, ideas of social work in the region were rethought as emanating from Latin America's own reality rather than borrowing models from industrialized countries (Healey 2008, 83; Parada 2007, 563). All social action was seen as having a political dimension. Healey (2008, 84) highlights the influence of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire on the reconceptualization of social work in Latin America, which was grounded in participation, organization, and consciousness-raising, moving away from the three accepted U.S. social work methods of casework, groupwork, and community organization.

Freireism and Boalism are acknowledged as the currents of thought behind the emergence of social circus in the 1990s in Brazil (Rivard, Bourgeault, and Mercier 2010, 182). During his exile in Argentina in the 1960s, Brazilian director and playwright Augusto Boal wrote his famous work *Theatre of the Oppressed,* which he further developed in Paris in the following years. In 1986, Boal returned to Rio de Janeiro to establish a major centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed. This coincided with the circus initiatives emerging in Latin America, mostly in partnership with theatre and social science professionals. The influence of his work on combining art and social change worldwide is widely documented (e.g., Jackson 2009, 306; Mills 2009, 552; Vieites-García 2015, 161).

The circus movement in Latin America thus came to be understood as having emerged at the intersection of Boalism and Freireism, the very intersection between art and social work that worried European participants at La Seyne-sur-Mer. The movement developed an attractive approach that captured the attention of NGOs and circus authorities, including Jeunesse du

Monde and Cirque du Soleil. La Seyne-sur-Mer marks the formal occasion when similar approaches came together, influencing one another and triggering the hybridization and separation of circus movements.

A Gap between Terminologies and Aims: From Professionalization and Social Transformation to Intervention for At-risk Groups

As discussed above, the predominant narrative points to Cirque du Monde and the assistential approach; several circus organizations have adopted the official narrative and terminology. Nevertheless, the objectives and principles of various organizations classified today as social circus seem not to be crucially affected; many of them are training artists at professional levels and occupy a central place in the development of contemporary circus around the globe, as will be further explored in the second part of the essay. They are indeed transforming the realities of children and youth across the globe.

At the narrative and institutional level, however, several additional forces are at play: on one side, the adoption of certain terminologies and categories in order to comply with funding bodies and bureaucratic language; on the other, the impact that such terminologies have on the collective consciousness. The combination of these factors works to diminish the real impact that social circus is having in breaking down cultural and political barriers and balancing the unequal global structures that resulted in the rise of the Western empire. If France rejects the term social circus because what it understands as art is more reputable and better funded than what it understands as social work, the opposite is true in Latin America and other geographical regions, where funding is more readily allocated to socioeconomic targets than art.

In the fundraising and formalization process, artistic language is translated into bureaucratic language. This was another crucial topic of discussion at La Seyne-sur-Mer where the religious and military connotation of terms such as "vision" and "mission" employed by social circus organizations was debated at length (PRICTS 2002, 6). Participants voiced their discomfort owing to the fact that their aims and ideals were not identified with such terminology, which was inherited from the donors' lexicon (6). A question arises about the negotiations made by cultural organizations in the course of fundraising, such as the terminology used to describe their initiatives and aims. To what extent are these organizations able to safeguard their own lexicon and principles?

Social Circus: A Hybrid

More than a direct descendant of community circus in Europe or the work of Father Silva, then, social circus is the result of the hybridization of various approaches. Tracing the origins of social circus exclusively via Cirque du Monde and the global North neglects the role played by fundamental actors such as Latin America and so-called marginal groups. It also neglects the role of resistance against hegemonic structures of power and, in fact, reinforces these structures. The 1990s constituted a specific moment in circus development when an alternative movement arising in Latin America became organized and institutionalized. In the process of hybridization, the movement was translated into the narratives and canons of the North. The role of Latin America and so-called marginal groups in the emergence and consolidation of a circus movement has been overlooked and even neglected by official narratives. Distinctive elements of that approach, such as offering

professional and artistic training to peripheral populations and challenging modern ideas of art and social work, were removed during the construction of the hybrid and the appropriation of the movement.

Social circus is understood today in terms of an orthodox, top-down version of aid and social work, a program developed by those at the centre of sociopolitical and economic structures to help those in the peripheries. Latin America and other peripheral groups are once more portrayed as populations in need of assistance; they are regarded as the recipients, rather than the architects, of a circus movement. Children and youth, Indigenous groups, disabled populations, homeless citizens, refugees, and women affected by violence are all placed together under the category of "marginal" or "at-risk" populations, following the terminology used in traditional social work directed to children and youth (e.g., Follesø 2015, 243; Infantino 2011, 36). They are all portrayed as targets lacking in self-esteem and other psychosocial skills. The result is a hybrid and confounding entity that reflects hegemonic socioeconomic and cultural inequalities stemming both from the global North and the global South.

In spite of the different approaches and specific contexts, crucial similarities are observed between community, youth, and social circus: in short, they are all responses to limitations imposed on various groups across societies, and especially on those traditionally regarded as the other.

Looking more closely at the work of Reg Bolton, a pioneer of community and youth circus in the global North, it becomes clear that his intention was not to become a circus professional or circus performer; rather, he wanted to open the learning of circus skills to everyone. In reaction to a "repetitive and discouraging" experience as a student at L'École Nationale du Cirque in France, Bolton opened a summer circus school in Edinburgh in 1977 "that was, at least, fun" and different from his experience in Paris (Bolton 2004, 150). In the preface to *Circus in a Suitcase*, Bolton clarifies that his work was written "not for these already highly skilled performers, but for the thousands of individuals, young and old, who are trying circus skills for the first time." It was an equal-opportunity book, driven by the belief that both girls and boys can and should do everything, and challenging the aesthetic standards imposed on gymnasts and professional circus artists (Bolton 1988, 19).

A similar testimony is provided by the cofounders of Circo Para Todos in Colombia. Their Intrepida Trupe was created with eight Brazilian "dissidents" from the National School in Rio de Janeiro (Pratt 2000). Looking for explorative approaches outside formal training, students left the Brazilian circus school to organize the collective of artists. Felicity Simpson, who also studied at L'École National du Cirque in Paris, soon became disenchanted with the European style of circus; in looking for something different, she arrived in Brazil only to find that "the school was a copy of Europe!" (Pratt 2000).

Community, youth, and social circus in the globalized world speak to the confines of a professional sphere, including aspects such as enrolment fees, socioeconomic background, aesthetic style, physical attributes, race, and gender. They share elements of circus practice and a clear political agenda of fighting cultural and socioeconomic discrimination, which is reinforced by the modern art world. A final note on Father Julio Silva: his proposal shares many of the elements of social circus, including that of circus professionalization. More needs to be said, however, about the proposal functioning under the colonial structures of social assistance run by the church under charitable models.

Implications of the "Social Circus" Narrative in Colombia and Britain

In the cases of Colombia and Britain, social circus organizations have been crucial in both the development of contemporary circus practice and the recognition of circus as art in recent decades. Artists who were trained through these initiatives are now performing at professional levels. In spite of this reality, the official narrative of social circus remains powerful. In both countries, social circus is associated with specific populations or nation-states and undervalued through stigmatized preconceptions associated with low artistic quality and the poor, as this section further explores.

Social Circus in Colombia

Social circus is regarded as a constitutive part of contemporary circus in Colombia. The movement is reported as having been introduced to the country by foreign organizations sponsored by "international circus companies" (Villa and Pinzon 2011, 16). Social circus is described as offering circus training and professionalization to children and youth who have been overlooked by formal education systems (16). Organizations such as Circo Para Todos (Cali, 1995), Circo Ciudad (Bogotá, 2003), and Circo Momo (Medellin, 2006) are the most representative examples and all offer training programs. Circo Para Todos is the only professional circus school in the country (Villa and Pinzon 2011, 17; Ruiz and Ramirez 2013, 44; Forero 2014, 30). It offers four types of programs: community circus workshops, professional circus school, training for trainers, and a "bridge program" (*programa puente*) that supports graduates in starting their professional careers.

In 2005, Circo Para Todos updated its name to National School Circo Para Todos with the endorsement of the Ministry of Education, offering a four-year fully subsidized professional program. Applicants must complete an audition process, which assesses physical, acrobatic, and artistic skills. Circo Para Todos guarantees 70% of places to low-income groups, while 30% are allocated regardless of socioeconomic background. The program was designed by circus and theatre professionals and based on a thorough investigation of curricula from national circus schools in Cuba, Brazil, Canada, China, and France.

Graduates of Circo Para Todos now perform all over the globe in the professional and performance worlds. They take part in circus Olympiads and have obtained medals in renowned contests such as the Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain (Paris), the Wuhan International Acrobatics Art Festival (China), the International Circus Festival Circuba (Cuba), and the Circus Master Awards (Russia). They run their own circus-training programs in Colombia, France, Croatia, the US, and the UK. Those working with the production company Circolombia perform in various settings including the Roundhouse in London, the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Cirque en Chantier in Paris, New Vic Theatre in New York, the Adelaide Fringe Festival in Australia, and the International Circus Festival in Rio de Janeiro. Graduates of Circo Para Todos regularly perform at venues such as Jackson's Lane, the Place, and the Hippodrome in London. Others teach at the National Centre for Circus Arts, and those working permanently in London run training programs in artist and community centres. Graduates of Circo Ciudad have also performed with Zippo's Circus (London) in their 2016 Hyde Park Christmas show. Those graduates interviewed for this research comment on their long history of performing in Colombia with La Gata Cirko and in various countries such as Italy, Cuba, and France, as well as auditioning to enter the national circus in Canada (although funding and visa issues prevented this). All of these performers are part of the pool of circus artists in Colombia and Britain, working in partnership with artists from all over the world, influencing and constituting the contemporary circus scene.

Circo Para Todos and Circolombia Performances and International Contests. © Circolombia and Circo Para Todos archive (2006–2012)

Social Circus in Britain

Social circus is a relatively new term in the "U.K.-based discourse" (McCaffery 2014, 33); community circus has historically been the term used to describe initiatives involving circus and nonprofessional performers (33). The term social circus is now increasingly applied to these initiatives. The most representative example is the Belfast Community Circus, which is classified today as social circus in both practice and academic literature (Bolton 2004, 164; Belfast Community Circus 2017). Social circus has recently attracted the attention of the UK media, where circus is reported no longer as "a romantic way of escaping the family and leaving behind conventional society," but instead as "a way of preventing marginalised young people from dropping out" (Pickles 2015). In short, circus is now portrayed as offering an opportunity to join the system rather than challenge it. Emphasis is placed on the social impact of circus and the increasing number of scholars, or circademics, who are analyzing the socioeconomic impact of the form. Social circus is becoming a crucial means of demonstrating both the overall value of circus and its specific advantage: namely, its power to transform societies and to contribute to the social order.

Social circus is associated with determined populations and nation-states and located outside the performance world. The abovementioned article by Pickles (2015) reports the power of social circus as "particularly useful for young people in conflict zones and divided societies such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Northern Ireland." On the other hand, the *Circus Diaries* blog clarifies that because the blog is "a website primarily devoted to circus performance," little information is provided about social circus "where skills are used to benefit communities and the disadvantaged—to help people learn, grow and develop as individuals." *Circus Diaries* identifies social circus as a "widening area in which circus-trained artists are working" (2016). The relationship with the professional world is established in terms of a job, rather than a constitutive part of artists' or participants' performing experiences.

Inspired by a visit to Ethiopia and research in Colombia and Brazil, the Roundhouse in London developed its street circus and youth circus programs directed at youth in the borough of Camden, with special emphasis placed on vulnerable groups. They offer circus training and a performance space for the local youth as a platform to either continue an artistic career or simply enjoy circus and artistic engagement. Even though the program follows the social circus methodology, different terms are used to denominate their initiatives. Similar programs are run by commercial venues and circus organization working with excluded communities in the UK. Circus administrators

interviewed for this research refer to those initiatives as "education programs," which are described as similar initiatives to the work Circolombia is doing with social circus at the Roundhouse.

Variously related terminology is used in Britain, and some confusion and contradictions have arisen as a result. For example, even though community circus and/or social circus are regarded as separate from the professional and performance worlds, organizations classified as such are described as offering professional and performance spaces. Community circus, for instance, has been reported as an influential movement in the emergence of the new circus of the 1980s (Selwood, Muir, and Moody 1995, 61). It is also recognized as the initial motivation for the Arts Council to invest in circus in the 1990s (53) when the contemporary movement began to emerge.

The Belfast Community Circus (BCC) is described as both a school and performance venue, providing circus workshops and professional training (Hall 2002, 13; Bolton 2004, 164; Belfast Community Circus 2017). In the 1990s, the organization was mentioned alongside Circus Space (today the National Centre for Circus Arts) and Circomedia as places offering circus training (Hall 2002, 13). BCC is recognized as a central actor in the emergence of the circus artists who gave birth to contemporary circus in the 1990s (13).

An increased number of professional and performing circus companies have chosen to incorporate into their work the desire to break down social barriers and transform the lives of performers, audiences, and communities. An example is Diversecity, a circus organization that involves the participation of diverse artists, hidden stories, silenced voices, and excluded talents, both at the level of circus training and performance, producing circus shows featuring a cast of disabled and non-disabled young performers without making clear divisions between them (Diversecity 2017). While these initiatives are not necessarily classified as social circus, this terminology is increasingly used to describe the combination of circus and socially excluded groups.

Social and Community Circus in the Recognition of Circus as Art

As suggested above, official descriptions and narratives attached to terms such as social circus do not correspond to the reality of the circus practice. Community circus in Britain and social circus in Colombia are both influential movements linked to the professional circus scene and the emergence of the contemporary circus. Moreover, they have played a crucial role in the recognition of circus as art, as well as in circus developments worldwide. The work of Circo Para Todos in Colombia and the success of its graduates performing across the world with Circolombia are among the main reasons for the Ministry of Culture investing in circus and recognizing circus as an artform (Sorzano 2018, 202).

A similar situation can be found in Britain with community circus and organizations such as the Belfast Community Circus. The Arts Council began to invest in circus and to open a place for it within the cultural sector in response to the community initiatives of the new circus movement of the 1980s. The performance element of the new circus was rather overlooked, however, when the Arts Council began to include circus within its cultural policies and funding (Selwood, Muir, and Moody 1995, 53).

In the twenty-first century, circus is recognized as art; however, further divisions and segmentations have taken place, and, with them, resistance toward and internal rejections of social circus. Not-

withstanding the close links between social circus and the professional world of contemporary circus, there remains a tendency for the art world to reject both individuals and organizations coming from the social circus movement. This resistance operates more at the level of narrative and ideology than that of real practice, where individuals with social circus backgrounds are indeed performing on professional platforms. In Britain, a circus administrator comments on the opposition raised by certain artistic circuits in Europe, and more specifically in France, to the programming of "social circus" groups in arts venues. Among the arguments provided, the participant declares "an eventual responsibility of the arts to resolve the problems that governments are meant to solve; together with questions such as: are they artists if coming through a social program?" (British circus administrator 1).

Fifteen years on, the discussion held at La-Seyne-sur-Mer prevails. When arguing for a separation between art and the "responsibility . . . to resolve the problems that governments are meant to solve," the artistic circuit is not only neglecting the central role they play in social stratification and cultural distinction (Belfiore and Bennet 2008, 165–66) but also endorsing the place that modern societies have assigned to the so-called poor, vulnerable, and others as residual members of society (Hall 1992, 277–80). The responsibility for these people appears to lie with the church or the government, rather than society as a whole. Both in Britain and Colombia, a series of stigmas and stereotypes still exist. A group of contemporary artists in Bogotá refer to the "Cali school" as training gymnasts rather than artists, while they are looking for the kind of dramaturgy, dance, and integral programs offered by circus schools such as those found abroad. An amateur acrobat from an upper-class background commented on the absence of circus training in Colombia, mentioning the "Cali school" as the only option directed at "the poor" while s/he is looking for "quality" and "proper training" (Colombian amateur acrobat 1). One student participant returned to Colombia after finishing a degree in Contemporary Circus and Performing Arts at the Universidad Mesoamericana in México and decided to audition for Circo Para Todos. This student became aware of the Colombian school while studying abroad and joined looking for further circus training: "I think in Latin America it is one of the circus schools with a higher technical level; besides this, the social component makes it a more valuable venture for this country" (Colombian circus artist 1).

Further concerns are raised by circus administrators, mainly regarding the use of the "social" label as a mere fundraising or commercial tool. In Colombia, the director of a contemporary circus company commented on the various artists who come from the city slums and difficult backgrounds: "I have never used this information to raise money as many other organizations do. I work hard every day to dignify the artistic profession rather than presenting artists as 'street kids'" (Colombian circus artist and administrator 1). In Britain, when artists from Circo Para Todos are seen performing with Circolombia at a professional level, the socioeconomic background and artistic commitment of these performers are rigorously questioned; for example, two comments from interviews with different circus administrators: "I have worked with them, and they are not all street kids" (British circus administrator 2), and "are they doing circus as the only option they had?" (British circus artist and administrator 1).

Varying evaluations of skill and artistic level are also made in Britain as found in testimonies provided by participants interviewed for this research. Adjectives such as "raw," "crazy stuff," and "messy" are attached to Circolombia's performances, while the skills of their performers are reported as not being "at the level of the Russians or the Chinese" (British circus administrator 1). One participant describes Circolombia as doing "astonishing things," although "very scary" and "a bit undisciplined in theatrical terms" (British circus administrator 2). On the subject of circus and its

distinctive characteristics as an art form, the same participant comments: "in circus there is no established way of doing things; in theatre you are very much bounded by sort of established methods . . . dance never feels like it is risking everything to me; there is too much discipline in dance" (British circus administrator 2). When another participant was asked how Circolombia is received by the contemporary scene in Britain, the answer was:

> Mixed. Nobody doubts their skills and everyone thinks they are amazing, which they are, and it is a real spectacle and they have done so much in this country in terms of developing circus audiences. Contemporary circus audiences stay away from it because they went, "Oh! commercial." It wasn't playing to them, it was playing to a wide audience; and I think it is a bit of jealousy. (British circus administrator 3)

Several questions emerge regarding the criteria by which these artists and organizations are evaluated by the contemporary circus world. To what extent do professional artists in Colombia and Britain meet the standard set by the Chinese and the Russians? Is this the gauge by which a circus artist in the twenty-first-century narrative-driven form should be judged? Is the "messy," "raw," and "undisciplined theatrical style" a positive or negative factor when assigning value to a circus performance? Is this a response grounded in theatrical and dramatic canons, rather than the distinctive character of circus as a diverse, physical, and flexible form? Is circus professionalism being questioned here, or a specific aesthetic taste, or the socioeconomic and cultural background of the artists and organizations? And, finally, to what extent is this response a matter of funding and market segmentation?

In the meantime, while a particular subset of funders, arts managers, and artists debate whether individuals coming through social circus initiatives are artists or not, street kids or not, artists from Circo Para Todos performing at professional and commercial levels around the world respond:

> What makes me an artist? A long process of ten years of my life invested in this endeavour and now I am seeing the results, and understand it is indeed possible. (Colombian circus artist 2)

> For me, being an artist is to be on stage and make people applaud and when you come out after the show and they all say "Wow, that was incredible!" That's the only thing that makes me an artist, right? (Colombian circus artist 3)

When asked if the "social" label had opened or closed opportunities in their artistic careers, answers lean toward:

> No, people don't even pay attention to that . . . people, artists, and society in general care about the quality of the show and how good you are on stage. . . . While those who manage the projects like circus schools, the consul, the venues, those who deal with the money, they must pay attention to that because it is what brings them benefits and what provides them something . . . but people in general . . . no way! How many years working here and I've never used the "social" story . . . some people are interested in hearing it and I told them, but people here . . . no way! (Colombian circus artist 3)

The above-quoted professional artist, named both in the literature and in the media as a street kid, vulnerable, marginalized, disadvantaged, at-risk, and poor, arrived at a similar conclusion to this analysis, summarizing straightforwardly and sharply the situation of social circus today: in short, it is a matter of funding and structures of power.

In another interview, an artist who had graduated from the National Centre for Circus Arts in Britain was asked if s/he considers him/herself an artist. They responded:

> Yeah I'd like to think so. I don't know what makes an artist or not; I think I'm an artist of intention. I want to create art . . . at the end of the day, creating art is not that easy; well, because you have to sell tickets, is not that easy. . . . Art is a weird word. (British circus artist 1)

Art: a "weird word" coined in the European Enlightenment (Shiner 2001, 3), together with the "bourgeois modern aesthetics" (Eagleton 1990, 8) discussed above, is influencing both the practice of circus and its recognition in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion: Is Social Circus the Other of Professional Circus?

This analysis of social circus and professional circus in Colombia and Britain suggests that the construction of the social–professional divide and the disputes between these two worlds have deeper roots that transcend the professionalization of circus as such. Social circus and professional circus are highly intertwined, as artists who came to the art form through social circus initiatives are performing on national and international platforms at commercial and artistic levels. The question, then, is to what extent the debate centres around professionalization—understood as training under a consistent program over a certain period of time, combined with a career trajectory in circus—and to what extent it concerns issues of class, otherness, aesthetic taste, and funding and commercial strategies. To what extent is this divide a result of social stratification and the perpetuation of modern sociopolitical structures of power, as maintained by the "grand narrative of art" (Wolterstorff 2015, 25) and traditional social work?

Social circus is becoming the other of professional circus at the level of narrative, discourse, and ideology. The definition of social circus and the social–professional divide, far from reflecting the real practice of circus, is operating more as a discourse; a discourse that produces knowledge through the use of language, entering and influencing practices while shaping new realities (Foucault 1980, 201–3). The term social circus was initially used in Latin America to denominate an alternative circus movement that emerged when circus and theatre artists encountered children and youngsters who had been excluded by society. Inspired by their attitude and energy, as well as their physical, intellectual, and emotional capacity for learning circus, these young professionals found a new way of practising their art form. The result is a consolidation of professional training programs offered to those traditionally labelled as deprived youth that also breaks down cultural and sociopolitical barriers.

A more horizontal and complementary approach is observed between participants and social circus organizations. A different relationship is also observed between Cirque du Monde and the Latin American organizations that worked with peripheral groups and facilitated circus professionalization in the early 1990s. Various forces emerged and worked to translate the initial meaning of social

circus; among these were the modern division between artistic, political, and social spheres, as well as the hybridization of the Latin American approach with similar programs found in the global North such as community circus and youth circus, both of which are defined as nonprofessional and outside of the performance world. Another factor was the consolidation of Cirque du Monde as Cirque du Soleil's corporate responsibility platform, supporting and investing one percent of their benefits in social initiatives around the world. The relationship seems to have been transformed at the level of narrative, funding, and institutionalization.

Social circus is understood today as social work rather than art, following a division established in the global North. Individuals taking part in social circus are referred to as marginalized or at-risk populations and portrayed as targets in need of assistance, following the lexicon of development programs applied in the global South. The result is an ambivalent category that combines global structures of power and the stratification of cultural practices according to the individuals' socioeconomic background. The social component dominates the narrative while the political component disappears.

Nevertheless, social circus is transforming the reality of peoples all over the world while also breaking down traditional socioeconomic and political barriers. The practice constitutes a palpable example of the emancipatory struggles of our times (Sousa-Santos 2016, ix) through its contribution to global social justice. However, the translation of the movement into the languages of the Centre and the North is diminishing both the transcendence of the social circus movement and the reality of circus practice as a whole.

Notes

1. Different terminologies exist to denominate the multiple transformations of circus across the ages. "Modern circus" provides the historical reference to explain the origins of circus "as we know it today" (Speaight 1980, 7). "Traditional circus" refers to the consolidation of the modern format over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—a general notion of circus as an organized sequence of animal and human skills performed under the big top. "New circus" is associated with a break with the traditional format in the 1970s: performances outside the big top and no longer displaying animals. "Contemporary circus" represents the most recent and striking transformation, where the circus totally breaks with the classic aesthetic, format, and content. This category is further divided into multiple subcategories such as social circus, community circus, youth circus, and many more.

2. This and subsequent translations are mine.

3. This and subsequent interviewees' citations are part of my doctoral research. Participants' identities have been kept anonymous and further information is provided in Sorzano (2018). The final version of the dissertation and amended pages will be available for open consultation at City, University of London in the second half of 2018 via http://openaccess.city.ac.uk.

References

Arrighi, Gillian. 2014. "Towards a Cultural History of Community Circus in Australia." *Australasian Drama Studies* 64:199–222.

Arrighi, Gillian. 2015. "Circus Studies: Where to Next?" *Popular Entertainment Studies* 6 (1): 62–65.

Belfast Community Circus. 2017. *Belfast Community Circus School*. http://www.belfastcircus.org.

