The “Problem” of Character in Contemporary Circus in Québec

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the nature of character in Québec (Canada) contemporary circus focusing on two case studies: *Patinoire* (Patrick Léonard, *7 doigts de la main*) and *The Whore of Babylon* (Andréane Leclerc, *Nadère arts vivants*). Given that circus studies is a relatively new and interdisciplinary research field, I rely on the theory from other art forms. Circus theory provides circus performance analysis models that I use to study circus shows and companies from Québec (Hurley, 2016, Batson, 2016). Theatre provides a rich theoretical framework for understanding and representing character ranging from Aristotle to Lehmann. Louis Patrick Leroux's "Conceptual Model for Circus Dramaturgy" is useful for studying how the performer's persona and body influence circus character (Leroux, 2016). My research also draws on interviews with Patrick Léonard and Québec contortionist Andréane Leclerc on the intentionality and execution of their shows, and the relationship between their performance experience and spectators' reception.

After analyzing the performances, their dramaturgy, aesthetics, and artistic intentionality, and informed by the interviews, I argue that the contemporary circus character becomes manifest through its striving to unite the represented character, the performer's body and the performer's persona. Though only two shows were analyzed, these two were distinctive case studies of current trends in contemporary circus in Québec beyond the well-known Cirque du Soleil's own aesthetics and narrative.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introducing the "problem"

Though contemporary circus and, increasingly, its dramaturgy have been thoroughly studied in past years, publications in Anglophone counrtries have barely touched on the notion of character.

The term "character" has many different meanings ranging from dramatic character to one's nature (or 'personality'). In this study, "character" will describe an identity represented on stage through physical actions, spoken words (when present), music, costume, and make-up.

Character in contemporary circus has been affected by conventions influenced by traditional circus, dramatic theatre, physical theatre, and dance. This study will examine the traits of a different emerging relationship between performer and character that is specific to contemporary circus as an art form.

The creative process in contemporary circus seldom begins with a written plot and characters, as is customary in dramatic theatre, where the text is (traditionally) pre-established. The relationship between character and performer emerges differently than in dramatic theatre. In *Introduction to Contemporary Circus* (2012), Toni Purovaara distinguishes the creative process of circus from that of theatre. Managed by a director, a theatrical production often starts with a written text, while in circus, artists usually develop acts alone or with colleagues, without written scripts or plays (Purovaara et al, 116). This process gives circus artists a different relationship with their characters—one not so much written as developed through stage persona and influenced by technical abilities and personality. The skill-based nature of circus changes the performer-

character relationship. Character formation emerges from the performer's skills and technical feats, which endow the character with a particular way of moving.

To understand circus character, this thesis explores three constituent parts—the character, the performer's body, and his/her persona. In this study, represented character describes an identity created for and performed on stage, represented through physical actions, spoken words (when present), music, costume, and make-up. The performer's body refers to that of the artist executing the scenic action. The performer's persona decribes the performer's personal identity, including biography and personal characteristics. Given that character constists of all three components, these are in constant negotiation during the performance, being more visible in some moments than in others. Moreover, these constituent parts are inseparable from and dependent on each other, since they all influence circus character in performance. Even when one aspect is more apparent than the other two, it still depends on them for identitication and definition. There is also an inherent relationship between the performer's body and the performer's persona, which are inseparable and mutually influenced.

1.2 Methodology

By approaching character from this perspective, I will explore how it communicates its complex nature in circus shows and hope to find in this process the nature of circus character in two Québec shows—*Patinoire* (2011) and *The Whore of Babylon* (2015). These shows have different goals, scopes, and ideologies, and are two very distinct productions of the diverse circus scene in Québec. Since my methodological framework is based on the three constituent parts of "character", specific questions will cover the relationship between the performer's persona, the performer's body, and represented character. I will also examine how the interconnection between these three aspects influences circus character. For clarity purposes, I will divide my

anlysis to study the interaction of only two constituent parts at a time, while respecting the interdependency and inseparability of all three parts and their fluid relationship as they intersect and change in time.

Overall, this study explores the relationship between the represented character, the performer's body and the performer's persona via two shows. It also questions, through the same shows, whether the relationship between these three aspects influences the intended meaning, and in which moments this relationship is visible and how it is manifested.

Each of these questions will be examined in separate chapters, exploring the relationship between the represented character, the performer's persona, and the performer's body, and consequently, the nature of the character in circus. In order to do so, I ask these questions about the examined shows:

1. What is a character? How does circus character relate to other performing arts traditions? Are characters consistent, and if so, how does that influence the narrative? How is character formed and how does the performer communicate its nature through movement?

2. What is the relationship between the represented character and the performer's persona? How does it change when the performer's persona is part of a group?

3. What is the relationship between the performer's body and technical ability, and the represented character? How do objects and/or obstacles, notably apparatuses, change this relationship? How does the relationship change if the performer's body is objectified by the spectator's gaze?

Three different methods were used to gather data to study character in the two case studies: a performance and dramaturgical analysis of the selected shows (through analysis of the videos of performances and as a spectator of live performances whenever possible), interviews with the creators of the selected shows and with the performers, and an analysis of show reviews.

Since this thesis is focused on the dramaturgy of two shows and the dramaturgical analysis of their characteristics, it is necessary to address the notions of dramaturgy in general and circus dramaturgy more specifically, and present the ways in which these notions will be understood and used further in the text. Circus dramaturgy is a relatively new field of studies, which draws its methodology from theatre dramaturgy, semiotics, and performance studies, among others. Dramaturgy is understood differently in each theatrical tradition. Sometimes it is closer to scenic writing, at others associated with creative process or a critical response to the evolving work. In "Enter Dramaturges", the introduction to *What is Dramaturgy*? (2000), Bert Cardullo situates the birth of modern dramaturgy: "The modern sense of dramaturgy comes from the time of the German Enlightenment, after about 1764, particularly from the writing and work of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing" (6). With time, however, Lessing's definition became less applicable to the role of dramaturgy and the meaning of the term.

The current state of the performing arts is also complex. The blurred lines between different practices and multidisciplinary performances complicates the definition of dramaturgy in theatre and in other disciplines, especially those only starting to introduce dramaturgy into their practice. Hans-Thies Lehman and Patrick Primavesi explore the challenges of modern dramaturgy in "Dramaturgy on Shifting Grounds", drawing on the topics of European Dramaturgy in the Twenty-first Century international conference (Frankfurt am Main, September 2007). They begin by describing the current state of the performing arts and dramaturgy's place in it. Since

"distinctions between theatre and performance are increasingly blurred," (196) the dramaturg's task is no longer no longer as focused on dramatic text as traditional theatre dramaturgy used to be (Lehmann and Primavesi). The authors explain new dramaturgical trends:

> In postdramatic theatre, performance art, and dance, the traditional hierarchy of theatrical elements has almost vanished: as text is no longer the central and superior factor, all the other elements like space, light, sound, music, movement, and gesture tend to have an equal weight in the performance process. (Lehmann and Primavesi, 169)

Lehmann and Primavesi describe the moment when contemporary circus and the exploration of its dramaturgy started developing. They note the importance of "dramaturgies of the body" in dance, performance art and physical theatre, disciplines where "the factions of the body are no longer subordinated to pre-existing structures and systems, stories or narratives" (Lehmann and Primavesi, 170). In that context Lehmann & Primavesi conclude that the dramaturgy of dance and performance art may "work on structures of physical and spatial relations, among the performers and between different notions of choreography, dance, and movement that are no longer bound to the systems of linguistics signs" (171).

Here, the authors introduce important possibilities of the "dramaturgies of body" (171) that could help clarify circus dramaturgy, and its features, which I will examine by studying the dramaturgical tools used in creating the characters in *The Whore of Babylon*.

In "On Dramaturgy in Contemporary Dance and Choreography" (2015), Sandra Noeth proposes an understanding of dramaturgy that resembles how I consider "circus dramaturgy":

> Much more, dramaturgy designates a space of negotiation that works on understanding how different, multi-layered materials and elements are attached to one another – how

> they act, react, and interact, within and outside of the process. It means more than binding together separate elements or achieving consensus. (415)

This definition considers different layers and elements in the shows, which influences the represented character(s) I will explore. Noeth highlights the importance of "precision of intentions and intuitions," which I will consider in detail in my analysis of character. (415) Moreover, I understand the shows as multi-layered pieces in which the layers interact with each other and the audience in different ways, while also influencing character perception.

Noeth's definition helps me explain the term "dramaturgical analysis", which I distinguish from Erving Goffman's notion, connected to performance studies. Goffman (1959) argues that one's life is a series of performances of different social roles that can be analyzed dramaturgically. Here, "dramaturgical analysis" describes the method for analyzing show characteristics in the manner suggested by Noeth, but from the spectator's point of view, rather than that of the dramaturge involved with the production.

Finally, I will use the term 'tools for "dramaturgical analysis"' to refer to careful dramaturgical analysis of the performances.

The theory of the constituent parts of circus character that provides the methodological tool to explore the dramaturgical traits and potentials of the circus character, was developed by Louis Patrick Leroux. The "Conceptual Model for Circus Dramaturgy" was officially presented in July 2016 and discussed during the Study day on circus dramaturgy organized by the Working Group on Circus Research at the National Circus School in Montréal, in February 2017.

I conducted interviews with the creator, director and performer of *Patinoire*, Patrick Léonard, and the creator and director (and eventual replacement performer) of *The Whore of Babylon*,

Andréane Leclerc. I also interviewed one of the performers of *The Whore of Babylon*, Dana Dugan. The questions differed for each show and artist. Questions focused on the initial intention, the creative process' development and evolution, how choices were made and why, and the themes they intended to propose to the audience. I inquired about the anticipated audience reception and its influence on the performance itself. After each interview, I compiled detailed reports focusing on the main themes, and compared them to the data from the dramaturgical analyses and reviews.

1.3 Personal background as a possible bias

It is necessary to state my personal background as my dramaturgical analysis will be affected by the relatively subjective nature of a method guided by the observer's perception.

My choice of subject was guided by my academic background and artistic experience. My Bachelor studies were focused on playwriting and screenplay writing. I also have a Bachelor's degree in Dramaturgy, from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade. Thus, I have gained knowledge about the ways in which the character is created and analyzed in these art forms. During the process of learning about the character in film and theatre, I discovered my interest in contemporary circus as an art form, and particularly, in the possibilities and nature of the circus character. My Bachelor studies have influenced the way in which I observe character in the performing arts, and the tools I apply to its analysis.

Moreover, my background influenced the choice of theoretical approaches which are presented in this thesis. Most sources I use for my thesis come from the theory of the theatre. Since circus theory is a relatively new field, the number of sources available in English is limited. In response to the limitations of the language and the number of sources, I chose to use theatre theory since it

is the most familiar to me but also, it has considered the character in the performing arts for the longest period of time. Furthermore, the character in contemporary circus is partally a consequence of the influence of theatre on circus; thus, grounding the analysis in the theory of theatre enabled me to question how the difference in the art forms influences the nature of character.

Regarding all of the previous facts, my approach to character might be influenced by my playwriting education. It is necessary to state outright that I do not think there has to be a parallel between the circus character and the theatre character, as I make a clear distinction between the theatre (both dramatic and postdramatic) and the circus (traditional, Nouveau, and contemporary).

2 Situating the Case Studies

2.1 Situating the case studies

In this chapter I use *Patinoire* and *The Whore of Babylon* as two case studies in an attempt to answer the research questions of this thesis. This chapter is mainly concerned with the reasons to focus on contemporary circus in Québec, the choice of *Patinoire* and *The Whore of Babylon* as case studies, and these shows' dramaturgical and aesthetic qualities.

First, I situate the shows in the context of each director's artistic career. Next, I describe the aesthetic of each show, with a short summary of its action and story (when present). My discussion of the story and action focuses only on crucial moments, dramaturgically (for the development of action or character) or physically (moments of intense physical presence and skill presentation). This choice is an attempt to make the discussion more concise and easier to follow. The presentation of the shows includes their aesthetic qualities, as they are crucial for full understanding of the performances.

It is important to begin by explaining the choice of these two shows as case studies and the nature of the circus scene they are part of. In his "Introduction" to *Cirque Global* (2016), Louis Patrick Leroux describes the thirty-year history of contemporary circus. Moreover, he describes the nature of Québec circus and its place in society:

> Québec circus offers a fascinating paradox. It is both athletic and aesthetic. It draws on European circus tradition and commedia dell'arte tropes, yet only fully came into its own when it sought to break away from explicit circus codes, drawing on the vocabulary of theatre and dance. It stems from a society much concerned about its distinct culture and

> linguistic survival. A mainly francophone, lapsed Catholic, and mostly left-leaning nation of 8 million surrounded by a mostly English-speaking and neoliberal North American population of 340 million in a globalized society in which English functions as the lingua franca. (Leroux, "Introduction" 8)

The characteristics Leroux presents are important for understanding the cultural context in which *Patinoire* and *The Whore of Babylon* were created. These shows were produced in Québec and are products of its circus scene, which tends to be more commercially driven than experimental. *Patinoire* is an example of a show produced by a major circus company for commercial success and designed to communicate easily with audiences around the world. *The Whore of Babylon* represents the more experimental side of Québec circus, one using highly disciplined and proficient circus artists to question the possibilities of circus. Though both shows are influenced by their cultural context, this is especially true for *The Whore of Babylon*. Leclerc uses and questions Catholicism, which has a strong historical influence in Québec. Furthermore, Leclerc also brings in burlesque and contemporary dance techniques and codes, which add complexity to our reading of her work. In the "Epilogue" to *Cirque Global,* Leroux underlines that contemporary circus in Québec is "anything but formulaic and homogenous" (290). To best represent these tendencies towards aesthetic diversity, I chose *The Whore of Babylon* and *Patinoire* as case studies.

Given my focus on contemporary circus in Québec and the importance of its biggest circus company, Cirque du Soleil, it is necessary to address why I will not use a Cirque du Soleil show here. These reasons are complex and stem from the nature of the company and the research that has already covered its aesthetics and ways of operating. (Hurley (2016), Hurley & Harvie (1999), Fricker (2016), Lesile & Rantisi (2016)).

In “States of Play,” Harvie and Hurley define “imagi-nation”, an important notion for further understanding Cirque, and present the company’s characteristics. (309). Their article explores the relationship between Cirque and the Québec government and nation. The authors underline that “the Cirque is at its base a multinational corporation; it creates its touring products in Québec, finances them through its own profits, and manages their distribution through a series of business offices located across the globe.” (Harvie & Hurley, 311) They also describe the aesthetics of Cirque’s brand– “a brightly-colored, fantastical world characterized by the harmonious play of an international cast of circus performers” (Harvie & Hurley, 312). The impact of these aspects motivates the exclusion of Cirque’s shows in this analysis. Hurley and Harvie write:

> Equally revealing of the Cirque’s assimilating drive is its effacement of performers’ ideological, cultural and national placements. Although the troupes are composed of international artists with their own specialties, the shocks of these cultural differences—in expression, skills, technique, language, physique, and so on—are all but effaced in production. For example, in breach of standard circus procedure, neither acts nor performers are introduced. (313)

Given Cirque du Soleil’s disinterest in fulsome character development, I decided to look to another major circus company in Québec, the 7 Fingers.” My exploration of character is based on the proposition that there are three constituent parts to character: the performer’s body, the performer’s persona, and the represented character. Studying the performer’s persona through Cirque’s shows would have been complex given their aesthetic choice of effacing the performers’ identity to create a “fantastical world” and make each performer replicable. Moreover, any possible results of such an analysis would have been affected by Cirque’s choice to reduce the visibility of the performer’s persona to an absolute minimum.

In “Multiple Bodies of Cirque du Soleil” (2016), Erin Hurley has already convincingly explained the notion of character in Cirque’s shows, defining it as “character body”, drawing on David Graver’s study of the actor’s body in performance. Hurley writes: “All of the company’s performers portray a character – from the musicians to the house crew to the specialists (124).” Further she explains how the “character body” is supported by the productions’ theatrical elements: “Unidentified in performance and uniformly dressed, the corps move and react in synchrony” (Hurley, “Multiple Bodies of Cirque du Soleil” 125). I decided to exclude Cirque du Soleil shows for two reasons—the aesthetic choice of minimizing the importance of the performer’s persona in the show, and the existence of literature exploring character representation in Cirque’s shows. Since not much academic research exists on Québec circus outside of Cirque, it is useful to broaden the current literature by exploring other companies.

This thesis focuses on contemporary circus in Québec for several reasons: its importance in the global contemporary circus scene, the dynamic of current research on Québec circus, and, finally, the chance to experience and explore it intimately in Montréal.

