Rethinking the Political: Art, Work and the Body in the Contemporary Circus

by

Lindsay Stephens

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Geography and Collaborative Program in Women and Gender Studies

University of Toronto

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Abstract

This dissertation is about the circus, but it is also about how we think through a range of possibilities for individual and social change in the contemporary post-Fordist or neoliberal moment. In the last 40 years geographers, along side other scholars, have documented an increasingly close relationship between social, political, and economic aspects of life in western countries. These shifts have raised concerns over shrinking spaces of resistance and loss of counter hegemonic voices, and increased interest in transgressive or ‘outside’ spaces and bodies as sites of resistance, escape, and social change. Two contested sites that seem to offer promise for resistance, yet are simultaneously critiqued for their participation in dominant discourses, are art (or creative labour) and the body. Despite prolific literatures on these topics in geography in the last decade, links between creative labour, theories of embodiment, and the living practices of cultural workers are still far too rare. To address this I examine the intersection of theories of research, labour, art, discipline,
embodiment and politics, understood through the daily practices of circus performers doing highly physical and embodied work. I focus in particular on clowns and aerialists, performance forms to which I have outstanding access as a performer in these genres. In addition to extensive participant observation over several years of performance work, my research is based on 26 elite interviews with key performers in the Canadian circus community, and an ephemeral archive of visual and textual materials. The resonance of questions about the nature of social research, art and work, and disciplined and fluid subjectivities, opens up new space for thinking across often-disconnected spheres. I believe the presence of circus performers’ lived experiences and my own embodied knowledge throughout this analysis deepens our understanding of political possibilities across many different spaces.
Acknowledgements

I did not begin my PhD program intending to study the circus. I entered the program intending to study homecare. At the end of my first year I was offered the opportunity to travel to Macedonia with a group of Toronto performers to kick off the first annual Skopje International Busker Festival. The timing of the tour overlapped with an academic conference on embodiment which I had been keenly interested in. It only took a few hours for me to decide which one I was going to do, and I have been dealing with the consequences ever since. A few months after the trip to Macedonia (yes that is the option I chose) I had become so involved in my performance life that managing an entirely separate academic life was no longer feasible, with some resistance and some excitement I changed my research topic to focus on the circus. I have never looked back.

The community of performers, producers, teachers, technicians, photographers and fans that make up the circus in Canada have been outstandingly generous to me. They have embraced my work with trust and enthusiasm, and provided me with so many opportunities - creative, financial, educational and emotional. I truly hope I have represented them fairly and adequately - though I know nothing I could write would really unpack the layers of experience, affection, frustration and plain old living that we have shared. Thanks for everything, lets keep building and making fun, outrageous things happen.

I also want to thank my supervisor Sue Ruddick who has had outstanding patience throughout this project, holding space for me as I stumbled my way towards this topic in the early years, and then struggled to achieve some helpful distance from it in later ones. My committee members Emily Gilbert, Minelle Mahtani, and Pat Mckeever were always very generous in their reading and feedback, and fostered my skills and confidence in many diverse and essential ways.

I also want to offer so many thank my dear friends, you know who you are, who have supported me through so many stages, especially when it seemed like my worlds could not quite fit together.

And most importantly I thank my family, my mom and dad and my husband Jeff. All of you have made this possible. My mom with your insightful editing, my dad with your positive spirit, and Jeff who always asks so generously “what can I do to help?” This has been a remarkable and interesting journey, I look forward to the ways it will continue to enrich our lives and hope I can find more and more ways for it to contribute to others lives as well.
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Introduction:

What counts as the political, where is it located, and what does it have to do with emotion, the body and the circus? In the last 40 years geographers, along side other scholars have documented an increasingly close relationship between social, political, and economic aspects of life in western countries. This is seen in a number of areas, namely: an increase in commodification or marketization of daily life (Harvey 1990; Jackson 1999), the growth in consumption of creativity and cultural products (Waterman 1998; Rantisi, Leslie and Christopherson 2006; Currah 2009), the significance of the body as a contested political site (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Foucault 1991; Longhurst 1997; Nast and Pile 1998; Thrift and Dewsbury 2000; Lemke 2001; Massumi 2002; McCormack 2002), and a reorganizing of previously distinct categories such as art, labour, politics, and intellect (Hardt 1999; Florida 2002; Virno 2004; Gill and Pratt 2008; Rancière 2004). These changes have been identified using a number of different terms. Sometimes these changes are called post-Fordism, sometimes neoliberalism or a host of other terms. Though many of these labels have been critiqued for being applied too broadly and indiscriminately to changes occurring at many scales and across many spheres of life, they also have some clear commonalities (Amin 1994; Larner 2003). The elements these concepts have in common clearly characterize contemporary western society as undergoing a significant change in the organization of both social and capital relations. This change includes the penetration of the economic into areas of life that were
previously considered discrete, and the increasing navigation of the spheres of politics or governance, and economics, in and through the body. Documenting the movement of governance and economics to more intimate spaces can been seen in the explosion of geographic interest in emotion, affect and the body, spheres that many scholars describe as a new political battleground (Pile 2009; Wright 2010). But while it is described as new for some, it is considered old territory for others, Wright (2010) for example argues that rather than something new in geography, it was the ongoing work of feminist geographers privileging materiality and challenging notions of rationality and objectivity which laid the ground for the embodied, emotional and affective turns in geography.

Questions about the shifting landscape of the political have raised concerns over shrinking spaces of resistance and loss of counter hegemonic voices (Chiapello 2004; Shaw 2005; Lazzarato 2008), and increased interest in transgressive or ‘outside’ spaces and bodies as sites of resistance, escape, and social change (Fowler 1994; Cresswell 1996). Two contested sites that seem to offer promise for resistance, yet are simultaneously critiqued for their participation in dominant discourses, are art (or creative labour) and the body. Both of these areas have received growing attention in geography in the last decade. Geography has extensively explored cultural and creative labour and its connections with the growing precarity of work in the contemporary moment, but it has remained either critically or normatively focused on the creative city. The discipline has yet to fully engage broader literature on the role of creativity and art in broader social and
economic transformations. In geography the “body turn” has simultaneously amplified questions about the role of the norm in producing compliant populations and new ways to regiment and discipline the body (Foucault 1975; Nast and Pile 1998; Longhurst 2001; Moss and Dyck 2002) while celebrating the political possibilities of rethinking the body (Longhurst 2001; Whatmore 2006 p. 602). Despite these powerful and quite prolific literatures, links between creative labour, theories of embodiment, and the living practices of cultural workers are still far too rare. Discussions of creative labour in geography tend to overlook actual workers bodies and the daily habits, desires, choices and constraints that they work within. I feel strongly that these explorations can be deepened by the work on embodiment and the politics of the body, including emotional and affective geographies, which are becoming abundant in other areas of the discipline. Our understanding of the proliferation of the current economic system requires a deeper examination of affect, interrogation of notions of subjectivity and choice, as well as greater insight into the ways social categories like gender and race continue to discipline bodies. It is these connections that I undertake to make in this dissertation.

As a result of moving between several different literatures, this dissertation straddles a tension that has arisen in the wake of the rapid expansion of interest in the body, emotion and affect in geographic scholarship. While there are many differences between embodiment literature and literature on emotion and affect (which I will explore in chapter 6), these literatures wrestle with similar questions about subjectivity, boundaries, fluidity and materiality, and as a result grapple with
some of the same tensions. In geographic literature this tension is often expressed as conflicts in the meanings and definitions of these terms, but more deeply it is about how we identify and frame the questions that we are using these terms to address. I agree with Curti et al (2011) when they say it is important “to confront the different political and geographical implications affect and emotion have for questions of identity and difference” (p. 590). What is the political territory that we are examining with these terms? What are the frames of reference for our questions? It is this tension I inhabit (rather than resolve) as I find the contributions from these different schools of thought can be productive if used to illuminate rather than obliterate each other.

Pile notes in a survey of affect and emotions in recent human geography, that there is little agreement about the use of the concepts affect and emotion (Pile 2009). And while he comes to some conclusions about trends and tendencies in the use of these terms, these conclusions have been quickly and decisively challenged by other geographers working in these areas (Sharp 2009; Bondi and Davidson 2011; Curti, Aitken et al. 2011; Dawney 2011). In response to the way Pile categorizes emotional vs. affective geographies, Bondi (2011) balks at the constraints a dualistic model places on what she thinks are appropriately fuzzy and unruly subjects. I feel that while these are not “two separate and internally coherent traditions” (p.595), they do come from different lineages (however impure and hybrid each might be) and although they intersect in fruitful ways (for both traditions), they have distinct histories, emphasis and priorities. There are differences in how the terms affect and
emotion have been mobilized (Dawney 2011), not exclusive or airtight differences, but tendencies that reflect the priorities and interests of those using the terms, and that are built in part on the reactions of different scholars to one another, carving out distinct niches for their ideas. However, there is also a lot of overlap, and unpacking how we define and categorize these terms can reveal a lot about our different political projects and intentions in research, perhaps more than about whether affect and emotion are terms which are referring to distinctly different things.

Emotional geography, drawing on a feminist lineage is founded on a concern with subjectivity, the organization of social systems along categories of identity, and the particular political fights that emerge from that. Affective geography, drawing on a philosophical tradition from Spinoza through Deleuze, is more ontological, concerned more with being than with beings. As Dawney says “analyses of affect can successfully consider the material production of bodies without having to posit any pre-social subject or even body” (p. 599). These different emphases produce different results and raise different issues. For example, Sharp (2009) argues that growing use of the term affect has moved the debate away from the approach feminist geographers have taken - of politicizing the personal - by detaching emotion from subjectivity. There is concern among some in geography that “attending to the flexible niceties of a fluid and open social world can divert attention away from a range of more enduring social and political problems” (Anderson and Smith 2001 p. 7). In response to this concern I think affective
geography can learn something from emotional geography about its tendency to remain disembodied, and the importance of evaluating a given approach based on its material impacts in the world. However the philosophical tradition of affective geography cracks open, even more widely, areas which emotional geography has long been approaching, albeit perhaps more tentatively:

It offers an approach that recognizes that objects of social scientific enquiry, such as the subject, the human and the body are not originary, nor are they uncontested as categories, yet they are nevertheless important and interesting insofar as they are produced as effects of the material regimes through which they come into play with the world. (Dawney 2011 p. 599)

Affective geographies can expand and push the thinking of emotional geographies by shifting even more profoundly the ontological terrain on which they lie.

In this dissertation I explore what have been called emotional geographies and affective geographies as well as geographies of the body. Illuminating some of the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, ultimately I believe they need each other to rethink the political in ways that are both innovative and effective. I ask the Spinozist question “what can a body do”, but I ask it not only of abstract and fluid theoretical bodies, but also material and bounded bodies. Through talking about specific performers bodies including my own I am talking about real limits of the body – “what can a body do?” includes examination of what is it able and what is it not able to do. I believe moving back and forth between these two approaches can
open up political spaces while still checking in with the “real world effects” this approach is having (for example on gender and racial equality).

This dissertation is about the circus, but it is also about how we think through a range of possibilities for individual and social change in the contemporary post-Fordist or neoliberal moment. There are four different lines of interrogation that I take through this problem. The first (in chapter 2) is about the methods I used to conduct this research. In this chapter I explore how the kinds of questions asked in this dissertation about embodiment, affect, subjectivity and becoming, invite and require new ways of doing research (Dewsbury 2009; McCormack 2009). In addition to outlining the methods I have used, I also ask, what kind of resonance there is between transformations in social research methods, and the growth of interest in creativity and flexible subjectivity, which the rest of the dissertation explores. The second line of enquiry (in chapters 3 and 4) is an examination of the work that the term Art is doing both theoretically and in the lives of contemporary circus performers. In chapter three I look closely at several theoretical debates about the role of art and its relationship to work especially in the contemporary moment. And in chapter 4 I ask, what light can the lived daily experiences of circus performers shed on these debates? The third question I explore (in chapter 5) is: how do the experiences of circus performers help us understand issues of participation in, or resistance to, dominant disciplinary discourses? I utilize Foucault’s notion of disciplinary discourses and explore the way circus performers participate in and negotiate their relationship to particular gendered, racialized,
aesthetic and emotional embodied expectations. The final line of questioning (in chapter 6) travels through changing notions of embodiment and subjectivity to ask about how shifts in our understanding of embodiment and subjectivity sparked new formulations of the political. And perhaps more significantly this chapter draws on the experiences of circus performers to help answer the question: how can we operationalize these new notions of the political? Unsurprisingly, the intersection of these four approaches does not result in a definitive answer. It does not resolve precisely what political possibilities are available to contemporary subjects, nor does it describe how to be a circus performer who is truly free (from disciplinary expectations and market pressures). It is however a unique examination of the intersection of several ideas that are often not brought together, theories of research, labour, art, discipline, embodiment and politics understood through the daily practices of circus performers doing highly physical and embodied work. I believe that the resonance of my questions about the nature of social research, art and work, and disciplined and fluid subjectivities opens up new space for thinking across often-disconnected spheres, and that the continuous presence of circus performers’ lived experiences in all these areas opens up new ideas and challenges which can deepen our understanding.

Why Circus?

There are several reasons why circus, and circus performers in particular, provide fertile ground for these explorations. The primary one in this instance is that I am a circus performer. I perform as both a clown and an aerialist, and as such I have both
outstanding access, and profound embodied knowledge about their experiences and practices. When conducting research on questions of embodiment, it is strange how infrequently researchers use their own bodies. This insider status opened up many opportunities and challenges, which will be discussed in my methods chapter, and was absolutely essential overall to my intimate understanding of circus performers’ experiences on and off stage.

Aside from my penchant for hanging up side down, there were a number of compelling intellectual reasons for exploring these ideas through the experiences of circus performers. The first is that because of dramatic changes in its recent history the circus currently has a hybrid identity by virtue of being organized as both an art and an entertainment form. As such, most performers are both actively engaged in a labour market, and vigorously involved in defining themselves as outside such market forces. The second reason for exploring these ideas through the experiences of circus performers is the association of circus with marginality and transgression or being ‘outside’ normative or dominant social relations. These concepts become important when unpacking ideas of both art and the political.

The third reason is that circus, which has always been important to North American culture both practically and symbolically, has been experiencing an upsurge in the popularity of circus iconography, circus performances, and circus based lifestyle activities like camps and classes. It is significant that the timing of this upsurge

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1 For notable exceptions please see (Longhurst, Ho and Johnston 2008; Lea 2009).
corresponds to the time frame for socioeconomic transformations classified as both post-Fordist and neoliberal, which provide the backdrop for this research. Finally I also chose to speak to clowns and aerialists specifically because they are primarily non-verbal, physical performers, and as such have developed their physical practices in ways that can offer extensive empirical testing and challenging of what are too often still largely theoretical ideas in embodiment theory. I will address each of these factors in this introduction.

To understand the first relevant trait of circus performers, their feet-in-both-worlds relationship to art and labour it is necessary to understanding something about the history of the contemporary circus. On November 6, 2009 the Canada Council for the Arts recognized “Circus Arts” as a distinct art form. The announcement was also clear that granting circus this status did not come with any additional funding, the same pool of funding would now be dispersed among all nine areas of the arts. As with all policy decisions, this was not a sudden epiphany on the part of the Canada Council for the Arts, but the result of both a dramatic shift in the nature of circus performance and the culmination of many years of lobbying and effort on the part of a number of circuses.

According to Helen Stoddart’s comprehensive book *Rings of Desire, Circus History and Representation* (Stoddart 2000), modern western circus is commonly understood to have started with the first “ring” show put on by Philip Astley in the UK in 1768. However, it did not arise out of nothing, and right from the start
borrowed elements from a diverse set of cultural institutions like Roman coliseums and traveling gypsy shows. Astley’s show was primarily a horse spectacle and the ring shape was designed to best show off the horses’ skills. But it was Astley’s decision to intersperse his riding displays with an eclectic mix of other entertainment forms that helped congeal such a diverse set of activities into one form, the ring circus. In many ways, since the performances were so diverse, it was the development of the space of the circus ring that originated the form. Circus went through many stages of evolution, keeping up with new technologies such as changing from wagons to trains, and adapting to new demands from audiences.

Modern, or what we might now call ‘traditional’ circus, gained popularity and thrived through the 1800s and 1900s especially in North America where the vast scale of circuses like Barnum and Bailey and the Ringling Brothers which toured with trains of over 100 cars became the stuff of legends. The three-ring circus was invented in the 1870s as part of the ever-expanding scale of North American circuses. Traveling circus shows experienced various degrees of popularity, sometimes being associated with vagrancy and ill repute because of the nomadic lifestyle and unusual people associated with it, often times being “the outlaw in relation to vagrancy and middle class morality” (Stoddart 2000 p. 65). Though still going strong at the turn of the last century, circus saw something of a decline in scale and popularity during the 20th century.

This was not the end of circus, however, as it underwent yet another reinvention in the early 1980s. There was a resurgence, or what some call a reinvention of the
circus in this period. There emerged the concept of “new circus”, or the circus reinvented. The language used to describe this change was clear - circus shows and acts created during this time were called Noveau circus, “New Circus”, “Cirque”, “contemporary circus”, neo-cirque, or “reinvente” (Bolton 1987; Babinski 2004; Albrecht 2006). There are still several thriving examples of traditional circus. Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey joined forces in 1907 and still travel and perform all across the US by train. But the new circus, epitomized by Cirque de Soleil is increasingly what people (especially in Canada) think of when they hear the term circus. The main ways in which new circus sought to distance itself from the old circus was in the idea of increased artistry, and the absence of animals. I will deal extensively with the notion of an increase in artistry in circus, but will also briefly address the question of animals in the circus in chapter 5, as they are connected to notions of otherness and exoticism, which have been dominant themes in both old and new circus. Ernest Albrecht (2006), a circus aficionado and popular historian describes the new circus saying:

In addition to all the artistry seen in the various displays of skill, the physical trappings of the performances are extraordinarily tasteful, stylish, and elegant. Nary a sequin or spangle is to be seen in any costumes, which depend instead on fabric, drape and detailing for their effect, even the color palate is restrained. (p.16)

Albrecht among others argues that the “new circus” incorporates more elements of theatre and dance (typically considered ‘higher’ arts) and raises circus to the level of arts (Albrecht 2006). In some ways this is more like European circus, which has
tended towards performances in theatres, while American circuses were still going strong in tents and trains (Stoddart 2000). And it is unsurprising that the biggest growth of new circus has arisen in Quebec, where extensive government support has nurtured a number of fledgling companies like Cirque de Soleil, Cirque Eloise and Les Sept Doigts de la Main, to great popular and financial success. It is this transformation to new circus, with the effort to distinguish this as a more artistic form of circus by the circus community broadly speaking, and specific lobbying efforts by a number of companies and organizations, which has resulted in circus being granted status as an art. It is interesting and relevant that the rise of the art form circus comes at the same time as creativity is being promoted as the heart of new systems of capital production. And this raises questions about: why circus would want to become an art form, why it has done so now, and what this means about both art and circus. I discuss how circus is the kind of art form (mobile, economically viable, and experienced at marketing, entrepreneurship and financial independence), which is desirable in the current socioeconomic moment. Simultaneously I suggest that the meaning that performers give to the different kinds of work they do in different spaces (for example, art or not art), shines a light on the power of desire, and what may remain important distinctions between what we might still call alienated and unalienated work.

Alongside this material history of the circus, the circus has had a remarkable virtual and symbolic life as well. The circus is a powerful myth-maker, operating in symbolic ways to define and reflect the world beyond its bounds (Davis 1993;
Carmeli 1995; Garland Thompson 1996). With strong links to carnivals and freak shows, (Bakhtin 1968; Adams 2001), the circus is perceived as a space that celebrates and capitalizes on transgression, pushing the boundaries of social and physical norms: what is considered possible, and desirable, for human bodies (Stoddart 2000; Tait 2005). While having a material history of spatial marginality - traveling and living on the outskirts of towns - circus has had an almost more dramatic symbolic history captured in the common expression “running away to join the circus”. Stoddard argues that popular culture tends “to make an interpretive leap between disrepute and dissent and assume that the popular may always at some point either voice or at least harbour dangerous politics” (p. 65) and this has frequently been the case with the circus which has inhabited the virtual ‘outside’ for generations of North Americans (Bouissac 1976; Handelman 1991; Davis 1993; Adams 2001). As a result of this symbolic significance a number of scholars have made compelling arguments about the role traditional circus played in shifting ideologies and social concerns during industrialization (Bouissac 1976; Carmeli and Berg 1993; Garland Thompson 1996). So I am simply continuing a well-established scholarly tradition in arguing, as I do in this dissertation, that circus continues to play a significant symbolic, imaginary and social role in current socioeconomic transformations.

Circus is also interesting not just because of how it is changing, but because it is also currently experiencing an increase in popularity. These numbers are hard to pin down for two reasons: due to its relatively small size and newness, not much
research has been done on the contemporary circus industry, and secondly, it is a relatively mobile population since many performers travel with their work, and agents source performers from all over the world for local shows. But there is a lot of evidence that it is growing rapidly. According to En Piste, a circus advocacy organization in Quebec:

[Although] the total number of performances for all performing arts dropped by 5.4% between 2003-04 and 2004-05, the number of circus and magic shows increased significantly by 64.9% during this same period. Along with song (3.8% increase), this was the only performing arts sector that experienced an increase in performances during the reference period. (Jean-Arsenault and Conseil inc 2007).

Although clearly Quebec data is not extendable to the rest of the country since Cirque de Soleil’s presence dramatically influences the findings, and I have not been able to find similar data for the rest of Canada, there is no doubt that circus (and in particular new circus) is having notable success and growth. This growth is not just in the form of large scale circus shows, but even more in the dramatic growth of what could be seen as a new model of circus production, the practice of hiring circus performers and troupes, in formats tailored to clients, to perform at corporate events like Christmas parties, galas, and even private functions like weddings. Because this shift is not yet well documented, I am reliant on my interviewees to comment on these changes, but I feel comfortable, given their centrality to the circus ‘community’, and the length of time they have been working in the industry to feel that these interviewees can legitimately describe this change. Eli Chornenki who
runs Zero Gravity Circus, the largest circus entertainment company in Toronto, says he has seen a tenfold growth in the circus industry in the ten years he has been in business in Toronto. This is growth in the number of circus-based companies (from 1 to 9 or 10), performers (from about 5 aerialists to about 40), and also growth in demand for circus entertainment.

Finally there also appears to be an upsurge in non-performing circus related activities like the use of circus iconography in advertising, and in the emergence of a range of circus based lifestyle activities such as circus themed corporate group team building and circus classes for all ages. Many of the circus companies that have arisen in Toronto over the last 10 years have included adult recreational circus classes and children’s classes and birthday parties in their business model. These non performance-related activities often provide a more stable source of income than the inconsistent entertainment industry.

**Clowns and Aerialists**

Given all of these transformations and the way (as I will argue) they map temporally and thematically onto post-Fordist and neoliberal ideologies and practices, circus is ideally suited as a site to shed light on some of the details and micro-practices of these socio economic forms. My research, however, is not principally on circus as a social or institutional form, although this provides the important backdrop. Although I am interested in issues of institutional structure, I feel that the most productive and most neglected arena for examining these socio-cultural changes is
in and through the body. There is a growing interest within geography in embodiment theory. There is a furthering of the longstanding recognition that bodies, identities and places are deeply intertwined (Nast and Pile 1998; Longhurst 2001), and simultaneously a reintroduction of the category of the body into the realm of the political (Russo 1986), particularly through the uptake of Spinozist and Deleuzian theories of the body as process, a becoming-body rather than a fixed or inert materiality (Deleuze 1978; Grosz 1994; Nast and Pile 1998). With this in mind, I conducted my research with individual performers in order to gain insight into the kinds of intimate governance, and micro processes of power that have become a current site of new ways of thinking about change and politics. As Pratt says the “body is the site where material and discursive, objective and subjective are intertwined; it has been reconceptualized as a site that defies the binaries that permeate Western philosophical thought and philosophy” (Pratt 1998 p. 287). Much of the fear surrounding the development of both post-Fordism and neoliberalism has to do with feelings of futility about escaping from or resisting these dominant practices. Some of the most optimistic notions of the political in recent years have arisen in relation to unpinning the body and subjectivity from static positions, ostensibly allowing new political possibilities to emerge in the new spaces of connection and relationship that open up. In this dissertation I unpack these ideas and work them through using the embodied experiences of circus performers in order to explore further what some of these new political possibilities might be.
I didn’t speak to all types of circus performers. Circus is a very diverse form and conducting interviews across the spectrum of all types of performance would have left me with scattered and disjointed descriptions that would be hard to relate to one another. I chose instead to speak specifically to clowns and aerialists. This decision was informed by my involvement in both performance forms, but also because they each hold a unique symbolic and material place in circus tradition and in relation to each other. The clown and the aerial acrobat have been central to the circus through most of its history. They are present in almost every circus troupe, and often symbolically represent the circus in posters and stories. They are also counterpoints to each other, with the aerialist evoking tension and demonstrating the epitome of human achievement (Tait 2005) while the clown releases laughter and revels in human foibles (Little 1991). These figures also map onto categories that have haunted examinations of the body and social/political processes throughout the history of western thought: the abject/grotesque and the transcendent/sublime (Stallybrass and White 1986). Although rarely examined in relation to one another, like the sublime and the grotesque, the aerial acrobat and the clown are strongly connected: both rely on bodily transgressions (some extraordinary and some mundane), both primarily work in the realm of feeling and affect, and both have undergone significant transformations in Canada in the last 30 years. I position these figures in my research (as in a traditional circus show), side by side to illuminate their similarities and differences.
Overall Patterns

There is a valuable connection between emergent research methods, changing labour practices, and theories of subjectivity and embodiment. Each offers an essential piece to unpacking possibilities for politics and change in the contemporary moment. Transformations in research methods which are recognizing the flexible subjectivity of both researcher and subject, and encouraging ‘creative’ use of both methods and knowledge translation, resonate with the same issues of freedom and disciplining expectation that we find in debates about precarious labour and the blurring of the boundaries between work and home life. Similarly there are important links that need to be made between affective immaterial and emotional labour, and theories of embodiment which foreground affect and flexible subjectivity as potential sites for a new understanding of ethics and politics. Each of these spheres encompasses fears of cooptation, concern for discipline or reproduction of the status quo, and simultaneously suggests possibilities for freedom, escape, and change. Only in the resonance between these ideas can we see some of the patterns and avoid the quick judgment of labeling various processes good or bad - like objectivity or empathy in research, precarity or flexibility in labour, or habituation or fluidity in subjectivity. Only in working through these ideas using multifaceted empirical examples, and the sometimes-contradictory experiences of people navigating these experiences in daily life, can we tease out the nuances and move forward with more applicable, grounded and well-developed concepts.
If there is a pattern in my actions in this dissertation it is to try and unpack concepts about which many scholars, including myself, have been hopeful. These include art and creativity, transgression and resistance, the body and affect. While taking some of the shine off of these ideas, my aim is not just to be critical, but also to move towards a more operational understanding of what are sometimes abstract and seemingly impractical terms. I do believe in the value of happy endings, and I think the kind of stories we tell matter. So I have structured the chapters in such a way that I discuss notions of discipline and practices which are in service to a normative discourse, before describing possible avenues by which we might reclaim discipline from hegemonic fixity, or unfreeze subject positions. In truth these processes don’t have such linearity. Circus and art do resist norms, they push boundaries consciously and through unconscious desires, but simultaneously they inhabit spaces of discipline that limit the capacities and possibilities for both creators and audiences. I will argue that how we determine the distinction between these things lies in the layering and flexibility of subjectivity and in negotiation of habituated and disciplined practices with occasions of newness and change.
Chapter 2: Methods and Embodied Learning

“neither the researcher nor the researched remains unchanged through the research encounter” (Rose 1997 p. 315)

I am a scholar but I am also a circus performer. Hours in the gym, on stage, suspended in the air by my hands, feelings of fear, excitement, and exhaustion, are all a central part of my research looking at art, work and embodiment among circus performers in Canada. The acquisition of this knowledge through years of practice and training is undeniable, but how I translate this embodied experiential knowledge into research knowledge, and how I navigate my continued movement between these worlds, including the process of writing this dissertation, is still a work in progress. I face ongoing questions about which part of my practice (performance or studying performance) is art, and which is research, and I struggle to take responsibility for both kinds of creations.

Figure 1: Left, author during an aerial silks performance

Figure 2: Above, author during a clown performance
It has been over 10 years since Robyn Longhurst described the state of geographical methods in this way:

The mind/body dualism plays a vital role in determining what counts as legitimate knowledge in geography. So long as the mind is privileged over the body, the hegemonic group in geography will continue to edit out that which they consider to be dirty (read: inappropriate, illegitimate topics that geography cannot yet speak of), preferring instead the clean, the clinical, the quantitative, the heroic and the scientific. What constitutes appropriate issues and legitimate topics to teach and research in geography comes to be defined in terms of reason, rationality and transcendent visions as though these can be separated out from passion, irrationality and embodied sensation. (Longhurst 1997 p. 494)

We have come a long way in 10 years - a growing number of scholars are writing seriously about embodied experiences in research (Nast and Pile 1998; Spry 2001; Crang 2003; Wacquant 2004; Crossley 2007; Longhurst, Ho and Johnston 2008). We are at a vulnerable and exciting moment of birthing new methods that expand our toolkit and don’t privilege the mind or deny emotions and the body as research tools. But we are still in transition (and at different stages depending on your sub-discipline). I would like to leap joyfully forward but my experience is that there is a veritable minefield of anxiety-provoking moments, paradigm clashes and difficult choices in this new world.
This chapter looks closely at my own research choices and experiences and asks what does our current methodological terrain-in-transition look like? What contradictory systems and ideas must be reconciled, juxtaposed, or left out, in shifting the boundaries of what we understand as research? How do we best transform new knowledge acquisition acquired through touch, feel and embodied learning into something meaningful that we are collectively willing to call relevant research (Staeheli and Mitchell 2005), and what do we gain and lose by doing so?

Using the body as a research instrument, learning through the body, and acquiring embodied knowledge, are practices that still sit on the cutting edge of research methods and are still in development. Some, like Whatmore (2006), argue that there is an:

- urgent need to supplement the familiar repertoire of humanist methods that rely on generating talk and text with experimental practices that amplify other sensory, bodily and affective registers and extend the company and modality of what constitutes a research subject. (p. 607)

This area of research, inspired by the phenomenological, allows for sensations and emotion to be central to research processes in innovative but still not well defined ways. I firmly believe that these methods undeniably improve the quality and richness of research, as a vast new world of sensations, feelings, experiences and movements are opened up to the realm of data. However, finding ways to integrate this proliferation of data (most of it in very unconventional formats) into research
and writing is still lagging behind. Reading through the existing literature (and my own work) I see moments where the body intervenes or becomes noticeable: moments related to food, strong emotions, discomfort, or physical practices like gym or dance (Spry 2001; Crossley 2004; Bain and Nash 2006; Longhurst, Ho and Johnston 2008). When looking at these particular embodied experiences and physical practices the presence of the body is loud and clear and pushes its presence to the fore. We can see this in Longhurst et al’s recounting of the sensation of disgust experienced in relation to some foods in their research on cross cultural eating, and in Crossley’s first hand descriptions of the sweat, pain and kinesthetic learning he experienced through his immersion in the world of the circuit trainer. But these are still glimpses, interruptions in an otherwise still largely disembodied research paradigm.

Sociology has been slightly ahead of the curve when it comes to fully committing to immersive research practices. Bourdieu wrote quite extensively on reflexivity based on his experience conducting research his home village of Béarn. During this process he says “the labour of analysis was accompanied each time by a slow and difficult labour of self-analysis” (Bourdieu 2003). Bourdieu was at the time doing what was considered by some to be work in the domain of anthropology. Following his explorations, Bourdieu’s student Wacquant (2004) undertook an even more deeply ethnographic project including embodied experience as a central component in his research. He spent three years training in a boxing gym, participating in competitions and tournaments in an:
endeavor to clasp and restitute this carnal dimension of existence... through a methodical and meticulous work of detection and documentation, deciphering and writing liable to capture and convey the taste and the ache of action, the sound and the fury of the social world that the established approaches of the social sciences typically mute when they do not suppress them all together. (p. vii)

He wrote passionately and eloquently, (and he documented diligently and prolifically, and he sweat and bled and bruised) but I wonder, is something still lost in translation? Especially if, as Crossley (2007) says and I have been finding, "embodied knowledge is not discursive knowledge and can’t be put into discourse without distorting it" (p. 87). I too am still struggling with the question of translation. What can I bring to you of the experience of being energized, inspired and transformed by an audience? How can I share the many ways one can approach a piece of equipment - with dread, excitement, familiarity and newness - ways that reveal both multiple selves and the potency of relationships between performers, objects and audience? And most importantly, if I do succeed in sharing these things, what does it produce? What is the impact of doing research in this way?

Geography has been a fundamental contributor over the last two decades to the interdisciplinary discussion about situating knowledge. It brings its insight about location and place to strengthen our understanding that all knowledge is situated and located (Kobayashi 2009). I operate with a keen awareness that my understanding of my research problem and the findings I generate are entirely
shaped by my intimate experiences of being a circus performer. I can’t imagine how
I would understand this intersection of issues of art, work, embodiment and
intersubjectivity without it. But beyond this awareness, I have struggled with what
this actually means. How can I share this knowledge so that this is not a navel-
gazing exercise of repeated self-reflection, or what Kobayashi calls the “slippery
slope of solipsism” (2009, p.140), in which my own position becomes reified
through the act of reflecting/observing?

One response to this is to identify the ways in which my “self” is not stable and
really not even singular. Others who have undertaken embodied ethnographic
research, where their personal physical experiences are a central source of data,
have described how even within themselves the insider/outsider divide plays a role,
with their different voices not always in agreement, and one voice sometimes being
used to “stave off the other” (Davies 1999 p.186). There are many possible
strategies for dealing with this, Panourgia for example (in Davies 1999), when
conducting research on the intimate topic of her grandfather’s death, wrote two
parallel texts, one for her personal experiences and one for her analytic ones. She
then used the textual separation as a way to examine how the two intersected. In
particular she observed the way one voice sometimes held the other voice back.
Others have observed the same thing, as Davies suggests:

Even in the most autobiographical forms of research the ethnographer does
not have unconditioned and unhindered access to knowledge: the question of
insider status is still problematic. Thus ethnographers, even when they are
their own key informants, commonly find their ethnographic self engaged in a process of othering their social self ... using their professional selves to deny or isolate their other selves. (p. 189)

I have certainly experienced this “staving off” or holding back of some parts of myself by other parts throughout this research process and most strongly in the writing stage, the point at which a singular voice or narrative seemed most required (a requirement that could possibly be challenged using a divided text). As a result my multiple selves with their multiple alliances had to do battle for which perspective would end up on the page. If I were to polarize two main identities (which in reality multiply like rabbits, bleed into and feed off of one another) I would say this holding back has affected my writing in both directions. The self that desires to please an imaginary scholarly audience (regretfully comprised of narrow minded symbolic critics rather then the more flexible open minded ones I find in my actual surroundings) has found ways to distance my embodied experience from the text. It has been a real struggle to speak from my experience and make full rich use of the bodily knowledge I have acquired, I have often found myself claiming, “I don’t know how” in response to this task. On the other hand my performance self has dearly wanted to tone down my critical scholarly voice for fear of what its “outsider” notions will do to the comfort and integrity of social meaning within the circus community, and my own position within it. Even though from within the circus ‘community’, social meanings are far from coherent, this seems all the more reason
for my circus self to desire to defend this precarious coherence, especially in the face of something from ‘outside’, even if that ‘outside’ is within me.

“To adopt an essentialized epistemic position based on identity is to deny the very process through which identity is socially constructed, multiply positioned, and contingent” (Kobayashi 2009 p. 140). It is not enough to simply situate yourself, as I will explore later in further discussion of reflexivity. As with all knowledge, “The production of geographical knowledge is thus simultaneously a moral and a political project” (Kobayashi 2009 p. 142), situated knowledge is not just naturally and inevitably situated but actively being situated, and as such has implications for the ongoing production of knowledge and distribution of power.

I have struggled with a sometimes-paralyzing (and perhaps delusional) anticipation of the different audiences who may read this work. Against my own better judgment I often find myself operating as if power were fixed and positions static. I work with a deeply ingrained sense that academia and the researcher are always in a position of power, participants always vulnerable, and therefore while academia ought to be challenged; participants ought to be handled with kid gloves. My active sense of responsibility to my participants, some of whom I continue to work with regularly, as well as my theoretical understanding of the role of power in the research process, has resulted in anxiety when writing ideas that could be perceived by my participants as being critical, especially when I feel they confided in me in part because of my “sameness” and therefore trustworthiness. This has taken the form of
a kind of coddling (in absentia) of my participants, through imagining them as an audience who I did not want to upset or alienate.

I have found comfort in believing if I stick to this understanding of power then I can be assured I am accounting for the moral and political components of knowledge production. But while not entirely false, this is an illusion of moral security, which has been more limiting than liberating, and which downplays the complexity of the research context. It especially fails to account for the effect the research will have once it has been shared. As Rose (1997) says “All these discussions remark that what audiences may do with a piece of research is unknowable” (p. 317). Rather than trying to escape our concerns, Rose suggests that we keep our worries and work with them, the research process is a dangerous one and the kind of reflexivity required is reflexivity that acknowledges its own inadequacy. As Rose further suggests, the research process is a process of transformation for all involved. My position is not static and neither are those of my participants or my scholarly readers, I expect, and perhaps hope that my academic readers will be moved and even transformed through the process of reading this work. I have also come to hope for the same of my circus colleagues, who may read this and agree or disagree, but hopefully will be in some way moved, as I have been by producing it.

**Triangulation of Traditional and Non Traditional Practices**

I used several methods in this research. In addition to the participant observation and embodied learning which I undertook in the gym, on the stage, and in the audience and
which will be a central focus of this chapter, I drew on two other primary sources of data for this research. The first was verbal, oral data comprised of interviews, and one informal focus group. The second was a visual and material archive, comprised of newspapers, promotional material, and policy documents. These two methods have become a common double-barreled methodological combination in geography and are considered relatively safe and well vetted. What are considered acceptable research methods in geography, like many other disciplines was expanded during the ‘cultural turn’ in the ‘90s (Johnston, Gregory et al. 2000; Barnes 2001; Ruming 2009), and has grown even more with the proliferation of more than human geography and non-representational geography (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000; Lorimer 2010). But the uptake of different methodological paradigms has been uneven, and theory has tended to outpace the development of accompanying accepted and vetted tools, as Lorimer (2010) says:

> There is a widely shared sense amongst non-representational and more-than-human geographers that methods are lagging behind theoretical developments and that the discipline requires methodological invigoration and innovation. (p. 239)

So there remains a lot of uncertainty around how to deploy and assess less commonly used approaches. Resistance to the transformation in qualitative methods has also been strong. I would say we are still firmly in what Denzin and Lincoln (2008) call the “methodologically contested present”, in which understandings of what comprise acceptable research methods are being continually negotiated. Despite the pervasiveness of the ‘cultural turn’, a lot of
geography’s theoretical and methodological foundations were laid in the 50’s in the ‘quantitative revolution’ (Johnston, Gregory et al. 2000), and like many other social sciences Geography is still strongly influenced by notions of science found in other more positivist disciplines like health and laboratory sciences.

I undertook these multiple methods because despite my thorough feminist education which rigorously unseats much of traditional positivist research, I find I still partake in what Steinman calls an “epistemological unconscious” of “methodological positivism” (Clough 2009). As I struggle to define my scholarly voice I have found myself afraid of being unscientific. Despite outward resistance, we are still strongly influenced by what Steinman suggests are unconscious residual influences of the positivist paradigm. It is because of this that I chose to triangulate my current research methods, using not just embodied participant observation with its emphasis on the importance of experience, but also interviews and ‘archival’ work. By embodied participation I mean participant observation which foregrounds the researcher’s own embodied sensations and experiences as part of the data, and which emphasizes active physical participation and practice rather than observation and token or symbolic involvement.

Depending on your milieu, triangulation may seem like a straightforward decision or a strange one. The term ‘triangulation’ was coined in psychology in 1959 by Campbell and Fisk, and generally argues that the validity of a study is increased when the results of several methods converge on a single outcome. It has been used
in many different ways since, including triangulation of different theoretical approaches (Kushner and Morrow 2003). More and more researchers have turned to the term triangulation along side the increasing use of mixed methods (Hemming 2008). Triangulation in the social sciences was also taken up as part of an effort to explore and develop methodological practices for a growing interest in critical realist approaches to research (Wai-chung Yeung 1997; Downward and Mearman 2007).

It seems to me that the current uptake of "triangulation" expresses the anxieties of a discipline in transition. Triangulation seems to allow the best of both worlds: openness to multiple perspectives including those that may still be considered less rigorous, while retaining a structure that keeps the uncertainty of post positivist, constructivist or critical theoretical methods somewhat at bay (Guba and Lincoln 2008). Although defined initially from within a rigorously positivist paradigm which aimed at converging on a single truth, triangulation has been used quite often in a less strict manner to suggest that a more complete picture of complex phenomenon can be obtained through the use of multiple methods (Fielding 2009). It is in this latter sense that I entered into this practice, albeit motivated in part by the anxiety and uncertainty of the status of my less conventional methods (embodied participant observation) within my discipline. Although I report on each method independently, I also fear this approach can lead to somewhat inadequate categorization of certain objects and places as more significant, and separable, from others - interview talk is more important than gym talk, writing is more significant.
than sweating - and I question the supposed containment, as if these practices are not supposed to affect each other. The knowledge acquired through practice in the gym informs all the rest of my research as, for example, I can understand a performer’s communication with their equipment in a way that both my interviewees and I had difficulty expressing in words. There are kinesthetic ways of apprehending things that do not easily translate into simple descriptions. Crossley (2004) describes how body builders know far more through their bodies than they can calculate rationally. He says:

If this were a reflective calculation it would be a complex one, involving objective time, overall fitness level, current energy levels, current injuries, etc. It isn’t a reflective calculation, however, it is an embodied feel, a practical sense of self and world derived from immersion in practice. (p. 49)

I think this also describes the challenge for a performer to identify, isolate, and describe the knowledge and experience on which they base decisions and choices when training or on the stage. The process of identification and compartmentalization of terms and experiences is quite challenging. My own kinesthetic knowing allows me some insight into these experiences, which are hard to rationalize and articulate. This also means that my own ability to apprehend information is already contaminated, my interviews are influenced by my time in the gym, and my interpretation of promotional material is shaped by having designed my own.

Similarly my deeply immersed practices make traditional ethical boundaries
difficult to observe. The line between living and doing research was rarely clear and traditional ethical practices like letters of consent which were adhered to and seemed relevant in some environments were relatively meaningless in others where friendships, partnerships and shared physical practices meant that my response-ability to use Haraway’s term\(^2\), went far beyond the rational ethical distance expected of the researcher and subject relationship (Greenhough and Roe 2010; Haraway 2010). Geographers like McCormack (2003) have suggested that awareness of the unbounded relational components of research can extend our ethical sensibilities rather than compromise them, and that in fact standard ethics procedures can “serve to displace response-ability onto a piece of paper or committee meeting” (Greenhough and Roe 2010 p. 45).

Despite my theoretical questions about the notion of triangulation, in practice my interviews proved an invaluable resource. Since my research is concentrated on the last 30 years, the time of the most rapid growth of contemporary circus, I was able to draw on the living memories of those involved in the circus, some of whom have a clear perspective on changes they have seen occur over that time. This research was focused in Toronto and Montreal with two interviews in Edmonton and one in Las Vegas. Largely because of Cirque du Soleil, Canada has had a central role in the birth of contemporary circus, Toronto and Montreal are the most vibrant circus cities in Canada, and my interviewees were some of the key figures in this national and

\(^2\) With the term response-ability she is questioning researchers ability to really respond to and engage with their participants. She suggests we need to rethink our relationship with research participants - human and non human - including our willingness to share suffering with them.
international community. The community is still relatively small, however, Eli, the
director of Zero Gravity Circus, estimates there are about 40 full time circus performers
in Toronto, and about 400 part-time performers. Montreal has a somewhat larger pool
of performers since the National Circus School graduates approximately 20 students a
year. However, many of those are international students who return home upon
graduation, or students who get jobs with international and touring circuses and leave
Montreal after graduation. The number of circus performers who reside in Montreal is
very hard to determine even by En Piste the circus advocacy organization that operates
out of Montreal. They currently have 249 individual members, and 26 corporate
members (En Piste 2011) but are not willing to comment on what percentage of the
Quebec circus community that might comprise, or how many of those are full or part
time performers (Belhumeur 2011).

I conducted a select sample of 26 elite interviews: 12 with aerialists (3 men), 12 with
clowns (5 men), one with a circus agent who heads the largest circus production agency
in Toronto, and one with a civil servant working for the Ministry of Culture in Ontario
who was involved in the development of Ontario’s ‘Status of the Artist’ legislation. I was
not intending to interview bureaucrats but while discussing my research with various
acquaintances uncovered information about this particular policy, which seemed
relevant to my study and so I pursued this one interview with someone who was not a
performer. Given the relatively small size of the performer community my interviews
represented a significant portion of the population. It is important to note that while
varying somewhat in sex, age and class, all my participants were racialized as white.
Both the aerialist and clown performance community in Toronto (and I think in Canada) are largely perceived as white, although they are heterogeneous in other features of identification like country of birth. There are many performers who would not be perceived as white in other disciplines in the Canadian circus community, especially among the large group of performers who were trained in other countries like Cuba and China. But the performers in Toronto and Montreal whose main identification is either aerialist or clown are predominantly racialized as white and so were the performers I interviewed. I didn’t choose a sampling strategy specifically seeking out different racialized groups, and as a result, I ended up with a ‘white’ participant group. It is important to reflect here the way race was able to remain unspoken for much of the research process. This is in part because of my insider status and the shared ‘whiteness’ of myself and my research participants which allowed certain racialized paradigms to remain undisturbed until later in the analysis when my scholarly self achieved some distance from the interviews themselves and I found myself better able to challenge these “silences” and unpack these clearly racialized spaces. I will discuss this racialized organization of bodies in the circus again later in this chapter and in chapter 5.

The interviews were open ended and in-depth and lasted about 1-1.5 hours each, with questions that ranged from how performers made a living to whether they felt different on and off stage [see appendix A for interview guides]. The interview questions were tailored by my familiarity with the experiences and language of the performers and I was able to ask them in-depth questions about the nuances of their performance
experiences. In about one third of the interviews I had some prior acquaintance with the interviewees, who were colleagues, teachers and friends, while the other contacts were either acquired through word of mouth (snowball sampling), or purposive strategies (purposefully targeting relevant people through their activities such as training in circus studios or advertising their circus skills on promotional web sites) (Given 2008). I interviewed people in coffee shops and in their homes and audio recorded all but one interview. I also took part in an impromptu focus group with 10 aerialists who had gathered of their own accord to talk about shared concerns such as applying for grants (after the arts council’s decision) and the potential of joining a dancers’ union, and who generously agreed to let me use their discussion as part of my research.

All the participants provided a wealth of expertise and information based on their extensive experience teaching, directing and performing both freelance and in many different companies and venues (See appendix B for list of full names and dates of interviews). The majority of these performers are key figures in contemporary Canadian circus, many having founded or co-founded and performed in the most successful shows, and having taught in some cases many hundreds of students. All of them were practicing performers actively negotiating the issues at the heart of this project. All of the people I interviewed, with the exception of one, considered themselves to be professional circus performers with performing (and/or teaching/directing) as their main activity and the main or only way they made a living (currently or in the recent past). Most of the clowns had at least 15 years
experience working professionally as a clown. The aerialists had generally been working professionally for shorter time frames from 1 to about 10 years, which is to be expected, as aerial careers are often shorter than clown careers, and these performers on average were younger. Two aerialists (Annie and Shana) run their own performance companies, one of which, “Les 7 Doigts de la Main,” is one of the three top circuses in Canada, and the other, “Firefly Theatre”, is currently the only circus company in Edmonton. One interviewee (Sarah), in addition to performing, is an aerial instructor at the National Circus School, one of the most prestigious circus schools in the world. Six of the aerialists (Shana, Sarah, Caroline, Annie, Anouk and Jon) have worked for Cirque du Soleil or Cirque Eloise (the other two most successful and well known circuses in the country), or the Big Apple Circus, (one of the most well known ‘new’ circuses in the US). Combined, these aerialists have performed on almost all available aerial apparatus and many have even invented their own apparatus in the course of their careers. Many of them are also considered leaders in their field and have been innovators or notably successful in aerial arts over the last decade or more in Canada.

