

Art of (dis)obedience:
A Study of Critical Embodiment Through a Circus Body

Dana Dugan

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

Rachel Berger Chair

Charles Batson Examiner

Shauna Janssen Examiner

Angélique Willkie Supervisor

Approved by _____
Graduate Program Director

Dean of Faculty

Date _____ 2019

ABSTRACT

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Dana Dugan

In a critical examination of circus and its larger socio-political context, the concept and practice of (dis)obedience aims to alter or eradicate authoritarian power relationships between the doing and undoing of oppressive codes and traditional embodiments - normal and queer, success and failure - as a circus body. Its intent functions to expose and interrogate such binary power relationships and transgress authoritarian paradigms such as North American circus and Paul Preciado's *pharmacopornographic capitalism*. How can a circus body and its embodied knowledge re-imagine and challenge current existing authoritarian paradigms?

The inquiry into what a circus body is, its embodied knowledge (technical and aesthetic practices), and its relation to and engagement with authority are explored in this thesis. The inquiries originated from my hermeneutic phenomenological circus practice and informed my theoretical investigations. I investigated *through* my circus body as both researcher and object of study, providing unique insights into the particularities of that common engagement. Through this process, the circus body, its embodied knowledge, and (dis)obedience emerged as the three pivotal concepts of interest in this research. In current circus discourse, these concepts have yet to be fully explored. There are two parts to this thesis—a thesis performance (*Dialogues of Disobedience*), which in turn informs the second part, the theoretical analysis and synthesis in *Art of (dis)obedience: A study of critical embodiment through a circus body*. The result is a working theoretical proposition for four of the nine essentials I identify of a circus body – a baseline model for understanding the specificities of my circus body and for establishing the habits developed through technical practice as a form of embodied knowledge. From (dis)obedience, new embodiments and practices manifested in queer and grotesque aesthetics that serve socially conscious practice and performance. Unconventional propositions of new performance forms in both artistic and scholarly mediums emerged from the act of *undoing* through (dis)obedience towards self-determination and innovation.

This thesis offers discourse from a practice-based perspective that is highly under-represented in current circus research. It also strives to speak to both the scholarly and artistic communities, and to contribute to the burgeoning field of circus scholarship through an intimate account of my approach to artistic scholarly research.

Keywords: a circus body, embodiment, embodied knowledge, habits, disobedience, self-determination, pharmacopornographic capitalism, practice-based artistic inquiry, queer, grotesque

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Chapter One: Introduction

DECLARATION OF (DIS)OBEDIENCE

In my humble human existence, I find it increasingly necessary to examine my relationship to spheres of influence and community, to engage in questioning what reverence, accordance, compliance, duty, and docility manifest in my relationships. There are often days I question the authenticity of everything around me.

I am frustrated, fed up, and hungry for the unknown, the new, the avant-garde.

I long to be inspired and alive in my artistic existence.

I suffocate under the notion that being anything but true to myself and my work is unthinkable.

My agency is welling up inside me.

I wish to emancipate myself from the oppressive authorities that enslave me through critical self-examination.

I write to provoke a rupture in the current cultural trajectory that serves only the past and those who hold the current cultural authority sometimes referred to as power.

This is a political proclamation against the mainstream, prohibitive culture of circus and its greater capitalist context and influences. I reject the current stifling, aestheticized visual expression of circus and activate my agency through critical subjective disobedient expression and performance.

(dis)obedience to be able to:

Break away from, dissolve, digress from, transgress those authorities that enslave subjectivities and prevent the pursuit of personal freedom.

Assume and activate my entitled agency to change, delineate, separate, stand apart from, using existential examinations of those powers that impose themselves on individuals and groups.

Grant myself permission to discover the unknown and to re-imagine my existence in service of self-determined freedom.

Manifest and declare the cause that compels me toward (dis)obedience.

Alter ways of doing that are frivolous or arbitrary.

Typically, bodies, humans, persons, including myself, are not predisposed to change. In fact, I am more likely to suffer in the face of the insufferable than to rid myself of those mechanisms, habits, traditions, or authorities that induce such suffering simply because I am accustomed and programmed to do so. Even more so and of greater concern, I may simply not be aware of such suffering.

Revolt, to resist, to transgress, to disobey mainstream practice which relentlessly targets all subjectivities, in order to normalize or marginalize and reduced them to dehumanized objects. It becomes my duty, my right to establish new ways, new paradigms to secure a respectful existence, a basic human right.

I hold these truths to be self-evident, self-determined, self-assured. They are granted by critical reflection.

This manifesto is for, and dedicated to those artists and persons past, present, and future who long for change.

Introduction

I am a self-proclaimed artist, mother, lover. I am an American, white, middle-aged woman living a relatively privileged existence compared to the multitude of bodies spanning the globe. As a performing body, my medium is my circus body. As a professional circus artist, the impetus to return to academic life was to immerse my practice into a world of questions and critical examination that so rarely exists in mainstream contemporary circus practices.

Historically, circus¹ has primarily existed as a form of entertainment. While there are some circus bodies performing in artistic registers that engage in deeper questioning of self, the circus community, and its larger socio-political context, much of what exists in the mostly animal free North American contemporary² circus continues to adhere and be loyal to the traditional tenets of spectacle and entertainment. It is a tradition of elite acrobatic training, entrepreneurship, global branding, showmanship, (Leroux & Batson, 2016, p. 8). I am not interested in engaging in a discussion about what is considered art or not, or who is an artist or not, nor do I want to abolish entertainment circus. I am stifled by the reigning North American mainstream circus practices and dissatisfied by a lack of queer, feminist, political work that embodies a reflection of the self and others. What is most problematic is a status quo of highly aestheticized and depoliticized circus bodies that perpetuate mainstream hegemonies that seek to control subjectivities through the normalization sex, gender, and sexuality, and that fetishize and eroticize Otherness. These circus bodies, generated by unexamined physical virtuosic technical practices, work toward disciplining self-surveillance the global neoliberal agenda of a North American billion dollar circus industry (Leroux & Batson, Leslie & Rantis, 2016, p. 232; Paul, 2004, pp. 590-91). North American quotidian authority reigns and is skeptical of change or evolution. Experimentation is often met with hostility and dismissed if the sterile, normalized neoliberal aesthetics are disrupted and their strict codes challenged. Artists engaging in experimental work often do not receive funding and lack support from their circus community and its leaders. Typically, experimental work is shunned and dismissed as

¹ The circus form, founded in the tradition of spectacle and entertainment, founded by Philip Astley in 1768 marked the birth of *Modern Circus*¹ or more commonly referred to as *Traditional Circus*.

² The 1970-80's marked a global shift from Modern Circus practice with a global emergence of *cirque nouveau* (or New Circus). In 1984, Cirque du Soleil marked the emergence *cirque nouveau* in Québec. Québec developed a distinct *cirque nouveau* voice to its global counter parts by borrowing from the *cirque nouveau* movement in France, from the circus business practices of its southern neighbor – United States, and from the Russian acrobatic pedagogy and practices. These played key roles in the foundation of Québécoise (North American) circus practices and aesthetics was laid.

not being circus. If the work is able to survive lack of funding and ostracization, getting programmed and touring presents an even greater challenge. I have witnessed this many times over.