Since contemporary circus in Québec is booming, there are numerous shows that I could have included in the thesis. One of these shows is Cirque Alfonse’s *Timber!,* which explores the lumberjack culture in Québec. I believe that this show could have provided some additional nuances to the understanding of the character in contemporary circus in Québec. Further, a number of shows developed by Québec companies like 7 Finger’s *Triptyque* and *Reversible* could have benefited this analysis. Additionally, shows like Leclerc’s *Mange-moi* and *Cherepaka* would have added new layers. However, given the focused nature of my dramaturgical analysis of character, I felt it essential to preferentially explore *Patinoire* and *The Whore of Babylone.*

2.2 *Patinoire*

2.2.1 Context.

Patinoire is a solo show by one of the founders of the Montréal company 7 Fingers, Patrick Léonard. Given the company's long aesthetic tradition, I will firstly present the company's context and then describe the show and its dramaturgy.

In "Les 7 doigts de la main and Their Cirque", Charles Batson writes about the company and the way in which they build characters. Batson argues that the "human scale" is the main force behind 7 Fingers' aesthetics and dramaturgy: "It is this human scale, if we follow the rhetorical gesture that stands as their flavour, their new texture, their new posture, one that is necessarily different from the offerings of the dominant Cirque" (100). This "human scale" is the context in which *Patinoire* was developed.

In our interview, Patrick Léonard says he begins his performance before the show, by interacting with the audience in the venue as the character. (Personal interview, March 23, 2017) He recalls that this practice was present in the company's first show, *Loft*, but he adapted it for *Patinoire*. Interestingly, Batson also focuses on this element of *Loft*, the 7 Fingers' inaugural show:

> A key element of the production that encourages this kind of identification occurs prior to the show's beginning, when some audience members enter the hall through a stage door designed to look like the door to the loft's kitchen refrigerator. As these audience members enter, the artists introduce themselves and each other as they guide their public to their seats, a gesture that solidifies the recognition of the human scale of their creation. Welcome to our loft, they seem to say; make yourselves at home. (104)

Patinoire too presents a welcoming atmosphere created by the use of everyday objects like tables, chairs, speakers, and old records that seem to be an invitation to both the character's and the performer's worlds. The whole action, supported by the show's theme, creates a feeling of intimacy.

Furthermore, Léonard takes audience interaction a step further, using it in a different way to create his character. While in *Loft* interaction was a way of introducing performers as "normal" people, in *Patinoire* he uses it to play with the audience's expectations and ideas of what a performer and his/her character in circus should look like (P. Léonard, personal interview). Léonard explains that he has always played with the audience's expectations, lowering them and showing his vulnerability to the audience (Personal interview). In *Patinoire*, he appears in the venue already in costume and gets into nonverbal or verbal contact with audience, making his character mysterious before the show (P. Léonard, personal interview). For Léonard, this game lasts even once the show starts. He comes on stage to tell spectators to turn off their phones and then brings in various objects, leaving the audience wondering if the show has started or not. (Personal interview)

Batson describes another important characteristic of the 7 Fingers aesthetic. The troupe strives to present the performers to the audience as real people during the show because it "enhances our response to the art these Sebastiens and Isabelles create" (Batson105). Even though the character in *Patinoire* does not strive to present the artist's personality as authentic, he works on gaining the audience's trust and care by showing his human side, confused and clumsy. He explains himself to the audience verbally, communicates his feelings through facial expressions, and embraces the possibility and fear of failure in his actions.

2.2.2 Description of the show.

Patinoire's subtitle is: "How far are we willing to go in order to love and be loved?" This question frames the show's theme and explains the character's motivation to perform in a certain way. His character is awkward, and uses unusual acts that draw from clowning and underplayed daredevil acts.

The character is revealed from the moment the audience enters the venue, as the performer waits with them, catches their gaze, and confuses them with his presence (P. Léonard, personal interview). Then the performer enters the stage, wearing black pants and a yellow sweater. While the costume recalls no specific era, when combined with the scenography that includes vinyl records and a gramophone, a retro atmosphere emerges. In his first address to the audience, the performer asks them to turn off their cellphones, but adds something unusual—a thank you note in which he explains that the show that evening is really important for him. Then he starts bringing in objects for the show: a table, chairs, speakers, and other objects that will gain importance later.

It becomes clear that the show has started the moment when the ukulele thrown from above hits the performer in the head. Appearing from nowhere, the instrument introduces another important element of the story and underlines the aesthetic characteristic of the show; it is an absurd world that produces actions independent from the performer's will or generally accepted laws of nature, creating obstacles and opportunities for the performer and the character, and rewarding him for his boldness and actions.

The performer continues to set up the scene and props on stage in a sequence of actions that includes several small gags, like putting the speakers on an inappropriately positioned table that

falls on one side, or fighting the cables attached to the speakers. The performer tries to play the records and then constructs a pyramid with the chair and speakers on the table and climbs on top of it. This number is one of the most skillful ones in the show and is important for understanding the character's performance and his determined attitude. With regards to story development, the moment he climbs the speakers, he proves he is ready to do anything, and that his wish to be loved can bring him into bad situations. Moreover, at the end of the climb, the absurd force offstage rewards him for the effort, awarding him the first (and smallest) of his trophies.

Soon after the appearance of the first trophy, another crucial element for understanding time flow in the story and the change in character enters– the blue jacket. In our interview, Léonard explained that the jacket is something his character thinks is necessary in order to be a "real performer" (P. Léonard, personal interview). Thus, the represented character sees the jacket as crucial for presenting himself as the performer. If at first the jacket fits him, later in the show it will get gradually smaller, unlike the trophy, which will gradually grow larger. Moreover, this jacket, in the same way as the trophy, is a sign that comes from the absurd force that exists in the offstage space and that interacts with the performer. This absurd force influences the performer's actions and the space that the performer uses. The trophy is seen as an award and abetment for the performer's actions and the jacket is there to show the character that he does not need the "performative" appearance or the costume to be the "star" or character of the show (P. Léonard, personal interview).

In the next act, the performer puts on a jacket, finds a coin in it and throws it in the air several times ("fails" the first two times) while delivering a long monologue on the nature of circus. Every time he successfully catches the coin, he celebrates. After the last catch, he leaves the stage and returns with the diabolo. The performer tries to present an act with it, which is constantly

interrupted by disruptions in the music. Sent up in the air, the diabolo disappears offstage and the act ends. Its disappearance leads to the second monologue, while carrying around the speakers. The action includes bringing an audience member on stage, “handing over the show” to that person, and leaving the stage for a brief period of time. After his return he takes the show back from the audience member through/with the action of taking the speakers from the spectator’s arms.

The performer decides to impress the audience by constructing another pyramid to balance upon. He puts four bottles on the table and adds a chair on top of them. His construction finished, he climbs it, performs a short hand-balancing act and contorts himself around the chair. After each demanding task the performer receives a bigger trophy and his jacket shrinks.

Finally, the performer receives a last challenge from the absurd offstage force. When the show is apparently over, a large high platform appears onstage pushed in from the offstage space. All lights except one that illuminates the performer are turned off, and confetti fall on his head. This being his final task, he gives his best when climbing. He fails several times, until he finds another way to climb, from the side. The show ends with his celebration on top of the platform.

Though there is no explicit story, the structure of the acts, along with the character’s motivation to impress the offstage entity and hazard that arranges the scenography and props so they are in place for the next act create a unified narrative. The only visible signs of progression in the story are the trophy and the jacket that change size. Dramaturgically, these two elements enable us to follow the evolution of the represented character, despite there being no observable change in the character himself. In other words, these elements show how the offstage presence changes its

relationship with the character, thereby allowing the audience to perceive an evolution in the character.

Patinoire is a show in which the relationship between the performer and his created character is deep and personal. Its simple dramaturgy and structure allow an analytical focus on the character, while the show's (apparent) relationship with established theatre and circus traditions permits the exploration of possible influences on character.

2.3 *The Whore of Babylon*:

2.3.1 Context.

Because the show develops constantly, it is necessary to mention that this study is based upon the video recording of *The Whore of Babylon* presented at Théâtre La Chapelle, in September 2015. I saw this version of the show as a live performance, as well as a newer version presented as part of the OFF-CINARS program, in November 2016. The Théâtre La Chapelle version was chosen in conversation with the director, Andréane Leclerc, as the most suitable one to investigate character.

Despite its complex nature and the multiple levels of meaning, I chose *The Whore of Babylon* for several reasons. Leclerc developed a story and characters before creating the choreography, which enables me to explore how the relationship between the performer's persona and the represented character is built when the character is defined before the creation of the movement. Also, the structure of the story has dramatic tension in certain moments, and so *The Whore of Babylon* lends itself to an exploration of the nature of the circus character in those moments.

To understand *The Whore of Babylon* and my discussion of it here, it is crucial to view it alongside Leclerc's two previous shows—*Cherepaka* and *Mange-moi*. I had a chance to see

Mange-moi in fall 2015, at Théâtre La Chapelle. My access to *Cherepaka* was only through a video recording, reviews, and my interview with Leclerc. It is important to note that *Cherepaka* was produced as part of Leclerc's Master's thesis on contortion, "*Entre contorsion et écriture scénique: la prouesse comme technique évocatrice de sens*" ("*Between Contortion and Scenic Writing: Prowess as a Sense-making Technique*"). Leclerc studied contortion at the National Circus School and performed as a contortionist before writing her thesis.

In the interview, Leclerc describes the idea which is at the basis of *Cherepaka*, explaining that she wanted to explore how "the moment of presence" that is "the essence of a *prouesse*", usually found in circus tricks, can be used to "support a coherent idea throughout the whole piece (Personal interview, March 14, 2017)." Leclerc adds that for her, contortion has become a quest to make her body speak (Personal interview). This desire to communicate through bodily movements and to build a show from the presence of the body by deconstruction of the trick and the skill is visible in *The Whore of Babylon*, both in the ways in which the story, movements and music intertwine, and in the nature of the movement material.

In *Mange-moi*, Leclerc continues to explore contortion by questioning the audience's gaze on the naked female contortionist body. The show is described on the company's website, *Nadère Arts Vivants*, in these words:

> *Eat me* (*Mange-moi*) is a female contortionist's contemplation on the art of contortion, which is often performed by young girls, and on the sexual image that could be projected into the audience's eyes. *Eat me* strips this body naked, making the artist and the spectator fully aware of its vulnerability, sexuality, and womanhood. Displaying a process of

> empowerment through the objectification of the body, *Eat me* seeks to create a protective distance between body and soul by questioning nudity, both mental and physical.

The elements Leclerc uses in *Cherepaka* to explore the "speaking body" and those she uses to study the audience's gaze on the contortionist body in *Mange-moi* are also present in *The Whore of Babylon.* Leclerc applies her understanding of the "speaking body" and its ability to execute "scenic writing" to aerialist performers. In the interview, she notes that the performers were "very true to everything about circus", exploring the essence of circus disciplines in order to create movement material (Personal interview). The same quest for an "essence of circus" also fueled Leclerc's earlier solo work, *Cherepaka*, which grew out of her Master's thesis.

Though the intention is not explicit, we can observe the audience's gaze scrutinizing the performers' bodies in *The Whore of Babylon*. The costumes reveal a lot of skin, including the labia of most of the performers, while one of them appears naked in several scenes. In certain ways, the action resembles that of *Mange-moi* - the gaze of one performer and character defines other performers and their morality. The resemblance is visible in the gaze of the character, *Jesus*, which defines her relationship with *The Chorus*, showing her dominance over them. Interestingly, *Jesus* is performed by the same actress that performs the observer whose gaze on the other performer's body problematizes the objectification of the body in *Mange-moi*, Marie-Ève Bélanger.

In the "Epilogue" to *Cirque Global*, Leroux introduces Andréane Leclerc as a Québec director who pushes the limits of circus and he suggests important information for understanding her work:

> Andréane Leclerc is a contortionist with a vast experience of putting her distended body on display in the contexts of circus, burlesque, alternative music (she worked alongside the Tiger Lilies, and developed *Whore of Babylon*, currently touring internationally), and feminist performance (she toured with Annie Sprinkle). Her experiences creating full-length solo contortion pieces (most notably *Cherepaka*) welcome the audience's gaze in order to challenge it and sit interestingly alongside the most provocative pieces of contemporary dance and performance art. ("Epilogue" 288)

Leroux summarizes the possible influences and (un)intended themes in *The Whore of Babylon*, such as burlesque and feminist performance as ways to question the spectator's gaze on the (contortionist's) body, alternative music, and the possibilities circus offers as an art form. *The Whore of Babylon* will be analyzed in the context of these themes, since they are all identifiable in the show's aesthetics. The show was a project in collaboration with Martin Jacques, front man of *The Tiger Lilies*, an alternative British musical trio, with whom Leclerc had been touring and performing prior to the production of the show. Since Leclerc and Jacques decided to produce a show together, the aesthetics are partly influenced by the musical style of the band. The score was produced for the show, and meant to blend with the physical movements. (Personal interview). The music adds an atmosphere and advances the story via its lyrics, giving cues and explanations on the performed action. Also, codes of burlesque and feminist performance are present in the aesthetics, notably in the props and the way performers relate to each other and to the audience.

2.3.2 Description of the show:

The Whore of Babylon is difficult to describe because the simple description of the story, scenography, and costumes cannot capture the entire significance of the action and scenography.

The show has many mythological levels, some of which are intentionally left unclear. Therefore, I will explain the aesthetics of the piece, its noteworthy scenes, and the principal story. I will also explore how the biblical story behind *The Whore of Babylon*, the seven-headed beast, unites all the characters of the show into one.

The Whore of Babylon is loosely based on the biblical story of the same name (Douay-Rheims Version, 1609). Psalm 17: v. 3-5 (*Apocalypse* of St. John the Apostle) describes the Whore of Babylon as follows:

> And I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was clothed round about with purple and scarlet, and gilt with gold, and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand, full of the abomination and filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: A mystery; Babylon the great, the mother of the fornications, and the abominations of the earth.

In *Revelations* 17: v. 9-13, one reads the following apocalyptic musings on the beast of Babylon (*Apocalypse of St. John the Apostle*):

> And here is the understanding that hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, upon which the woman sitteth, and they are seven kings: Five are fallen, one is, and the other is not yet come: and when he is come, he must remain a short time. And the beast which was, and is not: the same also is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into destruction. And the ten horns which thou sawest, are ten kings, who have not yet received a kingdom, but shall receive power as kings one hour after the beast. These have one design: and their strength and power they shall deliver to the beast.

The biblical description of the Whore influenced Leclerc's aesthetic choices, such as the colors of the scenography and costumes, and the number of stage performers. (A, Leclerc, personal interview). However, the show's narrative is only inspired by the Biblical story: "So we started with the text but after that we went further. We made it ours" (Personal interview).

The story follows the sixth king's ruling period, *Jesus* in *Hell*, which Leclerc defines as "God's paradise" (Personal interview). In *Hell*, *Jesus* revives the five dead kings that have preceded her so she can use them for her sexual games and pleasure. Together, these five kings create a collective character, *The body of the Whore* or *The Chorus*, whose life cycle the story follows from inception to death. The life cycle of *The Chorus* and *Jesus* is organized in a sequence of acts—*birth*, *childhood*, *teenage years*, *the adulthood* and *the death* of *The Chorus* (Personal interview). The relationship between *Jesus* and *The Chorus* is defined though *Jesus'* gaze on *The Chorus*. A third character, the *King who is yet to come* (from here on, *Future King*), becomes visible to other characters only later in the show. *Future King* observes the action and waits for *Jesus' Kingdom* to end so she can start her own *Kingdom*. An important prop, a crucial element for *Future King*, and a favorite toy of *Jesus* is the rope-wrapped rocking horse hiding boiled and live eggs inside. *Jesus* plays with the rocking horse from the beginning and keeps it around. *Future King* wants this horse for she needs its eggs to wash herself and start her kingdom (A. Leclerc, Personal correspondence, March 25, 2017).

The story is told in seven tableaux, each described in the lyrics. In a prelude, the dead kings (*The Chorus*) lie on stage and *Future King* lies naked on the glass upstage. In the first scene, a bored *Jesus* craving new sensations is introduced. *Jesus* brings the dead kings back to life in order to use them to satisfy her perverse desires. The second scene represents the birth of *The Chorus* and the period preceding it. In this scene, *The Chorus* follows *Jesus* around, being given drops of

milk, and *Future King* lays eggs on the proscenium and dons scarlet drapes. *Jesus* then gives birth to *The Chorus* and *the Whores* of *The Chorus* go into their small rooms of scarlet drapes. Here the next scene (*the childhood*) starts. *Jesus* goes from one to another *Whore* of *The Chorus* and "tattoos" them. After this, *The Chorus* hangs the drapes that will become the scenography and one by one *the Whores* take the whips. In the fourth act, *The Chorus* and *Future King* whip the eggs that *Jesus* gives them. This is the scene in which *Future King* becomes visible to others. Before *Jesus* turns to the audience, there is a short period in which it seems like *The Chorus* attacks her with whips. In the next scene, *Jesus* invites *Future King* to eat with her on the "furniture" constructed by *The Chorus*' bodies. They "eat" by spitting eggs on each other. This escalates into an "orgy" that ends when *Future King* "crucifies" *Jesus* by strewing ashes over her in the form of cross. In the sixth scene, the attention shifts to *Future King* who performs the "walk on water" on the glass. Finally, in the last act, the intercourse begins between *Jesus* and *The Chorus*, where *Jesus* kills *The Chorus* and dies from pleasure. Then, *Future King* takes over the world.