Eight of the clowns I interviewed are leading clown teachers in Canada, who, combined, have taught almost all of the hundreds of new clowns trained here in the last 20 years. They run clown-focused schools like “The Clown Farm” on Manitoulin Island (John), teach their own series of courses (Helen, Francine, Grindl, Sue and Jeff), or instruct at The National Circus School in Montreal (Yves). As performers these clowns ranged from a member of one of the most successful clown Duos in
recent Canadian History “Mump and Smoot” (John), to former and current cast members of Cirque du Soleil (Shannan, Helen, Francine, James). They also work in a range of other clowning jobs like Therapeutic Clowning (Helen) or being a recurring clown character in a popular children’s TV show (Grindl in ‘The Big Comfy Couch’).

Seven of my participants had worked for Cirque de Soleil in the past (only one was currently working for them). They had been employed either for longer contracts or for one-off corporate events. There are two reasons why I did not pursue further interviews with performers from Cirque de Soleil despite their size and apparent centrality to the ‘new circus’. Firstly, I was interested in exploring both the precarity of work for performers, and the possibilities of ‘freedom’ or unalienated labour through creative autonomy. Cirque de Soleil employees did not provide the best avenue to access these experiences. Cirque, although it has begun to symbolize all of circus, in actuality is a (very large) exception to the way work is organized for performers outside that company. For the (sometimes brief) time that performers work for Cirque de Soleil they have quite stable income and some certainty in their working life. Some of them, as you will see later, also complain about a lack of creative freedom compared to life outside Cirque. For performers who never join the elite ranks of Cirque, or for Cirque performers before and after their contracts with Cirque, working life is much more precarious and it was these circumstances which offered me greater insight into the kind of post-Fordist questions I wanted to investigate. In the few explorations of the experiences of creative workers that have begun to emerge in recent years:

the general findings have been that the creative industries are marked by
strong and growing divisions between a small elite that can command high levels of market power, and a growing mass of workers whose skills are generic and in constant oversupply, and who are, consequently, forced to accept low pay and insecure, or precarious, forms of employment (whether this be self-employment, freelance work or short-term contracts). Among this “creative precariat” — as we shall call them — work is generally repetitive and mainly a matter of deploying generic social skills in the construction and maintenance of productive networks. (Arvidsson, Malossi and Naro 2010 p. 296)

Secondly, and more pragmatically, Cirque does not have any standing (permanent) shows in Canada. Most Cirque performers are on tour, and those who are home in Montreal, for example, have usually finished their time with Cirque or are only working occasionally with them and are back to fending for themselves as individual performers.

Although I separate it here for greater clarity, the textual/visual archive I gathered was closely intertwined with my participant observation in that it was my active involvement as a circus performer that led me towards many of the materials I have assembled. Thus the sampling logic is opportunity or convenience sampling (except in the case of newspaper articles) and was directed by the path I took through the circus performance world over the last 6 years. Circus is an ephemeral practice, springing up in a wide variety of spaces for brief times and maintaining some of its consistency
and cohesion through virtual and consumable media like YouTube videos and event flyers. (For an excellent example of an ephemeral archive see Berlant (1997). The archive I assembled is disparate and certainly not exhaustive; it is a sampling of visual and material culture, which reveals something about both the cultural imaginary of circus performers and the materiality of the way they connect, network and navigate their lives. The selection of materials is intensive and highly relevant, having been gathered during my participant observation and through connections with my interviewees. The archive provided information on the policy framework, media perceptions, and visual culture that performers operate within but may not have been able to comment on directly because they may comprise the invisible backdrop of their experience.

My archive consisted of:

1) Training manuals: I looked at two aerial instruction manuals (Heller 2005; Bernasconi and Smith 2008) (I only found two aerial manuals though there are many books on juggling, unicycling and other circus tricks). I looked at these texts to see how others described what are often visual and practical techniques and experiences as well as to see different approaches to representing aerial performance among performers. I was interested in how aerial instructors described in two dimensions a very dynamic and three-dimensional practice. I was also interested in which aspects of a rapidly evolving skill set and practice were concretized in the form of a manual.
2) Newspaper articles about circus. These were searched and collected from the major Canadian newspapers that are part of the electronic archive ‘Canadian Newsstand, CBCA Current Events’. They were found using the keyword “Circus*” in the timeframe 1986-2007 [accessed December 2007]. Because the library has an archive of these materials I was able to search farther back than for the more ephemeral materials like show flyers. The timeframe I used corresponds to the emergence of ‘new circus’. These newspaper articles provided insight into meaning and representation of contemporary circus in the broader culture and in particular showed the degree to which circus and business have become linked in popular media.

3) Advertisements and cultural products which use circus imagery or ideas, such as print ads in newspapers, magazines and billboards, and TV commercials. These are not products of circus performers, but reflect how circus is perceived in the broader culture. These were collected using ‘opportunity’ or ‘convenience sampling’ while I was undertaking this research. They were examples that I came across over the last 6 years or which friends and family brought to my attention knowing I was interested in them. This is a very ephemeral part of this archive. Rather than distinct artifacts it perhaps belongs better in the participant observation of this work. Basically I have been aware of and observing how circus is represented in the broader culture for many years, watching TV commercials and collecting print advertisements such as the Browns shoe magazine which will feature later in the dissertation.
4) Flyers, on-line promotional material, YouTube videos. This material was also accessed using opportunity or convenience sampling between 2005 and 2011. For example, the flyers I collected were for shows I watched or were collected at shows I watched or worked on. The websites I visited were for performers I know or know about. The YouTube videos like newspaper articles above were sampled more randomly using common searches for aerial, silks, hoop, clown, clown trapeze, etc. These videos were a combination of promotional videos and how-to videos mostly by aerialists and to a slightly lesser extent clowns. These actually provide an important window into the social and practical world of contemporary circus performers, both professional and recreational. Circus performers are a disparate community who connect face-to-face in some central training locations. But there is also a lot of decentralized cross-pollination using social networking and on line media. As one ephemeral example, I am a member of a Facebook group called “Overheard at Trapeze” where 226 people I don’t know from all over Canada and the US post humorous comments which they have heard or said in the gym. This could be seen as a kind of virtual water cooler for inside jokes that mostly make sense because they are typical or unusual for these performers. For example, a recent post went like this “"does it hurt?" - yeah - "a LOT?" - yeah - "good, then you're doing it right". This is just one example of the virtual culture that helps hold the circus performing community together. YouTube is another very common virtual space - watching and learning from acts posted on YouTube is a central part of the dissemination of aerial culture and tricks (and to a lesser extent clowns also utilize this technology). It is part of the spread of tricks across the continent such
that aerialists who have never met may find they do very similar tricks. Finally these virtual connections are a factor in creating common practices around performers’ self-representation such as expectations and standards for good photographs, videos and promotional material.

5) Policy documents and reports: Circus has not (until last year’s Canada council announcement recognizing circus as an art), been the specific subject of policy interventions in Canada (it has received more attention in arts councils specific to Quebec). However there are a few documents, which were brought to my attention by my participants, which have shaped the environment that performers work in. I looked at some of these documents, specifically ‘Status of the Artist’ legislation from Ontario (2006) and Canada (1996) and Canada arts council guidelines and publications published over the last 20 years, to get a bigger picture about the state-level constraints and opportunities that performers were operating under, and the context in which the move towards artistic status has taken place. I also looked at some basic research on the situation of circus artists prepared by En Piste, a circus advocacy organization, in 2007. I was interested both in the numbers they generated and how they chose to represent circus in their report. Their reports are some of the only provincial or national scale research that has been published on Canadian circus to date.

**Participant Observation**

The participant observation, and embodied learning part of my research was by far the most in depth, comprehensive and “thick” component of my work, and also the hardest
to report on. I have added the term ‘embodied’ to the more commonly accepted label ‘participant observation’ because the way participant observation has traditionally been employed does not sufficiently capture the extent of active participation and kinesthetic knowledge acquisition which comprised this part of my research. I undertook a significant amount of ‘embodied learning’ as part of my research process, because although embodied knowing is increasingly accepted with geography (Longhurst 2009), the process by which we apply and utilize this is still in development, and it is not reflected in our standard use of participant observation. Participant observation is a well-accepted method of conducting research, but due to the intensity and type of participation, my approach could be considered somewhat unorthodox. Having a label like “participatory observation” is comforting, but is no guarantee of clarity. Participant observation in and of itself is not a new practice, but its more formal procedures are still commonly based on the notion of immersing oneself in a new or ‘other’ culture with the corresponding opportunities for distance and ultimate extraction. This is not a distance that my research afforded me as I continue to fully identify as a performer, live with my performing partner and have ongoing training, friend and working relationships with my colleagues in the circus community. Fulfilling the practices of documentation and reporting which may make sense in a three month ‘visit’ to an ‘other’ place, are harder to satisfy when conversations relevant to the research questions happen in bed, or when you are hanging up side down. The most related recent example of a similar kind of emersion is Wacquant’s (2004) “Body and Soul”. During this research he immersed himself deeply in the practices of a boxing gym in Chicago, training regularly and attending boxing matches, and even admitting in brief
moments considering abandoning his academic life for that of a pro-boxer. He did maintain some distance, however, and sense that his project was temporary and his involvement directly linked to his research. I do not have this relationship with my research; circus is first and foremost my life and also what I have chosen to study. As such my relationship to the research is different than Wacquant’s. Where Wacquant left the field to return to his home each evening and spent time writing up his field notes, I spent evenings still ‘in the field’, designing shows, watching shows, and discussing promotional strategies with my partner. I don’t necessarily believe this is always the best strategy for conducting research, but it provided a lot of richness to my research. I have also found it challenging, while writing up this research, to unpack the layers of knowledge that I have acquired in this process. But it is a model of conducting research that is still quite rare, and I feel it provided me with valuable and comprehensive understandings about the experiences of circus performers and about some of the grey areas of innovative research methods.

My participant observation and embodied learning was quite extensive and very participatory. In addition to 2-4 times weekly training at a circus gym in the east end of Toronto, I have taken part in at least four clown workshops (three to sixteen day intensives), attended community meetings, taken other performers’ classes and (unsuccessfully) applied for a grant with fellow performers. I have worked on approximately 200 circus performance events from 2006-2011 (see appendix C for list of shows I have worked on and other participatory activities). These shows include a range of very different kinds of events, and provide some insight into the
flexibility expected of performers, the precarity of the organization of this work, and the geography of this work. The events I have been involved in range from stilt walking performances where I provide roaming (walking around) ‘site animation’ for paying corporate clients, to monthly ‘underground’ cabaret shows which I perform in and help produce. The ‘shows’ are sometimes solo but very often I will be working alongside anywhere from 2-10 performers. In these shows I stilt walk, perform solo aerial acts, roam as a clown and/or do a clown acrobatic duo show that I performer with my partner. The corporate work takes place at a wide range of venues across southern Ontario and even around the world. Towns and cities I have performed in include: Toronto, Barrie, Waterloo, Guelph, Ajax, Mississauga, Vaughan, Brampton, Mimico, Wasaga, Scarborough, Niagara Falls, Niagara on the lake, Kitchener, Milton, London, Parry Sound, Sudbury, Caledon Hills, Newmarket, Cambridge and Hamilton. Elsewhere in Canada I have performed in Winnipeg, St Johns, and Iqaluit. I have also performed in Macedonia, and Cuba. Our monthly cabaret show takes place at a circus training space and theatre called the Centre of Gravity in the east end of Toronto.

In this same 5 year time period, I have also seen over 60 shows: theatrical clown shows, clown cabarets, student shows, cabaret shows with circus acts, and full touring circus shows (See appendix D for list of shows I have seen). Seeing these shows, often in the company of other performers, has informed my awareness of the aesthetic sensibilities and expectations of both performers and audiences, as well as the range of shows that are being produced right now. Most of these shows were also
in the Greater Toronto Area, but some were located in Montreal, Edmonton, and Las Vegas.

Savage (2000) argues that “participant observation has no single agreed-on meaning” (p. 327), and in fact seems to try and capture a broad range of positions related to closeness and distance, observation and experience, bracketed by the two terms “participant” and “observer”. In particular Savage flags the centrality of observation and vision in participant observation while noting that there are many other sensory experiences and knowledges that arise while participating. Vision has a long history as the privileged sense, and in close relationship with the ‘verbal’ has largely dominated qualitative research (Crang 2003). Of the experiences that comprise this research, it is easiest to refer to and report on the dozens of conversations held in the gym, back stage, or at intermission of shows or festivals. Some of these I made notes about immediately after they happened and therefore find them relatively easy to translate into text, which fits into traditional research/reporting models. But many other events I simply experienced, without immediately documenting them by translating them into text, usually because there was no opportunity (or desire) to take notes after a show at 1am, or on the gym floor. So these experiences sat in me, un-verbalized. Some of them eventually took the shape of important insights and reemerged onto the page; others have still not found verbal expression. Wacquant (2004) describes the challenge of “how to account ... for a practice that is so intensely corporeal” as “the most formidable of all” (p. xi). He says:
Having understood what the craft of boxing is..."by body"...would I know how to retranslate this comprehension of the senses into sociological language and find expressive forms suitable to communicating it without annihilating its most distinctive properties? (p. xii)

The successful reception of his book suggests that he did manage to communicate something that his readers found valuable and interesting, but whether he maintained the “most distinctive properties” of the craft is more difficult to determine. And equally hard to assess is what the benefits of successfully doing this might be.

Despite hours of reflection and living and breathing this research, I feel I am still full of un-verbalized preferences, recollections, aversions and desires about my research. These surface in more or less fleeting ways, undoubtedly influencing my choices, directions and ideas about circus performance, but still remaining less tangible than the established concepts which I have pinned down and articulated through the research process. In order to grapple with this less articulable acquisition of experience and knowledge, I have looked to and Massumi’s (2002) description of non-conscious perception and his articulation of Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of “expression”. In the former, he describes how practice becomes perception, but makes a distinction between virtual perception and conscious perception. This virtual perception, influenced by practice, nonetheless presses on our conscious perception but not in ways we can easily anticipate or understand. In Massumi’s discussion of Deleuze and Guattari’s work, he shows how expression itself is an event, distinct from any representation of that event. Expression can incite a chain of representations but those
representations remain distinct from and partial when compared to the event itself. He says Deleuze also describes the process by which sensations come to be conscious experiences:

Deleuze ... considers every step along the chain a ‘perception’. Before the perception reaches the ‘molar’ level where it can be experienced as a memory, thought, or sensation consciously belonging to the life of the organism as a whole, it has already been these partially and nonconsciously. It has been a crowd of stratum-specific ‘molecular’ or ‘micro’ perceptions. (p. xxx)

If the unique experience of performing is an event, of which all descriptions and analysis are representation, then it makes sense that something might remain in excess of those representations, or at least that, despite my best efforts, the conscious perception remains distant from and only a partial representation of the original event.

I find some comfort in knowing that my anxieties about reporting and documenting are not new to contemporary practices of science and research. I am responding to a long history of expectations, many of which have always been more ideals to aspire to than common practices. Daston and Galison (2007) in their book Objectivity, about the history of objectivity, describe the role of the practice of documentation in the mid 19th century. They quote Faraday writing about note taking:

The laboratory notebook, intended to receive the account of the results of experiments, should always be at hand, as should pen and ink. All events worthy of record should be entered at the time the experiments are made, whilst the things themselves are under the eye, and can be re-examined if in
doubt or difficulty arise. The practice of delaying to note until the end of the
day is a bad one, as it then becomes difficult accurately to remember the
succession of events. (p. 245)

Pragmatic concerns, however, even in these heady days when Enlightenment
Science was at its height, took their toll and they remark that in practice even
Faraday wrote his own notes at the end of the day. I know that my anxieties and
feelings of inadequacy in my research methods are not unique (Rose 1997). I am
looking at them now as my own version of the ubiquitous failures to create perfect
experimental conditions which science has faced through its history. A failure that is
compounded by the new deeply personal contemporary scientific identities
required of modern researchers, which I will explore in a moment.

I did not take notes every day, not during or after every training session, not even
every week. I made notes about things that stood out, things that caught my
attention, and the other things, the everyday practices were simply layered in my
body, they became a different kind of knowing. According to Daston and Galison my
anxiety around this makes sense in the context of the growth of the scientist as
“worker”, a scientific identity that arose in the era of mechanical objectivity in
response to uncovering the limitations of the enlightenment scientist. For the
worker scientist, industry and perseverance, patience and endless work was what
produced scientific objectivity. I have certainly demonstrated perseverance as my
bruises, burns and broken ankle can attest to. I am however uncertain about the
best way to direct that force. In becoming a researcher/circus performer one
sometimes has to make choices between doing chin-ups, or writing about doing them. The learning I did in the gym was in my body: it was learning of repetition, learning that has become layered into my body so that I lift and turn, pause and let go in particular ways that keep me in the air, keep me on tempo with the music, and mean that I understand experientially many of the fears, desires, tensions and motivations that other performers experience. This kind of learning shifts my ‘knowing’, not just my intellectual knowing, but also what we might call instinct, feeling, or embodied knowing and doing. This is the kind of knowledge I have been hoping to achieve through practicing embodied “participant observation”, but the translation of this kind of multisensory knowing into the realm of research knowledge still confounds me. It has also been the source of prolific exploration in geography, as scholars wrestle with ideas of affect, becoming, non-representation, and the more-than-human (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000; Dewsbury 2003; McCormack 2003; Whatmore 2006; Greenhough and Roe 2010; Lorimer and Davies 2010). As Whatmore (2006) says about more-than-human modes of enquiry, “Such modes of enquiry attend closely to the rich array of the senses, dispositions, capabilities and potentialities of all manner of social objects and forces assembled through, and involved in, the co-fabrication of socio-material worlds” (p. 604). All of these concepts loosen the subjects grip on individuality and on consciousness, opening up an astonishing wealth of knowledge, but also sparking great debates about how to do geography in this new context. As McCormack (2009) says about the notion of ‘becoming’, “Such philosophies also demand a recasting of practices of geographical knowledge production. Put another way: to take seriously the
becoming of the world is to cultivate a commitment to enactive styles of thinking and doing” (p. 280). Geography has certainly opened up to new practices of knowledge production, but is still in the process of cultivating the ensuing styles of thinking and doing.

Castree (2006) has argued that knowledge shapes actions, and different kinds of knowledge influence actions and meaning in different ways, thus the presence or absences of multisensory, kinesthetic, affective and even local knowledges in research practices strongly shapes our understanding of the world. As a result of feminist and postcolonial challenges to constructions of what counts as legitimate knowledge, there are growing openings for other kinds of knowing to have a presence in academia. For example, some scholars are calling for ways of knowing that account for power inequities reproduced by hierarchies in research across the global north and south, including drawing attention to the risks of objectification inherent in processes of abstraction (Jazeel and McFarlane 2010), while others, rather than striving for a notion of objectivity, specifically incorporate gender into analyses of environmental geography (Reed and Mitchell 2003). But these are still not mainstream, and while theory is prolific, it is less common to see kinesthetic and affective kinds of knowing actually incorporated into research and writing/knowledge translation (Crang 2003), and I am no different. The embodied learning component of my research is extremely difficult to report on, much more so than the interviews and even participant observer findings. It is not just practical
concerns like time and effort that lie in the way of turning these experiences into analyzable text, but the nature of the knowledge itself.

**Scientist as Artist**

My methodological challenges are not only confined to representation of my embodied experiences. The “methodologically contested present” I referred to at the outset of this chapter (Denzin and Lincoln 2008) extends to all the methods I undertook. Daston and Galison argue that historically, when the scientific community recognized the limitations of previously valorized scientific activities (such as mechanical reproduction and arduous labour to accurately capture the truth), they developed yet another version of scientific subjectivity, that of the expert who could practice trained judgment. This involved an entirely new set of traits and characteristics, including preparing the self for intuition through rest, setting aside work, and allowing the unconscious time to work out a problem and prepare for the leap of insight or intuition that was considered an advancement or discovery. Increasingly there was a sense that scientists could rely on the cognitive capabilities of less than conscious thought (Daston and Galison 2007). This version of objectivity began to valorize judgment or artistic choice and interpretation over mechanical reproduction and arduous labour.

This shift paves the way for the development of a whole new set of requirements for scientific identity. Daston and Galison argue that the scientist as expert is currently the most prolific and necessary subject position for producing science, but they are
also very clear that new versions of objectivity and definitions of scientific subjectivity don’t replace the previous ones - they join in the cacophony of expectations, guidelines, meanings and definitions of what science and research is. So now the researcher is not only haunted by these ghosts of scientists past crying for triangulation, generalization, documentation and perseverance, but in addition they also need to conform to new identities for methods that are still in the process of being developed.

Post structural or interpretive social scientists find themselves saddled with new sets of demands for characteristics that must comprise our contemporary scientific identities. It is not out of the blue or in a vacuum that ‘embodied’ research has become tenable. It has arisen in a context in which flexibility and affective labour are gaining prominence in many spheres. And it is not characterized by a sudden freeing of all constraints around research and knowledge production. It has its own sets of norms, costs and expectations. Four of the qualities most commonly expected of the post-positivist researcher are empathy, intimacy, artistic merit or creativity, and reflexivity. In all these categories my research seems to fair quite well. But although I am enthusiastic about this new set of traits required of researchers, and find they respond well to many of the problems of the previous paradigm, they simultaneously raise their own sets of issues. And all of them, like the observations Savage makes about participant observation, still grapple with the relationship between selves and others, although in new and more complex ways. They negotiate and articulate self and other, closeness and distance, sameness and
difference, and all still rely on the management of feelings. It is now the presence rather than the absence of feelings that require our management, feelings of understanding, attachment, connection, and preference, among others. The demands on the contemporary scientific subject are just as strict as any enlightenment discipline, requiring emotional management, extensive labour, intensive identification of one’s position in relation to the scientific problem, and now even creativity and artistic ability.

Where enlightenment scientists were defined in opposition to artists (severely objective vs. thoroughly subjective), contemporary scientists are expected to also be artists (Daston and Galison 2007). For example in cultivating the important quality of empathy Bresler argues:

Empathic understanding involves resonance, an embodied state of mind that is cognitive and at the same time, affective and corporeal. I argue that artistic experiences in general and music in particular provide an important model for empathic understanding, juxtaposing similar processes of embodied affect and cognition within an aesthetic distance that generates dialogical relationship with the artwork. (Bresler 2006 p. 25)

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) say, “Qualitative research is endlessly creative and interpretive...the interpretive practice of making sense of one's findings is both artistic and political” (p. 26). Some social researchers have taken this identification to heart and taken it beyond the discreet practices happening in one’s own office to
produce research findings that closely resemble artistic projects whether it is using allegory (Dixon and Jones 1996), dance or fashion (Manning 2007), theatre plays (Pratt and Kirby 2003), or other artistic outputs. Through really embracing the aesthetic, subjective, sensual and emotional nature of contemporary social science research, these scholars have found that the conventional containers (writing in journals or presenting at conferences) for holding and displaying their ‘findings’ may no longer be sufficient. The new methods they choose have primarily to do with communicating in aesthetic and affective ways, rather than, or in addition to, rational or intellectual ones. This is by no means a widespread movement, and most of these scholars represent their work in all of the traditional formats as well, with these creative avenues remaining sidelined. But the movement connecting art and social science (and its ensuing pressures and opportunities) seems to be growing.

With the growing elements of ‘art’ in scientific practices it is no wonder that I find myself having some difficulty discerning which components of my research/practice are artistic and which are scientific. This issue of the growth of creative or immaterial labour in a post-Fordist society is certainly not confined to the labour of research and the scientific identities now expected of scholars, but is also present in the shifting role of the artist in society more broadly, a theme which will reoccur throughout this dissertation.
Empathy and Intimacy

As qualitative research, including face-to-face interviewing, has taken on greater centrality within social science since the cultural turn, many have made articulate and impassioned arguments for the cultivation of empathy within research. This is principally seen as an antidote to decades of data collection that tried to neutralize the researchers’ subjectivity and eliminate the relationship between researcher and subject. Advocates for empathy in research are often motivated by a strong desire to prioritize the point of view of the research participant. Empathy is seen to be a kind of embodied knowing and emotional intersubjective skill (Finlay 2005).

Related to empathy and to the goal of undoing a hierarchical researcher/subject model, there is a trend in qualitative research suggesting that insiders, or those with strong links to the research subject, are the ones best suited to conduct research in a given area. Amongst scholars who are concerned with the damaging effects of ‘detached’ researchers who may have vastly different social and political positions than the subjects of study, it is felt that insiders conducting research has ethical and scientific benefits. Recently, however, the negotiated nature of insider status has taken centre stage and the simple categories of inside and outside have come into question (Acker 2000; Lomba De Andrade 2000). The issue of insider/outside status in geography has arisen in a number of subfields such as religious geography/geography of religion (Ferber 2006). These broader philosophical questions of inside and outside as ontological categories have theoretical resonance and have sparked philosophical exploration beyond simply how much one can
identify with your research subjects (Probyn 1996). This question of inside and outside has also emerged as a theme in this dissertation and will reappear in subsequent chapters.

In my research, empathy and intimacy come easily for me, and my insider status means often I am interviewing friends and colleagues. It is easy to put myself in their shoes. I have a well-developed ability to hear what the participants are saying, I know their language and vocabulary, I know what moments they are referring to on stage or in rehearsal, I don’t have to guess what terms and descriptions mean, or struggle to interpret their body language. I can be emotionally responsive, having had, in many cases, parallel or related experiences. I can also use examples from my own experience, which is often directly related to theirs, to help draw out stories and descriptions, a classic technique for cultivating empathy in interviews (Finlay 2002).

On a practical level, when faced with the need to reproduce or communicate knowledge in particular ways, I have found insider status is not always helpful in achieving more traditional research goals. Some things are more easily seen at a distance. Familiarity can hide the challenge/opportunity of translation, keeping knowledge bouncing around in a self-referential bubble. When asking a participant to articulate something particularly intangible such as the feeling of their relationship with the audience, our familiarity made it all too easy for them to respond with “well you know! You just know” and for me to nod in agreement rather
than either of us finding a way to describe something hard to articulate. And I do know, but is it the same knowing? In addition to the challenge of writing this kind of knowing down there is no certainty that we are having the same experience, I can’t just substitute my experience for theirs and assume we agree on what that experience feels like or means.

Advocates of empathy in research as well as in broader usage vary in the meaning they ascribe to the word. Feelings of empathy are generally understood as the ability to share another person’s perspective and they can range from simple feelings of connection, to merging with another person (Finlay 2005). When coupled with the simultaneous growth in interest in insider status and intimacy in research, one could easily slide towards erasing the differences between researcher and subject - a trend that could be detrimental to research. Watson says ethnography is always the writing of difference, and asks if empathy is relevant for ethnography? She claims, “the gap between ourselves and others is the liminal space where research happens” (Watson 2009 p. 107). Rose (1997) also suggests trying to honour and even actively produce these gaps in knowledge, solidifying certain refusals to interpret, “to inscribe into our research practices some absences and fallibilities while recognizing that the significance of this does not rest entirely in our own hands” (p. 319). In line with this, my experience suggests that being an insider does not erase difference it just refocuses it. I had distinctly different relationships, with unique structures of feelings, with each of my participants. There was affection, envy, admiration, attraction, and a myriad of other emotional
links and simultaneous experiences of distancing. The roles I was negotiating were unclear and constantly changing. People with whom I play multiple roles were confused as to which role this one was, a new relationship, a continuation of an old one, a colleague, friend, authority, student, fun, serious, attractive, strange. Below is a brief excerpt from my research journal kept during my trip to Edmonton where I not only interviewed participants but was also invited out to dinner and to social events after the shows I had gone to see. It was a great but slightly awkward social/research situation to navigate:

It was a very intense time. The roles I was negotiating were unclear and constantly changing. John [who had previously been my clown instructor] and I got around this by affectionately titling me alternately as his “stalker” or his “date”, and playing up how good that was for his reputation... People seemed both flattered and puzzled that I had gone all that way to talk to them; they felt some responsibility to me, and I felt the need to perform casual self-sufficiency to help them feel less pressure about their involvement and their responsibility to me.

Attention to the different kinds of connections and gaps between my participants and myself was sometimes a fruitful (though always very partial) source of information, and at the very least seemed essential for the maintenance of respectful and honest - though multiple and not always consistent - relationships with those with whom I was working.
**Reflexivity**

The research journal described above (though partial and inconsistent) was one of my efforts to deal with the complexities of my intimate, flexible and creative/artistic research process. Reflexivity has become a catch-all fix-it that many scholars use when grappling with the challenges of post positivist methods. Like empathy and insider status, reflexivity is also celebrated as a way to deal with researcher subject hierarchies, position oneself, identify one’s biases and privileges, and avoid the god trick or overly objective universalizing science. In geography, as in many other disciplines, it is feminist scholars who have both advocated for and illuminated the difficulties and failures of reflexivity in research (Rose 1997). Decades of feminist and anti-racist scholarship has been clear about the importance of understanding how our viewpoint may differ from, and impact on, the views of our participants, and the violence that can be enacted by failing to do so. Educated in this tradition as well, satisfying my own sense of rigor in conducting research requires extensive reflexivity and ongoing self-evaluation about my different identities, and their impact on those around me and the ‘findings’ of my research. Understanding the shape of the space between self and other is part of the value of reflexive practices. This is a process of differentiating from others and from parts of my own experience, part creative imagining of other realities, and part critical examination of the stability of the realities I seem to inhabit most easily. My reflexive practice makes me feel as though I am caring for those around me and is an integrated essential part of both research and life.
But of course it is not this simple, as questions, problems and debates around reflexivity abound in every discipline, Lynch (2000) wrote on what he calls “reflexivities” identifying at least six distinct ways in which the term has been used from those “consistent with the Enlightenment ideal of self knowledge” to what he considers more radical versions that use reflexivity to question the nature of representation itself (p. 29). He claims that although reflexivity is “frequently associated with radical anti objectivist programs...many conceptions of reflexivity support rather than undermine more conventional programs of empirical research” (p. 34). He argues that what reflexivity does, depends on who is doing it, and what paradigm they use, and ultimately concludes that there is no clear differentiation between being reflexive and being unreflexive. In fact, he claims that being unreflexive is a very difficult practice perhaps only undertaken by those trying to deliberately mislead. He argues that “in a world without gods or absolutes, attempting to be reflexive takes one no closer to a central source of illumination than attempting to be objective” (p. 47). In other words, reflexivity, when used in certain static ways, can be used to further perpetuate troublesome separations, for example between our rational selves, and our feeling, experiencing, and sensing selves, and may contribute to the controversial goal of finding a singular truth through research. As with triangulation, my sense of safety in reflexive practice comes in part from a belief that by reflecting I can understand something 'better', but it doesn’t answer the question of what better knowledge might be – more situated? Less partial? More truthful? Part of its appeal also comes from the idea that if we put our feelings out in the open then maybe the reader can move beyond
the limitations of the researcher’s subject position, as if that itself were a fixed position, to decipher more of the ‘truth’ unpolluted by our bias.

Kobayashi argues that reflexivity is a moving living practice, and situated knowledge is not static or already situated, but always actively being situated. As a result:

Recognizing situated knowledge through reflexivity is thus deeply ironic and paradoxical. Any attempt to refashion the relationship between knower and known by acknowledging the power of the knower inevitably results in a repositioning of the knower, and emphasizes the contingency of that which is known. To succumb to the seductive appeal of reflexivity as a means of understanding the self, therefore, reinforces the extent to which all knowledge – including that of the self – is partial. (Kobayashi 2009 p. 140)

As a result Kobayashi (2009) suggest that reflexivity alone is actually a weak political action and has no meaning unless it is connected with a larger agenda. She suggests that clear political outcomes are the way we should measure and guide our research practice. One such clear political goal is a critical race perspective, in which unsettling racialized norms and “revisioning whiteness” are active goals which research can work towards.

We have to find the "places of contradiction" (Frankenberg 1993) in all of us in order to re-vision whiteness. White people need to work through "unnaturalising' ourselves . . . by re-examining our own personal histories and geographies, and praxis. 'Unnaturalizing' ourselves means engagement
in practical political work... [because]... [u]nlearning racism... is not the same as ending it" (Frankenberg 1993:82). Un-learning the whiteness of geography is a difficult but important goal. (Kobayashi and Peake 2000 p. 400)

For me this practice of unnaturalizing myself has come late in the process of writing up my research, as I noticed the silence about race that existed in the space between my white participants and myself as a white researcher. Reflexivity at the time of interviewing failed me as a way to examine race because without a broader political agenda to examine race, processes of racialization were able to seem entirely 'natural' and thus to pass unremarked. Once attached to a critical race agenda those silences became meaningful and the unsettling of racialized norms could begin. This is a kind of reflexivity, but one which is, as Kobayashi says, attached to a politics which allows one to reflect beyond the familiar, natural and known and into the realm of unsettling, unnaturalizing, and transforming.

If used well, and as one part of a wider critical methods agenda, I do think reflexive practices help us move towards recognizing the new versions of reality that emerge in the space between people (or identities); Doucet (2008), in a similar move to Kobayashi, advocates moving beyond reflexivity as a self-centered practice, and towards thinking of it as a social, relational, and active practice. Unfortunately in the majority of work I have encountered that emphasizes reflexive practices, this social, relational component remains largely unarticulated and underexplored. Because of this, these practices easily collapse back into old paradigms. I expect
because of the embedded nature of my research process that at least some of my reflexive practices have been social in nature, occurring in conversations and moments of sharing with my colleagues, but most of the time my reflective practice remains the traditional one that relies on an individuated and contained (though sometimes multiple) sense of self.

Not only do I need to think of these practices in relational terms - who am I in relation to my participants and vice versa - but also in relation to multiple versions of myself. I struggle with choosing which self, or which versions of my experience should be documented or valorized. Should I write down my experience immediately after I return to the ground from the air? Or is the end of the day more appropriate, when I have a less fragmented view of the whole day? Or is the most informed writing to come after I have really understood a certain practice? Similarly I wonder which version of myself should I be recording, the version that feels safely distant from the practice after I have eaten and rested? Or the one that is grumpy, scared and frustrated about not getting a trick, or elated and high on success from applause or positive feedback? Crang puts it well:

My concern is that too often exhortations to reflexivity and disclosure tend to depend upon and reproduce problematic notions of a stable, tightly defined, unchanging research project conducted by a singular researcher, with one stable essential identity, both between locations and over time, and suggest the latter is also true of the researched. (Crang 2003 p. 487)
So it seems we cannot eliminate nor can we absolutely pin down our researcher or participant identities, yet so many of the new research practices are linked to these as though to objects. No wonder new researchers like myself, operating in this new and shifting paradigm are fraught with anxiety. Overall the central methods of the new research paradigms respond well to problems in the old paradigm like the denial of feelings and the illusion of distance, but they raise new sets of problems such as the challenges of intimacy, how to deal with movement and lack of fixity of both identities and knowledge, and the difficulty of navigating distinctions between research knowledge and other kinds of knowledge.

In order to offer something really new, I can’t help but think that research must move in two ways. First moving beyond the limits of textual prose description, and second moving beyond the phenomenological, with its tendencies to remain bounded within a single body and static subjectivity. Although I have not entirely done this in this dissertation, I hope I have a clearer sense of the areas that might open up with further practice.

The first suggestion is reminiscent of the discussion above (Bresler 2006; Daston and Galison 2007; Denzin and Lincoln 2008) about how scientists are increasingly expected to also be artists, and as we generate and access knowledge that is embodied, we need to simultaneously generate ways of transmitting this knowledge. Are affective and aesthetic modalities more conducive to such translation? If so, is academia willing to embrace not only new kinds of knowledge,
but new practices for the dissemination and translation and use of knowledge?

Already we use photographs as a standard supplement to text, and we have developed ways of analyzing visual materials for research purposes (Rose 2001), so is video or even live interaction as a form of research dissemination far behind?

How far are we willing to go, and if we do open this up, what then will separate my performance from my research, or do they need to be separable?

Second, it seems to me the success of these practices are intimately tied to both knowing and letting go of our multiple subjectivities, and with the understanding that affect is something that happens between bodies. Clough (2009) argues, following Massumi, for an “expanded empericism”, she argues that “what is required is an empirics of affect, at the very limit of the phenomenal”. She calls this infra-empericism and says it “allows a rethinking of bodies, matter and life through new encounters in visceral perception and preconscious affect” (p. 47).

The problems with participant observation outlined earlier in this paper had to do with the limitations of observation as only one of many senses that might be enlisted in acquiring a more comprehensive understanding of a problem. Erin Manning (2007) poses the problem in another way: the problem of sensing is not which sense is privileged, but where the sensing is understood to occur. She argues that the senses are relational expressions of moving bodies, and can’t be captured and documented in a static moment regardless of how many senses are enlisted. She emphasizes touch because of how it foregrounds the relational. She argues that
bodies are always moving and must be stilled to be characterized. Research has a long history of characterizing, describing, categorizing, and critiquing, activities that require a relatively still object.

I find it easy at this point to get bogged down in what seems theoretically profound but impossibly complex in practice. I love the moving edge of possibility signaled by these theoretical explorations, but where they are theoretically strong, they seem practically and empirically troubling. Pragmatically speaking how does one consider preconscious encounters as a source of data? And if research takes place in the liminal space between some version of the subject and some version of the researcher, what, at the end of the day am I (or we) supposed to write down, present, or publish? Ultimately it does come down to the question of what are we really hoping to get from research and our move towards embodied, affective, methods? What are we hoping to find, and how much will we risk in the search?

Markussen argues that attending to perception and affective faculties “may facilitate deconstructive or transformative accounts of social and material realities.” I think that includes transforming the realities surrounding our ideas of what it means to understand something:

Any method attending to affect will profoundly unsettle any conception of method as being in the control of human agency or human consciousness inhering in the human subject. Any method of attending to affect will necessarily become entangled with an immanent dynamism, with the
potential for individuation. Method attending to affect necessarily is performative, having become entangled or assemblaged with affect’s capacity of self-information-ality. Any method of attending to affect cannot simply be a matter of containment; it also cannot simply be a matter of interpretation, meaning, signification or representation. Method cannot help but produce affective resonance, attunement, that is the intensifying or the dampening of affect. (Clough 2009 p. 49)

It makes sense to say we cannot help ourselves from having an affect when we attend to affect, but it’s still not very clear to me how this is to inform my research methods. Attending to the affective components of encounters does seem more like art than research, as we traditionally know it. Given this, what is the difference between my research and my performance- the goal of which it to create affective attunement with my audience, making them laugh or gasp together? Shouldn’t there be something unique about research and its ways of knowing, and most importantly shouldn’t there be something unique about what it does? What now separates what we do from other ways of knowing, understanding and organizing knowledge? And given the notion that method attending to affect will be out of the control of human agency, can I even hope to know?

I have no ready answers for this and so this dissertation, while ostensibly complete, is still a moment in a developing practice. I can accept that movements towards and away from certain research practices arise from tendencies rather than fixed points.
I can live with the notion that research findings exist in fluid tension between empathetic identification and appreciation of difference - tensions generated by appropriate (and changing) distances from 'others', both outside and within or scientific and circus selves. I can continue to remind myself that research takes its fluid and still moving shape in a co-created space (of course influenced by power) where the temporary answers are situated somewhere between one's selves and one's co-conspirators. This kind of research is something I perhaps can take some responsibility for, but certainly never own. I can really only share my tendencies and leanings, and as many versions of myself as come to the fore in response to this particular set of intersecting events and ideas, and then the research that really emerges will do so somewhere in the space between my selves and you.

The things I have learned in my body undoubtedly inform the more traditional elements of my research. They generate the ground on which I have discussions with my participants, and they guide me towards asking questions about tensions between art and work, politics and cooptation, mind and body that my research explores. As a performer I am caught up in ongoing struggles to get paid work, which makes me keenly aware of what is currently valuable and what is sellable in art and entertainment (performance work accounts for at least half of how I pay for food, rent and school). The need to generate an income keeps me aware that new shiny costumes, good makeup, and an excellent promotional package equal more shows. The work I create is influenced by this, as well as by the feedback of performers and the audience. Such influences are occasionally rational, such as a
colleague who tells me that one move works but another one looks awkward, but often these things are ephemeral, experiential, affective. I find my taste changing and realize I am drawn to, or avoiding, fabric, costumes, or physical shapes in ways I never would have expected and don't necessarily understand. I also have embodied experience of the compelling connection between an audience and performer, the kind of overwhelming connection that made me perform a trapeze act with a broken ankle rather than disappoint the crowd. Those kinds of practical very visceral experiences ensure I take seriously other performers’ discussions of the importance of ‘connecting’.

My embodied research also allows me to understand first-hand the experience of the multiplicity of selves that have power over different parts of us in a given situation. For example, my life is firmly in the hands of my embodied memory when I let go an aerial drop, and no amount of mental calculation would catch me if I were to try and decide in an abstract way what to do in that moment (though my rational mind can help me decide to unwrap and reassess the safety of a situation if I find myself in trouble). And then there is the messy, daunting feelings that come before you successfully get an aerial trick, the regular pain of bruises and broken limbs, the desire to have your body achieve certain lines, the terror of stage fright, the shiny new version of self that arises when you are in front of an audience, the thrill of applause, the satisfaction of a pay cheque. Embodied research allows me to prioritize emotional experiences that are more easily felt than explained, to unpack the complexity of the choices we make by feeling the contrasting threads that
influence them. It also signals me to ask others about experiences that I find myself stumbling through. All of these kinesthetic, emotional and embodied kinds of knowledge inform the way I interpret my colleagues' interviews, and very likely the way they chose to speak to me in the first place. Unfortunately the translation of these experiences always seems to leave something in excess, a phenomenon that is common to descriptions of affective experiences (Dewsbury 2009).

The best I can do right now is be aware of the limitations I encounter in translating these experiences. I can experiment with ways of describing: the feeling of being on stage, of being in a thoroughly interdependent relation with an audience, leading them with your movements while they lead you with their responses, and the feeling of being in the air, the vivid awareness of parts of yourself that we rarely experience in daily life, the reliance you have on the knowing and memory of your body, the way knowledge moves through your body residing in different parts and making space for new things as the old ones become habituated. I can draw parallels (as many others have) to experiences like driving a car, or going on a date, and I can try to represent my experiences in words, but of course all of these representations are poor substitutes for the experience itself. Hopefully, at least for now this is enough, as Dewsbury (2009) says when talking about the uptake of affect in geography, “it is not the words that count, it is the stuttering to articulate that which is unarticulable as such, that renders partially visible that which would otherwise remain painfully incommunicable” (p. 23)
Chapter 3: The Work that Art Does

“In the liberal Enlightenment tradition, art-making is understood as a creative, non-instrumental endeavor. It is a pursuit that enables individuals to realize their ideas and desires within the circumscribed space of the imagination, and to find surcease from the affective and practical demands of family, community and nation. The object of art – the work of art – is then the product and sign of that apparently free, expressive behaviour, and the material record of an active, purposeful human consciousness.” (Eisenman and Hemingway 2006 p. 291)

The debate over what art is has fueled the discipline of art theory for hundreds of years (Osbourne 1981; Freeland 2001). Theorists have even been making claims about the end of art for over a century (Geulen 2006). I am not entering that debate which has already seen many permutations by people more informed than I, but this dissertation does explore the question of what work the concept art is doing in the contemporary moment, and this chapter situates this question using the work of several scholars, in particular Bourdieu, Rancière, Lazzarato and Virno. I am choosing to use the term art here intentionally, although my use of it overlaps with how many others use the term creativity. This is in part because this is the word my participants used when discussing certain elements of their work, and also because, although it is a term with its own historical associations, it does not currently have the same faddish status that the related term ‘creativity’ has. As Arvidsson et al. (2010) suggest, we are currently facing an ideology of creativity. I feel that in the current moment the term art may allow us greater versatility then the pre-defined relatively narrow discussions of the creative economy, which are more common in geography (Currah 2009). Lazzarato (2006) has suggested that it is part of post-Fordism to turn “’creation’ into a process that traverses art, the economy, science,
and the social sphere, by transferring the problems, methods, and practices that were thought to be specific to art into other domains”. I wonder if by focusing more specifically on art, we can see where some of these transfers are occurring.

Despite a shared history of concern with questions of representation (Johnston, Gregory et al. 2000), geography (with notable exceptions, for example Dixon (2009)) has not paid extensive attention to art. As a small example of this there is no entry for art in the *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (Kitchen and Thrift 2009), and the entry for creativity focuses mostly on the role of creativity in economic geography (Currah 2009). Geographers who have engaged this subject have dealt primarily with the spatial connections between art, artists and place. They have explored themes like the representation of geographic knowledge, and understandings of nature and modernity in the work of particular artists (Gandey 1997; Crouch and Toogood 1999), and have even engaged in a few projects in which artists and geographers have collaborated in choosing and interpreting artistic sites (Foster and Lorimer 2007). However, the main focus of geographers’ examinations of art has been on the consumption of art. This avenue of scholarship includes two strains, the first being the question of *where* we experience or consume art. This has centered on the movement of art out of galleries and into non-traditional environments, a practice that has multiplied with the growth of installation or place-based art (Cant and Morris 2006; Morris and Cant 2006). The second and most common conversation among geographers about art, has dealt with artists as inhabitants and consumers of particular spaces (usually but not always urban
spaces (Bunting and Mitchell 2001)), or as catalysts for others’ occupation and consumption of those ‘creative’ spaces. This can be seen in the prolific writing about the creative class and the creative city (Tuan 1989; Heilbrun 1992; Ley 2003; Gertler and al 2006; Prichard, Boon et al. 2006; Rantisi, Leslie and Christopherson 2006; Molotch and Treskon 2009). Despite appearing to celebrate the process of creation, it has been suggested that creative city policies focus on consumption rather than production of cultural products (Goff and Jenkins 2006). Increasingly the creative city is seen as a cornerstone of successful economics in an era of overwhelming consumption (Adkins 2005; Clough, Goldenberg et al. 2007; Bohm and Land 2009).

Understanding the contemporary socioeconomic moment “requires an understanding of the changing nature of the relationship between culture and the commodity form and recognition of the increasing interpenetration of the cultural and the economic” (Wynne and O’Connor 1998 p. 843). Rantisi and Leslie et al. point out that the main focus of the contemporary discussions of creativity has been the role of networking and spatial concentration for the development of creativity – i.e. the conditions that produce economically fruitful creativity. They have also identified some of the critiques this discussion has faced:

Over time, the traffic in these ideas has led to an increasingly standardized narrative of ‘creativity-led urban economic development’ that meshes well with the free-market development discourse. Within this narrative, creativity
is valued only when it contributes to economic growth. (Rantisi, Leslie and Christopherson 2006 p. 1793)

One of the key proponents of this approach has been Richard Florida, whose work has received remarkable attention. Peck (2005), in a critique of Florida's work, points out that his book “seeks to describe a new new economy, in which human creativity has become the ‘defining feature of economic life ..’” (p. 743), and argues that he does so entirely uncritically, feeding directly into a neoliberal and post-Fordist paradigm.

This focus on the creative economy places art and artists in a distinctly new light. Gill and Pratt (2008) argue that “One group of workers [is] said perhaps more than any other to symbolize contemporary transformations of work: cultural and creative workers” (p. 2). While Peck (2005) claims that “the insidious ‘scalar narrative’ (Swyngedouw, 1997) of creativity has it that the bodies — or perhaps more accurately, the souls — of creative individuals have become the preeminent carriers of economic-development potential” (p. 765). However, there is a glaring absence at the heart of this particular narrative. This absence is the experience of artists themselves, working and creating art. Rantisi and Leslie agree suggesting, “this version of the creative economy is not about artists, or dancers, or creativity, but about marketing, consumption, and real-estate development” (p. 1794). While there is growing attention being paid to a somewhat abstract idea of creativity, there is an absence of attention to the act of making art, the actual labouring and/or creative practice. Arvidsson et al (2010) put it this way:
‘creativity’ and ‘creative industries’ have had a growing presence in policy discourses in most Western, and some Asian, countries... Until recently, however, analyses of the actual conditions and make-up of creative labour have been largely absent. Instead, most of the policy-oriented discourse on creativity has adopted largely ideological definitions of creative labour as intrinsically self-actualising and meritocratic. (p. 295)

What might the actual work of creativity or art be? Beyond motivating gentrifying aesthetic practices, what is it that artists themselves do, and in what more comprehensive ways might we think about these practices? What might the term art reveal that the current use of the term creativity obscures? How can we extend discussions of creativity by examining the living practices of artists’ and the meaning they give to their work?