Early in my theoretical research, I encountered Paul Preciado's – at the time Beatrice Preciado – (2013), *Testo Junkie: Sex, drugs, and biopolitics in the pharmacopornographic era*. Preciado argues that we are currently living under a new regime of biopolitics, a paradigm shift from Foucault's disciplinary *biopower* since WWII to a new *pharmacopornographic* regime: "We are facing a new kind of capitalism that is hot, psychotropic and punk" (p. 107). This new wave of capitalism began in America. *Testo Junkie* offers a historical review of the events and advancements in research during WWII that incited this shift. Preciado highlights the intricacies and major concepts of his theory and concludes with the need for resistance. Pharmacopornographic biocapitalism serves as the context in which I situate my circus body and its embodied experience. It serves as a point of departure for my investigations of my transgressive socio-political circus body.

The authority of pharmacopornographic biocapitalism infiltrates society through specific mechanisms that normalize desire for the purpose of making money. This regime disseminates normalized hegemonies of sex, gender, sexuality, race, class, age, and so on, at an accelerated rate in our global information age. Pharmacopornographic biocapitalism refers to an authority of "bio-molecular (pharmaco) and semiotic-technical (pornographic) government of sexual subjectivity – of which 'the pill' and Playboy are two paradigmatic offspring" (Preciado, 2008, p. 107). In my research-creation, specific thematics emerged, directly linked to the oppressive and violent mechanisms of normalization within this pharmacopornographic regime. In the present day neoliberal globalization, this pharmacopornographic biocapitalism stretches beyond the borders of the United States. US modern day imperialism – war industrial complex and pop culture – facilitates the spread of this new wave of capitalism. Preciado offers a name to the powerful socio-political paradigm that targets my subjectivity, proposing that the contemporary bio-political landscape of sex, gender, and sexuality became pharmacopornographic. He describes the specific mechanisms or technologies employed by this form of biocapitalism and proposes a need for resistive acts of corporeal self-determination. This paradigm represented the context in which I situated my circus body. It was compelled to question, resist, and disobey the hegemonies of pharmacopornographic biocapitalism. I placed my circus body in dialogue with pharmacopornographic capitalist technologies in my artistic conceptual explorations. It served as a key concept of exploration in my *Dialogues of Disobedience* thesis performance. This critical theory calls for my subversive proposition of *(dis)obedience* – critical subjective disobedience – to undo and transgress not just my circus practices but also challenge this broader authoritarian paradigm.

I research for new knowledge, new ways of doing, and new ways of embodying my self-determination, regardless of consequence. I seek to open, and embrace dialogues about the humanity,

meaning, and intent of circus body performances. As an artist, I have a circus body socialized by a mainstream authoritarian circus culture through an unexamined disciplining technical instruction sanctioned and practiced by the North American circus culture at large. In turn, my circus body is imprinted with its traditions and codes transmitted through these highly disciplined technical circus practices. These specific technical practices distinguish the circus body from other bodies. With my circus body, I sought to address these concerns and proposed re-imagining normative ways of doing to elevate and evolve my circus body and its practices and performances.

My initial research interests revolved around proposing a theory of embodied knowledge of circus performance and practice, that would serve as a tool to promote socially conscious artistic performance and cultivate self-determination. Early in my inquiries, understanding my body became essential. Who am I? What is my circus body? How did I become a circus body? The literature available in current circus discourse felt insufficient as a point of departure for a deep understanding of my circus body and its embodied knowledge. The landscape of circus discourse shows an interest in circus bodies, but these are primarily examined by a third party rather than being explored by practitioners themselves. Hence, I felt compelled to attempt to answer these questions for myself. Understanding a circus body as the source of my embodied knowledge allows for a deeper understanding of the specificities of such knowledge. I used my practice as a circus body to inform theoretical and conceptual notions of a circus body. When these questions first emerged, I did not fully understand the scale and scope of such an inquiry. However, as my body was the focus of inquiry, I pursued the colossal task of answering the question: what is a circus body?

A circus body and *(dis)obedience* – explored through its embodied knowledge – served as the pivotal concepts of my research. My circus body research offered a better understanding of the subject of study (my circus body and its embodiment). *(dis)obedience*, as a critical examination of circus and its larger socio-political context – pharmacopornographic biocapitalism – aims to expose the authoritarian power relationships between doing and undoing, normal and queer, success and failure. As a practical and theoretical project, it aims to expose and understand those relationships.

The focus of this research is twofold: 1) proposing a theory of a circus body, and 2) practicing, experimenting with, and uncovering the notion of *undoing* of the doing, of habits through the concept and practice of *(dis)obedience*, toward the unknown, in the interests of new knowledge, re-imagining new ways of doing, innovation, to uncover or awaken the unconscious, and to identify a sustainable mechanism for liberation from social authorities through self-determination. The practical and theoretical research involves three case studies of my circus body in three different circus disciplines. Achieving new knowledge requires breaking free from current embodied practices, techniques, and habits, which in turn innovate and liberate a circus body. Innovation is itself a form of new knowledge. My *(dis)obedience*,

regarding my current ways of doing, habits, techniques, and practices, both artistically and socio-politically, was a means for liberation and evolution. At the heart of (dis)obedience stands perversion and subversion of concepts, codes, traditions, and rules. I employ (dis)obedience as a productive form of resistance, redirecting my attention toward a more queertopian³ existence and innovation.

How can a circus body and its embodied knowledge re-imagine and challenge existing authoritarian paradigms?

Concepts: Authority, Habit, (dis)obedience

Authority

The first critical notion of this research, *authority*, refers to an interpersonal relationship governed by the legitimate or socially sanctioned use of power or superiority of a person or group over another.⁴ In this research, authority means anything that dictates, disseminates, and enforces community's social norms through socializing practices. At the foundation of a society are practiced techniques that support cultural traditions and codes. These practiced techniques function as mechanisms of control that serve to secure and ensure the survival of authority.

Authority is neither inherently positive nor negative. It can protect, but also abuse. It becomes so when it is oppressive and breeds inequality. How do we identify authoritative controls or influences within one's self and the obedience we grant such authorities? It is our habits and their habitual nature that give power to reigning authorities.

I employ the term authority instead of power as it specifically relates to the inherent need for obedience in order to exist. Authority is only as powerful as those who obey, and it typically operates through power wielded through the fear of negative social and economic consequences. Obedience to the powers or authorities of church, state, and public opinion, has the capacity to make society's individuals feel safe and protected.

[M]y obedience makes me part of the power I worship, and hence I feel strong. I can make no error, since it decides for me; I cannot be alone, because it watches over me; I cannot commit a sin, because it does not let me do so, and even if I do sin, the punishment is only the way of returning to the almighty power (Fromm, 1984, p. 21).

Critical to understanding culture and the subjectivities within it, is identifying the authority inherent in a given culture and to critically assess habits, obedience, and compliance to society. Authoritative codes, practices, and techniques are transmitted by society, learning institutions (schools, teachers, pedagogues), and parents. In what regimes of authority does my circus body exist? In my

³ A disidentification that exposes a landscape of possibility for Otherness through queer aesthetic expression-toward reimagining utopian modes of being the world (Muñoz, 2007)

⁴ Authority. (2015). Retrieved September 05, 2018, from <https://fromm-online.org/en/autoritaet/>

research, the authoritarian socializing power I challenge through my circus body manifests as the rigid, mainstream circus technique and aesthetics and practiced normalizing techniques found in Paul Preciado's pharmacopornographic biocapitalism.