The stage set-up is crucial for understanding the show. In the interview, Leclerc listed her influences for the scenography's aesthetics: Hieronymus Bosch, Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, and Caravaggio (Personal interview). These sources influenced her choice of colors as much as the biblical description of the *Whores* as covered in gold jewerlry, scarlet garments, and drinking blood (A. Leclerc, personal interview). The mixture of scarlet, gold, and naked skin creates a strong effect on the spectator and defines the aesthetic of the whole show.

The stage has three horizontal sections—the proscenium, the middle stage, and the far end. These sections are reserved for different characters. *The Chorus* stays in the middle stage, while *Jesus* and *Future King* move across the proscenium and middle stage freely. Only *Future King* has

access to the far end of the stage, which is covered in broken glass. *Future King* often prepares the glass to walk on or play with. No other character goes there.

The edge of the stage is delimited by candles that are lit at the beginning and blown out at the end. The drapes are multifunctional and heightens the stage'svertical dimension. They are first on the floor, then hung by *The Chorus*, and eventually pulled down by *Jesus*. Though the stage is relatively big, the use of light and darkness gives the impression of narrowness and closeness, a feeling further underlined by the performers' presence on stage for the entire show.

Jesus wears a scarlet body suit that covers her from the chest to her thighs. *The Whores* in *The Chorus* wear scarlet shorts with a hole between the legs, and *Future King* wears the same type of shorts in gold (when she is not naked). Since costumes reveal more than they hide, skin and flesh become an important part of the costume, influencing thus the aesthetic of the show.

Prerecorded music (instrumental and songs with lyrics) contributes to the narrative while also creating the "presence of God" through its omnipresence (A. Leclerc, personal interview). The music is key for understanding the action and characters.

3 Theoretical grounding

3.1 Introduction:

The literature review focuses on three main questions: a) What is contemporary circus; b) What is the nature of representation in contemporary circus? c) What has been written about the character and the body in contemporary circus? I gather my data exclusively from literature in English, due to language limitations and time restrictions. Moreover, the focus on English scholarship has allowed me to approach circus from the perspective of performance studies, given its strong theoretical base and wide-range of possible applications, including for contemporary circus. In the Literature review I will present some of the articles and notions used later in the analysis.

English scholarship on the development of the character in contemporary circus is limited. Consequently, this literature review will focus on examples stemming from theatre, performance, and philosophy (hermeneutics of the self). The notions of character and dramaturgy appear in several books and articles about contemporary circus, including "Les 7 doigts de la main and Their Cirque: Origins, Resistances, Intimacies" (Batson) and "The Multiple Bodies of Cirque du Soleil" (Hurley) from *Cirque Global* (Leroux and Batson, eds.2016); *An Introduction to Contemporary Circus* (2012); as well as "An Epic of New Circus" (Maleval) and "Ecstasy and Visceral flesh in Motion" (Tait) from *The Routledge Circus Studies Reader* (Tait and Lavers, eds. 2016). Also, two Master's theses written from a European perspective will be included: *Taking Back the Technical: Contemporary Circus Dramaturgy Beyond the Logic of Mimesis* (Kann, 2016) and *A Desire for Presence: The Ritual Aesthetics of Contemporary Circus* (Lievens, 2009).

When explaining his understanding of circus dramaturgy, Louis Patrick Leroux states: "I realized that *in circus the action is not between bodies, but rather on the body*. The body becomes the site

of the action" (Cruz, 272-273; Leroux). The shift of action from "*between bodies* to *the site of the body*" (as well as between bodies when there is more than one performer), distances the nature of the character in circus from that of dramatic theatre, and brings it closer to the realm of performance art, dance, and postdramatic theatre. This shift brings to light the relationship between performer and character in circus because the body is the site of an action both representational and acrobatic. The (perceived) increased risk for the performer's body and its physical exceptionality acquired through training influences how the spectator perceives a character in circus.

3.1.1 What is contemporary circus and how can it be studied?

Nouveau Cirque developed in the 1970s from the collaboration between theatre directors in search of new forms of theatre that could reach wider audiences and serve as a political tool. Circus artists strove to create a different form of circus without animals and sought to place virtuosity at the heart of its spectacle.

In her article "An Epic of New Circus" (2016), Martine Maleval establishes the history of Nouveau Cirque by studying three companies founded in France in the 1970s and 1980s—*Cirque Plume*, *Cirque Archaos*, and *Cirque Baroque*. This article is one of the few articles and books on French circus translated into English, which highlights its importance for the presentation of theory about contemporary circus. Maleval notices that the creators of these companies and their shows inherited the aesthetic and theatrical practices of the 1960s, which questioned the relationship with the audience, the primacy of text, and the place of the body in performance. (51). Moreover, Maleval underlines that the Nouveau Cirque artists insisted on creating an "authentic art form" to replace "the easy production of mere entertainment" (52).

Maleval's conclusion defines Nouveau Cirque's characteristics, which can be applied to contemporary circus, too: emotional tension extends to various elements of the production, not just circus skills; the focus is not on the idealized body; music creates not only ambience but also develops in parallel with the main themes; light is used to emphasize emotions and to sculpt the space; and costumes, make-up and masks help artists assume a character and create a fictional reality. (61)

Similar reflections on Nouveau Cirque aesthetics appear in Toni Purovaara's *An Introduction to Contemporary Circus* (2012). In this book, Purovaara traces the development of circus from its origins and traditional period through Nouveau Cirque, to the contemporary form. Purovaara positions the development of Nouveau Cirque in postmodernism, arguing that this movement brought new energy to the arts and broke cultural conventions and taboos. (91) This seems paradoxical given Nouveau Cirque's narrative structure, but the change was revolutionary as it enabled artists not born into circus families to learn the skill and explore possibilities for expression. Nouveau Cirque has brought energy and has questioned the traditional form of circus, despite its narrative-driven structure inspired by dramatic theatre practices. Interesting for this paradox, Purovaara later draws parallels between Nouveau Cirque and the punk movement seeing both forms as rebelling against tradition and searching for new ways of expression. He underlines that circus is still transforming and that it is not outdated as the punk movement has become. (Purovaara et al., 121)

The relationships that contemporary circus has with other performing arts might be clarified by situating the former on the spectrum of performance, as defined by Richard Schechner and performance studies theory. For Schechner (2013), performance is "any action that is framed, highlighted, or displayed" (2). He describes the scope of performance as follows:

> Performance must be structured as a "broad spectrum" or "continuum" of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainment, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music), and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles, and on to healing (from shamanism to surgery), the media, and the internet. (Schechner, 2)

Schechner's spectrum of performance covers a wide range of human activities. This enables one to examine all characteristics of contemporary circus in terms of performance. For centuries, circus was seen as entertainment, created to attract and entertain masses by offering thrilling performances of strength and risk. This definition still represents some contemporary shows. Contemporary circus, while still risk-oriented, has moved away from risk-taking as a main attraction. The entertainment factor came from daring physical feats, which often included revealing exceptional bodies. To make profit, circus companies still often present highly risky numbers and exhibit exceptional bodies. Yet, contemporary circus, like other performing arts, presents acts that are framed and separated from real life. Such acts are meant to provide an aesthetic experience for the spectator, and express something beyond physical feats…

In *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006), Hans-Thies Lehmann asks an important question about postdramatic theatre that concerns the nature of art in general: "[…] does aesthetic distance, even if radically reduced, remain the principle of aesthetic action or not?" (138) For Lehmann, the answer lies in the ethics and "ethical choice" (138) of creators and performers. An "ethical choice" can be understood as an intention to communicate meaning or present subjective images of the world and/or its parts. Contemporary circus frames extraordinary physical acts aesthetically, creating an aesthetic distance between real life and performance. Simultaneously, contemporary circus can include real risks for the performer's body, including death. The

difference between aesthetic distance and real life influences the understanding of the circus character by underlining the importance of the performer's personaand body.

3.1.2 Mimesis or representation in theatre and contemporary circus.

As many terms in my thesis are broad and have several layers of meaning, it is crucial to define the exact meaning of some of them for clarification and in attempt to provide a common ground of understanding.

The term *theatre* defines here a performing art that represents and/or imitates life through characters and their relationships, which move the action forward through speech and movement (in all the models in Western theatre, from Commedia dell Arte to Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Brecht, Grotowski,etc.). The term *narrative* refers here to the context connecting the character(s) represented and their actions as a whole. The term *drama* will describe written text, which includes dramatis personae, their relationships, and plot, in the context of theatre. When talking about circus shows, the term *story* will mean the same as *drama* in the context of theatre, with the exception that drama has to be (pre)written. *Plot* will address a non-physical action that moves the story forward. *Action* will be used to address the performer(s)' physical action during the performance, which might or might not be related to narrative.

The treatment of character in circus is partly a consequence of the influence of theatre on circus. In her Master's thesis (2009), dramaturg Bauke Lievens argues that:

> Another consequence of the theatre's influence on circus arts is the introduction of the dramatic character. A tightrope balancer is no longer simply a person who walks on a rope and exposes oneself to the danger of a deadly fall. Instead, this person on the rope communicates us something about the world. (63)

Thus, to understand character in contemporary circus it is important to examine the relationship between theatre and circus, to identify the differences between dramatic action and action in the circus, and to study the circus' evolution and development.

Lehmann's description of the relationship between dramatic and postdramatic theatre can clarify the differences between contemporary circus and dramatic theatre. In the "Prologue" of *Postdramatic Theatre*, Lehmann underlines several important characteristics of dramatic theatre that apply to contemporary circus as well. "Despite an ever increasing characterization of dramatic personae through the non-verbal repertoire of gesture, movement and psychologically expressive mime, the human figure even in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was still centrally defined through the speech" (21-22).

Lehmann underlines that "dramatic theatre was the formation of illusion" that requires "neither completeness nor even continuity of representation" in order to form (22). He finds that the necessary component for creating illusion is "the principle that what we perceive in the theatre can be referred to as a 'world', i.e. to a (sic) totality (*as a* totality)" (Lehmann, 22). Lehmann concludes:

> Wholeness, illusion, and world representation are inherent in the model 'drama'; conversely, through its very form, dramatic theatre proclaims wholeness as the *model* of the real. Dramatic theatre ends when these elements are no longer the regulating principle but merely one possible variant of theatrical art. (22)

The concept of dramatic theatre that proclaims "wholeness" can help us differentiate between (dramatic) theatre and contemporary circus. (Dramatic) theatre attempts to create an illusion based on a representation of the world in its totality, and uses speech to define its characters

(dramatic personae). Contemporary circus, given its foundation on (physical) technique, distances itself from the illusionistic since acrobatic movement does not strive to create the illusion of normal human movement. However, contemporary circus breaks away only from the illusion of "wholeness" and "world representation". It can still create other illusions, such as the simplicity or difficulty of a trick, error, and, importantly, the illusion of a *represented character*. The latter is an illusion because it is fictional, even when based on authenic experienes. In the performance, the *represented character* is what the performer wants to present– an aspect of himself /herself, or a completely different character. Both represent an illusion. Importantly for contemporary circus, *the represented character* does not necessarily have to be defined through speech as is mostly the case in (dramatic) theatre. In stage action, costumes and make up become visible. Since the audience accepts the presented character as something beyond the performer himself/herself, it becomes a convention. Thus, the *represented* character exists in contemporary circus the same way it exists in theatre—as an illusion that is part of the convention.

The illusion-based difference introduces new questions, particularly in relation to the nature of physical action in dramatic theatre and contemporary circus. In "Reading Contemporary Performance: Theatricality across Genres" (2016), Peta Tait defines circus as an "artistic, body-based, acrobatic performance with apparatus" (59)" She uses the terms "body-based" and "acrobatic" as two related characteristics of circus performance. "Acrobatic" refers to the movement quality of circus performance. In contemporary circus and Nouveau Cirque, movement can sometimes resemble dance or theatre-acting due to the influence of dance and theatre on these art forms. The adjective "acrobatic" distinguishes the action in circus performance from other body-based performing arts (dance, theatre, physical-theatre, performance art, film, television), though parallels between them seem inseparable.

The action in circus might include an apparatus, an object of a different nature or structure that enables the perfomer to execute a move. Many circus disciplines use such objects – a characterisitic of circus as an art form. Props and set pieces are used in other performing arts but in circus they allow the body to perform a particular feat (e.g., trapeze, rope, juggling). Without an apparatus, certain movements would be only partially expressed.

Given its form, circus performance does not tend to imitate reality. Following Lehmann's work, Sebastian Kann argues in his Master's thesis (2016) that mimesis does not fit easily into the circus form, and tends to reduce the "technical circus body" to its similarities with other bodies (2). Kann contends that circus technique can be understood as mimesis only in "the most abstract way" and that "mimetic dramaturgy absents the circus trick as it is, nuanced and articulating, and posits it as a flat symbol" (2). He points out that circus tricks cannot truly/authentically imitate reality in the same way dramatic theatre might do. Further in his thesis, Kann explores the possibility of developing a circus dramaturgy based on technique. But in stating the problem that appears when circus tries to imitate, Kann points out an important characteristic of circus–its movement (in most cases) is not imitative. He underlines that circus tricks have non-imitative qualities, which can and should be used to create meaning in circus. Since created meaning does not strive to imitate but to represent something other than itself, it adds meaning to the physical part, which is presentational.

3.1.3 Theory about character in contemporary circus.

One article that touches on this important issue is Charles Batson's "Les 7 doigts de la main and Their Cirque", in which he proposes three kinds of character: *fictional*, *autobiographical* and *autofictional*. (109) Batson applies these character types to circus shows and problematizes the authenticity of performing oneself as a character, using a review of *Sequence 8*:

> That "indeed" suggests, of course, a slippage between the characters perform*ed* on stage, taking shape through gesture, word, and acrobatics, and the artists perform*ing* on stage, whose own creative process and relationships with their art and each other inform those very shapes. (112)

This passage echoes the question of my thesis: What is the relationship between the performer's persona and the represented character (even when s/he is performing her/himself) and what does it communicate? Batson draws on Roland Barthes and his notion of the "grain of the voice", which he recontextualizes and adapts:

> As such, Roland Barthes's notion of the grain may be particularly relevant here: even if or as the performers' gestures, including those of the verbal text, may create personifying autofictions, the materiality of the gesture, the body that gives it, remains present. (121)

This means that not only the performer's persona exists on stage but also that his/her body cannot be ignored in the performance.

Similar questions appear in Louis Patrick Leroux's (2012) article on body and language in Québec theatre and performance: "Yet, can the authentic 'I' exist at all in theatre- even in this explicitly autobiographical and relentlessly physical form?" (115) Leroux concludes that the action in postdramatic theatre is similar to that of contemporary circus in the sense that the body becomes "*a site of action"*:

> The scenic body performing itself essentially requires the performer's active engagement in the autobiographical act both as a reconstruction of the past and as a perpetually present projection into the future. This representational body is not only engaged in mimesis, it is

> the reminder, by virtue of its autobiographical ethos, that it has taken the dramatic action onto itself. ("From Language to Body" 116)

Leroux's notion of "the scenic body performing itself" in postdramatic theatre relates to the notion of performing personal identity in contemporary circus. The question of performer authenticity in circus relates not only to the problem of (representing) personal identity but also to the issue of the body. Each circus body is unique and has a particular set of skills, thus it has an immanent corporeal authenticity. This corporeal authenticity is developed as the performer's personality meets specific training conditions, personal limits, and bodily affordances.

In theatre theory, character is much more discussed than in circus theory. In *The Life of Drama* (1965), Eric Bentley explores traditional notions of drama, providing an interesting understanding of dramatic character and introducing his theory of archetypes. Bentley's theory of dramatic "types" convincingly explains the tradition of "types" in dramatic theatre. Despite the fact that his theory is somewhat dated, it manages to stay relevant due to the modern theoretical focus on new theatre forms that emerged in the 20th century. In the chapter on character, Bentley explores different kinds of dramatic characters and draws the following conclusion about character and its relationship to plot: "Furthermore, before he is an individual in the sense in which a person seems an individual when painted or well photographed, a fictitious character is *a force in a story*" (45).

