

Introduction: Circus and Its Others¹

Karen Fricker and Hayley Malouin

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

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

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

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

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

How Did Circus Become Other? Locating Our Inquiry

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Introduction of Our Approach; Chasing the Other

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

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

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

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

Gender and Difference in Contemporary Circus

Section Editor: Karen Fricker

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

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

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

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

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

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

In “Cavalia’s *Odysseo*: A Biopolitical Myth at Work,” Ante Ursic proposes an “unworking” of modern circus. Drawing on the thought of Foucault and Nancy, Ursic explores “the spectacle of the biopolitical regime” in circus performances, concerned with stagings of discipline, docile, highly trained bodies (44). This modern circus, he writes, has served as “an apparatus of verification” in which the prevailing discourse of human exceptionalism dominates (44). In this narrative, the white, male, heterosexual body is superior to all others, which are in comparison feminized, racialized, exoticized, animalized. Ursic chooses *Odysseo*, Canadian company Cavalia’s horse-human show depicting feats of profound equestrian virtuosity, as the centrepiece for his investigation of circassian⁷ biopolitical myth. Through his analysis, Ursic finds ample evidence of this humanist narrative of (masculine) exceptionalism. He identifies the role of the horse performer as a key element, noting that horses have served as a crucial medium in both establishing a Western vision of masculinity and femininity and in producing an imperialist narrative of Western dominance. Ursic analyzes the nonhuman performer in relation to *Odysseo*’s nonwhite performers—racialized, animalized, and in positions of overt subjugation to the predominantly white horseback riders.

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

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

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

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

Reading Circus Bodies and Signs

Section Editor: Michael Eigtved

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Location, Locatedness, and Mobility

Section Editor: L. Patrick Leroux

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Is Social Circus the Other of Professional Circus?

Section Editor: David Fancy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Freak and Queer

Section Editor: Charles R. Batson

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

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

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

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

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

The Future of Others

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

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

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

Notes

1. We would like to thank two anonymous peer reviewers for their very productive comments on this introduction, and on all the articles in the issue.
2. MCC is the first North American international festival dedicated to circus arts. It was founded in 2010 by TOHU, a permanent in-the-round venue dedicated to contemporary circus, in partnership with the circus companies Cirque du Soleil, Cirque Éloize, and les 7 Doigts de la Main, and the national circus network En Piste.
3. This terminology is glossed and problematized extensively in the articles that follow, but for the present, we can understand social circus as the use of the circus arts in the context of social justice, education, and empowerment of at-risk populations; and professional circus as that performed for ticket-buying audiences by trained, paid artists.
4. Lepage is the artistic director of Ex Machina, a not-for-profit multidisciplinary company based in Quebec City.
5. The exception is "Location, Locatedness, Mobility." An unexpected last-minute problem led to the longer contribution to this section not being submitted.
6. By neoliberalism, we refer to "the revived form of liberalism which thrived first in Britain in the seventeenth century and which recognizes and prioritizes the individual's right to seek self-fulfilment and to do so in conditions unrestricted by state-instituted regulations, such as the requirements to play appropriate taxes, to heed trade restrictions or to observe employment laws pertaining to hiring, firing, and paying workers" (Harvie 2013, 12). Articles by Bessone, Kreusch, and Gandhi in this issue are particularly focused on the effects of neoliberal capitalism on circus practices and practitioners.
7. We intend *circassian* here to mean "of the circus." This usage derives from the French *circassien*, which has become a familiar term in Francophone circus studies, in both its adjectival form and as a noun to indicate a person who works in the circus. The word *circassien* appears fourteen times in the online resource "les arts du cirque"—a shared project between the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Centre national des arts du Cirque, also in France. *Circassien* started to appear with increasing frequency in North American Francophone circus studies after 2000: Marie-Christine Lesage and Dominique Lafon titled the introduction to a special issue (32, 2002) of the peer-reviewed journal *L'annuaire théâtrale*, about the relationship of circus to theatricality, "Aspects théâtraux, culturels et historiques de l'univers circassien"; and Erin Hurley uses the term in her seminal article "Les corps multiples du Cirque du Soleil," in *Globe* 11.2 (2008). The title of a 2018 article by Luke Hallgarten on the website *The Circus Diaries* proclaims "Long Live the Circassian" and defines the term as "Noun: circassian; plural noun: circassians. 1. A person whose primary activity or profession is circus"—an indication that the term is migrating into English usage. It is also important to note that the word *Circassian* refers, in its *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, to "a group of mainly Sunni Muslim peoples of north-western Caucasus," and that people from Circassia are implicated in the now-discredited practice, from the heyday of modern circus, of the display of human bodies deemed "other" by the white mainstream. As Robert Bogdan argues in "Race, Showmen, Disability, and the Freak Show," "Circassian Beauties"—

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

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

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

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