Habit

The second critical concept is *habit*. In this research, habits manifest as the existing embodied knowledge of my circus body. Pierre Bourdieu's theory on *habitus* informs and supports my discovery of habit in my practical research, while also providing a depth of understanding regarding habit manifestation and production. Bourdieu's (1977) notion of habitus, introduced in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, was defined as,

a system of lasting and transposable dispositions (the tendency of actors to behave according to their habitus. Dispositions can be corporeal as well as cognitive, leading individuals to act, react, feel, and think as they do) which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks (pp. 82-83).

Outline of a Theory of Practice explores what determines, motivates, regulates, dictates, governs, and controls human action. Bourdieu's practice-oriented way of thinking situates social phenomena and practice as entwined, indivisible, and interdependent; placing the two in a productive dialectic intersection that results in his notion of habitus. He embraces phenomenology and experience as a governing principle which informs my practice-based research and nurtures my theoretical development of habit in relation to my circus body and its larger socio-political paradigm.

The concept of habitus theoretically supports my discovery of habit in relation to the knowledge transmitted to and embodied through my circus body via technique and practice. According to Bourdieu, these manifestations of habitus are most heavily influenced by education and family socialization, followed by the cultural impact of environment and peer groups. The assimilation of such habits is disseminated and transmitted primarily in pedagogical, institutional, and domestic settings. Habitus is indicative of the socialization of a subject into a particular culture. Bourdieu's habitus situated my embodiment and its subjectivity and legitimized the notion that my individuality is tied to a multiplicity by way of its cultural setting (i.e. circus culture and its greater socio-political context).

Bourdieu set the conditions for my existing, current knowledge created by my degrees of technical mastery through practice. The focus is not just on the manifestation of habit, but more importantly, on the practice of such habits (Maggio, 2018, p. 33). My circus embodiment manifests as technical habits embedded with aesthetics whose codes and traditions depend on the compliance of prevailing practices (physical culture and ideologies).

Bourdieu's theory maintains that habitus functions unconsciously and is unchangeable. In opposition to Bourdieu, my research suggests that habitus or habits are malleable and capable of transformation through conscious reflexive practice. My ability to consciously change habitus or habit(s) through self-deliberation and critical subjective (dis)obedience leads me to disagree with Bourdieu. However, at times, habits appeared unconscious and difficult to identify, hidden in the minutiae of banal existence.

Habits are formed through the practice of technique. *Technique* is one of the mechanisms that produces habitus or habits. It also functions as a transmitter of embodied knowledge through practice. The Cambridge Dictionary defines technique as “a way of doing an activity that requires skill or thought” or “a way of performing a skillful activity or the skill needed to do it”.⁵ I designate my technique as highly specialized skills practiced by my circus body disseminated by my circus community (and sports acrobatics).

Marcel Mauss is one of the most notable theorists on the concept of technique. In his essay, “Techniques of the Body,” Mauss discusses the notion of habitus. The main focus of his discussion revolves around technique and its relationship to practice. Like Bourdieu, he sees habitus as the result of taught bodily techniques. This essay was relevant as it offered another angle for understanding the source of my embodied habits and offered theoretical support to tether the notion of habit as embodied knowledge.

Mauss uses habitus to describe the aggregate nature of embodiment; habitus manifests within individuals acculturated through technique. Habitus varies between communities and those variations are collectively learned by specialized techniques – “These 'habits' do not just vary with individuals and their imitations, they vary especially between societies, educations, proprieties and fashions, prestige. In them we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason rather than, in the ordinary way, merely the soul and its repetitive faculties” (p. 73). Technique serves as the vehicle, mechanism and transmitter of specific socio-psycho-biological practices – “I call technique an action which is effective and traditional... There is no technique and no transmission in the absence of tradition” (Mauss, 1973, p. 73). His definition of technique supports my argument for linking the circus body and micro and macro-communities through technical practice.

Mauss argues that body techniques are transmitted through education – “In general, they are governed by education, and at least by the circumstances of life in common, of contact” (Mauss, 1973, p. 86). His essay offers deeper understanding of the source of habits; my circus body techniques and practice

⁵ Technique Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary. From <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/technique>

were transmitted through a circus “education”. While not formal, dissemination and transmission by my circus culture were the primary source of my habits. His argument supports my collective experience with other circus bodies as being the result of learned, habitual techniques and practices.

From this transmission, an authority manifested in the technical practices. “In all these elements of the art of using the human body, the facts of education were dominant...The child, the adult, imitates actions which have succeeded and which he has seen successfully performed by people in whom he has confidence and who have authority over him” (Mauss, 1973, p. 73). These authorities serve as gatekeepers of socio-psycho-biological traditions. Disciplining through techniques establishes a power dynamic through the notion of authority. Mauss’ theory exposes the authoritative capacity of technical practices and their dissemination, gesturing in significant ways to the notion of compliance and obedience in practice.

Mauss uses the cog-wheel to explain the implications and possible outcomes of human behavior – “What is the breadth of the linking psychological cog-wheel? I deliberately say cog-wheel.... What I can tell you is that here I see psychological facts as connecting cogs and not as causes, except in moments of creation or reform” (Mauss, 1973, p. 86). Here, Mauss speaks to the human capacity of both being a part of and breaking away from the cog-wheel metaphor. It is the instrument of technique that forms (unconscious) habit and places bodies as passive cog-wheels in the machine. However, if one is in an oppressive cog-machine relationship, our consciousness has the capacity to liberate one’s self from its unconscious habitual nature and break away from the machine. Mauss was not as fatalistic as Bourdieu in his idea that habits are unconscious and unchangeable. Mauss (1973) states, “It is thanks to society that there is an intervention of consciousness. It is no thanks to unconsciousness that there is an intervention of society” (p. 86). Understanding the capacity of the authoritarian power of technique, his argument supports my strategy of (dis)obedience – critical subjective disobedience – and its deployment for freedom and evolution. Additionally, his arguments deepen the discussion of how such habits, developed through the practice of techniques, serve as a powerful socializing mechanism.

In *What a body can do? Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research*, Ben Spatz considers technique as knowledge and a legitimate epistemological consideration. Bringing arguments for embodied knowledge to academia, Spatz legitimizes and contextualizes my research pursuits. Spatz asks what the body can do and examines the disparate ideas of knowledge, practice, and embodiment. He debates these ideas in the contexts of several different terrains of physical culture (embodied practices), from the highly specialized virtuosic to the quotidian.

Arguing that “*Technique is knowledge that structures practice*” (p. 1), he counters Bourdieu’s unconscious habitus, focusing on technique as the epistemic dimension of practice. Spatz (2015) states that “embodied technique then refers to transmissible and repeatable knowledge of relatively reliable

possibilities afforded by human embodiment” (p. 16). Like Mauss, he states that technique operates in both conscious and unconscious repetition. While he does not offer an explicit definition of embodied knowledge, he does present a strong argument for technique as knowledge, which is an embodied practice. The methodology presented in his argument supports my practice-based research.