After this, Bentley explores different possible character "types": "I have been speaking of both major and minor characters, but it may already have become apparent that the major characters are not types in the same sense as the minor ones" (46). In order to explain major characters that *are* "types", Bentley uses Shakespeare's *Othello,* and Alceste from Molière's *The Misanthrope*.

Using these two examples, Bentley argues that major roles that are "types" are more complex than minor ones, and "tend, in the hands of masters, to become archetypes" (49). Here, Bentley introduces a crucial difference between roles, which is potentially important for understanding circus character. "If the traditional fixed characters typify smaller things—groups and their foibles and eccentricities- the archetypical character typifies larger things and characteristics that are more than idiosyncrasies (Bentley, 49)." Bentley's inquiry of typology leads him to conclude that all "types," even minor ones (the "nonarchetypes") have a potential for myth-building in a spectator's mind, since they are familiar to the audience and easily recognized. (53) Bentley writes:

> In the tragic tradition, the characters can be different every time, because the story remains the same; in comedy it was the characters who remained constant, while the changes were rung on plots. If tragedy makes use of narrative myth, comedy makes use of character myth. (53)

The notion of "narrative myth" means that the general (tragic) story does not change, while the details, like the characters' motivations or their relationships, can. As Bentley argued, this follows from the fact that extant Greek tragedies that continue to exist share common plots and endings, even when writers assign characters different motives or traits.

Further, from Bentley's conclusion it follows that the term "character myth" is used in comedy in order to differentiate stories with the same character "types". The "character myth" occurs in most comic traditions in Western theatre, starting with Ancient Greek and Roman comedy. Different comic character types developed in various traditions (e.g. Commedia dell Arte and its types) but have remained easily recognizable to their contemporary audiences and nation. In

circus, clowning tradition also relies on two basic types, the *whiteface* and *augustes* (Bouissac, 2015).

"Narrative myth" and "character myth" can connect to the narrative in (contemporary) circus in two ways. The "narrative myth" connects to contemporary circus character through its immanent narrative about individuals (or people) who perform acts of extreme physical strength and craft and overcome nature in different ways. This characteristic can be seen as circus' "narrative myth" and be used to create meaning. "Character myth" can connect to circus by triggerring identification and/or understanding with the limited presentation of the character's traits and motives.

Even when the previous two notions are not used, character in contemporary circus can relate to Bentley's "archetypes" because it is often created without developing or communicating any complex motivation. Still, the audience can relate to the character thanks to its humanity, which is represented by its overcoming itself and different obstacles.

The notion of "character myth" connects to Paul Bouissac's "typology of clowns," described in *The Semiotics of Clowns and Clowning* (2015). Bouissac argues that there are two distinctive clusters of traditional European clowns:

> Since the mid-nineteenth century, these two clusters have been broadly known in the technical language of the circus as the *whiteface* clowns and the *augustes*, and they are primarily based on the type of makeup they wear and the kind of behavior that characterizes them. (*The Semiotics of Clowns and Clowning* 24)

These two standardized clown characters are built on basic characteristics that allow for improvisation and the creation of new situations. Bouissac explains the difference in their nature and behavior:

> The whiteface is articulate, moves graciously, and is elegantly dressed. In contrast, the garb of auguste is gaudy and ill fitting, his behavior is awkward, and his way of speaking is unpolished as well as impolite. They form a semiotic couple in which the signs that define one are inverted in the other. (*The Semiotics of Clowns and Clowning* 38-39)

Bentley's notion of "archetypes" is useful for understanding both kinds of clowns. Because clowns were the first dramatic characters in circus, it is important to note that, traditionally, they were defined as recognizable types rather than as individuals. The clowns were defined by their make up, costume, and expected behavior, which enabled the types to be easily established and recognized by the audience.

Even though "character myth" is one layer of character in circus, there is a newer tendency that developed with the contemporary form. The performer's individuality gains visibility in some shows and sometimes becomes the foundation for developing the represented character. There are numerous theoretical approaches that explore the use of the performer's individuality as the basis for the represented character. Of particular interest is Paul Ricoeur's philosophical exploration of identity in which he examines real life as narratival material and real people as characters.

Ricoeur argues that the problem of personal identity confronts two major uses of the term 'identity': "sameness" and "selfhood" (116). Briefly, "sameness" defines *what* (someone is) and "selfhood" *who* (someone is) (118). "Sameness" allows for and conceals change over time, while "selfhood" remains the core of personal identity. Ricoeur relies on Aristotle and structural

theories of action and concludes that character is defined in relation to plot and revealed in the action.

In what concerns the relationship between character and the artist's individuality as he/she paints his or her characterization, Ricoeur writes:

> The person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her "experiences". Quite the opposite the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted. The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character. (147-148)

Another theoretical concept that explores the performer-character relationship is Richard Schechner's notion of "restored behavior," which he defiens as "living behavior treated as a film director treats a strip of film." (*Between Theatre and Anthropology* 35) "These strips of behavior," adds Schechner, "can be rearranged or reconstructed; they are independent of the causal systems (social, psychological, technological), that brought them into existence" (*Between Theatre and Anthropology* 35). According to Schechner, "restored behavior is the main characteristic of performance," and is thus a characteristic of circus performance too. (*Between Theatre and Anthropology* 31) In *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (1985), Schechner explores the characteristics of "restored behavior", but I will focus only on those that speak to the relationship between the performer's persona and the represented character. Schechner explains:

> Put in personal terms, restored behavior is "me behaving as if I am someone else" or "as if I am 'beside myself,' or 'not myself,' as when in trance. But this "someone else" may also be "me in another state of feeling /being," as if there were multiple "me's" in each

> person. The difference between performing myself – acting out a dream, re-experiencing a childhood trauma, showing you what I did yesterday – and more formal "presentations of self"– is a difference of degree not kind. (*Between Theatre and Anthropology* 37)

In this paragraph, Schechner proposes an important point for understanding circus character–the performer's persona,"me", is always at its base. This concept opens an opportunity to explore the relationship between the performer's persona and the represented character.

3.1.4 Theories about the body in contemporary circus.

Since the body performing extraordinary feats has been a main conmponent of circus since its beginnings, it is important to understand the position and meaning(s) of the body in contemporary circus. Louis Patrick Leroux places the circus action on the body rather than between bodies, like in dramatic theatre. Doing so shifts the tension too – from the (conflicted) relationships between bodies that create the action, to the tension in the body itself. A similar concept to Leroux's exists in Lehmann's differentiation of action in dramatic and postdramatic theatre: "The dramatic process occurred between the bodies; the postdramatic process occurs *with/on/to the body*" (163). Lehmann adds that "this prevents all representation, illustration and interpretation with the help of the body as a mere medium" (163).

This distinction is problematic in the context of contemporary circus as it recalls the traditional form that presented extraordinary skills without intended meaning. In her Master's thesis, Bauke Lievens touches on this issue, arguing that "The body in contemporary circus invites us to look differently because it makes a constant shift in the framing of what is presented on stage. It balances between pure presence and theatrical representation, thus inciting the experience of magic and surprise." (35) Lievens' notion that the body in contemporary circus "balances

between pure presence and theatrical representation" connects to the represented character in circus, and its close relationship to the performer's body and the performer's persona. Thus, when the action is on the body, the latter does not (only) represent something more than itself. It also becomes the site of struggle and communicates additional meaning that can be completely opposite to the represented (and intended) meaning. The performer's body overcomes obstacles and performs demanding physical actions that carry immanent narrative connotations while enabling the expression of the performer's persona and the represented character. Without the body there is no circus as we know it.

Erin Hurley, another circus scholar from Québec, examines the question of the body in contemporary circus in her analysis of the circus body in Cirque du Soleil shows (2016, first ed. 2009). Hurley draws upon David Graver's theory of mutual forms of existence of the actor's body on stage to examine bodies in Cirque du Soleil shows, usings Rachel Adams' concepts of "natural or born freak" and "made freak" to clarify body types.

Hurley (2016) finds three types of bodies in Cirque du Soleil shows—the "character body," the "performer body," and the "fleshy body". Each stage performer can have any of these three types of bodies, depending on the action in which he/she engages. Usually all Cirque du Soleil performers represent characters, and have "character bodies", which Hurley describes as "supported by theatrical elements that knit them into the fabric of the show." ("Multiple Bodies of Cirque du Soleil" 125). But in some cases, like in moments of great technical virtuosity or physical accident, the "performer body" (or the "fleshy body") becomes more visible than the "character body". Hurley defines the "performer body" as "cultivated exceptionalism", and describes the moment of its appearance:

> In the moment of execution, the performer body captivates or absorbs attention into itself and as itself. The performer's body is inherently interesting: it is interesting for itself, independent of its potential meanings. Its virtuosity – its irreconcilable singularity – arrests narrative. ("Multiple Bodies of Cirque du Soleil" 131)

Hurley then proceeds to describe the third kind of circus body– the "fleshy body", which she connects to "natural exceptionalism" and "born freaks" (in Rachel Adams's meaning of the term): "Where 'character bodies' are a fictional identity, and 'performer bodies' are presentation of the skill, the 'fleshy body' is the nonsemiotic, self-identical corporeal envelope of skin, hair, flesh, blood, fat and muscle." (Hurley, "Multiple Bodies of Cirque du Soleil" 133) Hurley argues that "fleshy bodies" exist mostly in circus injuries and falls. In her model, the characteristic that differentiates the "performer body" from the "fleshy body" is the "cultivation" of the body, while the "signification of character" distinguishes the "character body" from the "performer body." Hurley, "Multiple Bodies of Cirque du Soleil" 133)

3.1.5 Conclusion.

The literature review on circus and theatre enables several conclusions. Given the nature of Nouveau Cirque and contemporary circus, action in contemporary circus is representational, and in some cases, it can be mimetic. Representation is a result of the action being performed for an audience, with a certain intended meaning. Next, the literature offers some tools for exploring circus character. Ricoeur's notion of "narrative self," Bentley's notion of "archetypes" and "types". In the analysis of the two case studies I will return to several articles presented in this literature review.

4 Speechless character

4.1 Introduction:

The chapter "Speechless character" addresses two main questions: a) How does the character in *Patinoire* relate to circus and theatre traditions and what can we learn from these relationships? b) How does movement form and communicate character in *The Whore of Babylon*?

I will develop two separate arguments. My first argument is that the character in *Patinoire* is unique, even if at first glance it resembles the traditions of clowning and Theatre of the Absurd. The second argument is related to the character's physicality and follows the theory that clarity in direction and intention can create characters that are easy to understand, as those in *The Whore of Babylon.*

4.2 The Nameless Character in *Patinoire*:

Character in contemporary circus draws on and recalls numerous traditions developed throughout previous centuries: clowns, commedia dell' arte, and theatrical character "types" (as defined by Bentley). To a certain extent, the clowning tradition and the theatrical understanding of character have influenced the nature of character in contemporary circus. I will examine these influences via the example of character offered by *Patinoire,* which evokes many traditions.

I will explore the nature of this character using the characteristics of theatrical "types" defined by Bentley, the tradition of clowning, and theatre of the absurd. When exploring the relationship to Bentley's "types", I will seek to show how the character in *Patinoire* relates to the notion of the "tragic hero" introduced by circus dramaturg Bauke Lievens.

Patrick Léonard does not mention clowns or any relationship to clowning in the interview conducted for this thesis. (Personal interview) He describes his choice of the character's characteristics as a "vulnerability" that should attract the audience to the character, and help him establish a relationship with it from the beginning. (Personal interview) Léonard describes the world he created for the character as a "bad dream feeling" in which the character knows he has to perform, and be interesting and entertaining, but his tricks constantly fail for no apparent reason. (Personal interview) Notably, he does not relate his character to any tradition, including that of clowning. Therefore, this show is not based on any of these traditions (clowning, theatre of the absurd, or theatrical "types"), though some characteristics in the performance recall them. Even more, *Patinoire's* character has Bergsonian rigidity in it, which connects him to comical traditions. Bergson states that the "laughable element" can be found in the "mechanical inelasticity" of human beings at moments when they should be adaptable (10). This element is present in *Patinoire* in the difficulties the character experiences in adapting to the changes in the world around him, albeit without any change in his desire to reach his goals.

4.2.1 The notion of character "types" and *Patinoire*.

Comic "types" are numerous and exist in numerous different theatre traditions: from Roman comedy to Commedia dell' Arte. Nevertheless, in the periods of naturalism and realism, they were not appreciated as they lacked apparent depth and complexity. In his analysis of comic "types", Bentley proves that characters that are "types" exist in tragedy as well, and are not necessarily less accessible to the audience's understanding than fully developed characters resembling real human beings in their complex motivation and psychology. As discussed before, Bentley proposes that "types", in comedy *and* tragedy, can become "archetypes" (49).

Bentley defines “types” as “fixed quantities” (41). The character’s image in *Patinoire* remains the same from beginning to end. His motivation and all observable characteristics are fixed, even if the expanding trophies and shrinking jacket suggest some kind of change. In the end, he is still willing to jump into bold acts in order to win the audience’s affection just like at the beginning of the show.

Another characteristic of Bentley’s “types” is their “predictability,” a consequence of their “fixed” nature. In *Patinoire*, the character behaves in a consistent manner; he performs unexpected tricks and feats. These tricks and actions are interconnected as each prepares the ground for the next by relocating the scenography and props, and by putting the character in certain situations. Even though the character surprises the audience with each action he takes, his unpredictability is constant. His way of thinking is different from anything we could expect and does not change until the end. Moreover, the enlarging trophies the offstage force gives him and the shrinking of the blue jacket symbolize change in the character, who realizes that he does not have to prove anymore that he is a “real” performer worthy of the audience’s love. Thus, the character’s nature is not as fixed as it first appears. Still, these changes do not influence the character’s actions visibly because he continues to prove himself until the end.

There is one more characteristic, though, through which the character in *Patinoire* deviates from Bentley’s “types”–his motivation. Discussing the complex motives of Shakespeare’s characters, Bentley argues that: “They do not have a life story behind them. Their motives belong to a less familiar world, and/or are not as fully gone into as is expected” (46). He ends this argument with a conclusion about Iago: “First and foremost he is a force in the story” (46). Unlike the unclear motives of Bentley’s “types”, *Patinoire*’s character has a clear and simple goal. He performs for the admiration and love of his audience. This is a very simple aim, which the audience knows

from the beginning (the title of the show also suggests this in its subtitle: “How far are we willing to go in order to love and be loved?” His goal is not only evident but also constitutes the force that moves the story forward. It is the reason for every action that the character performs.

All these characteristics connect the character to the theatrical “types” mentioned above because his motivation drives the story onward and his actions are predictable. However, this connection does not imply that the character is a theatrical “type” since he is not a dramatic character created for theatre. Nevertheless, the similarity with Bentley’s “types” and their traits can inform our understanding of the character by offering dramaturgical tools to analyze character and its nature. This similarity shows that in both theatre and circus, human qualities is observable even in characters with the simplest motives and personalities, thereby forming a basis for the spectator to identify with the character.

Can the character in *Patinoire* constitute a Bentleyan “archetype”? An “archetypal character” according to Bentley “typifies larger things and characteristics that are more than idiosyncrasies” (49). In *Patinoire*, the character wants to be loved as a performer and human being. This desire for affection and acceptance is a basic human need. Thus, it is arguable that he is an “archetypal character” in Bentley’s sense, even considering that the show is produced following the rules of another art form.

The resemblance of the character in *Patinoire* to Bentley’s “archetypes” recalls Bauke Lievens’ theory of the circus artist as the “tragic hero” developped in her Master’s thesis and in her “First open letter to the Circus” (2015). Bentley’s notion connects to Lievens’ notion of “virtuosity”, which she defines as a: “vainly striving human being at work” (“First open letter to the Circus”). Further in her definition of virtuosity, Lievens argues that the circus artist is a “tragic hero”

because he/she will never reach his/her goal. This idea recalls Bentley's notion of archetypes, which extends not only to comedy but also to tragedy. Thus, Lievens' "tragic hero" implies that circus characters can be both tragic and comic "types".

4.2.2 The clown tradition and the character in *Patinoire*.

The clown was the first circus character, the first representation of someone else other than the performer himself/herself. A clown's feats are not direct imitations or actions of everyday life, but exaggerated, slightly altered representations (by failure, unexpected twists, or something else) that depend on our understanding of what we know the action should be. Given the long history of clowning and clowns' presence in all circus forms (from traditional to contemporary), I will analyze the connection between *Patinoire*'s protagonist and clown types to understand the character's nature.