While in geography it is most common to talk about contemporary creativity using the language and examples of the creative city, the creative city is in some ways a symptom of a broader transformation. Whether it is called post-Fordism, neoliberalism, society of security, late capitalism, or something else, most descriptions of the contemporary moment identify a growth in the role that art, creativity and aesthetics play in the central mechanisms of control in late capitalism (Rantisi, Leslie and Christopherson 2006; Dowling, Nunes and Trott 2007).

The growth of this creativity discourse, and its intimacy with late capitalism, has raised fresh fear that art is losing its ability to promote an “artists critique”
(Chiapello 2004), or simply losing the ability to embody an alternative (or perceived alternative) to capital. If creativity has become the engine of the contemporary economy, how much descriptive power or critical value remains in the notion that art is non-alienated labour, or is distinct from other kinds of work? If the contemporary production of art remains distinct and unalienated, then perhaps we can learn something from art that may allow us to transform labour outside the sphere of art. If however, this distinction no longer describes art in the contemporary moment, or if these categories are significantly changing, then the question becomes does non-alienated labour exist anywhere, and what does this situation mean for the organization of labour and society more broadly?

One of the central functions of the concept art through European post-enlightenment history has been to separate artistic activities from other related activities like craft making and other kinds of labour. The practice of distinguishing between different kinds of productive activities has occupied a significant portion of the liberal Enlightenment tradition of defining art. Part of this was the discourse separating high from low or mass culture, which was central to European thought by the 20th century (Hutnyk 2006). Becker argues that craft has, as part of its “folk” definition, the expectation that the activity undertaken will be useful (Becker 1978), this is in contrast to art, which was defined in part by its lack of productivity or usefulness and its association with the elite and the rare (Dorn 2004). The insistence that art is not productive may stem from Kant, whose understandings of beauty were that the beautiful object must stimulate us emotionally and
imaginatively, but not in a purposive way. He thought beauty should not be related to the common satisfying of everyday pleasures, but rather should stimulate us in a detached way, purposive without a purpose (Kant 1914). Hegel further developed this by suggesting that entertainment serves pleasure, while art is free and serves nothing (Shusterman 2003). These ideas were still prevalent in the mid 20th century when Tolstoy (1960) said we call beauty “that which pleases (without evoking desire)” (p. 114). Later theorists developed the notion of an aesthetic response, and some of these took up the idea of art inspiring special detached emotions different from the normal emotions linked to life, politics and work (Freeland 2001). Most recently Deleuze and Guattari have taken this theory to a new level as they have developed the notion of expression uncoupled from communication. They see art as an event, which is an expression that can strike and transform a body - it is undefined and not anchored to content. They distinguish this from the representations found in communication, which is tied to content, and assumes a stable world of already defined things (Massumi 2002). What is shared among these descriptions is a privileging of unattached, or uncontained experiences, sensations or expressions, over common, captured and more easily representable emotions or communications. According to all these scholars the key to the value and uniqueness of art is felt to lie in this distinction.

Marx's idea of alienated labour coined in his 1844 manuscripts has also been interpreted by some theorists as relevant to a distinction between art and labour. He said:
What constitutes the alienation of labour? First, that the work is external to the worker, that it is not part of his nature; and that, consequently, he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well-being, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. The worker, therefore, feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not voluntary but imposed, forced labour. It is not the satisfaction of a need, but only a means for satisfying other needs. Its alien character is clearly shown by the fact that as soon as there is no physical or other compulsion it is avoided like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self sacrifice, of mortification. Finally, the external character of work for the worker is shown by the fact that it is not his own work but work for someone else, that in work he does not belong to himself but to another person. (Marx 1959 p. XXIII)

Eisenman and Hemingway (2006) refer to this when they say:

It has often been claimed (and not just by Marxists) that artistic labour is in some degree exempt from the normal constraints of work under capitalism, and stands for the ideal of non-alienated self-fulfilling activity in which individuals freely realize themselves. Is this idea a Romantic myth or does it still have a critical value? (p. 292)
Despite such a long history distinguishing art as outside, or separate from, other more purposive and less fulfilling practices like politics and labour, these relations are not entirely stable. In the contemporary moment, rather than being held apart from economic processes, creativity and art have moved to a central position in our definitions of labour and economic success. The artist is becoming an increasingly important figure in new understandings of labour as we see the explosion of terms like creative labour, emotional labour, cognitive labour, affective labour and immaterial labour (Hochschild 1983; Hardt 1999; Gunaratnam and Lewis 2001; Gill and Pratt 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008; Lazzarato 2008; Rancière). Gill and Pratt (2008) suggest that “while such terms are not reducible to each other, their very proliferation points to the significance of contemporary transformations and signals – at the very least – that ‘something’ is going on” (p. 2). There is a quantitative and qualitative change in academic discussions about art in the last 30 years, in fact concern over the changing relationship between art and politics, labour and economics is at a high water mark as evidenced by the work this chapter will explore. Questions about art are not marginal musings by those interested in art; they are the cornerstone of contemporary theories about current mechanisms of control and social organization.

There are a number of key recent thinkers who have addressed art and creativity beyond the notion of the creative city, with greater attention to the political implications of this shift (Bourdieu 1993; Massumi 2002; Deleuze 2003; Virno 2004; Gill and Pratt 2008; Lazzarato 2008; Negri 2008; Rancière). The four scholars I will
explore in this chapter hold important places in an increasingly vocal and relevant
debate. Like others in this field they all agree that there is a shift happening in the
role of the artist in society. Where they differ is in whether they feel concerned or
optimistic about this role, and how they periodize the current configuration of art in
society. What is interesting about these scholars’ ideas about art and society is not
only their description of the changing context for art in society, but also their
fundamental belief that it is the very definition of something as art, and the position
of art in relation to other social forms, that has led to its growing importance in
contemporary understandings of politics and economics. By examining these
 scholars’ questions, this chapter will set the stage for an exploration into the
contemporary possibilities of art’s contribution to social change. What kind of light
can the experiences of circus performers shed on the question of the changing
relationship between art and work, the politics of the term art, and disagreements
over whether (or when and where) we are experiencing a benefit or a threat from
the growing integration between art and work.

**Art as Structural Oppression: Bourdieu**

Bourdieu, is one of the most prolific and influential recent writers to write against
what he perceived was a cult of the artist. Although as a sociologist/philosopher
Bourdieu has not been used as extensively in geography as some other
philosophers, some feel he has made critical contributions to the discipline
(Cresswell 2002) and has perhaps been underutilized (Holt 2008). Casey has argued
in favour of including Bourdieu more in geography, suggesting that Bourdieu’s
concept of habitus can “help situate the body more securely in its relation to place” (2001 p. 716), while others argue that habitus can contribute to a more progressive sense of place (Dovey, Woodcock and Wood 2009) and also importantly links behaviours with social and physical environments (Setten 2009). Bourdieu held an important position of skepticism about the inherent value and natural politics of art, which he felt was being idealized as pure, admirable and outside normative social structures. He argued against a set of beliefs around art and the artist, in which art was seen as a cure for despair, and which he felt had become a repository for yearning. Keeping Bourdieu’s critiques in mind is a valuable way to counter the prevalent tendency (both across a broad range of literature, and in my own thinking) to uncritically valorize the artist.

Bourdieu was writing in the 1980s in response to what he saw as the institutionalization and ideological predominance of ‘high art’, an extension of the separation of art and craft, or art and other forms of labour. Bourdieu felt this idea of high art had failed to bring the enlightenment or moral superiority that it had promised in centuries before. Rather he felt the classification between high and low art or the ‘distinction of taste’ had solidified a hegemonic power. According to Fowler, Bourdieu was responding to ideas of art that turned taste or aesthetic appreciation into a rational, educated, abstracted kind of pleasure believing that art, which once was about the “refusal of the bourgeoisie” now “serves the ancient purposes of ideology in justifying social inequality and domination” (in Fowler 1994 p. 129).
Bourdieu was very cognizant of the historic relationship opposing art and labour or capital, calling the field of cultural production an “economic world reversed” based on a “winner loses” logic since economic success (in literary terms for example, writing a best seller) may well signal a barrier to specific consecration and symbolic power (Johnson 1993 p. 7-8). I suspect that this description of the “economic world reversed,” while certainly illustrative of some relationships between art and money, has also become more complicated in the last two decades. Bourdieu further identifies three competing realms of legitimacy for art, or ways in which this power is distributed 1) specific legitimacy (by peers, art for art’s sake), 2) bourgeois or class based legitimacy (by trained critics etc), and 3) mass culture legitimacy (Bourdieu 1993). While it is still possible to see these realms at work, I wonder how the functioning of these realms might be shifting, as capital becomes increasingly oriented towards the consumption of creative products.

It was not the content of art that was of interest to Bourdieu, but what work the concept of art was doing. He says:

The work of art is an object which exists as such only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art.

Consequently, in order to escape from the usual choice between celebratory effusions and the reductive analysis which, failing to take account of the fact of the belief in the work of art and of the social conditions which produce that belief, destroys the work of art as such a rigorous science of art must.
Pace both the unbelievers and iconoclasts, and also the believers, assert the possibility and necessity of understanding the work in its reality as a fetish; it has to take into account everything which helps to constitute the work as such, not least the discourses of direct or disguised celebration which are among the social conditions of production of the work of art qua object of belief. (Bourdieu 1993 p. 35)

One of Bourdieu’s main productive concepts was the concept of cultural capital, in which “those with social power have a monopoly over ways of seeing and classifying objects according to their criteria of good taste. The ability to create new systems of discernment is class power” (Bridge 2006 p. 1966). With this concept he teases out the nuances of power in the cultural field arguing that the cultural field “is structured by the distribution of available positions (e.g. consecrated artists vs. striving artist, novel vs. poetry, art for art sake vs. social art)” (Johnson 1993 p. 16). The distribution of power across the culture field was related to the structure of hegemonic power, as Johnson (1993 p. 32) says: “when a new literary or artistic group makes its presence felt in the field of literary or artistic production, the whole field is transformed, since its coming into being i.e. into difference, modifies and displaces the universe of possible options.”

Bourdieu’s description of the social field raises questions for me about the changing position of circus, and its effect on the distribution of cultural capital and on the shape of hegemonic power. His perspective complicates how I understand the
impact of granting circus performers status as ‘art’. What might be the effect on the whole social field? In what ways might the universe of possible options for social positions be displaced around these performers with their new status as artists?

**The Artist as a Beacon of Social Change**

Of course, Bourdieu has many critics. Fowler (1994) for instance, suggests that Bourdieu prematurely closes off the space for art to be a form of resistance, suggesting that artists are not necessarily out to maximize their gains and social status in relation to one another. She also thinks that where Bourdieu is committed to a radicalization of the Enlightenment project, a more complete rejection of the scientific realist perspective is needed. She argues that Bourdieu lacks a close reading of contemporary forms of mass culture and she proposes instead “social movements drawing on the support of that section of ‘prophetic’ artists who, by resisting the dangers of cooptation, continue to make us see both the inequalities and distinctive ideologies of modernity” (p. 152). While skeptical of the notion of ‘prophetic’ artists, I am drawn to the notion of seeing differently through art and will explore this further in the next three chapters. I am also interested in the concept of habitus and the way that it occupies the space between agency or subjectivity, and repetition or reproduction. Although habitus for Bourdieu remained a relatively static concept and was somewhat unrelated to his work on art, it hints at questions of how subjectivity is reproduced or shifted, and in turn suggests possibilities for change which I will return to throughout this dissertation.
Fowler belongs to a group of scholars who argue that there is something politically necessary and inherently positive about the artist’s role in society (Massumi 2002; Deleuze 2003; Manning 2006; Toscano 2009). Though this may sound idealistic, there have been significantly more scholars who have written positively about the relationship of art to politics and social change than those who, like Bourdieu, critique it. At this art-positive end of the spectrum, art has been saddled with the expectation and responsibility to imagine alternative futures and utopias (Bloch 1988), charged with providing a foundational critique of society (Chiapello 2004), or opening up the possibilities of equality – the “only universal axiom of politics” (Rancière 2004). Though Bourdieu was critiquing what he thought were idealistic notions of art and artists among his predecessors, beliefs about the political potential of art have received even further invigoration during and since the time he was writing.

Toscano (2009) has grouped together several scholars (Negri, Rancière and Badiou), all writing in the late 70s and early 80s, who he argues have used a positive belief in the possibilities of art and affect “to invent conceptual configurations that permitted them to traverse a period of punishing reaction that either destroyed or co-opted many of their erstwhile companions” (p. 370). The conceptual configurations they invented are theorizations of art and aesthetics developed in such texts as Rancière’s *The Politics of Aesthetics* and Negri’s *Art and Multitude*. Toscano claims that these texts were “an attempt to recover the constituent energies of 1977 in the midst of a period of crushing defeat and of rapid but
seemingly depoliticizing cultural upheaval" (p. 373). This group has been tied together under the title Italian autonomists and they are often identified with coining and using the terms affective labour and immaterial labour (Dowling, Nunes and Trott 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008). Though they each have a somewhat different articulation of the current relationship between art and capitalism, they also have a number of similarities in their fundamental concern with the dramatic changes they perceive in contemporary capitalism, and their insistence that art plays a central role in this. I will not deal with them all, as there are many differences as well as similarities between them, but will focus on Rancière as one example of this approach.

Equality Through Art: Rancière

Rancière has begun to be taken up in geography (Dikec 2005; Dixon 2009), though he is still not widely used. Despite this, I am interested in his work because he articulates changes to the function of art in a manner that thoroughly embeds them in parallel social and political changes. Also because, like Bourdieu, he is not focusing on political content in his discussion of the politics of art. Whether or not a work of art is political by virtue of its content is an important question, but not the one taken up by either Bourdieu or Rancière. In conversations with my participants, most felt that the content of their work was not necessarily political in the sense of having a social agenda or making social commentary, but some felt that their work might be considered political in the sense of how it was situated in relation to normative society, and in the effects it had on the audience, there was something
perhaps disruptive or perhaps just significant and unique about the relationship of some performance work to every day life. It is the politics of art in this broader sense that Rancière also refers to. Rancière describes the ‘distribution of the sensible’, as the way in which all things become visible, seeable, and knowable and identifies the role of art and the aesthetic in this process. Before we can appreciate a work of art Rancière says:

There must be a previous mapping of the visible, the sayable and the thinkable allowing us to connect in this or that way something that we call artistic form and something that we see as political content. Art and politics are not two terms that would be linked through some form of representation. They are constituted as such in the same knot of the visible, the sayable and the thinkable, in the same framing of a common space where some practices appear to be named ‘arts’ and some matters are be viewed as ‘political’.

(Rancière 2002 lecture transcript)

For Rancière, art and politics are always intertwined: art is always political because the same distribution of the sensible that determines what is art, also determines what is political. Rancière says:

Art is not political owing to the messages and feelings that it carries on the state of social and political issues. It is not political owing to the way it represents social structures, conflicts or identities. It is political by virtue of the very distance that it takes with regard to those functions. It is political as it frames a specific space-time sensorium, as it redefines on this stage the
power of speech or the coordinates of perception, shifts the places of the actor and the spectator, etc. because politics is not the exercise of power or the struggle for power. Politics is first of all the configuration of a space as political, the framing of a specific sphere of experience, the setting of objects posed as ‘common’ and subjects to whom the capacity is recognized to designate these objects and argue about them. (Rancière 2002)

Rancière, like Bourdieu, claims that the process of defining art as art, is intrinsically linked to our politics. Rancière suggests that this “distribution of the sensible” has very broad impacts as it dictates who can speak and what they can speak about (who is allowed to voice political ideas), based on which spaces they occupy and what kind of time, knowledge, and voice they are granted in society.

Rancière periodizes art into three regimes and in each regime the artist has a different relation to work. Reflecting on all three regimes is useful for destabilizing any relationships between art and work that may have become normalized in the contemporary moment. However, although he claims these regimes arose in particular historic periods, each new regime does not abolish the one that was previously dominant, and as a result several regimes co-exist. In the first “ethical regime of art” the focus of art is on the image, and the artist him or her self is a problematic figure. In this configuration, the artist becomes a displaced form of work and is an unstable exception. This regime is linked to Plato, and his concern with imitations that were modeled on ‘truth’ and “whose final aim was to educate the citizenry in accordance with the distribution of occupations in the community”
The second regime, “the poetic or representative regime of art”, was codified in the classical age and is rooted in Aristotle’s critique of Plato. In this regime the central concern is the “substance” of the art. This substance begins to represent the activities of men (sic) to the detriment of the essence of the image. This regime sees the rise of the “fine arts”, and “defines proper ways of doing and making as well as assessing imitations”. In this regime it is no longer about how true an imitation is but also about how that imitation was made, the proper forms of art. In this regime art ceases to be the displaced visibility of work and the distribution of the sensible attempts to stabilize the artist’s exception by assigning it a ‘techné’ that resolves the problem of the artist as an exception. Art in this second regime becomes about technique and must be produced in the proper way to justify being art. Representation is no longer seen as a lie (as it may have been in the first regime), it is rather a technique. Rancière argues that in the representative regime of art the fiction of the separation between art and work is cultivated as a way of stabilizing the artist’s exception – the artist in this fiction is granted the ability to step outside work and participate in community and political life – something which was not supposed to be possible for other workers who had no time/space outside of work (Rancière 2004).

Finally the third regime, the aesthetic regime of the arts is the most recent (about 200 yrs old). This regime “asserts the absolute singularity of art and destroys any criterion by which to isolate that singularity” (Rancière 2004). Rancière claims the aesthetic regime “is the true name for what has been incoherently labeled
modernity”3 (Rancière 2004 p. 24). It abolishes the hierarchical distribution of the sensible associated with technical judgments put forth in the representative regime of art, and implements a certain equality “based on the destruction of the hierarchical system of the fine arts” (Rancière 2004 p. 53). The move to the aesthetic regime presupposed indifference regarding modes of expression and a willingness to abandon all subject matter. This leads to the development of abstract art, which Rancière argues allows for increased possibilities for equality. Unlike Bourdieu who would say that you still require class based cultural competencies to understand abstract art, Rancière believes the aesthetic regime of art opens up the possibility for equality by doing away with technical requirements for art production and dissolving the boundary between art/life and work.

This does not mean that the artist becomes a heroic figure in the aesthetic regime (which is an idea Deleuze has been accused of perpetuating (Kester 1999)); on the contrary, he feels the artist should not be held responsible for embodying ideas of freedom or autonomy - this becomes the task for all people. Although grouped with modernism in the aesthetic regime of art Rancière argues postmodernism has come “to challenge the freedom or autonomy that the modernist principal conferred – or would have conferred – upon art the mission of accomplishing” (Rancière 2004). Instead, Rancière seems optimistic about the aesthetic regime because he thinks the opening up of boundaries between work and art, through abolishing hierarchical

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3 Rancière has problems with the term modernity. He suggests it masks things it should revel in, particularly the relationship with the past, and prevents a clear understanding of transformation by indicating rupture.
and technical systems of art, is beneficial for the cause of equality. Rancière in fact advocates further dissolution of the boundary because he thinks everyone should do art, rather than distinguishing between “artists” and “labourers”. He doesn’t want a division between, on the one hand, those who think, contribute to community life, act, and are cultivated, and on the other hand, those who work, have no time to leave the place of work, are acted upon, and are uncivilized. He argues strongly for reattaching art and work. He says:

   It is necessary to abandon the lazy and absurd schema that contrasts the aesthetic cult of art for art sake with rising power of industrial labour. Art can show signs of being an exclusive activity in so far as it is work.

   ...Whatever might be the specific types of economic circuits they lie within, artistic practices are not ‘exceptions’ to other practices. They represent and reconfigure the distribution of these activities. (p.45)

So Rancière is not engaged in determining whether art is good or bad for society. Rather he claims that definitions of both art and the artist affect politics and labour in ways that impact possibilities for equality. For Rancière, equality is the condition necessary to think politics, and it is one of his central concerns. However, there are different kinds of equality, only one of which, aesthetic equality, is necessarily produced by the aesthetic regime of art. Despite this limitation, Rancière is in favour of the increased integration he perceives between features of life associated with art and those associated with labour.
What Rancière articulates very well, are the longstanding relationships between art and work, and the ongoing historical transformation that has surrounded the relation between these two things. He theorizes in some ways that are similar to Bourdieu - namely that art is not political by nature of its content – or to put it in Deleuzian terms it’s not about ‘communication’, which is tied to content and linked to already fixed objects in the world. The politics of art for both Rancière and Bourdieu are not related to whether it is making a social statement. Instead the politics in art lie in the way it shapes objects and subjectivities, allowing us to see certain things and obscuring others. However, Rancière differs from Bourdieu in that he focuses on the transformation and reorganization of the hierarchy of art, and the relationship between art and work. He is largely focused on how these relations have changed over time. As part of his perception of change he maintains the optimism and hopefulness that art has evoked in many people.

**Workers in the Nerve Centre of Capitalism: Lazzarato**

Maurizio Lazzarato is best known for writing about “immaterial labour” a concept he uses to outline the salient features he sees in post-Fordist capitalist production, namely the integration of all activity into wage earning activity. Lazzarato also has written specifically critiquing Rancière’s articulation of the role of art and the artist, arguing that the world no longer matches Rancière’s descriptions, and therefore requires different conclusions than those Rancière arrives at (Lazzarato 2008). Lazzarato and Rancière frame their problems in similar ways: both argue that there is an enduring connection between art, politics and labour. Similar to Rancière’s
discussion of the links between politics, labour and intellect, Lazzarato says
“aesthetic, political and economic practices are the elements of a single assemblage
traversed by a single problem, of which work, politics and art constitute the
different facets or viewpoints” (Lazzarato 2008 p. 7). They both also argue that
there is a transformation in the relationship between art and work, and identify this
as a breakdown of the previously stable boundary between art and work. Where
they differ from one another is in their assessment of whether the prior (and in
some cases still lingering) distinction between art and work is beneficial or
problematic. They also differ in the time period on which they focus. I find these two
scholars each offer something constructive. While Rancière presents a valuable long
view which helps put the current changes in perspective, what Lazzarato’s critique
importantly suggests is that there may be features currently at work (such as the
modulation or manipulation of freedom in post Fordism and neoliberalism), which
are unique to the contemporary moment and need to be addressed with greater
urgency and a more critical view than Rancière offers.

Rancière finds the growing dissolution of the boundary between art and labour to
be liberating. He advocates further abolition of the distinction between art and
work, and feels that the aesthetic regime of art’s encouragement of art without
techné or hierarchy promotes equality and a better society. In contrast Lazzarato
raises the specter that capitalism has already captured this flexibility and turned it
to its own uses. Using Lazzaratto’s lens it would appear that although it is true we
may have arrived at some kind of equality as heralded by Rancière, it is only to find it is equality based on consumption and nothing else.

Their periodization of the current phenomenon also does not match. Rancière’s time frame is much longer; he is talking about a period of 200 years in which we have seen the dissolution of the boundary between art and work. Lazzarato claims that art and its relationship to society, specifically to work and to politics, has dramatically changed in the last few decades. Lazzarato uses the transition Foucault has identified from disciplinary societies to societies of security (Lazzarato’s term) as a framing device for the transition he is describing. Foucault’s periodization of disciplinary societies overlaps with Rancière’s periodization of the aesthetic regime of art but they do not have the same traits. Lazzarato says that art is defined in opposition to work in disciplinary societies, but argues, as we are now moving away from disciplinary societies, art is now no longer defined in opposition to work. Ultimately, both claim we are witnessing a change in the relationship of art to society, economics, and politics, but for Lazzarato this is a more recent urgent and troublesome transformation.

Lazzarato identifies two central changes in the last 30 years. The first turns artists into workers and citizens into publics who consume art. The second makes practices that were once confined to art (creation) ubiquitous in many other domains. He also says there is no longer a rupture between art and work but growing continuity, and this is something we must be concerned with. He says:
The artists, the technicians, and the cultural operators ‘work,’ like the various publics, in the nerve centre of this new domain of capitalist accumulation and acculturation...Art and culture are bound up with and participate in the configuring of a new situation in which the problems are no longer those of disciplinary societies. (Lazzarato 2006 p. 2)

Where Rancière spoke optimistically about the advantages for equality\(^4\) once the ‘absurd’ classification of art as distinct from work was no longer tenable, and art/work theoretically became available to everyone. Lazzarato says those were the problems/opportunities of a disciplinary society. Now Lazzarato fears the blurring of these boundaries and wants the separation between art and work maintained or reinforced. Otherwise he argues, work becomes everything, leaving no outside position from which one could form a critique of capital (Lazzarato 2006).

Lazzarato says that whereas in a disciplinary society it made sense to critique the cult of the artist and the false separation between art and work, now that we have seen a thorough merger of these categories the critique no longer makes sense. In fact with nothing left “outside work”, he feels we have lost a valuable position from which to pose alternatives to the status quo. In the society of security, rather than a space of disruption or a “rupture with the logic of meaningful situations” (Rancière 2004), art is now at the centre of control. Lazzarato argues that what were

\(^4\) One of Rancière’s main concerns is equality, which he understands as “the condition required to think politics” (p. 52). However there are different kinds of equality, the kind of equality which the aesthetic regime of art implements, which is based on the destruction of the hierarchy of fine arts, is not equivalent to political equality, literary equality, or “equality in general”. I think Rancière is suggesting that while some equality (like that created by the aesthetic regime of art) is better than no equality, it is still not the same as political equality or equality in general.
previously important alternative ways of life, are now just options for capital, and
culture has become the territory where corporations launch their current
occupations and neocolonial takeovers. Although he doesn’t develop these ideas
much more extensively, his critique is a powerful sketch which leaves many details
to be worked out (Lazzarato 2006; Lazzarato 2008).

Lazzarato further describes this change from disciplinary societies by arguing that
now societies are “governed through the management of heterogeneities”, the
“optimization of systems of difference”, and through “a modulation of ... coefficients
of freedom” (Lazzarato 2008 p. 1). Art and the artists have long been what capitalism
regarded as “the very paradigm of freedom, heterogeneity, difference and deviance”
(p. 1), and Lazzarato now argues that is the central site for control, corporate
colonization and capitalist production, begging further questions about the capture
of freedom and the commodification of difference. This optimizing of difference and
manipulating degrees of freedom is key, and will come up again in discussions of the
experiences of circus performers in the next chapter.

**The Particular Features of the Artist that are Being Mobilized: Virno**

Like Rancière and Lazzarato, Virno believes that the separation between spheres of
different kinds of activities that have been in place for centuries are currently
failing. For Virno the separation that is failing is between notions of labour, intellect
and politics, and like Rancière and Lazzarato he is centrally concerned with the
figure of the artist and its role in the contemporary moment. He agrees with
Lazzarato that in the post-Fordist economy, performance artists are but exemplars of a form of labour that has become pervasive but he is much more specific about what exactly the special skills of the performing artist are.

The term he uses to describe the particular features of the artist, which are now the features of all labour, is virtuosity. He argues that virtuosity is a distinctive feature of all life in the contemporary moment, and by virtuosity he means 1) an action which “finds its own fulfillment” i.e. does not produce an end product and 2) “an activity which requires the presence of others” (p. 52). These are features that the cultural industry is particularly good at - in fact he argues that the culture industry has actually become the industry of the means of production, producing the required competencies for all other post-Fordist industry to function.

Virno argues that virtuosity is intrinsically political by virtue of not having an end product and being relational in nature. As more labour moves in this direction, labour has taken on the characteristics of what was previously the realm of politics, leaving a gap as to what politics now might be. He says “where there is an end product...there is labour, no longer virtuosity, nor, for that reason politics” (p. 53). For Virno, because all of life is now infused with labour and all of labour with politics, the figure of ‘the people,’ the previous source of political change, is no longer possible. Using the words of Hanna Arendt he claims, “all virtuosity is intrinsically political.” However, he also describes the way Glen Gould moved away from his virtuosity and the ‘political dimension’ of his work by seeking “to bring his
activity as a performing artist as close as possible to the idea of labour” (p. 53). Virno does not conclude whether this virtuosity is desirable or what politics might look like given this new configuration. He does, however, raise very interesting questions about the political elements of art and what is currently being mobilized by post-Fordism, and gives us greater detail than either Rancière or Lazzarato about what elements of the performing artist are relevant to politics and also to capitalism.

In the context of the circus and the rest of this dissertation, Lazzarato raises valuable questions about the relationship between politics and art when that art is organized “as close as possible to the idea of labour”. As we will see, circus production is currently organized in a similar manner to other post-Fordist labour structures, in terms of growing flexibility, precariousness and emotional labour.

**The Role of the Artist Today**

Given this context, some advocate returning to an earlier time when (they feel) the role of the artist, and the category ‘art’, were clearer and more distinct (Chiapello 2004; Dorn 2004; Bohm and Land 2009). For example, some debates in policy circles in Canada and the UK express concern that the term ‘art’ is being replaced by the term ‘culture’, which does not have the same sets of historical associations and values attached to it. They claim rebranding makes it easier to dismantle programs and protections for something called ‘culture’ than it would be to dismantle the same support for ‘art’. In the debate, also, we see the question of the relationship
between art and work arise. As the term culture replaces art, this simultaneously opens up the idea of art to the market and to policy, realities from which art was previously sheltered (Dorn 2004). Bohm and Land (2009) argue that, at least in the UK, government is interested in “using culture to form the social image of capital” (p. 75), revealing yet another example of art/culture being used in the service of new capitalist paradigms. In these examples the movement away from a well defined notion of art is considered problematic and should be resisted.

Chiapello (2004), who has written extensively on post-Fordist work structures, argues for a return to something she describes as the “artist critique leveled against the new industrial capitalist, and bourgeois society of the nineteenth century, largely by artists in the name of freedom and individual fulfillment” (p. 585). Similar to Lazzarato, she claims that contemporary capitalism has absorbed the artist’s critique of capital. She says at issue is the very existence of a critique of capitalist society:

Our argument is that artist critique has fallen into a severe crisis over the past 20 years becoming not only less virulent but also – and this is probably no less worrisome – fulfilling less and less its social function, which is to maintain an active critique within our capitalist modernity in the name of such values as freedom or the refusal of commodification. (p. 589)

Certainly not everyone would agree that the primary social function of art is to maintain an active critique of capitalist modernity, but you don’t have to entirely
embrace that idea to accept elements of her point. What Chiapello is suggesting, others have also argued, that it is the position of art as something that occupies a space outside normative relations and represents freedom, which makes it so appealing to contemporary capitalism. These qualities of difference, resistance to predictability, and appearance of freedom are, as we saw above, what make art so perfectly suited for absorption in the post-Fordist production model. Massumi (2002) describes it in a slightly different way:

Capitalism’s own form of power is to produce variety...capitalism starts to intensify or diversify affect but only in order to extract surplus value. It hijacks affect in order to intensify profit potential. The capitalist logic of surplus value production starts to take over the relational field that is also the domain of political ecology, the ethical field of resistance to identity and predictable paths. It is very troubling and confusing because it seems to me there is a convergence between the dynamic of capitalist power and the dynamic of resistance. (p. 224)

The art industry has a well-documented history of eventually consuming artwork that began as a form of resistance to social expectations and the very economic system that embraced it (Grindon 2011). Massumi describes what he sees as a worrying convergence between what was previously a space of resistance, and capitalist power. Here we see that not only is there less room for a critique of capital, but the very relational field or ethical field which might have cultivated critique, is itself being hijacked for profit. Finally what is even most difficult to find a
way around is that the mobilization of our affective experiences means that many of us are enjoying the encroachment of capitalist production into all the spaces of our lives. Virno calls post-Fordism the communism of capitalism, suggesting that it offers its own skewed versions of many of the desirable things that communism has stood for (less alienation, greater fulfillment) but offers them largely as appeasements without taking down the system of capitalism itself in the ways communism promised. Foucault argues similarly that the contemporary models of governance and control are founded on a sense of choice and freedom in which governance is internalized to the point that it feels like we are following our own desires when we make choices that dovetail with the preferences and needs of capitalism.

Massumi also mobilizes the concept affect to describe what it is that is being manipulated and diversified in capitalism. The use of the term affect has exploded in geography as in other disciplines (Pile 2009), however, the links between affect and labour, or even affect and that other proliferating discourse – the creative economy, are still too sparse in geographic scholarship. Without exploring this connection both spheres suffer. Those discussing the politics or ethics of affect often remain relatively abstract, providing too few empirical examples through which to work out the limitations of their ideas (Thrift 2004; Venn 2010), while those discussing the creative city remain trapped by the limitations of their analytic tools (Florida 2002; Wojan, Lambert and McGranahan 2007). Although as I suggested in chapter 2, perhaps this gap is due to the limitations of traditional methods for investigating the
fluid, relational and unbounded subjects who are the focus of scholarship on affect (Pile 2009), but even with this understanding, it remains worth noting. The autonomist Marxists I mentioned in this chapter such as Negri, Rancière and Virno are bringing these concepts together in ways that are productive, and this project also attempts to build such links by responding to the limitations of both, and hopefully addressing some of the questions raised by them and left unanswered.

What specific role is carried out today by artists/the communications industry/virtuosic labourers (Virno 2004)? Given the pivotal role (symbolic if not actual) that artists have in the current moment, what are the experiences of workers/artists? We have been told repeatedly that all workers are becoming more like artists, yet as we will see in the next chapter the category ‘artist’ is still operational. I will explore how contemporary Canadian circus performers are caught up in the capture of art within current systems of production and consumption. Where might possibilities exist for social critique in the contemporary moment, and what forms might they take? It is with this context in mind that I move forward to exploring what light the experiences of present-day circus performers can shed on this situation.
Chapter 4: Art and Work in the Circus

“We would contend, however, that subjectivity is always mediated by the meanings which people give to their experience – even ‘materialization in the flesh’ (which we would understand as embodied ways of knowing) is not, in our view, outside culture. Thus, to understand emergent subjectivities... centrally requires attention to the meanings cultural workers themselves give to their life and work – not merely, we must stress, for the sake of sociological completeness, but in order to found a political project.” (Gill and Pratt 2008 p. 19)

Why Circus? Why Now?

Given the proliferation of scholarship documenting the growing centrality of creativity and art to post-Fordist capitalism, I don’t think it is coincidental that circus has recently been granted status as an art form. Looking at the practices of circus performers historically and contemporarily, it appears to me that circus is precisely the kind of art that does well under the constraints and disciplines of the current economic paradigm. Under these conditions art is subject to increased pressure to be financially viable, and there is a growing demand for artists (and all workers) to be entrepreneurs who market and manage their images and careers. Circus has a long history of being an entertainment form that has survived economically without the patronage that other arts have received. According to Carmeli, one of the most prolific circus scholars, circus was emphatically excluded from the sphere of traditional artistic genres like theatre as recently as 1984 (Carmeli 1996). Circus has traditionally been a creative form that has made its way as an entertainment rather than an art by pleasing large audiences and finding ways to get them to pay for their experience. Stories of ‘old circus’ culture are full of
references to ‘marks,’ gullible audience members who could be persuaded to part
with their money in any number of ways: sideshows, ticket prices, buying
memorabilia, or even pick pocketing. Stoddart (2000) in her book *Rings of Desire:*
*circus history and representation,* one of the few scholarly books to explore the
meaning and position of American circus in American culture in the 20th century,
says:

Advertising, and most especially print based advertising of various kinds, has
not only constituted the fuel which has powered and perpetuated the circus
from the outset, but has also become recognized in itself, like the circus
wagons, as a part of its art as well as its machinery. (p. 50)

Circus is arguably a market-savvy art form that has a long history of marketing and
promotion, a tradition of billboards, posters, and material culture that to this day
inform the collective historical imaginary of circus performers and their audiences.

Figure 3: Vintage circus posters, purchased on-line, and repurposed to
decorate the coffee shop attached to the Centre of Gravity circus training
studio in Toronto
While contemporary circus performers may not have direct connections to the ‘old circus’, there is a rich material culture mostly comprised of banners, posters, and photos, which were the result of prolific marketing practices and which now form the backdrop for circus performers. This inheritance of a comfort with marketing and selling is something that other art forms are now trying to develop for the first time.

McCormack (1984) argues that of all art forms, the ones that stand a chance of ‘making it’ in a market model are the masterpieces (the most prestigious forms), and popular culture (the least prestigious forms); circus has historically belonged in this bottom category. Stoddart makes the case for the traditional position of circus as a money making endeavor. She says:

To classify the circus within these terms as ‘work’ rather than ‘art’, is to feed the illusion that ‘art’ may not be subject to commodification in the same way that it is in the circus in which exhibitions of skill are perhaps more obviously driven by a thirst for profit-making. (Stoddart 2000 p. 81)

5 Its rich history of material culture, especially in promotion and advertising, has resulted in a vast array of heritage posters, images, fonts and advertising wordplay, which contemporary performers mine for their own promotional materials. This is part of what promotion looks like for contemporary circus performers; it is the old made new again. It could be described as gentrification of the old circus. Gentrification is generally understood to be the redevelopment of certain formerly working class segments of the urban core in ways that both preserve the “historic” elements of these spaces while transforming them to meet the desires of middle class consumers seeking to distinguish themselves through valuing “historic preservation” and “the consumption of non standardized commodities” with a “retro” sequentiality (Bridge 2006) (Zukin 1990). Gentrifiers aspire to authenticity. The historic authenticity is important, as is the distinction granted by the originality of living in this way. In processes of gentrification something old is recuperated and made new again, given new life and most importantly new value.
Yoram Carmeli, an anthropologist, and one of the few scholars who have made an ongoing study of the circus, points out the tendency in traditional circus to advertise itself as “first time ever,” “really impossible,” “unique,” “one and only” (Carmeli 1990). According to Carmeli, circus has been trying to reinvent itself and sell itself at every turn. If circus has always been concerned with, and responsible for, making its own buck, it is not surprising that circus ‘art’ is growing at a time when cultural or creative industries are increasingly considered linchpins of economic success. The arts are being forced to validate themselves as economically viable and circus is in an excellent position to do this. In the transition from Fordist models of production to post-Fordist or neoliberal market based models, circus may well be a perfect representation of the new articulations of the idea of ‘art’.

Like many workers these days, circus performers are quite sophisticated when it comes to thinking about themselves as both products and labourers. Performers have to both justify their work in economic terms, and be able to present themselves as desirable saleable attractions through self-promotion. In justifying their work they are quick to calculate and share with others the hours of training and rehearsal that are required to create each performance piece. Jen, a Toronto-based aerialist, described it this way:

It’s a lot of hours outside of [the show], a lot of hours of preparation for six minutes of show time and you have to have daily training to keep strong and to keep able to do that and to do it well, and so it really is like a whole lifestyle commitment.
With physical tricks like aerial it is relatively easy to see the technique and skill – but still performers talk extensively about the hours they spend in the gym and additional hours of therapy and other physical practices required to perform in this way. Clown performers also made a point of describing the hours of practice and technique that went into their work. The version of artistic success presented by circus performers today is clearly not about a moment of inspiration but rather emphasizes the hard work and perseverance that goes into doing what they do.

The performers I spoke with also had a clear expectation that they must sell and market their own work. Caroline, a Montreal-based aerialist, said, “you have to learn to sell yourself, to market yourself so that your service is appealing to the client.” While Chris, an aerialist who has worked in both Toronto and Montreal said:

I promote myself. I would say that you are never operating alone because if you are just promoting yourself you still need to be dealing with the people who are going to hire you … you can create for yourself a very good world if you are doing good work, if you are at the right price, like all those things in business that you need so you can just function.

Thus these performers usually have two jobs, artist and self-promoter (sometimes three because they still might need another job to pay the bills). Many performers learn video editing, photo shop, and web design; they organize photo shoots and of course manage their on-line presence. Where they do not do all the work themselves, there can be a symbiotic relationship with other ‘creative’ professionals. Many in the circus community travel with an entourage of photographers who get
access to ideal subjects (unusual, colourful, dramatic, entertaining), and who in turn fill the promotional needs of performers, helping to keep them performing by providing the kinds of images they need to promote themselves. Some examples of web sites are shown below.

![Firefly Theatre Website](http://www.fireflytheatre.com/)

**Figure 4:** The website of a small Edmonton based aerial company. This company emphasizes theatricality and narrative in their work ([http://www.fireflytheatre.com/](http://www.fireflytheatre.com/))
Figure 5: The website for a Montreal based aerial duo, 'Duoja', showing the number of images which performers mobilize to promote themselves (http://www.jongulick.com/duoja_site/duoja_site_en.html)

Figure 6: The website of Montreal based clown performer and instructor, Francine Cotê (http://www.formationclown.com/Anglais/site_en.htm)
Performers are even encouraged to individually embody the idea of a flexible labour supply. They are financially rewarded for being able to fit themselves into a diverse range of sellable products. Eli of Zero Gravity Circus said:

especially if you want to be a contract performer you need to have a kid friendly show, you need to have an adult show, you need to have an aerial show, you need to have a ground act and you need to have a roaming act.

Developing this kind of versatility is what is necessary for many performers to survive in this model of production.

Circus seems positioned to respond well to the contemporary desire for niche products and in particular, commodification of the marginal. The small amount of academic scholarship on circus reflects popular opinion in their descriptions of circus as inhabiting a space outside the norm. In a similar fashion to the kind of outside status that art more broadly is often ascribed, many scholars argue that circus has traditionally helped define and reflect the world outside, especially the boundaries of what is normal, what is desirable, what is outrageous, and what is possible (Bouissac 1976; Handelman 1991; Davis 1993; Carmeli 1995; Garland Thompson 1996). It is this edgy quality of the idea of circus that arguably also helps it sell itself at a time when niche marketing is the rage, or as Lazzarato said when capitalism is optimizing difference (Lazzarato 2008). The image of circus as outside social norms, and its associations with the carnivalesque, the freak show, and the transgressive, are part of what make it so consumable in the current climate of mass expansion of consumption. Shaw (2005) argues that marginal communities have a
unique relationship to processes of gentrification because of the kinds of socio-cultural forces that are reshaping landscapes, such as the “increasing symbolic value of cultural diversity” (p. 150), or what others might describe as the need for niche marketing, or the desire for non-standard consumption among a growing cosmopolitan urban population (Wynne and O'Connor 1998; Bridge 2001; Chaney 2002). Circus is well suited to the marketing of edginess and marginality, pushing boundaries just enough to create a unique or niche product. Carmeli says of traditional circus that there was already a distinction “between actual circus travelers, who live in social and political marginality, and a performance of marginality, which is accomplished in the encounters between the travelers and their public as well as through circus lore [and] circus metaphors in daily language” (Carmeli 1994 p. 176). So even in traditional circus some boundary pushing was desirable and economically viable, and this is without a doubt part of the appeal of circus both historically and contemporarily. Today given the increasing emphasis on consumption as a driver of economic processes (Rantisi, Leslie and Christopherson 2006) success at this kind of marketing can have growing importance. And its marketability does not just benefit circus, many other industries and companies are working to capitalize on the image of circus including everything from obscure references, to making an entire class of the National Circus School in Montreal models for a high end shoe magazine.
Figure 7: A contortionist duo from the National Circus School are featured in B Magazine, the glossy shoe magazine published by Browns. This was part of a special issue in which Browns’ shoes and image were marketed using circus performers and circus themes (Browns 2008)
Figure 8: The sex appeal (skin tight clothing), skill (high wire in heels), and edgy (ripped stockings, spiked hair) countercultural imaginary of the circus are captured in this image also from the special issue of *B Magazine* (Browns 2008).
In many ways circus seems to be well suited to succeed in the current socio-economic moment, and this may be part of why ‘new circus’ has become re-popularized and revalorized in the last 30 years. Given the centrality of ‘creativity’ to this contemporary configuration, perhaps it is only natural that circus performers would also be interested in, and granted recognition as, an art form. However, this relationship is not straightforward; the two versions of circus, one as a successful economic force, and the other as an art form don’t always fit together in daily life. The attitudes and behaviours of performers as they negotiate their participation in economically viable labour and in art are not clear-cut. The ways performers give meaning to and negotiate their relationship to both work and art is a site of tension which, while supporting arguments about the pervasiveness of post-Fordism, also illuminates the lived reality of this as a contested site that includes spaces for resistance, change and transformation as well as compliance and participation.

Many performers I spoke with both in interviews and during training and shows, seemed quite clear about when they were doing ‘shitty corporate work’ and when they were not (though such comments are carefully kept behind closed doors while smiles and gratitude are communicated to the clients themselves). They made a point to identify the differences, however, the logic of these distinctions was not always straightforward even to me. Among the performers I interviewed there was sometimes an eerie continuity between the two spheres or art and work, with the same activities counting as either meaningful art or alienated work depending, not on the content of the work itself, but on factors like location and most significantly
remuneration. As such, despite performers drawing boundaries around art, in practice these boundaries are changeable and porous, and both spheres of art and work are undoubtedly influenced by what is happening in the other field.

As the epigraph at the beginning suggests, this chapter examines the “meanings cultural workers themselves give to their life and work”, “not just for the sake of sociological completeness, but in order to found a political project” (Gill and Pratt 2008). What the language and descriptions of performers reveal are both shifting understandings of art and work, and strong and complex distinctions between art and work. Despite Rancière and Lazzarato’s claims about the blurring of the boundary between art and work, this distinction is still active in the lives of these performers. It seems there are still strong opinions among circus performers about what kinds of activities comprise art, and what do not, and these opinions shape choices, such as what kinds of acts they will do in different environments and under different conditions.

The Precarity and Flexibility of Circus Production in Toronto

We’re a custom made-to-order kind of circus. We don’t build a show, put up a tent and sell tickets. That’s not the way our company has evolved. We work with clients who have something in mind and build the show the way they want it...It’s a very flexible company. It’s the way a modern company has to run. I have a big Rolodex of people who are happy to come out and do shows with us.
This is a description of his circus company given by Eli Chornecki, founder, owner and creative director of Zero Gravity Circus in an interview with The Globe and Mail (Jermyn 2011). In contrast to the familiar traditional format of American Big Top circus as a coherent troupe traveling from town to town for an entire season, the Toronto circus ‘community’ is a loosely affiliated group of people comprised of performers, agents, technicians, teachers, photographers and fans/volunteers, who do not belong to a stable organization, but come together frequently enough to describe themselves using words like ‘community,’ and to support one another in their work. The source of the greatest cohesion for myself and many other performers in Toronto has been the agency Zero Gravity Circus, which provides a low cost training space for performers, and hires many of us to do corporate events together. There are at least eight other circus agencies/companies in Toronto that also operate as employment agencies, and also frequently manage training facilities alongside them⁶.

Additionally the Lunacy Cabaret and several other regular cabarets in the city provide spaces where performers can workshop or showcase their work or try out experimental new pieces, and where photographers can take lots of photographs and fans can watch, volunteer and enjoy each others company. These regular venues greatly enhance a sense of collaboration and community among these otherwise infrequently connected individuals. Many of the people working and performing

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⁶ These include Circus Orange, A2D2, The Wonderful World of Circus, Cirqueability, Femmes de Feu (primarily fire and aerial), Big Top Circus, Toronto School of Circus Arts/Cirque Sublime, and Circus Alchemy. It is possible I have missed one or two, there are at least five or six other companies which have also emerged and then dissolved over the last eight years.
together are also long time friends, and so the community feeling also involves friendships and celebrating social events together, like baby showers and weddings as well as attending each others shows and fundraisers. It is a strong subculture of networked people who support each other both through their work and in their personal lives. However, there is very little infrastructure in the community except that provided by the agents and performers themselves. For example, Zero Gravity Circus has put a lot of money into building the community through creating a training space and supporting regular cabarets in their space. Several other companies and collectives have also done the same.

Many performers work with one or more agents, or run their own companies or both. Performers have personal websites and promotional material and/or belong to performer run collectives or agencies that promote their work. These agencies and individuals often bid against each other for shows in a classic contract-based model. As indicated by the quote at the beginning of this section, these ‘shows’ are often custom packages designed for corporate clients and can include a wide range of performance types. These usually include ‘site animation’, and a mix of skills and apparatus in the form of ‘feature acts’. These can be performed at street festivals, seasonal corporate parties, fundraisers, nightclubs, weddings, sporting events, and almost any other gathering one can think of. There are several different formats and locations for circus performance, and I have worked in all of them. For example, in Southern Ontario I have performed in Toronto, Barrie, Waterloo, Guelph, Ajax, Mississauga, Vaughn, Brampton, Mimico, Wasaga, Scarborough, Niagara Falls,
Niagara on the lake, Kitchener, Milton, London, Parry Sound, Sudbury, Caledon Hills, Newmarket, Cambridge, and Hamilton as well as some places in between. Elsewhere in Canada I have performed in Winnipeg, St Johns, and Iqaluit, and elsewhere in the world I have performed in Macedonia and Cuba. The shows in these locations range as I described above from solo events where I was the only performer to large shows with up to 15 or 20 performers. The format for the shows also varies depending on the venue. I have described four different categories of common types of shows which we perform below (for a full list of events I have been in and what I did in them see appendix C) The categories below are not set-in-stone definitions used by performers, but elaborations of general terms referred to when describing the type of show a performer is doing.