Embodied practice is epistemic. It is structured by and productive of knowledge. Accordingly, an epistemological account of embodied practice is one in which practice actively encounters and *comes to know* reality through technique, rather than simply producing or constructing it. Social epistemologies allow us to analyze the development and circulation of embodied knowledge – in the form of technique – through processes that are both socially enabled and materially engaged (Spatz, 2015, p. 26).

Spatz was not convinced of the strength of Bourdieu’s notion of habitus as unconscious and unchangeable. He borrows from Bourdieu’s habitus to articulate the notion of sedimented technique. Spatz discusses technique and its relationship to practice, legitimizing technique as knowledge and practice as rigorous research.

The sedimentation of technique in and as embodiment is not just a question of learned patterns or muscle memory. The plasticity of embodiment – the degree to which it can be shaped by technique – is not unlimited. But to whatever extent the anatomy of the body is shaped through technique, physiology itself can be understood as a form of sedimented agency (Spatz, 2015, p. 51).

Spatz (2015) pushes this notion further and “provides a model for how these relate to each other through the sedimentation and circulation of agency” (p. 16). He embraces Bourdieu’s habitus when he discusses the notion of *sedimented agency*. Spatz argues that agency can be sedimented in and as embodiment both consciously and unconsciously. He connects this to Bourdieu’s habitus (Spatz, 2015, p. 51).

This adds another dimension to the difficulties one encounters in unlearning or retraining deeply ingrained technique. It also suggests a stronger and more literal sense in which “*what we know* becomes *who we are*” (Spatz, 2015, p. 56). His work speaks to the layered dimensions of my research, his own being “a work of performance philosophy and the philosophy of practice” (Spatz, 2015, p. 14). His approach reflects my own study of embodied practices in connection to individual and social construction.

What unconscious or conscious habits develop or imprint the ‘natural body’⁶ through the cultural markings of authority? How do these habits impact my existence as well as the authoritative paradigms in which my circus body is situated? Within my artistic culture, mainstream capitalist circus practices control bodies and their subjectivities. I propose that habits reflect the cultural markings of authority that

⁶ I refer to the natural body as a way to describe the material/immaterial granted at birth.

manifest as both conscious or unconscious acts of obedience. Habits develop through practices of technique imprinted by the authorities of a given culture, whether the circus community or a larger socio-political regime, like the pharmacopornographic regime.

Not all habits are bad. Habits can be problematic when they represent an obedient compliance to authoritarian conventions that subscribe to the normalization of subjectivities and breed inequality. Unexamined and compliant habits carry the capacity to perpetuate hegemonic practices, codes, and traditions. Habits materialize as performative social aesthetics that reflect the cultural markings of the authoritative paradigms of a specific culture. How do my habits manifest as obedience toward authority? Is this obedience willful and examined? Fromm (1984) states,

[o]bedience to a person, institution or power (heteronomous obedience) is submission; it implies the abdication of my autonomy and the acceptance of a foreign will or judgement in place of my own. Obedience to my own reason or conviction (autonomous obedience) is not an act of submission but one of affirmation (p. 19).

When heteronomous obedience and autonomous obedience do not align, disobedience surfaces. I examine both notions of obedience, but pay particular attention to that of heteronomous obedience, which might subjugate the self and hinder self-determination.

(dis)obedience

As a rebuttal to habit and authority, I propose a revival of the age-old concept and practice of disobedience. Historical accounts of disobedience are primarily limited to “revealing the limitations of political government” (Loizidou; Finchett-Maddock, 2013, p. 88). Disobedience functions not only as a means for emancipation from unjust laws, but also carries the potential to uncover the subjective obedience of the individual – political disobedience (public) versus subjective disobedience (personal, private or domestic). The place of subjective disobedience by the individual offers a productive value for changing social norms (Loizidou, 2013, p. 4). The practice of disobedience unveils the opportunity for subjective individual liberty and evolution in ways of doing.

In this research, *(dis)obedience* materializes as both a philosophy and a reflexive practice. The parentheses (in its unconventional spelling) function as a demarcation of a specific concept and practice versus its common place usage as a term – critical subjective (dis)obedience animates self-reflection, provoking a critique of one’s habitual obedience to authoritarian practices. (dis)obedience cannot exist without obedience. In order to (dis), one must understand one’s relation to obedience. The parenthetical designation also indicates the dependence of (dis)obedience on obedience. It operates as the mechanism that illustrates the critical distance (dis) creates between that of the subject (and their subjectivity) and obedience (conscious or unconscious). The (dis) – critical distance – holds obedience before the subject for questioning and reflection.

Subject/subjectivity + (dis) + obedience = critical subjective disobedience or (dis)obedience

Obedience can manifest at all levels of human behavior beginning with choices of the individual – conscious or unconscious – and so can be transposed across the strata of experience. Obedience is one of the binding forces of a community or social group and “evokes the adjustment to social norms to comply with the basic desire to belong to a social group” (Pozzi, Fattori, Bocchiaro & Alfieri, 2014, p. 23). The nature of obedience is learned through and maintained by practice which operates as a prominent facet in molding the obedient body. (Loizidou, 2013, p. 122). Obedience fundamentally sustains the survival of social systems and maintains social order (Pozzi, Fattori, Bocchiaro & Alfieri, 2014, p. 23). These passages speak to the function of obedience in society – survival and order, and its establishment and maintenance – the practice of obedient embodied habits for inclusion.

In order to know *how* obedience and (dis)obedience operate in relation to authority (negatively or positively), it is necessary to understand the individual’s “context-dependent behavior” (Pozzi, Fattori, Bocchiaro & Alfieri, 2014, p. 19). Obedience and (dis)obedience are neither inherently negative nor positive, but contextual – nuancing the positions of obedience and (dis)obedience as singular and subjectively situated.

Initially in my research, (dis)obedience emerged as a transgressive undoing of my obedient habitual embodied practices. “‘Dis’ means to set apart, to unravel, to deconstruct” (Loizidou; Finchett-Maddock, 2013, p. 91). This ‘dis’ resonates with the undoing necessary to the pursuit of new embodied knowledge. (dis)obedience is a mechanism to challenge through undoing or ‘unbraiding’ habitual engagement with social structures of authority. My (dis)obedience was a concrete behavior that challenged the beliefs, ideas, values, symbols, and expectations of my circus community, and was later transposed to the pharmacopornographic paradigm. It sets a trajectory toward shifting the status quo, habits, and normalizing hegemonies.

(dis)obedient undoing and unbraiding demands awareness of unexamined habits and practices. Awareness inhabits the body by consciously and deliberately turning inward and embracing the continuum of body sensations – a self-awareness of the intuitive physical, emotional, and mental manifestations in practice. Engaging in this kind of ‘introspective awareness,’ “we momentarily break the hold of the habitus, we ‘unbraid’ movement practices from the ideological ends and open up the possibility of no longer perpetuating ‘social structures at the level of the body’” (Noland & Sklar, 2009, p. 210). (dis)obedient self-awareness demands *listening*. The idea of “listening” leads to the undoing of deafness to discover the subtle ways in which we may begin to see disobedient events (Loizidou, 2013, p. 4) within ourselves, and beyond. “Listening” functions to actively awaken the unconscious to reflection and critique of obedient habitual embodiments and thereby unearth the possibility of (dis)obedience.