Belfiore, Eleonora, and Oliver Bennett. 2008. *The Social Impact of the Arts: An Intellectual History*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bhambra, Gurminder K. 2014. *Connected Sociologies*. London: Bloomsbury.
Bolton, Reg. 1988. *Circus in a Suitcase*. Mt. Lawley, Western Australia: Suitcase Circus Publications.
Bolton, Reg. 2004. "Why Circus Works: How the Values and Structures of Circus Make it a Significant Developmental Experience for Young People." PhD diss., Murdoch University. http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/401/.
British circus administrator 1, interviewed by Olga L. Sorzano, London, June 2015.
British circus administrator 2, interviewed by Olga L. Sorzano, London, June 2015.
British circus administrator 3, interviewed by Olga L. Sorzano, London, June 2015.
British circus artist 1, interviewed by Olga L. Sorzano, London, June 2015.
British circus artist and administrator 1, interviewed by Olga L. Sorzano, London, November 2016.
Circo Para Todos. 2017. "The History of Circo Para Todos." http://circoparatodos.org/history/.
Cirque du Soleil. 2017. "Social Circus, a Cause: At-Risk Youth." https://www.cirquedusoleil.com/citizenship/community.
Colombian circus artist 1, interviewed by Olga L. Sorzano, Bogotá, March 2015.
Colombian circus artist 2, interviewed by Olga L. Sorzano, London, April 2015.
Colombian circus artist 3, interviewed by Olga L. Sorzano, London, February 2015.
Colombian circus artist and administrator 1, interviewed by Olga L. Sorzano, Bogotá, March 2015.
Connell, Raewyn. 2007. *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science*. Cambridge: Polity.
Diversecity. 2017. "Diversecity." http://www.diversecity.org.uk.
Eagleton, Terry. 1990. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
Hall, Felicity. 2002. "Strategy and Report on Circus, Arts Council of England." http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160204101926/http:/www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/browse-advice-and-guidance/strategy-and-report-on-circus.
Hall, Stuart, and Bram Gieben, eds. 1992. *Formations of Modernity,* vol. 1 of *Understanding Modern Societies: An Introduction*. Oxford: Polity/Open University.
Follesø, Reidun. 2015. "Youth at Risk or Terms at Risk?" *Young* 23 (3): 240–53.
Forero, Guillermo A. 2014. "Memoria de un Viejo Payaso: Reconocimiento Nacional a la Crítica y el Ensayo: Arte en Colombia, Universidad de Los Andes, Ministerio de Cultura." https://premionalcritica.uniandes.edu.co/?p=655.
Foucault, Michel. 1980. *Power/Knowledge*. Brighton: Harvester.
Healey, Lynne M. 2008. "The History of the Development of Social Work." In *Social Work*, edited by Ann Buchanan, 65–90. London: Routledge.
Infantino, Julieta. 2011. "Artes Entre Políticas Culturales e Intervenciones Sociopolíticas en Buenos Aires". *Nómadas* 18 (1): 13–29.
Infantino, Julieta. 2015. "A Contemporary History of Circus Arts in Buenos Aires, Argentina: The Post-Dictatorial Resurgence and Revaluation of Circus as a Popular Art." *Popular Entertainment Studies* 6 (1): 42–61.
Jackson, Adrian. 2009. "Augusto Boal: A Theatre in Life." *New Theatre Quarterly* 25 (4): 306–9.
Kavanagh, Katharine. 2014. "The Rising Star of Social Circus." *The Circus Diaries, a Critical Exploration of the Circus World* (blog), March 26, 2014. http://www.thecircusdiaries.com/2014/03/26/the-rising-star-of-social-circus/.
LaFortune, Michel, and Annie Bouchard. 2011. "Community Worker's Guide: When Circus Lessons Become Life Lessons." http://holisticcircustherapy.com/ufiles/library/Social_Circus_Guide.pdf.
Lavers, Katie. 2016. "The Resilient Body in Social Circus: Father Jesus Silva, Boris Cyrulnik and Peter A. Levine." In *The Routledge Circus Studies Reader*, edited by Peta Tait and Katie Lavers, 508–27. Oxon: Routledge.

Lobo, Lilia, and Tiago Cassoli. 2006. "Circo Social e Práticas Educacionais não Governamentais: Social Circus and Non-Governmental Educacional Practices." *Psicologia & Sociedade* 18 (3): 62–67.
McCaffery, Nick. 2014. "Social Circus and Applied Anthropology: A Synthesis Waiting to Happen." *Anthropology in Action* 21 (1): 30–35.
Micklem, David. 2008. *Circus Healthcheck*. London: Arts Council of England.
Mills, Sandra. 2009. "Theatre for Transformation and Empowerment: A Case Study of Jana Sanskriti Theatre of the Oppressed." *Development in Practice* 19 (4–5): 550–59.
Parada, Henry. 2007. "Social Work in Latin America: History, Challenges and Renewal." *International Social Work* 50 (4): 560–69.
Pickles, Matt. 2015. "Circademics get Serious about Circus." *BBC News*, July 1, 2015. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-33277907.
Pratt, Timothy. 2000. "Street Kids Run Away to the Circus and Find a New Life." *American News* Service, October 5, 2000. http://www.berkshirepublishing.com/ans/HTMView.asp?parItem=S031000652A.
PRICTS. 2002. "Cirque et Travail Social Premières Rencontres Internationales Conclusions." Vergeze: Cirque Pour Tous.
Rivard, Jacinthe, Guy Bourgeault, and Céline Mercier. 2010. "Cirque du Monde in Mexico City: Breathing New Life into Action for Young People in Difficult Situations: A Circus in Action for Young People in Difficult Situations." *International Social Science Journal* 61 (199): 181–94.
Ruiz, José Lenoir, and Felipe Ramírez. 2013. *Segunda Caracterización del Circo en Colombia*. Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura Colombia.
Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. 2016. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis.
Selwood, Sara, Adrienne Muir, and Dominic Moody. 1995. Developing New Circus in the UK. *Cultural Trends* 7 (28): 49–62.
Shiner, Larry. 2001. *The Invention of Art*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Sorzano, Olga Lucía. 2018. *Circus between the Centre and the Periphery: Recognition of the Form in 21st Century Britain and Colombia*. PhD diss., City University of London.
Speaight, George. 1980. *A History of the Circus*. London: Tantivy Press.
Spiegel, Jennifer Beth. 2016. "Social Circus: The Cultural Politics of Embodying 'Social Transformation.'" *The Drama Review*, 60 (4): 50–67.
Vieites García, Manuel. 2015. "Augusto Boal en la Educación Social: del Teatro del Oprimido al Psicodrama Silvestre." *Foro de Educación* 13 (18): 161–79.
Villa, Juan D., and Javier I. Pinzon. 2011. *Caracterización de la Población Circense en Colombia, Documento de Caracterización del Sector Circense*. Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura Colombia.
Wolterstorff, Nicholas. 2015. *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Social Circus: Developing Structures for Program Efficacy in the United States

Amy Cohen

This short piece aims to provide context about the unique situation of social circus in the United States and the ongoing work of the US-based 501 (c) 3 not-for-profit American Youth Circus Organization (AYCO). In August 2014 Cirque du Soleil called a meeting of select AYCO members with whom it had "partnerships" (Guilford 2014). At the time, I was two years into my service as Executive Director of AYCO, a twenty-year-old nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the participation of youth in circus arts and supporting circus educators in the US. AYCO and Cirque du Soleil have had a strong relationship since AYCO's founding in 1998, when Cirque du Soleil staff member Gil Favreau attended the planning retreat that led to the founding of AYCO and aided the organization in starting up its operations. The 2014 meeting, held at the Cirque du Soleil headquarters in Montreal, was designed to address the current state of social circus in the United States. Cirque du Soleil asked, "What must happen to make social circus a prominent recognized practice in the U.S.?" (Guilford 2014). Social circus was healthy but stagnant in the US at that time, and Cirque du Soleil was involved in numerous projects around the world that revealed social circus programs could grow their impact in significant ways by partnering with governments, corporations, and educational systems (Guilford 2014). The group that gathered was asked to determine if they saw room for growth and, if yes, how they might do so.

This produced our core question: what kind of action in the circus sector will enable social circus growth within the unique United States context? It is important to note that circus in the US does not inhabit a relative position of heightened cultural capital in the way that it does in other parts of the world. The deep cultural imprint of the golden age of the traditional circus is very present. With all due respect to traditional circus and circus history, assumptions about what circus is and can be among the public often present barriers to innovation—artistically, educationally, and socially. Although attitudes are changing slowly, circus's widespread reputation remains that of family entertainment, with high-risk activity not meant for participation.

Sitting around the table at the Cirque du Soleil headquarters that day in 2014 were representatives from over a dozen organizations that self-identified as doing social circus, including organizations such as Circus Harmony, CircEsteem, Circus Juventas, and Prescott Circus Theatre. Based on my knowledge of the participants, the majority of the participating organizations were at least ten years old and had sustained consistent and powerful programming during their lifespan without the capacity to increase their impact in a significant or scalable way. I could tell that what unified the group was their shared identification that they all did social circus, and an agreement that, yes, they wanted to grow social circus's impact in the US. However, there was a palpable dissonance in the room. Not everyone believed that the others were indeed doing *social circus*. Some defined social

Amy Cohen is the executive director of the American Youth Circus Organization, a twenty-year-old nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the participation of youth in circus arts and to supporting circus educators. She is also the founder and director of Circus Culture in Ithaca, NY and an instructor of Circus Arts at both Ithaca College and Cornell University. Amy holds a BS in arts management from Ithaca College and an MA in "circus as a tool for social change, education, and creative expression" from NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study.

circus as providing financial aid for circus training whether or not those served were determined to be "at-risk," while others held strict criteria that program outcomes be evaluated or that programs serve specifically "at-risk" youth. The lack of unified vision about what social circus is created a clear barrier in the midst of a call to action for growth in the sector.

The product of the fateful meeting was a clear call to action for AYCO to take the lead on mobilizing the growth of social circus in the US via what was named the Social Circus Initiative. The initiative was a multi-phase three-year plan aimed at proving the efficacy of social circus via evaluation and research, and increasing the funding resource pool for these social circus organizations. AYCO hired a team of consultants, who had a deeply rooted understanding of social circus in the US as well as expertise in clinical counselling and nonprofit fundraising, to devise the initiative. Cirque du Soleil funded the inaugural phase in 2015 (Guilford 2014), and they have continued their generosity to date.

The goal of Phase One, which took place from October 2014 to September 2015, was to create a Social Circus Network with a mission of providing pedagogical, capacity-building, and professional development support to individuals and organizations pursuing and engaging in social circus work (Brookes 2015). This network would enable AYCO to do the following:

- Establish good practices for social circus programs
- Recognize social circus programs that currently employ good practices
- Identify needed capacity-building assistance for social circus projects
- Create a plan to provide this assistance
- Develop materials to help social circus programs build capacity

The consultants hired to work on this project identified that our first step would be redefining the parameters of what social circus means in the United States in order to build a stronger foundation for developing funding relationships. AYCO formed a committee of experts and hired a staff member to facilitate the network's needs. We decided on a definition for social circus that would guide our work in establishing the proposed network and in making social circus a prominent and recognized practice in the US. The group devised a definition that determines social circus to be "a social change intervention that uses the circus arts as a tool for fostering personal and social development of identified "at-risk" individuals" (Brookes 2015).

In order to centre the Social Circus Network around tangible outcomes (more specifically, to drive funds and awareness to social circus), it was decided that entry would be based on three main criteria: organizations must be focused on a clearly specified "at-risk" population, they must be directed toward achieving a particular social change and specific outcomes related to that change, and they must have a commitment to evaluating effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes. After much discussion and strategizing, it was determined that if the network were to actively solicit funds, commission studies, and advocate for social circus, it was critical to include the requirement that programs serve identified "at-risk" individuals. This specified requirement was intended to develop higher quality collaborative efforts to prove the efficacy of social circus, hence answer Cirque du Soleil's mandate. With the understanding that it is impossible to define "at-risk" in the term's totality, we instructed applicants to the network to consider that the population they work with be a specific population that is disadvantaged in some way (Brookes 2015). This varies in different communities and contexts, but the intention unifies the network group and has already proven to be

helpful. When commissioning the first ever study about social circus, we decided to focus on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) outcomes. SEL is defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional learning as "The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, etc. and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions." The fact that all of our network members had a common ground of serving a specific and disadvantaged population was helpful in crafting our research questions and strategy. There were zero complaints about these parameters once AYCO released them as there was a great deal of education and community outreach that explained why we made these constraints, and how they would serve the larger community (Brookes 2015).

Currently, the network comprises seventeen active member organizations that meet these criteria. Of these members, seven were present at the initial meeting in 2014. Two organizations applied for the network and were given a pending status, as they did not initially meet the criteria; however, they have since revised their programs to include evaluation, and their participation has since been approved. The other six organizations were not previously partnered with Cirque du Soleil, hence were not a part of the meeting group. Of those that attended the meeting but did not end up in the network, one organization did not meet the criteria, one opted not to join, one joined for a year but did not renew their commitment to the group, and the others in attendance were individuals who did not represent an organization that would be eligible to join.

The criteria are based on a keen awareness that, if we are to motivate growth of social circus in the US, we need to keep funding at the top of mind. For funders to invest in social circus, they need to know that it works—not just via anecdotes and relationship building with leaders, but via research as well. Up until this point, we have had very little US-based evidence beyond anecdotes to show funders and foundations about how and why circus works. Each body of research conducted in Canada, Finland, and Australia regarding circus as a tool for positive youth development has proven to have a significant impact on US-based constituents' ability to raise funds (American Youth Circus Organization 2015). At the biennial American Circus Educators conference, keynote speakers citing studies about resilience, physical literacy, and readiness have provided circus educators and organizations with a language to advocate for their programs. There was reason to believe that a study conducted in the US about social circus and SEL outcomes would bring significant resources to not only the network members directly, but the sector at large.

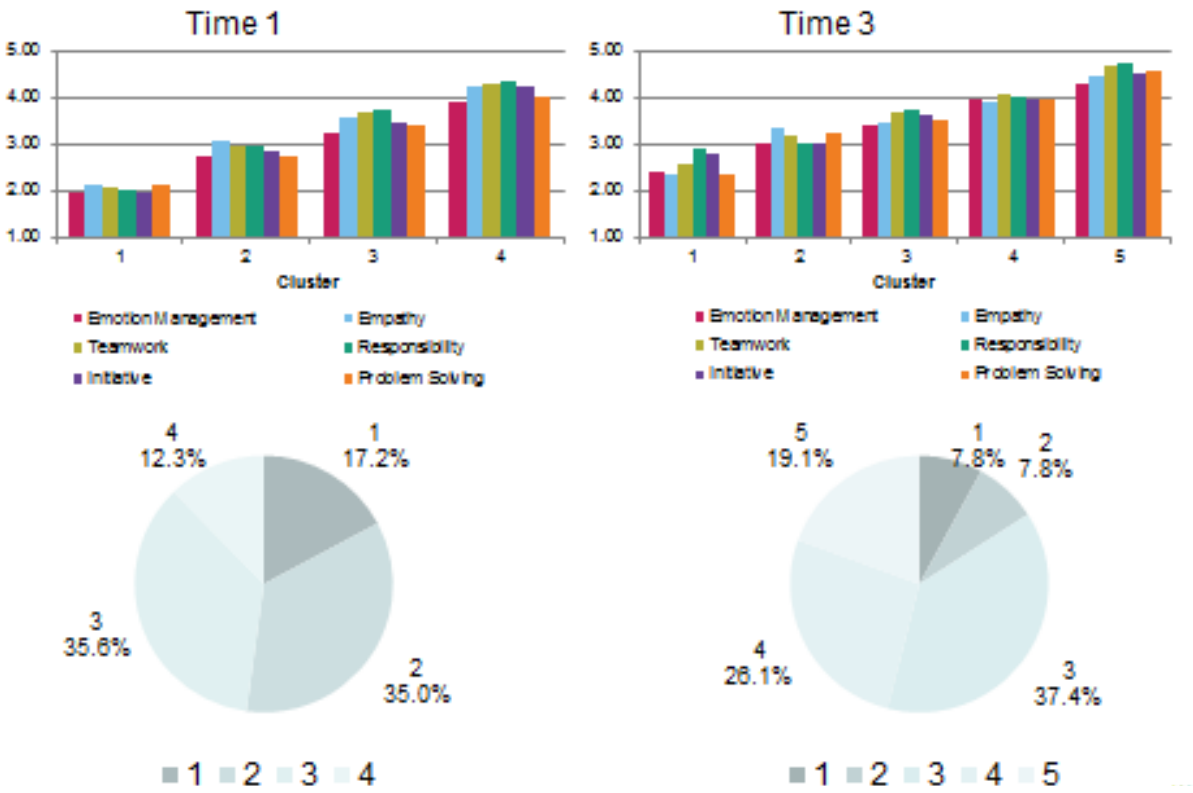
Because of how organizations are funded in the US, and because circus education can be oriented in such a way that enables access to support from the educational and therapeutic realms, which are typically better supported and validated in the United States, being a social circus practitioner is a viable career path with a multitude of pathways for growth and entrepreneurship. It is arguably easier and more accessible to work professionally in social circus in the US than to become a professional circus performer. Based on my count, at this point, the US has more notable and internationally known social circus organizations than professional touring circus companies. In my experience managing relationships and job postings in the US circus education sector, there are typically more jobs than people suitable for those jobs within the social circus sector. I receive emails multiple times per month from students who have grown up in youth circus and are entering college seeking out degrees that align with social circus such as social work, occupational therapy, and youth development. With the appropriate cultivation, an entirely new generation of social circus innovators will emerge ready to occupy leadership positions.

Much of the strategy of the first phase of the project related to gathering the currently functioning social circus organizations in the US together via a unified vision for growth, and investigating the funding structures at play as they relate to the future of social circus. While in many other countries there is government funding for the arts, arts in education, preventative healthcare, and other relevant subjects, in the US this type of support is minimal at best. The consultant team identified during the first phase of the project that the most effective strategy would be to develop a clear case for social circus via research and studies that show its impact in order to solidify relationships with foundations and private funders.

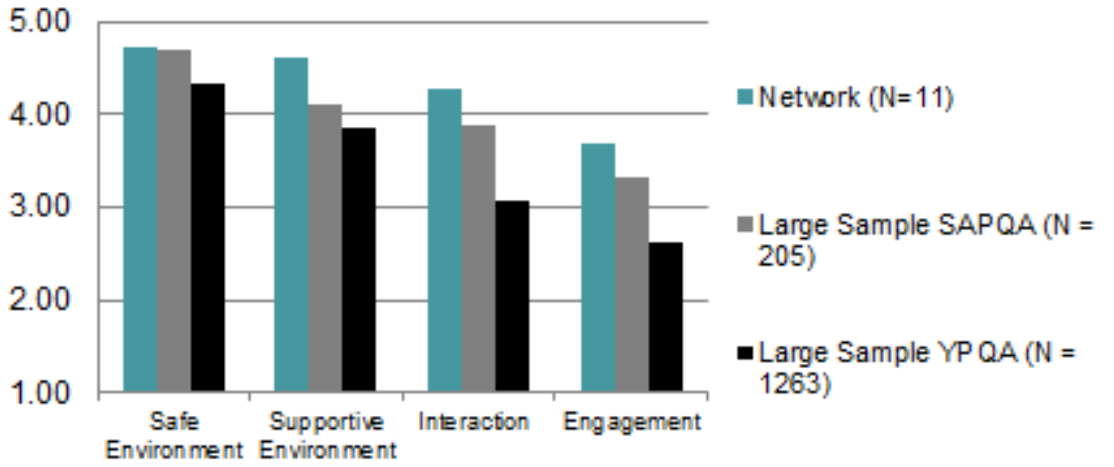
Phase Two of the initiative, which took place from October 2015 to September 2016 (Brookes 2015), led us to our first commission of research about social circus. Our staff came across the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, an organization that researches SEL outcomes for youth programs. We pursued a relationship with them, and a month later we commissioned the first ever study about social circus and SEL outcomes. Because we had the Social Circus Network in place, we were able to collaborate with eight members who we knew had the capacity to be involved in the study. Eight organizations took part in the study, which was conducted over a nine-month period. Select staff members from participating organizations were trained to be evaluators and worked alongside Weikart experts to evaluate programs at three points during the study. Preliminary results released in August of 2017 showed significant evidence that the programs increased SEL outcomes for the youth who participated. The initial report delivered at the 2017 American Youth Circus Festival by the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality revealed that:

> Measures of both staff and youth behaviour suggest that AYCO program settings are both delivering high quality programming and producing substantively important change in youth SEL behavioural skills. Specifically:
>
> - Quality of staff SEL practices are substantially higher than Weikart Center's large reference sample for afterschool programs and approach the level of quality seen in the exemplary SEL programs in the SEL Challenge Study.
> - Change in individual youth's SEL behavioural skills from baseline to post is uniformly positive, substantively large, and approaching the magnitude of effect found in the SEL Challenge Study. (Roy & Harris 2017)

The visuals below from the initial report reveal that there has been an overall improvement in SEL behaviour over the course of the study (with Time 1 being the first evaluation and Time 3 being the third evaluation out of three). This change is revealed by the cluster of the staff ratings of behaviour data for Time 1 and Time 3. Each one of the bars represents a Social and Emotional Learning domain. The pie charts provide a distribution of youth in each one of the clusters. At the first time point about 18 percent of students were in the "low" cluster, and at the third time point, only 8 percent were in the low cluster (Roy & Harris 2017).



Network Cluster Analysis Comparison. From L. M. Roy and J. M. Harris, "Planning with Data Workshop of the Center for Youth Program Quality." David R. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, 2017.



Network External Assessment Time 1 vs Large Sample External Assessment. From L. M. Roy and J. M. Harris, "Planning with Data Workshop of the Center for Youth Program Quality." David R. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, 2017.

Evaluation results paint a translatable picture of the efficacy of circus arts that we have rarely had access to. It speaks in multiple tongues: to funders, foundations, arts, social work, sport, and more. The numbers and the research speak volumes and result in increased advocacy and communication; our Network members can thus mobilize this information, as can the wider web of social circus programs and practitioners around the world, enabling growth of the sector with AYCO as a national force motivating its development.

The full results of the study were released in November 2017, to great excitement. We are currently in Phase Three of the Initiative, and our focus is on communicating our impact, making connections, and increasing participation. Our plan is to work on generating original media content to help funders and supporters understand what social circus is and can be, and to continue moving toward our goal of sustainable growth of social circus programs in the US, as well as encouraging increased effectiveness and capacity of these programs.

Phase Three also addresses AYCO's first attempt at creating training resources for social circus practitioners, young adults rising into leadership in social circus programs, and young adults seeking social circus-related work as a profession. Alongside training hosted by Cirque du Monde, and via young adults attending higher education institutions with a focus on or affinity with social circus, this prepares us to further develop and expand the field. We remain dedicated to developing the evaluation capacity of our community and are working with Dr. Jen Agans to develop a databank of questions for circus organizations to use to evaluate their social circus programs, and subsequently garner support. This information will be made public and available for all programs to use in 2018. As Research Associate in the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research and Assistant Director of the Program for Research on Youth Development and Engagement (PRYDE) at Cornell University, Dr. Agans is uniquely suited to develop this databank. She received her PhD from the Eliot Pearson Department of Child Study and Human Development at Tufts University and grew up in a youth circus in New Hampshire. Further, Dr. Agans grew up attending AYCO events and now serves on the Board of Directors; she thus understands the efficacy of circus both experientially and academically.

In conclusion, we have found that, by organizing and structuring our approach to social circus, we have been able to deliver outcomes that will drive resources and support to the social circus sector. We believe that any research about social circus impacts our entire global community, while recognizing that in the US there is a unique funding and support generation context that we must address through our actions. The success and power of communicating the benefits and efficacy of social circus work can help to continually elevate and reshape the cultural understanding of circus in general in the United States by proving that circus works as a tool for social intervention.

References

American Youth Circus Organization. 2015. *The Case for Social Circus* [Resource sheet]. Ithaca: American Youth Circus Organization.

Brookes, Zoe. 2015. "Social Circus." PowerPoint presentation at the American Youth Circus Organization Festival, Portland, ME, 2015.

Guilford, James. 2014. "Notes for U.S. Social Circus Movement Discussion." Minutes. Cirque du Soleil, Montreal.

Roy, L. M., and J. M. Harris. 2017. "Planning with Data Workshop of the Center for Youth Program Quality." Trenton: David R. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality.

Freaks No More: Rehistoricizing Disabled Circus Artists

Katrina Carter

In her detailed analysis of aerial performances, circus historian and commentator Peta Tait (2006) suggests that cultural memory is complicit in both sustaining and blurring realities of the past through a process that Joseph Roach (1996) calls "selective memory." He explains that this "requires public enactments of forgetting, either to blur the obvious discontinuities, misalliances, and ruptures or, more desperately, to exaggerate them in order to mystify a previous Golden Age, now lapsed" (3).