In her article "Clowns and clown play" (2016), Louise Peacock discusses briefly the development of clown types and, more importantly, defines "Clown Show", "Clown Theatre", and "Clown Actor". Unlike Bouissac, who offers two clown types, *the whiteface* and *the augustes*, she adds a third—the Tramp, who is much more recent addition to the repertoire than the first two. The differences between the Auguste and the Tramp are slight given the latter developed from the former. (Peacock, 83)

Peacock classifies clowning routines and actions into several types: "interruption of ceremony", "subversion and parody", "physical skill (acrobatics, juggling, contortion, high wire)", "incompetence", "interaction with objects", "interaction with other clowns", "status", "food", and "the exploration of the human condition" (85). These types of action are explained further but

this section will focus on the three that can be partially identified in *Patinoire* – "physical skill," "interaction with objects", and "the exploration of the human condition."

Peacock notes that "in many areas of clowning, clowns display considerable physical skill" and can demonstrate other circus skills as well. (86) To draw similarities between Léonard's character and clowning, it will be important to consider the presentation of physical skills and circus technique, which are important characteristics in the clowning tradition.

Patrick Léonard is a skilled performer trained in many circus disciplines, mainly in juggling. During the show, he performs different kinds of object manipulation. He balances a bottle on his forehead, and one on his hands. However, his diabolo act is staged differently. The action unfolds in two movements: first the character sits; then he stands. The difficulty appears while he prepares to stand. Though he continues to juggle the diabolo without mistakes, every time he tries to get up, the music stops. Because he tries to juggle in time with the rhythm, unexpected musical interruptions impede the action. After two interruptions, the music continues and the character can display his skill. But not for long – soon, the diabolo, sent high in the air, does not come back down. He looks for it but the object is nowhere to be found, suggesting that it no longer obeys the laws of gravity. The obstacles this character faces while displaying his physical skill resemble those of the clowning tradition, where a character attempts to show off a skill but is interrupted by comic obstacles meant to intentionally thwart his/her purpose for the amusement of the audience.

Peacock also notes that "interaction with objects" developed due to language restrictions. Performing in different countries conditioned clowns to avoid speech. As Peacock notes, "clown interaction, whether with objects or other clowns, tends to be governed by status" (87). Peacock's

example of an "interaction with objects" is that of a balloon game in which the clown constantly kicks the object whilst reaching for it. She concludes that: "In this way the whole act is a demonstration of performed incompetence in which the clown cannot establish a higher status than the object which he seeks to control" (87). This conclusion is also partly true for *Patinoire,* for example when the record falls out of its cover, when the character gets tangled in the speakers' cables, or when he cannot climb the platform.

In all other acts, objects serve a new purpose, other than that of their everyday use. This change influences the way they are seen and recalls the questioning of everyday use of these objects, but the character keeps control over them. Climbing onto the speakers or juggling the bottles are successful acts, and the character has control over the objects he uses. However, the unusual use of objects recalls the clowning tradition. In our interview, Patrick Léonard explains that he used everyday objects that are familiar to the audience in order to establish a connection with them that is different from one where he would just juggle the diabolo (Personal interview). Though some similarities to clowning can be observed in some moments and in the show's general atmosphere, Léonard did not intend to mix clowning and object manipulation.

Peacock's "exploration of the human condition" is much closer to the action in *Patinoire,* despite the easily observed object manipulation:

> More recently clowns in the theatre deal with what it means to be human. Through a number of the actions listed above but particularly through incompetence clowns develop performance pieces which deal with themes such as what it means to be a success (usually by repeatedly failing), what is important in life (often the relationships we form with those around us and how we cope when we are left alone). The clown's traditional role as

> both an outsider and a truth-teller render him perfectly placed to comment on the interaction between individuals and the societies in which they live. (88)

Patinoire's main theme explores the limits of what one is willing to do to be loved, in terms of a performer-audience relationship, but also at a more general level. In this way, the show explores a subject connected to a basic human condition—love. It explores this need in an exaggerated, awkward version of the real world. The aesthetic of the show offers no possibility of measuring the passage of time, no explanation for what happens offstage, and no clues about the entity that awards the trophies and the jacket to the character. This lack of explanation allows for similarities between this character and clowns. The resemblance arises from the world that surrounds the character and the theme of the show, as well as in the exaggerated actions.

Peacock suggests two more characteristics of clown acts that appear in *Patinoire*—breaking "the fourth wall" by interacting with the audience, and the lack of a linear story (90). The root of these similarities lies not only in the clowning tradition, but in that of circus as an art form, which this show embraces through risk and skill performance brought to the fullest extent. Thus, the character in *Patinoire* shares some traits coming from the clown tradition. Still, these similarities do not imply that this character is a clown nor do they demonstrate any intentional reference to the clowning. As mentioned, some similarities come from the nature of circus as an art form and its rooted connection with the tradition of clowning that integrates high level juggling and dare-devil acrobatics into its comedy.

4.2.3 The theatre of the absurd and the aesthetic in *Patinoire*.

The theatre of the absurd is a theatrical tradition developed in the 20th century. It is important to see how the *Patinoire* character relates to this tradition given the absurdity of the show's aesthetic where objects change, appear, and disappear without the character's interference.

Let us first define the theatre of the absurd. In his "Introduction" to *The Theatre of the Absurd* (2001, 5th edition), Martin Esslin discusses the nature of absurdist theatre and playwrights, while in the last chapter, he explains the philosophy of absurd theatre:

> It bravely faces up to the fact that for those to whom the world has lost its central explanation and meaning, it is no longer possible to accept art forms still based on the continuation of standards and concepts that have lost their validity; that is, the possibility of knowing the laws of conduct and ultimate values, as deducible from the firm foundation of revealed certainty about the purpose of man in the universe. (399- 400)

Esslin classifies several characteristics of absurdist theatre: lack of objectively valid characters, emphasis on poetic elements, use of language as only one component of the play, and no intellectual concepts. In order to explore the "absurdity" of *Patinoire*, I will study how some of these characteristics apply to the show.

Esslin finds that the theatre of the absurd "lacks objectively valid characters" because it is a projection of "its author's personal world" (403). He explains that: "The action in a play of the Theatre of the Absurd is not intended to tell a story but to communicate a pattern of poetic images" (Esslin, 403). By contrast, in *Patinoire,* the character is defined – his motivation is clear and consistent. Despite not having an explicit story, the action is meaningful and based on the character's nature and his situation.

Esslin contemplates the purpose of character in absurd theatre:

> In the Theatre of the Absurd, on the other hand, the audience is confronted with characters whose motives and actions remain largely incomprehensible. With such characters it is almost impossible to identify; the more mysterious their action and their nature, the less human the characters become, the more difficult it is to be carried away into seeing the world from their point of view. Characters with whom the audience fails to identify are inevitably comic. (411)

Contrary to this description, the character in *Patinoire* is graspable. His motives are traceable and easy to identify with, unlike those of an absurd character. The laughter comes from the character's unexpected and bold actions, not from a lack of identification with him.

The next characteristic Esslin describes is the emphasis on poetical elements rather than on narrative (404). This characteristic can be observed in *Patinoire* because the show does not project a clear, linear story. Esslin bases his description on characteristics such as "abandoning psychology, subtlety of characterization, and plot in the conventional sense" which are not highly present in *Patinoire* (404). Even though the story's development appears only in the changing jacket and trophies, the action is not in itself meaningless, but goal-directed.

The last of Esslin's characteristics is a lack of intellectual concepts:

> [The aheatre of the absurd] does not present its audience with sets of social facts and examples of political behavior. It presents the audience with a picture of a disintegrating world that has lost its unifying principle, its meaning, and its purpose – an absurd universe. (411- 412)

The theme of *Patinoire*, however, is clear from the beginning - in the monologues, in the character's interactions with the audience, and in his actions. This theme can be seen Esslin's "unifying principle" that connects everything the performer does into one linear action, such as the character's relationship with the audience and to life in general. Using this description as a reference point, it can be concluded that *Patinoire* does not follow the conventions of the theatre of the absurd.

However, even if the action and sole character in *Patinoire* are not absurd, the aesthetic of the show presents some characteristics of the absurd. Such features are visible in several of the offstage force's interactions with the performer. Some such instances are the diabolo's sudden disappearance, the loudspeakers's monologues (spoken by invisible nagging women), the platform's appearance, and the morphing jacket and trophies. The rules of the offstage force are not familiar or explained to the audience, which makes them seem absurd. Even though the show and the character are not absurdist by definition, the observed aesthetic of the show does suggest a clear attraction to the absurd; this, in turn, influences the way in which the character is perceived, allowing the possibility of considering it as absurd.

4.2.4 Conclusion.

Though *Patinoire* reminds us of certain aspects of different traditions and their characteristics, its character remains unique, just like the world in which it exists. The specific exploration of the represented character in *Patinoire,* without taking into consideration the performer's persona or the performer's body, is important in the context of this thesis because it allows an analysis similar to that which would apply to a theatrical character and thereby enables comparison. The relative similarity of the *Patinoire* character to those of theatrical and clown traditions brings out its unique nature. However, having no tools specific to circus with which to describe and

understand this character, we automatically tend to connect it to different, already known traditions.

As we saw earlier, Lievens' "tragic hero" does something and this situates the *Patinoire* character within the contemporary circus scene and its emerging dramaturgy. Based on this connection, I argue that this character's uniqueness belongs to the contemporary circus tradition, which is currently developing and evolving. My analysis attempts to clarify some aspects of *Patinoire*'s character: ability to perform extraordinary tasks, clear motivation, characterization through physical action and speech, creation of conflict via relationships with objects, and action-framing to enable meaning.

4.3 The Physicality of Character in *The Whore of Babylon*:

4.3.1 Introduction.

In this chapter, using *The Whore of Babylon* as an example, I will examine the ability of circus action to communicate narrativized meaning, as well as consider the clarity of represented characters and their relationships. I will explore how characters are formed and presented through movement. My analysis will also contrast the clarity of communicated meaning to that of intended meaning. I will explain how the tools used to define and differentiate the represented characters also impact their development. The starting argument is that represented character can be built and communicated clearly without necessarily using language.

The Whore of Babylon is a challenging example for studying character physicality and the extent to which physical action alone can communicate character. There are several circumstances that can make communicating a character difficult — the complexity of the story and its mythological implications; an (intentionally) obscure meaning; numerous details that can be easily overlooked;

provocative movement; and costumes that can lead the attention in another direction. In our interview, the show's director, Andréane Leclerc explained that: "our main dramaturgy is not there for the audience to understand." (Personal interview) This intention and the show's aesthetics allow for a subjective reception and interpretation.

4.3.2 Tools of characterization.

To understand the extent to which character forms through movement in this show, it is necessary to consider all the tools Leclerc used to to create the show and its meaning. The artistic devices she used to provide information about her characters and express their respective personalities are common in the performing arts: the quality of movement and physical actions, costume, scenography, music and lights that create an aesthetic specific to the show and its intended meaning. Using these tools, Leclerc creates a complex show with several layers of significance. In the following analysis, I will discuss both the meanings I perceived and the ones Leclerc explained in our interview in order to reveal the multiple and complex layers in this show.

To better understand Leclerc's approach to character representation, it is useful to consider that both Leclerc and Dugan (one of the performers) focused only on the movement research process in their interviews, and not on the creation of a story or of a character. However, Leclerc explains that each part of the collective character had a special relationship with *Jesus* (Personal interview). This implies that in her creation, Leclerc depicted relationships between characters, their individual personalities and their functions essentially through movement, while the characters themselves were created separately and used as a point of departure.

The first and most basic way to differentiate the three characters (*Jesus*, *Future King* and *The Chorus*) is through their costumes. Yet the differences are subtle. There are two colors and two

styles of costumes that help the spectator differentiate between the characters and understand how they are grouped. The costume styles show status. *Jesus* wears a small catsuit, a symbol of her current position as *King*, while the others wear shorts in sign of their past or future ruling power. The colors help situate the characters in different eras. Dressed in scarlet, *Jesus* and *The Chorus* belong only to the present, while *Future King* wears gold for she belongs to the future. *Future King* is fully naked in the beginning, when she is born, and in the end, when she takes over the *Kingdom*.

Although the costumes themselves do not reveal much about the *Hell* in which the characters exist or the nature of the individual characters, they are a primary and crucial tool for differentiating the characters. Their shape and color are the first clue that helps the audience understand that *The Chorus* is a collective character and that *Future King* differs somehow from the rest. However, the costumes do not give access to the mythological levels of the narrative since they do not indicate that all the characters are part of the "The Seven-headed beast of Babylon". In the interview, Leclerc explains that the shorts that *The Chorus* and *Future King* have imitate those worn by prostitutes, who wore them so that they would not have to undress in order to engage in sexual activity (Personal interview). Leclerc made this artistic choice while aware of its opaque nature and intentionally left it open to subjective interpretation (Personal interview). Of course, the colors of the costumes follow the aesthetics of the piece and the biblical story. Thus, Leclerc perceives the costume as a basic way to differentiate the represented characters without dialogue or narrative.

The characters' movement qualities are another important factor that differentiates them. These differences are evident in the performers' particular skills—*The Chorus* consists of circus artists, *Jesus* is an actress, and *Future King* a burlesque dancer. While *The Chorus* explores acrobatic

movement and its possibilities, *Jesus* and *Future King* do not perform acrobatic movements. However, *Future King* walks on shattered glass at one point in the performance.

Thus, quality of movement is a way to identify characters, together with the costumes. *Jesus*' movements are highly theatrical without including acrobatics, but define the character's relationships in the story and drive it forward. *Future King*'s theatrical movements contain certain burlesque elements (e.g. when she "lays the eggs" in the beginning) and her acts present a special skill (i.e. glass-walking). *The Chorus* moves in a way that resembles acrobatics and dance, as well as contortion. It is also important to note that the only character with a defined and clear skill is *Future King*, who walks on glass. While the performance of aerial movements on the ground and without apparatus is a deconstruction of circus movement, glass-walking is not deconstructed but only framed in order to move the story onwards. This further underlines the difference between *Future King* and the other two characters.

Movement quality is one of the most important tools for differentiating the represented characters in *The Whore of Babylon*, but it does not facilitate any conclusions on their nature in terms of narrative. It is the interrelation of the characters' actions that informs our understanding of both character personality and narrative.

The next tool that communicates the meaning of the action is music. Since this production was developed with *The Tiger Lilies*, music has an important place in the show. As Leclerc explains, the music and the movement-creation influence each other (Personal interview). The music and the narrative conveyed through the lyrics begin with the first action on stage. The lyrics give key information about the action. The words have a kind of epic quality– it narrates the story of the Whore of Babylon as seen by Leclerc and Jacques. The music helps the audience

understand that one of the characters is *Jesus* (or *God*) and that the collective character is *The Whore*. Next, the narration explains the general story of how *The Chorus* is brought to life and how it evolves through childhood to adulthood and, eventually, death. The narration is particular and connected to each scene and almost each movement. The music helps not only to frame the action, but also to make it spectacular, engaging several senses.

The song lyrics are used to give meaning to the stage action, explain the identity of some characters, and help the audience follow the evolution of the represented characters. Nevertheless, the music neither addresses the mythological aspect, nor explains the scenography. The scenography, props, and lighting are all connected. The scenography plays an important role in *The Whore of Babylon* and scenographic elements become props in different scenes. The scenography consists of a rocking-horse with a rope bridle, several bottles, whips (which are invisible most of the time), eggs (visible and invisible), scarlet drapes and ropes for them, a line of glass at the back of the stage, and candles. Using these elements, the performers build the aesthetic world on stage.

Most scenographic elements and props are used throughout the piece in different actions. Bottles with different liquids and ashes are used in stage action. Drapes are also very important because their function changes several times. First, they form a place where *The Chorus* is born, then they become *rooms*, and finally they create a stage space by hanging from ropes. Most of the uses for these drapes are not obvious ones. It is difficult to understand what they represent and how their use changes. For instance, the meaning of the walkway of broken glass at the back of the stage, where *Future King* constantly performs, is not fully accessible to the audience except as the base for the spectacular walk at the end of the show. Finally, the wooden horse is a prop that creates a dramatic tension between *Jesus* and *Future King.* In the interview, Leclerc explains that the

aesthetic of the show is a representation of "Hell, which is God's Paradise" (Personal interview). The colors inspired by Hieronymus Bosch and Caravaggio's paintings should suggest to the audience that the show represents an image of Hell.

The scenography serves a multiple purpose. It creates stage space and aesthetic of the show, and in some cases functions like props. In some acts these two functions are united. When used as props, the scenography enables actions that allow the audience to follow the relationships between characters (e.g. the use of the bottles and the relationship with the wooden horse). Despite the effective functionality of the scenography, the full significance of the whips or hanging drapes, or that the black liquid used in one of the scenes is a way of tattooing *The Whores* of *The Chorus* is not always revealed. Not all scenographical layers of meaning are fully accessible to the audience given the director's decision to conceal and restrict the access to a clear understanding of the production.