(dis)obedience is a singular subjective act highlighting the importance of understanding human behavior and its complexities. The subject is embodied; it desires, fears, eats, and so on. “It is truly the nature of man to be free and to wish to be so, yet its character is such that he instinctively follows the tendencies that his training gives him” (Loizidou, 2013; De la Boétie, 2007, p. 122). This passage exposes the power relationship between authority and the unexamined obedient body. “Obedience evokes a liability of the individual who seems to uncritically follow the orders and laws that the authority sets. Disobedience instead evokes personal autonomy as a fundamental criterion for one's own realization” (Pozzi, Fattori, Bocchiario & Alfieri, 2014, p. 25). The labor of (dis)obedience entails breaking “away from habitual modes of relating to the world and authority, or overcoming the fear of authority” (Loizidou, 2013, p. 109). To “undo the habits of a lifetime” (Loizidou, 2013, p. 123) requires effort, courage, and (dis)obedience when breaking habits, unhinging codes, and defying authority.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Academic research in circus remains relatively obscure and the current discourse primarily reflects historical discourse *about* circus. The majority of the current discourse does not stem from or reflect a practice-based research perspective *through* circus. The research interests of historical discourse versus practice-based discourse diverge. While both might refer or pertain to the circus body, the interest in and questioning of the circus body diverge from the practitioner's perspective. The discourse contains many examinations of circus that reference circus bodies and their participation in specific contexts of circus, but little to no discourse provides a concrete theoretical proposal of the circus body, let alone explorations of a circus body from a practitioner's perspective. As a practice-based researcher whose body is the subject of research, I seek a deeper understanding of my own circus body, its embodied knowledge, and how it is distinct from other performative bodies. Most historical circus discourse agrees on the centrality of the body as a core, distinctive form. The landscape of circus discourse demonstrates an interest in circus bodies, but these are primarily examined by a third party rather than explored by practitioners themselves. This reveals the under-representation of a practice-based research perspective, along with under-explored theoretical and conceptual articulations of the circus body.

Helen Stoddart's, *Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation*, is a thorough and relatively current historical account of circus. Her account's primary function is to set the stage for circus's impact on film and literature. In this book, Stoddart offers a classical definition of old circus mastery that is present in contemporary practice and performance: "The capacity of the human body to perform beyond its normal or even imagined limitations in forms which are entertaining, astonishing and beautiful has always constituted the very core of circus." (Stoddart, 2000, p. 167). Stoddart (2000) also describes circus bodies (performers) as exotic, gorgeous, skilled, novel, magnificent, dangerous, with performances of "danger, delight, beauty," and "spectacle" (p. 85). Stoddart does not seek to theorize on the essentials of a circus body. Her text serves as a point of reference that contextualizes and describes the circus body historically. Her characterization of the circus performers points to an embodied knowledge and language expressed on the stage through circus bodies. My research seeks to articulate the source of these embodiments and the underlying process of her described manifestations.

Several edited collections have contributed to the historical study of specific bodies in circus (racialized, gendered, sexualized, marginalized), such as Peta Tait's *Circus Bodies: Cultural identity in Aerial Performance*. This book functions as a historical survey and examination of "the performance identities of muscular aerialists and the social interpretations of them over 140 years" (Tait, 2005, p. 2). Tait's intent is not to define or theorize all circus bodies, but she does articulate the concept of circus bodies. Tait's *Circus Bodies* offers a point of departure for the examination of other essentials that serve as a baseline understanding of circus bodies. She offers useful theoretical examinations of particular

aspects of circus bodies, e.g. identity. Tait (2005) focuses on the body as an “apparatus of identity” and examines how that “apparatus” navigates a paradoxical public perception (p. 3). In contrast, I consider identity a single essential component of my circus body. I build off her notion of “apparatus” – circus body – and seek to conflate her concept by articulating the essential components of that “apparatus”. This book explores aerial circus bodies, specifically trapeze. My theorization of circus bodies extends beyond just aerial circus bodies to include all six disciplines. Again, I seek to uncover the site and source of the described embodied practices and performances.

The Routledge Circus Studies Reader, edited by Peta Tait and Katie Lavers (2016), assembles thirty-five essays by circus academics, most of which are historical accounts of circuses from around the world (Australia, United States, Canada, China, Mexico, France, Sweden, Finland, United Kingdom) or of specific figures or bodies from circus history. No essay offers a distinct theory of a circus body. Tait’s (2016) contemporary definition of circus advances that the body is at the center of the circus form: “circus reveals itself to be about the human body exploring its physical potential in artistic ways” (Tait & Lavers, p. 2). Based on the literature, if a circus body is central to the form, then understanding a circus body and its essentials seems essential for a deeper understanding of circus and the bodies that make it up. In her chapter, “Ecstasy and Visceral Flesh in Motion,” Tait (2016) offers a theoretical framework of circus bodies as phenomenological and intersubjective (Tait & Lavers, p. 305), tethering my own theoretical propositions for a circus body. My research of a circus body attempts to create a baseline understanding of circus bodies and contextualize the intersubjective collective while respecting the individual phenomenological experience of circus bodies. My research acknowledges Tait’s theory as its point of departure but strives to expand on and offer insight into the specific essentials of a circus body.

Women & Circus comprises essays, conference presentations, and interviews collected at the international “Women & Circus” convention held in Croatia in 2009. This collection is key to any academic inquiry focused on female circus bodies historically and across many disciplines. The main themes are: the valuable contributions of women in circus and gender performance de-categorization (re-appropriating the mainstream definitions of gender binaries as well as femininity and masculinity). Without engaging in in-depth discussion, *Women & Circus* brought into question some of the essentials of the circus body: Is gender, identity, and exceptionality essential to the circus body? This volume points toward the interest in deeper understanding the fundamentals of a circus body.

From *Women & Circus*, the chapter, “From traditional to New Circus: Women’s Place and Aesthetics,” Anne Quentin (2009) extends beyond centralizing the body in the circus form by affirming that the circus is the body: “if the circus is the body, what we perceive about the circus body in comparison to the dancer’s or actor’s body is its ability to unify bodily states” (p. 251). In another chapter from this collection, “Coiling in First Person Singular: Circus, ‘Circumsfession’ an autobiography with

Angela Laurier and/as Jacques Derrida,” Natasa Govedic (2009) offers critical reflection and insight into what a circus body can, physically, philosophically, and politically do. These reflections indicate a circus body stands apart from other performative bodies. To better understand my own circus body as the source of self-determined embodied knowledge, these reflections point to what might define the circus body.

Cirque Global: Quebec's Expanding Circus Boundaries, edited by Louis Patrick Leroux and Charles R. Batson (2016), gathers the main figures of academic research in a book that offers critical perspectives on Quebec's influential presence. Certain chapters address specific bodies of circus. In “The Multiple Bodies of Cirque du Soleil,” Erin Hurley (2008), Professor of English at McGill University and prominent circus scholar, examines circus bodies present in Cirque de Soleil and proposes three categories of bodies: “character body,” “performer body”, and “fleshy body” (Leroux & Batson, 2016; p. 133). Hurley does not attempt to (nor needs to) define a circus body *universally*, but rather identifies types of circus bodies. She relies on the contexts of these circus bodies and how they function in Cirque de Soleil. Hurley (2008) uses David Graver's definitions of these categories: “Where ‘character’ bodies are a fictional identity, and performer bodies are skill on display, the ‘fleshy body’ is the nonsemiotic, self-identical corporeal envelope of skin, hair, flesh, blood, fat, and muscle” (Leroux & Batson, 2016; p. 133). While these examinations characterize a circus body, they do not address essentials or fundamentals of a circus body, but define how these three categories exist in the circus bodies of Cirque de Soleil. Hurley's work provides an important contribution to the discourse on circus bodies specifically in Quebec, yet remains limited as it focuses on the bodies of a single company. Her perspective provides an understanding of circus bodies from a non-practitioner perspective. As a practitioner, I aim to offer a more intimate understanding of the particulars of a circus body.