Selective memory offers an opportunity to erase those aspects of the past that are uncomfortable or less desirable, and Diana Taylor (2003) proposes that the writing of history is itself a process of perpetual reinvention. It is a constant "back and forth. The versions change with each transmission," she writes, "and each creates slips, misses, and new interpretations that result in a somewhat new original" (xx). This process of remembering and forgetting is therefore "imbued with ideological bias" (Tait 2006, 28) and the circus artists remembered or forgotten are undoubtedly dependent on the opinions of those recording at the time, the culture in which they performed, as well as the interests of those writing the associated histories that follow.

In relation to disabled[1] circus and variety performers, I agree with Leonard J. Davis (1995) that, "in the realm of the body, ableist culture still reigns supreme" (6). Circus histories focus attention on nondisabled elite artists, some of whom had accidents that might have rendered them disabled,[2] but I have discovered that numerous *performing* disabled artists also existed in the nineteenth century.[3] Even Steve Gossard (1994), who shares a photograph of one-legged gymnast Frank Melrose in his *Reckless Era of Aerial Performance*, proffers him as an example of novelty, alongside animal acts that "were known to employ trapeze features" (20). Despite Melrose being acknowledged by one of his contemporary critics as "America's most wonderful one legged gymnast," who was "a fine performer in the variety profession, and command[ed] a high salary" (Saint Paul Sunday Globe 1882, n.p.), latter-day historians appear to dismiss disabled artists as novelty or ignore them completely. I propose here that, as disability and circus have most commonly been associated with the excesses and discourses of freak shows, where individuals with diverse impairments were exhibited as "oddities" and "monsters"[4] before being medicalized, institutionalized, and removed from public view, artists like Melrose were ostensibly forgotten because they offered an oppositional account; in Roach's words, they presented obvious discontinuities to the freakery narrative and were therefore dismissed. Focusing on the highly emotive subject of freakery, and reexhibiting those performers as "other," leaves little room for performers like Melrose to sit within accepted knowledge. It is easier for them to continue to be forgotten. Their omission has arguably distorted cultural perceptions of disabled people and the circus that, once reviewed, could realign and relegitimatize disabled circus

Katrina Carter holds a PhD from Royal Holloway University and is currently an associate lecturer in the School of Music and Performing Arts at Canterbury Christ Church University. A world leader in Accessible Aerial, Katrina is also the founder of Airhedz (airhedz.co.uk), working internationally with circus schools, individuals and companies to find ways of making the aerial arts available for disabled people. She choreographed the aerial scenes in the London 2012 Paralympic Opening Ceremony.

practitioners within today's circus, not merely as social participants, but as artists. Disabled performers are not *new* to the art forms, but twenty-first-century artists like Jennifer Bricker, Erin Ball, Amelia Cavallo, Milton Lopes, and all those involved in London's *Paralympic Opening Ceremony* of 2012 are reclaiming an art form to which they have had an association for centuries.

Documentary evidence shows how some disabled freak-show performers often did more than expose their unusual physiques by engaging in acrobatic activities for their public (Johnny Eck (1911–1991) and Eli Bowen (1842–1924) for example), but there is also evidence of established disabled artists from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who were top-billing attractions in circus, music halls, and variety shows.[5] Furthermore, at least a few disabled gymnasts can be credited for significantly contributing to technical developments of acrobatic forms now embodied by their nondisabled descendants, upon which this paper will focus.

In *The True Art and Science of Hand Balancing*, renowned hand-balancer Philip Henry Paulinetti (c. 1863–1940) is shown holding a "one hand planche"[6] that, we are informed, "has never been duplicated" (Paulinetti and Jones [1945] 2007, 40). Paulinetti's student and friend, Robert L. Jones, explained that the photographer, also an enthusiastic hand-balancer, was so stunned at Paulinetti's ability that it took three attempts to take the photograph. In the final photograph, Paulinetti's prowess was, according to Jones, tainted by fatigue and therefore not quite as exquisite as it might have been. It is undoubtedly still an impressive action and one that was only rivalled by Jules Keller (c. 1860) who also regularly performed a one-hand planche. However, Jones instantly dismissed Keller's action as unworthy of comparison because, in his words, "Keller, you see, was a cripple" (42). He continued:

> [Keller] stood but four and a half feet in height, and while his body is like that of a normal well built man, his legs and hips were very, very small as a result of . . . paralysis in his youth, and were of no use to him. The slack of weight in the lower body of course gave him tremendous advantage in leverage, his weight being entered almost in the shoulder instead of near the waist as in a normal individual. His planche, held with the legs curled behind the back instead of straight from the hips was really little more than a one handstand—the arm was vertical, and held at a right angle from the body, whereas Paulinetti's planche is held with the arm at a considerable angle . . . making the feat exceedingly more difficult. (Paulinetti and Jones [1945] 2007, 40)[7]

As if needing to find ways of undermining Keller's abilities by highlighting his deficiencies, Jones concluded this excerpt commenting, "Keller was so 'top heavy' that he could not perform the half arm planche, a feat that is readily performed by almost anyone willing to practice a little" (Paulinetti and Jones [1945] 2007, 40); if *anyone* could do such tricks, however, I wonder why a performer would waste time on demonstrating them! Later, Jones writes that "Paulinetti did various ring and bar feats that have never been duplicated by a normally formed man" (44), and Paulinetti himself comments in the following chapter how he managed to "master a number of feats which the leading gymnasts of the world contended were impossible of accomplishment by [again] any normally formed man" (47). Clearly, there was an anxiety over differentiating himself from anyone he considered to be *ab*normal, or whom he felt might have had additional advantage in mastering similar feats owing to their specific physiology; I sense he thought they were somehow cheating and that their involvement might have a negative impact on how his own achievements were received. Much is made in the book of Paulinetti's small frame and how, "were you to meet him on the street you would readily

take him for a banker, or a lawyer, or a doctor" (45) rather than a skilled gymnast. His pre-performance physical anonymity provided a surprise to his audiences (including other gymnasts) who doubted such a slight man could embody such power and control, and he appeared to enjoy that element of surprise, yet he did not extend such a perspective to Keller whose body clearly differentiated from his own. After seeing Keller perform for the first time, however, and clearly anxious over the praise the "crippled" acrobat was receiving at his expense, he wrote, "I walked out of that theatre with my sails drawn considerably, and did some deep thinking for a couple of weeks. . . . Mr Keller's most difficult feat, as I noticed was a planche on one hand. So I started to work on that also" (51).

Certainly not lacking in self-congratulation, Paulinetti concluded of his new accomplishments, "the writer feels safe in saying that this routine performed in the way explained is the most difficult and scientific of any routine ever accomplished in the art of hand balancing or gymnastics" (Paulinetti and Jones [1945] 2007, 51). Not satisfied in raising his game above Keller's, Paulinetti ventured to master other actions being performed by Stuart Hall (d. 1902), a one-legged gymnast performing with one or other of his brothers as the Dare Brothers or Brothers Dare. Challenged by Mr. Hugo Moulton, allegedly "one of America's very finest horizontal bar performers" (52), Paulinetti declared, "I am absolutely certain that I could accomplish all the feats that yourself and all the others have said were impossible for a normal man: besides, I am sure that it is quite possible to add a few more, even more difficult, than what either Mr Keller or Mr Dare is performing" (52). To his credit, he did achieve his goals, and as Stuart Hall left his brother Thomas to perform in Europe, Thomas invited Paulinetti to perform in his stead at some of the great US vaudeville establishments of the time, including Leavitt's and Koster & Bials.

Keller and Dare led successful professional lives as international circus and vaudeville artists until their deaths in the early twentieth century. Audiences clamoured to see them, and I have only found a few references to potential freakery or significant "othering" in their regard.[8] I surmise that especially in the aftermath of the American Civil War, which produced hundreds-of-thousands of amputees, seeing performers with missing limbs became quite commonplace. I have uncovered dancers, acrobats, leapers, cyclists, and aerialists with one or more missing limbs touring professionally especially across the US and UK—instances that my UN**FR**IQUE™ project aims to unpack further.

The image above is of a poster I made for a sharing of UN**FR**IQUE™ in 2015 that shows some of the historical and forgotten (disabled) dance, circus, and music hall performers of previous centuries alongside three contemporary disabled performers (shown in red) who worked on the project. It aimed to demonstrate how disabled performers were not unusual in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While some did perform in freak Shows and exhibitions, this was not the only platform on which they were welcome. Zampi and others were also top-billing attractions.

Paulinetti's career of fifty years also saw him touring internationally. Each of these artists would have been seen by thousands or tens-of-thousands of people throughout their careers, and certainly, Dare and Paulinetti trained in spaces with other gymnasts, with the latter also becoming a coach in his later years; undoubtedly therefore, others would have tried their novel feats. If Paulinetti is to be believed and it was he who copied Keller and Dare's original hand-balancing actions, introducing them to the nondisabled community of gymnasts and circus artists, then all three have arguably made significant contributions to the discipline. The skills he described, not least the one-hand planche with bent or straight legs, are almost commonplace in today's hand-balancing acts. The increasing number of circus artists (and historians) who are surprised by my findings, however, demonstrates that many are unaware that disabled acrobats existed in the past and are astonished that some of the actions they now perform originated from two of them.

Returning to Tait's theories of memory and the biases of history shown to be evident in such recollecting, the omission of Dare and his fellow disabled performers highlights not only a loss to circus's rich history but also the predominance of an "ableist culture," as Davis calls it, and a perhaps perverse obsession with freakery that persists as the dominant feature linking disabled people with the circus. The existence of Dare, Keller, and others suggests that the nineteenth century was perhaps more diverse in its circus performers than has been remembered. The disabled circus artist, who is today considered a relative newcomer, can look back in time and see their precursors and challenge the conventions of the profession being solely for the nondisabled. The ring or stage should be more welcoming to disabled practitioners as circus artists and not merely social participants.

Notes

1. I choose to use the term disabled here to reflect both the medical and social models of disability as it is not only that the bodies of the artists bore impairments, but, as I argue, that the historians rendered them invisible and forgotten, therefore historically disabled by omission.

2. See Steve Gossard's book *A Reckless Era of Aerial Performance: The Evolution of Trapeze*, in which he comments on several prominent aerialists who fell and either returned to the air or remained on the ground.

3. For more detailed information on this see my PhD dissertation, *Suspending Conventions: How "Disabled Aerialists" Are Challenging Aesthetic and Methodological Practices in 21st Century Aerial(ism)*.

4. See Bogdan (1998), Adams (2001), and Thompson (1996) for examples of diverse literature on freak show participants and discourse on the subject.

5. See Carter's UN**FR**IQUE™, available at https://vimeo.com/127269529.

6. The one-hand planche appears impossible as the acrobat's entire weight is held almost parallel to the ground, legs held together with feet pointed, on a single hand; the second arm extends the horizontal line of the body away from the head for balance. The balancer's supporting arm is almost straight, but leaning slightly in the direction of his head.

7. On page 41 of *The True Art and Science of Hand Balancing*, Jones includes a composite of images including one of Keller's one-hand planche.

8. An unnamed writer for the *Salt Lake Herald* wrote in 1889: "the phenomenon Jules Keller, whom nature has put on hands instead of feet, is a phenomenon indeed, but an uncomfortable one more suited to a museum than a theater" ("Amusements"). Stuart Dare was depicted in cartoon formation in *Funny Folks* (1878) alongside three other performers under the heading "Odd fish at the Aquarium," but in his duet with his brother Thomas, he was the serious gymnast while the latter played the clown.

References

Adams, Rachel. 2001. *Sideshow USA: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

"Amusements." 1889. *Salt Lake Herald*, January 26, 1889: 5. Library of Congress: Chronicling America. https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/.

Bogdan, Robert. 1998. *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Carter, Katrina. 2014. *Suspending Conventions: How "Disabled Aerialists" Are Challenging Aesthetic and Methodological Practices in 21st Century Aerial(ism).* PhD diss., Royal Holloway University, London.

———. 2015. *UN**FR**IQUE™* [Film]. Available at: https://vimeo.com/127269529.

———. 2016. "Is the Twenty-First Century Disabled Artiste Un-Freaking or Re-Freaking Circus?" Paper presented at the Circus & Its Others Conference, Montreal.

Davis, Leonard J. 1995. *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. London: Verso.

Gossard, Steve. 1994. *A Reckless Era of Aerial Performance: The Evolution of Flying Trapeze*. 2nd ed. Bloomington: Gossard.

"Odd Fish at the Aquarium." 1878. *Funny Folks*, January 19, 1878: 22. University of Florida Digital Collections. http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00090051/00001/26x?search=odd+fish.

Paulinetti, P. H., and Robert L. Jones. [1945] 2007. *The True Art and Science of Hand Balancing*. Edited by L. Christopher. California: Logan Christopher.

Roach, Joseph R. 1996. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Tait, Peta. 2006. "Re/membering Muscular Circus Bodies: Triple Somersaults, the Flying Jordans and Clarke Brothers." *Nineteenth Century Theatre & Film* 33(1): 26–38.

Taylor, Diana. 2003. *The Archive and the Repertoire*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Thomson, Rosemarie Garland, ed. 1996. *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*. New York: New York University Press.

Welcome to the *Cyborg Circus Show*: Imagining Disability Futures beyond Normative Bodies
A Manifesto

Shay Erlich

What is the *Cyborg Circus Show?* Is it a concept, a show, a practice orientation? Could it be all of the above, and what might it look like in each of these forms? The *Cyborg Circus Show* is an exercise in juxtapositions and possibilities peeking through the horizon. What are its genealogies? How do we imagine its futures? How can the *Cyborg Circus Show* provide new spaces to affirm the lived experience of disabilities in the circus arts?

The cyborg and the circus, each in their own way, have come to represent an unshackling of the human form from various types of bodily limitations. As such, to live as either a cyborg or a circus performer means that these bodies may have experiences that have not been previously understood, or even understood to be possible. In other words, both the cyborg and the circus share elements of the posthuman, where the limits of humanity and the human form are pushed to nearly the point of breaking and being perceived as another figure entirely (Braidotti 2013).

The figure of the cyborg (Haraway 1991), for example, can be understood to be the mediation of the human form via technology. From this perspective, a cyborg is a being that is neither fully biologically human nor completely technological. Whether such mediation is considered an elevation or a degradation of the human form often depends on one's view of technologies and of the seemingly irreversible incorporation of technology into every aspect of our being. In today's world, humans with disabilities are often at the forefront of cyborg technology. Wearable and implanted technologies are used to alleviate human suffering. They can replace bodily functions lost to disability, either through congenital conditions or simply as a result of the degradation of bodily functions over time. As such, these technologies evidence a posthuman potential.

Not entirely dissimilar from the figure of the cyborg, circus performances can also represent a conscious uncoupling from the apparent limitation of human biological possibility. Generally speaking, this uncoupling in circus does not result from technological amplification of the body's potentials alone. Instead, circus reveals the virtuosic exertion of the body against forces of gravity or the limitations of standard ranges of motion or strength, amplified through circus technologies such as aerial apparatuses. In the circus, traditionally-abled and disabled performers do the seemingly impossible by exhibiting superhuman feats of strength and endurance: the results of an ever-increasing effort to subjugate their bodies in order to overcome the limitations of the human form. Circus performers can be argued to demonstrate a posthuman—or even "über-human" (Carter 2014)—sensibility through their pursuit of corporeal excess.

How could we harness the posthuman resonance between the cyborg and the circus to develop deeper understandings of the un-evoked potential in both circus and disabled futures? While sharing a common goal of escaping the limitations of the human form, the cyborg and the circus appear to

Shay Erlich is a hard of hearing, multiply disabled, and genderqueer child and youth care practitioner and circus artist. Shay holds a master's degree in child and youth care from Ryerson University, and their recent thesis project explored how social circus can be understood as child and youth care practice.

accomplish this goal in diametrically opposite ways. One embraces the role of technology to supplant human experience, while the other demonstrates the absolute limits of what is possible without it. Is there a form of creative expression that can combine the posthuman element of these divergent realities?

I propose that what we can call the *Cyborg Circus Show* is a space of such convergence.

I entered the world of circus as a cyborg twice over, relying on technology to supplant the human functions of hearing and insulin production. Mine is a chronically ill, hard of hearing body, requiring the use of technology not only for being able to function in an audio-centric society but in fact for being able to survive. Prior to the discovery of insulin in 1922—and the evolution of technologies to extract, produce, and supplant insulin within a human body—diabetes was a death sentence, which could be delayed only through the utilization of starvation diets (Quianzon and Cheikh 2012). Today, many diabetics, myself included, use an insulin pump, a small battery-powered device about the size and shape of a pager, to continuously deliver the insulin required for survival through a small plastic cannula inserted into our fatty tissue and affixed to the skin. These technologies can be seen as both amplifying the human potential of my body and also recognizing the limitations present within it. While these technologies allow me to mediate the impact of my body's inability to perform metabolic and sensory tasks, they have not yet reached the point where they are capable of performing the tasks with the same efficiency as a typically functioning body. In short, while becoming a cyborg has enabled my survival, I have not regained the full set of normative human abilities via my use of technology.

What does it mean then to enter the world of circus—a world whose core tenet is to escape the limitations of the body—as a cyborg whose body is already simultaneously amplified and limited? Within the noncircus world, my experience of my body is one where my body limits me. My body places limits on my lived experience of humanity. Rightly or wrongly, many doors have been closed to me because of my disabilities. I am often seen by others as less than human. My disabilities fundamentally shape my experience of my body and my world and place limits upon me that would not otherwise be there. And so, on the one hand, my experience of circus has at times been one of profound liberation from bodily limitations. It has been an enchanting reexperiencing of the body and its capabilities. For one of the first times in my life, I have had the opportunity to experience my body as something that empowers me and allows me to accomplish things I never thought possible, rather than being something confining me to a subjugated existence. For example, prior to my participation in circus, my relationship with my body was frequently marked by significant pain and fatigue. These realities would keep me from being able to participate in my world as fully as I wanted. Through circus, my relationship with pain in my body has changed, and I can recognize that pain is not always problematic, but can be a signal of my increasing strength and capabilities. When this awareness is coupled with learning new circus skills that I would not have previously imagined were possible for me, I have experienced opportunities to experiment with a different transcendence of my apparent bodily limitations. These are instances where the quest to move beyond the limitations of my body hasn't been fuelled by a sheer need for survival, but rather for the sheer joy of it. To do something just to prove that I can. To luxuriate in the effort that a task can require.

This experience has been far from a utopic liberation from subjugation, however. It would be naïve to assume that, within the posthuman "anything is possible" world of circus, the inclusion of those with disabilities would be taken for granted. In fact, within the über-abled world of circus where physical virtuosity is celebrated, discrimination against cyborgs and others with disabilities can be

markedly harsher than within the noncircus world. Disabled people are often subjugated precisely because they remind others of the fragile status of their own humanity. This dynamic can be especially pronounced in a space where one's livelihood depends on the appearance of being an über-abled posthuman capable of surpassing typical body limitation, such as is the case in the professional circus. While circus creates the potential for an exploration of what it means to surpass a variety of limits placed upon the human body, it can be difficult to find spaces to participate in circus that are accessible to a wide range of bodies. Circus spaces are often inaccessible to those who can't climb stairs or require a quieter setting to be able to participate. Additionally, those with chronic or episodic disabilities may require classroom or studio training policies that can support late cancellations or unpredictable attendance. These are just a few of the common structural barriers to participation for disabled circus participants. It can also be difficult to find coaches or trainers who believe that those with disabilities belong in circus settings. Attitudinal barriers are significant, as the perspective of the coach and overall circus space play a large role in how welcome and supported in their progress students with disabilities feel.

These barriers, however significant, can also simply be understood to be an invitation to more progress. The juxtaposition of disabled cyborgs and über-abled circus performers can create opportunities for new partnerships and understandings. The circus world, if it is willing to give disabled cyborgs a chance and a space suited to their needs, can create the opportunity to explore new ways to be human, to release posthuman potential, and as such to redefine the ways bodily limitations can be surpassed. This could result in new partnerships with the disability community, fostered in respect and inclusion. By embracing the circus's focus on surpassing boundaries, the disability world can utilize circus as a medium to reimagine the beyond of the body—creating new ways of opening previously closed doors within circus and beyond. Exploring disability and über-ability simultaneously can give rise to new stories being told: stories that can only be told within the physicality of circus and the physicality of disabled, cyborg bodies; stories in which these bodies are not inspirational super-humans, but fully authentic bodies, telling stories that reflect the full reality of their experience in posthuman terms.

Ultimately, I think that both posthuman cyborgs and über-human circus performers teach us something profound about what it means to embrace our experience in all of its forms, within or beyond normative bounds of "humanity." There is a shared desire to reach out past what ought to be possible, and push just a little farther. To reshape what is possible within the confines and limitations of human experience. When combined they represent an acute juxtaposition, the cyborg circus, all too aware of the limitations of the human form, participating in an art form where limits only exist because someone hasn't found a way past them yet. From the removal of options to the discovery of those that only some might be able to achieve.

The *Cyborg Circus Show*: a limited world revealed to be without limits.

References

Braidotti, Rosi. 2013. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Carter, T. 2014. "Dangerous Play: 'Supercrip' Aerialists and the Paralympic Opening Ceremony of London 2012." *About Performance* 12:83–102.

Haraway, Donna. 1991. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (149–81). New York: Routledge.

Quianzon, C., and I. Cheikh. 2012. "History of Insulin." *Journal of Community Hospital Internal Medicine Perspectives* 2 (2): n.p. https://doi.org/10.3402/jchimp.v2i2.18701.

Affirmative Freakery, Freaky Methodologies: Circus and Its *Bodies without Organs* in Disability Circus

David Fancy

There is a common dynamic of enfreakment—those mythologizations and minoritizations associated with and generating the figure of the "freak" (Kérchy and Zittlau 2012, 1)—mappable in the discursive and lived histories of both circus and disability. From nineteenth-century constructions and depictions of "monstrous" disability circulating in Euro-American popular culture (Rai 2004; Bogdan 1988; Hevey 1992) that still negatively mark contemporary understandings of the differently-abled, to the circus arts' long-term reliance on the exoticization of naturally exceptional corporealities (Hurley 2016), the parallels and convergences are evident. In what ways can such intersections be generative for the present theorization and practice of circus, especially questions around Circus and Its Others framing this collection of written interventions? By extension and more specifically, how can we think through and beyond what has come to constitute the relatively impermeable distinction between "(mainstream) circus" and what is often called "social circus"—that "other" of circus (proper) that is understood to engage the social and political more directly than its allegedly more politically disinterested and aesthetically accomplished relation (Infantino 2016, 447–49; Lavers 2016, 508–25; Spiegel 2016)?

In this article, I draw on the ways the thought of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari can limit methodological tendencies toward binarization and hierarchization (1987) and invoke reflections on some of my recent practice at the intersection of circus and disability (*Recounting Huronia Cabaret* 2016). I proceed in this fashion in order to think how we might put the shared genealogies of disability and circus to work to generate new circus art and discourse that simultaneously embraces both the aesthetic and the political, recognizing the always-already mutual generativity of these two often falsely stabilized methodological categories. By demonstrating the mutual constitutedness of the aesthetic and the political via an example of disability or "crip" (McCruer 2006) circus, I seek to problematize and forestall the taxonomic supremacy implied in any suggestion that social circus is necessarily the freaky, differently-abled and poor cousin of "circus proper": big on heart, weak on virtuosity and aesthetics. Key to this project will be the articulation of specific aesthetic strategies emergent at the intersection of a range of virtuosities that constitute mainstream and social circus, in this case from the encounter of disabled and more traditionally abled circus bodies. In case my observations here are seen to be reductively operationalizing disability simply to fuel circus discourse and practice, let it be said from the outset that while the focus of this publication is circus, the insights generated throughout this inquiry celebrate disability as a locus of exploring diversities of corporeality as much as they celebrate circus for the same.

Central to my thinking is the notion of the Body without Organs (BwO) initiated by Antonin Artaud (1982) and taken up by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Both a concept and series of practices, the BwO can help explore the ways in which circus bodies as well as disabled bodies—perhaps especially so when working in concert or when they are indeed the same body—serve to both semiotically and affectively *exceed* the possibilities of what are constituted as being more normative

David Fancy is associate professor in the Department of Dramatic Arts at Brock University. He is currently publishing on immanence and performance, as well as immanence, electromagnetics, performance, and social control.

bodies in contemporary late-capitalist societies in the economic north. Indeed, the BwO as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari is well suited for transcending the parameters of normative corporeality. The BwO can be understood to be a postidentitarian body in that it is not reduceable or recuperable to discourses of autonomy, self-governance, and separation that are traditionally part and parcel of bourgeois subjectivity (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 149–66). Additionally, given the range of bodies that the concept embraces given its postidentitarian status (including social bodies, animal bodies, bodies of thought, bodies constituted of collections of other bodies, etc.), the notion of the BwO can be used to question the validity of the taxonomic separation of "circus" from "social circus" in contemporary discussions about the art form.