Stage lighting is meant to focus the spectators' attention on the most relevant action, since the performers are always on stage. While it facilitates focus, the lighting does not clarify the aesthetics or the characters. Thus, it becomes clear that movement and its qualities are the most important tools for presenting and differentiating characters. Although the music introduces the characters, its focus is on explaining the characters' performed actions and their meaning, and not the characters themselves.

4.3.3 How are characters formed through the action they engage with?

After exploring the tools used to help the audience understand the characters, I will attempt to explain what can be learned about their nature while having access to them only during the performance itself, without any pre-written text available. Costume, movement quality and type,

as well as lyrics differentiate three characters. They (one of them being a collective character) wear costumes of different colors and shapes. The quality of their movement differs given each performer's background and their role in the story – acrobatic, histrionic, or burlesque. Finally, the narration explains the significance of the actions performed.

The Chorus' evolution constructs the main story of the show. We observe its conception, birth, maturation, adulthood, and death. It is important to note that *The Chorus* is a collective character. This character is defined mainly through its relationship with *Jesus* and the rapports within the group between the different members of the cast. In most actions, *The Chorus* appears as a collective character and differences in movement or appearance seem somewhat irrelevant. The relationship they have with one other is clearly represented in their actions. When they are given "milk" they compete and when they try to "free" themselves from the drapes they do not cooperate. But when they try to please *Jesus* as a group, they focus on her and are ready to cooperate. There are two examples taht illustrate these relationship dynamics—the *birth scene* and the *hanging of the drapes*.

In *the birth scene*, *The Chorus* is born from *Jesus* as the characters liberate themselves from the drapes that *Jesus* holds. This is one of the rare moments in which the parts of *The Chorus* do not cooperate and, seemingly go against *Jesus.* A little later, when they hang the drapes, they cooperate and use each other to achieve the necessary height. In the interview, Leclerc explains how this particular movement of climbing applies hand to hand acrobatics in an unusual way. Instead of helping the ones at the top to move more easily, the ones on the bottom were instructed to try to get on top (A. Leclerc, personal interview). Even though the task was to use each other, in this scene *The Chorus* members seem cooperative. In some cases, there might be a gap between the intended meaning and the viewer's reception of the action. In these moments, the

relationships between both *Jesus* and *The Chorus* as collective, and between *The Chorus* members can be opaque.

Despite *The Chorus* being the represented character whose development we follow in the story, its nature remains unclear. There are not many cues in the action that would explain sudden apparent changes in the relationship between *The Chorus* and *Jesus,* as in *the birth scene*. It also remains unclear when *The Chorus* members cooperate with one other and when they do not. Part of this inability to understand might arise from the show's abstract aesthetic and its divorce from reality. Therefore, certain actions, such as throwing eggs, can have a different meaning from that in everyday life. In *the furniture scene*, *Jesus* and *Future King* have dinner, but this might be impossible to understand because they throw eggs and spit on each other. While in everyday life these actions are highly offensive and combative, in *The Whore of Babylon* they are accepted as normal and usual.

Jesus' personality is mainly transmitted through the lyrics, as well as her relationship with *The Chorus* and *Future King*. She is confident, powerful, and enjoys herself and her Whore (*The Chorus*). Given the lyrics, it is easy to assume that this character is Jesus or God. Because of the "crucifixion" at the end, when *Future King* strews ashes over her, Jesus seems more probable. Other actions further support this assumption, as when she shares the bread with the audience in *the whipping scene*. *Jesus* is probably the most comprehensible character. Her relationship with *The Chorus* is highly sadistic, and it seems as she controls the space (except for the strip of broken glass in the back). She also controls the rocking horse, an object that *Future King* desires.

The problem with *Jesus* is similar to that of *The Chorus.* It is not fully understandable whether or not her actions are part of a love game she plays with *The Chorus,* or a physical conflict. This

constructs an obstacle in our understanding of both the characters and the action in *the whipping scene,* as well as later, when *Jesus* is dragged around the stage and is "crucified". *Jesus'* main traits, like her perversion and love of power, both of which motivate her actions, are clearly portrayed in her movements. Her desire for pleasure and fun appears in her relationship with *The Chorus* and is mirrored in the lyrics. She plays with *The Chorus* members but never loses control until the very end. But due to *Future King's* playing with the wooden horse while observing *Jesus,* it might seem that *Jesus* can see *Future King* in the first part of the story, which is not true. *Future King* actually becomes visible to *Jesus* and *The Chorus* only after *the whipping scene*. On a mythological level, some things remain opaque, such as *Jesus'* being also part of *The Beast.*

Future King is the most mysterious character because her actions do not explain her role in the story and the lyrics do not mention her until the end. She is with *The Chorus* in *the whipping scene* but remains isolated from it the rest of the time. *Future King* interacts with them twice more, in *the furniture scene*, when dining with *Jesus,* and when she strews ashes over *Jesus* in the form of a cross. Her presence on stage is hard to situate in the story, which makes it difficult to understand her motives.

In the beginning, *Future King* lays eggs on the proscenium and picks up the drapes, as if to help *Jesus,* but then goes to the rocking horse. When *Future King* rides the horse while watching *Jesus* there is a palpable tension between them that only becomes stronger towards the end. It is difficult to say if this tension is subjective or objective. As a spectator, one is not aware that *Jesus* cannot see *Future King*, or it would be easy to conclude that the tension is subjective. Observing *Future King,* we can see that in most cases she isolates herself from the action and watches the others, for an unknown reason. It is also unclear why she constantly plays with the glass before walking on it and why that part of the stage is available to her only.

In general, it can be deduced from her relationship with others that she is opposed to *Jesus.* This is confirmed at the end, when she remains the only survivor. Her function in the story, however, and the reason for her uniqueness, are not clarified by her actions. Similar to *Jesus,* it is difficult to deduce that *Future King* is also part of *The Beast* solely from her actions and the corresponding music.

From analyzing the ways in which these characters are represented, it follows that movement and action can define characters to a certain extent and make them partially graspable. Unexplained and unexpected changes in the action (like sudden attacks on *Jesus*) might obscure our understanding of the characters.

4.3.4 Conclusion.

Physical action can give a rough sketch of the characters' relationships and their nature, but due to perceived inconsistencies, these ideas about the characters shift throughout the story. In moments when consistency disappears, like in *the whipping scene*, the story can be potentially misread and misunderstood. It is important to note that movement and its qualities define the relationships in *The Whore of Babylon* on a basic level. However, at least partly because of Leclerc's intent, the movement qualities do not make the mythological layer as fully accessible to the audience.as it could have been. Perhaps it is because the audience doesn't always have all of the socio-religious codes?

4.4 "Dramaturgical" conclusions about circus character:

This chapter aimed to clarify the relationship of the *Patinoire* character to different performing arts traditions, and explored the possibility of defining the characters in *The Whore of Babylon* from the performed action alone. Comparing the *Patinoire* character to clowning, theatrical

"types", and the Theatre of the Absurd reveals that the character cannot be situated in any of these traditions in any strict way. He relates to the objects, audience, and the general theme in a unique way that unintentionally resembles other, older traditions. This similarity might result from the relative newness of circus character and the influence of theatre and clowning upon it.

The Whore of Babylon is an example of character construction in circus through narrative. One can understand a character's motives and personality as far as one can correctly decipher the character's actions. An abstract or opaque action (e.g. spiting in *the furniture scene*) influences one's ability to fully understand the characters' relationships to one another and their individual nature, leaving these unclear.

5 Staging variations on the persona

5.1 Introduction:

In this chapter I will study how the performer's persona might influence the represented character using *Patinoire* and *The Whore of Babylon* as examples. *Patinoire* shows how the performer's persona can be a basis for the character. *The Whore of Babylon* will demonstrate how the performer's persona can influence the action at different moments. I will question the performer's persona - represented character relationship in both group and individual performances, and examine how the story and dramatic tension influence this relationship. My aim is to illustrate that the performer's persona is visible in certain parts of the show only (*The Whore of Babylon*), and can serve as a basis for the represented character (*Patinoire*).

5.2 Negotiating identity in *Patinoire*

In *Patinoire,* the represented character derives in part from the performer's persona, which derives in part from the performer's life experience and influences the character's formation. To explore the represented character's identity in this case, I will be using Paul Ricoeur's notion of "narrative identity". My main point is that the character that Léonard created for the show can be seen as a variation of Ricoeur's "narrative identity."

The character in *Patinoire* is an example of a represented character created on the basis of the performer's persona and his experiences. Thus, this character is a suitable example for exploring the application of Ricoeur's notion of "narrative identity" to circus character. My aim is to investigate whether or not "narrative identity" can be applied to the *Patinoire* character, and if so, how this enriches our understanding of circus character.

In our interview, Patrick Léonard describes his relationsip to the character in *Patinoire*:

> This character is really close to myself. It is very much an extrapolation of who I am. I think that in my everyday life, there is a part of me that is very insecure, but at the same time there is this part of me that is very willing to say: "Ok, I don't know if I can do it, but I will do it anyway — 'cause what have I got to lose."

The represented character and the performer's persona share many things: objects, music, life philosophy, and their attitude towards circus performance. Léonard explains how the objects for this show were collected during a long period of time:

> The idea of doing a solo show came a long time ago and I accumulated a bunch of objects — cans, puppets, everything that spoke to me. And also old objects. I really like old things — not necessarily fancy old objects that are expensive, but more common objects like old shoes that have been worn by I don't know by whom. And I put them in my basement over the years. And for *Patinoire* I said, "Ok, I am going to take everything I accumulated for so many years, put them in a room, and start playing with them." So that is how I started.

Aside from using objects he collected over the years, Léonard also used music that he loves and that somehow speaks to him. Music has an important place in some of the acts (for example when he performes the diabolo), and in others it gives additional meanings to the action (so as when the performer precariously climbs the speakers). In the interview, Léonard points out that he explored some very personal questions, namely that of the performer-audience relationship and the extent to which a performer is willing to go in order to obtain the audience's love and admiration.

At certain moments, the line separating the represented character from the performer's persona becomes indistinct. This is most noticeable in the monologues. Léonard explains how improvisations might develop:

> So my character goes above that. He looks really stupid, but pushes, and pushes, and suddenly becomes completely inspired. I remember having speeches where I start to talk about my mother who said, "Whenever you get lost, just close your eyes and empty your mind, and something will come." I also have flashbacks of real moments in my life when I was supposed to have the situation under control and I was just dying inside.

Léonard's relationship to his character is a close one. The action is fixed, the performer knows how to get out of the problematic situation in which his character has found itself, but still chooses to use his personal experiences to express himself and his emotions in the performance. Improvisation is a way to blur the lines between the character and performer. Here the line between the two is blurred.

Léonard's description of this relationship recalls Paul Ricoeur's notion of "narrative identity". Ricoeur writes:

> The person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her "experiences". Quite the opposite the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted. The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character. (147- 148)

The similarities between Ricoeur's "narrative identity" and the notion of represented character in *Patinoire,* as Patrick Léonard describes it, are numerous. The artist uses objects in the show

collected by himself in his lifetime, describes the represented character as “an extrapolation of who I am,” and the music in the show is a mix of the artist’s personal music and was not chosen only to fit the acts (Personal interview). Moreover, the artist uses personal experiences from his life to improvise his monologues, which change based on his inspiration, giving the character a “dynamic identity” in the sense Ricoeur describes it (P. Léonard, personal interview).

All these characteristics imply that the represented character in *Patinoire* connects to the performer’s persona, with some important differences. The spectators are not introduced to Léonard’s life as a whole and the performer does not strive to present himself but his character. Though the represented character is inspired by the performer’s experiences he is isolated from the totality of the performer’s life.

Given these similarities and differences, and the fact that here the object examined is a show and not a person’s life, Ricoeur’s notion can be used only partially. This concept can help clarify the relationship between the performer’s persona and represented character when the former serves as a basis for the latter. In *Patinoire*, the represented character feeds on the performer’s life experiences and uses the objects as his own.

In this case, Ricoeur’s concept of “narrative identity” represents a link between the performer’s persona and the represented character. The represented character in *Patinoire* does not only derive from the performer’s persona, but draws from his personal experiences during improvisations, and is manifested in little hesitations during risky moments and in his interaction with the audience before the show. Though similar to the performer’s persona, the represented character is, in this case, the identity that the performer chose to present.

The “narrative identity” in *Patinoire* also depends on another component—the performer’s body, since the body influences the performer’s persona, and the two cannot exist separately. Here, “narrative identity” represents the union between persona – including the body – and character, where the character emerges from the performer’s personality and life experience. Understanding this allows us to recognize that the character is not entirely based on the performer’s identity as a whole. Ricoeur’s notion of “narrative identity” shows how the performer’s persona and the represented character can relate in performances where the performer (or director) creates the character using his/her personal experiences, but only as a way to inspire the represented character, which is shaped separately.

5.3 Persona and Group in *The Whore of Babylon*:

5.3.1 Introduction.

Using examples from *The Whore of Babylon*, I will attempt to see if there are differences between the way in which a performer’s persona is negotiated in a group versus a solo performance, and how the audience interprets the performer’s persona in moments of perceived dramatic tension. My aim is to understand the extent to which the performer’s persona influences the represented character in different situations within the aesthetic of the show.

5.3.2 Negotiating the performer’s persona in solo and group acts

To appreciate how the performer’s persona is negotiated differently in group and solo performances, I will use the character *Future King* from *The Whore of Babylon. The whipping scene* will serve as an example of group performance, and the last scene as one of solo performance.

In the final scene, *Jesus* joins *The Chorus* in a final and fatal "sex" act, while *Future King* stands apart. The action I will focus on is brief and occurs at the end of the show, after the "death" of *Jesus* and *The Chorus,* and during the rise of *Future King*. This scene contains only resolution and peace. The performer sits naked on the stage under the spotlight, slowly breaking real eggs and "washing" her skin with them. How is the relationship between the performer's persona and the represented character negotiated in this scene?

Future King is the only character alive and still moving, which could influence the relationship between the performer's persona and the represented character because there is no distraction. But, when observing the action, the represented character stays in focus, overshadowing the performer's body (even though naked in this moment) and the performer's persona. Poetic significance and the aesthetic of the action capture the specatators' attention in this moment of the show, keeping the focus on the represented character and the story.

The whipping scene is the *The Chorus*' transition to adulthood from adolescence (D. Dugan, personal interview, March 1, 2017). The scene is important for the story's development because *Future King* becomes visible to *Jesus* and *The Chorus* (A. Leclerc, personal correspondence, March 28, 2017). While *Future King* is visually isolated from the others before this scene, here she joins *Jesus* and *The Chorus*, which stands in one line behind *Jesus.*

Because *Future King* is at the end of the line formed by *The Chorus*, she is still marginalized, but there is no specific relationship between herself and *Jesus*. *The Chorus'* relationship with *Jesus* becomes hers as well. With this loss of individuality and the characteristic isolation that defines her, *Future King* accepts a collective identity and unites with the collective character of *The Chorus*. In this scene, we can see the represented collective character as it becomes visible,

concealing the individual ones. The relationship between the performer's persona and the represented character, even for *Future King*, becomes less relevant. This relationship is negotiated by the acceptance of a collective identity. This identity change reduces the importance of individual character in this scene, which in turn diminishes the visibility of the performer's persona.

In "Collective identity and social movements", Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper define the notion of collective identity as follows:

> To avoid overextension of the concept, we have defined collective identity as an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity. (285)

The definition of collective identity offered in this article speaks to the potential for the represented character to become part of the collective character. However, the negotiation of the relationship between the collective represented character and the performer's persona doesn't always allow for a clear individual character to emerge. When we observe the action of the represented collective character in relation to the *The Chorus*' collective identity, our attention is not on the characters' singular identities or on the performers' personas. We focus on the action of the represented collective character as a whole and, given the nature of the action, on the story and its perceived tension.

Polleta and Jasper add that "Collective identities are expressed in cultural materials– names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on – but not all cultural materials

express collective identities" (285). Due to the performers' same rhythmical action, their similar or identical clothing and physical placement, the *The Chorus*' collective identity absorbs that of *Future King*. Thus, in the group scene, the relationship between the performer's persona and the represented character is overshadowed by the collective character's identity.

5.3.3 The performer's persona in a situation with dramatic tension.

The last question about the persona-character relationship will focus on the role of the performer's persona in a narrative characterized by dramatic tension, using *The Whore of Babylon* as an example. I will use the relationship between *Jesus* and *Future King* to examine how this relationship is observed and whether it is important. The choice of this relationship is imposed by the story, as *Future King* wants *Jesus* to die so she can start her own *Kingdom* (Personal correspondence).