Swedish academic publications served as points of departure for articulating a definition of a circus body in terms of its specificities. These did not attempt to define a circus body, but contributed to my theoretical inquiry and validated my discoveries in practice. *An Introduction to Contemporary Circus*, *Documentation of CARD: Circus Artistic Research Development*, and Camilla Damkjær's *Homemade Academic Circus* were important contributions. *An Introduction to Contemporary Circus* (2012), co-written by five authors⁷, was one of the few books that devoted a section to defining key elements of contemporary circus, one of which was the performer. In this book, Tomi Purovaara (2012) defines the circus performer as having “human movement and physical skill” that at its core is “supported by [an] instrument and equipment in the act” that is “defined by a relation with space, time and the history of circus arts and the field as a whole” (p. 74). Purovaara also expands on the definition by including the performer's relationship to the audience; the technical demands on the performers in circus; the traditional

⁷ Tomi Purovaara, Camilla Damkjær, Stine Degerbøl, Kiki Muukkonen, Katrien Verwilt, Sverre Waage

conventions that have shaped circus performers; and also questions whether circus performers are artists. While this definition is not a thorough investigation of the performing circus body, it is a careful consideration and exploration of the interweaving and dynamic elements that make up a circus body. In a later chapter in the book, Purovaara expands on the defining feature of the circus body's technical relationship to its disciplines, and discusses the identity of the circus performer and its social context. Purovaara offers a foundation that anchors my research on the circus body. This text serves as a point of departure and validation of the theoretical and practical aspects of my research. I expand on these contributions which has influenced the essentials of my proposed definition of a circus body.

Documentation of CARD: Circus Artistic Research Development focuses on the regional experience and context of circus in Scandinavia. However, circus is an intimate, yet globalized form; circus stretches the globe and yet maintains a low degree of separation between individuals. While each region may have their specific challenges, the circus community is united by the form and the universal challenges inherent in the form. In "The Specificity of Circus," Jean-Michel Guy focuses on the distinguishing features and philosophical problems specific to circus in comparison to dance (Skjönberg & Damkjær, eds., 2012, p. 52). He asks what circus *can* rather than what circus *is*. He explores the specificities of circus in terms of seven separate fields: space, time, object, body, skills, economy, and spirit. I pay special attention to these specificities of circus as a theoretical dialogue with my own essentials of the circus body. He refers to circus as having bodies that are "very specific [beings that] suffer a lot" and who are often confronted by injury and accidents (Skjönberg & Damkjær, eds., 2012, p. 51). His examinations and articulations of the circus body specifically acknowledge circus as having bodies as beings. This definition touches aspects of the circus body experience, but does not state how that experience might inform a theoretical articulation of a circus body. Additionally, Guy (2012) acknowledges that "[I]t would take too long to develop this point [defining the circus body]" (p. 48). Of his own admission, his hint at a definition of the circus body eludes the scope of such an inquiry.

John-Paul Zaccarini's "What is Circoanalysis?" questions the who, or the subject, of circus while examining also the what, or object, of circus. Zaccarini (2012) refers to the need to "find the origins of circus within the individual...because it goes to the root of circus" (p. 33). In this passage, Zaccarini alludes to the need to know (define) the circus body, the individual's circus body and even possibly define one's circus. Knowing the origin (the circus body), one can better know the form itself. His research offers support for exploring the essentials of the circus body. Like Zaccarini's, my research is concerned with the origins or foundations of circus subjects, circus bodies but our interests diverge regarding the lens through which we examine the subject. While Zaccarini examines the circus subject (the circus body) through a psychoanalytical lens, mine is sociological. Employing a sociological lens offers an alternative

perspective to Zaccarini's and carries the potential for richer understanding of peripheral research related to a circus body: process, practice, dramaturgy, pedagogy, and aesthetics.

One of the main publications examining a contemporary circus body is Camilla Damkjær's *Homemade Academic Circus: Idiosyncratically Embodied Explorations into Research in the Arts and Circus*. In this book, she exposes the process of self-inquiry as both an academic and amateur circus practitioner. This publication is a relevant and promising contribution to current academic discourse on circus characterized by its underrepresented practiced-based methodological approach. While her practical perspective as an amateur circus practitioner differs from mine, it is one of the only publications, if not the only, that interrogates circus hermeneutically through practice.

I expand upon Damkjær's (2016) methodological approach which she validates with reference to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophical grounding of embodied knowledge in circus practice:

As I see it, circus performance as a way of thinking passes through a physical material of sensation – not only as it is held in a piece of art, but as it is continued through daily practice. Practicing circus art is a reflective practice in which the practitioner is constantly analyzing the physical processes going on in the movement, and how to influence them. It is an embodied reflective practice, which passes through movement and action and involves all capacities of embodied reflection (p. 49).

Damkjær's (2016) book reflects my experience as an artistic researcher, i.e. "in active relation to the work of art, interfering with it, struggling with it, learning from it – in order to get other kinds of information about art and artistic process" (p. 34). My research process aligns with that of Damkjær – a process that involves "circus performance as an art form and as a form of reflection, a reflection that is just as much a part of my work as reading and writing" (Damkjær, 2016, p. 15). Her articulation of circus as a way of thinking tethered my research method and addressed the fact that it is a continuous and constant process even outside the physical practice or performance.

Homemade Academic also speaks to the methodological challenges stemming from the problematic and conflicting inertias of being an academic and a practitioner: "the position of the researcher, research as embodied experience, the function of writing, and the relation to and function of theory" (Damkjær, 2016, pp. 34-35). Here, Damkjær articulates a researcher's distinct efforts in the position of research practitioner. This work informs and supports many of the discoveries and challenges I myself encountered while navigating theory and practice.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

Methodology

Scholarly circus research can be *for*, *through*, and *about* circus⁸. Up to now, much circus discourse is historical (*about* circus), mostly conducted by researchers outside of the circus community. More than a research object, circus is also a medium of investigation for theoretical development – *through* and *for*, which is what my research focuses on. I research *through* my circus body *for* circus scholarship. My research is practice-based and therefore embodies theoretical and practical explorations. I phenomenologically interrogated my body through practice and theory. Bringing these two together, I tried to bridge the traditional gap between artistic and scholarly practices, which are mutually dependent. I used the knowledge of my practice to stimulate theoretical explorations that, in turn, provide a critical lens for my practical experience. The goal was that the artwork be scholarly and the scholarly creative.