I come to this inquiry as a member of an artist-researcher team funded for three years (2013–16) by the Social Sciences and Humanities and Research Council of Canada involving intellectually disabled (ID) survivors of extensive institutional abuse at the hands of the Ontario government at the Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia, Ontario. From the late nineteenth century, individuals diagnosed as "idiots" or as "feebleminded" (Binet and Simon 1916) were placed into provincially-run institutions where many remained institutionalized for life (Barken 2013; Malacrida 2005, 2006; Inclusion BC n.d.; Walmsley 2005). Although the majority of such institutions have closed in Ontario, former residents speak of widespread physical, sexual, mental and emotional abuse while living there, as well as ongoing trauma from these experiences (Institutional Survivors n.d.). Huronia, formerly the Orillia Asylum for Idiots, was one of Canada's first and largest residential facilities for people with IDs.

As one response to the complex historical reality of these institutions, our project, entitled *Recounting Huronia*, engaged all manner of creative work, including poetry, storytelling, bookmaking, and circus work in group settings, with a view to providing members of the oft-silenced survivor populations an opportunity to re-tell their experience of institutionalization on their own terms. As part of the process, I invited dancer and circus artist Alisa Walton to participate in monthly creative meetings with the survivor co-researchers in a process that resulted, among other outcomes, in a cabaret at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in Toronto in the spring of 2016, further discussed below. The group of survivors in question had all been involved in a settlement agreement reached in a class action lawsuit brought against the province of Ontario by former Huronia residents in July 2010 that was approved by the Ontario Superior Court in early December 2013. This decision was followed soon thereafter by an apology in the Ontario Legislature delivered by Premier Kathleen Wynne. Although Wynne stated in her remarks that "Today . . . we no longer see people with developmental disabilities as other" (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 2013), this can most generously be understood as an aspirational statement. As the work from the project revealed, many Huronia survivors living with ID felt otherwise about their ongoing experience. They spoke often of living with continued stigmatization of their condition in what they experienced as a seeming continuation of a now demonstrated history of emotional, physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, abuses implicitly sanctioned by the historical construction of disability as abject, dangerous, unclean, impure, and, since the late nineteenth century, deserving of medicalization and frequently correction (Rossiter and Clarkson 2013).

Seeking to add substance to the kinds of aspirational statements such as Premier Wynne's, the field of Critical Disability Studies is premised in many ways on the understanding that the work of achieving the goals of more complex and equitable practices of diversity should not be entirely in the hands of abled populations (Withers 2012). Colleagues participating in the *Recounting Huronia* project have suggested that "The lawsuits do more than reconcile past wrongs through the demand for

apology or financial compensation, but also provide legitimating space for the historically-silenced narratives from people with ID about institutionalization to emerge and be entered into public record" (Rossiter and Clarkson 2013, 1). Based on decisions made in collaboration with participant-researchers drawn from those leading the class action suit and their contemporaries, part of the necessary work of such kinds of legitimation that form the bulk of our *Recounting Huronia* project involved the re-narrativization of experiences of ID through engagement with circus. In the face of witnessing some video of rehearsals of the silks and suspended ropes work that became integral to the project, Barry Smith, the senior citizen Huronia survivor with whom I worked closely for three years on storytelling projects, explained that the team's collaboration with Alisa Walton "allows us to seek truth and justice by helping us be everything we've been prevented from being, and more." Barry continued by stating, speaking both of the art form he was witnessing and of his fellow survivors, "Circus is a place for me, for us all to be free. People do wonderful things there. We do wonderful things. We are circus" (Smith 2015).

In our work together, Barry often reminded me that his sense of agency and self-determination had frequently been suppressed by minoritizing perceptions of people with ID. Early in the work, he noted that "People think we're freaks and monsters, it's so wrong" (Smith 2013). Telling remarks such as these initiated in the creative team the desire to bring together histories of freakery shared between disability and historical popular art forms like the freak show. Speaking to the source of exotifications informing both these narratives, Amit S. Rai has noted that the forms of "the freak" and "the monster" "gave birth to modernity: those unnameable figures of horror and fascination shadow civilization as its constitutive and abject discontent" (2004, 539). As such, "freaks" are constructed to remind us that civilization is a thin veneer over an otherwise consuming chaos, a human analogue of the perceived risks of degrading and anarchic forces lurking at the perimeter of a well-ordered body politic. Speaking specifically to the contemporary, Laura Davis and Cristina Santos note that the figure of freak and the monstrous engage "real anxieties about our vulnerability in an age of rapid globalization" (2010, xi). Disability scholars such as Margrit Shildrick trace the monstrous as it manifests as part of the long-term depiction of disability as unwanted difference from accepted bodily norms, when, from Biblical depictions onwards, "disability can be positioned as an abomination that is subject to an array of exclusionary and purification procedures" (2008, 46–47).

Addressing the ways in which representations of disability intersect with freakery and the monstrous in popular entertainment, Robin Larsen observes that, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "circuses and carnival sideshows had given people with disabilities a slight amount of honored status and celebrity" (2002, 1). Other scholars stress that objectification of the disabled body nonetheless continued throughout this period and forced the disabled person to be offered up to "the voyeuristic property of the non-disabled gaze" (Hevey 1992, 72). Echoing this line of thinking, Bogdan described the freak show as "the pornography of disability" (1988, 2), with the freak show being a dominant representation of disability before disability became "medicalized" (63).

The echoes between the exceptionalism of circus bodies more widely and the focused realities of the freak show are invoked by Erin Hurley. She compares corporeal exceptionalism acquired through extensive training with the innate exceptionalism of "naturally" unorthodox corporealities and the manifestations of difference each of these forms of exceptionalism enact. Hurley notes, after Graver, that the display of these "fleshy bodies" is marked by previously circulating representational tropes of naturally exceptional corporealities: "It may be argued that all circus bodies are tainted with

the residue of the sideshow freak body" (2016, 134). She continues by referencing Grosz's writing on the abject: "In the sideshow, born freaks' existence 'imperils categories and oppositions dominant in social life'" (quoted in Hurley 2016, 134). Hurley notes that even as stage bodies that embody the putative normalcy of the audience's bodies occupy important "character bodies" within the narrative spaces of influential contemporary Cirque du Soleil productions, and even as acquired exceptionalism is emphasized and foregrounded in many Cirque du Soleil shows (138), the freaky bodies of those such as contortionists continue to interrupt the more normative character bodies' full command of the narrative and fictional spaces these circus productions generate (138–39). As such it may be that the enduring freight of actively mystified otherness associated with the freaky body is still working in these productions as a locus of exoticism. The implications of this, Hurley suggests, following Rosemary Garland, are potentially significant: "A freak show's cultural work is to make the physical particularity of the freak into a hyper-visible text against which the viewer's indistinguishable body fades into a neutral, tractable, and invulnerable instrument of the autonomous will" (quoted in Hurley 2016, 138). This dynamic serves, in Hurley's words, to have the abnormalities of the freaks' bodies in the circus freak-show "secure the superiority of the 'normal' or ordinary body" (138) of the voyeuristic spectator.

Given the current pervasiveness of Cirque du Soleil as the globally recognized purveyor of exceptional bodies, is there then an inevitability to exotified depictions of naturally other-than-normative bodies in contemporary circus? A number of additional and interrelated questions motivated the thinking around the circus in the *Recounting Huronia* project: Can the convergence of critical perspective and practices around disability in circus serve to mutually deterritorialize the minoritizing and exoticizing myths of these historically intertwined types of corporealities (circus and disability)? How can those with intellectual disabilities often complemented by physical challenges understand their bodies to exceed limits, boundaries whose crossing Hurley points out is integral to the kinds of body-limitations-defying actions born from acquired exceptionalism at the heart of a Cirque de Soleil production (2016, 122–24)? Is there a way in which the discourses of freakery can be shed by those with intellectual and other disabilities by reflexively inviting such individuals to partner with artists pursuing acquired exceptionalism through high-performance circus virtuosities? Can the pursuit of such strategies allow disabled bodies to move beyond what Petra Kuppers argues to be narratives of tragedy and loss usually associated with the disabled experience (2009, 224)?

These questions can be approached by first articulating a perspective on embodiment that provides us with a way of understanding: a) the fundamental mutability of corporeality; b) the ways in which dominant discourses centralize appropriately abled, gendered, and raced bodies; and c) the means by which we can push back on those forms of capture. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) undertake such a perspective by distinguishing what they describe as organs, the organism, and the Body without Organs or BwO. With the Body without Organs, Deleuze and Guattari posit a concept and practices that resist the constraining and contorting role that discourses and performativities enforce upon bodies. Instead, they propose a preindividual, preidentitarian substrate composing all bodies, be they human, institutional, conceptual, or otherwise. Deleuze and Guattari understand this substrate to be composed of nonformed, nonorganized, and nonstratified affects and material components that are then stratified and territorialized—their terms for organized and captured—through material and discursive processes in time that result in the intelligible forms of bodies and discourses with which all bodies make sense of and negotiate the world (1987, 149–66). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari ask "How do you make a Body without Organs?" They suggest in initial response that we all already "have one (or several)" and that "It's not so much that it preexists or comes ready-

made, although in certain respects it is preexistent." What is clear is that the BwO is key to all development and change given that while a body needs to have some agency in making one, in actualizing what is inherent within it, "you can't desire without making one." They continue by suggesting that "it is an inevitable exercise or experimentation, already accomplished the moment you undertake it, unaccomplished as long as you don't" (149). They describe the BwO as "not at all a notion or a concept, but a practice, a set of practices" (149–50), thereby avoiding the notion that the "idea" of the BwO is somehow exterior or transcendent to its actualization. Practices of experimentation, such as people with ID exploring new expressions of their sociality and singularity through creative activity, can, for example, be considered as practices actualizing their BwOs.

Deleuze and Guattari invoke the moment in 1948 when Artaud "declares war on the organs" in his *To Have Done With the Judgment of God* (1958) stating, "there is nothing more useless than the organs" (1987, 150). The "organs," those enumerated, taxonomized, fetishized, and deeply socially invested categorizations of corporealities, are what need to be removed and by extension exceeded in order to explore "what the body can do" outside of epistemologically restricting and socially constructed norms of embodiment. "The BwO is what remains when you take everything away," Deleuze and Guattari affirm, specifying that, "What you take away is precisely the phantasy, and significances and subjectifications as a whole" (151). In other words, to actualize the BwO one seeks to remove anything that traps a body into normative modes of engagement, interaction, and self-definition. Given that the BwO inheres within bodies as potentiality, Deleuze and Guattari draw on Deleuze's earlier work on ontology and the nature of the real (Deleuze 1994) to propose a schema in which that which is potential is still real, but is *intensive*, while that which is actual is equally real, but *extensive*. The BwO can best be understood as a mobilizing force that "causes intensities to pass; it produces and distributes them in a *spatium* that is itself intensive, lacking extension" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 153). As such the BwO is that which simultaneously precedes and inheres within every moment:

> That is why we treat the BwO as the full egg before the extension of the organism and the organization of the organs, before the formation of the strata; as the intense egg defined by axes and vectors, gradients and thresholds, by dynamic tendencies involving energy transformation and kinematic movements involving group displacement, by migrations: all independent of *accessory forms* because the organs appear and function here only as pure intensities. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 153)

Given that it is such a field of potentiality, the BwO is always at risk of constraint and capture by forces that would aim to contain it. Deleuze and Guattari describe the BwO as being composed of desire and note that: "Every time desire is betrayed, cursed, uprooted from its field of immanence, a priest is behind it. The priest casts the triple curse on desire: the negative law, the extrinsic rule, and the transcendent ideal" (1987, 154). The restricting "priest" that would harness the desire and potentiality of the BwO inhering in bodies can be many factors, ones that can intersect and amplify each other's constraining effects. These might include a dominant discourse (patriarchal, colonial, ableist), an institution, a self-styled *doyen* or expert, and so forth. Such forces would, in late capital, wish to construct desire as lack or absence (the negative law) as well as suggest that bodies are unable to be moved by their own potential to differentiate and change but are instead governed by external forces (the extrinsic law). The "priest" would argue that such restrictive forces are in fact rooted in natural and inevitable "truths" of the cosmos to which individual bodies are subject (the transcendent ideal). The "priest" who casts the triple curse, Deleuze and Guattari explain, "cannot

bear the BwO, because He pursues it and rips it apart so He can be first, and have the organism be first" (159).

They also observe that, under the yoke of "the judgment of God" of which Artaud (1982) speaks:

> The organism is not at all the body, the BwO; rather, it is a stratum on the BwO, in other words, a phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation that, in order to extract useful labor from the BwO, imposes upon it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 159)

"We are continually stratified," then, as the BwO "is that glacial reality where the alluvions, sedimentations, coagulations, foldings, and recoilings that compose an organism—and also a signification and a subject—occur." Indeed, it is in the BwO "that the organs enter into the relations of composition called the organism" (159) that can only be moved beyond via the activation of intensity and desire inherent within it.

In the model of the BwO, subjectivity is not a starting point but the result of processes that construct it, which thereby open out onto the potential of as yet unlived subjectivities and corporealities. Given that these new forms will necessarily involve that which is unorthodox, an alignment with the body *in extremis* of the naturally exceptional as well as disabled bodies is clear. The emphasis, however, in Deleuze and Guattari's deeply "inventionist" model (Massumi 2002, 12) of generating potentialities for the new, the excluded, the unrecognized, and the allegedly unlived serves to reposition the exceptionalism of the circus and disabled bodies, both acquired and innate. Deleuze and Guattari would agree that the so-called freak, the exceptional body no matter its provenance, has been adeptly captured and capitalized upon from Barnum to Laliberté via cultivation of exotification and various subtle or unsubtle forms of minoritization that allow a ticket-buying public to be both alarmed but ultimately comforted by their own putative normativity. Indeed, their thought helps us understand that, as manifestations of potentialities inherent in the human experience of corporeality, no longer are such othered bodies simply exotic outliers to be sought for thrill, thrall, and titillation in the socially sanctioned spaces of display beyond normative social and corporeal relations. Instead, in the Deleuzo-Guattarian model, these bodies are profoundly ethical sites at the very core of our work in the world as beings. As such, circus and/or disabled bodies involve enacting and constructing previously unexpressed and/or suppressed lifeways and potentialities as a lived ethical instruction about the importance of differentiation. Exceptional bodies can serve as examples for those clinging anxiously to normativities that can only constrain them, no matter how orthodox they think they are or wish themselves to be. Exceptional bodies can share the ethical project of the BwO: the important work of exploring the full implication of Spinoza's influential dictum that "nobody knows what a body can do" (Deleuze 1988, 17).

And yet enacting that desire and those releases is not simply a matter of a commitment to chaos or a submission to pure vitalism given the risks inherent in a too-rapid commitment to the actualization of a BwO that Deleuze and Guattari describe as "wildly destratifying" (1987, 160). "Caution is the art common" to all enactment of the BwO since "in dismantling the organism there are times one courts death, in slipping away from significance and subjection one courts falsehood, illusion and hallucination and psychic death" (160). If you free the BwO "with too violent an action, if you blow

apart the strata without taking precautions, then instead of drawing the plane you will be killed, plunged into a black hole, or even dragged toward catastrophe" (161). How then to proceed?

Harold Dougall, a participant in the *Recounting Huronia Cabaret*. Photo by Alex Tigchelaar.

A key perhaps to articulating the relationship in between circus and disabled bodies via the BwO is to return their shared quality of difference, specifically that of being *in extremis* of one kind or another—that way of simultaneously exceeding normative embodiments by activating the potentials of the BwO. This was one avenue of creative inquiry employed by the cabaret team as we looked at pairing Harold Dougall, one of the survivors currently living in Orillia, with Alisa Walton in a dance where she was suspended contorted on ropes partnered with Harold as he, earthbound, led her about the space. In our studio explorations, the acquired exceptionalism of Alisa's work came up against the limitations of her own natural body, the "fleshy body" Hurley, after Graver, uses to describe the very fleshiness of the corporeal, with all of its possibilities of pain, of rupture, of failure. Through contortion and restraint meant to express in some sense the difficulties of Harold's experience at Huronia, the extremity of Alisa's fleshy body—one she understands by her own description to be "old, failing" (Walton 2015, np)—in the performance moment created an ally-ship with the histories of suffering and trauma of Harold's historically and individually medicalized, drugged, and restrained body. As Alisa's aging circus body became one of restraint and pain, this aesthetics of failure echoed and amplified Harold's articulation of his own experience as a resident of Huronia, with all of its attendant discursive and physical constraints, restrictions, enforced bodily sufferings, and other potentially more intimate violations (Dougall 2015).

Alisa Walton and Harold Dougall in the *Recounting Huronia Cabaret*. Photo: Alex Tigchelaar.

Thinking of Hurley's typology of circus bodies, Harold, as witness and party to Alisa's body, was foregrounded—both for himself as well as for the spectator—as having a particular narrative function or personification within the complex histories of institutions such as Huronia and the discourses that sustained them and that they promoted in turn. The inherent criticality of exposing the induced and shared extremity of the two performers, slowly revolving in an intimate dance in which the disabled body leads the constrained traditionally virtuosic body, renarrativizes the experience of enforced institutional suffering by exposing its extreme fleshiness, its implausible arabesques of Agambian bare life. Similarly, the traditional virtuosity of the trained exceptionality of the professional performer is no longer arranged in a horizontal relationship of "excellence" *over* the untrained and disabled body. Instead, the shared power between the performers as manifested in the choreography of routine also expresses—in the context of specific and nuanced artistic choices—an aesthetic counterpoint organized along a horizontal axis of transversality and complementarity.

The simultaneously dual and recursive performance of allyship stages exceptionalisms and virtuosities in productive counterpoint via the intermediary of circus arts. These arts have historically both freed and constrained similar bodies in different ways more directed toward spectacle. And yet, despite the innate exceptionalism of a man with intellectual disabilities, we are invited to consider through Harold's circus work in the context of the BwO that disability is a doing rather than simply something we are. This opens up his experience to renarrativization, the gradual disentanglement from trauma, and shifting to different narratives than ones of victimhood frequently mobilized as part of the process of litigation that led to the class action. The spectator watching the work sees Harold's dancing, marked as it is by shivering hands and an uncertain step, in counter-distinction to Alisa's suspended assurance that demands the extremity of restraint and contortion to bring its fleshiness, its bare embodied self to the surface, simultaneously visible through the flames of the

virtuosic. In this moment of foregrounding of freakery to displace its effects, another virtuosity, one beyond the singularity of Alisa's achievements of her acquired exceptionalism, appears through Harold here. A sort of *virtuosité du quotidien*—a virtuosity of the everyday—is paradoxically exposed in Harold through the convergence of the acquired and innate exceptionalism of these two performers as their character or personifying bodies of the autobiographical renarrativization shift through the shared performance. The result is the revelation of a common origin of both pain and affirmation in which performance is harnessed as a means of displacing minoritizing and enforced performativities and corporeal subjections.

This work is the work of caution in the face of the dangers of "wild destratification" mentioned above: in this particular instance the risks of retraumatization, of physical injury through the work, and of reinscription of minoritizing enfreakment of the types that Harold and the others had already been subjected to during their time at Huronia, and since. Deleuze and Guattari describe a procedure of careful experimentation brought to the fore in the work Alisa and Harold undertook:

> Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. (1987, 161)

What are some of the implications of the work of creating the "small plot of new land" of the performance? Deleuze and Guattari continue their observation immediately above by noting that "It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO" (1987, 161). In the careful and meticulous process of creating and performing the work, in actualizing affective and corporeal intensities of the BwO, ultimately freakery itself as a negative term is displaced back onto its source, rather than letting it rest on the resultant site of its projections. An *affirmative freakery*, that of a continuously productive differentiation and generation of difference, is left in the wake of its captured and minoritized cousin. In their performance of pain, tenderness, multiple virtuosities, memory, and trauma, Harold and Alisa affirm their difference, their freakiness. They do so outside of discourses of "nonnormativity" and pathology, working instead to manifest the BwO that inheres in the ways in which they have each been captured and stratified. This movement of the shedding of external subjectivation understood by dominant discourses to be natural leads then to a broader examination of the entire structure of feeling supporting and generating such discursive and embodied "judgments of God." Deleuze and Guattari describe this shift from individual exploration to broader social bodies:

> We are in a social formation; first see how it is stratified for us and in us and at the place where we are; then descend from the strata to the deeper assemblage within which we are held; gently tip the assemblage, making it pass over to the side of the plane of consistency. (1987, 161)

Following these directives, it is clear then that the discourses and institutions that would construct the freakery of disability through the process of exotification, channelled anxiety and projection are challenged. These discourses and institutions themselves are foregrounded as aberration, pathology, in need of correction. Emphasizing this dynamic, the crip circus performance of the cabaret was supported by a display of objects placed around the periphery of the auditorium that drew attention

to the medicalization and pathologization of IDs that occurred in Huronia. Physical restraints, whipping belts, barred crib cots, phrenological equipment: these objects referenced the history of the freak show as a historical precedent for disability theatre. They also foregrounded freakery and aberration as central to the institutional and discursive dynamics that medicalized and pathologized those it actively constructed as other. The discourse is sick, not the "freak" itself. Continuous difference, or *affirmative freakery*, is our collective and liberatory ontological heritage that courageous artists such as Alisa and Harold remind us of through their work.

A conceptual tool such as the BwO allows us to recognize that the construction of otherness—an apparent bifurcating epistemological premise informing the naming of the Circus and Its Others gathering that led to this journal issue—will always already be but an ontological mirage. Such an illusion posits essential difference where in fact complex relationalities and alliances can always be sought out, affirmed, drawn upon to enact complex horizontal relations of mutual becoming rather than vertical relationships of epistemological or other forms of hierarchization. And so, the work with Barry, Harold, Alisa and others, engaged with via a range of circus bodies culminating in the BwO as a body of ethical potentiality, causes a meta- or methodological consideration at this point in this paper, best posed—given the necessary brevity of the reflections here—as questions. Can we challenge a problematic taxonomization circulating in contemporary circus studies that appears to posit circus practices not pursuing immediately commercial and/or aesthetic ends as being recuperable to the designation of social circus? Does this nomenclature not necessarily reaffirm the cultural supremacy of commercial and/or aesthetically oriented circus and by extension, the dominant arrangements of capitalist and/or neoliberal order that support their circulation as commodities? Can the variously virtuosic but nonetheless socially engaged work undertaken in the context of projects such as the *Recounting Huronia Cabaret* be understood to undermine in part the minoritizing tendencies in the designation social circus? Instead, could those other bodies of social circus, released even slightly from the contortive restraints of a discourse that would posit social as the minor to the major of cultural capital, not just in the world of circus practice, but in the equally potentially constrained field of circus studies, serve as an invitation to posit a Body without Organs of the very field itself? Does the possessive operating in the phrase "Circus and Its Others" risk presupposing that circus owns its others when in fact we've seen that circus understood via the BwO can in fact liberate a field of difference that can reverse the power dynamics implied in such objectification, enfreakment, and ownership? Isn't a circus that embraces its BwO comprised of its own difference, its own differentiation? In short, isn't circus always already its others?

References

Artaud, Antonin. *The Theater and its Double*. 1958. Translated by Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Press.

———. 1982. *Antonin Artaud: Four Texts*. Translated by Clayton Eshelmand and Norman Glass. Los Angeles: Panjandrum Books.

Barken, Rachel. 2013. "A Place to Call Home: Intellectual Disabilities and Residential Services in Nova Scotia." *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 2 (1): 51–70.

Binet, Alfred, and Théodore Simon. 1916. *The Intelligence of the Feeble-Minded No. 12*. Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins.

Bogdan, Robert. 1988. *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. 2013. "Kathleen Wynne Apologizes for Huronia." December 9. http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/kathleen-wynne-apologizes-for-huronia-1.2456565.

Davis, Laura, and Cristina Santos. 2010. *The Monster Imagined: Humanity's Recreation of Monsters and the Monstrous*. Witney (UK): Inter-Disciplinary Press.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1988. *Spinoza. Practical Philosophy*. Translated by Robert Hurley. San Francisco: City Light Books.

———. 1994. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Dougall, Harold. 2015. Interview with Author, February 27. York University, Toronto.

Grosz, Elizabeth. 1996. "Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks at/as the Limit." In *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, edited by Rosemarie Garland Thompson, 55–66. New York: New York University Press.

Haller, Beth, and Robin Larsen. 2002. "The Case of *'Freaks'*: Public Reception of Real Disability." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 29 (4): 164–73.

Hevey, David. 1992. *The Creatures Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery*. London: Routledge.

Hurley, Erin. 2016. "The Multiple Bodies of Cirque du Soleil." In *Cirque Global: Québec's Expanding Circus Boundaries*, edited by L. Patrick Leroux and Charles Batson, 122–39. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press.