*Theatrical productions* take place in theatres or arenas and can be solo or large group shows. These shows can be one-off or touring shows, which move from venue to venue. Clown shows often take this format; hence the title “theatrical clowning”, and they may tour on the fringe circuit, or rent a theatre and mount productions in a similar fashion to more traditional theatre. *Cabaret style shows* are another format that is common in Toronto. These take place in theatres or in more transient spaces like nightclubs or converted warehouses. Usually there is a producer who publicized the event and sells tickets, and performers sometimes volunteer and sometimes receive an honorarium. Usually the money is significantly less than they would make at a corporate event but they have significantly more creative license to do whatever they want on stage. Cabarets that include circus acts seem to me to be growing in
popularity. Second City, just this year, started their own “late night cabaret” to capitalize on this, showcasing not only their usual roster of funny sketches and standup, but adding aerial, acrobatics and variety acts into the roster. Cirque de Soleil has also produced one show using the cabaret/vaudeville format, which was called “Banana Shpeel”, but usually it is a low budget format for presenting a number of individual acts without group rehearsal time in the framework of a single show. Festivals are a common site for circus performance, and include the now well-established “Toronto International Circus Festival”, busking festivals, and small community festivals in towns across the province. Finally corporate shows, the ‘corporate’ side of circus performance, are also very diverse. Some would group them with the festivals described above. These events range from upscale gala events with large budgets like the cocktail party held as part of Toronto’s bid for the Pan Am games, to community events, fundraisers, weddings, proms, and entertainment at the mall. All of these situations, except busking, usually involve a form of contract labour where the performer either directly, or through an agent, enters into a contract with the client which lays out the rate of pay, hours, location and expected entertainment services to be provided. And even busking at a festival involves contract labour for the festivals, which in exchange provides more infrastructure in terms of advertising, gear storage between shows, and often a retainer fee.

The ability to adapt to all these different environments is largely responsible for the successful growth of circus performance, but it is certainly not without costs. The
nature of these performances, the range of venues, working arrangements, and performance conditions reveals a lot about the conditions of circus performance work in the current moment. Performers may find themselves warming up in a dirty hallway outside the kitchen of a busy restaurant for an act that will have them hanging 25 feet in the air. Or if they are lucky (or have a good agent or good negotiating skills) they may have a climate controlled hotel conference room all to themselves equipped with food and drink. These flexible working conditions are the least of the challenges; the central challenge is the consistency of the work itself. The just-in-time model requires a surplus pool of labour to be available on demand, a roster of performers which Eli of Zero Gravity Circus suggests is only fully utilized two or three times a year (New Years Eve, Canada Day and a few other occasions). Eli says “When I have a show for 40 performers I have 40 people in my circus but then the next day there is no show I don’t have anyone in my circus”. This inconsistency impacts agents who still need to pay their bills in a dry month but arguably it most directly impacts performers who have less infrastructure in the form of ability to borrow money or own fixed capital, and yet also have to maintain their skills, store their costumes, and often work at (many) other (flexible) jobs to get by. Additionally for performers, this system makes things like missing a show because of being sick, just not an option, as it is entirely possible that that one show may represent half of your income for the month.

The impact of this varies of course depending on how reliant each performer is on circus for their income. According to Eli there are a large number of ‘professional
amateurs’ who occasionally get paid for their work but don't necessarily rely on it as their only employment. However, for those who put a lot of energy and time into their circus work and rely on it for even half their income, the instability of the market rests squarely on their shoulders. The nuances of the classic post-Fordist ‘flexible accumulation’ and ‘just-in-time’ models of production have been discussed elsewhere in great detail (Harvey 1990), including debates about how these models are not all-pervasive or monolithic (Linge 1991; Rutherford and Gertler 2002). Simply put, however, the organization of circus production in Canada right now clearly seems to fit typical frameworks of a post-Fordist approach to flexible labour organization, and may comprise at least part of the reason that circus is undergoing so much growth. It has successfully adapted to the demands of the contemporary economic paradigm using the willingness of performers to adapt to a very wide range of conditions and weather significant instability. I think it has managed these conditions so well for two reasons. The first is because of the potency of the idea of a circus ‘community’, and the second, related reason, is the association of artistic and creative work with experiences of desire, passion and choice. The first reason I have outlined above I will address further here, and the second will be discussed throughout the rest of this dissertation.

Performers themselves, while necessarily competing for work, are strikingly helpful and supportive of each other (especially given that they are often in direct competition). Performers frequently lend equipment, costumes, and exchange information about successful promotional strategies (sometimes sharing the cost of
such strategies, like getting group deals on printing costs). They also share important information about safety and insurance, and even pass on shows when unable to do them. Zero Gravity Circus has even been known to lend their insurance (a holy grail in such a high risk business) to smaller companies who have not been able to get their own insurance. This is a situation that speaks to the generosity of people in the community, their commitment to improve the industry overall, and also perhaps to an awareness of their own vulnerability. Exploring these networks can shed a lot of light on survival and success in the post-Fordist moment. However, it is far from idyllic, and surviving based on these kinds of informal networks requires intensive complex navigation of relationships and unstated and shifting expectations. There are spoken and unspoken rules of engagement for this kind of sharing. For example, when working for a particular agent there is usually a clause in the contract stating work cannot be solicited independently while working for that agent - any work inquiries that you get must go through the agent you are working for. Performers also may have clauses in their contracts indicating expectations of professional dress and behaviour. Unspoken courtesies include not poaching an agent contacted through another performer, and not undercutting other performers by offering lower rates. The latter issue can be challenging given there is less than perfect transparency about rates and contracts. Also, accessing these kinds of supports is dependant on friendship networks and ‘getting along’ with those who might help out. This dynamic can be one of the most challenging aspects of these kinds of business/friendship networks; it results in a sometimes tricky blurring of emotional ties and business relationships. This is part of the
emotional labour and blurring of boundaries that does not receive enough attention in conversations about immaterial labour.

**A Little More Context...**

There is considerable evidence that post-Fordist and neoliberal environments described by so many scholars (Rose 1996; Brenner and Theodore 2002; Clark 2002; Virno 2004; Rantisi, Leslie and Christopherson 2006) are not just abstract notions but are operational in the lives of Canadian artists. Corresponding to the time frames of Fordism and post-Fordism, Canada saw an increasing investment by the state in cultural life (art, film, media, etc) around 60 yrs ago, followed by a divestment between 30 and 15 years ago. Finally even more recently (5-15 yrs) Canada has seen what I would call a symbolic reinvestment under new conditions, wherein the relationship of artists to society is being renegotiated yet again, and in this new relationship, the kinds of recognition and support and social role given to artists has changed yet again (more status, less money, some change in the relationship between art and work).

The Canada Arts Council was founded in 1957, and the Ontario Arts Council in 1962. They were quite literally a Keynesian invention, being strongly based on the model of the Arts Council of Great Britain, which was set up by Maynard Keynes himself (Brighton 2006). The Arts Council was founded on the ideas that cultural policy should promote Canadian nationalism, and that since art was a public good, which everyone should be able to access, government should support art that was not
economically viable. However, over the last 30 years some of these basic principals have shifted.

Goff and Jenkins (2006) argue that in comparison to what they call “traditional” nationalist cultural policies in Canada (of which the National Arts Council is emblematic) new cultural policies focus on the “creative city”. This new model still receives funding from national and provincial sources but also receives a lot more funding from private sources than the traditional model. They argue this new version is also more focused on consumption and micro – level cultural activity, than the production orientation and macro level cultural activity emphasized in traditional Canadian cultural policy (p. 187). In this shift one of the most notable differences is the mobilization of cultural policy in service of non-cultural goals including economic goals. They identify six areas in which traditional cultural policies differ from current cultural policies. These are: 1) cultural vs. economic goals 2) focus on production or a focus on consumption 3) sectoral vs. spatial strategies 4) macro or Micro approach 5) federal/provincial lead vs. growing municipal involvement 6) public vs. private funding.

This shift was most clearly marked by the release of the report of the Applebaum-Hebert Committee (Applebaum-Hebert Committee 1982), which was appointed by the Liberal government to review Federal Cultural Policy. This Report signaled to many the movement of Canadian arts policy from a national and welfare policy model towards a marketized model (McCormack 1984). At the time it was released
it received significant backlash, but in many ways has now become the relatively accepted discourse about the best approach to arts policy, and has set the tone for the policy that has been written since, including the ‘Status of the Artist’ legislation that I will discuss below. Many surface elements in the Applebaum-Hebert Report echo the Massey Report written 30 years prior, both emphasize the importance of the artist to Canadian cultural life, recognizing that “the greatest subsidy to the cultural life of Canada comes not from governments, corporations or other patrons, but from the artists themselves, through their unpaid or underpaid labour” (Applebaum-Hebert Committee 1982). However, one of the main divergences between the Massey Report and the Applebaum-Hebert Report was in the perception of the relationship between art and market forces, which the Applebaum-Hebert Committee claimed could be beneficial in filling the financial gap which they argued the government was just not capable of filling. Recommendations along these lines made broadcasting “the chief battleground for the future of a nationalist model of culture and the state” by recommending that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation discontinue its production and begin to contract out to independent production firms (McCormack 1984 p. 273):

Finally, when a benign nationalist concept of art is dropped for art as an end-in itself, the conclusion is that Applebaum-Hebert marks the end of a period in modern Canadian history in which culture and state relationships were shaped by nationalism. (p. 274)

It was not only the end of a nationalist model but also the beginning of the era of justifying art as valuable because of its economic contributions. This approach has
just grown stronger over the last 30 years. Léger (2010) when describing the most recent debate around cuts to arts funding in 2008 said this:

What is clear from this debate is that it is virtually impossible for any of Canada’s political party leaders to construct a view of art’s social function other than as a gauge of economic productivity and competitiveness, on the one hand, or a cipher for liberal pluralism. (p. 562)

A policy analyst at the Ministry of Culture in Ontario also remarked on this transformation. M7 had only been working in the Ministry for a few years but she felt that the Ministry of Culture was increasingly required to justify their spending on arts and culture in economic terms, i.e. to demonstrate that their choices in spending government money on cultural activities were resulting in economic benefits. She said:

My understanding is my ministry is really trying to position itself as not art-for-art’s-sake. This is art for the economy’s sake...I think that shift has been happening slowly over the past 10 years just to get traction, to get dollars, because when you go to the Treasury Board or Finance or whatever to get funds to support arts and culture you don’t do well if it’s art-for-art’s-sake. If you build an argument that has an economic rationale you are more likely to get money, so some people in the ministry are definitely the - I don’t want to say old school - but very philosophically, ‘No! Art-for-art’s-sake and that is the most important thing’, and then you have a lot of people who are just

7 An acronym she chose to protect her identity
more pragmatic about it, well no, its an important economic driver and we need to support that. So I would say right now there is quite an appetite for anything that supports itself and is self-sustaining because it's a good business model that's been proven.

This description evokes parallels to the dissolution of the welfare model as the figure of the patronized artist is replaced by the disserving artist, justifying their worth by generating value in the creative city. This deliberation over the value of the artist is not just a fleeting question; it has in fact become the foundation of a new round of arts policies developed to concretize the status of the artist. ‘Status of the Artist’ Legislation has been developed at the federal and provincial level over the last 15 years to outline exactly the role and ‘Status of the Artist’ in Canadian society. The Federal Government has had ‘Status of the Artist’ legislation since ’93, and Ontario began working on it in 2006, and it was eventually introduced as a 3-page schedule at the back of a budget bill in 2007.

While in theory (and in the introduction and preamble) the Ontario version of this legislation seems (like the Massey and Applebaum-Hebert Reports), to be an affirmation of the innate value of art and artists - perhaps indicating a hold out against neoliberal agendas seeking to withdraw support for art, in reality the main focus of this legislation is to set the stage for collective bargaining and the creations of unions for artists, not increasing state investment in the arts. While unions have undoubtedly been central in supporting workers’ rights against the pressures of
capitalism, and are not usually in the neoliberal agenda, the fact that this legislation is arising at the same time as we are seeing the relationship between art and labour changing, causes me to pause. I wonder about the ways this legislation may be making artists’ work function more like regular work through removing some of the exceptions previously surrounding artistic work. It is beyond the scope of this research to evaluate whether this legislation is good or bad for artists or other workers, but regardless of its impact I am curious about why it is emerging now. Is this legislation becoming necessary because relations of art production are increasingly like other relations of production, and as such artists are suddenly in greater need of an advocate than ever before? Are niche art-producing communities now gaining more power as creative work is increasingly valued and therefore better able to demand legal representation? Is this yet further evidence of the growing integration of art and work in the ways that Rancière and Lazzarato describe? Is ‘Status of the Artist’ legislation shaping relations of art production so that they are more like other kinds of work? I’m not sure if any or all of these possibilities are true, but the apparent need for ‘Status of the Artist’ legislation does seem to provide evidence that the contemporary moment is demanding new articulations of previously accepted relations between the artist and capitalist production.

According to my interviewee at the Ministry of Culture who worked on this legislation, there was great disappointment among a number of artists’ advocacy groups when the legislation in Ontario ended up being largely symbolic. The main
goal for which artist lobby groups like ACTRA⁸ were advocating, was to empower artists to engage in collective bargaining, and this was not part of the final legislation. In fact the legislation that was eventually passed did not actually change any of the structural factors framing artists’ lives, like tax policy or collective bargaining rules, and resulted in no new funding for artists. To my mind, what this legislation signals is the need to deal with the increasing proximity between relations of art production and other relations of production. However, as artists are increasingly asked to value their work in economic terms, but are still not allowed the rights and privileges of other workers, the outcome seems to be a simultaneous erosion of the unique position of artists (making them more like other workers) and the stability of workers’ rights as workers (since precarious relations are still the standard in the case of artists).

While circus performers are not the intended subjects of this legislation⁹, they are currently grappling with some of these issues. During the research and writing of this dissertation, several ad hoc groups were formed among Toronto-based circus performers to deal with collective concerns like developing standards for rates of pay, safety and insurance requirements, and promoting the image of circus performers as professionals who expect to make a living from their work. The rise of these groups (although not all of them lasted) indicate to me an awareness in the  

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⁸ ACTRA The Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists is arguably the largest most powerful union for performance artists in Canada, runners up are Equity (representing theatre artists), and the DGC (Directors Guild of Canada) representing writers and directors.

⁹ My interview with M the policy advisor occurred prior to the Canada Council announcement about the addition of the category “circus art”, and according to her, circus performers were nowhere on the radar of the Ontario Ministry of Culture.
circus community that there are issues around working as a performer that demand some collective organization. The closest thing to a union that currently exists for circus performers is a Montreal based organization called En Piste. En Piste was formed in 1997 and they currently have 249 individual members, and 26 corporate members (En Piste 2011). They, along with several of the largest circuses in Quebec, were responsible for lobbying the Canada Arts council over a seven-year period to grant Circus Arts status at the Council (Public meeting September 28, 2010). En Piste describes itself as a national organization, and has some members outside of Quebec, but is funded by the Quebec government and as a result can't offer many of its service outside Quebec. On September 28, 2010 Zero Gravity Circus, one of the largest and most successful Toronto based circus companies invited En Piste to Toronto to meet with local circus performers and discuss the possibilities of extending the reach of En Piste to Ontario circus artists, or starting a similar organization to represent and lobby on behalf of circus performers in Ontario. One of the potential action items addressed was to consider lobbying the Ontario Arts Council to add circus to their list of recognized arts. Clearly circus performers themselves are standing right in the heart of these considerations around work and artistic status.

En Piste is also an excellent example of how circus performers themselves are actively part of the dialogue about the economic viability of circus. In terms of promoting circus and lobbying for circus performers on the local and national stage, En Piste has focused a lot of their efforts on presenting circus as a viable and
important economic sector (an argument that is easier to make in Quebec than elsewhere in the country where the scale of circus work is still much smaller). From reading some of their material it is clear that one of their main arguments for government funding of circus is based on its economic viability. For example they make their arguments using data which favorably compares “occupancy rates” or paying attendants for circus with less favourable rates of attendance at other kinds of live performance like theatre and song, and in Quebec at least, they talk extensively about job creation and circus as an economic engine for the province (Jean-Arsenault and Conseil inc 2007).

It is not just En Piste that is promoting circus as economically viable and a good business venture. The case for circus’ economic viability has been made in numerous places. Of course Cirque du Soleil is the most commonly discussed example; it is now so famous it is seen to be almost synonymous with contemporary circus in North America. Cirque is something of a favorite of the Globe and Mail’s Report on Business Magazine which called them “The Greatest Canadian Company on Earth” in September of 2007 (Yakabuski 2007), and although this is clearly in part a play on words, they went on to say “The Cirque has become a favorite of business school professors around the world, who use it to teach about managing exponential growth, innovation, globalization and error avoidance”. World Business described Cirque du Soleil as having the “Midas Touch” (Albrecht 2003). The Financial Post ranked Cirque du Soleil in their top 50 best managed companies in 1996 (Anonymous 1996), and Canadian Business ranked Cirque in their top 75 companies
in 2003 (Kirby, Wahl et al. 2003). Surveying Cirque du Soleil in the mainstream media using a search of Canadian Newsstand between 1986 and 2007 I was somewhat surprised to find at least half of the articles that talked about Cirque du Soleil talked about its economic success rather than, or at least more frequently than, discussion of its creative accomplishments. Cirque’s unexpected economic success is inexorably linked with the growth of its image.

Of course it’s hard to separate the curb appeal of circus from its financial success as the two clearly feed into one another. Business magazines and TV shows like to incorporate the circus for the same reasons that people spend enough money on circus to warrant it being mentioned in a business magazine – it is seen to be unique and unusual and therefore appealing and marketable. Circus is good business but not just business-as-usual. Maintaining its hip, interesting, edgy image seems to have been a central part of Cirque du Soleil’s continued success, or at least how they have chosen to manage their image (perhaps less now than in the first 15 years – now they have enough money to buy virtually any image they want). Cirque du Soleil has put a lot of effort into cultivating its image of being poor and artistic with “authentic street performance” roots. It is a paragon of the capitalist ‘rags to riches’ dream. Many of the official publications by Cirque cite their rag-tag, street performer credentials, appealing to this history despite clearly no longer having any current artistic poverty to claim (Babinski 2004; Cirque Du Soleil 2011). Though entirely unique, since no other circus company (or arts company for that matter) can claim the kind of meteoric rise that Cirque du Soleil can, the Cirque story also
seems typical, if not of the actual experiences of circus performers, then at least of their current symbolic meaning in the shifting relations between art and work. Guy Laliberte, one of the founders of Cirque who is also one of the “rag tag” figures identified in the early stories, is quoted in *Time Canada* as saying he “tried to make a wedding between the business and the art” (Albrecht 2003). The fact that these are the kind of words that are quoted so commonly, indicates to me that there is a lot of interest in this particular wedding. It is not just circus companies that maintain such narratives about themselves; many large successful companies do the same, but for circus the story is an easy one to tell. This story seems to be able to simultaneously validate the possibilities of success within capitalism, while still maintaining the artists’ mystique, and outside status that arises from the division between art and work.

**An Enduring Distinction Between Art and Work**

Given this context, how are individual circus performers negotiating the union between business and art and the changing status of art in Canadian society? Although at the level of policy and even popular opinion it seems like there is a strong link, even an overlap in these two spheres, in the descriptions of the individual performers I spoke with there is also a notable amount of tension around negotiations between these two spheres. Despite the easy discussion by Cirque, En  

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10 Like most large companies Cirque didn’t achieve its economic successes all on its own as the capitalist myth likes to suggest. Cirque de Soleil was started with major government investments, as it was one of the first circuses to successfully access government arts funding long before circus was a category at the arts councils.
Piste, and in the mainstream media that art and money can go hand in hand, the most common feature of the definition of art for the performers I interviewed was its association with a lack of remuneration. Art was what performers said they did when they were not properly paid for their work.

Art as a term was most commonly referred to in my interviews in relation to discussions of financial arrangements around performance activities, and was most frequently used to explain a lack of money either in relation to particular gigs (shows), or in relation to performers’ overall financial stability. In this way, my interviewees strongly upheld a dichotomy between art and work or paid labour. At least half the comments made about art referenced challenges in making a living; this was a kind of Derridean difference, with art being positioned opposite financial stability but still being connected to it through being defined primarily by its lack (Derrida 1982).

I do not think that if performers were specifically asked to describe what art is, that they would say unpaid work (art had many different definitions and facets, some of which I will explore later), but the most consistent and functional work that the term art was doing was explaining a lack of financial stability. This can be seen, for example, in a comment by Yves, a successful clown, and head of clown instruction at the National Circus School. He is well respected in his field, is offered a lot of work related to his expertise, and yet described how he must work relentlessly because none of those jobs, which he characterizes as artistic, pay him very much. He says:
I have to work a lot and at very different things, corporate work, workshops, theatre, clown, circus...to have all those, it’s always hard, I’m not doing publishing I’m not doing movies. In 1975 I took the bad way, the artistic way, it was a bad decision but I have to live with it.

While sincere about working very hard and not making money easily, I also felt there was something tongue-in-cheek about his description of the artistic way as the “bad way”. He appeared to simultaneously be expressing some pride that he was making things work the artistic way, and presented a lack of money as a validation of the artistic credentials of his chosen path. This could be understood as a form of refusal of work as suggested in Marxist theory as a moment of de-alienation of labour (Grindon 2011). Grindon (2011) suggests that the “ambiguous tension between aesthetic play and capitalist work meant that it was possible for the notion of art as play to be reactively articulated against work” (p. 83).

I don’t want to suggest that performers participating in this research enjoy struggling to make a living. The clowns in particular described themselves as facing financial hardship and this was not something they took lightly. Grindl Kuchirka, a career clown who has toured around the world and been a regular character on a children’s Television show said it’s “hard to make your living as a clown...You do what you have to do...It’s all about survival”. While John Turner who is one half of one of the most popular clown duos in Canada “Mump and Smoot”, and someone who has ‘made it’ as a clown if anyone has, still says, “it’s brutal to be an artist in Canada”. However, part of the landscape of this hardship, is a distinction between
artistic and non-artistic work. Not all parts of being a performer are equal or equally paid. Performers describe taking on what they consider to be non-artistic performance jobs because they need money (these include birthday parties, clubs and corporate shows). “Corpos” as they are sometimes called, are relatively well-paid gigs for private and corporate clients at a range of venues such as nightclubs, private homes, convention centers and Public spaces. These make up a greater portion of aerialists’ performance lives compared to clowns, and this may explain why aerialists spoke less about financial struggles, but both groups are aware of these performance opportunities and many felt they are essential if not central to making a living as a performer.

Shana describes this division in circus performance very clearly. She is a very successful Montreal aerialist, and has been performing as an aerialist for 20 years so she has been around for much of the development and growth of the New Circus scene. She started out working with Pickle Family Circus, a well known American circus from the west coast, and she then spent time performing with Cirque Du Soleil, Cirque Eloise, and several other companies, before becoming a founding member of ‘les Sept Doigts de la Main’ (probably the third most successful Circus in Canada after Cirque Du Soleil and Cirque Eloise). Shana describes the availability of corporate work as relatively new in the circus world. She says that now:

There is the whole corpo scene, which really didn’t exist before, where people can do gigs for corporate parties, for companies and things like that, and that wasn’t so much. I think partly because of Cirque du Soleil it became
really trendy to have circus acts and to have the sort of artsy Cirque kind of acts so a lot of corporations wanted to have Cirque acts in their shows and so people can really make a living doing corporates as we call them. And that again is sort of in some ways a shame because I don't really think of that as the artistry of the whole thing, which is something I am more interested in. Yet we do corporates too, because you can balance it out, you can make more money off of a corporate and less off of a show, and you just balance it all out. So in that way yeah, there is more work for aerialists in that kind of level, but again what happens is people are creating acts to sell to a client who doesn’t know what they are talking about, and so you need punchy music or something that looks really like something they have already seen, often they don’t have any imagination and so it’s not necessarily a good thing, and still again on the other side of it, the fact that there are more people working, always there are people who want to be more original because more people are working and people who really take risks to go out of the pack because they are trying to differentiate themselves, so it goes both ways.

In this text you can see the tension I am referring to, Shana uses words with the root ‘art’ in two very different ways. She distinguishes between “artsy” and “artistry”. In this description the difference between these terms lies in whether the performer has to meet a client’s demands, whether they are expected to please people who have “no imagination” and want to see something “that looks really like something they have already seen”. Artistry is clearly desirable and ‘more interesting’, and yet
difficult to achieve when doing ‘corpos’ because the pay cheque requires the
performer to meet the client’s expectations, in this case ‘punchy’ music, and
familiarity which involves achieving a “Cirque-like” aesthetic (referring to the style
of Cirque du Soleil). Yet she also notes that having work - any kind of work - is good
for performers; it means more of them can perform, and this has some benefits for
furthering the discipline. When there are more people able to do aerial performance
people “really take risks to go out of the pack”. And so she argues that the debate
over the impact of “corpos,” “goes both ways”.

You can also see in this text a suggestion of peer-based policing through critique,
which came up in several other interviews. Sarah, a Montreal aerialist and instructor
at the National Circus School, said she “goes into her little artist snob” about the hot-
pant-wearing, club-performing aerialists. When asked how she would describe the
alternative to this she says she is looking for movement that is more than the
physical, more than the big tricks. For aerial artists ‘big tricks’ usually means drops –
falling quickly several feet through the air or power moves like holding very difficult
and strenuous positions. These tricks are desirable, everyone wants to be able to do
them, but they are also not enough, like Sarah said performers are looking for
something more. There is judgment of performers who just try to please clients, or
whose artistic integrity can be questioned, and this can be seen in the ubiquitous
denigration of the ‘Birthday Party’ for Clowns, and the dismissal of the ‘Nightclub
Gig’ for aerialists. But determining when artistic integrity has been compromised
can be difficult. In some instances any financial success is a sign of a problem. John
Turner, one of the most well known clowns in Canada said, “you have these weird perceptual changes that happen - as soon as you sell more than 100 seats, you’ve sold out”. With notions of artistic integrity linked so closely to lack of financial success, contradictions can arise, as the same work might be called art or selling out, depending on how many people buy tickets. This makes the question of art a challenging line to navigate for performers. In negotiating it they are reliant on each other for recognition and some shared understanding or collective determination of the difference between what is art and what is ‘artsy’, while at the same time operating within constraints that suggest ‘art’ shouldn’t sell tickets.

Art, Aesthetics, and Affect

Of course it is not just poverty that defines art. Although lack of remuneration was the most common context in which art was mentioned, there were several other elements that also went into identifying whether something was art. In my observations and in the descriptions of my interviewees I noted a number of features that currently help distinguish art from other kinds of performance work. A performance was considered art if it complied with hierarchies of taste which included: preferred types of movement, preferred modes of presentation, preferred styles of costume, preferred locations or staging and preferred aesthetic experiences. In each category there are a range of possible creative choices, some of which are interpreted as better or more artistic than others, often depending on who was judging them and in what context. It is part of the circus performer’s expertise to be able to perceive and negotiate these differences even though they
are not always straightforward. Of course Cirque de Soleil has a powerful influence on the kinds of creative preferences that performers espouse, but so do the other creative influences in performers’ lives including other performers, shows they have seen, and what kind of performance background they come from (gymnastics or theatre for example). Cirque has an aesthetic that requires a lot of money be spent on production including intensive lighting, costume and makeup. Both Cirque Eloise and Les Sept Doigts de la Main have a much simpler and less theatrical aesthetic, which includes things like costumes that are basically normal clothes, or sets that look like mundane locations such as bathrooms and kitchens. This complements their attempts to make their circus shows more ‘human scale’, in contrast to Cirque’s larger-than-life approach. The choices of these smaller troupes also influence the freelance performers working outside these groups. Finally, performers are strongly influenced by one another through watching each others’ shows, training in the same space - often teaching and learning from one another, and through extensive production of promotional material and YouTube videos. YouTube is a remarkably common tool, for aerialists in particular, who use it to learn new tricks, get ‘inspired,’ and see what other aerialists are doing. Even for clowns it can be an opportunity to watch ‘classic’ clown turns by well-known performers, or see how others have solved a problem you are wrestling with. I am always somewhat surprised watching these videos how common the physical and aesthetic language of aerial performance is given that most of these performers will never meet face-to-face. They are definitely related in terms of typical movements, familiar venues and even common aesthetic choices. These kinds of virtual
networked connections are exciting and comprise a vivid example of how the ‘real’ physical space of the gym or the performance, and an electronic or virtual space can strongly influence each other – aerialists often ‘try’ tricks they see on line. While this can expand a performers vocabulary, I also wonder if they function to limit the possibilities as well, as new performers strive to reproduce the success of other performers by producing similar shows rather than creating something more original. Ultimately despite these commonalities, determining the ‘artistry’ of a circus piece is not black and white and is influenced by a lot of different factors but there are some categories which are common enough they are worth describing.

Preferred types of movement were sometimes described as affective or emotional rather than ‘just technical’ movement - dance rather than tricks. Ideally a performer does not just achieve a position, but emotes through the position, makes the movement meaningful by having appropriate facial and other corresponding physical expressions. There was also not always agreement about which movements qualified as artistic, for example, pointed toes are traditionally seen as central to an aesthetically pleasing line, but could also be seen as un-artistic compared to the more unusual flexed foot which some consider more unexpected and expressive. We can see Bourdieu’s distinctions of taste at work in this discourse, it seems specific cultural capital is required to identify whether any particular flexed foot is an ugly mistake, or a deliberate aesthetic provocation.
From designing, watching and discussing many shows, I have observed that, especially with aerial or acrobatic shows which have traditionally emphasized individual impressive tricks, to be considered artistic, shows often require some type of narrative rather than just a series of tricks or acts. Narrative was a signal that a show had artistic value and meaning beyond a performer just being “a performing dog” as Chris, a Toronto-based aerialist, described it. Caroline, from her aerial experience in Montreal, described how the inclusion of narrative is a new element in circus acts. She said:

Well before there was no story, there was two people having a nice character, maybe there was a nice energy, maybe there was a little bit of a set up but other than that there was just glitter … there was no intention to tell a story, as much as there is now.

Any narrative was better than none, although a slightly obscure narrative (such as metaphoric or mythological narrative or simply thematic organization of material) was preferred to straightforward or linear story telling. Cirque du Soleil has on many occasions used mythological stories like Icarus, and the Journey of Man (sic) as the theme around which to organize their shows. Albrecht (2006) describes how Cirque du Soleil has frequently been called impenetrable and obscure. Cirque itself promotes this obscurity in their official history for example by reproducing the words of critics who describe some of their shows as “inaccessible” (Babinski 2004). Here again this makes sense when looked at through Bourdieu’s idea of cultural capital. Perhaps part of becoming an ‘art’ is generating an aura of mystery that requires more uncommon cultural capital to penetrate, understand and appreciate.
Performers and audiences also expressed preferences for styles of costumes that contribute to the assessment of whether a performance can be called art. Interestingly, although all these categories were important signals of the artistry of a performance, there was not always agreement about the details. While costuming is felt to be an important indicator of whether something is artistic, a style which one person felt was artistic was not deemed to be so by another. ‘Artistic’ costuming could range from plain cotton bloomers or jeans and t-shirts, to lace and sequin negligee or individually designed leotards. Whether a polka dot shirt was a good choice for a contemporary clown, or too reminiscent of a Birthday Party Clown could be a source of debate among performers. What was consistent is that people often called the aesthetic they preferred, creative, effective, or artistic. There is a tendency with costuming, as with tricks, that a degree of nonchalance is often admired, thus performing spectacular tricks in jeans is likely to be seen as artistic, and ensure one is not seen to be selling out.

Location and staging also contribute to whether something is perceived as artistic. Jen, one of the most frequently employed, Toronto-based aerialist says, “clubs are my least favorite place to perform, they make you feel like you are being a decoration rather than doing art.” Interestingly, she is often performing the same act in the clubs as she is doing in other more “artistic” settings but her experience of the meaning of the act is different in each location. She was not entirely clear about what the differences were beyond decoration vs. being artistic, but my sense from
other conversations is that this relates largely to how the audience perceives and receives the performer, including factors like being drunk, and being distracted. To this end, lighting and ambiance also seem to influence how artistic a performance is deemed to be.

Interestingly, ideas of national identity also arose when deciphering between different preferences. There was awareness among performers that taste differed by geography and nationality. Especially in Quebec, performers remarked on the different aesthetic preferences found in European circus as compared to American circus (Canadian circuses could go either way). According to a few performers originally from Europe, Europe has a history of smaller circuses that are “autre” (alternative) and Quebec performers considered this more artistic. This style of circus was contrasted to Barnum and Bailey ‘American style’ circus, which was felt to be less artistic. Cirque du Soleil fell somewhere in between with its aesthetics (costumes, sets, and metaphoric or thematic narrative) being deemed artistic, while its large size and popularity was sometimes counted against its artistic credibility. I have participated in conversations with performers in which critiquing Cirque du Soleil for selling out or losing artistry seemed to signal an advanced critical artistic eye. Out doing other groups or performers by accusing them of a lack of artistry, is an undertaking that seemed to help establish their credentials among their peers.

Overall, among the performers I interviewed and those I have worked with, there was a sense that generating an affective or emotional reaction in your audience,
especially responses that were nuanced and not just happy, was a highly sought-after goal. Chris, an aerialist who has worked in both Toronto and Montreal, said:

I feel I need to put more there, because people aren’t there to see some guy walking down the street, they are there to see something that is more, they are there to get in touch with something that is bigger so if I’m on the stage I want everything I can possible get there for them, because I’m not going up there for myself, I mean in terms of a job that’s not my job to just go up there and dance around and say look at me look at me, I want them to be affected by me so that they are getting something out of it.

All the performers agreed that generating some kind of emotional response in the audience, beyond or in addition to the wonder or fear created by the tricks themselves, was a central goal of their work but achieving this goal was not always easy. Performers overcame great odds to try and make this happen. This was a challenge especially among aerialists where achieving emotional connection was often found to be at odds with the technical challenges of performance, especially on apparatus like swinging trapeze, where a lot of technique was required to complete the physical movements. Performers described trying to balance safety and concentration with finding ways to connect with the audience and evoke emotional responses beyond those conjured by the tricks themselves. Noe, originally a dancer from Switzerland, came to Montreal to study at the National Circus School with the world-renowned swinging trapeze instructor Victor Fomine. Noe made the argument (echoed by two other performers who also do swinging trapeze) that
some apparatus are not conducive to the kind of emotional connection performers strive to achieve. He said:

For swinging trapeze it’s really hard to have the connection, you have it but you don't feel it... it’s impressive because you fly. But you don't feel because you are so focused on what you do, and you don’t see people look at you, or sometimes you try to do something artistic when you have time, but when you just do technique it’s like [no feeling] and you just feel it when they are like (makes gasping sound).

On the swinging trapeze he can't feel the connection with the audience except in brief moments when they react to a trick, and his ability to do something ‘artistic’ is relegated to moments when he ‘has time’. Because of the general preference for artistic “emotional” impacts, in some circles difficult tricks are looked at with skepticism if they can’t also be performed without interfering with the performer’s ability to connect with the audience.

Although there was relative consensus that affecting the audience was the aim, there were a broad range of desirable affective goals. Clowns were more specific about these goals than aerialists who spoke more generally about affecting or making people feel. All the clowns I spoke with agreed that the clown’s job is to make people laugh, but evoking experiences in addition to laughter was also a desired goal. Some of the clowns described in greater detail what they wanted the audiences to feel. Two Toronto-based clowns, Helen and Jeff, said they want the audience to step outside of normal relations and everyday realities, have a break and experience
levity. Soizick, a Montreal-based clown, said she gave the audience permission to laugh or do unusual things and was able to point out power relations. Sue, a Toronto-based clown instructor, said she wanted her audience to feel open and to abstain from passing judgments. All these descriptions seem to me to suggest that affecting the audience involved changing them in some way, at least temporarily, for example by making them more open, more relaxed or more aware of power relations.

Circus performers have arguably always tried to affect their audiences. But the ways they do this have changed, and this effort is increasingly central to their performance work. Performances that don't meet this criterion, while entertaining, are just not enough. Within the range of things included in ‘affecting’ the audience, some affects seemed to be more associated with being artistic than others, such as making the audience uncomfortable, rather than pleasing or entertaining them. We can see echoes here of Kant’s descriptions of art, that the kinds of emotions that art inspires should be distanced from, and more meaningful than regular pleasure. It also strongly evokes ideas of art as disruption, an event or a shock to thought, which has been part of contemporary conceptions of the role of art for Deleuze. For Deleuze the interesting and valuable aspect of art, found in such paintings as Francis Bacon’s Scream, was that it was a ‘violence of sensation’ rather than a spectacle or a representation (Massumi 2002; Deleuze 2003). In fact for one circus performer, it was actual physical pain that characterized the distinction between art and corporate performance. Jon, a Montreal-based aerialist, works on many different
apparatuses, one of which is the Chains. Chains are just what they sound like, long loops of chain hanging from the ceiling that the performer uses to climb, wrap and sometimes drop. Jon indicated in our conversation that he saves the chains for his art numbers, knowing they won't be approved of or appreciated in most corporate environments:

L: You said that was for your art numbers, do you do different kinds of acts?
Jon: Ya like chains isn't really a good corporate event thing like you know the [name unclear] association isn't going to want to see me cut myself on chains, or like bleed on chains, the corporate numbers are usually (in high cheery voice) “hi, ya look at what I can do, ooooh I can do a flip” ...[at corporate events] I can’t use a string quartet doing a tool song, one of my acts is a string quartet with breathing and like (hah – breaths heavily) and like I can’t do that because I guess this makes people feel uncomfortable and they are at this sort of event to be happy and do something fun so I guess there is different things in different environments.

L: Do you make sure you have corporate stuff?
Jon: Corporate stuff pays a lot more so you do corporate stuff and then like if I’m working on a new number and it’s something crazy I'll do it, I'll do free shows sometimes to work on something or fundraiser shows, they'll be like ‘oh we need a fundraiser show’ and I’ll be like ‘ok I'll do it but I’m doing what I want to do, I'm not going to do something nice, it's going to be weird or its going to be ugly or it's going to be uncomfortable or I'm going to bleed.’
Despite his indication that this apparatus is not welcome in most corporate environments, this is certainly not the case for all corporate environments. Some corporate clients, while not the majority may actually be drawn to the darkness or edginess of this particular performance. Certainly Jon still has promotional material available for this act suggesting it is not entirely ‘underground’.

Figure 9: Promotional image of Jon Gulick doing Chains (http://www.jongulick.com)
What Work is Art Doing for Performers?

These efforts on the part of performers to reinforce/articulate a distinction between art and work, despite their confusion about what actually belongs in each category, leaves me with a few questions. Why do these performers work so hard to maintain or establish the idea of art as part of their performance? Given the difficulties of achieving artistic work, the physical and emotional demands of producing something unusual, edgy, or emotionally impactful, and significant financial disincentives, why do performers work so hard to undertake artistic activities? Performers clearly try to retain distinctions between work-like performance and artistic performance. Also given that the qualities and definitions of art vary quite widely, what is it exactly that performers are trying to cultivate as they strive to be artistic, what is it they are sacrificing financial stability for, and trying to keep from the perceived encroachment of corporate work? Although there is some common ground in what they consider to be artistic, much of the interpretation of this happens in particular encounters between audiences and performers, and in the minds and bodies of the performers themselves. Because we have become accustomed to the idea of alienated labour and consider art the ideal of non-alienated labour, it makes sense that we also expect that by being exempt from some of capitalism’s constraints, art is also exempt from some of its benefits – like appropriate pay. This may help explain why performers accept these conditions, but not necessarily why they would seek them out, or why different experiences are categorized differently as art or not-art.
Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital provides one possible explanation for why performers uphold the art/not-art distinction. According to his explanation artists have unique cultural capital in society that may outweigh or at least compensate for some of the loss of economic capital. This has some explanatory power; artists in Canada have disproportionate social capital compared to their income level. Generally Canadian artists have “almost double the education levels of the overall labour force”, but (in 2006) their median individual earnings were $10,000 compared to the Canadian labour force median of $25,000 (The Status of the Artist Sub-Committee 2006). So at least some performers are not poor out of necessity; most it seems could work in more lucrative employment if they chose to do so. But instead they choose the “bad way” as Yves so bluntly put it in the quote above. Is there something unusual about these individuals? The evidence is to the contrary as there seems to be no end to the people who (at least in theory) want to join the ranks of circus performers. When performers are not making a living from performing, many of them teach, as there is a seemingly endless supply of people wanting to take classes (or send their children to classes), get on stage, and get one step closer to being a performer. It seems that what we gain from being a performer or artist in terms of cultural capital is seen by many to be a worthwhile tradeoff for the loss in economic capital. This makes it seem not to be the individual choice of a few unique people, but rather a broader social value that performers embody.

While clearly there is valued habitus associated with being an artist or doing art, (and perhaps this status is growing these days in the creative city), I think there is
more going on. I think we would be remiss to neglect the observation that amongst performers there is also a strong desire to do this satisfying work that is very motivating. Gill and Pratt (2008) say:

One of the most consistent findings of research on work within the creative industries is that it is experienced by most who are involved with it as profoundly satisfying and intensely pleasurable (at least some of the time). A vocabulary of love is repeatedly evinced in such studies, with work imbued with the features of the Romantic tradition of the artist, suffused with positive emotional qualities (von Osten, 2007). Research speaks of deep attachment, affective bindings, and to the idea of self-expression and self-actualization through work. Indeed, such characterizations are so common that McRobbie (1998) argues that we might dub this kind of labour ‘passionate work’. (p. 15)

Performers perceive that they have greater freedom when doing art, and they describe a difference in the kind of work they can produce in the different spheres of art and work. As I said at the end of the last chapter, Virno calls post-Fordism the communism of capitalism, meaning that it offers many of the desirable things that communism has stood for (less alienation, greater fulfillment) but without necessarily generating political equality or taking down the system of capitalism itself. This is a possibility we ignore at our peril, that post-Fordism may actually be meeting and fulfilling some of the needs of workers for less alienation and greater fulfillment, albeit with unclear consequences such as the possibility such structures
are perpetuating the belief that one is making choices and experiencing freedom, without ensuring a corresponding political equality or guarantees of rights. It is all the more challenging to unpack the political implications of this work since it is motivated by desire and results in satisfaction. In other research on creative workers, scholars have found that “most workers, even those whose labour tends to be repetitive and generic, are to a large extent motivated by a notion of their work as self-expressive and self-actualizing” (p. 297). This is certainly part of the discourse circus performers use in relation to their work. Even their flexibility is sometimes couched in these terms. Eli of Zero Gravity Circus described in our interview how he thinks performers should regularly reinvent their shows and work for their own sense of satisfaction and enjoyment, which just complements the desire of clients for flexibility and diversity. I have to admit I feel the same way about my performances. I am generally more inspired when I am creating something new rather than repeating a show I have done many times. Despite my intimate involvement with this situation, I do not feel equipped to judge whether what we are seeing is a form of ‘false consciousness’ in which performers are internalizing an external demand for versatility, or a true mobilization of satisfaction and desire to create new work, or even what the difference between these two things might be. Either way, this notion of the motivation of self-actualization shapes actions and experiences, and it may be that politics in the contemporary moment is going to rest on our ability to unpack these distinctions. I will revisit this question in chapter 6.
Different experiences of desire and satisfaction in relation to different kinds of work can be seen in the dislike some performers feel for corporate performance conditions. Both clowns and aerialists described strongly disliking at least some of their corporate work and finding it unsuited for the kinds of performance they wanted to do. John Turner of Mump and Smoot described how performing at the closing night event of a large conference made it impossible to have the kind of conversation with the audience that he felt was at the heart of his work. He said:

We came on the last night, it was the last night, all they wanted to do was get drunk and go to bed with their secretaries, like that was all that was going on. They couldn’t care less about a couple of clowns coming in... so right away half the audience isn’t even looking at the stage. Then there’s like a 40 foot dance floor between the front row and the stage so there’s this huge physical gap to cover and we’re not, again we’re not something you sit back and watch the skill level, somebody flying through the air and go wow, we’re involved in a conversation with the audience. So uh, it was ludicrous.

John clearly felt this environment was not conducive to the kind of performance he does which involved an intimacy with the audience that was not possible in this physical and social setting. You can also see in this description that he makes a distinction between the kinds of work that he does as a clown, and the aerialists who often share the billing at large corporate events like this. He also mentions that to his mind aerialists are better suited to this kind of venue, and this may be true, but aerialists also complain about similar obstacles to connection, interaction and focus when performing in venues like this.
It is not only one-off corporate shows that can have a damping effect on performers’ sense of their ability to do the kinds of performance they want. For some performers even Cirque du Soleil is associated with creative limitations and restrictions.

Shannan, a long-time clown performer with Cirque du Soleil describes the process she went through re-negotiating the content of her act when she was pregnant. Typically Shannan designs and writes her own pieces, and expected she would be able to continue to do so during the pregnancy, adapting the act to respond to her changing body. She said:

> It would be great if I could use it when I was pregnant. I thought I would be in the show till I had the baby because I am the clown and who cares, I’m not flying, and I was excited to make a new act. And even they were concerned if I drink scotch and I thought, oh well I should smoke too, trailer trash. If you are going to say something you might as well say it, and I thought I could be just wasted, and then we are sex experts at the beginning, but the reality is we probably never had sex. And then I thought, if this show is about sex and everything it would be great to be pregnant, you know knocked up, and I’m selling dildos, like ok, if you want to make a statement! It’s just my job but we can change things up - but no way no way no way.

Cirque was absolutely clear that even though she was the clown in a show about sexuality and other taboo subjects, there were some things they would not permit such as acting like she was drinking and smoking while pregnant, or even being explicitly pregnant on stage. They were comfortable with the boundaries of her act
before the pregnancy and were not willing to change those to incorporate the new material she felt her pregnancy allowed her.

Shannan like many performers was very aware of the boundaries that can't be crossed if you are to stay employed. She joked about Cirque’s “golden handcuffs”. Saying with understanding that if Cirque wants to have a big following (and a lot of paying customers) they have to respond to the norms of a wide group. She herself knows that it is nice (and unusual) to have stability and a regular paycheck as a performer, and that one is sometimes willing to sacrifice certain creative choices. But she makes sure to say she is always keeping her future options open for a time when she might make a different choice. Stability becomes increasingly appealing and necessary, for instance, with dependants, illness, or other insecurities. Despite her frustration with their ‘handcuffs’, she was very appreciative that Cirque kept her job in the show and that she was welcomed back to work shortly after her child was born. Performers almost never have these kinds of rights that many other workers take for granted. For example, John, of Mump and Smoot said:

We probably would not have taken six years off if we’d not had both of us caught in a treadmill of paying off debt. I mean that is all it’s been. That is why I have no children. Basically I’ve never been in a moment where [there is any certainty]. You don’t ever have a job ever, you never have any kind of backup plan, there is no unemployment insurance there is no anything, um you get an injury you’re fucked, and how many people get those, lots and lots
of people, you can’t call in sick. I don’t have a replacement for Smoot [his clown persona].

These examples demonstrate that there can be benefits (at least for life, if not for art) of making the relations of artistic production more like other (secure, unionized) relations of production. But that this was seen to come at a cost, the loss of some experience of artistic freedom. Ultimately these distinctions seem to require a lot more exploration to turn them into clear observations; in the meantime I am left with a number of questions. What is meant by creative freedom, and what happens when it is lost? What makes it more worthy than maternity leave and job stability, and why are the two placed in opposition to one another? Are there valuable lessons to be learned here about alienation and self-actualization? And under what circumstances might each experience be desirable or problematic? For example, in the case of some corporate work, instability remains but creative freedom doesn’t.