Leclerc explains that there is no underlining conflict in this relationship. *Future King* "just wants this [*Jesus' Kingdom*] to end so she can build her own kingdom" (Personal correspondence). Leclerc adds that *Jesus* believes that she is the strongest and does not see *Future King* as a threat (Personal correspondence). The opposite relationship appears in the show, however, in scenes such as when *Future King* sits on *Jesus*' rocking horse or when they spit on each other at "dinner". There is a possible tension in the action and story, which I will address in this section.

The relationship between *Jesus* and *Future King* develops in parallel with the *The Chorus*' maturation and *Jesus'* relationship with *The Chorus*. *Future King* and *Jesus'* relationship really starts in *the furniture scene*, when *Jesus* invites *Future King* to have "dinner" with her. They sit across from each other and communicate by breaking and throwing eggs at each other, spitting

the fluid from a bottle into each other's faces. Though the performed action can seem hostile given the aesthetic of the show, it is actually acceptable, usual behavior.

In this scene, the focus is mostly on characters and their actions. The performer's persona is not the main focus. Perhaps because the action is relatively safe and incorporated into the story, the represented character becomes the main interest. The character might become more important than the persona because of the possible dramatic conflict between *Jesus* and *Future King* that emerges from the way they treat one another, or just because the story is the most dominant part of the scene.

5.3.4 Conclusion.

From this analysis of *The Whore of Babylon* follow several conclusions. The performer's persona can become invisible in collective actions if the nature of the action is unifying for the collective character. Even in solo performances, when the character is not based on the performer, the performer's persona can emerge without affecting the understanding of the represented character. The same is true for the action in a situation of tension. The performer's persona (if visible) does not influence the way we perceive the character. It is also important to underline that in *The Whore of Babylon*, which is based on a narrative, the performers' personae do not influence our understanding of the characters. The irrelevance of the persona is revealed in the characters' nature, which remains static while the cast changes.

5.4 Conclusion – The Performer's Persona and the Circus Character:

This chapter focused on the relationship between the performer's persona and the represented character with the aim of offering several conclusions that cannot be generalized but which provide a better understanding of the nature of circus character. Examining *Patinoire* in part

through the lens of Ricoeur's notion of "narrative identity" has offered some insight into the observed relationship, when the represented character develops from the performer's persona. In this case, "narrative identity" can function as a link between a performer's persona and the represented character. But in *Patinoire*, "narrative identity" does not cover the performer's whole life in the way Ricoeur describes it. Here, it symbolizes the relationship between the performer's persona and the represented character, in which the former is only partially revealed to the audience through the latter. This relationship approaches Ricoeur's definition of "narrative identity" partly when the performer (or director) shapes the narrative he creates from lived experience, as Léonard does, and chooses how he wants to present his story.

The importance of the performer's persona as seen in *The Whore of Babylon* led, unsurprisingly, to opposite results. While the performer's persona is an important component for the *Patinoire* character, in *The Whore of Babylon*, it has much less importance. When the represented character is part of a dramatically tense story, the performer's persona is not important and our attention goes elsewhere. Also, in group performances where the character becomes collective and the accent is on the story, the performer's persona can lose visibility, as *in the whipping scene* in *The Whore of Babylon*. The performer's persona fades into the rhythm of the hitting whips, which draw the focus towards them, in *the whipping scene*.

6 The performer's body and the represented character

6.1 Introduction:

This chapter will focus on the performer's body and its relationship to the represented character. I will investigate the represented character's capacity to shift the spectator's focus away from the body as an object in *The Whore of Babylon*. In the same show, I will look at how the performer's physical abilities and the performer's persona influence the character's nature. Next, I will examine the relationship between the performer's body and the represented character when both confront objects and/as obstacles in *Patinoire*.

I will develop three main arguments in this chapter. The first is that the character can redirect our attention away from the possible eroticization of the performer's body. This relates specifically to the costumes in *The Whore of Babylon* which reveal large amounts of skin and eroticized movements in accordance with the fact that they represent the erotic play between *Jesus* and *The Chorus*. The next argument is that the body's technical proficiency can inform the represented character. And the third is that obstacles influence the relationship between the performer's body and the represented character and make the former more visibile. The obstacles and objects that the performer faces, creates, and uses in *Patinoire* enable the action. Thus, it is important to see if they influence the relationship between the performer's body and the represented character.

6.2 How Burlesque Codes Enhance the Reading of *The Whore of Babylon*:

The Whore of Babylon presents the images of *Hell* ("God's Paradise") created by Leclerc as her reading of the biblical story. The aesthetic of the piece includes barely dressed female bodies, intentionally eroticized movement, codes that indicate sexual acts, and descriptions of sexual acts in the lyrics of the songs. This aesthetic offers a platform for addressing an important question

about circus character, its nature, and its ability to communicate meaning. Can the character influence the way we perceive the performer's body in a performance that enables objectification by exposing the body? Can it subvert the "male gaze" through an action that is framed in a strong narrative? If so, how does a represented character change the spectator's gaze?

The Whore of Babylon is a fitting example for exploring these questions given its aesthetic and that of Leclerc's earlier shows. In her article about Leclerc's and Montreal performer Leslie Baker's performances, Hurley introduces the main subject of Leclerc's pieces that preceded and anticipated *The Whore of Babylon*. Hurley argues that: "Across her work since 2009, Leclerc has investigated and experimented with the kinds of relations fostered between her white, female, contortionist body and that of the viewing spectator" ("Occupying the Object" 275). She also highlights Leclerc's interest in burlesque, whose codes are also present in *The Whore of Babylon*.

Hurley describes Leclerc's deconstruction of the classical circus "feat" as her dramaturgy: "However, Leclerc's shows are not a 'turn' or otherwise part of a sequence of different acts; rather, they are complete to themselves. Defying the logic of variety, she creates and performs full-length pieces with their own narratives" (Hurley, "Occupying the Object".279). This type of dramaturgy exists in *The Whore of Babylon*. The disciplines melt into each other, and are hard to recognize most of the time, in the same way that acts and scenes turn into one other, but without clear beginnings and endings. The characteristics Hurley describes become particularly noticeable in *The Whore of Babylon*, the longest of Leclerc's creations. Hurley also presents reasons for Leclerc's dramaturgical choices:

> *Un*doing the structural principle of the feat, common to contortionism and to circus is thus a double-barrelled institutional critique. Instead of difference from and wonder at the

> performer-object of contortion, Leclerc's audiences are invited into a less hierarchical encounter where her corporeal mastery is deconstructed. ("Occupying the Object" 279)

The same principle appears in *The Whore of Babylon*, along with the complex story that presents many questions to the spectator. I will consider whether or not the strength of narrative, story, and represented characters distances the spectator's gaze from the performer's body, despite the presentation of almost naked performers who engage in provocative acts.

Laura Mulvey's seminal article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1973) influenced film theory. Mulvey introduces the notion of the "male gaze" developed in a psychoanalytical exploration of Hollywood mainstream cinema. Mulvey uses Sigmund Freud's writings on scopophilia and Jacques Lacan's theory of the "mirror stage" to explore the pleasure of watching films. Mulvey argues that movies are filmed in a way so as provide pleasure for men and enable them to identify with the male protagonist while simultaneously objectifying the main female character. Describing a "woman as image" and "man as bearer of the look", Mulvey argues that:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (19)

The "male gaze" has influenced a number of feminist artists who try to deconstruct or subvert its codes. It is introduced in this analysis because Leclerc works with female bodies in *The Whore of Babylon*, thus simultaneously questioning and enabling the objectification of the female body.

But, does enabeling it undermine the questioning of the gaze circus scholar Katie Lavers has written about the similarities between the body in performance art and in contemporary circus. To explore the possibility of embodied protest in circus, Lavers (2014) claims that:

> When thinking about the body of the performer in performance art, one central idea is that the body of the performer, with no text, script, or theatrical props, and in a much reduced, but carefully considered context, is believed capable of holding encoded political, social and personal meanings and can function as a site of embodied protest. (58)

She then investigates the role of embodied protest in the 20th century and writes that the "physical embodiment of 'political personalism' with the body as a site of protest" was crucial for the development of performance art (Lavers, 60). Lavers argues that: "The body began to be seen as being invested with the power to be read as a statement of personal protest, as a political body" (60). She concludes that with "the active and engaged spectator in deciphering allusive layers of meaning," there can be "a wealth of meanings to mine and reveal the political body in New Circus and contemporary circus arts" (65-66). Lavers' conclusion suggests that it is possible to create multiple meanings, as Leclerc does in *The Whore of Babylon*.

6.2.1 The represented character and the spectator's gaze.

The Whore of Babylon follows a linear story. We see characters who follow a certain narrative path that changes them in time. In Leclerc's vision of *Hell*, *Jesus'* gaze is the one that makes *the Whores* look good or evil, and the one that introduces moral references and rituals as a way to control *The Chorus*. (A. Leclerc, personal interview; D. Dugan, interview)

Since all the performers are women, it is important to ask how the relationship between the represented character and the performer's body influences the audience's "male gaze" on the

performers' female bodies. Their bodies are exposed to our gaze form the beginning to end. The show begins with *Jesus* sitting on the floor, licking her feet and focusing on the pleasure, becoming more and more sexualized. She then takes the rocking horse and rides it while drinking, with possible sexual allusions. *Future King's* movement also carries a note of eroticism in her walk and the way she interacts with objects and the bodies of other performers. *The Chorus*' movement has sexual undertones most of the time – in the way they touch, move and interact with one other and with *Jesus*, gently or roughly. But, given the aesthetic of the show that frames these movements, an intellectual distance from these sensory reactions can appear. The focus goes quickly from the performers' naked bodies to an exploration of the reasons for and understanding of their actions. Once the aesthetic becomes habitual and accepted, there is a chance for the nakedness or the eroticized acts to become only representational. The relationship between the performer's body and the character can play a role in this process of normalizing these aesthetic characteristics. The characters and their relationships trigger our imagination and capture our attention. The performers' bodies are not perceived any more as eroticized or objectified in themselves – they become representational.

The audience's perception of the performers' bodies are influenced by the story and by the characters who engage the audience's attention and frame the nudity and eroticism as normal. Therefore, in certain cases, multiple factors can influence the way a character shapes the audience's perception of the performer's body.

6.3 The Proficiency of the Body in *The Whore of Babylon*:

The relationship between the performer's body and his/her character is important in circus because the performer's technical skills sometimes capture the audience's entire attention. Erin

Hurley underlines this phenomenon when she defines the "performer body" as the one that becomes visible when executing virtuosic tricks ("Multiple Bodies of Cirque du Soleil" 131).

Using an example from *The Whore of Babylon*, I will explore the relationship of the performer's body to the represented character in performances of exceptional skill. I will ask whether the represented character still exists when technical virtuosity is displayed; how the performer's skills create or influence his/her expression of character; and how the performer's body's technical proficiency enhances or disturbs the expression of character and narrative.

The scene in which *Future King* walks on broken glass barefoot and naked while smoking a cigar offers an opportunity for discussing for answering these questions. As we will see below, the scene offers tools for us to decode the story and to follow the character's development, even minimally. In the scene, *Future King* reaches maturity and becomes ready to take over the *Kingdom*. This scene includes a very specific skill, glass-walking, which has its roots in side-show performances. It is an unusual skill in contemporary circus and unique in the context of the show. Glass-walking is specific to this show because it is the skill that has not been deconstructed like the circus disciplines of other performers. It maintains its form, but is framed according to the meaning of the story, signifying the "crossing of the river." Adding meaning to the skill facilitates its placement within the story.

In *Signs of Performance* (1996), Colin Counsell writes about 20th century theatre and in his final chapter on the human body in performance art, argues:

> The human body is not usually disruptive, far from it, for most often the body is heavily incultured. Gesture, posture and movement are bound up with behavioral codes, while clothes signify a host of meanings, indicating gender, class, ethnic origin, and more

> subtly, aesthetic preferences and the finer subdivisions of social grouping associated with them. Nor is the naked body inherently any less readable. (223)

Counsell discusses how the two performance artists, Annie Sprinkle and Karen Finlay, create and control the meaning of their nakedness in their performances. He argues that framing nakedness, in both performances, was politically ambiguous, "as any female exposure must be in our culture" (Counsell, 224). Counsell adds that "Such disruptions of representation, of corporeality's abstraction and codification, are effected most forcefully when the body is combined with a chance to produce genuine physical hazard" (224). Counsell's notion of "disruptions of representation" (224) caused by explicit nakedness is useful for my analysis.

When *Future King* walks on broken glass, the spotlight is on her while the other performers remain motionless. As she prepares for the walk, our attention is entirely focused on her. Before she prepares to walk, she enters the scene naked, holding the cigar and "crucifies" *Jesus* with ashes.

Future King goes to the glass strip at the back of the stage, washes her feet slowly in a pail and starts to walk. As spectators, we do not know if she has to wash her feet in order to cross the glass safely or if this is an action required only by the represented character. What we observe on stage is a representation of power—both in the performer's body and in the represented character. The performer's physical power is nested in her ability to walk on glass, since the framing accentuates this action, being the only evident skill in the show. In the story, this action represents the final challenge *Future King* has to overcome before taking over the *Kingdom*.

Future King is indifferent towards the other characters. The cigar and the slow leisurely pace of the walk emphasize her distance from the others. The strength of this image is in the naked

performer's body performing an action that is perceived as dangerous, with ease and enjoyment. The performer's skill—which separates her from the audience and, in the story, from the other characters too— grabs the audience's attention and represents the power of the situation and of the *Kingdom,* which *Future King* has acquired.

In the story, the glass-walking symbolizes the ability to walk on water to cross the river Euphrates, a symbol of *Future King*'s adulthood (A. Leclerc, personal interview). Returning to Counsell's notion of "disruptions of representation" (224), I argue that for the audience, the story and the represented character are less important. The story fades while we focus on the performer's body. The ease of her movement produces two effects. Our fear of a possible injury decreases and her control over the movement becomes increasingly obvious. This powerful image created by the performer's body and its discipline carries us away from the story.

Glass-walking, an action executed by the performer, clearly defines *Future King's* character. This skill separates her from the other characters, especially given that before this action her character's movement did not include acrobatics nor displayed acrobatic skill, while the others performed contortion-like movements.

The action the performer accomplishes in this scene defines her character as calm and in control of the situation. By glass-walking she becomes the main character of the piece and her function in the story finally becomes clear – she is the future. This inference comes from the fact that she is the only one still strong enough to move and becomes even more isolated from the others than before. This action also clarifies her relationship with the glass on stage, which was present from the beginning. Thus, this performance is crucial for understanding the nature of her character.

Even though our attention during the action is on the performer's body, it communicates crucial information about the story and for understanding the represented character.

Even in moments when a skillful performance overshadows the represented character and the performer's persona, it can enhance the spectator's understanding of the represented character and advance the story. In the example from *The Whore of Babylon*, the performer's body and its action (as well as the performer's persona, which is part of the performer) offer crucial information for defining the character. This indicates that the relationship between the performer's body and the character is inseparable. Even when the focus is only on one of the two, it feeds the understanding of the other.

6.4 The Body and Objects and/as Obstacles in *Patinoire*

6.4.1 Introduction.

Objects play an important role in circus. As tools, they enable and influence bodily movement. As props, they can be crucial to the development of the action or the story. I will not focus on apparatus in this thesis because neither show uses them, with the exception of the short diabolo sequence in *Patinoire,* which will be addressed. I will discuss the use of objects as props that are necessary to the development of the action and stories. In some cases, these props are used as an apparatus, like the bottles that are juggled or the fork that is balanced on the performer's face. In *Patinoire*, many everyday objects are used to enhance our understanding and knowledge of the represented character and its nature.

I will focus on clarifying the relationship between the performer's body and the represented character when external objects are used. I hope I can reach some conclusions that can shed some light on the relationship between circus character and apparatus.

6.4.2 Objects and the performer's body in *Patinoire*.

In the aesthetic reality of *Patinoire*, everyday objects become a constant obstacle for the performer to fulfill his intentions and, in a way, play the antagonist. To explore this relationship further, I will look at the following elements: how objects underline the performer's physical abilities; whether or not the objects are obstacles for the performer's body and/or the represented character to overcome; whether the treatment of external obstacles influences the relationship between the performer's persona and the represented character.

The objects in *Patinoire* have an important dramaturgical role. They are obstacles that the character faces and has to overcome. They constitute a tool to externalize internal conflict in the represented character. These objects also serve a comical function, not only when they prevent the character from performing a simple action (e.g. playing a record), but also when the performer uses them in an unusual, "new" way. In *The Semiotics of Clowns and Clowning*, Paul Bouissac explains how objects can be given new functions and meanings in order to create a gag:

> In the same way as puns activate unsuspected semantic ambiguities concealed in the phonetic structure of words and phrases, artifacts used in gags are emancipated from their normative functions and unfold in new dimensions to produce surprising, even at times shocking, meaning. (62)

In *Patinoire*, most objects are given new meanings that create difficulties for the represented character. But, is the audience's perception of the character different if these objects are or are not obstacles?