Inclusion BC. n.d. "About us." http://www.inclusionbc.org/ about-us.

Infantino, Julieta. 2016. "A Contemporary History of Circus Arts in Buenos Aires, Argentina: The Post-Dictatorial Resurgence and Revaluation of Circus as a Popular Art." In *The Routledge Circus Studies Reader*, edited by Peta Tait and Katie Lavers, 434–52. London: Routledge.

Institutional Survivors. 2014. "Background – Huronia." http://www.institutionalsurvivors.com/background/huronia/.

Kerchy, Anna, and Andrea Zittlau, eds. 2012. *Exploring the Cultural History of Continental European Freak Shows and "Enfreakment."* Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Kuppers, Petra. 2009. "Toward a Rhizomatic Model of Disability: Poetry, Performance, and Touch." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 3 (3): 221–40.

Lavers, Katie. 2016. "The Resilient Body in Social Circus: Father Jesus Silva, Boris Cyrulnik, and Peter A. Levine." In *The Routledge Circus Studies Reader*, edited by Peta Tait and Katie Lavers, 508–27. London: Routledge.

Malacrida, Claudia. 2005. "Discipline and Dehumanization in a Total Institution: Institutional Survivors' Descriptions of Time-Out Rooms." *Disability & Society* 20 (5): 523–37.

———. 2006. "Contested Memories: Efforts of the Powerful to Silence Former Inmates' Histories of Life in an Institution for 'Mental Defectives.'" *Disability & Society* 21 (5): 397–410.

Massumi, Brian. 2002. *Parables for the Virtual*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

McCruer, Robert. 2006. *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. New York: Temple University Press.

People First of Canada. n.d. "Deinstitutionalization." http://www.peoplefirstofcanada.ca/deinstitutionalization_en.php.

Rai, Amit S. 2004. "Of Monsters: Biopower, Terrorism and Excess in Genealogies of Monstrosity." *Cultural Studies* 18 (4): 538–70.

Recounting Huronia Cabaret. 2016. Created by Recounting Huronia Project Members, May 20. Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, Toronto.

Rossiter, Kate, and Annalise Clarkson. 2013. "Opening Ontario's 'Saddest Chapter': A Social History of Huronia Regional Centre." *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 2 (3): 1–30.
Shildrick, Margrit. 2008. *Dangerous Discourses of Disability, Subjectivity and Sexuality*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
Smith, Barry. 2013. Interview with Author, December 10. L'Arche, Toronto.
———. 2015. Interview with Author, February 27. York University, Toronto.
Spiegel, Jennifer Beth. 2016. "Singular Bodies, Collective Dreams: Socially Engaged Circus Arts and the 'Quebec Spring.'" In *Cirque Global: Québec's Expanding Circus Boundaries*, 266–83.
Thomson, Rosemary Garland. 1992. "Introduction: From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity." In *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, edited by R. G. Thomson, 1–22. New York: New York University Press.
Walmsley, Jan. 2005. "Institutionalization: A Historical Perspective." In *Deinstitutionalization and People with Intellectual Disabilities: In and Out of Institutions*, edited by Kelly Johnson and Rannveig Traustadóttir, 50–64. Vancouver: Jessica Kingsley.
Walton, Alisa. 2015. Interview with Author, February 27. York University, Toronto.
Withers, A. J. 2012. *Disability Politics and Theory*. Halifax: Fernwood.

Freak and Queer

Charles R. Batson, Hayley Malouin, Kelly Richmond, and Taylor Zajdlik

====

Toward a Queer Circus: Lessons of and from the Theatre with Jean Cocteau, Barbette, Phia Ménard, and *Les Précieuses des nuits de Montréal*

Charles R. Batson

We'll do this queerly, we said. Musings on questions about queer circus deserve queer treatments, we said. My co-contributors here have no doubt risen to that occasion: Taylor and circus as/through invitation, Kelly with circus as/in kink, Hayley on circus and/of a bearded lady. We'll see how I do, as I examine what appear to me to be intertwining and mutually informing notions of queerness, in-between-ness, danger, and risk in certain circus practices and theories. Through explorations in particular of what queer writer and artist Jean Cocteau, queer circus performer Barbette, queer theorist Mark Franko, and transgender artist Phia Ménard may offer in understanding these intersecting notions, I turn to the 2014 circus cabaret *Les Précieuses des nuits de Montréal* to look a bit more deeply at what it might mean for us all to move toward a queer circus.

Seeing and Seeking Queer Circus

This is not an easy task for me, however, even as I readily identify as—and am just about always read as—a queer dude. I've so long *already* conceived of circus as queer, you see. As I've written elsewhere, I'm a habitual wearer of what, to borrow a concept from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, I might call reparative-reading lenses.[1] Genealogies of critics' recent turn to explore the meanings of affect and feeling in cultural productions almost always include Sedgwick's 2003 *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Sedgwick there offers affect and its ontological knowledges as keys to readings that are "reparative" (Sedgwick 2003, 123). For Sedgwick, a strategy familiar to many of us trained in structuralism and its several "posts" is the "paranoid reading" (123), which would work to show how certain voices and experiences are kept *out* of a particular text. A "reparative reader" would instead seek how that text could, through meanings proffered in vocabularies of affect, offer "sustenance" (150) even to readers not avowedly sustained by the culture surrounding that text. One might imagine, for example, a queer reader thrilling to science fiction texts, with their presentations of emotional and material alterity overpowering, in a reparative reading, the striking paucity of non-heterosexual relationships in their pages. One might similarly imagine a queer circus-goer taking meaning in the very noncommonplace of the spectacle, even as gender roles and gendered

---

Charles R. Batson, Professor at Union College, Schenectady, NY, has published widely on French and Francophone cultural production and performance, including circus, dance, and theatre. The author of *Dance, Desire, and Anxiety in Early Twentieth-Century French Theatre* (Ashgate, 2005), he co-edited with L. Patrick Leroux *Cirque Global: Quebec's Expanding Circus Boundaries* (McGill-Queens, 2016). **Hayley Malouin** is the web editor for *alt.theatre*, a professional Canadian theatre magazine examining the intersections of politics, cultural diversity, social activism, and the stage. She writes and teaches theatre criticism and holds a master's degree in studies in comparative literature and art. **Kelly Richmond** is an artist, advocate, scholar and PhD student in the Department of Performing and Media Arts at Cornell University. Her work explores modes of queer practice in the performing arts, playing seriously with pleasure and potential, affect and arousal. **Taylor Zajdlik** works for Brock University and has a master's degree in popular culture. His interest in contemporary circus and its others began as a study of freak and queer representations in traditional circus but has since become a deep passion for the physical and affective potentialities of performing bodies in contemporary circus.

expressions in those performances often repeat heterosexist codes from beyond the stage. And, yes, you've by now guessed it, I'm sure: I am that sci-fi reader, I am that circus-goer.

If I'm already feeling circus—with its freakish performances and its palpable textures of difference—as queer and as queerly pointing to the humanly and differently possible,[2] I just might be performing a reading of circus as a taste, in the manner of queer theorist José Muñoz, of an alter-world-making. Muñoz's "then and there" of those queer utopias he has invited us all to cruise (see Muñoz 2009) and in which minority subjects have voice, just may be alive for me already: circus's lived and showcased differences already place me, a queer in reparative-reading mode, at home in its own here and now.

You will no doubt see why an exercise on writing about queer circus may be difficult for me. What brand of circus do I explicitly call queer when I the queer have already been feeling at home in just about all of its brands? I mean, goodness, who fergoshsake chooses to hang and twist and go up and down and up and down and up and down again a billowing red silk fabric for six-minutes-fifty-five-seconds except someone in my tribe, a queer, an abnormal, a freak who does stuff differently, who is different? And the oddball gets a huge round of applause at the end! Yes, *that*'s the world I want to be in; that's a world that gives to me—someone whose own differences have not always been received with warmth and applause—life-affirming sustenance.

In order to dive a bit more deeply into the task the editors of this journal issue have given us, I may have to remove (some of) my reparative-reading lenses and look more critically for and at contemporary circus's queer shapes, figures, and impulses.[3] Those lenses off, it becomes certainly intriguing to note the relative paucity of scholarship devoted to the queer in circus and/or devoted to queer circus. As we know, queer theory, musings, and explorations have come to inform much scholarship in many of the performing arts, from dance through music to theatre. And yet in the burgeoning field of circus studies, very little has been written examining queerness, even as one might argue (even *sans* reparative lenses) that the queer—always already the exceptional, the odd, the outsider, the outcast—lies at the heart of circus practices and meaning. There are, of course, notable exceptions to this rule of the silent, absent queer. Peta Tait, for example, has consistently offered important work on circus bodies (including her groundbreaking 2005 *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance*) that includes the queer. A recent (March 2015) Study Day in Toulouse, France, focused on "Queer Circuses and Esthetics," which featured work by PhD students, pointing thus to a potential future of this research. And Mark Sussman penned as early as 1998 a study on New York's Circus Amok called "Queer Circus," perhaps the very first peer-reviewed academic article using those two words together in a title.

The mere fact that these pieces focusing on the queer are rare, with scholarship that engages explicitly with queer theory even rarer, calls out for more work. I thus propose my pages here as one exploration of an explicit engagement with both queer theory and a self-consciously queer performance that draws on specificities in particular cultural and performance contexts, those of Montreal. That city is a self-affirmed circus capital due in no small part to it being the home of the billion-dollar-revenue-stream Cirque du Soleil, even after its recent sale to a multinational conglomerate of financial interests; of the École nationale de cirque (ENC), one of the very few national circus schools on the planet; and of the world-renowned summer festival Montréal Complètement Cirque, which receives support from local, provincial, and national agencies. Indeed, let me insist on saying that the pages that follow present only one, initial, potential exploration of

this particular combination of elements—queer, circus, theory, Montreal. They represent most assuredly a work in progress, a preliminary presentation of a blended engagement with live(d) performances and queer(ed) theories.

Before I look at that explicitly queer-themed production in Montreal in 2014, however, I must note that there is a somewhat vibrant space for some things called queer circus in other parts of North America. There is and has been, for example:[4]

- The Topsy Turvy Queer Circus in San Francisco, which has intimate relations with the famed kink-fest Folsom Street Fair and the city's Queer Cultural Center
- Sir Cupcake's Queer Circus in Portland, Oregon, with resonances, it would appear, to previous events in Portland called "Pervert the Cirque," touted as bringing "kink to the big top"
- A Queer Youth Circus project in North Carolina with funding from "The Pollination Project"
- A queer circus collective called Tangle Movement Arts in Philadelphia
- New York's famed Circus Amok, whose very own bearded lady, Jennifer Miller, served as a keynote speaker for the Montreal 2016 conference on Circus and Its Others, and which serves as the key field of exploration for Hayley Malouin's contribution to this section
- The boylesque star the Luminous Pariah in Seattle, who has performed in queer circuses like Iceland's Sirkus Islands
- A Queer Circus Weekend held in December 2016 at the New England Center for Circus Arts, billed as a "weekend of celebratory LGBTQI circus community"
- A Facebook group called Queer Circus Artists Unite, whose moderator(s) appear to be based in North America
- The 2007 iteration of the queer Montreal circuit party Black and Blue, which featured a (luminous and sexy—I was there) Chinese pole number with Quebec acrobat Dominic Lacasse
- The 2016 version of the gay circuit party Martinée Las Vegas, which featured performers from Cirque du Soleil's Vegas show *Zumanity*, and, in particular, if the publicity stills are to help us judge (I was not there), at least one of the artists involved in the staged male queer coupling in that show (which I have seen)

I must mention that North America is of course not the only site for queer circus productions. Australia, to take a notable example, has the Briefs Factory (long billed on Facebook as "all-male sharp shootin' cabaret of burlesque with balls, high-flying circus bandits & savage gender offenders" [see Briefs 2015]) which Kristy Seymour explores in this journal issue, as well as the Lamplight Circus, a "Circus & Sideshow Burlesque" with what looks to be queer flavours. Australia is also home to the company Circa, which recently hired the queer-identified ENC graduate Nathan Knowles (he is the artist known as Roscoe de l'Amour in the Montreal production described below), and which frequently features its female base Rowan Heydon-White as the strong body who supports the weight of (both male and female) acrobats above her. While my own writings here do not explore a *non*-explicitly queer-themed performance, I would certainly note that, in the case of Heydon-White, having a traditionally male role (that strong base) played by a female does point to at least some flavour of queer somewhere—as does having a bendy boy perform contortionist skills so

very frequently reserved for women . . . but I'll leave the development of these thoughts, perhaps, to others in the section in Gender and Difference in this issue, even as some of them may already be intimated in the intriguing thoughts that Kelly presents below on re-presented gendered bodies. But while I'm pointing in this direction of circus work conceived as nontraditional in gender(ed) terms, I should also mention Stockholm's Gynoïdes Project, billed as "an artistic operation that raises and examines the question of women's agency in circus art . . . engag[ing] in a female-centred circus making" (Gynoïdes), an extremely rich field of exploration and production and creation, given the continued male dominance in training and performance (explored by Alisan Funk in this issue). The time seems ripe to explore the queer more fully, as toward a queer circus we may indeed be going.

Besides, here in North America in the 2010s, the "freak" has returned to take a sometimes literal front stage position. The musical *Sideshow*, featuring in particular so-called Siamese twins, was revived on Broadway for the 2014–15 holiday season; the television series *American Horror Story* had "Freak Show" as its theme for the 2014–15 season; and that festival of things alternative, Burning Man, had as its 2015 theme Carnival of Mirrors, with the event-goers, including myself, making frequent performance and artistic reference to the freak over the course of the week.[5] Indeed, in his review of the Broadway revival of the musical *Sideshow*, the *New York Times'* Charles Isherwood explicitly links contemporary movements that include "geek chic" to circus culture by saying, "Being a freak is virtually the new normal" (Isherwood 2014).

You will have noticed, no doubt, a slippage from my digging to locate the queer in performance and scholarship to this reference to the very-much-still-present freak. The slipperiness may well be at the heart of our questions, however. Where the freak has become foregrounded from the stage to television, becoming, virtually, that "new normal," can we say that the freak is still freakish, that the queer is still queer? And, then, in the words of the editors of this journal issue in their prompt to us here in our queer(ing) section: "How are contemporary circus practices exploding or extending the stigmas around conceptions of freak and queer?"

It is here that it seems helpful for us to turn to Hayley Malouin's response to our editors' question—indeed, her *own* question, as she serves as one of this issue's editors—to get some deeper understanding both of these multiple intertwinings and of the uses and meanings of this arguably (nay, demonstrably) slippery word "queer." Her "Queer Hatchings: Carnival Time and the Grotesque in Circus Amok" offers a productive examination of the celebrated New York–based queer troupe and what happens when its bearded lady does/is/becomes/remakes/deforms Lady Liberty. Is it carnival? Is it grotesque? Is it queer? Does it do queer things? Are we queered by it? What might appear if the grotesque itself is queered?

To Hayley, then:

====

Queer Hatchings: Carnival Time and the Grotesque in Circus Amok

Hayley Malouin

In the fall of 2006, in a park in New York City, on a portable wooden stage painted a garish purple and adorned with bright red curtains, Jennifer Miller emerges from a plywood egg dressed as a swan.[6] She recites, in a frank, conversational tone, Emma Lazarus' poem "The New Colossus." Given Miller's rather unorthodox emergence from this giant prop egg, her high-glam outfit

prominently featuring a white feather boa, and her full beard, her performance—evocative of both drag and cabaret—is perhaps a vastly different turn of phrase than the one intended by the stern engraving at the base of the Statue of Liberty:

> Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
> With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
> Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
> A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
> Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
> Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
> Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
> The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
> "Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
> With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
> Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
> The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
> Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
> I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" (Lazarus [1883] 2002, 233)

The scene is from *Citizen*Ship: An Immigrant Rights Fantasia,* a show by Circus Amok—New York City's queer free-to-the-public circus collective that tours its public parks. Jennifer Miller, circus artist and professor at the Pratt Institute, is Circus Amok's emcee and artistic director.

Jennifer Miller in *Citizen*Ship*. Photo by Shehani Fernando.

In 2006, *Citizen*Ship* took the ramp-up of the US war on terror under the Bush administration and subsequent US presence in Iraq, as well as the surveillance of citizens and residents within US borders, as inspiration for its sardonic commentary. The political observations in Miller's distinct delivery of the words "world-wide welcome," dripping in sarcasm, are self-evident, as is the poignant irony in Miller's (and Liberty's) call for the world's tired, poor, homeless, and tempest-tossed to join her.

Miller emerging out of her plywood swan egg is a very different kind of "mighty woman" than the one described in Lazarus' poem. She is not only vastly different in appearance to the lady liberty, who, by way of being made of copper, embodies those conventionally idealized feminine traits of silence and immobility; her tone is also simultaneously derisive and passionate, and she takes serious liberties (so to speak) with the text, teasingly foregrounding the nationalistic contradictions interwoven into the American cultural imaginary. The language, so elevated and expertly structured in Lazarus' poem, is sloppy and windingly topsy-turvy in Miller's rendition. As she thus de-forms the text, Miller's sing-song delivery ends up being both direct and exploratory, inviting her audience to peek in between and at the words and stanzas as she does; her performance is a lesson in critical thinking, delivered with expert comedic timing.

The contradictory tension thus implicit in Miller's performance evokes certain conceptions of the grotesque and queer. As Miller slinkily creeps out the tip of her roughly hewn shell, she can be seen to both emerge onto and produce a carnivalesque space, a space of "becoming, change, and renewal" (Bakhtin 1968, 10). Her emergence onto the stage is also an emergence *in*to the space—that is, she is simultaneously revealed and coming into being—in which she is "reborn for new, purely human relations" (10). Importantly, and as evidenced by Miller's oh so frank and free delivery, such relations are loosely structured and deceptively complex, allowing for an equally complex, politically-oriented carnivalesque style of expression to also emerge alongside (and, indeed, within and through) her. The grotesque, championed by Miller, not only takes part in these new human relations but produces them, thus invoking a politics that is itself resoundingly grotesque and resoundingly comical—inescapably funny.

What's more, the humour is the point. As Andrew Stott writes, the grotesque denotes "a form of humorous monstrosity devised for satiric purposes, [which] marries the repulsive and the comic" (2005, 87). The humorous monstrosity in this case is not necessarily Miller herself—although her own unique brand of gender-queer "monstrosity" is no doubt foregrounded, with her pristine white feather boa and her bushy, dark beard—but rather the illogical contradiction between the words engraved on the Statue of Liberty and the US immigration policies she alludes to. The grotesque in this instance marries traditionally comedic circus elements—the comically large egg, the general satirical and festive atmosphere of the event—with the repulsive: the xenophobia and racism masquerading as policy in discourses of national security. Rather than display itself *as* the abjected, humorous monstrosity on the margins of normative society, the grotesque in this case, including those dripping de-/re-formed words, demonstrates the monstrosity *of* the normative society. Such a process readily invokes a particular queerness because the grotesquery of the moment and of Miller refuses to remain securely in the margins—the margins of society and, yes, the margins of Lazarus' poem—instead insinuating itself within and through normative space, within and through the text. The grotesque in this case, then, is not only queer, but also a queering force.

That Circus Amok is most definitely a queer entity is not news. The troupe describes itself as "a queer celebratory spectacle" committed to providing "free public art addressing contemporary issues

of social justice to the people of New York City" (Circus Amok 2017). The folks at Amok are already in the queer business, both by way of their content and their subversion of many classic sideshow tropes. The infamous "Bearded Lady" is no longer the nineteenth-century subject of fear and intrigue; she is emceeing the show. Bodies of all shapes and sizes perform acrobatic routines, play instruments, and walk on stilts; rather than focus simply on dazzling feats, these routines—in words, allegory, gesture—also educate or instruct the audience on anything from immigration policy to handling a stop-and-frisk encounter. The freaks are quite literally running the show, and they are queer as folk/fuck.

Cast of *Citizen*Ship*. Photo by Shehani Fernando.

The implicit critique and challenge to historically marginalizing notions of freak and queer in Circus Amok's work are thus self-evident. As explored above and below, I propose that the freakiness and queerness of Circus Amok are also implicitly grotesque—that is, that Circus Amok as a freaky and queer/ing entity functions in a larger socio-political milieu much in the same way as the grotesque. Further, this queer force reverberates in a myriad of directions, so that the very notion *of* the grotesque is subverted and re-imagined by such queer manifestations.

The terms queer and, to a lesser extent, grotesque are no doubt contentious. In that arena we call the "real world"—by which I refer to those social spaces of colloquial interaction rather than the supposedly "unreal" world of circus and performance—the explicative "Queer!" is not so much uttered as an exuberant celebration of nonconformity, but as an act of violence. An exploration of the act of *queering,* then, is not and cannot be a simple act of reclaiming those words that accompany, to quote Miller herself, the "seething, white, heterosexual, patriarchal, misogynist fist of social control" (2016). As such a brutish description suggests, this social control is distressingly adept at recapturing and harmfully reinforcing even the most resistant of terms and concepts. And so, even as I work through what we might ever so easily refer to as "the queered grotesque" and "the grotesqued queer" in Circus Amok, it does well to remember that simply naming the grotesque as queer and the queer as grotesque through linguistic sleight of hand does not do the "good works" it may seem to. Further, the risk is run of identifying these terms too closely with the bodies and

movements of Circus Amok in a manner that reduces them to the sideshow exoticism they attempt to disrupt.

To engage with the queer and the grotesque, then, is to engage in the fraught and ever-pressing project of bodies—plural. While the grotesque body and the queer body make fine critical tools in resistance to aggressive heteronormative, patriarchal regulation, to render them as exclusively such is to be complicit in the ongoing violence waged against a myriad of tender, brittle, firm, mutating, leaking, racialized, gendered, pathologized, entrained, multiplicitous bodies that continue to *be*.

Grotesque, the Noun

That many-formed moniker of literature, art, and culture we call the grotesque has a long history of disruption and unrest. Emerging out of the tense relationality between the classical world of art, culture, and civilization and the unnatural world of wilderness, animality, and paganism—a relationship dating back to the Italian Renaissance rediscovery of Roman art and aesthetic treatises (Russo 1995, 3)—"the grotesque" can be seen to emerge out of and in relation to the norms that it exceeds. Kayser claims that the grotesque is a restructuring of the categories that constitute our view of the world: "The grotesque is the estranged world . . . it is our world which has been transformed" (1963, 185). Similarly, Thomson suggests a basic definition to be: "the unresolved clash of incompatible in work and response . . . the ambivalently abnormal" (1972, 27). A key characteristic of this category, claims Thomson, is "the fundamental element of disharmony, whether this is referred to as conflict, clash, mixture of the heterogeneous, or conflation of disparates" (20).

Bakhtin's work on the grotesque and the carnival in *Rabelais and His World* echoes this notion of disharmony. He writes, "[the grotesque] reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming" (1968, 24). The disharmony of the grotesque, thus, is the discordance of process; it is becoming itself. This discordance also conversely constitutes an unbecoming, as the grotesque represents the undoing of the social order, of the world, as we understand it. The realm in which this simultaneous becoming/unbecoming, doing/undoing is made possible is the carnival, subject to its own carnivalesque time. In this sense, the grotesque can also constitute what Deleuze and Guattari call a rhizome, a being "always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 25).[7]

More specifically, the grotesque body is in disharmony with the social world and as such is estranged from it. The grotesque body is never fully expelled, however, as it must emerge as a deviation from the norm in order to maintain the borders of normalcy itself. In other words, the grotesque is granted a marginal status so that bodily regulation may persist. Bakhtin refers to this process as the degradation of the grotesque body, the "transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (Bakhtin 1968, 20).

Herein lies the rub. Even if the carnival and the grotesque represent, as Bakhtin claims, a "temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank" (1968, 10), carnival time and the reign of the grotesque conceived as such will always retain the majority of their power because of their brevity. Despite Bakhtin's claim that, during carnival time, life is subject only to "the laws of its own freedom" (7), the grotesque and the carnivalesque remain undeniably subject to the prevailing laws of social order that arguably emerge all the stronger after carnival time is over. The freedom of carnival time is always contingent on the rigidity of official time, just as the grotesque Other is always contingent on the normative Same.

Queer, the Verb

Can the grotesque, then, ever be freed from such a dynamic of control? In order to see how queerness can challenge or even halt what seems to be the inevitable recapture of the grotesque, let's first explore how the grotesque interacts with queerness. In some ways, given its functions of discordance and disharmony, the grotesque is already queer. As E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen write, "queerness has always been marked by its untimely relation to socially shared temporal phases" (McCallum and Tuhkanen 2011, 6). They continue: "More often than not, this connection remains defined in negative or hurtful ways, ways that reinforce queerness as a failure to achieve the norm. Or queerness is altogether excluded from the very possibility of trajectory" (6). Such a fate rings similar to that of the grotesque as always and persistently marginal, and to the conceiving of carnival time as wholly separate from and irreconcilable with official time. Like the grotesque, the queer is that abject, marginal entity through which the heteronormative patriarchal order maintains itself. Also like the grotesque, however, "it is precisely the skewed relation to the norm that . . . gives queerness its singular hope" (8).