When asked this directly, most performers say that they do not change what they do as a result of what sells. Simultaneously they say that some performances are not possible in all environments. They describe seeing others make performance choices based on the context, and admit that they themselves do different parts of their work, styles of performance, and even use different apparatus, in different environments. This changeability seems to be more at play among the aerialists for whom corporate work is more available. Clowns are more likely to say they do not
change their behaviour in different working contexts, but both sets of performers express an awareness of the disciplining force of what sells. C, a Montreal-based aerialist just returning to the scene after a pregnancy, describes being aware of the saturation point of the market for certain acts, “I never wanted to build a silk act because I didn’t see the point in doing it because there are 50 silk acts in the market in Montreal.” She goes on to describe how she hesitated to do what she really thought would be fun because she felt it wouldn’t be sellable, but eventually took the risk:

I kept thinking for a while that I was feeling like I was doing like figure skating. I was feeling like it was figure skating and it really made me depressed because it was not what I wanted to do. I wanted to do something that looks more like dance that is more meaningful than just putting some figures one after the other and finally I decided to build an act that was more dance like…and realized that it would be sellable anyway.

Despite saying she is challenging ideas of what is sellable, she is also clear that she can’t take that too far in the given reality of her time and economic constraints. She said:

C: Of course it cannot be too experimental; it would be fun to do experimental work sometimes. I don’t really have time to apply for grants and things like that.

L: What would be experimental?
C: I think that really strange with strange music with strange body movement, with trying to do - I would like to do an entire show only with the hoop and the rope of the hoop and playing with it on the floor, in the air, separate, together, but this - I would have to ask for a grant and I don't think I could really sell that thing a lot. It's not... mainly in Quebec the market is so small that you cannot really work with a strange show.

C makes it very clear that different economic arrangements - grants vs. selling her show - result in the production of different work. She believes that if she had time to apply for arts grants she would be freer to do the kinds of experimental acts and performances that she would prefer to be doing.

Finally, in addition to expressing a frustration with corporate environments as venues, and admitting to choosing not to produce certain kinds of acts or use certain apparatus given the limitations of corporate environments, I have also heard performers suggest that given the difficulty of making a living some do not feel like they have much choice about who their clients are and what events they will perform at or even promote. Jen, a Toronto-based aerialist said:

I got offered a job to perform for the Canadian troops in Afghanistan and that was a bit complicated because I was not supporting the war but definitely supporting Canada and our people. So it was kind of confusing for me on what I was going to say, and then it ended up that the government said it wasn’t safe to come so I didn’t have to make that decision. And then there is
some (pause), we perform for companies that we don’t necessarily support or love everything that they do.

Performers take the jobs they are hired for and often feel they can’t be too picky about who is offering the contracts. In addition to decisions about whether to take work from sources they don’t agree with, performers have a common habit of joking about an event or company after the fact which seems to serve the purpose of creating some distance between themselves and the company who hired them.

In the discussion of doing different kinds of performance in different environments performers articulated a central distinction between when they were doing ‘art’ and when they were doing corporate work, which they described as better paid but less free, resulting in less satisfaction with the kinds of things created. Some spoke more openly than others of the restrictions they felt when doing corporate work, but all expressed some awareness that the performance environment and the expectations of employers and audiences could influence creative choices. They often expressed that both the content and satisfaction of creating within structures of ‘art’ production was preferable to the content and satisfaction of performance created under more standard economic relations such as those found in performing for corporate clients. However, they were also clear that the benefits from doing corporate work such as better income and more regular work sometimes outweighed any concessions it required.
Performers’ interpretation of this division of spheres (which I perceive they both inhabit and reproduce) seemed to be that ‘art’ was the natural state that circus should inhabit and that corporate work was infringing on this. They described a pressure for relations of art to become more like other relations of production and a sense of being pulled towards creating more alienated work to meet employers’ expectations. However, rather than a situation in which well-established relations of art are being infringed upon, the particular circumstance of contemporary circus requires us to consider the ways in which art, not cooptation, is what is new for circus. In effect, we are simultaneously seeing relations of production, which previously focused on being entertaining rather than artistic, being renamed as relations of art, while those creating the art perceive an erosion of that category. I have not interviewed many circus performers who worked in the ‘old’ circus; so I don’t know if discussions of artistry were part of their milieu. I do know, however, descriptions of the emergence of ‘new circus’ all emphasize a new and growing artistry in the discipline, and that the Canada Council’s addition of circus as an art has not been inevitable, but rather is the result of significant lobbying efforts. These circumstances provide some evidence that the desire to be defined as an art is new for circus performers. Because ‘old’ circus wasn’t called an art, being inartistic or co-opted wasn’t a problem. As the concept of circus as an art solidifies, so does the idea that the artistic side of it can be corrupted, co-opted or bought. The growing awareness of a corporate ‘scene’ may be as much part of the process of defining circus as an art as it is evidence that circus ‘art’ is suddenly being captured for the purposes of corporate entertainment. In this way circus mirrors many other
industries that are now, in the contemporary moment being encouraged to become more ‘creative’, solidifying their connections to art and creativity.

Given the range of ways art is understood among my participants there is no universal essence of art, no clear line dividing art from not-art. As we saw above, the idea of art still functioned among these performers as a way to identify and valorize the elements of their work that were more and less desirable. On the question of whether art has an important role politically, I found no indication among this group of performers that circus artists are naturally critical or moving towards any previously determined utopian or counter cultural creations. But none of the theories of art being a liberatory practice outlined in the previous chapter were actually concerned with the content of the art itself. What these theories focus on is the relation of art to other productive concepts like work. This is affirmed by my participants who suggested that while content was important, it was a secondary effect of the alternate relations of production which were permitted by the role of the performer as an artist. It was the relations of production and the conditions under which art was produced and shared that emerged as a more consistent feature. The idea of art seems to be a productive and flexible term that could be used to define, and sometimes to defend, a range of different values and relations. Having artistic status as an option for circus performers does seem to have resulted in tensions that performers struggle to make sense of.
To sum up, in examining the experiences of these circus performers I found that there is a blurring of the categories of art and work and simultaneously, performers are making efforts to maintain these distinctions and put the concept of art to work for themselves. The experiences of these performers corroborate the theories laid out in the previous chapter, which suggest that changes in our relationship to ideas of art and the artist require our attention. Their experiences do indicate a melding of the spheres of art and work, whether it is because art is being captured by work, or because the term art is being applied to new spheres, which are inherently more work-like. Despite the arguments about the melding of these spheres, performers still stated quite clearly that they inhabit a different relation to themselves, their work and their audience when they are doing ‘art’, even if it looks very similar to what they are doing when they are doing work. I have no clear answers about which one of these tendencies might be the dominant one, but I feel confident in saying that it is worth paying more attention to the multiple ways the term art (or creativity in other contexts) is being used. Without some attention I feel such shifts may change our opportunities for the use of art as a productive concept in the future. The discourse of the performers I talked to suggest that the term art is still at work but it is shifting, and perhaps further awareness is needed about these shifts. Perhaps we require a clearer articulation of the work that the term ‘art’ might be doing, as I have tried to do in this chapter, and a closer examination of what values it might be sheltering or upholding.
It is a difficult investigation to undertake however, as these understandings do not hold still for examination. Only three months after the Canada Council recognized circus as an art form, I was part of an informal gathering of aerialists who were discussing collective issues of importance to the aerial community. Part of the discussion involved sharing strategies on how to make performance resumes look more artistic and less corporate by, for example, using the performance company name such as ‘Zero Gravity Circus’ rather than the name of a corporate client such as ‘Rogers’. It was felt this would improve performers’ chances of getting grants. As a result of these very recent shifts, performers may now be more likely to have two resumes presenting the same credentials in different formats, an ‘art’ resume with names of production companies, and a ‘corporate’ resume listing impressive corporate clients. Only a few months into the Canada Council decision ‘being artistic’ was beginning to be associated, at least theoretically, with financial possibilities, though perhaps different ones than those offered by corporate money.

**What Work Could the Term ‘Art’ Do?**

Given the fluid definitions of art described by my interviewees, perhaps the idea of art continues to spark debate because people use the term flexibly, to define that which lives outside normative social relations and relations of production, whether it be a sublime ‘outside’ when it is the impossibility of social change that is at hand, an incoherent or emotional outside when we are trapped by the limitations of Cartesian reason, or an ‘outside’ to capital when we fear everything is becoming
absorbed in a system of alienation and consumption. Is it this possibility of ‘outside’ status that gives art some value? Is this ‘outside’ status still possible given the rapid pace at which we see transgressive and countercultural features being consumed and commodified? Specific definitions of the term art do not seem to be inevitable or fixed. This is the crux of the issue and the place where we can potentially make an intervention. What work could the term art do?

Self-conscious use of the terms arts and creativity are important given the expansion of these terms (Lazzarato 2008; Arvidsson, Malossi and Naro 2010; Rancière). Art or ‘creativity’ now can be used to refer to almost everything, and in that way can become a slippery, almost treacherous concept, suggesting something positive that may be far from the reality the term is describing. Also, the term can undergo a simultaneous narrowing of its meaning as people struggle to weed out meaningless parts of the definition. When trying to describe the differences between corporate work and artistic work with participants it sometimes seemed that the term art was left to stand only for free things that make the audience uncomfortable, since so many other elements of the work also were elements of a corporate performance experience. In response to Virno’s questions about what specific role is left for the communication industry (now that all other industries do what it used to do), I am asking whether there are affective or labouring

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11 What I’m not sure about is whether by defining the artists as exactly that which falls outside the boundaries of being captured by social and economic forces you produce an internal fallacy (whereby you praise the category for being the very thing you defined it to be), or whether you create a useful, productive and flexible concept.
experiences, and/or alternative aesthetics, that the discipline of the market doesn’t allow and which the idea of art could champion?

The power associated with the discourse around art differs depending on the truth that it is in service of. The flexible use of the term art can, and is, being operationalized in a number of different ways with very different outcomes. At the current moment there is increasing concern with precarious employment, and with relations of labour becoming more like relations of art work in the sense of instability, precarity, and low wages (Armstrong 1996; Aronson and Neysmith 1996; Dowling, Nunes and Trott 2007; Gill and Pratt 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008). Where art is being used as a label to justify precarity in labour conditions through imbuing those conditions with the social status granted by the term art, then we are looking at a further erosion of workers’ rights and the development of another strategy of intimate governance which encourages people to accept these precarious conditions in exchange for the possibly elusive notion of creative freedom.

However, when the term art is used as a strategy to hold on to notions of unalienated labour and remind us of the existence and value of unmarketable activities, or activities outside the growing shadow of neoliberal marketization, then it may still be a productive and valuable concept. Should we not, like Rancière believes, desire creative possibilities to be open to all people and all labourers, not just a designated elite of artists? Lotringer, in his forward to Virno, quotes Weil
saying “it is a question of whether it is possible to conceive of an organization of production that wouldn’t be ‘grinding down souls and bodies under oppression’” (Virno 2004 p.8). Shouldn’t we be advocating for work that doesn’t grind the soul? Would artists themselves not benefit from the freedom to do financially viable work? Might, as Shana suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the proliferation of performers in fact make art more likely (though perhaps not in the same spaces as those in which they are making a living)? Might this mean the creation of new ‘outside’ spaces, with new resistances and new counter-economic spheres? Is it possible to shape the emerging forms of art/work in this way?

But it is still unclear whether (or when) the term art is managing to sustain its promise of providing an outside to alienating relations of production. We have some choices about how we want to put the term art to work (and under what conditions). If the instability and flexibility of post-Fordist relations of production are the most pertinent issue, then we should be distinctly skeptical of the growing cachet of the artist’s life. This cachet fits well into entrepreneurial precarious relations of production. We should be wary of the ways art is employed as a term to justify poor working conditions, or as a panacea for the erosion of labour standards and economic stability, and think instead about ways to interrupt the “ideology of creativity” (Arvidsson, Malossi and Naro 2010). But if our main concern is growing commodification, or the redefinition of human action as a form of the economic (which will be discussed further in the next chapter), then the idea of art might remain an important place holder for “non-financial” values, and for affective
experiences that are less immediately pleasurable and perhaps less marketable. In order to operationalize the term art for different political ends, it is necessary to be clear which meanings of art we are invoking, and in what circumstances. Continuing to ask detailed intimate questions about what we mean by art and creativity and how different workers are using these terms will greatly enhance debates and discussions about post-Fordism and the creative city. For example, examining the actual experiences of performers gives us insight into the gap between the sexy image of flexibility and marginality associated with art and the reality that living in this way is precarious and limiting in its own right because of the constraints of lack of stability, certainty and money. And also through the experiences of performers we can see the term art being used to describe particular hard-to-articulate experiences. For example, the term art was sometimes used by interviewees to distinguish between entertaining activities that had no elements of transgression (simply reproducing expected combinations of movement and aesthetics), and activities in which there was a moment of disruption in the form of discomfort (a challenging of expectations). Most often the sought-after experience was the notion of connection, by which they were referring to some loosening of self-referentiality and a moment of shared experience. This will be taken up further in chapter 6.

For now what is necessary is to take an even closer look at the context in which circus performers are working and living. Performers make a distinction between art and not-art based on a complex intersection of expectations and experiences. I have not yet found an overarching rule that can distinguish art from not art. If we
are to assess what work the term art might be doing, or be able to do, we have to look realistically at what it is allowing and what it is obscuring in specific cases. It is the intersection of environment and subjectivity that can reveal the subtle distinctions that may help decipher between art as panacea and art as transformative practice, or even if this is the right question to be asking. The next chapter will explore the layered subjectivity of circus performers in order to lay bare the Habitus, or disciplinary context in which they are working, and then chapter 6 will build on this to reexamine the question of where politics might lie in the contemporary circus.
Chapter 5: Foucault and Discipline in the Circus

Looking at contemporary circus performers using Foucault’s notion of discipline reveals that they are heavily subject to expectations, boundaries and disciplinary discourses; embodying, to use Foucault’s term, distinctly disciplined bodies. This stands in stark contrast to their long association in popular culture with transgression and marginality (Bouissac 1976; Little 1995). Foucault’s work has been the starting point for the development of the concepts of biopower and neoliberal governmentality, concepts that theorize shifts in governance, in particular, the movement of governance to more intimate spheres. These shifts are closely linked in both content and temporality to the shifts described in the previous chapter about labour and economic practices. Peta Tait maps the rise of modern circus in the 18th century onto what she calls Foucault’s “new political anatomy of the body” (Tait 1996). Does the ‘new circus’ of the last 30 years fit into, challenge or extend these ideas? How does the lens of discipline and governmentality through the body illuminate the ways my participants (and I) may be disciplined, participating, neoliberal, subjects rather than marginal, transgressive and resistant ones? What role might circus performers have in contemporary systems of biopower? How might they be implicated in, or invested with, truth discourses promoting extremely disciplined bodies and behaviors that meet and create “ideal” standards of health, beauty, race, sexuality and labour? This chapter will explore the role of disciplinary discourses of gender and sexuality, race, aesthetics, and emotion
in the lives of circus performers and ask what this means in the context of the changing relations between art, labour and politics outlined in the previous chapters.

Foucault described the ways bodies in the 17th century were disciplined to become more efficient and governable subjects - docile bodies were trained to govern themselves from within. This occurred first through repetition and the discipline of the body, and second through the regulation of populations. Foucault argued that power over life was comprised of two poles, one focused on the body as a site of control which could be disciplined and optimized to work within systems of economic control, and the second, focused on population and the management of social features of life like birth, health and death:

The disciplines of the body and the regulation of the population constituted two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed. The setting up, in the course of the classical age, of this great bipolar technology – anatomic and biological, individualizing and specifying, directed towards the performances of the body, with attention to the processes of life – characterizes a power whose highest function was perhaps no longer to kill, but to invest life through and through. (Foucault 1990 Vol 1 p. 139)

Foucault also argued that there was “a growing importance assumed by the action of the norm” and that “A normalizing society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life” (Foucault 1990 p. 144).
Out of his extensive work on discipline and technologies of domination, Foucault developed “a fascination with ancient modes of subjectification and the possibilities of freedom” in the latter part of his life (Rabinow and Rose 2003 p. 200). The micro politics of the disciplines he observed at work on the body led him to his interest in exploring the Greek concept of care of the self (Foucault 1990). Foucault said that he was able to examine the formation of sciences that refer to a concept and the systems of power that regulate its practice in the disciplines of medicine, psychiatry, punitive power and disciplinary practices. However, when he began to focus on sexuality he realized he needed to further develop his ideas about the subject, specifically the forms within which individuals are able and obliged to recognize themselves as subjects (Foucault 1988; Foucault 1990). As such he began to develop models of understanding governance through techniques of disciplined and self-disciplining bodies.

While some scholars classify a definitive break in Foucault’s work between earlier and later understandings of government, Lemke argues that this move is not a break, but rather it is a refinement of the problem of government which Foucault long identified with both technologies of dominance and technologies of the self (Lemke 2000). Just as he argues that sovereignty did not cease to play a role once the techniques of government arose (Foucault 1991), his interest in the government of the self does not indicate a disappearance of the techniques of domination.

According to Michel and Still:
In his genealogical work, Foucault described the one-sided shaping of the individual by the disciplines of penology, psychoanalysis, etc., as well as by the micropowers of regimentation and measurement practiced in more or less peripheral institutions. These are powers that fix the capacities and limits of the person. (Michael and Still 1992 p. 870)

Foucault argued that the contact between technologies of domination and those of care of the self is what he calls governmentality (Foucault 1988). Governmentality “refers to a continuum which extends from political government right through to forms of self-regulation namely ‘technologies of the self’” (Lemke 2000 p. 12).

Foucault posited that with the rise of governmentality, politics was no longer just the purview of the state (Foucault 2005), and with such an understanding problems of government can now signal problems of self-control, not just management by the state (Lemke 2001).

He coined the term biopower, which he argues is a two-pronged force, comprised of work that individuals do on themselves, and the truth discourse to which it is in service. Rose and Rabinow (2003) say that in order for biopower to be at work, the disciplining processes need to be not only subjecting the body but doing so in service to a specific truth discourse. Without this broader context we have no way of connecting intimate bodily disciplines to practices of governance. But how do we identify these truth discourses? Rose and Rabinow suggest:

These truth discourses may not themselves be ‘biological’ in the contemporary sense of the discipline, for instance they may be demographic
or even sociological. Strategies for intervention upon collective existence in the name of life and health, initially addressed to populations that may or may not be territorialized upon the nation, society or pre-given communities, but may also be specified in terms of emergent bio-social collectivities, sometimes specified in terms of categories of race, ethnicity, gender or religion. (Rabinow and Rose 2003 p. 195)

While exploring the individual self-disciplinary practices of circus performers it became evident that when looked at as a whole, they shed light on collective social processes, such as specific racializing and gendering discourses, which individual practices are in service of. These practices are different for clowns and aerialists, but each reveal elements of the most dominant governance discourses of the contemporary moment, and suggest how circus performers fit quite comfortably within them.

Alongside theories of discipline, Foucault was also a major contributor to an analysis of the current economic moment. This analysis parallels, both in ideas and time frame, the shift in labour, art, and the boundaries of the economic described in the previous two chapters. In his lectures on neoliberalism at the college of France, Foucault talked about the expansion of the social sphere becoming an extension of the economic domain, not just governing in the name of the economy, but redefining all forms of human action as economic (Lemke 2001). According to Lemke, Foucault argued that neoliberals and Marxists, although unlikely bedfellows, both believe capitalism has traditionally under theorized labour, and that because political
economy has been unable to “provide a concrete account of labour” we see the current emergence of the concept of abstract labour. However, where Marx saw the distinction between abstract and concrete labour as a fundamental product of capitalist society, neoliberal thinkers see it simply as a problem of representation, and want to overcome it by thinking about the economy differently using their “theory of human capital”:

‘Human capital’ is made up of two components: an inborn physical-genetic predisposition, and the entirety of skills that have been acquired as the result of ‘investment’ in the corresponding stimuli: nutrition, education, training, and also love, affection etc. In this model, the wage laborers are no longer dependent on a company, but are autonomous entrepreneurs with full responsibility for their own investment decisions and endeavoring to produce surplus value, they are the entrepreneurs of themselves. (Lemke 2001 p. 199)

One of the outcomes of this framework is that “the neo-liberal (sic) program seeks to create neither a disciplining nor a normalizing society but instead a society characterized by the fact that it cultivates and optimizes differences” (Lemke 2001 p. 200). The theory of human capital, which was birthed in its modern form in 1960, became widespread in the 1970s (Blaug 1976). It counts human qualities like affection, desire and creativity as fundamentally central to the creation of capital. Foucault’s insights were part of the earliest stages of theorizing neoliberalism, a concept which has since been perhaps overly used (Larner 2003). But despite disagreements in how the term neoliberalism it is used, there is some broad
consensus that there has been a ‘post-Keynesian’ change in both economic and social policy over the last 30 years, which is marked by a devolution of responsibility for the well being of the state to the level of individuals, an increasing marketization of all aspects of every day life, and the optimization of flexibility and difference (Harvey 1990; Lemke 2001; Mitchell 2004). Among other qualities, the tendency to optimize difference makes art (as a unique, niche, activity) particularly vulnerable to capture under a form of capitalism dominated by the theory of human capital.

While proving to be remarkably powerful analytical tools for understanding the contemporary moment, Foucault’s concepts of biopower and neoliberalism need to be used in specific and focused ways. They require uncovering the particular truth discourses that are being revealed by particular disciplinary practices, as well as the role of choice and the appeal of freedom that are central to the implementation of neoliberalism. Rabinow and Rose (2003) argue that some people have used the concept of biopower as all encompassing, resulting in the loss of some of its explanatory power. Larner (2003) also cautions us against what she says are all too common, dangerous and unhelpful uses of the idea of neoliberalism, using it as an all encompassing hegemonic idea that “obscures the details and complexity of the processes involved” (p. 509). She argues that there is a dearth of work looking at the “techniques” of neo-liberalism. Although there was some discussion about neoliberal subjects, most often in the form of the rise of entrepreneurial, self-responsible individuals, the implication has been that the state somehow ‘forces’
people to act in these ways. The complex appeal of ‘freedom’, ‘empowerment’, and ‘choice’ has been rarely acknowledged and even less theorized. She says without looking into this, the tenacity of neo-liberalism can’t be explained. In order to explain the techniques of neoliberalism, we need greater understanding of how freedom and choice operate. This understanding must include observations about individual and embodied disciplines and techniques, insights and descriptions of the perception of the role of choice in these practices, and an analysis of the big picture, which can reveal the hegemonies or discourses these practices are serving.

Larner’s criticism, that detailed individual and subjective elements of neoliberalism have been neglected in the neoliberal literature, parallels critics of Foucault’s theories of biopower, who argue these theories “emphasize the docile body and reify the technologies and apparatuses ignoring the active role of embodied agents” (Crossley 2004 p. 41). Michael and Still argue that “criticisms have been leveled at this work [on disciplines] for eschewing a coherent theorization of resistance, and in particular, for neglecting the subjective or humanist component in resistance” (Michael and Still 1992 p. 870). This chapter examines the individual disciplinary practices of circus performers partly in response to these calls for a more detailed examination of individual and subjective experiences of neoliberalism, and greater attention to active and resistant subjectivities found in relation to neoliberalism. Specifically, this chapter explores performers’ expressions of subjectivity, choice and resistance in relation to disciplinary discourses. It also recognizes the limitations of conscious subjective resistance by identifying disciplinary practices
that performers conform to without being conscious of doing so. Overall this chapter reveals the presence of strong disciplinary discourses, but simultaneously it provides evidence of some role for subjectivity and choice in navigating through discourses and suggesting possibilities of resistance.

Practically and metaphorically circus performers fit well into the “new economic rationality”. Virno suggests that performing artists are emblematic of the changes in labour expectations that we are currently seeing, the proliferation of labour without a final product (or labour which finds it own fulfillment), and labour which requires an audience (relational labour) (Virno 2004). Lemke also says individuals and corporations are supposed to be “lean, fit, flexible and autonomous” (Lemke 2001 p. 203). Aerialists in particular have bodies that are described as ‘high-intensity’, ‘high risk’, and ‘overachieving’, words that are also often used to describe Wall Street.

Practically speaking, many performers’ behaviours fit the neoliberal ideal of ‘homoeconomicus’. The specific skill set necessary to be a working performer - which we saw in the previous chapter, includes self-promotion and self-management - takes time and energy, requires investment and hard work to achieve, and means privileging these skills over others. As we saw in the last chapter, by mastering many of these skills, the circus performer is in many ways already a neoliberal entrepreneur and fits well within new paradigms of capital and labour. Circus performers are not significantly different from workers in many other fields facing similar expectations and demands in the workplace, but given the symbolic significance of circus in particular as a free or transgressive space, and the
One of the greatest shifts in a post-Fordist paradigm is that in many cases the worker is no longer working only at work, or even reporting to management, but instead is managing him or herself. In being an ‘entrepreneur’ the performer is theoretically in a position of greater choice with respect to work and behavior. But what is clear from talking to performers is that fear of negative economic consequences, reinforces compliance with other disciplinary discourses. For example, if the perception is that there is limited work, and that the market wants certain (gendered, racialized, aesthetic and affective) performances, then performers fear a loss of work if they diverge from these expectations. The lack of certainty in performers’ lifestyles make the reinforcement of participation in disciplinary discourses more immediate and economic discipline more forceful.

Despite the fact that economic reinforcement is powerful, it is important to note that it is definitely not rational, measurable, or consistent, nor is it always the dominant disciplinary force. If making money were a primary motivation then most performers would be in the wrong business as there is often not a direct or consistent link between working and making money. Some performers expressed surprise that they did get paid for their work. Grindl, a Toronto-based clown says:
Well I think I am one of the very very fortunate ones, I really do. I’ve made my living as a clown! I have made my living as a clown! I can’t believe it sometimes but the tax forms say ‘clown’.

Many performers will work for free, especially early on in their careers, and, rationally speaking it would take years of work to pay back the investment they have made in classes, training space, costumes, equipment etc. Though performers want to earn money from their work, and sometimes feel constrained by this feature of their lives, economic rationality is certainly not the only or even primary disciplining force, and as we saw in the previous chapter there is still artistic prestige associated with not making money. This prestige along with other desires such as performing for a good audience, receiving satisfying feedback on your work, and creating something personally exciting, can motivate performers as much as financial incentives. In fact it is incredibly difficult to isolate financial incentives from other desirable outcomes because they are deeply intertwined. For example, social hierarchies within the performance community are in part influenced by who receives paid work. Performers are considered professional if they can make a living through circus, and the fewer outside jobs needed the better (even corporate performing jobs are preferable to non performing jobs). Overall economic discipline wields a lot of power, but it is far from perfect or complete and is certainly not often rational...it is messy, porous, and overlaid with other kinds of desires. Sometimes performers even push back, resist expectations or training, and go against the flow. The rest of this chapter will explore some of the other strong disciplinary forces that performers navigate.
Health, Beauty, Sexuality and Bodily Ideals

Foucault’s ideas of discipline have been instrumental in understanding and theorizing health and sexuality, beauty, movement, and even national identity. For example, Duncan (1994) says that Foucault offers “a useful way of understanding the mechanisms that inculcate an idealistic body ideal in women” (p. 48). And Paulson (2005) uses Foucault to frame an exploration of fitness regimes and aging, to explore how different ways of talking about a body, discipline the body in distinct ways, and how “different cultures of fitness mould the subjective experience in different ways through the use of body-maintenance techniques” (p. 232). He has also been used “for examining sites where forms of dance have been central to the announcement and maintenance of operations of power leading to a broader theorization of how social meanings are constituted and contested through embodied practices” (Vertinsky 2007 p. 27). Foucault has also been used to understand how female rugby players’ bodies were shaped by multiple discourses, and how they “resisted disciplinary processes of femininity but, at the same time, were willing participants in disciplinary processes of competitive sport” (Chase 2006 p. 229). Haywood (2007) identifies the promotion of the “extreme sport lifestyle” in her work on producing girls and the neoliberal body. She says the images sold with this lifestyle promote “the new can-do, DIY, take responsibility for yourself subject” that directly advances the aims of Empire12 (p. 113).

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12 Haywood uses Hart and Negri’s concept of “Empire” to describe unbounded systems of “global domination and subjugation”. While I would be more likely to use the somewhat more narrowly defined
Foucault’s work has also been used to grapple with ideas of sexuality and beauty. Foucauldian discipline has been used to describe the internalizing and self-monitoring which accompanies women’s involvement in health and beauty regimes with a particular emphasis on the centrality of personal choice to this form of power (Eskes, Duncan and Miller 1998). Scholars working on this topic take a range of positions with respect to identity, choice, and agency as they describe technologies of the body. For example, Wesely (2003), argues that, while exotic dancers have constrained choices due to the technologies of the body they are expected to conform to, they are actively navigating these technologies, while at the other end of the spectrum Schultz (2004) argues that such disciplinary practices ‘homogenize and normalize ideals of femininity’ (p. 185).

Somewhat unsurprisingly, aerial movements, bodily representations, and performers’ experiences fit well within the discourses identified by other scholars around idealized, athleticized and gendered bodies. Aerial action also easily corresponds to the kinds of movements that Foucault described as disciplinary.

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13 It is worth noting that although these ideas have been used repeatedly to describe gendering practices, some feminists argue that in Foucault’s work itself, gender was remarkably absent (King 2004). Although many consider Foucault to be the father of our understanding of the “disciplined” body, Bordo (1993) shows how much of feminist politics, well before Foucault was writing, was a politics of awareness of, and resistance to, the discipline of women’s bodies. One of the most common forms of resistance among early feminists has been a refusal to comply with expectations of bodily comportment: wearing pants, refusing corsets or makeup, not complying with expectations of feminine movement or spatial expectation of feminine presence and absence. Bordo argues that feminists were grappling with this long before Foucault, and that these women were politically aware of their own implication, or “choice”, in the disciplining of their own bodies.
namely movements broken down into components in order to be better learned as a discipline (Punday 2000). Aerial action requires constant training; there are expectations to produce certain forms and tricks. Aerialists are exceedingly disciplined athletes. Like Olympic athletes, they are constantly expected to surpass the physical feats of their predecessors and colleagues, an undertaking which requires a full lifestyle commitment. Many of them engage in hours of training, stretching and conditioning, they eat special diets, attend frequent doctor and physical therapy appointments, and deal with repeated confrontations with the pain of rips, burns, breaks, and sprains, and ongoing muscle soreness and fatigue, all in order to capture an appearance (usually for under 6 minutes at a time) of superhuman, controlled, weightless, effortlessness.

There is a clear gendered discourse at work among performers which outlines which bodies belong in which places, how they should look and move, what they should wear in particular spaces, and how they should perform specific identities. Generally, clowns are still more often assumed to be male, and aerialists’ assumed to be female. While this is somewhat justified by the actual proportions of men and women in each profession it does not always hold. I interviewed both genders in both professions and found that members of either group, who were not part of the dominant gender for that profession, were more likely to be aware of being inappropriately gendered for their profession. Noe, one of the male aerialists from Montreal (originally from Switzerland) spoke of an uphill battle as a man in the aerial world, and several female clowns said similar things (Helen, Jan, Sue). Those
who were ‘appropriately’ gendered for their profession either were extremely sensitized to their gender role (female aerialists) or relatively unconcerned with the role of gender in their profession (male clowns). Several female aerialists also spoke of the hyper-sexualization of aerial work, and some described their efforts to ignore or refuse this vision of themselves and their work.

Both aerialists and clowns started as male dominated professions, but women joined the ranks of aerialists very early on as their smaller size was thought to be valuable for flying aerial acts (where the flyer is caught by the catcher). Their sexual and aesthetic appeal was also always thought to help attract an audience (Tait 2005). Small size is still considered valuable among some aerial performers working in duos. However, most of the aerial performers who I interviewed were primarily involved in solo aerial acts so the gendered discourse largely circulated around sexual attractiveness rather than size. Two Montreal based aerialists, Noe (male) and Sarah (female), both described a belief among aerialists that if you are a young attractive female you will get work as an aerialist regardless of your skill level, since much of the show is seen to be about female sexuality and attractiveness. This feminization and sexualization of aerial work means male aerialists sometimes deal with similar issues around feminization and assumed homosexuality that male dancers have described (Mennesson 2009).

Overall this combination of bodily disciplines at work on aerialists produce normative embodied behaviors in terms of dress, movement and body shape that
conform to and at times epitomize gendered ideals outside circus. The emphasis on strength, power and control, while less physically extreme outside the circus, is still well within contemporary gender ideas of women as ‘superhero’ that have arisen in the last 30 years. The ‘superhero’ ideal has been used to describe the way women are expected to excel in a growing number of arenas (home, work, fitness, motherhood). It has also been argued that it proposes a model of feminine achievement through individuality and ‘choice’ that can be linked to capitalism’s push for an ideology of womanhood which is increasingly removed from the possible (Winship 1983). As well these extreme sport, independent, self-responsible ideals have been identified as part of some neoliberal paradigms (Heywood 2007). This gendered discourse of sexuality, youth and beauty is not new and it is not circus specific, but the aerialist body is a particularly strong symbol or paradigmatic example of the kinds of impossible, super-able, sexualized bodies that are currently being idealized.

While these expectations around gender and sexuality had some impact on all aerialists, the performers I spoke with occupied a range of more nuanced positions in relation to these discourses. They did not all respond in the same way to this disciplinary force. Sarah, an instructor for the National Circus School, claimed to actively fight these discourses by avoiding certain clothes when she was performing, while Annie, who runs Calgary’s only aerial company said she chose not to perform sexualized movements in her routines as a way to live outside these expectations. Annie also said that she felt she succeeded in living outside these expectations and
claimed they didn’t affect her. Given the proliferation of these expectations I wonder if, while admirable, such a thing is really possible. Jen, one of the most successful aerialists in Toronto, located herself in relation to these expectations by identifying how impossible and even absurd they actually are. She said that maintaining the ability to achieve aerial tricks is actually at odds with achieving the typical gendered body that women are taught to strive for, and which aerialists are theoretically supposed to represent. Her example was that training can lead to weight gain through muscle (as much as 20 lbs), unusually powerful shoulders, and a body often covered in bruises and burns which are not typically considered sexy. Such things don’t appear odd in the context of a performance when distance, makeup, costumes and lighting help create the idealized image, but can look strange and ‘unattractive’ when seen out of context. Finally Wendy, a part-time aerialist who was also an academic (so arguably less likely to be judged solely for her physicality than other performers might be) said that she felt empowered (at least at times) by the sexualized power of the aerialist.

My assessment based on the performers I spoke with, is that all aerialists struggle to some degree with this discourse and what position to occupy in relation to it. But these positions ranged from relative unawareness of this discourse, to insistence that they were unaffected and inhabited space outside of it, to acknowledgement of the pressures of the gendered discourse, to expressions of intentional resistance in relation to it. Most who were aware of the pressures of this discourse felt that they had managed a somewhat unique response of avoidance, resistance or creative
subversion, perhaps evidence they felt some measure of choice, control or at least responsibility for their involvement in it. Although those who were aware of these discourses realized they were in operation in the wider culture and affected all performers, most of their solutions to these experiences were individual ones, with only one performer suggesting a collective response might be helpful. While the range of subjective positions that performers took up in relation to this discourse suggests room for resistance to them, and shows them to be neither uniform nor monolithic, the individualized sense of responsibility for one’s own navigation of these expectations is troubling and suggests to me that more collective social work such as sharing experiences and deliberately strategizing to change the image of aerialists would be necessary for these counter-discourses to make any headway against the powerful normalizing gendered and sexualized expectations.

**Using and Obscuring Race**

Race is a central organizing discipline for bodies in the contemporary circus. This however, does not mean it was a topic of discussion among the performers I interviewed. In fact race organizes bodies in the circus so effectively that despite being a defining feature of circus space, this organization appeared to be normal and unremarkable to the white performers I interviewed (and to myself during the interview process), not warranting any commentary. I did not ask questions specifically about race or gender, but where gender was a common topic of discussion, mentioned by all participants (except the male clowns), race was not. One possible explanation is that gender may have seemed relevant to interviewees
in part because I am a woman (as were many of them), while race was able to appear irrelevant as a topic of conversation between white people whose racial identities could pass unremarked and seem unremarkable (Frankenberg 1993). One of the main characteristics of whiteness is the power to pass as an unmarked body, to embody the norm that doesn’t have to be noticed or identified as racialized (McGuinness 2000). This parallels the findings in the previous section that male clowns spoke the least about gender, to them gender was not an issue because they were gendered ‘appropriately’ for their discipline in a way that allowed them to feel ungendered or gender neutral. Similarly in a meeting between ‘white’ people processes of racialization can remain obscured.

Whiteness is indicated less by its explicit racism than by the fact that it ignores, or even denies, racist indications. It occupies central ground by de-racializing and normalizing common events and beliefs, giving them legitimacy as part of a moral system depicted as natural and universal. In such a system, whiteness is embodied and becomes desire in the shape of the normative human body, for which ‘race’ provides an unspecified template.” It is through the myriad of embodied encounters between whites and people of colour, which Razack (1998, 7) defines as “moments marked by ambivalence, desire, and the performance of domination,” that identities become solidified and their relation to place determined. (Peake and Ray 2001 p. 181)

This absence of open discussion makes it all the more essential to examine the way race functions in the circus. “Racialization is part of the normal, and normalized,
landscape and needs to be analyzed as such” (Kobayashi and Peake 2000 p. 392), and this is vividly clear in the landscape of the circus. Race has been a central organizing feature of circus throughout its history and continues as such to the current day. The limited literature that deals with race and the circus mostly deals with this as a historic issue. For example Wendy Holland describes the ways her circus performer grandparents renegotiated their racialized and gendered identities in the late 19th century through performing in the circus. She describes how they had to tolerate the commodification of their ‘otherness’ in the form of expectations of exoticism that gave the circus a desirable element of wildness. The category ‘other’ was operationalized by this circus as a generic one, with her grandfather being assigned a Spanish identity rather than performing his own aboriginal one. At the same time she also claims that they enjoyed relative social freedom within the circus compared to the confines of normative racist and sexist culture at the time, for example her grandparents marriage was interracial, something the circus community accepted, but which was looked down on outside the circus (Holland 1999). Such descriptions reveal how circus has been a site that has both enacted racialized and gendered discipline, and permitted a relatively unique flexibility of identity for a long time.

The heyday of modern circus corresponded with the rise of the ‘exotic’ as a central element in mass entertainment around the colonial world (Andreassen 2003). Davis has described central presence of representations of India in the American circus between 1890 and 1940 and considers it a central part of American popular culture
at that time, despite the fact that India and America did not have formal relations
until after WWII (Davis 1993). Brown (2007) describes the racialized space of the
traditional circus in this same time period through examination of a Degas painting
from 1879. She says:

The circus in particular was a hybrid space where class, gender, and race could
intersect in performance, where the sexuality associated with working class
women and the darker races could come together with the androgyny of
acroats, all of which could be enjoyed voyeuristically without endangering
the detached observer's own socially prescribed sense of privilege and
masculinity. (p. 744)

Brown suggests that at this point in history, the circus was a safe space to encounter
the 'other' and the primarily white audience was able to do so without any threat to
their own identity. Brown also examines the way race was used to market circus at
the turn of the last century. She says:

There were other black performers at the time as well as various acts billed
as "african" and other acts pairing black and white performers, this was part
of the marketing of new international circuses as exotic through the inclusion
of performers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. (p. 748)

Peta Tait (1996), who has written extensively about the circus, describes race in the
modern circus in these ways:

Historically, however, this performance of a foreign other blurred distinctive
identity and specific bodies. From the beginning of the twentieth century, the
veiled impressions of a mysterious other in circus was frequently oriented to a non-specific Middle-Eastern milieu and reflected what Edward Said terms orientalism - the imaginative projection of 'things Oriental'. (p. 45)

But race is not just a feature of traditional circus; racialization is not something that “happened” in the old circus and from which we have since moved on.

Contemporary circus clearly has very similar ways of operationalizing race and using it for marketing. Themes of the ‘exotic’ are part of the tendency of circus towards sensational and spectacular marketing and promotion (Andreassen 2003). Cirque de Soleil, for example, has a well-established practice of representing exoticism using costumes, makeup and prosthetics, which make for relatively unidentifiable or uncategorizable bodies – contemporary reproduction of what Tait called a “non specific...mysterious other”. Tait (1996) says “The circus performance transmutes the social banishment of unregulated groups into a social fascination with marginalized bodies” (p. 44), and goes on to describe how:

circus appropriated racial identity as part of the performance through the process of naming, dressing, and symbolically recoding bodies. These labels were fluid and changing significations. The languages of circus performance parodied notions of fixed cultural identity and presented an unstable condition of identity. (p. 45)
This social fascination with marginalized bodies can be seen in two of Cirque de Soleil’s more recent shows. Though I have not seen these shows in person, their advertising and promotional material makes their themes very clear. The aesthetics in *Ka* are based heavily in several non-western cultures, primarily Chinese, Japanese and Indian. The costumes, hair and makeup in this show appear to blend these traditions to present a kind of “Asian fusion”, producing a feel of the ‘oriental’ or the exotic without a direct attribution to, or identification with specific cultures (Said 1979).

Similarly, Cirque de Soleil’s most recent show to visit Toronto, *Totem*, presents a blending of indigenous and tribal cultures, an aesthetic, stylized representation of First Nations and tribal people which, while in some ways celebrating these groups, also simplifies, generalizes and appropriates complex cultures to produce an appealing and mysterious aesthetic which benefits the Cirque de Soleil empire. Such racialized choices clearly put these groups ‘in their place’ as people who belong in the category ‘other’.

The dominant organizing principle for the use of ‘race’ in the circus remains the mobilization of ideas of cultural and racial ‘otherness,’ using the desirability and fascination of the ‘exotic’ to market the circus. Cirque uses colouring of hair and bodies, and blurring of features with prosthetics and makeup to create characters that do not easily fit into specifically racialized categories. In this way the circus continues its history as a hybrid space where ‘otherness’ is still safely encountered,
although the ‘otherness’ in this instance can be extremely stylized. Mahtani (2002) has described how the experiences of ‘mixed race’ women, can help uncover the performativity of race or racialization-at-work. This “malleable” nature of racial categorization makes vividly clear the social construction (and deconstruction) as well as performativity of racial categories. However, where the women Mahtani interviewed chose to trouble racial categories with their own transgressive performances of racial identity, the blurring of the categories in circus representations is imposed rather than chosen – especially in the top down directive style of Cirque de Soleil’s productions- and seems likely to have been undertaken with the intention of improving Cirques ticket sales rather than challenging the limitations of the subject positions available to some racialized people and groups. Ultimately the representation of race in Cirque de Soleil’s shows, reifies the category “other” even as it blurs specific racial features and identities.

This presentation of the exotic ‘other’ also makes assumptions about who the audience is, what they will consider normal, what is exotic, and who the ‘others’ are who are on display. These assumptions reproduce assumptions and expectations about which bodies belong where in the space of the circus. As Kobyashi and Peake say:

Whiteness is also a standpoint: a place from which to look at ourselves and the surrounding society, a position of normalcy, and perhaps moral superiority, from which to construct a landscape of what is same and what is different. (Kobayashi and Peake 2000 p. 394)
*Zumanity*, one of Cirque du Soleil’s most recent standing shows in Las Vegas (which I saw in March 2009), is designed around the theme of sexuality and marketed and reviewed as being boundary pushing, full of acts that portray relatively explicit sexuality and include queer sexuality and interracial intimacy. Of all of their ‘boundary pushing’ practices, it is interracial intimacy that has garnered *Zumanity* the most attention. According to my interview with a cast member this aspect of the show has drawn significant attention in the form of letters of complaint from some audience members. In addition to this negative feedback, many of the reviews of this show refer to its displays of interracial intimacy in their descriptions of the show suggesting they see this as a key feature of the show. Some reviewers also suggested that interracial intimacy provides further evidence of Cirque’s progressive politics, evidence that Cirque is a unique ‘artistic’ ‘cutting edge’ company that we should feel good about supporting (Aubin 2003; Corliss 2003; Johnson 2003). The fact that placing interracial bodies together in *Zumanity* evoked such a volley of commentary, even positive commentary, shows the materiality of race. There are very clear expectations about what bodies belong where and with whom in the circus and on stage, and these expectations can be manipulated for the purpose of presenting a particular image. With *Zumanity*, Cirque chose to bend these expectations in ways that were perceived by some to be politically progressive, but simultaneously they were also able to capitalize on this perception, furthering their own image as an edgy innovator. *Zumanity* uses this interracial imagery in its own promotional material as well, providing a clear example of the way the exotic and exciting ‘other’
is mobilized to market contemporary circus. Variations of the image below of black and white bodies in a bathtub are the most common promotional image used for Zumanity, it contrasts regular unexciting ‘reality’ with the titillating racialized sexuality of Zumanity.

**Figure 10: A Zumanity advertisement posted on billboards in Las Vegas, March 2009.**

If we approach the image above with an awareness of the history of the sexualized black man, it becomes clear that rather than demonstrating something progressive, as Zumanity promoters and reviewers would have you believe. This image simply reproduces age-old stereotypes for the benefit of marketing the show, much as Brown described the use of race in circus at the turn of the last century.

Linked to the stereotypical sexualization of people of colour is the portrayal of bodies of colour as more animalistic, and less civilized than ‘unmarked’ white bodies. Aerialists and acrobats are admired specifically for their bodies and physical prowess (rather than verbal or intellectual skills). As the title Zumanity suggests,
themes used in circus performance sometimes emphasize animalistic characteristics (aerialists will portray insects, birds, or other animals), as well as, or in conjunction with, stereotypical images of the exotic. Although beyond the scope of this research it would be worth exploring whether the presence of animal imagery has increased as the presence of actual animals in the circus has diminished.

Animals also fit neatly into the fascination with marginalized others, being as Philo and Wilbert (2000) suggest “a relatively powerless and marginalized ‘other’ partner in human—animal relations” (p. 4). They also suggest that “The conceptual placing of animals is first about deciding what is or is not an animal” (p. 7), a dividing line which has long been stretched to incorporate people who might be considered slightly less than human:

- Notions of this kind clearly link to a long-standing human belief in a basic distinction between what is often termed the ‘civilised’ or ‘rational’ being who can think and act in the world (the human), and what are often identified as the base passions and instincts which allegedly obliterate a being’s potential for agency (the primal basis of the animal, present within humans, but most obviously displayed in non-human animals) (Horigan 1988; Ingold 1994b) ... Indeed, all kinds of cultural cross-codings have historically been constructed between some humans and some animals. Sometimes human groups may be regarded as lesser or marginal to other more dominant groups, and may thereby be associated with animals (or the
bestial in general) also viewed as lesser or marginal or as inhabiting marginal spaces. (Philo and Wilbert 2000 p. 15)

Given these associations of the physical with the non-rational, the animalistic and the marginal, it is perhaps not surprising that this confluence of identity features is presented together in the circus. It is a deeply rooted association, which continues to be reproduced and capitalized on in the circus providing the backdrop, if not the foreground, to many contemporary circus performances.

Part of the malleability of racial identity in the circus is that the identity of the performer does not need to match that of the character being presented, the offstage identity of the performer does not necessarily influence the onstage presentation of otherness. For example, as we saw above, the traditional circus had no qualms about presenting an aboriginal man as a Spaniard. Despite the tradition of presenting performing bodies in the circus as ‘other’, the contemporary aerial and clown performance community in Canada are predominantly racialized as white. I do not know much about the racialized status of circus performers in the traditional or modern circus in Canada prior to the 30 years covered by this research, but it would add an important element to our understanding of these shifts, if the dominance of white bodies in the contemporary circus were seen to correspond to its growing status as an art.

Even without this historical knowledge, it is valuable to explore why clowns and aerialists are predominantly racialized as white in the contemporary circus. It is
possible that the strong intersection between class and race in Canada, wherein people who are racialized as 'not-white' are still more frequently excluded from economic stability and wealth (Brown 2007), could be an inhibiting factor in being able to afford to do art. Additionally there may be structural constraints around idealized/expected body types for some bodies on display. In the same way that male aerialists described struggling against narrow sexualized and gendered expectations, female aerialists of colour might find themselves excluded from the dominant ideal type that white female aerialist represent:

Geographically, human beings reciprocally shape and are shaped by their surrounding environments to produce landscapes that conform similarly to ideals of beauty, utility, or harmony, values not immediately associated with "race" but predicated upon whitened cultural practices. (Kobayashi and Peake 2000 p. 394)

Finally and perhaps most significantly, given the kinds of images and expectations for racialized bodies outlined above, it would not be surprising if performers of colour were choosing not to participate in these spaces. Given the powerful expectation to perform otherness that has permeated circus history and which continues through the present in shows like Cirque’s Ka and Totem, performers of colour may be making choices not to participate in this production/reproduction of racialized bodies. Clearly the women performers I interviewed had chosen a range of positions in relation to gendered discourses including, resistance, empowerment, and avoidance. It makes sense that performers of colour may also be choosing their
own strategies, including non-participation, in relation to a racialized space that organizes and disciplines bodies in ways which may be oppressive or limiting. Whether through structural limitations or choices made in the navigation of subjectivity, clearly processes of racialization strongly discipline and shape the space of the circus and the bodies within it.