Circus scholarship is a burgeoning field that has yet to find a solid footing in academia, much as it has yet to find its place in the fine arts as a performing genre. In larger discourses, circus scholarship emerges as a field of study that possesses the interdisciplinary capacity to traverse academic disciplines. Research in semiotics, cultural studies, history, sociology, anthropology, and performance exists in current circus literature. However, circus epistemologies continue to be at the dawn of their discourse and what is or is not considered knowledge in circus has yet to be fully articulated: “Only recently has the contemporary circus world in Quebec produced emerging scholars who have an intimate knowledge of the training, practices, and culture of that world and also possess the analytical tools and broader understanding of research needs and practices” (Leroux & Batson, 2016, p. 12). While this is true in some spheres of circus research, it only partially resonates with my artist-scholar experience – based on existing circus literature, practice-based, artistic scholarly research on embodiment, is especially under-represented. This research-creation project contributes to existing circus literature not only through its methodological approach; it also contributes to the foundational knowledge base of this growing field through its theoretical proposal of a circus body and new performance and practiced embodiments.

I adopted a qualitative, hermeneutic, phenomenological (Riley & Hunter; Arlander, 2009, p. 77), which encompasses artistic practice *and* performance. Artistic-based research is inquiry through artistic practice and an avenue for developing new knowledge. The distinction between purely artistic versus academic objectives is accountability. Scholarly research rests upon institutional and disciplinary frameworks that must be negotiated, which is not necessarily true of artistic research.

In the existing work in the circus field, my research is situated “within some tradition or framework, to continue, add to, oppose, criticize or challenge it” (Riley & Hunter; Arlander, 2009, p. 80).

⁸ Borrowed from design epistemologies and their methodologies for research- Frankel and Racine, *The Complex Field of Research: for Design, through Design, and about Design*

I identify and articulate what might be considered “trivial and self-evident” in my hermeneutic research as new knowledge in the discourse (Riley & Hunter; Arlander, 2009, p. 80). “Trivial and self-evident” refers specifically to minutiae, which the practitioner might take for granted. In my research, the habits developed through the everyday practice of my technique manifested as the core embodied knowledge to be investigated.

Circus scholarship resides predominantly under the umbrella of the humanities but seeks to find its autonomy and establish its own discipline within the academy similarly to the Fine Arts disciplines of dance, music, or theatre. As a burgeoning field of higher education, it is essential for circus studies to explore and develop methodologies tailored to the specificity of its practices and to articulate scholarship that differentiates it from other disciplines. Therefore, it is vital to build specific knowledge (i.e. embodied knowledge) of artistic performance and practice, so it is not “bypassed, colonized, or assimilated into familiar forms of research” (Riley & Hunter; Arlander, 2009, p. 81).

Philosophical grounding

Hermeneutics and phenomenology are the theoretical and philosophical grounding for my research methodology, influenced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s existential phenomenology, which situates my research process both as researcher and object of research.⁹ Phenomenology defines lived and practical experience as the embodiment of knowing and its relationality. Merleau-Ponty’s discourse on perception grounds my body’s subjectivity in its intersubjective relation to the outside world (our interaction and connection with the world and others). If the body is the nexus of perception, the circus body and its subjective relational experience can exist as a conscious, intelligent, thinking, skilled, creative, and subjective body. The body relates and contributes to the world and its community as an affective being, not just as another object to be observed, researched, or consumed.

Hermeneutics seeks to understand and explain how cultural imprints (codes, traditions, habits) shape society as a whole, providing a lens through which knowledge is created, perceived, and interpreted. It situates knowledge through contextualization. My circus body, as a lens, has thus become a circus methodology.

⁹ “Phenomenology [as a philosophy] is only accessible through phenomenological methods...All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view [perception], or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless [relationality]. The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world, of which science is the second-order expression...To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.” (pp. viii-ix).

Phenomenological hermeneutics support embodied, qualitative, experiential, interpretive approaches to inquiry, research, and theory. Phenomenology and hermeneutics allow inquiries that can contribute to empirical, aesthetic, personal, and socio-political knowledge, advancements and evolution. From this interlacing, new knowledge, forms of inquiry, questions, and ways of thinking emerge. While idiosyncratic (characteristically distinct) inquiries, such as hermeneutic phenomenology, do not have predictive or generalized outcomes for practice, they influence thoughtful, reflective, attentive practice by revealing the significance of human experience.

“It is commonly known that academia values words above all else” (Riley & Hunter, 2009, p. 232). Objective knowledge articulated on the page has served traditional epistemologies for centuries. While subjective and embodied knowledges might be problematic in traditional disciplined epistemologies, phenomenological hermeneutics support artistic scholarship. “[I]t does not seek merely to deconstruct the traditional, metaphysical notions of ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’; it seeks to provide *alternatives* to them” that might support the development of circus epistemologies through authentic circus methodologies (Madison, 1988, p. xv). By investigating various avenues of artistic practice and research in circus, phenomenological hermeneutics offers insight into “the nature, meaning and possibilities of embodied knowledge” as it might serve circus scholarship.

I sought to use this embodied knowledge as a medium for both artistic and scholarly inquiry. It manifested as an embodiment of habits developed through technical practices, codes and traditions. “[The goal] was to substantiate the paradigm shift towards a holistic notion of knowledge and to affirm the body as integral to the process of knowing” (Riley & Hunter; Arlander, 2009, p. 81). Affirmed by this shift toward a holistic understanding of knowledge, the embodied knowledge under investigation was not discredited simply because it is tacit (nonverbal) in nature rather than explicit (verbal).

Autoethnography appeared as the most suitable choice to chronicle my process of artistic-scholarly research, and offer critical analysis and research synthesis. In sociology and anthropology, ethnography is the primary methodology for understanding people and cultures, fusing together intimate observations, critical theory, philosophy, and social critique. It offers the opportunity to unite both theory and my intimate phenomenological experience. As embedded and embodied self-inquiry, autoethnography allows meaningful and critical understandings of my circus body. Through this lens, I granted “equal attention to the minutiae of experience, the cultural texture of [my] social relations, and to [...] remote structural [paradigms]” (Duyvendak, Geschiere & Willis, 2018). Autoethnography allowed “unique perspectives on aesthetics, cognition, social relations, and challenges social structures” to emerge (Riley & Hunter; Graham, 2009, p. 99).

Ethnomusicologists have employed participant-observation ethnographic methodology¹⁰ since the 1950's. By participating, ethnomusicologists access what might be inaccessible through simple observation, "arriv[ing] at an understanding of the invisible process and transformation through his[/her] participation in performance [and practice] – illuminating the invisible" (Riley & Hunter; Graham, 2009 p. 101). Borrowing from ethnomusicologists, I acted as a kind of ethnocircologist. My autoethnography reflects the process itself, slipping between scholar and artist. My autoethnography proposes critical reflection as a methodological practice and grants intimate access to my process.

A critical facet of my practice-based research was not the product, but the process itself. Understanding the pathway is crucial and particularly relevant in artistic academic research. Articulating the process offers an opportunity to access the invisible and provides legitimacy to the results. It also offers explanation, description, illustration, enlightenment, and new knowledge. The invisible refers to the non-observable minutiae of my personal experience and perception. As circus is a burgeoning field with sparse practice-based discourse, this invisible offers insight into how scholarly circus research might be practiced. I researched circus *through* circus; *through* my circus body.