In Circus Amok, artistic director Jennifer Miller is both at the centre of the ring and the centre of this kind of resistant queer hopefulness. Miller's work with Amok and other groups is a common enough topic in circus studies—for good reason. As a queer woman with a beard, Miller plays a key factor in the mobilization of certain notions of the grotesque in Circus Amok's work. Bearded ladies, as they have been known, have been a longstanding staple in circuses and sideshows of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Miller herself has performed at Coney Island's Sideshows by the Seashore as Zenobia, a woman with a beard who encourages women in her audience to embrace their own facial hair. Bearded ladies, as Rachel Adams notes in *Sideshow U.S.A.,* "have typically been figures of exaggerated femininity whose facial hair stood out in jarring contrast to their voluminous gowns, jewelry, and elaborate hairstyles" (Adams 2001, 221). When presented as freaks or curiosities, "bearded ladies" uphold the "normality of the binary opposition between the sexes" (221). If the secondary sex characteristic of facial hair is meant to signify a normal transition for men into healthy adulthood, any deviation from this pattern must be simultaneously "othered" and captured as freakish, abnormal, and grotesque.

Jennifer Miller in *Citizen*Ship*. Photo by Shehani Fernando.

Miller, with her beard, occupies this freak-ish space, in part by way of pervasive binary maintenance that renders her as other and thus marginalized, and in part by her choice to perform in circus and sideshow contexts. A key notion in Miller's work is personal agency; by acknowledging the simultaneous emancipation and exploitation of women's (and other) bodies in sideshow contexts, she inverts this image of the bearded lady from within the same trope of circus that has historically profited from the exploitation of such freakishness. Miller is, as Adams says, "thus ideally positioned to dispute received notions about sex and gender in a manner that coincides forcefully with contemporary feminist, queer, and transgender politics" (Adams 2001, 222).

A longer piece than this might explore how, despite her (often literal) central position in the Circus Amok project, continuous fascinated engagement on the part of scholars with Miller's body as a site of gender trouble runs the risk of re-inscribing the very harmful tropes of spectacle she aims to challenge. Returning to the cautionary disclaimer mentioned above, that terms such as freak and queer cannot be so easily reclaimed and de-barbed, let us instead change course ever so slightly by returning to *Citizen*Ship*.

An Open Dialogue

Part of the political potential inherent in the grotesque[8] is its ability to reorient the marginalizing gaze in order to see monstrosity and disharmony in the official social order. This ability is exemplified in *Citizen*Ship* in a scene between a Latinx nanny and her white employers, who are bemoaning her resignation due to her being "so good with the kids" and "so affordable."[9] As the two parties argue, moderated comically by Miller and a posse of juggling clowns, a man stands up in the crowd—who are seated for the most part on camping chairs and blankets on the ground—and screams "Why don't you go back to Rio Argentina and leave the jobs for good Americans like me?!" The performers onstage engage him readily, admonishing him for interrupting the act with such xenophobic sentiments. Upset, the man yells, "I thought this was an open dialogue!" at which point the performers onstage scoff and the audience erupts into relieved laughter as they realize the man might not be an audience member after all, but another performer.

A highly theatrical grotesqueness emerges throughout this scene. From the outset, it is characterized by disharmony, which Thomson claims to be fundamental to the grotesque, not only between characters—the former nanny and her employers, the performers onstage and the audience plant—but also between performers and audience. As the racist audience plant emerges out of the audience, rather than from behind a stage curtain, it is not clear at first whether this interruption is a scripted moment or an authentic outburst. The barrier between performer and audience member, made mutable already by the nontraditional venue, is blurred even further. Having a player emerge from the space coded for audience occupation—although not unique to Circus Amok and indeed perhaps not even that remarkable a theatrical technique in and of itself—works to estrange the audience from the theatrical world. The space is grotesque-d, is carnivalesque-d. This is the world where the grotesque body—exemplified by Miller and her entourage of gender-queer freaks—reigns.

Further, and more importantly, such an exchange demonstrates an instance of what Bakhtin calls "a special type of communication impossible in everyday life" (1968, 10). After the initial interruption, the scene is disrupted once more by another audience plant who engages the first heckler and further decentralizes the stage as the primary playing space. She screams, "Man, why don't you just shut up and sit down! No one wants to hear your pathetic, American, paranoid ranting anyway.

Everybody knows the whole immigration issue is just glitter in your eyes, it's a ruse to get you to not pay attention to the stuff that's really wrong in this country."

Boundaries between performer and audience are once again disturbed as the audience adjusts to another rearrangement of their relationship to the performance. The world of the event is thus doubly estranged; the hierarchical rank, as Bakhtin calls it, of onstage performers and audience—already troubled by the emergence of the heckler—is suspended, as the realm of the playing space is flattened and widened to encompass more and more terrain. This second disruption exemplifies an intensification of Bakhtin's notion of carnival time, which in turn leads to a "carnivalesque, marketplace style of expression" which permits "no distance between those who [come] in contact with each other," who are in turn liberated from "norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times" (Bakhtin 1968, 10). In the case of *Citizen*Ship,* this special carnivalesque communication takes the form of a shouting match about civil rights, immigration, and US imperialism.

Cast of *Citizen*Ship*. Photo by Shehani Fernando.

It is vital that we do not forget what such a liberated carnival time is contingent on, however. As argued above, any freedom or liberation granted by carnival time is always partially made possible by the re-institution of official time, just as any liberating qualities of the grotesque body only exist because of their marginal status in abject contrast to the normative body. This scene in *Citizen*Ship* contains a similar critique. Just as the argument between onstage performers, hecklers, and hecklers of hecklers reaches an apex, the audience plants make their way—still arguing—to the officially designated stage space and join the onstage performers, who are all subsequently chased offstage by a goat.[10] The expanding carnivalesque forum is absorbed back into the stage reality, and the supremacy of the official playing space is reasserted. The special carnivalesque communication, in which distance between parties and official norms of etiquette and expression are suspended, comes to an end, only to be replaced by another scene. Thus, carnival communication and carnival time are always contingent on the re-emergence of official communication and official time, even if this official-ness comes in the form of another circus act.

Nevertheless, any potential melancholy or hopelessness this critique might incite is suspended because of its characteristic queerness. Returning to the core of Circus Amok's mandate, the "queer

celebratory spectacle" of the event prevents both apathetic cynicism and the seemingly inevitable marginalization of the grotesque body. The grotesquery of Circus Amok is always already queer/ed—thus, even though the special carnival communication of the event is absorbed back into a semblance of official time, what is communicated in the carnivalesque space retains lasting resonance directly because of its queer orientation. Queerness can resist normative models of temporality but can also challenge the division between "official" and "unofficial" (or carnivalesque) time. As McCallum and Tuhkanen write, if we conceive of the notion of queerness "not as an identity or a substantive mode of being but as a way of becoming, temporality is necessarily already bound up in the queer" (2011, 8).[11] Thus, the queerness of Circus Amok works to undo the stark contrast between carnival and official time, effectively queering the grotesque so that the kind of liberation found by Bakhtin in the pages of Rabelais, the "special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal" (Bakhtin 1968, 7), might actually take form and emerge—swanlike—from the queer, grotesque egg.

====

Returning with Batson: "Toward a Queer Circus": Cocteau, Barbette, Franko

As we let resonate Hayley's final thoughts on queered time and its possibilities of de-/re-forming traditional reception given to the outcast and the oddball, I'd like to turn back several decades to explore, if briefly, Jean Cocteau's "Le numéro Barbette," that signal and seminal examination of a freakish queer artist of the early twentieth century in France. Across some thirty-five pages, Cocteau offers his musings on the risk, power, and place of the performative work of the (male) American trapeze and wire artist Vander Clyde as the female-gendered Barbette, which had, upon the act's Parisian début in 1923, attracted rapturous attention from the European avant-garde. Importantly, the very title of Cocteau's 1926 essay, which could be translated as "The Act Barbette," points to his sense that it is the *performance* effected by the artist which is the site of what Cocteau calls a "Leçon de théâtre." That polysemic "de" of the French undoes, however, any solid sense of her lesson's relationship with theatre. Does Barbette, in the act, offer a lesson *of* and *about* theatre, thus showing, perhaps, what theatre is capable of doing and making? Or is hers a lesson that comes *from* or *out of* the very locus of the theatre, making, say, "Barbette" and "theatre" co-equivalents, wherein Barbette *is* theatre, they are one, mutually informing, mutually forming? The distinction lies, perhaps, in the directionality of our gaze of what and how we learn: are we looking back upon this thing called theatre from some distance, or do we find ourselves within its transformative cauldron? Such ambiguity of positionality may be intentional: we do well to remember Cocteau's noted penchant to celebrate crossing and crossed boundaries, visually rendered perhaps most famously in his films like the 1930 *Blood of a Poet* and the 1946 *Beauty and the Beast*, in which self-reflective mirrors are also just as many points of passage from one state to another. What is it that we learn, in this lesson of and from the theatre, then? Importantly, in this bi-directional gaze, we see that we, the spectator, are engaged and not "mere" gazers. We are called to cross boundaries. We are called away from solidity. We are called to learn.

In 1992, some six years prior to Sussman's essay on the queer Circus Amok, Mark Franko offered a fascinating—if arguably unheralded—contribution to the then-burgeoning field of queer studies with his essay "Where He Danced: Cocteau's Barbette and Ohno's Water Lilies." He argues there that "a common strategy of [then] recent scholarship has been to reinscribe homosexuality in the suppressed subtext of the dominant discourse, thereby naturalizing what discourse labels unnatural" (Franko 1992, 594): we queers have been here all along, no matter (or, even better, in light of) what

you've been trying to do to us. Franko then warns, "Despite its aggressive sophistication, this strategy has its dangers. It could stamp gay identity as a historical by-product of male hegemony" (594). Watch out: we may be reinscribing the discourse and the hegemony as generative, primal, and essential, or as, if not necessarily our *raison d'être*, our *source d'être*. He proposes a way beyond: "Could the most radical objective for gay discourse now be to reconceptualize maleness in terms of neither the feminine nor the ideologically masculine? By moving onto the terrain of an amplified maleness, gay theory could disqualify, rather than merely subvert, the basis of phobia" (595). His proposed queer goal: an undoing, a changing, of the terms of discourse itself. As Franko then explores this "amplified" nature of gender presentation and representation that would re- and de-form the very building blocks of such (re)presentation, it is instructive to note that it is to a boundary-crossing circus artist that he turns. Furthermore, we remember of course that it is writings *about* such an artist that the boundary-crossing Cocteau pens.

Thus, Judith Butler's presentation of drag as not a mere imitation of gender (re)presentation but also its disruption in her hugely important 1990 *Gender Trouble* find themselves enhanced, with Marko and Cocteau, in the locus of the circus and its own enhanced and amplified crossings. For, you see, not only does the Act Barbette leave us in an ambiguity of gender—which it does: at the end of the number when the male artist takes off his feminizing wig to "reveal" he is a man, Barbette, according to Cocteau, ends up in his gestures showing us even there he is *performing* the role of a man, "interprète le rôle d'homme" (Cocteau 1980, 38), taking on its performative codes: he "rounds his shoulders, spreads out his hands, pumps up his muscles, exaggerates the sporty walk of a golfer" (38–40, my translation). But the ambiguity which is Barbette's multiply-layered performance is also importantly sketched out over the course of a trapeze act, an act of what Cocteau calls "équilibre"—a word frequently translated as balance but which we should remember derives origins from the notion of "equal weight," firmly placed in an in-between-ness. We are not, say, in the realms of liminalities, of margins, of "neither-ness" but, rather, in a space created in and formed of what happens on and across points of balance. And it is *there* we see the radical lesson from and of this theatre. Interestingly, Franko refers to the resultant space, through Cocteau and Barbette, as a "no man's land" (Franko 1992, 596), "outside the tight sexual polarity from which it emerged" (596). I would argue that it is the trapeze and its complex demands on space and balance that reminds us that *this* "outside the polarity" is, rather, a situatedness of being *between*, enhanced by, taking movement and meaning and momentum from, the poles.

Although Franko is less specific about its connection with the circus act itself, he does suggest that the gender performance that has effected Barbette's androgyny is one that makes a "death-defying leap across . . . boundaries" (598). These acts are risky. A polarity/binary-driven system does not allow for the easy purchase of its in-between spaces. Peta Tait's signal work on the aerialist intimates, of course, that the physical risk of the trapeze calls for even more intense engagement with the risk already at play in the fantasmatic flesh of the artist. This risk, with the trapeze, is more than fantasy, more than metaphor, more than metonymy. It is palpable, corporal.[12]

Before I continue my own queer musings, it seems instructive to add Kelly Richmond's voice here at this intersection of fantasy, risk, and body. Her writings offer a close look at burlesque theatricality as it enters and informs certain circus practices and productions. This work engages indirectly in dialogue with Hayley's piece both in its explorations of the promises and failures of the carnivalesque and in its playfulness in working with "queer" as a fertile noun-verb-modifier cluster-construct. Kelly demands us here, however, to experience the potential rewards of seeing pain in the play, of attending to the fruitful frictions among fleshy bodies and fantasies.

====

Monsters in the Cabinet: The Queer Burlesquing of Circa's *Wunderkammer*

Kelly Richmond

Alice Muntz in *Wunderkammer*. Photo by Sean Young.

A fascinatingly queer and kinky trend in contemporary circus practice is the incorporation of burlesque theatricality into the aesthetics and athletics of circus acts. Today "burlesque" conjures a glittering imaginary of glamourized striptease acts, such as those popularized by international burlesque superstar Dita Von Teese and reimagined for the silver screen in the 2010 film *Burlesque* starring Christina Aguilera and Cher. In her 2016 touring show "Strip Strip Hooray," Von Teese recreates a number of routines that originated in the 1940s and '50s "Golden Age of Burlesque": stripping while riding a sparkling fuchsia mechanical bull, and luxuriating in a champagne bubble bath in an oversized martini glass.

Since the 2000s, referents to such hypersexual choreography and retro-glam aesthetic have become increasingly abundant within circus performances. In the 2011 Montréal Complètement Cirque Festival, *Wunderkammer* by Circa, *Le Cabaret* by 7 Doigts de la Main, and *Slips Inside* by Okidok all featured burlesque elements. Cirque du Soleil's *Zumanity,* the "part cabaret, part burlesque . . . sensual side of Cirque du Soleil" opened in 2003 and continues its residency in Las Vegas to this day, thousands of performances later.

Alexis Butler notes that while glitter, glamour and explicitly erotic choreography define popular contemporary conceptions of burlesque, during its origin in the late nineteenth century, burlesque was distinguishable from other variety show acts due to its use of "irony in the form of theatrical commentary [and] . . . emphatic deployment of camp and irony to socially critical ends" (2004, 44). Although the literary use of "burlesque" in reference to grotesque parodies dates from the seventeenth-century *Ixion*, the debut performance of the all-female performance troupe The British Blondes in 1869 marks the theatrical origin of burlesque. This pantomime retelling of the eponymous Greek myth—in which the king of Lapiths has sex with a cloud believing it to be the goddess Hera—was the impetus of a dramaturgical and uniquely feminine genre. The British Blondes created a sexualized parodic showcase of gender through a mix of cross-dressing and

curvaceous feminine bodies, high culture mythos, and low culture dance fads: the result amazed and horrified reviewers: "though they were unlike men, they were in most things as unlike women, and seemed creatures of a kind of alien sex, parodying both" (W. D. Howells, quoted in Allen 1998, 25). Burlesque and The Blondes defined themselves less through theatrical form than through the performers' attitude; as reviewer R. G. White noted: "The peculiar trait of burlesque is its defiance both of the natural and the conventional. Rather it forces the conventional just at the points where they are most remote, and the result is absurdity, monstrosity. Its system is the defiance of system" (quoted in Allen 1998, 2). It was the irreverence of burlesque that in turn aesthetically fascinated and morally repulsed reviewers. Peculiarly queer yet feminine, and jarringly self-aware, the burlesque performers were like nothing Broadway had seen before.

In the 150 years since this radical origin, the dramaturgical practice of burlesque has undergone a number of revolutions. As burlesque performance adapted to the predominantly male working-class audiences of variety hall stages at the turn of the century, the sexual content no longer functioned as a subversive performance of androgyny and gender parody. By the time it was incorporated into the middle-class vaudeville of the 1930s, "burlesque" was synonymous with striptease rather than political grotesquery (see Warren 2005, 240; Butler 2014, 46). While the Golden Age solidified a showgirl iconography of glitter, feathers, fringe, tits, and tassels in the popular imaginary, the emergence of the "neo-burlesque" subculture in the 1990s has brought politicized grotesque sex comedy back onto the burlesque stage. This trend has led Butler to suggest that these dialectical conceptions of burlesque can be understood by defining "burlesque" as both noun and verb: the noun refers to striptease script formula coupled with showgirl aesthetics; the verb refers to a critique of sexual norms accomplished via exaggerated theatricality.

If contemporary circus is adopting the noun form of burlesque into its practice, we do well to ask if it might also engage in the verb. What does burlesquing look like in contemporary circus practice? What are the sexual norms present in circus, and how does burlesque reveal and critique them? How does this critique re-constitute the sexual outsiders of the circus—the freak and the queer?

The spark needed to illuminate answers to these questions comes from the flashing talons of a pair of high heels suspended in a dark abyss, approximately halfway through *Wunderkammer*, the 2011 production from Australian circus company Circa.[13] The act unfolds like so: It begins when a male performer leaps from the ground to catch a trapeze hanging about ten feet in the air. He wears long black pants, no shirt, his chest a bright beacon against sheer darkness. Below him, three female members of the company stand in a line, each differentiated by a sexy bustier costume piece, each perched in a pair of platform stilettos—two shimmering black, one juicy red. One by one, the female performers shimmy up the male performer's body to perform a trick on the trapeze. The woman in the red heels goes last, her partner now suspended upside down, his knees gripping the trapeze beam. As she climbs his body, she forcefully steps into his mouth and her weight transfers, resulting in the crushing pressure of body into shoe onto skull. This single step is loaded with meanings that tie together and burst apart gender, desirability, arousal, agency, and circus.

Jesse Scott and Emma Sergeant in *Wunderkammer*. Photo by Justin Nicolas.

At first glance, these glistening cherry shoes readily hail cultural codes that dictate the performance of feminine sexuality. The costume piece cites a script where the wearing of high heels has the power to both feminize and sexualize the performer in the eyes of the spectator. This act of gendering and sexualization is, as we know from Judith Butler and others, performative and thus fallible: the script requires the performer's movement to seem effortless, rather than rehearsed and carefully navigated. Under the performative conditions the ability to balance and move with ease and grace atop minuscule platforms is a given, the constant injury these confining torture devices inflict on the body erased: should the performer reveal to the spectator the calculation or pain that underlies the wearing of the high heels, she will fail to be perceived as feminine or sexy.

By this same performative requirement of perceived effortlessness, the shoes serve as a symbolic representation of the practices regulating the artistry and eroticism of circus activity. Circus scholar Helen Stoddart calls the fundamental principle of circus artistry "the illusion of ease," a theatrical style maintained by choreography that works to cover the "level of physical discipline, body regulation and hardship which are unrivalled by any other western performance art" (2000, 175). The performance of effortlessness is a defining feature of circus theatricality, allowing the athletic activity of circus performers to be differentiated from the practised skill of sports or rehearsed choreography of dance. Thus the circus is also performatively fallible: should the trick be performed without the illusion of ease, it fails to read as artistically circus to the spectator.

The illusion of ease regulates more than just the mode of athletic artistry conveyed by circus performers. Rather than a product of rigorous training, the ease with which circus performers defy gravity can be imagined by the audience as near supernatural (see Tait 2005, 108). This fantasy of boundless freedom extends past the material bodies of the performers and into the cultural imaginary surrounding circus: the carnivalesque.

The carnivalesque is imagined by Mikhail Bakhtin as "a world turned inside out," where all organizing social principles are overturned, allowing for the "working out in concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a new mode of interrelationship between individuals, counterpoised to the all-powerful socio-hierarchal relationships of the noncarnival life" (1998, 251). Depictions of the circus as a carnivalesque space proliferate across media and are often embraced within the core narratives of circus shows themselves. This would seem to position circus as the ideal medium with which to critique the noncarnival social life, including the scripts governing the sexual desirability and agency of performing bodies.

Paradoxically, however, expectations of the carnivalesque have prevented spectators from recognizing how quotidian hierarchies dictating the distribution of agency and desirability onto socio-sexualized roles of gender, orientation, ability, race, and class are replicated in performance. As Stoddart has noted:

> Far from being a carnivalesque space in which disorder, illegitimacy and inversion reign, [the circus is] rather one in which there is an incorporation but also a hierarchal ordering of both the force of chaos and inversion and those of order, ascendency and power in which the latter invariably maintain the upper hand. (2000, 5)

As long as the illusion of ease perpetuates the fantasy of a dis-ordered space of freedom and otherness in the circus, any hierarchical regulations that limit sexual agency and desirability to normative bodies within the circus remain concealed from the audience. Thus in order to reveal and critique sexual norms, burlesquing the circus must also parody and unpack the illusion of ease.

So to return to the shoe. How can the piercing insertion of stilettos serve to overturn the insidious imaginary of carnivalesque dis-regulation? When Circa performer Emma Sergeant steps into her partner's mouth, she critiques the presumption that her performance grants her freedom from the pain and confinement of gendered sexuality. In order to engage this critique, the spectator must be made aware of the fallibility of feminine sexuality. This work is done by camp, the hyper-exaggeration of style involved in burlesqu*ing*. Bursting in contrast to the bare feet of her male counterpoint, or the disappearing matte black of her female costars, Sergeant's six-inch glistening blood-red talons bring the spectators' attention to how her feminine sexuality is theatrically constructed and campily artificial. Having signalled the sex-gender scripts at play with supersaturated iconicity, Sergeant works them ironically. Instead of using the devices to hide the rigour her body endures to ignite the spectator's desire, Sergeant sadistically externalizes this pain onto the body of her partner. This ironic inversion of the campily exaggerated sexual script fulfils Butler's definition of burlesqu*ing*, but the work of the critique does not end here. In live performance the gasps, groans, and giggles from the audience indicate the empathetic connection created by the act: rather than being affectively immersed in the wonder of Sergeant's precarious balance, they feel the crushing weight placed onto the partner. The rejection of typical circus affect critiques not only the effort of feminine sexuality, but also its tie to the illusion of ease.

This burlesque of gender and circus transforms the sexual dynamics at play between Sergeant and her partner, and between Sergeant and her audience, catalyzing an exchange where the submissive balletic sexual object becomes surrogated with a dominant queer subject. Historically, circus has used the theatrics of hyperfemininity to distract spectators from the athletic muscularity of otherwise feminine bodies (see Tait 2005, 69). Partnered with the gentle sensuality generated by the illusion of ease, hyperfeminine costuming coded the female circus body as a nonvolatile sexualized object. However, violent action disrupts passive heteronormative coding. As Tait has noted in relation to the "aggro femme" character of Circus Oz:

> Aggressive physical action by female performers remains double trouble. It exposes the way that bodies are socially identified according to patterns of movement so that atypical action undermines gender demarcation. . . . When a female displays brute force towards others, this can imply a parody of masculine aggressiveness or feminine gentleness but both upset conventional ideas of identity. (2005, 131, 137)

In *Wunderkammer*, it is not only ideas of identity that are disrupted, but also feelings of desire. Sergeant becomes queer not only because her activity falls outside the heteronormative script, but also because of the way it ignites arousal in the spectator. I take my definition of queerness from Moynan King who describes it as "a multiplicitous state suggesting transgression, dissent, desire, and self- identification" (2012, 5). Under this definition, queerness emerges somewhere between its use as an explicit indicator of sexual orientation (desire and self-identification) and its cooption as a more general term for any and all nonnormative practice (transgression and dissent). Queerness in burlesque is always rooted in a dialogue of desire, where the desired, arousing object transforms into the desiring, aroused subject through a violation of regulatory sexual practices. Sergeant undergoes this queer transformation as she inflicts her rejection of a fetishized feminine role onto the flesh in front of her, and like an act of voodoo, the spectator recoils in sympathy. Sergeant's queer subjecthood allows her to sadistically control the bodies on both sides of the footlights, requiring them to desire her differently, queerly, affectively aroused by her agentic activity rather than passive presentation. Carried by a traditional sexualized and feminine circus body, Sergeant's eroticism would be dependent on the illusion that her body is harmless, weightless and pliable, without matter or agentic impact on the spectator: the spectator is the agent who desires. By burlesquing this dynamic, Sergeant reveals how circus artistry denies agency to feminized circus bodies and offers an alternative. In place of the illusion of ease, burlesque transforms sexualized circus into a queer practice where the physiological engagement of the spectator is evidence of the performer's effort and empowerment.