Ultimately this discussion raises the question “what would a non-racist circus look like?” Could the circus construct a show that does not play on these notions of otherness, or that does so in a way that opens up possibilities for and with racialized bodies rather than closing them down? The circus celebrates difference in an astounding variety of forms, be it the strange and seemingly otherworldly abilities of a contortionist, or the superhuman skill of an acrobat. The entire circus is designed to evoke feelings of awe and astonishment. It is easy to see the way racialization constrains and disciplines bodies and spaces in shows like Totem. In Totem the appropriation of cultural difference and the privileging of a western narrative is spelled out quite clearly as “the (very white) scientist” leads the audience from act to act (Cirque Du Soleil 2011). However, in some of the smaller circus shows around the country, there is more flexibility, more celebration and less hierarchy in the way otherness and difference are put to work. I am curious about what might happen to circus if different assumptions were made about who is in the audience, who is “other”, and what constitutes the spectacular and astonishing. Is there room for circus to present a positive challenge to notions of racialized otherness if its entanglement with race is openly acknowledged? I do not have an
answer to this but feel such an exploration is required if circus is to address and learn from its racist history and present.

**Desirable Aesthetic Movement**

Inextricably linked to gender and race is a notion of desirable aesthetic movement. Certain bodies are seen to move in the appropriate ways for particular disciplines (i.e. women are thought to be more graceful and move more sexually, and therefore make better aerialists; men are thought to be strong, and perhaps less agile and so make good catchers or hand balancers). While the aesthetic movement discourse is certainly intertwined with gendered expectations, it is more than this as well, and is a dominant force shaping the boundaries within which performers work.

In unpacking this discourse the expectations surrounding body shape, ability, and movement blur together as the desired ‘graceful’, ‘clean’ lines and appearances of effortlessness require something from all these categories. In order to achieve this I (and other aerialists) often wear body stockings under aerial costumes that keep the body contained, with the desired shape. Straight legs and pointed toes are a prerequisite for acceptable aerial movement, and generally considered a foundational ability even if other aesthetic or artistic choices are made later. Seeing frailty, struggle, or other human features (which include unshapely lumps and bumps) are not part of the desired aerial action. Aerial performance inherits many of its aesthetic paradigms from dance, and though not nearly as restricted as ballet
for example, which has been called “one of our cultures’ most powerful models of patriarchy” (Aalten 2004 p. 264), it clearly is influenced by these traditions.

Like ballet, there is an expectation of bodily perfection or ‘ideal type’ that surrounds the aerial body. However, like the fashion industry much of it is about illusion, and any aerialist will tell you that in a performance setting proper lighting and makeup are critical. I often joke with my colleagues about how we look great from a distance but up close we are covered in bruises, burns and other unattractive evidence of our frailty. The production of aerial bodies is about producing an appearance of something that is slightly beyond what is possible. Again this is similar to ballet where the aesthetic principal is weightlessness and straight lines (neither of which are natural to an actual body), and the result is a gap between the ideal and the reality (Aalten 2004). The discipline required to meet the impossible ideal dancer’s body is seen in instances where women have bound and broken their toes in service of an virtually unattainable line that has been deemed aesthetically pleasing. Chris, a male aerialist, says:

Having come from the world of gymnastics the aesthetics is established, what you need to look like and if you don’t you are not a success i.e. you don’t get points and equating that with performing you wouldn’t get applause.

Because circus borrows from many physical traditions rather indiscriminately the aesthetic is more flexible than in ballet or other rigid movement traditions. Modern dance (which new circus also borrows from heavily) allows and encourages flexed
feet as well as pointed toes, as modern dancers are interested less in precisely structured movements and more in achieving expressive movements. Borrowing from this, the flexed foot in circus is often claimed to be more expressive than the standard pointed toe and used as an accent or to bring through elements of character or edginess in a piece. However, it’s a fine balance. The pointed toe is still the standard and the basic marker of competence, and too much flexing will make it appear as though you cannot achieve this basic line. As I mentioned in chapter 4, a degree of nonchalance - resisting or abandoning normative practices - was often considered more artistic and more desirable than simple reproductions of the perfect form. This aesthetic preference can signal ‘not’ selling out, or can create distance from the kinds of expensive production values associated with Cirque de Soleil – signaling a freshness and originality often not seen in big productions or corporate shows. But successfully achieving this carefree attitude requires a comprehensive mastery of the original expectation before it can be abandoned.

This discipline is enforced through the gaze of peers, through hiring practices, and through intensive self-discipline. Performers use visualizing technologies such as video and photographs, as well as feedback from peers to tell us if we have achieved a flat split, a perfectly straight leg or a graceful transition. Additionally, with the growth of circus schools, these aesthetic preferences are becoming institutionalized and reproduced more broadly. Conversations I have been part of in rehearsal and in the gym about style and creative choices include references to the ‘national school look’ or ‘national school aesthetic’ which includes heavier use of flexed feet and
'broken' lines, more jerky or sudden movements than used in the rest of the Canadian circus population, as well as recognizable preferences for costume and music. This look is sometimes favoured and sometimes not, but is considered distinct. Outside of the schools, the training and transmitting of certain aesthetics has been dependant on apprenticeships and teaching each other. Performers do not create their work in a vacuum, and there is significant technical know-how required for what they do, but also quite strict aesthetic expectations. These expectations can be broken but only in particular environments and always with some awareness of resisting or going against the grain.

**Emotional Discipline**

Finally, as described in the last chapter, one of the strongest disciplinary discourses among performers is an expectation of emotional expression. This is also the discourse that most defines the “new circus” of the last 30 years. The underlying idea is that being able to use emotions in performance work is necessary, and to that end having control and understanding of one’s emotions, as well as the ability to communicate using them, is considered essential to producing good, successful performance work. Through my experience with clowning I knew that emotional practices would be a central part of the clown’s discourse. What came as a relative surprise to me was the degree to which it became clear that emotional practices are required of aerialists too. Both kinds of performers repeatedly describe their performance goals as being to emote or express feelings in order to connect with and evoke an emotional response in the audience.
With both clowns and aerialists there are emotional and physical expectations, however their emphasis and intentions are different. The emphasis in aerial performance is physical - to look strong, beautiful, impressive, and effortless, - but following closely there is an expectation also to perform emotionally, to enrich the physical performance with a range of emotions that include sorrow, angst, pleasure, and tension and that may or may not link together to tell some kind of narrative story. C, a Montreal based aerialist who has been performing for over 10 years says:

    When I started I thought that all you had to do was go up there and flip around. Being a gymnast we were never worried about performing as a show, though that is what we were doing for the judges, we were all concerned just about just doing a thing perfectly perfectly, so that is all I figured I had to do in a show, do all my movements perfectly perfectly and everything would be fine, and that is not quite what it is (laughter).

C primarily performs aerial silks and hoop and has in the past done a highly technical acro-balancing act (balancing on a pole on a partner’s head). She came from a gymnastics background and so found the transition to the more emotive expectations of circus performance took some getting used to.

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14 The content of the story itself isn’t very important, but using a story to find emotional expression is considered an appropriate technique – Cirque is well known for having “stories” that few people can actually follow, but they give the impression of intention and justification for different emotional and artistic content at different points throughout the show.
Like discourses of gender, race and aesthetics outlined above, emotional discipline is not easily separated from other discourses. The gendered and sexualized physical disciplines I described above, are all accompanied by an emotional component that is part of their meaning, and the racialized and gendered discourses intersect with aesthetic and emotional expectations in determining which bodies are beautiful or how certain subjectivities should be performed. An essential component of Foucault’s understanding of power is that there is a relationship between technologies of domination of others, and those of care of the self, which include such intimate disciplines as emotional practices. The issue of physical discipline has been taken up more frequently than emotional discipline in literature using Foucault, but his later work on the history of sexuality and care of the self suggests that emotion was also central to his understanding of disciplinary forces.

The trick and skill based foundation of aerial acrobatics is exemplary of much of the history of circus performance. In traditional circus, especially modern American circus of the 19th and 20th century, the goals for acrobatics were relatively clear, and usually involved surpassing the tricks done by competitors and predecessors. Tait (2005) describes the constant efforts among aerial troupes to add one more flip or special feature to aerial feats to gain the edge on the competition, sometimes with deadly results. The goals for aerialists in the new circus seem to have changed slightly. While being impressive is still important, there is an added emphasis on demonstrating emotion or narrative while doing tricks at the same time. Aerialists need to know their tricks and their apparatus inside out in order to be able to do
both difficult physical feats, and express emotionally. Only then can they stop concentrating on the physical technique in order to make space to express emotionally. Can a performer do an incredibly hard trick and give that trick an emotional quality or a deeper meaning? There are expectations about what forms performers are supposed to achieve, and what the tricks are supposed to look like, but also an added component about how you are supposed to feel (or make your audience feel) while you are doing this. This is not an absolute break with the past - certainly Tait describes aerialists in the last century making sure to represent confidence through smiling and acting bold– definitely emotional labour when the emotional reality may be terror or even boredom with a trick done repetitively (Tait 2005). They also may have played with the audience’s emotions by hesitating before a trick to make it look harder or scarier (performers still use some of these techniques). But the new emphasis on the emotional elements in this work is different enough to suggest it is part of a paradigm shift. Chris, a Toronto based aerialist describes the expectation like this:

In gymnastics people are there to judge you, in entertainment people are there to experience, people are there to have fun, to cry, they want something from you, they are judging you but it is not their first goal. They want to have fun, they want to forget, they want to enjoy, they want to participate. So in circus I find you have a bigger responsibility if you are going to stand on a stage because you can’t just go up there and show them how great a body you have or how wonderful your toe point is or that you can just flip over, its not enough, that’s just like a painter going look ‘I’ve got paint and a brush’.
The metaphor of the painter is more than just convenient. This description of the relationship between doing tricks and really performing as being equivalent to holding a paintbrush vs. painting a work of art, shows both the significance of these emotional elements to performers, and the reproduction/emphasis of the idea of circus-as-art which was significant to most of my participants. It is the expression that seems to matter most, the intangible practice of connecting and affecting the audience, rather than the technique of being able to ‘simply’ do a trick. This seems to me to parallel Rancière’s description of the shift from the representative regime of art, to the aesthetic regime, with the emphasis in the latter being on the expression rather than the mode of expression, a move that also corresponds to the development of modern or abstract art. A move that, in Rancière’s eyes further dissolves the boundaries between work and life.

The Cultural Project of the Contemporary Aerial Body

Perhaps what we are seeing in contemporary circus is simply an extension of the principals of modern art to a new area, what has long been accepted in ‘high’ art is now making its way to other arenas. However, the major distinction is that circus has always been a popular form, it is highly visible, and important not just to art critics but for the symbolic meanings it has for society much more broadly (Bouissac 1976; Carmeli 1995; Tait 2005). What is it about the ways these circus bodies are disciplined that make them significant right now? I have described above how well the aerial body fits the metaphors being used to describe the new economic
rationality. How else might this disciplined body be tied to the current socio-economic moment? Rosemary Garland Thompson (1996) has argued that during the transition to modernity the Freak Show was “a central element in our collective cultural project of representing the body” (p.13). The heyday of the Freak Show in the mid 19th and early 20th century, during “America’s most intense period of modernization” (p. 4), was a time when industrial workers felt extreme anxiety about the status of the body, due to the need to adapt to mechanized production, new kinds of working schedules. She posits, “The changes in production, labour, technology and market relations that we loosely call industrialization redeployed and often literally reconfigured the body” (p. 11). The anxieties of workers during these transitions were alleviated when they saw the bodies of the ‘Freaks’ whose bodily differences reassured them about the stability of their own bodies. Peta Tait (2005) also argues about the symbolic role of bodies on display in the traditional circus. She says that aerialists in the last century performed specific cultural ideas arguing that “modern circus was developing as notions of happiness and fun shifted more towards pleasure and excitement under early capitalism” (p. 150). She claims that fast bodies can be pleasurable to watch and aerial action was emblematic of the kind of fun and excitement that capitalism promised in the 19th century.

These historical observations about circus bodies beg the question, what cultural projects are these bodies-on-display performing now? The project enacted by circus bodies has changed from their earlier roles, and the performances have changed too. If we follow the logic of Garland Thompson and Tait, suggesting circus may both
alleviate cultural anxiety and perform cultural ideals, what are these anxieties and ideals in the current moment? Contemporary circus performers, as symbolic bodies, strongly suggest that in the contemporary moment we must strive to be lean, fit and flexible, and we must also simultaneously be creative, spontaneous and emotional. As we have seen, one of the major shifts from traditional circus, to new or artistic circus bodies, is the requirement that these bodies perform emotional labour and connect with their audiences. The old belief was that a performer could just “flip over” and “show them how great a body he or she had” as Chris states above, which corresponds to a mechanistic view of the body, paralleling notions of the body as machine that are dominant in Fordism. It is precisely this view that new circus is challenging. It is not enough to be a machine; one must also be artistic. As I said in chapter 3, new forms of social organization and new forms of capitalism require virtuosity and emotional labour, both of which are now being performed by the bodies displayed in the circus and celebrated by audiences watching them.

These contemporary neoliberal and post-Fordist forms of social organization also require acceptance of much greater degrees of risk and flexibility in the workplace (Banks, Lovatt et al. 2000; Dowling, Nunes and Trott 2007; Gill and Pratt 2008). Moncrieff (2006) argues that feelings of inadequacy and anxiety serve neoliberal policies by suggesting greater consuming might make one more acceptable, and by encouraging workers to accept less suitable working conditions because they feel they have few choices. Although my research was not with audiences directly it is possible that aerial performances do cultivate feelings of inadequacy or the need to
achieve more in those who watch the show. The idealized images portrayed by
performers affect the audience and influence broader ideas of what are normal,
achievable, and desirable bodies, and as a result affect many people’s relationships
with their bodies. I observed a conversation after an aerial performance in which
two female audience members were speaking with both amusement and sincerity
about how they wished they could give up their children and quit their jobs so they
could do what the aerialist does and “have her body”. The point of the conversation
was ostensibly to forgive themselves for not being like the aerialist, because the
sacrifices that would be required were clearly absurd for them. But they seemed
reassured by the idea that if they could just give up everything else they too could be
the epitome of fitness, youth and attractiveness. I have repeatedly observed women
remarking that they wished they could attain the level of strength, fitness, and
control that they perceive belongs to the aerialist.

Regardless of the reality of performers’ relationships with their bodies, these
bodies, like other extreme athletes or dancers, promote and hold up a certain
paradigm of desirable fitness and disciplined embodiment. This fits well into
Featherstone’s (1982) discussion of the body in consumer culture, and the
productive and reproductive power of particular disciplinary ideas of health and
self-management. He says, “the closer the actual body approximates to the idealized
images of youth, health, fitness and beauty, the higher its exchange-value” (p. 21).
And goes on to describe how within this new consumer paradigm:

Children are seen as bad investments in terms of time, money and affection
and even resented as possible rivals. Cars, jogging, tourism, self actualization
and the new therapies offer more predictable pleasures and a better return
on the investment of time and money (Jacoby 1980, p. 64). This suggests that
within consumer culture a new relationship between the body and self has
developed. (p. 27)

Peta Tait (2005) argues that in traditional circus in the early 1900s, aerial action
dramatically shifted ideas of women’s bodies in ways that opened up the
possibilities for the development of musculature, which previously was not
considered physically or biologically possible for women. She argues that at this
time these embodied practices were opening up space for women to express new
parts of themselves. I have some concern that the effects might be quite different in
the contemporary moment, as this unique, highly trained, specialized and risk
taking body type becomes more desired and even expected. At the very least
contemporary aerial action seems to glamorize the idea of taking risks, and living
with danger, instability and uncertainty, as well as furthering notions of the super-
woman who can balance work, family, fitness and still look good. If the display of
these bodies is having these effects, then it is dovetailing with the demands and
requirements of a culture of precarious, flexible work, and the gendered and
racialized features of that model of labour.

Along side the growth of circus performance, there has been a rise in recreational
circus: exercise classes, kids’ classes, circus ‘boot camps’ and other activities that
feed the hope that everyone has the potential to be a circus performer. The reality, however, is that many of those who start aerial training as a hobbyist or a junior professional have to stop within a few months or a few years due to injury. Hand, shoulder, and back injuries are incredibly common and often surface after only a few months training. This ‘failure’ is, I think, more ‘normal’ than actually being able to succeed at such extreme physical practices. Bodies are not easily controlled - even among professional aerialists perfect discipline is always beyond reach, thwarted by injuries, weight gain, muscle loss, and other life events (this will be discussed more later in the chapter). If circus performers are iconic and their bodies on display are performing particular cultural projects, what are the effects of striving for body shapes and movements that are never achievable, even by the icons? Aerialist bodies and performances symbolically set the bar high, creating expectations of extreme, superhuman performances that workers in other industries might be expected to strive for in their every day working lives.

**Disciplined Clowns**

It was the distinctly disciplined movements performed by aerialists, and the way they clearly reproduce (and occasionally transgress) discourses around gender and sexuality that called me to look to Foucault. However, once I began to pay attention to the idea of discipline it became clear that aerial movement was not the whole story. When I started this research I expected to find that aerialists’ experiences would correspond with previous research identifying gendered and sexualized disciplines. But I also expected that clowns would likely demonstrate some sort of
escape from these bodily disciplines. I had also anticipated that discipline would
mean physical discipline, somehow thinking emotion would be less easily
constrained and a more likely site for resistance or transgression. Surprisingly to
me, clowns used the term discipline just as frequently as aerialists when talking
about rehearsal and performance. I have found both physical and emotional
discipline to be strong in both clown and aerial experiences.

Though clowns and clown teachers emphasize how much of clowning takes place “in
the moment”, with clowns being flexible and responsive to their surroundings,
discipline is also felt to be a central part of the training practices that ultimately
cultivate space and opportunity for this spontaneity. Jan a clown performer, director
and instructor who lives and works in Edmonton describes clowns’ structured
practices like this:

The clown shows I’ve directed are Nazi like, I shouldn’t use that word, they
are authoritarian. If we can get the beats, talk about liminal space. You know
exactly the rhythm of the movements. So going to bed with your partner
clown, first of all you pick up the blanket, and then you look at each other,
and then you turn it over like that, and then you put your hands like this, and
then you pick up the corner, and then you rock three times, and then you lie
down, beat by beat by beat by beat, paradoxically, once that’s in there and
you don’t have to think about it, if something untoward happens, if the
audience sneezes or a prop breaks (gasp), you can take that thread and just
go with it for five minutes if that is what happens but you know that carved
in stone structure so well that you know where to come back to. Whereas if you are totally improv [improvisational], the danger is it’ll be really great one night, and not so great the next night, because you lose your way.

Of course the use of the term discipline by my research participants does not refer to discipline in a Foucauldian sense, but some of how they talked about discipline definitely resonated with Foucault’s ideas of care of the self and the movement of governance to intimate spaces. Sue Morrison, an internationally renowned clown instructor based in Toronto ties the structured movements to intimate practices of governance like this:

What I want to do is establish how, when you are working, you can learn to recognize your moments, recognize your rhythm and work that, ... it’s so you can be self-correcting all the time.

Self-recognition and self-correction are indispensible tools in the clown’s toolkit of being “in the moment” which, far from purely spontaneous, is the result of hours and hours of practice. As a result of these findings, I broadened my search for disciplinary practices to include both clowns and aerialists and both physical and emotional disciplines. This was unexpected because I planned to theorize clowns primarily in terms of their transgressions or boundary pushing. I expected and perhaps hoped them to be living evidence of the kind of artistic freedom gestured towards by the theorists discussed in the third chapter, but the reality is, as always, more complex.
Far from inhabiting a space outside gendered expectations, clowns have been a predominantly male dominated occupation up until the last 20 years, and gendered norms are still not the same for men and women. In his book titled *The World of Clowns* Bishop (1976) sums up the traditional view of clowns. He suggests that clowns are supposed to be neutral characters, and that “obvious sexual identification interferes with the traditional role of the clown.” According to Bishop a female clown only really has a chance if she “makes herself into a neutral – that is, male - clown”, in this way she will no longer have gender getting in the way of the performance. Thankfully we have come a long way from these original views of female clowns, but the effects of the historical notion that being a woman may hinder being a clown are still apparent. A number of female clowns I spoke with played characters that gender-bended, but none of the male clowns I interviewed had regular female characters, although there is a history of female impersonation among clowns (Bishop 1976). Within the clowning community in Toronto there are men who perform female or feminine characters but not usually with red noses. These are usually considered character pieces rather than clown pieces, and are more common in the unpaid ‘art’ environments like cabaret shows rather than corporate events.

Francine Côte, (her website is shown in chapter 4) who has performed as a clown with great success all over the world for the last three decades, says that when she started, the gendered possibilities for women were narrower. Women could at that time play ‘tomboys’ and ‘strong’ personalities, but now there is more room for what
she describes as ‘softer women’. When she started clowning, she says she was relatively unique in using her feminine identity and gendered relationship with her male partner, ‘the battle between the sexes’, as a key source of her material. However, despite the growing flexibility of roles for female clowns Francine argues that while in some clown classes these days the majority of participants are women, women are still not as common in the higher level classes. Additionally, Francine says there are still far fewer female directors, which she feels impacts the kind of material that is produced.

Helen Donnelly, who has been working as a clown for over a decade in Toronto, says it’s a bit of an uphill battle being a woman in clowning, but she also sees changes taking place. She says:

I am encouraged about the amount of women involved in clown now. That is a huge issue for me, globally it is still a very male dominated profession, but in Canada we are seeing so many strong strong women clowns emerging and sticking with the form and uh I would love to see more of them in positions of power, which hasn’t happened there are a lot of great performers but they are working alone they don’t have companies that they own, that they hire other people, so that will come. But, and I guess that speaks to the political aspect too, is that I um, is clowning political ya cuz I am a woman in a male dominated profession so for me it is always political, just on a basic level. That’s part of the gender thing, and some people don’t see it, they don’t see
this at all either as an issue or as a reality, but trust me it’s there and uh it’s there, but it’s here in Toronto, it’s every where.

Among clowns, the gender-disciplined choices are different than among aerialists, but like aerialists they also occupy a range of different subject positions in relation to the discourses they are subject to. Some women clowns chose androgynous identities for their clowns, while others chose to play male characters at least some of the time. Some women clowns embody more traditional gendered female roles as part of their clown persona, and use the forum of clowning to play with and potentially expose the range of expected behaviors and stereotypes associated with that. Some female clowns work with male clowns and the gendered expectations and tensions of this pairing become part of the material for clown routines. Of course not all female bodies are equally welcome for clowning either. As we saw in the previous chapter, Shannan’s pregnant body was considered too much by Cirque, even though she herself saw her body as a rich source of material and humor.

Overall, the female clowns I spoke with had all grappled, at least at some point in their career, with being seen to be out of place, while the male clowns (out of all the interviewees) were least concerned with gender as a discourse. However, this does not mean male clowns are not subject to some related disciplinary expectations. While not identifying these as relating to gender, aesthetic and sexualized expectations of attractiveness and youth were still in operation for male clowns. Two Toronto based clowns, Jeff and Paul explained that there are some gigs they felt were not available to them because they were not “young” and “pretty” enough for
certain environments (for example, a high end shopping mall). Clowns have a more lax aesthetic discourse to conform to. Generally clowns are fit, physical, and fairly athletic. Clowns are certainly not subject to the same extreme physical expectations as aerialists, but still must conform to a certain norm. The expectations for clowns’ dress and behaviour are not entirely unconstrained. Especially when doing corporate work they must dress according to the expectations of those hiring them. They are expected to dress and behave ‘professionally’ and to not allow their oddity or disruptive clown behaviour to leak beyond the boundaries of the performance space/time. While inappropriate behaviour and dress may be funny during an act it is not welcome outside those boundaries. Clowns are also strongly influenced by expectations that good clowning is artistic, as we discussed in the previous chapter. ‘Birthday party’ aesthetics like really bright colours and patterns, big shoes, ruffled collars etc must be used cautiously, if at all, for fear that the clowns work will be undervalued and deemed inartistic. More subtle or one-of-a-kind costumes are preferred, often leaning in the direction of torn, mismatched clothes rather than shiny colourful clown costumes found in a costume shop.

The predominant whiteness of Canadian clowns may be part of the same discourse that has excluded female clowns. White male bodies are considered neutral, and therefore universal, while gendered and racialized ‘others’ are thought to stand out, making it hard for them to be perceived as having ‘universal’ appeal. Part of contemporary clowning philosophy is that the clown should be able to reach out to, and respond to, all audiences. Of course the reality is their work is far from
universal, and requires a lot of careful technique and negotiation to make it accessible to different audiences, all who bring different expectations and values to the encounter.

The most potent use of racialized discourse that I encountered among clowns was in the origins story of the new form of Canadian Clowning. Richard Pochinko is the man often seen to be the father of the contemporary rebirth of clown in Canada. He developed what has begun to be an internationally recognized ‘Canadian’ style of clowning called Pochinko Clowning. The narrative told about the origins of this now popular form are that he developed it through merging European clowning from the Lecoq and Gaulier schools with what is frequently described as First Nations’ mask making traditions. A web site dedicated to him uses the term “False Face Society” (http://richardpochinko.com/index.html) though I don’t believe he had any relationship with the Iroquois False Face Society, which used masks as part of Iroquois medicinal tradition from pre-colonial times up to the present (Fenton 1987). Unfortunately despite these claims it is unclear how much, if any, interaction Pochinko had with practitioners of First Nations’ mask making traditions. Most of the origins of these elements of his clowning practice have been obscured behind the explanation that Pochinko had a spirit guide who taught him for many years. While I can’t deny the possibility that this was truly part of his experience, and that in many spiritual and religious communities such experiences are a valued and valid part of learning, it is unfortunate and troubling that so few living people or traditions are acknowledged in the documentation of the evolution of this
performance practice. Despite these troubling origins, the idea that these clowning practices are rooted in First Nations’ traditions surrounds the development of these clowning skills with an aura of mystery and history that helps validate and authorize the practices and exercises used to teach new clowns. Unfortunately it does this by appropriating particular First Nations’ traditions, reproducing stereotypes of First Nations’ people as more in touch with their spiritual selves, and continuing a long standing relationship between circus and notions of the exotic ‘other’ (Tait 1996; Holland 1999). Though the idea that these practices originate in an unspecified First Nations’ culture is intended to lend them credibility, ostensibly honoring the value of these origins, the lack of acknowledgement furthers the idea that some bodies have privileged access to certain kinds of knowledge, but do not need actual credit or compensation for this expertise, while other bodies may be seen to be more modern, and more appropriate for the stage or the public eye. It seems to suggest that although this knowledge has been borrowed from people whose history gives it credibility, it is not from anyone important enough to be granted authorship.

Thankfully the relationship between First Nations’ communities and clowning practices does not end there. A new development in this troubled lineage of Canadian Clowning surrounds the arrival/return of this technique of clown/mask development to a reserve on Manitoulin island, where John Turner one of Pochinko’s students, now a well-known clown teacher, has been involved in working with the Debajehmujig First Nations’ Theatre Company. Clown teacher Sue
Morrison has also done some work with First Nations’ groups in Ontario, but I do not know the details of this relationship. From training with John Turner and hearing how he represents this element of Canadian clowning history to his students it seems to me his language and involvement with Debajehmujig may be helping shift the way the story about Pochinko is told, at least in some settings. The use of Pochinko clowning techniques by the artists of Debajehmujig for their creative practices at least begins to trouble the whiteness that still surrounds Canadian clowning.

Finally, the main discipline for clowns is an emotional one. For clowns, the emphasis for all their work is emotional, and the physical discipline they undertake, is in service of this end. The intention is to make people laugh and have other emotional responses. To do this, clowns need to learn how to express emotion freely, and to express it through the body. Clowns use stories and “gags” to cultivate humor but the emotional experience is primary and the gags, techniques and stories are generally the means to an emotional (and comedic) end. John Turner of Mump and Smoot describes his warm up routine before a show:

It’s the same thing as warming up specific muscles before a physical move before a physical competition, I’ll warm up my emotional muscles and I’ll use, instead of visualizing the basketball hoop and the moves I’ll use to get the outside shot as opposed to the moves I’ll use to get the inside shot, I’ll go to the moves and the visualization that I’ll need to achieve this intense moment on stage that is my end of the conversation to an audience, and so those
muscles I’ll be flexing will also be my listening muscles, not just my moves, my physical moves, I’ve got to warm that up I’ve got to warm up my emotional moves that I’ll make.

Contemporary clown training in Canada works so vigorously with emotional expression that some teachers find themselves fighting the reputation that the course is a kind of therapy, rather than a theatrical practice. During one clown training course in which I was a participant, a student suggested that the apparent goal of the course was to create “emotional geniuses”. The theory behind much of the clowning that has emerged in the last 30 years in Canada (which also builds on older European traditions) is that the performer must undertake the work to fully know themselves. In order to have mastery over their emotional expression, clowns are instructed to know themselves and their personality traits or tendencies. As clown teacher Francine Côté puts it, you need to know “what you have a lot of and what you have a little of” in order to utilize those traits for the sake of the audience’s laughter. Different teachers teach this in different ways, but most people find that taking a clown course means you are in for a personally challenging time, where your comfort zones and boundaries will be pushed. The training for clowns is extremely emotional. In many ways the clown’s apparatus is considered to be their emotional and physical body, where as the aerialist’s apparatus is the aerial equipment, and so training for this kind of work requires a lot of ‘feeling’.
The theory is that through using a particular set of techniques (exercises, games and sometimes mask-making and guided meditations) it becomes possible to know yourself and the different sides of your personality and behaviors. Then you can use that knowledge to fully engage with, affect, and amuse your audience with relatively few inhibitions. The premise is that these practices of self-knowledge are liberating, and even transgressive, breaking down and then mobilizing our ideas of ourselves. Once we have a better understanding of all our aspects we can ostensibly become unattached from any one identity, and therefore be free to express emotionally and to move in unexpected, unbounded, and therefore funny and affecting ways.

Aerial performance, because of its elements of extreme physical discipline, echoes Foucault’s earlier work on physical disciplinary regimes in schools and the military. These practices also mirror the neoliberal trend which Kelly et al. (2007) document, towards idealizing athleticism, control and physical self-management through practices like workplace health and fitness programs. Emotional management is still a secondary skill for aerialists. Clowning on the other hand, because of its focus on emotion, self-reflexivity, and self-awareness is better understood through Foucault’s latter notion of care of the self. In these practices the focus is not on external physical expectations, but rather on the tools and techniques through which the very notion of the self is constituted and managed. For clowns it is not only about the discipline required to move one’s body in appropriate and disciplined ways, or even to enact the appropriate emotional labour during a performance, but it is also about the intimate knowledge of and control over the self, and understanding of
one’s emotions, which are an increasingly valued (and necessary) skill set. In Foucauldian terms these skills are what are now required to properly fuse the political goals of the state and the intimate goals and practices of the individual. Previous studies have explored this trend through the proliferation of self-help books and the self-esteem movement (Lemke 2000), but these traits equally describe the ‘emotional genius’ that clown courses are believed to create.

**Emotional Labour in the Contemporary Moment**

Despite vastly different approaches, both clowns and aerialists prioritize achieving an emotional connection with their audiences, and that goal drives many of their performance choices and training experiences. Clowns require extensive self-reflexivity to achieve the desired emotional flexibility, while aerialists must extensively train physical practices so they can stop thinking about their physical technique and find ways to emote. While emotional connection is not the top priority for aerialists the way it is for clowns, it affects expectations for the work they produce. What does this say about circus and its relationship to other forms of work in the contemporary moment? In chapter 4, I suggested that recent growth and revitalization of circus was in part due to its character as an art that works well in a market system. Here I wonder if circus is also growing in popularity as it polishes and expands its performance of emotional labour, a suggestion that embeds circus even more deeply into processes of late capitalism. Other performers such as actors have been identified as having privileged relationships to emotional management and emotional labour, having access to significantly more resources.
for emotion management due to being trained with a series of techniques that teaches them to manage their emotions in certain ways (Orzechowicz 2008). Clearly circus performers also fit in this category, making them, alongside other performers, well suited and well trained to navigate the current structure and increasing demands for emotional, affective and immaterial labour in the contemporary labour market, and well suited to produce the kinds of affective experiences/products that are increasingly desired.

The role of emotion in work has been approached from a few different perspectives. In sociology the most prolific concept has been “emotional labour”. Hochschild (1983) wrote the classic sociological text that coined the term emotional labour. In this conceptualization, emotional labour was divided from general emotion or emotional work, which occurs throughout all spheres of life. Emotional labour was used to describe emotion when specifically used in the workplace as part of employees wage labour. Hochschild used Marx’ idea of alienated labour to help explain the damage caused to the worker by emotional labour, and she identifies “feeling rules” which are the social expectation and norms that help regulate how we feel. She argues that often we are unaware of these rules unless we come into conflict with them by feeling something inappropriate, or being instructed about what to feel by an employer (Orzechowicz 2008).

Since its conception, the term emotional labour has been used prolifically (Steinberg and Figart 1999), especially when talking about interactive service jobs.
Hochschild’s ideas are particularly common in health care and nursing literature. The idea also has its critics of course. Hochschild has been critiqued for being too simplistic in dichotomizing public and private emotions, and for always casting emotional labour in a negative light (Brook 2009). The concept of emotional labour has also been challenged and extended from her original formulations, to account more for employee agency, the complexity of emotional interactions in the workplace (Bolton and Boyd 2003), and the interactive and unconscious elements of emotion in the workplace (Theodosius 2006). Extension and development of the concept of emotional labour to “account for employee corporeality and sexualization of employees” has resulted in the development of the idea of aesthetic labour, a continuum on which employees are sexualized at work, and thus required to perform embodied aesthetic labour as part of their jobs (Warhurst and Nickson 2009). Emotional labour has also been specifically shown to be central to the construction and maintenance of racialization in the workplace (Gunaratnam and Lewis 2001). Through responding to its critics and expanding its scope, the concept of emotional labour has proved quite valuable as a way to understand the role of emotion in work. However, it has continued to be used primarily for work in the service industry, and has been used more often in empirical studies, rather than to theorize about changes in types of labour more broadly.

Though they are rarely considered together or by the same scholars, the terms cultural labour, rooted in emotional labour, and the autonomist Marxist conceptions of immaterial labour, affective labour, and precarity, have some overlap. While the
latter three terms are currently ‘in vogue’, they are used with less specificity and fewer empirical examples than the ways emotional labour has been utilized. By examining the empirical case of circus performers in Canada, this study is a response to this gap, and to Hesmondhalgh and Baker’s (2008) call to examine the details of how precariousness and emotion are negotiated in particular cultural industries, in order “to add specificity to the critical edge of such concepts as immaterial labour, affective labour and precarity” (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008 p 111 ). They argue that we lose important empirical work on emotional labour if we completely abandon this term in favour of the more in vogue notions of “immaterial labour”. They primarily critique Hardt and Negri for their “combination of rampantly optimistic Marxism with a poststructuralist concern with questions of subjectivity” (p. 99). Hardt and Negri (Hardt and Negri 2000) actually describe immaterial labour as having three different types. They say:

We can distinguish three types of immaterial labor that drive the service sector at the top of the informational economy. The first is involved in an industrial production that has been informationalised and has incorporated communication technologies in a way that transforms the production process itself. Manufacturing is regarded as a service, and the material labour of the production of durable goods mixes with and tends toward immaterial labor. Second is the immaterial labor of analytical and symbolic tasks, which itself breaks down into creative and intelligent manipulation on the one hand and routine symbolic tasks on the other. Finally, a third type of immaterial labor involves the production and manipulation of affect and requires
(virtual or actual) human contact, labor in the bodily mode. These are three types of labor that drive the postmodernisation of the global economy. (p. 293)

It is the third type, affective labour, that overlaps most with emotional labour as is has been used by feminist and sociologists. Although I understand that the terms immaterial and affective labour have arisen in a particular context and help lend theoretical clarity to descriptions of large scale changes in labour trends, I wonder if the new terms are not also welcomed for creating some distance from the term emotional labour, which originally was used when describing women's work, especially in the service industry. The latter terms have a way of suggesting something entirely new is happening, unconnected from work that was undertaken previously, when perhaps what is new is the scale of the effects, and the identities of the workers, who are experiencing this disciplinary expectation. It is no longer just service workers but now many other types of workers who are facing growing expectations to be creative, engaged and emotional in their workplaces. Bolton also cautions us that the terms immaterial and affective labour underplay the hard work involved in these labour practices, making them seem more ephemeral than they really are (Bolton 2009).

Though both clowning and aerial performance are subject to many of the same disciplinary discourses, they do not participate in each equally. Given all these ways in which circus performers' behavior reflects, and at times exemplifies, normative
discourses in the broader culture, it is clear that circus is not an exception to or outside of contemporary systems of governance; in fact it is in some instances a paradigm of these behaviors. Not only is circus an art that does well in a market system, but it also seems to fit well within contemporary disciplinary discourses around gender, race, aesthetics, and emotion.

The Limits of Discipline

Looking through performers’ experiences for discourses of discipline reveals some of the lines of power that are currently shaping social forms and bodies. Foucault suggests that even our most intimate spaces are governed; what we want, think, and do, are subject to governance. We can clearly see many ways in which such disciplines are at work on the bodies and in the lives of circus performers. Unpacking the extent to which these intimate experiences are currently in service to particular gendered, racialized and neoliberal discourses, raises questions about how absolute, or all-pervasive, this kind of disciplining force is, and where the possibility for choice, freedom or change might lie.

Foucault’s emphasis on discipline has been frequently critiqued for being too deterministic, not leaving enough room for choice, agency, transgression or resistance. Foucault can leave his readers with a feeling of futility as he draws a very convincing picture of a world where both body and emotion are in service to dominant discourses, and the analytic project is to be vigilant to uncover the structural discourses that inscribe and discipline them. However not everyone
agrees with this assessment of Foucault. His supporters say that this is a limited assessment of his contribution, that those concerned with his determinism are stuck on the “old” Foucault, not fully appreciating his later writing which by focusing on the care of the self, opens up space for a practice of freedom located in his ideas of power and subjectivity (Michael and Still 1992; McLaren 2006). Michael and Still (1992) say “Foucault did assert that disciplinary power is resisted, and by a core subjectivity; or in Foucault’s words, by ‘the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom’” (p. 870).

This resistance or recalcitrance seemed apparent in examining the range of positions performers took with respect to the disciplinary practices in which they found themselves immersed. Gendered and racialized discourses inspired a range of responses, and many didn’t depart too far from the expectations, but there was certainly some space within the discipline generated by different subjective positions and choices. Most commonly, theories of resistance are not forwarded alongside those of Foucauldian discipline. Many who use his theories seem to perceive overwhelming conformity with neoliberal subjectivities (Kelly, Allender and Colquhoun 2007). But where theoretically Foucault is critiqued for not leaving enough room for resistance, empirical studies that utilize Foucault, like this one, are likely to describe subjects as disciplined but also actively negotiating their situations, making the best of constrained choices and disciplining consequences (Eskes, Duncan and Miller 1998; Crossley 2004). It is possible that these alternative choices are simply another example of the increasing need to be self-reflective and
self-managing (for example women performers were hyper-aware of their position in relation to gendered discourses) but I’m not sure it is helpful to view this in such absolute terms. For example when discussing exotic dancers, Wesely (2003) reminds us that “the concept of identity is an ongoing process” (p. 645) and therefore gender identities are not only reinforced, but negotiated in an ongoing manner.

This evidence of the active negotiation of subjectivities and circumstances raises the troublesome specter of the acting subject. It is troublesome in the sense that subjectivity, in Foucauldian terms, arises in relation to the discourses that bring it into being. There is no pre-subject on which discourses act (and therefore no unsubjectified agent who can resist them). This does not mean the subject is an uncontested whole. Punday (2000) credits Foucault with establishing the language of the body as a site of differences, but says that this concept has passed into critical use in an incoherent way, as the idea of the body as a site is found in his early work, and the idea of the body as free or escaping full inscription is found in his later work. Punday argues that critics have been attracted to the language of the body as a “site of differences” because it allows for the bodies’ “involvement with discourse while, apparently, denying that any one discourse can define and map it fully” (p. 509). Punday’s concern is not with Foucault per say but with the way the structure of his earlier work and the optimism of his later work have been blended together by those using his work for their own purposes. Because of this he feels “the body site, then, is less an object of analysis and more a rhetorical gesture—a trope” (Punday...
If the way Foucault’s body-site has been used makes the body less an object of analysis and more a rhetorical trope that allows for conflicting understandings of the body as both free and constrained to be reconciled, then it makes sense that those using his work empirically (where the subject of analysis is a less rhetorical, more material body), come to different conclusions than those discussing him theoretically. Foucault’s original writings were based on extensive empirical observations of bodies, and he argued that discipline is designed to work on the material body, to change behaviours and ultimately impact processes of reproduction, health and death. But many who utilize his ideas do not reproduce with the same diligence this close examination of actual bodies. For those who do the role of agency inevitably arises.

One explanation of how this works empirically is that embodied behaviours are produced and reproduced through repetition, which can function as a kind of contagion. Disciplinary discourses can be spread through enforcement of consequences – like peer based approval and disapproval, or less conscious affective transmission – the kind of thing that happens in the gym when bodies learn through watching other bodies repeat particular movements. Performers both inhabit and reproduce these discourses. But some argue there is also a negotiation or imperfect reproduction that happens in this process. Judith Butler (1990) has articulated this dynamic quite well using Wittig’s understanding of agency. She says:

Wittig’s text …enacts as well a kind of diffuse corporeal agency generated from a number of different centers of power. Indeed, the source of personal
and political agency comes not from within the individual, but in and through the complex cultural exchanges among bodies in which identity itself is ever shifting. (p. 161)

Butler suggests that in these complex interchanges among bodies there is room for slippage in the perfect reproduction of roles, and she sees these as subversive acts, creating spaces for resistance. However she also says that “subversive performances always run the risk of becoming deadening clichés through their repetition and, most importantly, through their repetition within commodity culture where ‘subversion’ carries market value” (p. xxi). This leaves us once again with the question of where precisely subversion becomes marketable cliché, but I will address that further in the final chapter. What is relevant here is that the empirical processes by which discipline is embodied and reproduced are messy and may leave more room for flexible subjectivity, slippage and even resistance than are often considered when analyzing disciplinary practices.

The Body Speaks Back

Understanding agency in and through the body and between bodies, offers more to our understanding performers experiences than the idea of agency as an intellectual, individual and rational endeavour. Looking at the complex negotiations and dynamic positionality that circus performers take up in relation to each other and the disciplinary discourses in which they are immersed, it is clear performers’ relations with their bodies are far from simple. There is a disjuncture between the portrayal of appropriately gendered and aesthetic circus bodies, and the reality of
performers’ bodily experience. For example, training practices produce a very different relationship with the body for the 23 hours and 54 minutes of the day when the performer is not on stage, than the image which is displayed during the 6 minutes of performing. Circus performers, who portray the ideal ‘fit’ body are actually frequently injured, and require ongoing health care interventions to compensate for their activities. Other areas of their lives are often curtailed for fear of upsetting the precarious balance of their bodies or injuring themselves and being unable to work. Jen, a Toronto-based aerialist gives one description of the way the demands of her body can be a force to be reckoned with:

I had to gain about 20 pounds of muscle in order to be able to do what I can do now so sometimes you look at your pretty little skinny dresses and you wish that they would hang kind of like they used to, but I would never wish it away because that’s the body that does all the cool things that I do so without it being exactly like this it wouldn’t be able to do exactly what it does. It’s a lot of time spent trying to control and manipulate the body and make it be exactly perfect, and when it’s not perfect it can feel like it’s life altering and traumatic.

Some embodiment scholarship has been critiqued for failing to consider the body in its frailties and impairments, and for theorizing a movement of bodies through space that is unrealistically smooth and unfettered (Hutchinson 2006). The body has a material presence in circus performing that is unavoidable. As you grow into the practice it takes on a more and more significant role. It starts to demand certain
kinds of treatment, foods, sleep and lifestyle choices. Amidst abstract discussions of
the social and structural constraints and boundaries on the body, for aerial
performers the so-called material body demands a good portion of your attention.

Jen goes on to say:

A lot of hours of preparation for six minutes of show time and you have to
have daily training to keep strong and to keep able to do that and to do it well
and so it really is like a whole lifestyle commitment, you have chiropractic
and massage therapy and eating right and taking vitamins and um training
and running and stretching and sleeping and doing everything kind of
revolves around your job.

The performer’s body expresses opinions and makes commentary on many aspects
of life, such as continuing or not continuing to train, what and when to eat, even
what to wear (i.e. 2 or 3 pairs of pants after being burned by the silks a few times).
The body “speaks” by exhibiting distinct feelings and sensations when you over
train and others when you stop training. It speaks in ways that register to greater
and lesser degrees in your conscious mind but have an impact nonetheless. These
are some of the experiences I can speak about first-hand through my practice as a
performer, but they are corroborated by the words of other performers. The
messages of the body must always be considered and reckoned with both in and out
of performance. Shana, a Montreal-based aerialist who has performed for years in
many of the most prestigious North American circuses describes one of these
experiences where the body seems to have a mind of its own:
There is something physiologically with nerves, with adrenaline, where it changes your sense of timing, it changes your muscle reaction, it changes your sense in your body. And when you realize that it’s going to happen it’s like this extra effort to try to counter ride that bit of information to tell your body to do what it normally knows how to do, and if you know it is going to change your rhythm... you have to almost think about slowing down and feeling the swing.

The temptation when hearing about the demands that the body makes on performers is to see the biological body as a space of resistance to social disciplines. But if it is resistant, it is not absolute and the line between biology and the social is not easy to identify. Clearly the body does not desire or speak in a vacuum, the responses of performers to questions about injury spoke volumes about the boundaries of the body and the equally powerful social influence on those boundaries. For example, you might be tempted to say that the physical boundary is the point where you cannot do something. But in circus every trick is one that at one point you could not do. Some part of the definition of circus performance is about challenging the so-called limits of the body, but who sets these limits and how do they get challenged? There is certainly nothing natural about the limit so how do we identify the normal or acceptable limit of exhaustion, effort, repetition, or determination?
There are of course many people who simply can’t get past the first step of learning aerial acrobatics (usually due to pain or injury); this seems to be a solid physical boundary. But for most performers, once you are engaged in training, whether or not you can do something is related to how much time you spend trying, and how much of your lifestyle you commit to achieving those things. Is the boundary just before or just after you break a bone or dislocate a shoulder? And is that an end point or simply a setback in the process? The decision about what is physically possible and what is not is operationalized by complex sets of circumstances such as what have you seen others do, and what the consequences (such as being replaced or surpassed) might be of not achieving something. Jen whose aerial work has resulted in years of physical challenges, but who is still one of the most successful aerialists in Toronto says:

I see a team of physical therapists and they all mention how remarkable it is that I am able to heal really quickly when something should take six weeks I can get better in a week because I just make it happen, because I don’t enjoy the downtime, and don’t want to take time off and don’t ever want to miss work.

There is a strong interaction between what are often considered separate spheres of the social and biological. Intense emotional experiences associated with training may be due to socially identified feelings of achievement or failure, but also to the presence or absence of endorphins (which are probably both socially and physically stimulated). Awareness of this interaction is critical to any understanding we might try and achieve about agency, choice, discipline, freedom and subjectivity. This
awareness makes it clear to me that any of discussion of discipline or freedom, 
decontextualized from actual bodies and their networked experiences will miss 
important insights.

Among circus performers there is a culture of perform-no-matter-what: fever, 
throwing up, broken bones, can all be overcome. I broke my ankle during a show 
and after a split second hesitation (which apparently no one noticed), I finished the 
show (which meant doing a trapeze act with a broken ankle). In that moment it was 
very clear to me that it was preferable to deal with the broken ankle than to 
disappoint the two hundred people watching, or let down my fellow performers. I 
have worked with performers who have been throwing up with stomach flu 
immediately before they go on stage and who run right off stage to the toilet to 
throw up again when they are finished. As demanding as the body can be we have 
powerful ways of subduing and overcoming it.