The first analysis focuses on situations in which objects are not obstacles but they influence the relationship between the represented character and the performer's body. Manipulating bottles is

an action that is repeated on several different occasions throughout *Patinoire* and without apparent difficulties. Unlike the records that fall out of their sleeves or the diabolo that disappears into thin air, the bottles do not show any resistance. The bottles are not an obstacle for the body to overcome.

After a short introduction, the performer enters the stage spinning a bottle, and carrying a chair with the bottle balancing on the chair's seat. He then puts the bottle on the chair and successfully brings it to the other part of the stage, spinning it rapidly. The next bottle manipulation starts after a nagging female voice emerging from the speakers explains to him that he should be calm and that he is loved. Looking around desperately, the performer starts playing with the bottle on the table. Then he stands and performs a sequence of "ballet-like" movements, taking the bottle and balancing it on his forehead and then on his hand. He then walks to the jacket sitting in the middle of the stage and puts it on all while balancing the bottle on his forehead.

This act enables the performer to show his technique and make his (performer) body visible. Before manipulating the bottle, the character was passively listening to a recorded monologue comming from the speakers. Our attention was on the character and its rapport with the invisible female voice. When he begins his performance, our attention focuses on his body, shifting away from the established story and the character. Thus, when he manipulates the bottle, the performer's body can become important and visible. When the short activity is over, our attention returns to the represented character, who is satisfied by his successful performance. Here, the relationship between the performer's body and the represented character is similar to the one in *The Whore of Babylon* when *Future King* walks on the glass. His relationship with the objects enables the performer's body to inform us about the represented character.

In *Patinoire*, the offstage force creates obstacles for the represented character. The way in which objects are used in some activities turns them into obstacles for the represented character. The character himself does so as well, in his need to entertain the audience. In the *Dictionary of Theatre Terms* (1998), Pavis defines obstacles in dramatic action as follows:

> An obstacle or hindrance is something that opposes the character's action, thwarts his projects and frustrates his desires. In order for conflict and therefore dramatic development to exist, "one individual's aim encounters hindrances from other individuals, because an opposite aim, seeking commensurate realization, stands in the way. (241)

The relationship between the character and the different obstacles creates a certain tension and conflict between the two, enabling the action to move forward and the character to prove itself.

The relationship between the performer's body and the represented character will be explored using the scene in which the represented character puts the chair on the table and performs a handstand on it. In this action, the chair placed on the bottles on top of the table becomes the obstacle because the performer's body has to balance on this structure and sit on the chair without falling. By doing this, the represented character creates an obstacle for the performer's body to overcome. The character's action is motivated by his wish to gain the audience's love and admiration. Chair-balancing becomes an obstacle for the performer's body to overcome, but for the represented character as well, as he wants to convince the audience that he is worthy of their love and of being called a performer. The performer's body must complete the objectives in order to satisfy the represented character's need to be loved.

As the performer's body balances on the chair and contorts itself around it, the context remains clear. The represented character remains present through his facial expression when he poses and

gives the audience a chance to admire him. The clear motivation of *Patinoire's* character prevents him from being obscured by the performer's body when facing an obstacle. The chair becomes an obstacle for the performer's body to balance on and contort around and for the represented character to satisfy the expectations he has for himself as a performer. Even though this obstacle is created by the represented character exclusively for the performer's body, in the moment it is created, it becomes something the represented character must also face, a challenge to overcome in order to prove himslef to the audience. Thus, in this case, the obstacle unites the performer's body and the represtented character towards a common goal in order to execute the action. This activity is framed by the show's narrative, which is defined by a clear shared motivation. The performer's body-represented character relationship is therefore affected by that narrative frame.

The physical obstacle that inconveniences both the represented character and the performer's body can be observed also in the diabolo juggling scene. Juggling should be one action that the performer's body (with the support of the performer's persona) executes without difficulty because it is the primary circus discipline of the performer. But, in the "bad dream" aesthetics of the show, even this action becomes problematic. There are several disruptions of the action, all of which are created by the absurdist force from offstage.

The music suddenly doesn't play when the performer juggles and, in the end, the diabolo disappears. The obstacle is of a different nature here. It is not physical but technical and aesthetic. The music stops every time the juggling becomes rhythmical, which is a problem for both the performer's body and the represented character. The latter wants the music to support his performance, which, in return stops the performer's body from executing a technically perfect activity.

The second problem when the diabolo disappears is much bigger as it causes the final interruption. This prevents the performer's body from showing its skill, and makes us wonder what he would have done had he not been interrupted. This disappearance also creates a problem for the represented character, who loses the opportunity to use the skill of the performer's body to perform an activity which could award him the audience's love. The character needs to find a solution and a replacement for the suddenly interrupted action. The focus switches between the performer's body, present in the presentation of a skill, and the represented character, which becomes more interesting and important when facing interruptions.

The obstacle, here used as a dramaturgical tool, connects the performer's body and the represented character by thwarting their intentions. Even though the diabolo is not an obstacle for the performer, the absurdist aesthetics in which the character exists are an obstacle, and they in turn transform the diabolo into one for the performer. Thus, we can observe how a harmless or neutral object becomes an obstacle for the represented character and for the performer's body too.

This analysis provides another view of the relationship between the performer's body and the represented character in the presentation of a physical skill. In *Patinoire*, where the motivation of the represented character is completely clear—even when the performer's body faces obstacles and executes the trick—the represented character remains visible due to the performer's gesticulation and facial expressions.

6.5 Conclusion: The Importance of the Performer's Body for the Circus Character:

Above, I addressed the relationship between the performer's body and the represented character during the presentation of the performer's skill, the way external objects affect the relationship

between these two, and the possibility that a character's existence can influence the spectator's gaze on the performer's body.

The relationship between the performer's body and the represented character was investigated by questioning the possibility of a character and its narrative frame to subvert the "male gaze" in *The Whore of Babylon*. When the story remains central, the objectification of the performer's body can be minimized. Because we focus on the represented character, and on the story and its complex meaning, our attention can be redirected from the performers' exposed bodies to the story they (re)present.

In *The Whore of Babylon*, it is clear that the moments displaying physical skill only serve to enhance our understanding of a character. Even though the spectator's attention is directed towards the performer's body executing the action, his/her understanding of the character is informed by the action. In *Future King*'s case, the performer's body walks on glass, informing the audience's understanding of *Future King's* personality and her role in the story. Of course, this understanding is further supported by the narrative frame of the piece, which never stops and includes all actions.

A similar situation appears in *Patinoire,* when the performer juggles bottles. In this case, the object is not an obstacle for the character. This action can focus the attention on the performer's body and informs us about the character's personality, allowing us to note his reaction when he succeeds.

These moments enable the conclusion that physical skill can help to define circus characters. Even though in the moments of action the attention is not on the represented character but on the performer's body, the circus character as a whole continues to exist in these two performances.

The circus character exists throughout all actions as the frame and reason for these actions, both in *Patinoire* and *The Whore of Babylon*.

The relationship between the objects, the represented character, and the performer's body in *Patinoire* implies that the objects and the character's relationship with them can be a powerful tool to communicate the character's nature.

7 Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis was to define the nature of circus character(s) in *Patinoire* and *The Whore of Babylon.* To achieve a definition, this thesis probed the relationship between the performer's persona, the performer's body, and the represented character - the three aspects that I propose constitute circus character. The details of this relationship were organized into three chapters focusing respectively on: character and the tools used to define it, the relationship between the performer's persona and the represented character, and the relationship between the performers's body and the represented character. Each point was discussed separately to facilitate the analysis and to deepen the focus on particular relationships and aspects of circus character. This strict separation does not, however, imply that these constitutent parts of circus character can be completely separated in creation or performance, where they intertwine to form a whole.

The questions posed at the beginning of the thesis have enabled several conclusions about the relationships between the performer's body, the performer's persona and the represented character. The initial questions have lead to a sequence of short, partial analyses, exploring specific relationships, like the one between the performer's body and the represented character in moments of exceptional physical skill. All these questions were part of the main interrogation: What is the nature of the circus character(s) in The Whore of Babylon and Patinoire? To answer this question I will bring together elements of the analysis of each show in the next paragraphs, attempting to identify a common conclusion.

I have explored several aspects of *Patinoire*: its connection with different circus and theatre traditions, the use of the performer's persona for the creation of the represented character, and the way the performer's body and the represented character relate to the obstacles and objects. By

studying the character in *Patinoire* and comparing it to the traditions of "types" in theatre as defined by Bentley, the theatre of absurd, and clowning, I concluded that, despite similarities with these traditions, the character is unique. Even though several parallels exist between the *Patinoire* character and Bentley's "types" (the character's predictability, and the character's role as the force that moves the story forward), the character is not a theatrical "type" because it uses circus technique to express itself. Also, the character exhibits a clear purpose, which distinguishes him from characters in absurd theatre. The similarities with the clown tradition are numerous (the use of objects, theme, use of other circus disciplines), but they can also be traced specifically to circus as an art form. The character in *Patinoire* is therefore independent of the traditions that precede it, although it shares aspects of them.

Further, I have explored the relationship between the performer's persona and the represented character in Patinoire, relying on the interviews with the director of the show, Patrick Léonard, and focusing on Paul Ricoeur's notion of "narrative identity." Applied to my study of the influence of the performer's persona on the character in *Patinoire*, Ricoeur's notion of "narrative identity" indicates that two constituent parts of circus character can relate directly to one another. In *Patinoire,* the character draws from the performer's persona in several ways. It uses the performer's personal experiences and personality, his personal objects, and music that touches him. This suggests that the performer's persona can form a basis for the circus character. Here, the performer's persona strongly influences the development and content of the monologues, as well as the "personality" of the character. Also, it suggests that the performer's body and the performer's persona are inseparable.

Finally, in the example of *Patinoire,* I explored the relationship between the performer's body and the represented character in scenes involving objects and obstacles. In the aesthetic of

Patinoire, which includes a clearly defined and always present character, the represented character stays visible and important when the performer's body (and persona) faces physical obstacles. In this particular show, the character communicates through the performer's facial expressions during the performance. Also, given the character's clear motivation, and the importance of that motivation for every action in the show, the character's presence is felt when the performer overcomes the obstacles.

The exploration of the represented character in *Patinoire* and its relationships with the performer's body and the performer's persona suggests a general conclusion about the nature of this particular character. The circus character in *Patinoire* successfully negotiates the use of personal and intimate experiences, integrating them in the represented character in a way that facilitates their recognition but not their full assimilation. The relationship with the performer's body appears to be similar– the represented character stays present in the moments of physical challenge. Léonard never stops performing the character in order to execute the trick, making sure that the focus on the character's story never fades. Finally, I would argue that the precisely negotiated relationships between the performer's body, the performer's persona and the represented character lead to the third conclusion– the circus character is unique and separate from older traditions. Because it appears that the character is developed in constant negotiation between the performer's body, persona and represented character, inspirations that might have roots in diverse traditions are merged in an original way. The character in *Patinoire* is clearly defined, with a basic human need as its motivation, becoming easy to identify with and to understand.

The Whore of Babylon, with its complex, multi-layered aesthetic, informed us about a different kind of circus character. Several analyses of the represented characters, their mutual relationships

and the ways in which their relationships with the performers' bodies and the performers' personae were negotiated enabled insghts into the nature of the characters in this show.

The complexity of the characters, of their relationships, as well as their similarities and differences gave insights into the definition of character in the show. When exploring the tools used to represent the characters in *The Whore of Babylon*, I anaylsed the characteristics of three characters (*Jesus*, *The Chorus* and *Future King*): their costumes, their movement quality, their representation in music and their relationships with each other. I have suggested that the costumes are the first tool to observe difference and define the characters in the story. After that, the quality of their movement enables further distinctions and is connected to the relationsips between the characters. The most important aspects for understanding the story and its characters are the ways in which they interact with each other and the narration in the show's soundtrack. These two components inform the specatator about the relationships between the characters, as well as the nature of the place in which they exist (*Hell*) and their "personalities." In *the tattooing scene* the spectator is even introduced to individual performers of *The Chorus* and their specific relationships with *Jesus*. All this information gives general clues about the story and the nature of the characters that nevertheless remain opaque due to sudden (perceived) and unexplained changes in the relationships. These changes come essentially from the aesthetic of the show and its rules, sometimes directly opposite to those of the real world.

Further, in the example of *The Whore of Babylon*, I have explored the way in which the relationship between the performer's persona and the represented character is negotiated in solo and group performances, as well as in moments of dramatic tension. This analysis has lead to two, apparently separate conclusions: firstly, the performer's persona does not have much influence on the way in which the represented character is perceived in either solo or group

performances, and secondly, the performer's persona easily fades into the narrative when dramatic tension is perceived. I say that these two conclusions are only apparently separate because I believe that they are both rooted in the same characteristic of the show i.e. its clearly defined story that was developed in great detail before rehearsals began,, and which inspired its aesthetic. Because of this, the accent is not on the performers' personae but on the represented characters, who captivate the spectators' attention.

A similar situation appears in the exploration of the relationship between the performer's body and the represented character in *The Whore of Babylon*. The rootedness of the physical action in the story and its aesthetics imposes specific relationships between the performer's body and the represented character– instead of losing importance when the performer's body becomes more visible, the story is fed and moved forward by the body's action. Thus, the action is immanent to the story and its development, enabling the story to stay present in the moment of exceptional skill. I would also argue that the story influences the way in which the performers' bodies are perceived in the show. Because of the aesthetic which reveals the bodies and uses burlesque codes, the bodies are easily objectified by the spectator's gaze. Due to the strength of the story and the represented characters, the bodies become representational.

The characters in *The Whore of Babylon* are drastically from different the one in *Patinoire*. They are more opaque, non-verbal, and relatively hidden behind their actions that sometimes come across as confusing. Nevertheless, I would argue that they present another way to show the nature of the character– one that is left open to interpretations and that provokes feelings in a different way. The spectator might not be in a position to easily understand these characters, to ever know their motivations, emotions or history, nor to identify with them. These characters can evoke strong feelings with their revealing costumes and eroticized, sometimes confusing actions, but

they manage to captivate the spectator's attention and communicate certain aspects of their natures. I do not believe that clearer, more easily understood characters would enhance the experience of *The Whore of Babylon*.

7.1 The Nature of the circus character:

A final question that demands an answer is: What can be concluded about the nature of the circus character in general from these two, completely different shows?

Léonard and Leclerc have started with different goals: to reestablish the circus as a form that can tell clear, personal stories (rooted in the aesthetic of *7 Fingers*) on the one hand, and to question and deconstruct the circus as a form, on the other. Both have succeeded in creating the shows they wanted: *Patinoire* has an understandable story and character, while *The Whore of Babylon* deconstructs everything– from movement and circus disciplines to the way in which the characters relate to each other. The 'deconstruction' of the ways in which characters relate to each other comes from the nature of their actions and the fact that the show's aesthetics present social codes that are almost opposed to those acceptable in reality– eating together is performed as spitting on one another for example. Since this deconstruction may not be easily understood, there is a certain perceived obscurity of these relationships. Nevertheless, this obscurity does not prevent the show from succeeding in the creation of distinctive characters and a story that has multiple layers. These layers give richness to the story of *The Whore of Babylon* and its characters, while the actions and the available traits of the characters communicate the meaning.

Despite the radical differences between the two shows, both have circus characters that are separate from the performers that present them, and there is one conclusion that follows from the analysis of these shows in this thesis. The character unites the performer's persona, the

performer's body, and the represented character in a way that enables these parts to mutually feed each other and that contributes to the understanding of the nature of character. Where there is a complex circus character, as in the two examined shows, the performer's body and the performer's persona might become more visible or dominant in certain moments, but eventually these moments inform the spectator about the nature of the represented character. This relationship is observed in both *Patinoire* and *The Whore of Babylon*, independently of their other characteristics.

7.2 Further Research:

This paper opened up several paths for future research. I believe that a study of larger proportions, based on similar methodological tools and focused on contemporary circus in different cultural contexts can give more information about the nature of the circus character. Even though each circus show is different and has its own aesthetic, rules and goals, exploring more shows could suggest different possibilities for the performer's persona, the performer's body and the represented character to relate to each other. Moreover, investigation of the ways in which narrative is intertwined with the action in circus, and how they relate to each other would also help to clarify the traits of the circus character. Finally, creation-based study of the relationship between the performer's persona, the performer's body and the represented character could give intimate insights into the nature of the circus character, and the possible challenges to its creation.

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