The theme of queer eroticized pain continues throughout *Wunderkammer* as glistening scarlet campily coded props reeking of sexual fetishism (ribbons, bows, tassels, bustiers, lace panties, scarves, and pointe shoes) all have their moment in the sadomasochistic spotlight.

Yet even when these explicit burlesque referents disappear, the violence inherent in circus's regulation of sex and gender is revealed through the burlesquing of circus activity. In the penultimate act of *Wunderkammer*, two of the female performers engage in a number of adagio, hand balancing, and tumbling tricks. The movement between poses is slow and sensuous, as the performers run their hands along one another's bodies, signalling a touch to enjoy and explore rather than simply to hold and balance; as a result, the act feels explicitly erotic. Just as the spectator becomes lulled and aroused by this gentle movement quality, one performer leans suggestively across her partner's body only to finish the motion by biting her partner's arm and aggressively tears

her into the next balancing trick. From there, the act disintegrates into a confusion of erotic violence where the hair, ears, and mouth are transformed in handles for lifting the body, all without disrupting the sensuous quality of touch and reach.

Freyja Edney and Emma McGovern in *Wunderkammer*. Photo by Justin Nicolas.

The lack of burlesque props and costume in this act allows the activity of the bodies to read as pure "circus." Thus the critique in this sequence reveals how even in the absence of theatrical indicators of gender and sex, circus works to regulate both. Here the campy stylization is in the posture and movement of the bodies, rather than their adornments. Gender becomes camped as the two female performers repetitively strike mirroring postures, drawing to attention how tableaux subtly reiterate gender norms in the circus. Peta Tait has noted how in hyperathletic circus acts such as aerials or acrobalance, moments of free fall are framed by gendered gestures taken from a culturally recognizable ballet vocabulary (Tait 2005, 24). The doubling of these gestures in *Wunderkammer* draws attention to the artifice of this convention, emphasizing for the spectator how the femininity of the performers relies on the perceived femininity of these shapes.

Similarly, the sensual stylized touching showcases how the effortless circus body is equated as erotic. The theatricality of the reaching, stroking, and gripping between bodies in this act is standard among contemporary circus shows, a core element of how artistry, ease, and erotics are inextricably linked in circus. As Tait notes, "a mystique arises with artistry of seamless fluid action when it falsely looks easy and painless" (2005, 108). *Wunderkammer* rejects this aesthetic throughout the show; instead, hand gestures, grip adjustments, and the occasional vocalized signal are all clearly demarcated in performance—occasionally creating the sensation that the spectator is watching a rehearsal rather than a finished show. In contrast, the two female performers here engage in balances and lifts identical to those performed in the rest of the show, while the exaggerated theatricalized movement

quality creates a hypersexual affect missing from the effortful theatricality that characterizes previous acts.

These exaggerated codes of gender and sexuality are once again ironically played with through the introduction of violence. The performers become paradoxically feminized and masculinized, virginal and licentious, through the genre-defying mix of effort and ease. The performers do not lose their coding as feminine and sexual upon the introduction of violent action, but instead this burlesquing re-constitutes how their agency and effort create and transform this code. They become queer subjects performed into being, using the very circus conventions that exist to prevent such monstrosity.

Thus the burlesque of the illusion of ease through erotic violence begins to evoke the spectre of the freak. In traditional circus, the coding of circus space as big top/sideshow created a united identity of the carnivalesque performers as "exceptional" but differentiated the basis of this exceptionality: superhuman achievement of feats vs. subhuman irregularity of biology (Stoddart 2000, 25). The burlesque re-constitutes the origin of arousal from the fantasy of freedom not onto the skilful effort of the performers, but rather through their aggressively material bodies.

Burlesque proves to be a queer and freaky practice when set at play among the codes and conditions of circus performance. Left unexposed, the erotic regulations of circus are insidious and normative, limiting the role of desirable bodies to cis-hetero-able-bodied performers who successfully create an illusion that their bodies lack matter, and therefore pain, pleasure, desire, or agency. To fail at sustaining the illusion of ease, in most circuses, is to fail at the successful completion of the trick, or the surrounding theatrical choreography. This failure is distinctly unsexy, intentionally depicted only by the clowns (Tait 2005, 123, 132). Yet burlesquing the illusion of ease proves to be an erotic re-mattering of circus bodies. As the performers in *Wunderkammer* complete their tricks in ways that bring the freaky flesh of their bodies to the centre of attention, they demonstrate that they too feel pain and pleasure. The performers transform the eroticism of their trick through queer violation and violence, by exaggerating rather than erasing their materiality, by effortfully and intentionally engaging an audience of voyeurs in a sadomasochistic exchange. This queer freaky eroticism does more than performatively produce sexual agency; it also deconstructs the carnivalesque fantasy. If circus is truly a carnivalesque space, there would be no regulations to break down and no arousal generated from these violent acts. For both performer and spectator feeling queerly and feeling freaky offer a way of desiring against the revealed normativity of circus.

While *Wunderkammer* is not particularly radical in the circus bodies it burlesques into sadomasochistic sexual power (the performers are all read as white, able-bodied, and of a size normative for circus acrobats), the successful queering of sexualized gender dynamics suggests that race, ability, and size could too be confronted in a burlesqued circus. Burlesqu*ing*, camp and irony, exaggeration and inversion are stylistic tools available to any director, choreographer, or performer interested in sexual play and critique. Queerness imagined as spectator-desire ignited by performer-transgression, and freakery as the exploration of exceptionally material bodies, offer generative new sexual identities, positions, and dynamics to be explored through further burlesque, performance, theory, and circus.

====

Returning with Batson: "Toward a Queer Circus": Phia Ménard, Danger

Kelly's exploration of re-generated fantasy and re-formed convention as a site for queer(ed) practices and stagings calls me now to add to *Wunderkammer*'s pain-transferring blood-red stilettos the image of shattering and melting glass as evoked and presented in the work of French transgender circus artist Phia Ménard, in particular through her 2012 video declaration "Manifestly Phia."[14] Over the course of more than thirteen minutes, Ménard walks through principal tenets of what she promises to come in an artistic manifesto that she tells us will be a book, an object that we shall be able to "hold in your hands" (Ménard 2012), even as we don't have it or see it yet. Exploring the theme she declares to inform all of her work, that of "the meaning of transformation and erosion and our relationship with this situation" (Ménard 2012) in which transformation is a constant in human life—and where, for example, upon the instant we are born, we "begin to age"—she speaks to us through the moving, intangible pixels of electronic media about a physical object yet-to-come (and still yet-to-come, as I write these lines in 2018). Evident in-between-ness indeed, for this queer artist, as the very medium of a message of constant change, constant trans-formations, and constant crossing of forms.

Phia Ménard. Photo by Tristan Jeanne-Valès.

For her 2008 creation *P.P.P.*, which she describes as an exploration of the decision to change sex—in her words, to "change fundamentally one's path in society and in life" (Ménard 2012)—she chose

to work with the theme of ice: water, frozen, yet *not* in stasis as she conceives of it and works with it. H_2O always moving from state to state. And dangerous. As she says, there is not only a *mise en scène*; there is a "*mise en danger*," where the staged scene is one with real peril. Ice falls, randomly; it breaks, randomly; and the artist is in it, on it, under it. Indeed, for Ménard, "the circus artist knows death," and necessarily "makes the spectator think of the danger of life, of the danger of death." But, importantly for both the spectator and the performer, the artist must also know how to "créer l'imaginaire," a French-language phrase which may find itself transformed in English as "create the shared meaning-filled image." She must also "savoir mettre en valeur l'élément pour que ça devienne de l'imaginaire" (Ménard 2012): bring forth, make present, that dangerous element that is carried, through images, to the viewer, the gazer, the participant-spectator.

Perhaps this is where I have been going throughout these pages: even as the queer—the artist, the art—may take literal front stage, the queer—the artist, the art—offers danger, brings forth a threat that is not only metaphorically present in the queer circus arts, in which we are reminded, to borrow a phrase from Judith Butler, that bodies matter. They bear and, in these lessons of and from the theatre, transmit risk as well as the meaning-filled image of risk. In the 2005 *In a Queer Time and Place*, J. Halberstam offers yet another vocabulary that may prove germane to our examination of the risks of the queer circus arts. For Halberstam, the queer participates in structures outside of "reproductive and familial time," living "outside the logic of capital accumulation" (Halberstam 2005, 10). Such queers are not only LGBT individuals; for Halberstam, they can be "ravers, club kids, HIV-positive barebackers, rent boys, sex workers, homeless people, drug dealers, and the unemployed," occupying "time and space . . . limned by risks they are willing to take . . . as they destabilize the normative values that make everyone else feel safe and secure . . . [or live] outside of organizations of time and space that have been established for the purposes of protecting the rich few from everyone else" (10). These "queer subjects" à la Halberstam are not about being productive in terms of *re*production, of safety, of norms. Even as Halberstam does not use the word, we can see, now, after Ménard, that they are, in fact, dangerous; carriers, transmitters of danger. In their nonproductivity, they present and represent death, death to, of, and in a system structured for accumulation and production of progeny, capital, status; a system structured for upheld stasis at and of delimned poles, away from the threat of the movement and momentum of the in-between spaces.

Before I turn to my exploration of the explicitly queer-themed cabaret show in Montreal that offers, in my analysis, an eloquent working out of queer risks and dangers, I'd like to use Taylor Zajdlik's contributions to our editors' questions to remind us of the power of a queer(ing) performance. The power to show and effect change. The power of exploring, living, moving, feeling differently.

====

Queering Circus Sessions

Taylor Zajdlik

My initiation into the world of contemporary circus came in the form of an invitation. On May 21, 2016, I was invited to attend the final production of Circus Sessions,[15] a weeklong Toronto-based creative laboratory produced by Femmes du Feu at the Toronto Harbourfront Centre. I had been researching and preparing to assist with the Circus and Its Others conference held in the context of the Montréal Complètement Cirque Festival later in the summer, and I had not seen a stage show that would fall under the classification of "contemporary circus." As we know, this new circus formula blends traditional circus skills with performing arts such as dance and theatre and tends to

follow a more character- and aesthetics-driven approach. My readings thus far, which included Robert Bogdan (1996), Yoram Carmeli (2001), Shayda Kafai (2010), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993), had suggested that, through its dramaturgically-oriented formulae and the agency employed by its exceptional, physical bodies, these contemporary circus performers might be able to find and create a space where they can transcend objecthood and retain control over their distinct corporealities to perform in acts that then open the audience up to new physical and ethical potentialities. In conversations with the leaders of the Circus and Its Others project, I had begun to process the possibility that contemporary circus could use current narratives to create a noticeable aesthetic and ethical distancing from traditional circus. By creating a performing space for freaks, queer and socio-cultural outsiders, these progressive shows could be capable of becoming productive sites of exploration of and for gender performativity—or so I had come to understand intellectually. I thought I was ready . . .

I arrived in Toronto on Saturday, the morning after the festival's first performance. My day began with a series of discussion panels in the Harbourfront Centre that truly set the stage for what was to be an eye-opening experience for me as a newcomer to the circus world. Presentations about directing and dramaturgy in contemporary circus and a Q&A with representatives from the Quebec-based organization En Piste speaking about their national research on circus initiated rich discussions about contemporary circus's place within the performing arts. I came into these discussions unaware of many circus terminologies and—now that I look back—I feel that my lack of experience enabled me to make several observations, with fresh and new eyes, about this vibrant group. I noticed the tangible sense of community within the theatre space which endorsed and perhaps foreshadowed what read as the personal narratives of the circassians that constructed the show itself. I learned throughout the day how many of the people surrounding me during the discussions were actually performers in the show. As these conversations took place in the stage area itself, there grew a tangible, visceral connection between the group and the theatrical space throughout the day. Even with this palpable sense of connection, however, I really did not know what to expect.

The 2016 Circus Sessions featured twelve circassians handpicked and led by Adell Nodé-Langlois. The troupe hailed from diverse backgrounds spanning five families of circus: aerial, acrobatics, balancing, object manipulation, and clowning, while Nodé-Langlois herself, a French clown-actress and aerialist, served as the ringleader for the show (Nodé-Langlois n.d). With just five days to create and rehearse an hour-long performance, the circassians were challenged to use their memories and narratives to stage presentations of their respective self-identities. Under such time constraints, the real-life journeys, talents and camaraderie of these performers—to my eye—forged the show's very foundation, using the adversities and exceptionalisms of its charismatic cast as its creative raw material. Furthermore, the venue, a nontraditional circus complex with no previously installed rigging system, served not only as a communal space that captured and called for the physical prowess of these talented circassians, but also as a space in which the audience could engage—without a proscenium barrier—with the themes and explorations prompted by—I ultimately discovered—the show's queering of heteronormative positions.

In Erin Hurley's words, performing arts are able to cast "subjective experience into readable molds," and she also claims that "emotional expression objectifies the subjective experience" (Hurley 2010, 17–18). And Mary-Margaret Scrimger's descriptions of the pressures of performing suggest that "it also drives exploration and discovery into just how far the limits of body and mind can be pushed" (Scrimger 2016). This became crucial for understanding the impact that this performance had on me

as a viewing/experiencing subject, and, looking back at how much I was affected by the stimulating acts of courageous physicality, I recall a sense of liberation as my understanding of human limitation was stripped away in recognizing these new potentialities.

By generating this connective tissue of affect in the spectator, the intrepid achievements of the performers initiate a suspension of (prior) beliefs, or as Hurley argues, they provide "super-stimuli" which allow for the tangible constructs of the performance to trigger real-life similarities and mental processes (Hurley 2010, 23). By performing in acts that compel us to make connections with real life, these performers use the theatrical space to initiate a reciprocal dialogue with the spectator. By concentrating and amplifying the world's "natural sensory effects," theatre is able to activate what Hurley calls "feeling responses" by focusing the audience's attention on these effects, which then generate *affect* by presenting complementary and/or contrasting viewpoints that, in turn, affect audiences' perception of the world (23, 29). If both parties embrace the potentialities of this relationship, the performance may present opportunities to alter/expand on previously inscribed conceptions of human limitation, both physical and emotional. Such a process underscores these arts' possibilities of showcasing the performativity, potentiality, and malleability of the human form, especially relating to gender.

Roy Gomez Cruz and Yury Ruzhyuv. Photo by SVPhotography.

Perhaps conveying this particular notion most prominently for me was the double act between the troupe's only two male performers, Roy Gomez Cruz and Yuri Ruzhyev. Ruzhyev and Cruz performed an intimate dance in drag, followed by a daring aerial hoop routine that, through the delicate actions of the two performers, called into question—for me—a rigidity of heteronormative gender dispositions. Their emotion-marked routine worked to queer the circus stage and open the audience up to potentially new ideas of biological orientation, gender, and performativity. I use the word "queer" here not necessarily to be synonymous with questions touching on the LGBTI community but rather, as clarified by Schuhmann, as a radical, anti-identitarian position that endorses subversive, transgressive, and transformative practices (2014, 94). This is one facet that

surprised me, a relative newcomer, about Circus Sessions: its ability to create moments of intimacy and emotional connection through stimulating and intricate acts of physicality that cleverly call into question many preconceptions of normativity, thus opening up spectators like myself to new lifeways and potentialities of the human form. I'm a living example of Schuhmann's statement: "The arts can play a role to confuse dominant assumptions of single stories and static identities of gender, sex, age, sexuality, class and so forth" (2014, 95).

Back to Hurley: the affective stimulation offered in theatre allows us to "move out of our ontological isolation, to connect with what and who is around us" (2010, 35). I certainly found this sense of connection, and the act between Ruzhyev and Cruz featured enough camp, satire, and physical exuberance to generate a response in me that was sufficiently provocative that it initiated a re-examination of my own biases and preconceptions of gender. As Schuhmann states:

> people seem to still see the categorising of a body's sex as based in biological difference; as an either/or binary rather than an as well as possibility. We are doing gender constantly and it is so normal to us that we only realise this practice in the absence of its automatism: it makes us feel awkward if we cannot determine the sex of the person next to us in a split second. (2014, 95)

Observing this affecting routine as a straight male, I was forced to recognize many heteronormative paradigms as they were deconstructed by the performers, placing me in an unfamiliar state of re-evaluation. It was the transgression of certain corporeal rigidities that alienated me, à la Brecht, as a spectator. By calling out and undermining strict gender positions through the use of drag, makeup, and camp performance, the performers' malleability challenged heteronormative gender roles by displaying the possibility of the erasure of fixed physical difference. This echoes the work of Bert O. States, who speculated that "the pleasure of viewing such theatrical limitations . . . arise[s] from a dimension of actuality in which the self and the other are joined and exchange natures, thus offering a momentary solution to the enigma of our ontological isolation from the things of the world" (1994, 19–20). As such, Circus Sessions revealed to me that something could exist and excel outside the norm, and thus the Sessions' attention to constructing more fluid gender roles showed itself capable of shattering ontological boundaries to promote acceptance of the nonnormative through the agency invoked by its exceptionally abled actors.

Yury Ruzhyuv. Photo by SVPhotography.

Yury Ruzhyev is a circus acrobat, aerialist, magician and clown who exemplifies a contemporary theatricality through his exceptional physical prowess and onstage creativity. Roy Gomez Cruz, on the other hand, is an academic who studied contemporary circus (as a multidimensional artistic space) before delving into the performance side of the art, ultimately demonstrating talent as a performer by singing and performing aerial skills in this tandem act. Together, these artists' interactions called me to ask myself: How do we sexualize bodies? This question also led me to examine how my thoughts on queerness were initially formed as they were challenged and reconfigured by the performance.

So what was this moving performance? The two men enter the stage area separately; Ruzhyev is in drag, having donned a dress, mid-thigh-high sequined leggings, high heels, and a paper bag mask, this latter's recurrent use and re-use throughout the show ultimately serving as a symbol of individuality, change, and transformation as it was moved and removed and replaced throughout the show. Cruz sings and plays a Spanish love ballad as he paces the stage, shirtless with a bandana on his head. He is closely followed by Ruzhyev, who appears magnetized by Cruz's ethereal movements. Noticing Ruzhyev approach, Cruz turns, pushing Ruzhyev away to maintain a certain distance. They near the silks (an apparatus constructed of hanging fabric on which artists climb, wrap, and drop to create their numbers) that have been positioned at the far end of the stage. Cruz

ascends the silks while Ruzhyev removes his mask, revealing clown makeup on his face as he gazes upwards. Cruz begins discarding his attire while Ruzhyev stands below in anticipation. After catching Cruz's bandana, Ruzhyev runs across the stage to an aerial hoop, climbing up and performing intricate movements. As he does this, Cruz dismounts the silks and follows him to the hoop—and they meet on the stage floor. Cruz assists Ruzhyev in taking off his dress as the two stare at one another, suddenly raising their fists, as if preparing to fight. This immediately reminds us of macho male characteristics that have become predominant gender expectations in a heteronormative society. Here at Circus Sessions, however, the two men lower their fists, looking relieved as the unveiling of the theatricality behind this macho act and its associative trait of dominance becomes queered, made into an act of submission rather than of conquest. Now almost entirely undressed, unflinching in their gaze, they climb up—performing a tandem hoop act relying on one another for support and balance as they spin rapidly. The routine is intimate and physically demanding as the two performers, sexually ambiguous now in their submissively muscled, dragged and de-dragged male bodies, demonstrate their physical mastery in a daring aerials routine that accentuated the connection and harmony between them, even without directly connoting any specific sex-charged eroticism.

These adept bodies perform the scene, exuding a technical mastery and emotional connection that directly points to the bodies' very cultivation. As Hurley suggests, this "cultivation" is what "distances the performer body from its fleshy compatriot" (2016, 133) and reveals those aspects of gender which, as Judith Butler puts forth, "are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence" (1990, 187). If we follow Butler here, can we say that these bodies are performing *outside* of their corporealities, extending the queer space, and dismissing preconceived normative notions of gender for the audience by revealing the inherent performativity involved in heterosexual, hegemonic dispositions?

Descending, the two actors embrace one another, and the rest of the Sessions cast (all female) join them, assisting Cruz in putting on the dress and the high heels before he and Ruzhyev exit the stage on opposite sides. The male-bodied Ruzhyev is then—fascinatingly to my eye that is by now shaken into an awareness of the multiplicities of gendered expression—welcomed into a sisterhood as he is greeted at the edge of the stage by the remaining circassians, further pointing to questions about binary gender coding and rigidity.

Together in their undermining playfulness around the markers of gendered identities, Ruzhyev and Cruz reveal the social coded-ness of gender with devastating elegance. They thus work toward displacing normative gender association by unveiling the potential of gendered malleability. They may well have ended up queering *me* in their work, if we follow Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who suggests that "queer" is simply "a space which disrupts hegemonic and linear interpretations of gender" (1993, 8). She further notes that queer spaces allow for "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlays, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituents of anyone's gender, or anyone's sexuality aren't made to signify monolithically" (8). Cruz addresses this in an interview with me during Circus Sessions, stating that the performance forces us to think "How can we use this space to think about outside?" for he believes "we create our gender identities every day" and that "circus for [him] is a way to conceptualize [this performativity]" (Gomez-Cruz 2016). Here, as Butler suggests, drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender, but it establishes that "hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations"(1993, 125). The space is thus queered by the gender ambiguity displayed in both attire and performance, in addition to the physical work of both Ruzhyev and

Cruz. The queer space created by the performance therefore felt very personal and seemed to express the liberated spirits of the Circus Sessions actors. As Cruz states, "you don't have to be gay, you don't have to be queer to be open to thinking about gender" (2016).

Carlos Alexis Cruz uses L. Patrick Leroux's words to remind us that in contemporary circus "the body becomes the site of the action" (2014, 272). When these bodies overcome physical and/or emotional obstacles, it therefore becomes "a triumph not only for that individual, but also of humanity over obstacles" (272). Watching these bodies generated a bodily response in *me* in which I could feel the hair on the back of my neck stand on end as the energy of the performance—seemingly overbearingly—made me feel almost numb and certainly overwhelmed as my preconceived notions of heteronormative boundaries were disrupted by the unveiling of corporeal actions that opened me up to the potentialities of gender fluidity. This became a transformational experience, one in which my response demonstrated a suspension of prior conceptions and readings of bodies, which were—in the course of these Sessions—replaced with a more complex understanding of the possibilities of physical bodies in motion. As a spectator who was truly opened up to new perceptions of gender expression, I can say that my affective response was a thoroughly bodily reaction to the circassians and their transcendent performance that destabilized my rather normative ways of thinking about sexual and gender expressions. Because it "reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality" (Butler 1993, 125), the influence of drag and the confusing of gender norms become powerful tools for subverting heteronormative constructs. As exemplified by the performance of gender within Circus Sessions, queer art practices are capable of creating "escape routes through patriarchal heteronormativities" and, as Schuhmann claims, can be done through "subversion, irony, and confusion" which can often be "more fruitful than clear cut opposition to regimes of domination" (Schuhmann 2014, 96–97).

This was me. There. Circus Sessions was a major point of self-realization for me, as the construction of the show proved to me that these performance spaces are capable of generating affective responses so powerful as to initiate a reevaluation of one's own preconceptions. I credit this response not only to the performers but also to the established sense of community between them and the emotional responses to some of the performances that I recognized both in myself and in the audience members around me. Although I can only speak for myself, I think that these components of contemporary circus had a resonating impact on the entire crowd at Circus Sessions and will continue to serve as valuable ethical tools in the performing arts. I immediately was welcomed into this space where I was inspired not only by the dedication that drove these performers to their physical limits, but also by the tangible emotional connection that made the show's transgressive themes reverberate and resound.

====

Returning with Batson: "Toward a Queer Circus": *Les Précieuses des nuits de Montréal*

The title of Taylor's affecting piece of welcome, invitation, and change nods back to the fruitful ambiguity of what it means to be and do queer things queerly, joining his voice to that of Kelly and Hayley to remind us of the power of that which is not completely legible or legibly complete. His "Queering Circus Sessions" seems not only to point to the potential of the Sessions to become queer(ed); the Sessions may be able to perform the action of queering, making their spectator-

participants, in actions and in affect, queer themselves. If Hayley and Kelly have suggested that, through certain circus practices and engagements, the carnivalesqued, burlesqued queer just might be able to live into another day beyond utopic carnival time, Taylor may well have shown us that the queer can indeed remain with us. And in us.