This approach to performance is not new to the culture of “new circus” but actually 
a long-standing part of the history of circus. Annie, an aerialist who is now based in 
Edmonton and who has performed in many different circus disciplines, described 
the attitude of her European stunt horse-riding boss from her time as a rider in a 
‘traditional’ American circus. She said:

   My boss she would just say ‘Americans are so lazy, Americans are so this 
   Americans are so that, my father rode in a show with a broken foot, I rode in 
a show until I broke water ya da da da da da da’ so broken ribs or a busted
toe do not keep you out of work, as a matter of fact one day I was washing horses and I was grooming one of them and they threw their head and it threw my hand against the trailer and a piece of metal and so I grabbed (something) I went running around the barn three times and I went to find my boss cuz I figured she could do anything and I said ‘you wanna sew me up?’ And she said ‘no way! You have to go to the hospital’. And I thought, what? It must be bad if you’re telling me to go to the hospital so I went, and I got back in time to do the horses. I was so close the show was already on.

Overall, although much of circus performance is about pushing and overcoming physical boundaries, this too is a site of negotiation in which the body itself has a voice, but where it also is difficult to distinguish between what we might consider the biological and the social. The body does speak back and present physical boundaries, which shape many elements of the performers’ life, but the body’s suggestions are interpreted and negotiated depending on the social expectations, disciplines and desires that are also at work, and those inputs then change the experiences of the body and so on in a deeply intertwined process. This resonates with the ongoing themes of this dissertation, questions of how the body knows, what use we can make of that knowledge, and what difference that kind of knowledge makes to our understanding of possibilities for change, are central here. These examples of circus performers help show these questions in action.
Agency or the Negotiation of Subjectivity with Foucault

This element of negotiation, or the idea of contradictory subjectivities, is at work not just in relation to the demands of the body but also to all the other disciplinary discourses. As we saw in the discussion of gendered discourse, performers took up a wide range of positions in relation to the relatively fixed points of discourse. For example, they denied that disciplinary discourse affected them, expressed frustration or resistance to disciplinary discourses, and sometime chose performances that they felt recuperated, challenged or transgressed expectations. And these strategies were also varied in the degree to which performers were conscious of having them.

Foucault deals with questions of resistance through the idea of subjectivity and yet also argues that the most intimate understandings of self are increasingly governed in systems of biopower and neoliberalism. Lemke does not see this as a contradiction but rather as a signal that understanding politics requires understanding “self-control” as well as docility. He says:

Political analysis must start to study the ‘autonomous’ individual’s capacity for self-control and how this is linked to forms of political rule and economic exploitation. In this regard Foucault’s later work on the ‘genealogy of the modern subject’ and on Ancient ethics do not, for all most commentators have said, mean that he gave up or replaced his analysis of power, but instead that he took this analysis further and corrected earlier studies in which he had investigated subjectivity primarily with a view to ‘docile
bodies’ and had too strongly stressed processes of discipline. (Lemke 2001 p. 14)

Foucault’s model of power is that power is simply productive rather than good or bad, and crosses the divide between domination and technologies of the self. This model reflects empirical observations where it is hard to distinguish a free or resistant action from a disciplined one, as there are multiple subject positions that arise in relation to each intersection of forces. But because it is not clear-cut, this model leaves us with the troubling question of how we are to understand politics in a paradigm in which power is simply productive. Foucault’s suggestion that disciplining actions are in service of a truth discourse (which seems to suggest a structure) makes it seem like actions that are in service to a truth discourse are disciplined ones and that there should be such a thing as actions that are not in service to these discourses, but this is not something he stated explicitly.

Lea (2009) uses Foucault’s ideas of care of the self to understand yoga practices. She tries to untangle Foucault’s ideas about subjectivity in a way that recuperates resistance without resorting to a static subjectivity or agency. She says:

Here, ‘truth’ concerns the connective relation of the subject and the contextually changing demands of the world – a relation that Foucault calls ‘spirituality’. This involves a form of becoming other; unpinning from precisely those existing structures of subjectivity that the ‘modern’ relation ascribes truth to. (p. 74)
And goes on to quote Foucault saying:

Truth is not given to the subject by a simple act of knowledge (*connaissance*), which would be founded and justified simply by the fact that he is the subject and because he possesses this or that structure of subjectivity . . . for the subject to have right of access to the truth he [sic] must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, other than himself . . . The truth is only given to the subject at a price that brings the subject’s being into play . . . as he is, the subject is not capable of truth. (Foucault 2005 p. 15)

According to this perspective there are “existing structures of subjectivity that the modern relation ascribes to” and that by “unpinning” from these and becoming “changed” subjects, we can see the truth of those relations. Myers (2008) has a similar interpretation. She says, “if Foucault’s previous work focused on the ways in which subjects are constituted, might his foray into ethics be understood as a hopeful attempt to consider the constituting capacities of subjects?” She says Foucault was suggesting people make aesthetic choices separate from authoritarian systems that involve patterns of behavior for everyone - making their lives a work of art, original and aesthetic.

This sounds promising; Myers is describing art as a practice of separating from authoritarian systems, or in Lea’s words unpinning from normative relations and seeing them more clearly using aesthetic practices. The most valuable element of this description for me is the idea that for a subject to be able to see the structures
they inhabit (and perhaps resist them), their very subjectivity has to shift, as it is in
the fluidity of subjectivity that political possibilities surface. However, as we have
seen in this and previous chapters, what are considered aesthetic or artistic choices
are equally subject to discipline, and frequently captured in modern relations of
production, especially in this contemporary moment where aesthetic and unique or
marginal choices are particularly commodifiable. Making alternative aesthetic
choices is still subject to capture and does not, in and of itself, guarantee change or
freedom from disciplinary discourses.

One solution to this is proposed by Myers (2008) who suggests we promote “the
strains of Foucault’s work that are oriented toward collaborative world making
rather than self-constitution” as “they point toward an understanding of freedom as
a fundamentally associative activity, capable of generating a ‘creative force’ or
‘counter-power’ that can begin to re-shape shared conditions” (p. 141). The
language of this description also seems to relate to the desire for connection which
so many performers spoke about, and which I frequently experience. It is not just
being seen; it is the desire to be ‘with’, the word performers use is ‘connect’, and it
requires a certain amount of letting go of your own fixed subject positions,
expectations, and self-referencing or self-assessments. This may be why connection
is difficult to achieve for aerialists performing hard tricks. It is harder for them to let
themselves go and be ‘with’ the audience in a kind of shared world-making
experience – of the kind that is absolutely central to clowns. This perhaps can be
seen as a point of connection between Foucault and Deleuze who will be taken up in
the next chapter. Myers concern is that Foucault’s accounts of power, both the
individuating power of discipline, and the massifying power of biopolitics, have the
effect of eliminating the possibility of politicized collectivities. Certainly the
discussions of circus performers, about negotiating or navigating disciplinary forces
were mostly devoid of ideas of doing so in any collective way. And this is a common
issue and concern which Gill (2008) suggests has not been sufficiently addressed.
He says:

The autonomist and activist focus on refusal and resistance raises questions
about the relative absence of labour organization within many cultural
workplaces (the film industry being an obvious exception), and this
represents a significant contribution. However, to understand this requires a
closer analysis than the autonomists provide – one that can engage with the
specificities of different industries, workplaces and locations, and attend to
the meanings that workers themselves give to their labour. (p.21)

From my specific engagement with circus performers, I would add that it would be
valuable to look further into alternative forms of collective organizing, not to
suggest that these forms can or should be sufficient but because examining them
may reveal how it is that these cultural workplaces exist without the presence of
labour organizations and what kinds of organizing might be most relevant and
appropriate for circus performers. Among circus performers for example, there is a
strong element of camaraderie, concern for the interests of the community as a
whole, and a lot of generosity among performers and even agents, which makes the
precarious lifestyle manageable. There is a clear subculture and social identification with ‘circus’ as a pseudo-family, and an awareness of a collective responsibility for shaping at least some elements of the social world. Myers goes on to say:

The practice of associative freedom differs from the freedom that Foucault locates in the self’s relation to itself not only because it is pluralistic in character, but because it is oriented toward a different object. It is less concerned with the elaboration of a self or selves than with the construction of a common world...We need to de-partition disciplinary space, to cultivate certain kinds of political ‘contagion,’ to refuse membership in masses by presenting ourselves as speaking and acting, and not merely biological, beings. To struggle with discipline and biopower is to engage in associative practices of freedom. (p. 141)

McLaren also argues that Foucault’s later work was not concerned with individuals but was about relationship (McLaren 2006). In other words, for these two authors (Myers and McLaren), thinking both with and beyond Foucault’s discipline requires not only that the subject unhinge from their subject position, but also that they do it collectively with others.

The next chapter will explore the unpinning of the subject and the impact of inter-subjectivity on the possibilities for a different understanding of politics. This is not to leave behind the kind of disciplinary discourses that are clearly at work in the lives of circus performers, and into which Foucault’s ideas give us a window, but to
add to this by filling in some of the gaps in this perspective in order to expand or
stretch its edges.
Chapter 6: Becoming Bodies, Contributions to a Cartography of Virtualities

"Virno has been attempting to provide: the description of a combat, a cartography of virtualities made possible by post-Fordism, elements in contemporary life that could eventually be mobilized. The problem is not to destroy capital or Empire... but bolster one’s own power. What is a body capable of?” (Lotringer 2004, p. 17)

I have provided extensive evidence suggesting that circus performers are disciplined subjects who successfully perform many roles and expectations central to the current socio-economic moment. Both circus and art have been associated with transgressive possibilities and alternatives to the dominant paradigm, yet clearly there are many ways in which they do not live up to this expectation. I must confess to an ill-disguised desire to uncover the alterity, political potential and artfulness of contemporary circus performance, to demonstrate its value or ensure its ethics. At the very least I wanted to be able to pinpoint the moment of cooptation, the shift from art to capital, so that as a performer I can navigate away from it or make choices in relation to it. I want to know what “parts of [my] subjectivity can resist, evade, or exceed capitalist colonization” (Gill and Pratt 2008). And I have hoped that the circus, with its historic links to carnivals and freak shows (Bakhtin 1968; Little 1995; Adams 2001), its association with pushing boundaries of social and physical norms, and challenging what is considered possible and desirable for human bodies and behavior (Stoddart 2000; Tait 2005), would reveal a thread of liberating otherness. But despite this revolutionary potential and its new label as an
‘art’, in the contemporary post-Fordist moment, the circus is also entrenched in reproducing disciplinary discourses, and perhaps has even expanded its practice of capitalizing on boundary pushing and the mystique of ‘otherness’.

Much of what has been previously considered political about art and circus - outside status, countercultural expression, or separation from labour and money – are not holding up well under the kinds of pressures applied by post-Fordist capitalism. Are we then to believe that their political potential is lost, and resistance is futile? According to Lotringer in the epigraph above, all is not lost. I also feel there are ways to look at this problem that offer something other than this discouraging conclusion. I would like to join Virno in exploring the elements of life which could be mobilized, and in particular in exploring what aspects of that cartography can be filled in by a better understanding of the capabilities of a body. To do this we need to expand our ideas about where new political possibilities might lie. Although discouraged by strong evidence of the participation of circus performance in contemporary socio economic discourses, I am encouraged to find myself in good company in broadening our understanding of political moments. Building on the problem defined in chapter 3 (that the growing integration of art, politics and economics, is raising concern for the loss of alternative political spaces), I am asking alongside many others, where might we locate a new kind of politics given the integration of art, marginality and economics? I am not entirely convinced that this is a ‘politics’ that we are seeing in these spaces. Is it simply change which we are interested in, or is it resistance to the status quo? If it is the former then we are possibly on the right
track with the explorations I will outline below, but if it is the latter then the success of these kind of ‘politics’ are difficult to measure. I do, however, feel strongly that we need to explore this further.

As Virno asks, given the kinds of changes we are seeing in this integration of intellect, art and labour, can any of this “be the actual basis for a radically new form of democracy and public sphere” (Virno 2001)? Though he poses the question well, he has not arrived at any answers to this question, according to Lotringer:

Virno doesn’t have any telos up his sleeve, no ready-made program for the multitude-certainly not coming out "the other side." It’s been tried before, didn’t turn out so well. Why should a "postmodern revolution" be any different? Anyone who cares for the multitude should first figure out what it is about and what could be expected from it, not derive its mode of being from some revolutionary essence. The ultimate goal of Virno’s inventive inventory is "rescuing political action from its current paralysis". (Lotringer 2004 p. 16)

I don’t have such grandiose goals, but will spend this chapter exploring, like many others have been doing recently (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Manning 2007; Gill and Pratt 2008; Revel 2008), the question of whether political action can be rescued in some new form, and if so what that new form might look like. I believe that exploring how circus performers negotiate theoretical concepts like flexible subjectivity, mind and body, and intersubjectivity or multiplicity in daily life can shed light on this emerging area of thought.
The most common descriptions of a new kind of politics are that it is a micropolitics of the encounter, which foregrounds the fluid ‘becoming’ subject, and the political potency of the shifting spaces between these subjects (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Haraway 1992; Colebrook 2000; Massumi 2002; Manning 2007; Gill and Pratt 2008; Manning 2009). Gavin Grindon suggests new political moments can be identified as an:

otherwise invisible or illegible performative social relation. These are often primarily affective, emotional, sensory and possess a fugitive history in official discourses, even as they compose more visible social struggles. In this way affect, central to biopower, has a role in producing and reproducing society. (Grindon 2011 p. 86)

I will look at some of these elements - micropolitics, flexibility, affect and subjectivity - in this chapter and explore how circus performers experiences can flesh out (make more embodied) our understanding of these ideas.

**Distinguishing Between the Meaning of Apparently Similar Practices**

Similar to the difficulty of distinguishing the moment of cooptation among circus performers, there is a concern among many scholars about how one is to distinguish the political moment from the captive moment (given the blurring of traditional political categories like art as transgressive, or circus as ‘outside’). Judith Revel (2008), articulates a question that haunted Foucault’s later work and subsequent scholars. She says:
What is the dissymmetry between art and capital, between the subjectivication of matter and the way in which capital itself today uses this subjectivication to produce value, between resistance and relations of power? (p. 36)

Gill and Pratt similarly describe the problem this way:

How is it that parts of subjectivity can resist, evade or exceed capitalist colonization? ... If contemporary forms of capitalist organization demand ‘cooperativeness’, ‘participation’, ‘creativity’ and other practices that are also – simultaneously – said to be features of an elementary spontaneous communism, then how can one distinguish between those instances that might make capitalists quake in their boots and those which are indices (on the contrary) of capitalism’s penetration of workers’ very souls? By what kinds of principled criteria might we differentiate between the radically different meanings of apparently similar practices? These are important questions that autonomist writing does not seem to resolve. (Gill and Pratt 2008 p. 19)(italics added).

Clearly a number of scholars are equally troubled about their/our inability to distinguish between “different meanings of apparently similar practices”, or determine the differences between resistance, and relations of power. Though approaching this problem from a range of perspectives, they all emphasize the centrality of understanding processes of subjectification to this task of
distinguishing the political. They also suggest that resistant or ethical actions, or actions which might “make capitalists quake in their boots” are possible and worth seeking out, but they remain troubled about how to distinguish these from actions which perpetuate “capitalist penetration of workers’ souls” (Gill and Pratt 2008 p. 19).

Our previous fascination and romance with the ‘outside’ status of art or circus, for example, made politics seem deceptively simple, but like others I have found it difficult to determine the exact moment when something that was ‘outside’ becomes domesticated (or commercialized). In addition, we have seen the racialized practices of ‘othering’ that have been part of establishing and maintaining these notions about circus in particular. With the loss of the category ‘outside,’ posing the political question as a question of what might remain outside of post-Fordism is unproductive. It leads itself to either an unanswerable question – the moving target or remainder is always what you can’t grasp, or a terribly futile answer – nothing is outside, nothing can offer alternatives because everything is already inside or domesticated. I think this is the paralysis that Lotringer suggests (above) that Virno was trying to rescue us from. Revel (2008) says this reliance on an ‘outside’ will get us nowhere. She says:

Theories of the margins, of marginality, of the remainder, moreover ignore precisely what is most characteristic of the bio-political configuration: the relations of power have from that point invested the whole field of existence.
Ideas of ‘outside’ or ‘margins’ are fantasies, at least unless, once again, a way out of history is found. (p. 37)

Revel feels that we have relied on a fantasy of the outside or the marginal, as a way to avoid dealing with the evidence that current biopolitical relations of power have permeated all of life. She thinks solutions that don’t rely on a notion of outside or escape are needed for constructing a useful politics in the contemporary moment.

Since there is clearly no way out of history, and we are running into problems with a model of politics based on the ideas of outside, we are left grappling with our fascination with difference and the even more challenging problem of thinking/doing politics in a new way. I am curious about efforts to formulate a politics that does not rely on a notion of outside or other, which may be either ungraspable (because it is perpetually elusive), or non existent (because it is instantly consumed).

**How Do We Operationalize These Politics?**

A focus on the flexibility of subjectivity and the becoming of the body has provided some of the most interesting and productive responses to this challenge. But while I love the positive possibilities in these perspectives, given that emotion, art and the blurring of boundaries between categories are central to our understandings of post-Fordism, how can we navigate this version of politics at a time when creativity and affect are being mobilized as labour, and are at the heart of contemporary capitalism?
Even aside from the potential inclusion of these concepts in the very systems they are trying to critique, these concepts are also are very hard to operationalize. What actually does this kind of politics look like? Who does it affect and how? How do we do it? And also can we evaluate it and the kinds of impacts it has? This approach doesn’t have any ready answers yet. We are still trying to figure out how to act in this newly opened up, affective political sphere that is no longer based on a notion of individual rationality or choice and is amorphous, movable, mutable, made of temporary assemblages and events, and which is still lacking sufficient empirical working-through (Dewsbury 2007).

In many ways the performance encounter surfaces many of the problematics of a politics grounded in these new notions of embodiment and affect. For example, I can wax poetic about the multiplicity and vulnerability of the clown, who in many ways does seem to be enacting, performing, and practicing these desirable traits of malleability, vulnerability, fluidity and responsiveness in their subjectivities. But still most clowns are male, and all clowns still carry with them their own socio cultural expectations and are entirely affected by the geographic, social and economic conditions of their work environment.

It is only through looking at these concepts empirically that we can hope to get a better handle on the new problems and opportunities brought about by this version of politics. Like Ahmed (2004), we need to ask what range of practices transmit
affects and connect beings and bodies, and what results are produced in different situations? (We have already determined that it is difficult to distinguish between the elements in a binary model of good and bad, or free and captured versions of artistic production.) This chapter will not provide answers to these questions but will contribute to moving the dialogue forward through a close examination of the experiences of circus performers. I will uncover some of the productive possibilities and dangers of this new approach to the political with a closer examination of the experiences of circus performers.

**Fluid, Flexible, or Unpinned Subjectivity**

“*Since each of us was several we were already quite a crowd*” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 p. 3)

Many performers I spoke to had a strong awareness of having multiple identities (characters or aspects of self). These multiple identities stood out in conversation because the challenge of talking about them revealed the insufficiency of language that commonly refers to a singular subject. For example clown training in Canada involves a significant amount of mask work. There are many aspects to this work but one major component is physicalizing the multiple faces (and bodies) of the self. Clowns often speak of their clown as another person, referring to “her” as distinct from “me” and even sometimes describing potential conflicts between their desires and those of their clown. Jan, a clown and clown teacher from Edmonton described it like this:
In terms of the body the only thing I can say is that after I clown I have aches. In the rare days I would be 100% in clown all day ...I’d be in agony the next day, on the floor because your posture is so bad, and it’s probably childhood posture, not aware of, you know, any of the things you are trying to deal with. It’s just like someone beat you up, and probably you were eating the wrong things too (laughter), for which there are consequences! So you need a strong editor, at a certain point you are like ‘do not eat the candy floss’, you have to make a big deal out of it (in whiny voice) ‘I want it, I want it’ (laughter). Try to explain to a clown why you can’t have candy when you have no sense of consequence, and sometimes the costume doesn’t fit because you ate too much before the last time. Its that kind of body.

In discussing different models of subjectivity Foucault and Deleuze are often juxtaposed such as when Michael and Still say “Foucault has traced the minute mechanisms of the freezing of the person, and Deleuze and Guattari have theorized the transition from freezing to liquefaction” (Michael and Still 1992 p. 873). This juxtaposition is an interesting broad based generalization, which might roughly characterize differences in their emphasis, but both thinkers actually describe both tendencies in different parts of their work. When taken out of their boxes it is clear that freezing and liquefaction are not necessarily opposed: in fact I think both are necessary to grasp all the elements of politics, oppression and change. Though Foucault is best known for his articulation of disciplined and static subjects, we saw in the last chapter that he also said in his later work that unpinning the subject, and
moving between subjective positions opens up possibilities for change or ‘true’ knowledge:

For the subject to have right of access to the truth he [sic] must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, other than himself. . . . The truth is only given to the subject at a price that brings the subject’s being into play . . . as he is, the subject is not capable of truth. (Foucault 2005 p. 15)

In this quote Foucault is suggesting that rather than an encounter between an already determined self (or static self and other), it is the movement or fluidity of subjectivity, which offers the most promise for seeing discourses.

Many different disciplines and scholars have embraced similar ideas of flexible subjectivity over the last 30 years, but this transformation in thinking has not always been easy. In geography, post-human geographers have described it most effectively. Sarah Whatmore explains the movement of these ideas in geography:

Cultural geography’s investments in questions of identity and culture have remained largely wedded to that most vociferously silent and self-evident subject of the social sciences, the ‘in-here’ of human being. So it is that recent contributions have sought to do (at least) three things. The first has been to re-animate the missing ‘matter’ of landscape, focusing attention on bodily involvements in the world in which landscapes are co-fabricated between more-than-human bodies and a lively earth. The second has been to interrogate ‘the human’ as no less a subject of ongoing cofabrication than any
other socio-material assemblage. The third in my list has been the redistribution of subjectivity as something that ‘does not live inside, in the cellar of the soul, but outside in the dappled world’. (Whatmore 2006 p. 603)

Both clowns and aerialists expressed a fluidity or redistribution of subjectivity that strayed well outside expectations of an individual rational Cartesian subject. Jon, a Montreal based aerialist, revealed some awkwardness when attempting to talk about his multiple selves. He said, “well when I am Andrew (pause), is that a good way to say it?” and then described Andrew as “it’s this person who exists in my subconscious, and they are coming out, kind of like a personality disorder. I guess all actors or all performers have that to a degree.” One of the most interesting things about Jon’s description of his alternate personae is that he has discovered he has dramatically different physical sensations depending on which character he is playing. He describes the experience of rehearsing an act while portraying a different character than he usually uses for that act. He said:

During rehearsal I was like ‘oh my god this really fucking hurts! How do I do this?’ Because when I do this as [the original character] I don’t feel it at all, it doesn’t hurt in the slightest.

Jon’s experience of sensation changes depending on the character or subject position that he is embodying. While we might just think of this as make-believe, it has enough reality for him that it profoundly changes his experience of doing his circus tricks. This could be alternatively described as a kind of mind over matter, except that it would be hard to call this experience of alternative subjectivity a
function of the mind, at least as it is traditionally conceived in this Cartesian
expression since the experience is one that happens in his whole body. It does offer
some alternative ideas about will or choice, however, in which a changed subject
position changes both effort and desire in relation to an action. Clearly this needs
further exploration but might prove valuable as a complicating/illuminating aspect
of agency.

Other groups of scholars working on these ideas include those working on
embodiment theories. Elizabeth Grosz (1994) has categorized embodiment theories
into three schools of thought. The first emphasizes the formation of bodies and
subjectivities through 'outside forces acting in' (popular mobilizations of
Foucauldian disciplines would belong in this group). The second emphasizes the
role of perception and agency, or the impact of the 'inner realm' on the world
around (phenomenological perspectives fit in this category). And the third and most
recent group of theories emphasizes the process of becoming defined as a body or
subject. This third area of theory is often focused on the relational, and has the least
static view of bodies and subjectivities (Deleuzian and Spinozist approaches to
embodiment fit in this category). It is in this last category, alongside reformulations
of what a body is, that we are seeing the reframing of the encounter between bodies
as a process of becoming, individuating, connecting and extending.

A number of scholars have suggested that the body itself is the ground for a new
ethics or politics (Colebrook 2000; Shildrick 2002). The body according to these
theorists is not inert matter with static or given boundaries, rather it is constantly in a state of movement, becoming a body, and becoming other than body in relation to other bodies. And this new version of subjectivity opens new possibilities for politics and ethics for a number of theorists, (Braidotti 2000; Shildrick 2002). As Colebrook says:

The idea of the body is an extension or becoming of the body's being. This creates a quite specific role for the body in ethics and political theory. The body is neither a brute and determining pre-political given, nor is it an effect of political or ideological representation. Rather, as an idea the body would be the political itself; the body is a relation to what is not itself, a movement or activity from a point of difference to other points of difference. (Colebrook 2000 p. 87)

These scholars are suggesting that considering the body itself, its fluidity and movement between points of difference, is in itself the ground for ethics and political theory. The key is politics does not begin with already predefined bodies and subjectivities but rather the political moment is the moment in which a body becomes defined. Ahmed (2004) describes the impression made on the skin by another object or the impression made on the self by another's action. Only through the impression, does the skin or the self become a bounded surface. Braidotti (2000) says, “politics in this framework has as much to do with the constitution and organization of affectivity, memory and desire as it has with consciousness and resistance” (p2). Shildrick (2002) speaks of touch, and wants her theories of embodiment to move towards an ethics that removes the boundaries between self
and other, is centered on a relational economy, and considers the ethical act to be
the encounter. “The fiction of self contained independence makes us imagine others
as free sources of our joys and pains” (p. 68). Understanding and transforming
affects (and thus what we are) becomes the central focus of responsibility (Gatens
and Lloyd 1999). Blackman and Venn put it well. They say:

    Relationality is another term that has become part of a different analytic for
examining the relationships between what previously might have been
thought of as separate entities which interact. This includes the relationships
between nature and culture, body and culture, individual and society, animal
and human, and mind and body, for example. If we start from an assumption
of singularity and separation, then this frames the question of relationship as
an ‘interaction effect’ between pre-existing entities, rather than the
conjoining of thoroughly entangled processes. (Blackman and Venn 2010 p.
10)

This relational analytic extends not just to the interaction of bodies ‘outside in the
dappled world’ to use Whatmore’s phrasing, but also to a redefinition of what is
‘inside’ such as the relationship of categorizing or individuating concepts like mind
and body, or emotion and thought.

**Body Without Organs**

The performers I spoke with expressed many of the same ideas as the philosophers I
have been discussing in this chapter. All made strong links between mind, body, and
emotions, and between feeling, knowing and acting. John Turner, a renowned clown
teacher, said "I think one of the biggest mistakes we make is to make a distinction between the emotional and physical: there is no distinction." When describing clown, Sue Morrison, another internationally known teacher, said: “I felt that I was in a genre that could accommodate my total self, my physical self, my emotional self, my thinking self.”

Many performers blur the categories between mind and body when talking about both rehearsing and performing. When asked to describe what is happening in rehearsal or on stage, they frequently refer to their bodies knowing things, such as: how big a room is and therefore how big their gestures need to be, whether they are connected to the audience, or whether they have made a mistake in a trick that needs to be corrected. They also speak of body memory, and refer to the body as a repository of information that is traditionally ascribed to the mind. I found their descriptions of thinking to be quite complex and sometimes awkward as they struggle with limitation of language that identifies mind and body as separate things. Soizick Hébert, a well known Montreal clown, describes “thinking without thinking” as what happens when she walks out on stage and assesses what is necessary based on the size of the room or the location (street, theatre, arena). She says “I’m thinking without thinking - my intelligence is thinking but I have to just keep that in mind and then I’m going to live through the thing”. During interviews, performers used physical gestures such as pointing towards the back of the head/body in contrast to the face when describing different kinds of thinking. This
gesturing also suggested the notion that different kinds of thinking could take place in different parts of the body.

Performers are very conscious of needing to respect the connection between thinking and acting. Sometimes their lives, but at the very least the success of their performance, depends on having an awareness of, or respect for, that relationship. Annie an aerialist who has also worked in many other areas of circus over the last 20 years says:

When you do object manipulation you are so connected to your thoughts, and I would say ‘oh it feels like I am going to drop the hoop’, and I would drop the hoop, if I even imagined dropping the hoop I would drop the hoop, and I still do, now maybe 90 something percent of the time I can avoid dropping the hoop, but you still have some days where maybe a thought or a doubt will creep into your head and you screw something up.

John Turner described the relationship between his mind and body in clown work using the example of athletes whose sports psychologists’ ensure they have a successful performance by ensuring their thoughts are aligned in the most productive way with their bodies. This kind of complete body/thought alignment is also necessary in clown work. Thinking in alignment with the body, or thinking through the body are essential characteristics for successful circus performance work. The balance between mind and body even privileges the body in performance work.
space and on occasion minimizes the importance of the mind. Part of a conversation with Chris an aerialist from Toronto went like this:

L: How would you describe your body when the show is going well?
C: Relaxed, almost as if I’m not even there
L: So by ‘you’, you mean like your head isn’t there?
C: Yeah, just quiet, I guess it’s the connection of everything, everything is together and my brain is not saying anything.
L: What about when the show is not going well?
C: Instantly my body tenses and my brain starts saying things.

Challenging the traditional relationships between mind and body changes not only what we think of as thought, but also importantly, what we think of as the body. An important element in making sense of this new ethics of bodies and subjectivities, is tied to the question of containment, or predetermined form. Connection and affect does not just happen between bodies that we already recognize as such. In as much as we can see shifts happen in social bodies, we also see divisions within what is traditionally considered an ‘individual’ body. Spinoza, for example, understood the human body to be a complex individual made up of a number of other bodies. Its identity can never be viewed as a final or finished entity as in the case of the Cartesian automaton, since it is a body that is always in constant interchange with its environment. Spinoza understood the body to be a nexus of variable interconnections, a *multiplicity* (Gatens 2000 p61). As Ruddick describes it:

For Spinoza, the individual refers equally to human individuals (themselves
composite individuals, formed of many discrete parts) or nature in its entirety, or a range of non-human things or bodies. The distinction between ‘individuals’ does not arise through the formal boundaries between modes but a thing’s ability to produce an effect or to be affected. (Ruddick 2010 p. 26)

Deleuze and Guattari conjure the notion of the body without organs to help us grasp the notion of sensation and affect, which is not already contained in compartments of the body and shaped by the predetermined associations of disciplines of those organs:

Terence Turner (1995) argued that although the body is an individual organism that biologically depends for its reproduction, nurturance, and existence on other individuals and the environment, even this biological individuality is relative, depending on other social beings. Thus, the body is best conceived as a multiplicity: the “two bodies” of the social and physical (Douglas, 1970); the “three bodies” of the individual body, social body, and body politic (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987); or the “five bodies” with the addition of the consumer body and the medical body to the three (O’Neil, 1985). (Low 2003 p. 11)

There was interesting confusion among my interviewees when they tried to identify a particular part of the self as being the self, or one part of the self as being more authentically ‘self’ than other parts. Some performers suggested that the main “I” was associated with the mind, while others described the authentic self as being the
body/emotion. According to Longhurst (1997), Merleau Ponty locates subjectivity in the body, my participants located it in a number of different places, head, heart, emotion, or body. There were even national cultural trends that contribute to which part of the self is viewed as most important. Francine, a clown who has lived in Quebec but has worked extensively around the world, says: “there is a physical connection with Quebec, [Anglophones are] much more here [head] not really here [heart]”. The identification of different features of the self or even different selves with different parts of the body is not confined to circus performers, but is strongly and openly expressed in them. Their descriptions of their selves in their work, show many fault lines along which a singular identity can be unraveled.

Jan Henderson a clown instructor and performer from Edmonton says:

The mind and body are all the same. Now there are many parts of the mind, one part is the editor, the conscious self that keeps you from falling off the stage, being impaled on the prop, actually poking that person in the eye in the audience, whatever, it’s gotta keep you safe, otherwise you are not sane. If you don’t have the editor you’re insane and you think that you are always your clown, and they have to keep you in a little room in between shows (laughter), and yet we’re multiple personalities, we have a harsh critic, we have an intellectual side, we love philosophy, we love words, on the other hand I can’t stand it when people are pretentious with words, you know we have many many many aspects.
In troubling ideas of a contained, singular and rational subject, affect has often occupied the apparent space between what we have previously thought of as ‘mind’ and ‘body’. Thomas Csordas (1993), who describes himself as a cultural phenomenologist, argues that the relationship between mind and body is often deemed to be mediated by emotion. In the broader social and biological sciences we have been shifting from a model that sees emotion as impinging on rational thought, to one that sees emotion as a central part of the basic structure of thinking. Ignatow (2007), describing theorists of embodied cognition, says there has been a major turn in the human sciences towards “conceiving of knowledge not in terms of disembodied and emotion-free information, but rather as thoroughly embodied” (p. 115-16). Ignatow cites Haidt (2001) claiming that now we are beginning to believe the “emotional dog” wags its “rational tail”, especially when it comes to moral reasoning, where the feeling supersedes the ability to justify the feeling rationally (p. 123).

Affect is also closely linked to the physical experience of moving bodies:

One version of movement that has been developed in the discipline of dance studies that has had an important purchase within body-studies is that of bodily kinetics. This has been taken up by Erin Manning in her study of tango ... and emphasizes bodily movement as being central to embodied experience. (Blackman and Venn 2010 p. 16)

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15 Cultural phenomenologists aim to extend the sometimes solipsistic and individual perspective of traditional phenomenology to a wider more social framework.
Challenging the traditional model of mind and body has been a central component of some feminist scholarship which has critiqued the association of the body with the lesser, feminine, passive principal, in contrast to the male rational, active principal arguing against the corresponding devaluing of both women and bodies (Griffin 1978). Exploring these binaries has also held particular interest for geography, as many central geographical concepts like place, location, and matter have been subject to categorization in similar binaries (Longhurst 1995). Although this kind of challenge is not new, these voices do seem to be suddenly growing stronger and gaining recognition not just in social sciences and philosophy, but also in scientific fields like biology and neuroscience. Over the last 40 years a number of scholars across several disciplines have seemed to be allied in bringing the body out of its Descartes-inspired submission, revaluing the body and exploring its potential for experiencing or knowing, offering the body a kind of agency or ability to think that was not previously available to it. Within this group, in addition to feminist scholars we find phenomenologists and perhaps most surprisingly, psychologists and neuroscientists. I think complicating the mind-body binary is part of moving towards a more flexible subjectivity that allows for multiplicity, once thinking and the sense of “I” can exist in more than one place. Once a notion of singular rational agency is also challenged, then we are one step closer to a model of the political which so many have been describing.

Circus performers are not alone in their efforts to articulate a concept of mind and body connection that goes beyond the notion of discrete categories. The notion of an
intelligent or thoughtful body is growing in popularity, and the distinctions between what were previously considered distinct categories of thought and body, and between bodies and other bodies are being increasingly blurred and redefined in a number of disciplines. For example, there has been a move in cognitive science from a belief in “a-modal cognition”, in which cognitive processes were thought to operate separately from sensation, to embodied cognition, in which cognition is directly linked to sensations like taste, touch, sight and smell (Ignatow 2007). The way performers speak about their bodies, about the fluidity of the boundaries of the body and the relationship between bodies, minds and emotions, corresponds with contemporary discussions from geography to neuroscience. The way performers talked to me made apparent the inadequacy of many of the terms we use to describe complex embodied and knowing experiences.

This kind of multiplicity seems promising to me, overcoming a number of the entrenched political challenges of the more polarized inside/outside, or us and them perspective. I am not trying to present a definitive empirical take on these theories of embodiment, but simply consider some possibilities if we are to develop this still predominantly theoretical version of the political into something that we might better operationalize. Of course each of these ideas in turn raises its own sets of challenges. The troubling of traditional ideas of a rational and individual mind raises great problems for our understanding of politics in a liberal enlightenment tradition. Without a singular rational actor most of what we think of as political choice comes
under threat and we are left with difficult questions about how we replace this idea, in order to step into the new ethics or politics.

**Knowing in the Body: Habit vs. the New**

One common approach to replacing the idea of a predetermined, rational, individual subject, has been the notion of habituation. In this approach, subjectivity is relatively deterministic and stable, not due to any pre-social biological qualities, but rather due to repetition, which instills in the body a certain not easily changed subjectivity (usually one which enslaves the subject to normative discourses). Foucault could be seen to belong in this category with his emphasis on the repetitive disciplines of the body. As I mentioned in the last chapter Judith Butler’s model of subjectivity rests on this principal. The performed subject is reproduced through, for example, performances of gender. As a result of this approach to subjectivity she has been critiqued (like Foucault) for an insufficient representation of agency. Despite these critiques it is an interesting way to move beyond the limits of the rational Cartesian subject and towards a stable but socially determined subject. Many embodiment scholars and those using the concept of affect use elements of this approach. Blackman and Venn (2010) describe it like this:

> Work on affect often eschews the concept of the unconscious for a notion of the nonconscious that is tied to a bodily unconscious understood through the concept of *habit*. These are forms of bodily memory which lie outside of a subject’s conscious reflections and deliberations and are often enfleshed within the processes of the central nervous system or proprioception. (p. 18)
We see in this quote the common notion of the unconscious often thought to be the 
enemy of the rational mind. The use of affect is mobilized to smooth the path to this 
aspect of the mind. What circus performers’ experiences reveal is an even greater 
integration between what we think of as conscious choice and processes 
traditionally considered “unconscious”.

The habit-forming body is a common idea among a number of scholars. Bourdieu 
refined and used the term Habitus when describing the set of dispositions or tastes 
that were related to the social field one occupied. Marcell Mauss used it before 
Bourdieu to refer to the set of body techniques that anchor culture in the body, 
habits or tendencies or styles, the way one embodies the social and cultural world. 
Mauss called Habitus “the sum total of culturally patterned uses of the body in 
society” (Csordas 1990 p. 11). Merleau Ponty also refers to the habit-forming body 
and suggests that the body has two levels, the sedimented body of habit, and the 
spontaneous body of the present (Shusterman 2005). Many scholars suggest it is 
through habit formation that we learn to identify patterns and group information 
together so that, for example, by knowing through experience and repetition the 
category “colour” we need not be completely surprised and reinvent the wheel 
every time we encounter a new shade (Merleau-Ponty 1945; Massumi 2002; Turner 
2008). Massumi says:

Habit is the body’s defense against shocks of expression. It ‘recognizes’ every 
arriving perception it can as being ‘like’ an impulse the body has already 
integrated as a functional life content. It contains potential with resemblance.
Any number of singular bodily events will automatically be grouped together, soliciting the same type of response. The resemblance is in this redundancy of response: it is in on the level of the event’s effect. In other words, it is a produced resemblance – of the body’s elicited actions to each other – rather than a formal likeness between the ‘stimulus’ and the response. The sameness of the response depends precisely on disregarding the singular contours of the arriving impulse: dismissing its potentially torturous anomalies as functionally insignificant. (Massumi 2002 p. xxxi)

In this passage Massumi suggests that habituation is actually the body disregarding the singularity of individual responses in order to group them together and avoid too much shock to the system.

The idea of technique, repetition and habituation came out strongly among performers and their descriptions help unpack this concept. They described how enough repetition could result in being able to forget your technique, for example Jen, a Toronto based aerialist, said while training that she is just “putting in the numbers” when learning a new trick. In both clown and aerial work, no longer having to think, but trusting your body to ‘know’ was often a preferred state for performing (although with dangerous tricks too much complacency or trust can also be hazardous). The ability to take on an additional task like emotional expression or listening to and responding to the audience, became possible after extensive habituation and repetition had grounded the first task in the body. Clowns talked
about repeating things so many times they could forget about the plan, take a tangent and know exactly where to pick up on the other side.

It seems to me that the repetition outlined by the performers I interviewed is somewhat different than the repetition described by embodiment scholars above. Rather than an unconscious habituation through immersion in life environments, in this case repetition is embarked on intentionally, for the sake of offloading work to the body. This offloading is felt to free the mind for other things, like creative expression or listening to what the audience wants, or performing emotionally in the way that has become central to the work of new circus performers. Moving thought into the body functions for performers like a kind of redistribution of labour, which they describe as essential for them to perform the more valued parts of their work. The emotional expression and social connection functions of performance require the performer to be ‘present’, fully aware and attentive to the situation and the audience, and they must habituate their technique in order to do this.

Cognitive neuroscientists also distinguish between different kinds of habituation in relation to thought. When describing cognitive theories, Paley (2004) uses the idea of becoming habituated through repetition to distinguish between “calculative rationality” and “non-representational thought” or “intuition”. Both of these second types she argues occur in embodied cognition. Her examples suggest that “calculative rationality” occurs when we are consciously engaging sets of rules;
however, once we have developed habits and can offload some of the cognitive processes to other parts of the brain or body, then we move into non-representational ways of thinking. Again we see the use of habituation to grapple with the boundaries between conscious, rational, individual thought, and non-conscious thought. Some also see this second kind of thought as extending beyond the individual subject. Another theory in cognitive neuroscience called “distributed cognition”, argues that thinking can be offloaded to many different places including the environment. For example, the size of the room can be part of the network involved in the process of analyzing how loud a performer should speak. In this instance the thinking body includes every aspect of the environment necessary to complete the task of cognition (Paley 2004). While this might seem relatively far-fetched, apparently it is not so strange to circus performers. Performers often speak about the agency of objects, apparatus and costumes, which “behave” in desirable or undesirable ways. Chris, an aerialist who also does ‘hat manipulation’ in his act described it this way:

Well I’m talking to the character (his own character) and in the instance of this act I’m also talking to the props. Talking is the only way to explain it because there is no other way to describe it, because communication is going on between a hat and a brain and a body, when we have a machine to analyze that it’ll be great but for now, yeah! I’m talking to all of them and trying to get feedback from the hat, as stupid as that’s going to sound, does it feel like that’s going in the right way? Does it feel right? Because sometimes the Hat will hit the ground and that will be the right thing to
happen and I wouldn’t have known that if it hadn’t ended up there. So I think awareness is the most important thing when you are trying to get a story across, because if you are not aware of what your actions and the states are doing you can’t possibly communicate the intended aspect of the story.

Performers also extend their experiences of feeling to inhabit the space around them. They identify a link between feeling and the shape and type of spaces for performance. Francine said, “you can’t feel anything in an arena because you can’t feel anything, it’s too big. In the chapiteau (circus tent), even if they are big, people are close together, 12-15 rows a couple thousand people but you still can see faces.”

In other words, there are spatial constraints on feeling and connecting, and given the close relationship between feeling and thinking arguably these performers may need the right kind of space in order to be able to think in the ways that are best suited for their performance. In this way we can see distributed thinking is also situated or spatial thinking, and part of embodied knowing extends to include more than just the body.

Both aerialists and clowns strove for a feeling of habituated embodied knowing and valued the decrease in the importance of the conscious mind. It was in this state that the most creative and affective components of their performance could arise. As we saw when discussing emotional discipline in the previous chapter, some undertakings were found to be more difficult than others to habituate, and these
tasks seemed to get in the way of connecting or emotional expression. Shana a
Montreal based aerialist from Les Sept Doigt de la Main, described it like this:

It’s like driving or something, when you first learn to drive you have to think
of every element of it, and once you get in your car every single day you are
able to have your most imaginative thoughts when you are driving. I feel like
performing acrobatics never really gets like that because it is too difficult to
get too automatic about it, but performing in itself kind of, ya it’s beyond
being conscious of it, and so you know what your performing self does, and
so you can let it take over. In the end I think it makes it stronger.

The more technical, complex or even life threatening the undertaking, the harder it
is to become habituated and move thinking into the body, but even with these
limitations performers value the habituated, non conscious state.

Performers also described managing the degree to which they surrender to
habituation. There are skills needed to manage this process, as there are
consequences of offloading ‘thought’, or habituating the body. Aerialists talk about
the danger of learning a trick with variations on the wrapping pattern. For example,
Annie said “if you forget that the drop you are doing comes from an opposite side
wrap, and you do a same side wrap, you know there’s serious repercussions, so you
have to so focus on what you are doing.” In these instances the body, which is being
relied on to know what to do, can easily become confused by alternate versions
resulting in an incorrect and potentially deadly sequence of movements. Performers
are aware of these limitations to habituation but overall think of habituation as
something that they are not just subject to, but also manage, enjoy, and use to their own advantage. This presents an interesting counterpoint to the either/or dichotomy of habituation vs. rational conscious thought. Catherine Nash (2000) in a paper questioning the recent rash of “abstract accounts of body-practices and the return to phenomenological notions of being-in-the-world” (p. 662) refers to research on dancing in which the elements of work, and learning are central and foundational to the more frequently celebrated moments of spontaneity, she says:

If the night-out clubbing contains intense and short-lived moments when the relationship between dancing, feeling and thinking is momentarily transformed, it takes a lot of often anxious work at learning to do clubbing well before that work and that self consciousness can be forgotten. (p. 659)

The other important element in this notion of habituation is that it is not something that only, or even most commonly, happens at the level of already individuated bodies. Aerialists in particular speak of what I would call the contagion of movement. Aerialists struggle with ownership of aerial tricks because watching others perform strongly influences movement in the watcher’s body. Being present in the gym with someone and watching him or her work, means that next week you may find yourself unintentionally reproducing their movement. This phenomenon has been considered with early research on ‘mirror neurons’, which behave in a way that suggests that the brain is profoundly influenced by watching others do or feel things (Ignatow 2007). New discoveries like the mirror neuron can be seen to blur the distinction between first and third person activity. Mirror neurons have taken
off in the popular imaginary being called the ‘empathy neuron’ in the popular press (Goldberg 2006). So while most discussions of habituation focus on the habituation of already individuated bodies, this is certainly not the defining feature of this practice.

Technique ideally becomes so habituated and engrained that it becomes invisible on stage, and performers’ choices become natural and intuitive. Jen said:

You are just lost in what you are doing, you know what you are doing but it’s not difficult and you are not really thinking of it because your body just has the memory to know exactly what to do so you get to get your mind lost in it too, and it’s not like even you are really thinking about anything you’re just feeling whatever feeling you’ve put to that routine so it’s just a total freedom to really enjoy it yourself and to be lost in it.

In addition to showing some of the challenges of describing her performing experiences using traditional dichotomous mind/body language, this quote is interesting because Jen describes this experience as a kind of freedom. She refers to getting to lose your mind, and the freedom of not thinking and relying on the body to have a memory of what to do. This to her is a description of a good performance moment. This is notable because the notion of habit is often placed in opposition not only to rational choice, but also to the freedom of creative expression, or the creation of a true artistic event (Deleuze 1990; Massumi 2002; Deleuze 2003; Virno 2004).
One common interpretation of the political importance of the artist is that the artist is particularly adept at creating something new, a true expression or event. It is the artist’s gift for newness and originality that many say is desirable, and offers political potential for the rest of life. In *Negotiations*, Deleuze says:

> Any creative activity has a political aspect and a significance, the problem is that such activity isn’t very compatible with circuits of information and communication, ready made circuits that are compromised from the outset. 
> ...The brain is a spatio temporal volume, it’s up to art to trace through it the new paths open to us today. (Deleuze 1990 p. 60)

Art in this philosophical paradigm is supposed to be shocking where “Shock is the precondition for openness to a process of transformation of subjectivity” (Lazzarato 2008 p. 4).

Here we seem to have the notion of art and the notion of habit juxtaposed. The job of art is to trace new paths. Rancière has described this (as I discuss in chapter 3) as part of the third regime of art (the one we currently inhabit), which “asserts the absolute singularity of art and destroys any criterion by which to isolate that singularity.” If art is associated with singularity and newness, what does this emphasis on habituation do to the notion of creativity? In one way performers feel it frees them from conscious thinking, making room or moving beyond the technique, but at the same time it can create patterns and ruts of movement. Rothfield (2008) when talking about dancers’ bodily movement, and engrained habits of kinesthetic being, describes the struggle of some choreographers to overcome the natural
conservativism of the body, and make the body “available to movement.” She discusses this as a problem found particularly in modern dance in which we see juxtaposed “the embodiment of technique versus the production of new bodily conditions via choreographic forms of invention” (Rothfield 2008 p. 33). In contrast, circus performers also see repetition as a useful tool, which can actually allow for spontaneity by creating the conditions under which the performer can be fully present with the audience. Perhaps cultivating space for what Merleau Ponty calls the second body (in addition to the habituated one) the “spontaneous body of the present.”