Here is where I wish to turn to that explicitly queer-themed cabaret circus show mounted in Montreal in October 2014. The show's venue itself, the famed Caf' Conç, points to certain Montreal specificities as they touch on queer life. This theatre was created in the lower levels of the Château Champlain, a hotel that opened in 1967 with the initial purpose of housing many of the visitors to that year's World Exposition. Montreal as a city was then riding the waves of what is known as the Quiet Revolution, which offered, at least in principle, a greater openness of the city, its province, and its peoples to the world as the province famously went about casting off conservative governance and the related dominance of a tradition-bound Catholic church. As we look at queer (hi)stories here, however, it is important to remember that the city, under the leadership of its mayor Jean Drapeau, also embarked upon a program to clean up its streets and sights for international visitors, resulting in the closing of the previously semi-tolerated queer brothels and bars and sending its queers literally into the streets and parks, including Dominion Square, just steps from the hotel.[16]

Louis Guillemette, a dancer who was part of the founding of the ground-breaking troupe La La La Human Steps in the early 1980s and current instructor at Montreal's ENC, conceived and directed the show. Emceed by noted drag king Nat King Pole, the performance offered a starring role to drag persona Billy l'Amour, who had also danced with La La La Human Steps some twenty-five years after Guillemette, and it featured ENC students as well as dancers from other Montreal companies such as the Ballets Jazz de Montréal. This was not Guillemette's first queer circus scene. I will long remember the notable numbers in 2008 he staged at the kink-themed soirée Kuir at Montreal's Bain Mathieu, with, again, ENC students and others doing black-and-white-clad hand-balancing and trapeze work with evident queer touch and eroticism in the same- and multi-sex pairings (and triplings and other poly-ings). There was, I can assure you, no need for any reparative-reading lenses that night, as the queer sustenance, not only of the *imaginaire*, was palpable and nourishing. Guillemette also crafted the work for a bar-sponsored float in the 2008 Montreal Gay Pride parade which had taken the theme "Place au Cirque!"[17] *Les Précieuses des nuits de Montréal*, Guillemette's thirty-five-minute production in 2014, stands, however, as perhaps one of the few fully developed, explicitly queer circus shows in Montreal, a city whose history of queer performances in theatre has, it is probably not an exaggeration to say, helped give expression to the province's very understanding of itself since the 1960s, given the complex, sometimes troubled, public engagement with works of such queer playwrights as Michel Tremblay, René-Daniel Dubois, and Michel Marc Bouchard.[18] Montreal, too, has hosted queer dance performances that have offered new physical vocabularies since at least the 1980s, contributing to what has been dubbed the *nouveau bouger montréalais*, the newly vibrant physical movements nourishing cross-developments in theatre, dance, and circus in that decade and the years following.[19] As we look at this history, it appears that it is not only queer circus *scholarship* that is rare; even in that Montreal where queers have for some time marked and made its streets and stages, explicitly queer circus *performance* seems yet rarer still.[20]

The opening sequences. Spotlight on Nat King Pole in front of the closed curtain stage. He offers welcome and invitation to "Mesdames, Mesdemoiselles, Messieurs, Kings, Queens, and Queers of the Night." He slides open the curtain to reveal four performers, those "précieuses des nuits de Montréal," circus artists all, that will "entertain, seduce, and ravish" us over the course of the evening. Billy, "la seule et unique Billy l'Amour," then enters, all seven feet of her from heel to wig,

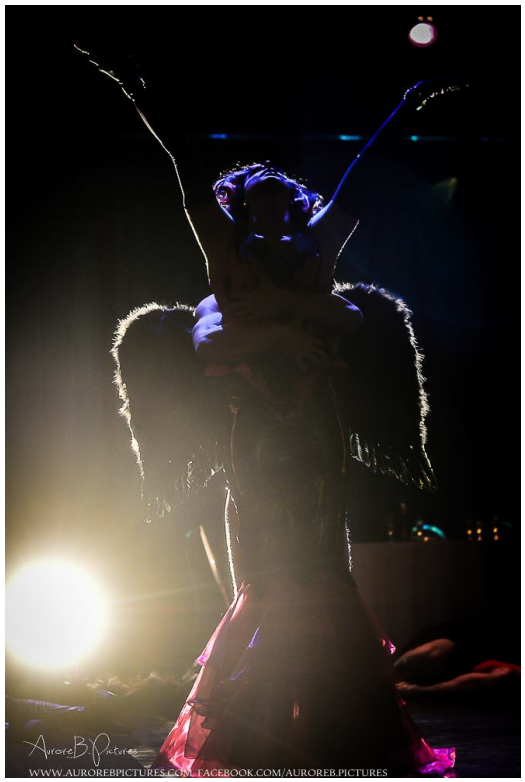
and proceeds to move, within seconds, from a purple-and-black-clad welcome and link her use of the French language with her—and our, the audience's—facility with French kissing. Only four minutes into the evening, and this queer show has already presented one of its dangers: blurred boundaries, blurred identities, effected from across the footlights. This audience is to be as queer(ed) as its performers, who are no mere entertainers; they are called, after all, to do things to us, to ravish us, to move us. As Billy immediately proclaims, before she begins a non-lip-synched medley of Edith Piaf songs: "quand on a l'amour on a la joie; quand on a l'amour on est gay; et vous mes amours vous avez l'amour et vous êtes gay!" ("When one has love, one has joy; when one has love, one is gay; and you, my loves, you have love, and you are gay") "Oui?" A rousing "Oui!" in response is shouted from throughout the hall, even as many of those shouting audience members would not, outside of that hall, self-identify as queer.

From this stasis-threatening queer communion rises another. Billy introduces the first solo circus act, a contortion number performed by Roscoe de l'Amour (mentioned above as a current member of Australia's Circa), naming Roscoe her child—and fathered by none other than myself (in a shock, as the spotlight turned to me in the audience), as one of our many children conceived together. Queer filiations indeed, with a Halberstam-like emphasis on a family that is *other*, one formed beyond productive reproduction. Billy and I have made a child, a contorting, scantily clad, boylesque-star child. This, of course, in a context in which all of us in that Caf' Conç have been made queer, in a gesture that recalls Fintan Walsh's 2009 study of Irish drag performer Panti Bliss in terms that see relationships formed not by legal and patrimonial ties. These queer bonds are those of shared experience and feeling in particular times and places which are themselves queered—in resonances that reach back to Hayley's and Taylor's contributions to these pages—by our recognition of ourselves as queers within them.

The Précieuses of *Les Précieuses des nuits de Montréal*. Photo by AuroreB.Pictures.

But the queer work is not yet finished in this show. Prior to singing "C'est beau un homme," whose lyrics suggest that a man is always (conceived of as) good and handsome, Nat King Pole offers a short (and real) biographical sketch that tells of the power of becoming the performer he always wanted to be, once he put on his moustache. With Pole, we may find ourselves distanced from those undertones in certain analyses of drag that can suggest that a certain melancholy accompanies the play, with all those glittered identities that may also point to a loss behind them in their paste-on of that which cannot be fully had.[21] In *his* drag, there seems little loss: Pole explicitly becomes *more*, a *performer,* a singer, with the signs of maleness becoming vehicles toward the *art*, and not (only) the gender. After all, Pole here sings the song from the first person: this "homme" who is "si beau," this man who is so good and handsome, is a "je," an "I," and in that voice Pole reworks the ending of this classic 1960s torch song to sing, repeatedly, "Je suis un homme," "I am a man."[22] The moustache makes the (singing) man. It is perhaps also interesting to note that, with Pole, we are granted a look back at Marko's reading of Cocteau's Barbette: Pole shows us, exhibits to us, performs on us an amplification, an art made possible precisely in an in-between-ness and because it partakes *of* that in-between-ness.

And then, in a closing number, we discover that this queer world—one also peopled and made in an intervening hand-to-hand number by tutu-clad muscly artists labelled as "une espèce en voie de mutation," de-/re-formed humans lying expansively at multiple points in a gendered spectrum—is one destined for a beautiful death. As Billy sings Dalida's famed "Je veux mourir sur scène" ("I want to die on stage"), one of the Circus School artists, whom we've previously seen as the tutu-wearing base of that hand-to-hand number, returns as a thong-clad angel of death, reaching out to feel his fellow performers and guide them, as they collapse upon his touch, to the floor. Lee Edelman's 2005 *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* stakes a claim for the very centrality and importance of death—death of production, of reproduction, of the explicitly clear and legible—that the queer represents. Indeed, Edelman's queer is one that refuses to embrace established political and social order, one that abandons accommodation, and one that accedes to a state of *jouissance*. And I must say that it is a very *jouissif* Billy who, arms raised, sings, full-bodied, of a death brought, in Dalida's words, "fusillée de laser," shot by stage lights as her queer stage family collapses, showing itself explicitly desirous *not* to go on.



Billy L'Amour, "Je veux mourir sur scène." Courtesy AuroreB.Pictures.

This, too, is that queer family Billy has described in English, as the song begins, as one that has embraced the notion "To choose to live an artfully authentic life is to choose to be unafraid of life, and to be unafraid of death." For Billy and her (our) family, we artfully true ones live a life of death, and we embrace it. As the music ends, her spotlight is extinguished; her arms remain raised as her death-angel grasps her around the torso. She is only backlit from the brightest light on the stage, creating Billy-contoured shadows cast upon the audience. In this lesson in and of this theatre in Montreal, we've all been cast in this show, with something dangerous reflected upon us. An awareness of that very danger, a participation in it.

It seems important to me to use this closing moment to step outside, if briefly, of the Caf' Conç, to remind us of the queer relationship with danger. ENC-trained Cyr wheel[23] artist Matthew Richardson recently found himself on a performance contract to create a number with his partner, the ENC graduate Francis Perreault, also a Cyr wheel artist. That creation process ultimately led to their 2016 video project "The Arrow," showing the two male artists in intimate, embracing, colour-filled movement on a single wheel. I'll now let Richardson tell this story, as presented on his Facebook page:

> Why does love between two men, or two women make so many people uncomfortable, or angry . . . even violent. The inspiration for this project began over a year ago. Francis and I were training to create something together, and I was constantly telling myself, "No we can't do that move, it's too intimate. It's too gay. We're too close. People are going to be uncomfortable seeing that." And at some point I said, "No. Enough. Why can't we tell our story, exactly how it is? Or just be who we are. Why can't we show that we genuinely love each other and have a beautiful story together. Why do I constantly

> have to change my nature for the comfort of the masses? Enough. I'm ready to show something REAL." . . . By chance, we filmed the day immediately after the horrific events in Orlando [at the Pulse queer nightclub that left forty-nine dead and fifty-eight more wounded]. Suddenly this creation meant more. This was such a huge blow on our community, we all felt it, and I knew when we filmed that I would credit the project in their memory.[24]

So yes. Even on front stage, as our freaks have contorted, hand-balanced, and hula-hooped us toward a queer circus, it is strikingly important to see that the queer in circus is still queer, offering the risk of a social order, a community, a performance, a practice that finds amplification in its in-between-nesses while it necessarily points to the real possibility of its own end, its own elimination. As we look to learn our lessons from and of this boundary-crossing theatre, we do well to remember, with Phia Ménard, that, for the queer circus performer, ice—medium, message, apparatus—is never in stasis. It drops and breaks. But, wow, *quelle jouissance*.

Notes

1. I have explored, briefly, some of this reparative-reading potential in an earlier publication (Batson and Provencher 2015).

2. Some of this language is influenced by Roy Gomez Cruz, who is currently completing a PhD at Northwestern University that explores multiple aspects of circus's possibilities and their others with a dissertation tentatively entitled "Transnational Acrobats: Performance, Flexible Labor and Contemporary Circus Communities in North America." Gomez Cruz has suggested that it is fruitful to contemplate the notion of "the possible" rather than the more traditional trope that circus offers, "the impossible."

3. Certain theorists of the current moment and status of queer studies may offer instructive—or at least provocative—intertext here (as I muse about expansive and reparative postures and contexts) concerning the roles and places of queer theory's antinormative stances. See for example Halperin 2003 and Weigman and Wilson 2015, along with, importantly, Halberstam's 2015 critique of Weigman and Wilson.

4. For the list that follows, I draw my information from the following web sources, listed here in the order of the list in the body of the article: https://www.topsyturvycircus.org, http://www.sircupcake.com/home.html, https://thepollinationproject.org/2016/06/03/abby-hylton-queer-youth-circus-north-carolina/, http://tangle-arts.com, http://www.circusamok.org, https://www.theluminouspariah.com, http://www.pridecentervt.org/misc/event/13142-queer-circus-weekend-with-necca, https://www.facebook.com/groups/1504776763148470/, http://www.dominiclacasse.com, http://www.matineevegas.com.

5. I invite exploration of any of the videos published from that year's Burning Man and recommend a quick glance at https://vimeo.com/138807400 to examine the multiple visual cues toward the freak.

6. Footage of Miller's performance can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7ugmGE2PTU.

7. Such a comparison falls short, however, when taking into account what Deleuze and Guattari might call *the radicle-system or fascicular root of the grotesque,* which does not break with dualism (the binary of carnival and non-carnival) but instead reaffirms it through ultimately asserting unity, an all-encompassing worldview in which the grotesque is continuously marginalized. Deleuze and Guattari may very well admonish Bakhtin's carnivalesque breaks from state-sanctioned order, as I attempt to do in this piece, for being "all the more total for being fragmented" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 6).

8. In this context I refer specifically to Bakhtin's conception of the grotesque, as well as the work of Kayser and Thomson, rather than other conceptions of the grotesque in relation to psychological interiority and the uncanny (Russo 1995, among others).

9. Footage of this scene can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTKhku092V8&t=2s.

10. Or, rather, a performer dressed as a goat.

11. Among others, J. Halberstam expounds this notion of a queer time in *In a Queer Time and Place,* arguing that the "new temporal logics" of queer time and space are "useful frameworks for assessing political and cultural change . . . (both what has changed and what must change)" (2005, 2–4). In their conceptualization, time and space are irrevocably intertwined, so that to queerly adjust our thinking about time is to both require and produce a queer conception of space.

12. For other work on some of these gender anxieties and ambiguities, see Ritter and Forrest.

13. All references to the *Wunderkammer* performance are courtesy of a DVD recording made available to me through the library at l'École nationale de cirque in Montreal.

14. Filmed in 2012 and published online in 2014 at http://cryingoutloud.org/circus-posts/manifestly-phia-1348. The English-language translations here are my own from her spoken French in the video.

15. My use of the term "Circus Sessions" throughout this article is deliberately—and perhaps queerly—ambiguous. On the one hand, the term refers to the week-long creative laboratory in which circus artists worked collaboratively toward producing a final show; the term also refers to the two-day event of public interaction, which includes the Friday night production, Saturday's dramaturgical discussions and Saturday's show; it also refers to the actual show itself, which carried the title *Circus Sessions*. Finally, and perhaps most profoundly for me, it refers to this significant, and first, exposure to contemporary circus and its sessions: times, periods, forums, discussions, meetings, gatherings that can transform and engage.

16. For exploration of Montreal's streets as queer, see Batson 2012.

17. English-language translation of this rather idiomatic French-language phrase might give us "Give Space to Circus," or, even, "Make Way for Circus."

18. For a sampling of this rich theatrical history and its multiple meanings and uses in Québécois discourse, see, for example, the work of Robert Schwartzwald.

19. See Tembeck for reference to the *nouveau bouger montréalais*. The work of Guillemette with his partner Pierre Blackburn stands as one example of queer dance performances marking and being marked by this *nouveau bouger*, along with the notable homoerotic stagings of the 1993 show *Bagne* by PPS Productions (recreated in 2015). I should also mention Dave St-Pierre and his striking presence with queer dance in the 1990s and then his own choreographies of the 2000s.

20. I welcome further information that points to yet more queer circus productions in Montreal and elsewhere. I am perfectly thrilled, however, to mention here the presence of explicitly queer stories and histories in the 2017 creation by Montreal-based Les 7 doigts de la main for the Montréal Complètement Cirque festival and the city's celebrations of the 375th anniversary of its founding. In their show *Vice & Vertu* produced at the SAT (Société des Arts Technologiques), situated near the corner of the crossing of St. Laurent and Ste. Catherine streets and thus not far from the original sites of some of the city's queer venues of the early part of the twentieth century, they reconstructed for the circus-theatre performance space certain aspects of the life and performances of the 1950s drag queen Armand Monroe. See for example http://blog.7doigts.com/index.php/2017/07/14/les-personnages-en-quelques-mots/.

21. For a deeper exploration of melancholy performance, see Batson 2004.

22. It is, of course, hugely tempting to see Pole's crafting and claiming of this phrase, "Je suis un homme," as some 2014 intertext to the famous closing declaration "Chus t'un homme" of Michel Tremblay's drag character Hosanna in the 1973 play of the same title, particularly in the context of queer performance in Montreal. Space here does not permit further exploration of such potentially rich and multi-layered connections.

23. A non-aerial acrobatic apparatus made of a single metal ring, in which the performer stands, moves, and rotates. The name comes from Daniel Cyr, one of the founders of Quebec's Cirque Éloize, who crafted its modern form in the mid-1990s in Montreal.

24. https://www.facebook.com/circusspinner/. The video "The Arrow" can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtnJUS30olE; the "making of" can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57uxLr4ZoUE.

References

Adams, Rachel. 2001. *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imaginary*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Allen, Robert C. 1998. *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1968. *Rabelais and His World*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

———. 1998. "Carnival and Carnivalesque." In *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, edited by John Storey, 249–56. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Batson, Charles R. 2004. "Men in Tights: The Ballets Russes, Nijinsky, and Inter-War Melancholia in Paris." *Contemporary French Civilization* 28 (1): 90–110.

———. 2012. "Dis/locating Dominion: *Being at Home with Claude* and Re-membering a Queer Montreal." *Contemporary French Civilization* 37 (2–3): 159–75.

Batson, Charles R., and Denis Provencher. 2015. "Feeling, Doing, Acting, Seeing, Being Queer in Québec: Michel Marc Bouchard, Rodrigue Jean, and the Queer Québec Colloquium." *Québec Studies* 60 (Fall-Winter): 3–22.

Bogdan, Robert. 1996. "The Social Construction of Freaks." In *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, edited by Rosemary Garland-Thompson, 24–36. New York: New York University Press.

Briefs. 2015. Facebook page. https://www.facebook.com/briefsfactory/. Page accessed in July 2015 and source of quote: https://www.facebook.com/briefsallmalecircuscabaret.

Butler, Alexis. 2014. "Re-vamping History: Neo-burlesque and Historical Tradition." *Canadian Theatre Review* 158 (1): 44–47.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

———. 1993. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge.

Carmeli, Yoram. 2001. "Circus Play, Circus Talk, and the Nostalgia for a Total Order." *Journal of Popular Culture* 35 (3): 154–67.

Circa. 2010. *Wunderkammer*. Video Recording of Live Performance. Directed by Yaron Lifschitz.

Circus Amok. n.d. "History." http://www.circusamok.org/history/.

Cocteau, Jean. 1980. *Le numéro Barbette*. Edited by Jacques Damase. Paris: Jacques Damase.

Cruz, Carlos Alexis. 2014. "Contemporary Circus Dramaturgy: An Interview with Louis Patrick Leroux." *Theatre Topics* 24, no. 3 (September): 269–73.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Edelman, Lee. 2004. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Forrest, Jennifer. 2002. "Aerial Misses and Spectating Messieurs: The Paradox of the Lady Acrobat in the French Fin de Siècle." *Peripheries of Nineteenth-Century French Studies: Views from the Edge*, edited by Timothy Raser, 133–55. Newark: University of Delaware Press.

Franko, Mark. 1992. "Where He Danced: Cocteau's Barbette and Ohno's Water Lilies." *PMLA* 107, no. 3 (May): 594–607.

Gomez-Cruz, Roy. 2016. "Interview with Roy Gomez-Cruz from Mexico." Interview by Alex Flores, *@Harbourfront Centre Circus Series 2016*, Youtube, May 20, 2016, Video, 10:55. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3A2h827Q4Cw&t=1s.

Gynoïdes Project. Website. http://www.cirkusperspektiv.se/About/.

Halberstam, Jack. 2015. "Straight Eye for the Queer Theorist—A Review of 'Queer Theory Without Antinormativity.'" https://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2015/09/12/straight-eye-for-the-queer-theorist-a-review-of-queer-theory-without-antinormativity-by-jack-halberstam/.

Halberstam, Judith. 2005. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press.

Halperin, David. 2003. "The Normalization of Queer Theory." *Journal of Homosexuality* 45 (2–4): 339–43.

Hurley, Erin. 2008. "Les corps multiples du Cirque du Soleil." Translated by Isabelle Léger. *Globe: Revue internationale d'études québécoises* 11 (2): 135–57.

———. 2010. *Theatre & Feeling*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

———. 2016. "Les corps multiples du Cirque du Soleil." In *Cirque Global: Quebec's Expanding Circus Boundaries*, edited by L. Patrick Leroux and Charles R. Batson, 123–39. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Isherwood, Charles. 2014. "United by Life, Divided by Dreams." *New York Times*, November 17, 2014.

Kafai, Shayda. 2010. "Subverting the Myth of the Bearded Lady: Jennifer Miller and Circus Amok." *MP: A Feminist Journal Online* 3 (2): 59–80.

Kayser, Wolfgang. 1963. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

King, Moynan. 2012. "Queer Performance: Women and Trans Artists." *Canadian Theatre Review* 149 (1): 3–5.

Lazarus, Emma. (1883) 2002. "The New Colossus." In *Emma Lazarus: Selected Poems and Other Writings,* edited by Gregory Eiselein, 233–34. Peterborough: Broadview Press. Citations refer to the Broadview edition.

Les Précieuses des nuits de Montréal. 2014. Dir. Louis Guillemette. Caf Conç, Montreal. October 18, 2014.

McCallum, E. L., and Mikko Tuhkanen. 2011. "Becoming Unbecoming: Untimely Mediations." In *Queer Times, Queer Becomings,* edited by E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, 1–21. Albany: SUNY Press.

Ménard, Phia. n.d. "Manifestly Phia." Video. http://cryingoutloud.org/circus-posts/manifestly-phia-1348.

Miller, Jennifer. 2006. "Jennifer Miller Circus Amok 2006 Parks Tour." Filmed September 2006 in New York, New York. YouTube video, 1:18. ckaroly2, October 10, 2007. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7ugmGE2PTU.

———. 2016. "Jennifer Miller's Lecture on Circus Amok, NYC—10 November 2016." Filmed November 2016 in Zwolle, The Netherlands. YouTube video, 38:34. ArtEZ studium generale, December 5, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IN9LZgEtWZc&t=164s.

Muñoz, José Esteban. 2009. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.

Nodé-Langlois, Adèll. n.d. "Adèll Nodé-Langlois." http://www.atelier29.org/pages/adell-node-langlois.html.

Richardson, Matthew. n.d. Facebook page. https://www.facebook.com/circusspinner/.

Ritter, Naomi. 1989. "Art and Androgyny: The Aerialist." *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 13 (1): 173–93.

Russo, Mary. 1995. *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity*. New York: Routledge.

Schuhmann, Antje. 2014. "How to Be Political? Art Activism, Queer Practices and Temporary Autonomous Zones." *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 28 (4): 94–107.
Schwartzwald, Robert. 1992. "From Authenticity to Ambivalence: Michel Tremblay's *Hosanna*." *American Review of Canadian Studies* (Winter): 499–510.
———. 2008. "'Chus t'un homme': Trois (re)mises en scène d'*Hosanna* de Michel Tremblay." *GLOBE, Revue internationale d'études québécoises* 11 (2): 43–60.
Scrimger, Mary. 2017. "Pushing Limits on Creation." Harbourfront Centre. http://www.harbourfrontcentre.com/blog/2016/11/pushing-limits-on-creation/.
Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 1993. *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke University Press.
———. 2003. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
States, Bert O. 1994. *The Pleasure of the Play*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Stoddart, Helen. 2000. *Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation*. New York: Manchester University Press.
Stott, Andrew. 2005. *Comedy*. New York: Routledge.
Sussman, Mark. 1998. "A Queer Circus: Amok in New York." In *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology*, edited by Jan Cohen-Cruz, 261–70. New York: Routledge.
Tait, Peta. 2005. *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance*. New York: Routledge.
Tembeck, Iro. 1994. "Dancing in Montreal: Seeds of a Choreographic History." Special issue, *Studies in Dance History* 5 (2).
Thomson, Philip. 1972. *The Grotesque*. London: Methuen.
Walsh, Fintan. 2009. "Touching, Feeling, Cross-Dressing: On the Affectivity of Queer Performance, or, What Makes Panti Fabulous." *Deviant Acts: Essays on Queer Performance*, edited by David Cregan, 55–71. Dublin: Carysfort Press.
Warren, Louis S. 2005. *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show*. New York: Alfred A Knopf.
Weigman, Robin, and Elizabeth A. Wilson, eds. 2015. "Queer Theory without Antinormativity." Special issue, *differences* 26 (1).