Perhaps the fascination with newness has operated like the fantasy of ‘outside’ or marginality to give a fictional sense of optimism and possibility of escape. While it is exciting to talk about change and transformation in these ways, perhaps it limits us from paying attention to the ways we can manage and utilize repetition for equally productive purposes. Massumi says:

> It is important not to think of the creativity of expression as if it brought something into being from nothing. There is no tabula rasa of expression. It always takes place in a cluttered world. Its field of emergence is strewn with the after-effects of events past, already-formed subjects and objects and the two-pronged systems of capture (of content and expression, bodies and words) regulating their interaction: nets aplenty. (Massumi 2002 p. xxix)

Rather than an inherent negativity about the nets we can get caught in, perhaps there is power and potential in expanding our expertise in managing repetitions, in
skillfully moving between the conscious and non conscious versions of self. Though most often repetition and habituation are not at the level of conscious thoughts, the experiences of circus performers suggest that there may be more contact between the levels and types of thought than we might otherwise expect.

Repetition and habituation may be fruitful areas for further exploration as we develop our understanding of new political possibilities, and examine the ways these practices are tied into current socio economic circumstances. Is the contemporary moment requiring that more work be offloaded to the habituated body? Is this an additional degree of the growing immateriality of labour? Even if this is the case, what can we do about it? Can we mobilize these capacities for our own or a greater good? What do these practices look like when they are not already individuated bodies that are becoming habituated? How can we make discipline work and who is it working for? Further exploration of these avenues will be necessary and fruitful for attempts to reformulate a politics based on amorphous subjects and fluid positions.

**Affective Labour and Desiring Subjects**

At the heart of the distinction between good (artistic) and not-as-good (simply technical) performance described by contemporary circus performers is the idea of connection or being ‘with’ the audience. I have already explored this in chapter 5, through the lens of the growing demand for emotional labour expected of all workers. I believe it is true that affective components of circus performers’ work are
part of what make them ideal labourers in the post-Fordist economy, if we are to join Virno in identifying “a cartography of virtualities made possible by post-Fordism, elements in contemporary life that could eventually be mobilized” (Lotringer 2004 p. 17) then these elements might have more than one meaning.

I find it easy to fall into the binary thinking I outlined at the beginning of this chapter in which affect is either good and opens up artistic possibilities or bad and serves the post-Fordist economy. I am not alone in this challenge. To begin with, it is appropriate, and I would argue necessary, to be skeptical of the proliferation of the term affect, especially since it is applied to so many disparate and seemingly unrelated circumstances. Gill and Pratt have just this kind of skepticism:

> We would echo Hemmings’ powerful interrogation of the ‘affective turn’, in which she argues that affect ‘often emerges as a rhetorical device whose ultimate goal is to persuade “paranoid theorists” into a more productive frame of mind’. (Gill and Pratt 2008 p. 16).

They go on to describe the limitations of how affect has been used by autonomists who have been key figures mobilizing this term in relation to labour and politics. They posit the following:

> Perhaps even more troubling than the rather general conceptualization of affective labour in autonomists’ thinking, is the work the notion of ‘affect’ itself is called upon to do in their account of contemporary capitalism. As in so much autonomous Marxist writing the notion has a double face – it speaks on the one hand to the extent to which emotions, feelings, relationships are
‘put to work’ in post-Fordist capitalism, and on the other to the immanent human cooperative capacities and potentialities that may be set free by such labour. (Gill and Pratt 2008 p. 15)

Gill and Pratt identify here the ambivalent use of affect as both the foundation of labour in post Fordism, and also the potential source of freedom and change. This framing of affect as both captured by post Fordism, and a source of political possibility, echoes the ambivalence created by the framing of art in the same way. In both cases, the same experiences can be seen for the ways they increase capacity or the ways they close down possibilities for movement in subjectivity. Though Gill and Pratt critique autonomists for this double-faced idea of affect, I wonder why we should expect affect to be only one thing. Much like Foucault’s idea of power, which he saw as productive rather than good or bad, affect can be dangerous or mobilizing. For example, Ahmed (2004) described the ways affect has been used to mobilize white supremacist groups.

Affect is also a difficult concept to pin down because of the vastly different scales that it is used to explain. The term affect has been used from micro scale examinations of the relationship between the body and thought using the notion of the preconscious (Massumi 2002), to social scale descriptions of shifts in labour patterns (Dowling, Nunes and Trott 2007). This range does not have to be an inherent problem, though it should be dealt with directly rather than ignored. I feel that using a Spinozist conception of affect allows for affect to describe both the micro scale of preconscious processes happening within an individuated or
‘biological’ body, and the differently bounded processes of the social body. I think this range of scales is necessary for a robust theory of what is going on in contemporary capitalism. We can’t adequately address social scale issues around labour and politics without a comprehensive model of the micro politics of desire, individuation, and affect.

These tools are necessary because, while the affective components of circus work feed into (or off of) the growing demands for affective or immaterial labour identified by both feminist and autonomist Marxists, at the same time, much of the work performers do is driven by ‘individual’ desire. Awareness of this affective register is critical to any comprehension of the post-Fordist growth in cultural industries. No matter how confining, limiting and unpleasant corporate events might be, very few performers I interviewed would trade them for desk jobs or factory jobs. Virno (2004) calls post-Fordism the communism of capitalism because it “puts forward in its own way many of the demands of communism (the abolition of work and dissolution of the state)” (p111). These are relations of work that appeal to workers. Though the post-Fordist model of production already captures these desires, might they also “eventually be mobilized” for other ends?

As I have described earlier, one of the most consistent findings of research on work within the creative industries is that it is experienced by most as profoundly satisfying and intensely pleasurable (at least some of the time). As I suggested in chapter 4, a vocabulary of love or passion is repeatedly evinced in such studies, with
work imbued with the features of the Romantic tradition of the artist, suffused with positive emotional qualities (von Osten, 2007). Research findings reflect these workers’ deep attachment, affective bindings, and self-expression and self-actualization through work (Gill and Pratt 2008).

Circus performers clearly describe their love of their work. At the risk of sounding trite or maudlin, the overwhelming description of the relationship of the clown to the audience is one of intimacy. I find this a notable contrast to the fascination with otherness that we saw as such a central part of politics in previous paradigms (although the intimacy is almost always with strangers). As John describes it, it is a love affair, a date:

L: what is that feeling like? You are behind the curtains, there’s people walking in, you...?
J: It’s like, well unless I’m really tired, it’s like going on a date. You know you can go to a restaurant you’ve been to a thousand times. You can know the waiter. You can know the maitre d’. You can know all those things you can have, all those things you know what you are going to order to eat. You know what makes your breath smell good in case you get lucky after and do some kissing. You can have all those things in place, but you don’t know what this other person is going to be or do. It doesn’t have to be a first date, it can be a fifth date with the same person, they can come in have had a bad day and if you want that relationship to happen on any level, it doesn’t have to you know go anywhere particular, even just for the sake of the meal you’re going to pay
attention to who the fuck it is you’re talking to...You go out of your way to make everything special and right and that’s what its like, its like a love affair with an audience. It is a love affair, it’s not like that, that’s what it is ... The purpose of that structure [of the show] is to get this relationship going, so uh that’s what its like, if you don’t love the audience get out, get out!

Is there something we can use in the notion of desire, love and attachment? At least the strength of these experiences ought to be addressed, as they are strong drivers of action. I am not arguing at all that a new politics should be about love - certainly it does not need to be about liking anyone in a fixed emotional sense. In fact we must be thoughtful, even skeptical about our feelings of love, not just surrender to feelings of safety or intimacy. But at the same time, ignoring the power and possibilities inherent in those feelings, would also be a mistake. Harding and Pribram (2004) believe that we should view the emotions as social and political. They argue for theorizing emotion and power together, as emotions participate in the reproduction of power relations (Harding and Pribram 2002). Important in this discussion, as in the discussion of habituation, is the distinction between feelings that are contained in an already individuated or ‘biological’ body and those that are shared, part of the social body (Gorton 2007). And certainly feelings of love, whenever there is an outside to that feeling, do not necessarily create loving outcomes for those outside the group. Ahmed pointed this out with her work on the shared feelings of belonging among members of white supremacist groups (Ahmed
However, provided the boundaries of feeling are not fixed, but rather flexible and adaptable perhaps this is worth further exploration.

I remain curious about the notion of intimacy, with its connotations of familiarity and togetherness. There is something potentially interesting about the notion of intimacy, rather than, or in addition to difference as an organizing principal. It parallels for me Ruddick’s suggestion that we let the monstrous other into the spaces where it can domesticate us (Ruddick 2004). Perhaps rather than the charged term “love” there is a better terminology to describe the qualities of this encounter. Braidotti suggests “Symbiotic interdependence” (Braidotti 2002). Haraway advocates encounters of greater reciprocity, saying it is time to rethink our fascination with strangeness through looking at pets and our fears of domestication. Haraway says:

Looking back in this way takes us to seeing again, to respecere, to the act of respect. To hold in regard, to respond, to look back reciprocally, to notice, to pay attention, to have courteous regard for, to esteem: all of that is tied to polite greeting, to constituting the polis: where and when species meet. To knot companion and species together in encounter, in regard and respect, is to enter the world of becoming with, where, who, and what are, are precisely what are at stake. (Haraway 2006 p. 102)

Ruddick (2010) has identified a difference among leading theorists who are trying to operationalize these notions of the political encounter. This tension rests on “how
we engage difference itself within our projects” (p. 23). She argues this divergence is founded in different mobilizations of what it means to become active, based on Spinoza’s concept of affect and its effect on “the ungrounding and reconstitution of the social body” (p. 23). In my own reading of Spinoza’s *Ethics* (2000), I was somewhat startled and initially discomfited to realize that he believed we are only affected by things that we recognize, things that have some element of sameness with ourselves:

> Any particular thing whose nature is entirely different from ours can neither help nor hinder our power of acting and in absolute terms no thing can be good or bad for us unless it has something in common with us.” (Part 4 prop 29)

For him the process of making ‘other’ does not seem to be part of what he considered an important source of political power, ‘potentia’. As Ruddick describes:

> Spinoza distinguishes forms of power between potentia, an indwelling capacity to act, and potestas, a form of domination or alienation, which exploits and separates things from what they can do. (p. 25)

Initially I balked at this element of his work, seeing, like a good ‘post’ thinker, all the possible ways this idea could be damaging, moving us back towards the kind of universalizing and homogenizing practices which many social movements are still emerging from. But after some consideration I recognized that the pendulum does not have to lie at either of these poles. If the absolute other is problematic, the answer is not a universal sameness, but perhaps the political encounter should be
allowed again to include an experience of familiarity or at least a process of getting-
to-know. I think it is critical to separate this notion of recognition and “something in
common” from ideas of universality or sameness which result in fixed categories to
which one either belongs or does not. These kinds of categories gloss over
difference or reify it, and can be vital for particular political interventions but also
can become the new ground for excluding other ‘others’. In ‘respectere’ or
multiplicity, the ‘we’ is never static, the body and the subject are always
differentiating, and what is in common is always changing depending on the
boundaries of the bodies that are coming into contact.

For Spinoza, humans must collaborate with one another to enhance their
potentia, their power to act. In the maximization of this objective, a
collectivity that would form for the purpose of exploiting another would lose
the possibility of a still greater collective power. (Ruddick 2010 p. 24)
In each collective becoming, leaving anyone out or gaining power at their expense,
decreases the capacity of that body.

For clowns, if a new element (such as an audience member or even a technical
interruption) enters the room, then the ‘we’, which the clown is responsible for
considering, shifts. The clown has to be responsive to the whole audience and all the
elements in the room. This is not an encounter between two previously determined
bodies that meet and become intimate. It is not a story of harmonious union and
finding a perfect place of consensus across all spheres. It is the process of
recognizing, individuating, listening, and shifting that offers possibility for a more
complex notion of the political. Ultimately the lack of unanimity and even conflict indicated by the idea of multiplicity is what is reassuring, an important counter to the “idealist tendencies” (Revel 2008) that can crop up in literature on affect. If there isn't disagreement in a body (individual or social) then we find ourselves with a dangerous lack of dissent. How we manage this movement between difference and familiarity in the negotiation and reformulation of subjectivities may be a fruitful area for further thought. This is not a large step from notions of individuation between points of difference, but suggests that points of recognition may also provide a worthwhile focus in the process of affecting and individuating that comprises this new understanding of politics.

**Being With, ‘Respecere’**

The state of clowning, or what it means to be a good clown, is claimed by some to happen only in the conversation between the performer and the audience. John Turner a renowned Canadian Clown teacher says “the biggest thing in clown is that it is a conversation, so none of that exists until there is an audience”. In a clowning workshop that I took, he described it this way: “In clown, thinking happens in the space between you and the audience.” Clowns have no “fiction of self contained independence”(Gatens and Lloyd 1999) yet neither are they completely unindividuated. In the language of clown training you must “bring something” to the conversation, but equally be willing to “drop everything” in order for the real, relational clowning to occur. This ultimate clowning arises in the place between a particular audience and a particular clown. Both components are changeable as the
composition of the audience changes from day to day (or moment to moment) and
the clown also changes because they rely on what the performer can bring to the
table –emotionally and physically- that day. This is considered the essence of good
performing, to have, understand, and be able to adjust in response to that always-
changing connection. Jeff a Toronto based clown said:

When the audience is paying attention and they are laughing together it’s like
there’s a wave or something that is created that you can build upon or lose
depending on what you do. So it’s just a feeling, it’s an energy, but right away
you know when you are doing it and it’s great, and you say something or you
do something and you lose half the audience and right away you can feel it,
you can feel the energy shift in the room, even the audience can feel it, I guess
they can feel it because they are part of it.

I feel that performers’ experiences can give some insight into how we might
operationalize ideas of becoming and intersubjectivity in ways that can have
genuine impacts. For example, they can have impacts on how we understand the
success of new economic paradigms, and how we assess the implications of these
paradigms on worker’s lives. How do we move from the abstract to the concrete in
this instance? Performers talk a lot about reading the audience, about the process of
listening, paying attention, and responding to their observations and sensory cues. It
turns out many of these ‘cues’ are simple social markers, clothes, age, body language
which are simply critical but typical assessments based on habituated ways of
encountering ‘others’. Thinking on our feet is often done with the limited tools we have at our disposal.

I am fascinated by this, not because I think clowns are outstandingly successful at it, but because the whole of their practice is to try to build a shared sense of identity, however fleetingly, and always with the elements (people, circumstances) at hand. I am interested in the practices of connecting, the effort of making familiar, and the respect involved in listening and picking up cues that will either make or break your success on stage. (When a clown fails on stage they are said to have ‘died’ on stage – in some schools of instruction the teacher literally says, “you’re dead - get off stage”). So it is not their success, but the effort of listening and learning, the active practice of connecting which intrigues me. Listening to clowns it becomes clear this is not a magical and mystical occurrence, but an active, very kinesthetic and embodied, and in this case at least partially conscious and practical, endeavor.

Cultural phenomenology offers an interesting way of viewing this relationship, which has previously been applied to dance practices. They use the concept of somatic modes of attention, to suggest that rather than pre-cultural or universal essential ways of perceiving, we are embedded in culturally and locationally specific ways of apprehending and practicing movement, and that we perceive and experience movement through these modes of attention or ways of turning towards and apprehending the bodies around us. (Csordas 1993; Rothfield 2008). Thomas Csordas, one of the main proponents of cultural phenomenology says, “Our concern
is the cultural elaboration of sensory engagement, not preoccupation with one’s own body as an isolated phenomenon” (Csordas 1993). He says the ways we attend to, and with, our bodies are culturally mediated. In his own research he describes the way healers in a number of societies describe being attuned to the bodies of their patients, and suggests that some somatic modes of attention are “consubjective” – that is occur between more than one embodied subject.

What is involved in these ‘somatic modes of attention’, the concept of encountering with respect, or being ‘with’ the audience? This is not a simple activity. Clowns work very hard to have this conversation with an entire audience. Grindl described the challenge like this:

   You know, sometimes there are many reasons why you cannot connect. It can be the position of the planets. It’s the weather. It can be a lot of things. We are all one mind so it can be a lot of reasons. The room can get cold, the building, the seating. When I do schools I am adamant that no child should sit on the floor and they squirm, they start getting interested in something else. Children you know, if they are sitting down they are in a theatre. I think the conditions are really important to establish a connection. That’s a really important thing for clowns to really make sure that the conditions that they are performing with, like their props, their set, their communication with the person that just hired them, all of those things are the conditions. I think they are very important, and then again they can be very mercurial, I’ve performed on a bus, a train in Japan, and you can give a brilliant show.
Physical and social location are all part of cultivating ‘withness’, and yes there is also no recipe, despite claiming that perfect theatre conditions can help, Grindl went on to say that a show on a moving bus can also be brilliant.

Jan, another clown, described the work involved in connecting across cultural divides such as varied habits and social expectations as follows:

We took our company to Japan. We had a show, a set show, and we were going to do it at the Canadian pavilion. And we get there and discover that the stage is one tenth of the size we need, we can’t even fit, we have a mobile bed we can’t even put the bed on it, we could put it on but it wouldn’t move around so all of a sudden the day we arrive we can’t do our show. We’ll just rove, and they said ‘oh no no you can’t rove, the Japanese are very particular and they are very into formality, and you can’t and they won’t like it.’ And we thought well there’s no alternative, we’re going out! And they looooved it, they loved it because, this is the power of the clown, it’s the universal, everybody is a fool inside, everybody is human, it doesn’t matter what the different external cultures are, the internal culture is the same. So we learned things like if we wanted to be polite we would make ourselves bow like that (puts hand on head and forces bow) ‘cause that is what they do to their kids so instead of saying ‘say thank you to the nice clown’ they would go, force their head down right. And we would get chopsticks and it would be so hot, standing in line, and we’d get buckets of ice and we’d feed them ice but with chopsticks because that was their culture, then we’d give them rides on the
bed and we’d make them take their shoes off, they thought that was hilarious, ‘cause we know that they are hyper hygienic and clean right so their shoes on the bed would be horrible, so and we’d threaten to do it, oh they’d go into paroxysms of laughter so ya it’s absolutely universal. That’s the beauty of clown you can take a clown show anywhere because there is no barrier.

Although Jan attributed her success to a kind of human universality, something that could perhaps transcend race or culture or make such categories obsolete, I see it quite differently. I see the ‘success’ of these clowns at connecting with their audience as the result of a careful assessment of the possible points of connection in the room, and an active effort to listen and respond to what was working (making people laugh) and what was not working. Though these performers may feel they are in a shared space with their audience, in actuality they are carefully navigating the points of contact and the points of difference, and co-creating a space that takes into account and uses both. In a typical clown show not everything the performer tries will work, or cultivate a sense of shared comedy, so the clown’s job is to listen to the audience and abandon those things which are not generating the desired connection. The group Jan was working with used what they perceived of the culture of their audience and tried things out, listened closely to what evoked laughter, and tried those ‘successful’ things again with other people. Together with the audience they created a comedic scene that played on their observations, the assumptions of both groups about the ‘other’, their habituated skills as performers, and the willingness of the audience to laugh both at the performer and at their own social expectations. Together they created a space of encounter that it seems from
her description everyone was comfortable with in that moment and which allowed them to play with the boundaries of social norms and habituated behavior.

What I have done in this chapter is to use the experience of circus performers to unpack some central theoretical concepts of scholars who are working to develop a new model of politics that is not caught in the same impasse that many traditional models have been. Where traditional politics is routed in binaries and founded on the rational choices of individuated and static subjects, the new politics tries to open up the field and uncover the political moment in micro spaces of encounter. These ideas while valuable need a lot more empirical exploration to reveal how they might connect to political and social movements and what new tools they might offer to help us create worlds worth living in.
Conclusions

At heart this dissertation is grappling with questions of political subjectivity. I have utilized the embodied experiences of circus performers to move forward political stalemates in the old binary of structure vs. agency, and to straddle emerging tensions in the divisions between emotional and affective geographies; mobilizing theories of subjectivity in more pragmatic terms to interrogate the relationship between habituated, disciplined subjectivity and possibilities of escape, newness and unpinning or change. This dissertation has used the experiences and circumstances of circus performers to think through questions of labour and politics, and possibilities for individual and social change in the contemporary post-Fordist or neoliberal moment. By approaching through several lines of interrogation, I have illuminated some of the resonances between seemingly distinct spheres of concern including research methods, labour processes, and new conceptualizations of bodies, feelings, politics and subjectivities. By looking across and between these points of contact I have unpacked some of their apparent logic and tried to re-infuse some political stalemates with new empirical encounters.

I have drawn on geographies of embodiment, affect and emotion to challenge fixed ontological categories such as our understanding of creative subjectivity, and artistic choice. At the same time I have chosen not to abandon vital categories of identity such as gender and race that strongly shape the spaces we inhabit and the breadth of our future possibilities. In this way I have straddled some tensions in
the geographic literature, which tend to either express concern for social identities, or revel in freedom from the confines of these categories. I have shown in this dissertation that considering both concerns is productive and possible.

Looking through the lens of changing labour processes writ large, the expectation that researchers should develop artistic subjectivities, which include being reflexive, empathetic, intuitive and creative, is revealed in a new light. While we may be developing research methods that better address the complexity of social interactions, and the power of aesthetic and embodied forces, we should also be wary of reflexively jumping on the ‘creativity’ bandwagon, and be up front about the additional emotional labour, and challenges of translation, that accompany these paths. Given my identification as both a clown and a researcher I can’t help but feel some similarities between them. Attending to the affective components of research encounters does seem more like art than research, as we traditionally know it. At times empathy in research, and ‘connection’ between the clown and the audience feel similar in my body. They are both practices that require attending to places of recognition and of difference, and unpinning from (or at least reflecting on) subjective positions. Determining which version of myself to employ in a given situation requires an assessment of factors which almost makes me long for a simpler time when I could just rely on ‘objectivity’ to see me through.

Looking through the lens of contemporary shifts in labour and governance changes the meaning of granting circus - a relatively successful entrepreneurial creative
form - status as an art. We are living through a time in which the ideology of creativity is dominant, but that ideology comes packaged with a disconcerting unraveling of previous labour relations and potent impact on work/life balance, as well as the increasing marketization of all aspects of life. In each instance we need to look at what the term creativity or art is actually referring to. I have pointed out that while there is growing attention to a somewhat abstract idea of creativity, there is an absence of attention to the actual labouring and/or creative process. We need to continue to extend discussions of creativity by examining the living practices of artists. We need to unpack terms like creativity in context. Is ‘creativity’ something like ‘reflexivity,’ which arguably is hard not to do? Or is it what most neoliberal discourse would suggest to us, a skill which all workers should apply to their work? What ideas of art and creativity might do, depends on the political priorities of those employing those ideas. If we are primarily concerned with the increased integration of art and work, and fear that this melding is resulting in a loss of space for life as separate from work, then the idealization of the artist’s lifestyle is dangerous and troubling because it is definitely enmeshed in the breakdown of previously upheld labour relations through mobilization of desire and ‘choice’. If, however, we wish to focus on the marketization of every day life, the term art may help us identify and valorize or support activities that are not fully integrated into the market, perhaps as a more flexible and moving version of the old model of art-for-art’s-sake. At least this seems to be how performers are still utilizing these terms to make sense of their overlapping labouring/artistic experiences.
Although I have outlined how others have argued (in broad strokes) that we are seeing a blurring of the boundaries between previous distinct spheres like art and labour, through talking to performers it seems to me these categories are still being put to work in meaningful ways. Circus provides an excellent example of how the categories of art and labour are difficult to keep apart in the contemporary moment, but also of how useful or productive those categories may be for particular political projects. Given the way performers described art, the term may still be valuable and may be providing important shelter, however temporary and tenuous, from the effects of some dominant discourses. As long as we are aware of these terms as not describing a static reality, but rather as terms that do work, terms that describe certain relationships of production but which must be actively interrogated, then they can be tools we can use. We should continue to ask pragmatic questions like ‘what are the affective or aesthetic experiences that the discipline of the market does not encourage right now?’ and ‘is the term art being used as a placeholder for these values or experiences?’

I have explored how cultural workers use the ideas of art and creativity as a justification or explanation for precarity, low income, and poor working conditions, and simultaneously as a way to defend or demarcate desired experiences of unalienated or self-authored work. Given that performers are using these terms in ways that seem to suggest something not currently captured in the ideology of creativity, we should continue to draw attention to changes in public policy about art, which result in the term art no longer meaning in policy what it means to
performers or artists themselves. These changes may make it increasingly difficult for the term art to have a broad range of uses. There is definitely a shift going on comprised of symbolic investment in artists, coupled with a lack of resources and the expectation that they justify their work in economic terms. Broader social and policy changes do not reflect the meaning that cultural workers themselves ascribe to the term art. Are performers themselves the last group holding (however tentatively) to the idea that there is a distinction between their unalienated experience of doing art and their experience of doing corporate work? I suggest that if relations of art and labour are going to become more alike, then we need to be clear about which parts of each concept are being mobilized. If art is going to be alienated like labour, then at least we should try to collectively bargain for conditions of work that mediate the effects of its precarity. In fact in many cases what we are seeing with corporate work for performers is the instability of artistic labour forms, without the freedom described as desirable by artists. We see flexibility of work conditions for employers without a comparable flexibility of work content for performers.

Being creative is not a fundamental good, nor has art had a stable or fixed meaning through history, across social groups, or even among a small group of performers. However, both remain potent concepts. Art and creativity can be found at the heart of new systems of capital, but their dominance is in part because they describe powerful experiences whose appeal to both practitioners and ‘audience’ must be examined if we are to understand the role of desire and freedom in shaping and
maintaining these new systems of governance. The ideology of creativity may function as a trope to glamorize precarity among some workers, through ideas of artistic freedom, which may make employment instability harder to challenge in other spheres of work. While cultural workers are a very small subset of precarious workers, ‘creativity’ and creative labour are currently key terms in broader discourses of labour. If the appeal of freedom, power, and choice are under theorized (Larner 2003), then we are missing valuable information needed to understand the tenacity of neoliberalism and the success of post-Fordism, as well as the places where these systems may be vulnerable. I have suggested that the kinds of affective support networks that are replacing Fordist models of organizing are a vital place to look for new possibilities for worker friendly futures, and also to learn about the dangers and costs (many of them hidden in emotional labour) of this flexible new economy.

You cannot examine freedom without being realistic about constraints. Alongside notions of freedom, in this dissertation I have looked at the kinds of racialized, gendered, aesthetic and emotional disciplines to which performers are expected to conform. The circus is an intensely gendered and racialized place, and these disciplines continue to shape the experiences of both performers and audiences. In fact in exploring the cultural projects these bodies-on-display are performing, the aerial body in particular seems to fit neatly within the current contemporary cultural moment. Much like the double-barreled expectations of researchers, aerialists’ bodies represent a two-pronged ideal - we all must strive to be lean, fit
and flexible, and simultaneously be creative, spontaneous and emotional. You cannot just be a performing machine doing arduous labour; you must also be emotionally present. As well, aerialists symbolize the need for risk taking - and acceptance of danger - things that are also increasingly being expected of workers in the new economy. Even clowns fit well into the growth of immaterial labour and new techniques of governance, and their demands for reflexive self-awareness and self-management practices (practices which are also part of new research processes).

Closely examining performers’ interactions with these forms of discipline reveals an interesting relationship between discipline and freedom. Performers seemed to suggest they both conform to disciplinary subjectivities and negotiate their identities, in relation to these expectations. Responding to past critiques of Foucault’s accounts of disciplinary power (as eliminating both agency and the power of politicized collectivities), I suggest that thinking with and beyond Foucault’s discipline requires unpinning from static subjectivities, and doing so with others. One fruitful avenue to do this is using new theories of the body as the site of an ethics or politics of encounter. Using concepts of affect and becoming, many scholars are articulating a politics that does not rely on a notion of outside or other, which may be either ungraspable (because it is perpetually elusive), or non-existent (because it is instantly consumed).
In contrast to an emphasis on newness and on difference in this literature, circus performers emphasized the importance of repetition to their creative practices and experiences. I have suggested that circus performers’ experiences suggest a greater integration between conscious and unconscious thought through the notions of repetition and habituation. The repetition outlined by the performers I interviewed is different than the repetition described by embodiment scholars. Rather than unconscious habituation through immersion in life environments, repetition is embarked on intentionally, for the sake of offloading work to the body, and can be engaged and manipulated at various levels of consciousness. Moving thought into the body functions like a kind of redistribution of labour, which they describe as essential. Circus performers see repetition as a useful tool, which can actually allow for spontaneity by creating the conditions under which the performer can be fully present with the audience - perhaps cultivating space for what Merleau Ponty calls the second body (in addition to the habituated one), the “spontaneous body of the present.”

I have suggested that how we manage the movement between difference and familiarity in the negotiation and reformulation of subjectivities may be a fruitful area for further exploration. This is not a large step from notions of individuation between points of difference, but suggests that points of recognition may also provide a worthwhile focus in the process of affecting and individuating that comprises this new understanding of politics. Is the contemporary moment requiring that more work be offloaded to the habituated body? Is this an additional
degree of the growing immateriality of labour? Even if this is the case, what can we
do about it? Can we mobilize these capacities for our own or a greater good? Further
exploration of these avenues will be necessary and fruitful for future attempts to
reformulate a politics that can utilize and account for our awareness of the flexibility
of subjectivity and the centrality of affective, embodied and emotional experiences.
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Appendix A: Interview Guides for Clowns and Aerialists

Clowns

Intro: Thanks so much for agreeing to participate. I am interviewing you because I feel that as a clown you have a particular expertise in a number of areas that are of interest to scholars studying the body, embodied cognition, identity, and intercorporeality or interrelationship. I am particularly interested in your physical experiences as a clown on and off stage (or in and out of clown), in how you know things, how you make decisions, how you navigate different environments both on and off stage.

You can choose not to answer any questions you don’t want to, you can stop at any time, if there is anything you say that you don’t want me to use or to associate with your name just let me know. If I quote you directly I will run the quote by you to ensure it reflects what you have said.

1) How did you get into Clowning? How long have you been doing it?
   a. What did you do before you started clowning?
2) When you think about being on stage for your first few performances, compared with now, what do you think are the biggest differences?
   a. The greatest skills that you have acquired as you have spent more time as a clown? (Reading the audience, greater bag of tricks, more confidence?)
   b. Or/ Is the environment for clowning different?
3) What do you think is different about you on and off stage (in and out of clown)?
4) How would you describe your body (characteristics, features, inner feelings)?
   a. When you are on stage?
   b. When you are off stage?
   c. When the show is going well?
   d. When it’s going badly?
   e. When you are playing different characters?
5) What is your relationship to surprise or newness when you are on stage?
6) How do you think/feel about being funny? Where does it come from? What does it do?
7) What is your experience of or relationship to discomfort, boundary crossing or transgression?
8) How important is your relationship to the audience? Your fellow performers? The room? The props? Why? What does this relationship consist of?
9) How do you know when you are connected with the audience?
10) What are some of the different reactions and responses you receive about your work? What do you think evokes these responses? (different people, different places, different performances)
11) What are some of the different environment you have worked in?
   a. Does your performance change in different environments or under different circumstances? Eg. A small theatre, a language or culture barrier, no laughter? Do you adjust your performance for different settings/audiences (eg. TV, theatre, festivals?)
   b. How and when do you make these decisions?
12) What are the economic realities of being a clown? How does the need to make a living effect the kind of work that you do? How have you made a living?
13) Do you think the context for clown work has changed? I.e. is there more/less work? Has the kind of work changed or the venues for the work? For example with the growth of Cirque, with the recognition of Canadian clowning? Does this affect your work?
14) Do you think of your work as political? What does political mean to you?
15) Is there anything I haven’t asked you about that you’d like to add?

Aerialists

Intro: Thanks so much for agreeing to participate. I am interviewing you because I feel that as an aerialist you have a particular expertise in a number of areas that are of interest to scholars studying the body, embodied cognition, identity, and intercorporeality or inter-relationship. I am particularly interested in your physical experiences as an aerialist (on and off stage), in how you know things, how you make decisions, how you navigate different environments both on and off stage.

You can choose not to answer any questions you don’t want to, you can stop at any time, if there is anything you say that you don’t want me to use or to associate with your name just let me know. If I quote you directly I will run the quote by you to ensure it reflects what you have said.

1) How did you get into Aerial? How long have you been doing it?
   a. What did you do before you started?

2) When you think about being on stage for your first few performances, compared with now, what do you think are the biggest differences?
   a. The greatest skills that you have acquired as you have spent more time performing? (Reading the audience, more tricks, stronger, more confidence?)
   b. Or/ Is the environment for aerial different?
3) What do you think is different about you on and off stage?
   a. What makes this happen, something you do? Stage? Lights? Makeup?
4) How would you describe your body (characteristics, features, inner feelings)?
   a. When you are on stage?
   b. When you are off stage?
   c. When the show is going well?
   d. When it’s going badly?
   e. When you are playing different characters?
   f. When you are injured?
5) What is your relationship to surprise or fear when you are on stage?
6) Do you try and evoke certain feeling in the audience? How and why?
7) What is your experience of or relationship to discomfort, boundary crossing or transgression? (eg. Making aerial funny, or scaring people with falls)
8) How important is your relationship to the audience? Your fellow performers? The room? The apparatus? Why? What does this relationship consist of?
9) How do you know when you are connected with the audience?
10) What are some of the different reactions and responses you receive about your work? What do you think evokes these responses? (different people, different places, different performances)
11) What are some of the different environment you have worked in?
    a. Does your performance change in different environments or under different circumstances? Eg. A small theatre, a language or culture barrier, no laughter? Do you adjust your performance for different settings/audiences (eg. Tv, theatre, festivals?)
    b. How and when do you make these decisions?
12) What are the economic realities of being an aerialist? How does the need to make a living effect the kind of work that you do? How have you made a living?
13) Do you think the context for aerial work has changed? I.e. is there more/less work? Has the kind of work changed or the venues for the work? For example with the growth of Cirque, with the recognition of Canadian clowning? Does this affect your work?
14) Do you think of your work as political? What does political mean to you?
15) Is there anything I haven’t asked you about that you’d like to add?
Appendix B: Interviews

Clowns (performers/teachers/directors)

Jeff Krahn (Toronto): January 25, 2008
Paul Wildbaum (Toronto): February 6, 2008
John Turner (From Manitoulin interviewed in Edmonton): February 12, 2008
Jan Henderson (Edmonton): February 12, 2008
Sue Morrison (Toronto): February 20, 2008
Helen Donnelly (Toronto): May 14, 2008
Francine Côté (Montreal): May 26, 2008
James Keylon (Montreal): May 26, 2008
Grindl Kuchirka (Toronto): June 26, 2008
Yves Dagenais (Montreal, National Circus School): October 19, 2008
Soizick Hébert (Montreal): October 21, 2008
Shannan Calcutt (Las Vegas): March 27, 2009

Aerialists (Performers/teachers/directors/company owners)

Wendy Mendes (Toronto): January 15, 2008
Annie Dugan (Edmonton, Firefly Theatre): February 13, 2008
Chris Taylor (Toronto/Traveling): May 5, 2008
Caroline Petrement (Montreal): August 28, 2008
C* (Montreal): October 17, 2008
Sarah Poole (Montreal, National Circus School): October 19, 2008
Jon Gulick (Montreal): October 19, 2008
Noe Roberts (Montreal): October 20, 2008
Elena Zanzu (Montreal): October 20, 2008
Shana Carroll (Montreal, Les Sept Doigts de la Main): October 21, 2008
Anouk Vallée – Charest (Montreal): October 21, 2008

Policy interview

M* : September 23, 2008
* Requested Confidentiality

Agent/Producer Interview

Eli Chornenki (Toronto) June 22, 2011
Appendix C: Participatory Research

Shows and Corporate Work (2006-2011)

2006
June Macedonia Busker Festival, Skopja (Aerial)
June Barrie Buskerfestival (Aerial)
July 1 Brampton Canada day (Aerial)

2007
02-Apr, Showcase for Event Planners (Stilting)
02-May, Venice themed corporate party, Hotel (Stilting)
03-May, HCTP conference in boardroom (Stilting)
14-May, Sassoon Magazine Launch, Carlu on College (Stilting)
03-Jun, Fashion show, Revival Club and Bar on College (Stilting)
21-Jun, Town of Waterloo, outdoor festival (Stilting)
23-24 Jun, Toronto Festival of clowns (Stilting)
24-Jun, Pride Parade (Stilting)
27-Jun, Corporate event, Liberty grand (Stilting)
01-Jul, Canada day festivities, Queen Park (Stilting)
04-Jul, Liberty grand (Stilting)
07-Sep, Holt Renfrew store on Bloor, gala event (Stilting)
September, Circus Festival, Distillery District (Stilting)
August 2007, St John’s Busker Festival, Newfoundland (Aerial)
20-Oct, Blackcreek Pioneer Village (Stilting)
20-Nov, Niagara Casino (Stilting)
24-Nov, London Ontario seasonal parade (Stilting)
25-Nov, Santa parade (other small town) (Stilting)
04-Dec, Forest Ethics Demonstration (Stilting)
08-Dec, On the Park Hotel, corporate holiday celebration (Stilting)
14-Dec, Mississauga Convention Centre (Stilting)
18-Dec, University of Toronto?? (Stilting)
31-Dec, Town of Brampton new years celebration (Stilting)

2008
31-Jan, King Edward Hotel (Stilting)
08-Feb, Hamilton Convention Centre, Asian Themed Fundraiser (Stilting)
16-Mar, Dance Recital (Clown)
26-Mar, Steam whistle Brewery, gala fundraiser (Stilting)
04-Apr, Photo Shoot
04-Apr, Mississauga Novotel Hotel (Stilting)
05-Apr, Burlington Convention Centre (Stilting)
09-Apr, Roy Thompson Hall, Pre Concert Celebration (Stilting)
12-Apr, Roy Thompson Hall (Stilting)
08-May, 60th Anniversary of Israel, Ricoh Coliseum (Stilting)
17-May, Toronto International Circus Festival (Aerial)
29-May, Slaw fest, Theatre in cabbage town (Aerial)
30-May, Ajax (Stilting)
01-Jun, Second City 24 hour comedy festival (Stilting)
07-Jun, Cambridge (Stilting)
14-Jun, Dance Studio (Clown)
21-Jun, Brampton parade (Stilting)
01-Jul, Canada day, Queens park (Stilting)
05-Jul, Barry waterfront festival (Aerial)
12-Jul, Wilson Bingo (Stilting)
24-25 Jul York University Tennis Canada (Stilting)
02-Aug, Wasaga (Stilting)
Aug, Wasaga (Stage managing)
09-Sep, Leons Commercial (Aerial)
Sept 12 and 13, Niagara Falls parks commission (Stilting)
18-Sep, City place (Stilting)
19-Sep, Dundas Sq (Stilting)
20-Sep, Harvest Festival (Aerial)
24-Sep, Toronto Congress Centre (Christmas party event planners) (Stilting)
27-Sep, Pirate show at Harbourfront (Aerial)
08-Nov, Debbie Birthday party our theatre (Aerial)
14-Nov, Marriott hotel, Sick kids Fundraiser (Stilting)
15-Nov, London Ontario (Stilting)
29-Nov, Full Bawdy comedy show - our theatre (Aerial)
05-Dec, Toronto Convention Centre (Stilting)
07-Dec, Riverdale share seasonal community show (Stilting)
10-Dec, Circa nightclub (Stilting)
31-Dec, Vaughn Night club, New Years Eve, (Aerial)

2009
07-Feb, Mississauga Convention Centre (Stilting)
11-Feb, Trade show, Direct Energy Centre (the Exhibition grounds) (Stilting)
20-Feb, Harthouse, UoffT (Stilting)
28-Feb, Newmarket (Stilting)
February Cuban National Circus (Clown Aerial)
30-Mar, BIA conference, Delta Chelsea Hotel (Stilting)
04-Apr, Vaun mills mall (Stilting)
17-Apr, Iqaluit Tunik Time festival (Aerial)
14-May, Environmental defense fundraiser, Fermenting Cellar, distillery (Aerial)
18-May, Circus festival Harbourfront (Aerial Clown show)
01-Jul, Ajax Canada Day Celebration (Stilting)
11-Jul, Caledon hills corporate picnic (Stilting)
25-Jul, Niagara falls (Stilting)
Aug 17-21, York university, Tennis Canada (Stilting)
22-Aug, Vaughan mills mall (Stilting)
22-Aug, Muzic nightclub (Stilting)
August 26-29, Buskerfest Toronto (Aerial Clown show)
31-Aug, Pan Am Games Bid on Toronto Island (Stilting)
01-Sep, Government nightclub (Stilting)
18-Sep, Perry sound (Aerial Clown show)
26-Oct, Greenwood park community event (Stilting)
14-Nov, London Ontario seasonal parade (Stilting)
21-Nov, Belleview manor, Vaughn (Stilting)
26-Nov, Liberty Grand (Stilting)
28-Nov, Vaughan mills mall (Stilting)

2010
30-Jan, Walk for memories fundraiser, First Canadian Place (Stilting)
31-Jan, Wintercity Festival, Nathan Philips Square (Aerial Clown show)
12-Feb, Highschool Prom, Design Exchange (Bay street) (Stilting)
13-Feb, Liberty grand (Stilting)
27-Feb, NDP event, Matty Eckler community Centre (Stilting)
17-Mar, Planeterra fundraiser (Aerial)
18-Mar, Maple Syrup festival, Kortright festival (Stilting)
08-Apr, Event planners Graduation (Aerial)
23-Apr, Niagara college seafood Gala (Aerial)
29-Apr Mississauga (Stilting)
15-May, Vaughan Mills Mall (Stilting)
May 22-24, Circus Fest Harbourfront, (Aerial Clown show)
29-May, Brampton (Stilting)
05-Jun, Milton (Stilting)
06-Jun, Niagara college culinary graduation (Stilting)
09-Jun, Jack Astor restaurant (Stilting)
12-Jun, Kitchener (Stilting)
25-Jun, Niagara falls (Stilting)
01-Jul, Mississauga (Stilting)
03-Jul Vaughan mills mall (Stilting)
July Winnipeg Folk Festival (Aerial)
17-Jul Guelph (Aerial Clown show)
24-Jul Vaughan mills mall (Stilting)
05-Aug, Young and Bloor (Stilting)
09-Aug, Rigging for movie (Rigging)
Aug 8-10, Tennis Canada (Stilting)
14-Aug, Vaughan Mills Mall (Stilting)
21-Aug, Vaughn village (Stilting)
24-Aug, Scarborough city (Stilting)
25-Sep Vaughn Mills Mall (Stilting)
01-Oct, Royal York (Stilting)
02-Oct, Mimico (Stilting)
05-Oct, Boiler room (Stilting)
22-Oct, Paula Fletcher election campaigning (Stilting)
19-Nov, Brampton (Stilting)
22-Nov, Dundas, Ontario (Aerial Clown show)
Nov-Dec, Young Street BIA Raise the Roof campaign (Stilting)
28-Nov, Bridalwood mall seasonal parade (Stilting)
02-Dec, Jack Layton constituency office party (Stilting)
04-Dec, International centre, Steelworkers Christmas Party (Aerial Clown show)
11-Dec, Riverdale Share community event (Stilting)
31-Dec, Promise party (All night new years eve party) (Aerial)

2011
19-Jan, Woodsworth College UofT Winter Festival (Stilting)
12-Feb, Vaughn mills mall (Stilting)
13-Feb, Paula Fletcher skating party (Clown)
15-Feb, Revival Bar on College (Stilting)
05-Mar, Vaughn mills mall (Stilting)
05-Mar, Greek Easter? Crystal ballroom event hall (Stilting)
18-Mar, M Club (downtown nightclub) (Stilting)
25-Mar, Dundas Square (Stilting)
26-Mar, Vaughn mills mall (Stilting)
16-Apr, Vaughn mills mall (Stilting)
15-May, Rogers 65th birthday party Rogers Centre (Juggling)
May 21-23, Circus fest Harbourfront (Stilting, Clown)
28-May, Brampton Rib and Roll festival (Stilting)
01-Jun, Dundas Sq 150 years of Italian unification festival (Stilting)
02-Jun, Dundas Sq Ontario Tourism event (Stilting)
02-Jun, Dundas Ontario Buskerfestival (Clown Aerial show)
08-Jun, Missssauga Novotel hotel (Aerial)
19-Jun, Dundas Square Milk promotion (Stilting)

Public Meetings, Festivals and Volunteer Work

Participant in Public Meeting between En Piste and Toronto based Circus Performers, Centre of Gravity, September 28 2010

Groups training session/focus group for aerial artists at Fact (Fight Arts Collective Toronto). In attendance: Brandy Leary, Holly Treddenick, Sabrina Pringle, Lara Ebata and Natalie Fullerton, and four others. Nov 19, 2010

Three years volunteering for, performing in, and attending shows at The Toronto Festival of Clowns (some but not all of these shows are documented in the list of
shows I’ve seen). An annual three-day festival dedicated to clowning in many forms (character, bouffon, red nose, and physical theatre).

Five years performing in the Toronto International Circus Festival, an annual three-day festival that has been held at the Distillery District, and Harbourfront Centre.

Six years helping to manage and perform in the Lunacy Cabaret, a monthly Vaudville/circus Cabaret held at the Centre of Gravity circus training studio in Toronto.

**Workshops and Training**

Toronto School of Circus Arts for Aerial Instruction, Sept-May 2005,

‘Bouffon’ with Adam Lazarus, June 2005


“Dancing Clown”: Weekend intensive with Grindl Kuchirka. Fall 2008

“Clown 1”: 5 day intensive with Francine Côté, January 2010

Extensive independent “Open Gym” training at the Centre of Gravity in Toronto, (2005-2011)

**Shows I Have Seen (2005-2011)**

**Full Circus Shows**

‘Banana Shpeel’ Cirque de Soleil (Toronto, September 2010)

‘Mystere’ Cirque de Soleil (Las Vegas, March 2009)

‘Zumanity’ Cirque de Soleil (Las Vegas, March 2009)

Cuban National Circus (Havana, February 2009)

‘46 Circus acts in 45 Minutes’ Australian troupe (Toronto, May 2008)

‘Kooza’ Cirque de Soleil (Toronto, August 2007)

‘The Spiegel Show’ (Toronto, July 2007)

‘Garden Brothers Circus’ (Toronto March 2007)

‘Loft’ Les 7 doigts de la main (Brampton, November 2006)

‘Cirque Niagara’ (Niagara Falls, September 2006)

‘Nomade’ Cirque Eloise (Toronto, April 2005)

‘Toronto International Circus Festival Mainstage Show’ Zero Gravity Circus (Toronto 2006-2011)
**Clown Shows**

‘Morrow and Jasp Gone Wild’ (Morrow and Jasp, Toronto March 2011)
‘Cracked’ (Mump and Smoot, Waterloo June 2010)
‘We is Blunderstruck’ (Toronto, June 2010)
‘Lupe’, and ‘Lupe’s next top Lupe’ (Melissa D’agostino, Toronto, June 2010)
‘Blind date’ (Rebecca Northan, Toronto February 2010)
‘Hooked’ (Claire Ness, Toronto June 2010)
‘Tightrope’ (Ensemble, Toronto March 2010)
‘Nearly Lear’ (Susanna Hamnett, Toronto July 2008)
‘Something’ (Mump and Smoot, Edmonton February 2008)
‘Moving Target’ (Erin Bouvy, Toronto January 2008)
‘Red Bastard’ (Eric Davis, Toronto July 2009)
‘Zdenka Now’ (Precious Chong, Toronto July 2009)
‘Booff Show’ (Russian Clowns, Toronto May 2009)
‘Chaotica (Christel Bartelse, Toronto March 2009)
‘Lionheart (Diana Kolpak, Toronto March 2009)
‘Aga boom’ (Russian Clowns, Toronto January 2009)
‘Puzzle me Red’ (Mike Kennard, Toronto June 2008)
‘The Gulch’ (directed by John Turner, Manitoulin island, July 2007)
‘This is Cancer’ (Bruce Horak, Toronto July 2007)
‘The Absence of Magic’ (Eric Davis, Toronto March 2006)
‘Fable’ (Adam Lazarus, Toronto December 2005)
‘The Hollow: a clown play’ (directed by Mike Kennard, Toronto April 2005)
And many more (maybe a dozen) I can’t remember

**Aerial shows**

‘Head First’ Femmes de Feu (Toronto, July 2009)
‘The Plank’ Femmes de Feu (Toronto, July 2010)

**Cabarets**


Pandemonium Machine, (Toronto, January 2010)

Ten showings (at least) of theatrical clown cabarets ‘Red Nose District’, ‘Clown Chowder’, and ‘Cirque de Poulet’ (Toronto, 2005-2011)

Fifty-five Lunacy Cabarets (Toronto, 2005-2011)

Eight to Ten Student Clown showcases from five different teachers (Toronto, 2005-2011)