Methods

My circus body is not only an object/subject of study, but also a medium of investigation. I phenomenologically interrogated my body through practice and theory. This process had multiple phases incorporating methods that support practical and theoretical inquiry. I engaged in experimentation, reflection, dialogue (with self and others), writing, reading (critical theory and philosophy), and listening. I conducted my research on a single circus body: my body. If my circus body and its performances are created through embodied practice, and knowledge emerges from doing, how do I articulate the embodied research and its knowledge? There were two ways of approaching this question—via examination of process and outcome.

Subject of study

Starting with my body and my practice seemed the most pragmatic choice given time and resource limits. Early explorations began as experimental body studies of hand balancing, trapeze, and clown. Personal interest and experience played essential roles in my decisions regarding the disciplines of choice for my study. I relied on my expertise in trapeze to inform my hand balancing (amateur) and clown (novice) studies. The studies continued for over a year and half. These experimental explorations marked the starting point of my research and were essential for discovering and developing the most appropriate and reliable methods and methodology. First-level (exploratory) investigations manifested as body studies that worked with tools typically employed in my artistic practice as well as some new ones generated by

¹⁰ observation of self and other in performance and practice

questions and impulsive curiosities. The tools used included: constraints, listening, and writing (journaling and documenting) for reflection. The constraints served as mechanisms of distillation and boundary.

Hand balancing permitted me to explore the problematic notion of falling as failure. The ultimate intention or success in this discipline manifests as a static, controlled, inversion balanced on two hands or a single hand. Variations exist, but essentially, hand balancing is an inverted balance; hence, falling, or not maintaining controlled balance or inversion, constitutes failure. Hand balancing requires rigorous and diligent technical practice and maintenance; my mostly falling, was a source of much anxiety and frustration that led me to investigate how I could subvert failure as possibility.

In trapeze, I questioned and pushed the limits of release in my body (muscle tension or engagement), as well as the thresholds of hanging. With clown, I initially constrained myself only to the use of a banana and the music from early R&B American music, choosing these elements based on intuition and curiosity. Proximity and perspective were also principal points of exploration stretching across all three body studies. Over the process, narrowing and specifying the constraints focused and deepened my physical explorations, enhancing the distilling effects.

Deviating from my typical artistic practice, I explored a “blank slate” or “blank canvas” (without a preconceived inspiration or concept) to inspire and apprise my creative process. Usually, I would have approached creation with a preexisting concept as a source of inspiration (typically from literature, music, dance, words, etc.). Approaching my creative physical research with a “blank canvas,” I employed the simple and sometimes challenging idea of active listening to set my thinking in motion—fully concentrating and receiving the phenomenological experience of my body with all senses.

As I steered my focus towards my phenomenological experience, I attuned to my body’s sensations, images, and words as they emerged in practice – active listening. I developed word clouds to recognize emerging themes, which I later transposed into my performance. In my hand balancing body study, “cubism”, “cyborg”, “impossibility”, “sterility”, “perfection”, “frustration”, “failure”, “electronic sounds,” were words, sensations, and concepts that emerged. These concepts informed the next steps of the process. The words, images, emotions, and sensations fed the word cloud and the work being developed. Concepts developed in this process pushed my research forward. Disobedience was one of the first concepts that emerged in my research, during my second body study on trapeze.

I was preoccupied with accentuating the “human” aspect of my performance versus the “super human” qualities of risk, prowess, and virtuosity typically experienced in my circus body. To facilitate this shift, I focused the research on process versus product, the pathway or practice taken to achieve a product or performance. Focusing on process allowed me to study form and its embodiment with little to no regard for production aspects of performance, such as costuming and lights. At times, music and sound

provided tools for developing and provoking new movements, but also served as conceptual support for the work created. I engaged in similar research practice in my previous artistic work; however, the desire to explore the unknown generated questions, curiosities, and a shift in focus. Immersing my artistic practice into a scholarly setting opened the opportunity for examining and articulating my process – a marked contrast with the culture of commercial North American circus that resisted such curiosities.

Each body study culminated with a presentation of the unfinished (work-in-progress) research for an invited audience of artists and academics. Following each presentation, the audience participated in a talkback with me, the artist-scholar. The final step of each body study dove-tailed into my scholarly practice, a writing of my theoretical examination of the practical research. Each cycle of the body studies informed the next phase of research.

Through reflection via writing, reading (theory, philosophy, my own writing), dialogue (with self and others), questioning, and intuition (active listening), I chose the content, tools, and practices that emerged as relevant and worthy of further inquiry. The body studies were an entry point into my embodied research. They were a space for experimenting with ways of researching and with my transition from artist to artistic-scholar, marking the genesis of my reflexive artistic-scholarly practice.

In the final stages of my practical research, the body studies transitioned into three case studies (trapeze, hand balancing, clown). The case study offered a more universally recognized and established method in academic research. While the body study and the case study served the same purposes in my process, the case study, as a documented method, offered credibility to the research, while also supporting the autoethnographic tools necessary to capture the complexity of my practice-based research. A case study is “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2014, p. 16). Case studies typically seek to understand the perceptions of their subjects of study. They are an empirical, qualitative research method that tries to “preserve the *multiple realities*, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening” (Stake, 1995, p.12). They offer freedom to the researcher to employ a variety of methods that best suit each case study. In my case studies, my methods included theoretical research, interviews, observations, journals, and artifacts (video, pictures, performances). The case studies served as the foundation of both my practical (performance) and theoretical thesis.

I decided on three case studies in which I explored three of the six circus disciplines¹¹: trapeze (aerial acrobatics), hand balancing (balance), and clown. Based on the initial body studies, these case studies provided richer exploration of these three disciplines. I limited my choices to three of the six disciplines in order to properly and substantially investigate the essentials of my circus body and its

¹¹ floor acrobatics, aerial acrobatics, balancing, juggling, clowning, and equestrian

embodied knowledge. The time needed to thoroughly research all six families extends beyond that of both master's level research and my physical capability. I chose trapeze (my expertise), hand balancing (amateur experience), and clown (novice). I also wanted to have a range of perspectives based on differing artistic and technical experience and expertise.

As the body studies transitioned into case studies, I bolstered my method choices with an autoethnographic lens to include photo studies and self-interviews. The photo studies consisted of photographs taken at the end of each practical research session. The photo study, used as an exploratory method, explored the altering of the material body through its engagement with, and participation in, circus practice. The photo study was only used in the trapeze case study. At the end of each practical research session over the course of six months, I photographed typical points of body contact with the trapeze – places from which I hang. There is a myriad of places from which to hang my body on the trapeze. I chose only two conventional points on my circus body—the hand(s) and the “toe(s)” (talus, tali). The photo study functioned only as an exploratory method that may inform future inquiries regarding the relationship between the technical practices of circus (and its disciplines), and the material deviations of the body, becoming a circus body from such practices. In hindsight, the photo study should have been used in all three case studies.

The interviews (self-interviews) offered insights and reflections that define my circus body and its embodied knowledge. Upon completing my thesis performance, I answered a series of predetermined questions (see Appendix A) through written responses. The interviews facilitated my continued quest for identifying what distinguishes a circus body from other performative bodies.

Practical conditions shaped my research choices as well. Time constraints and available resources (other circus bodies, spaces, economic support) heavily impacted my choices. Thus, I chose my body as the site of investigation. Circus requires very specific conditions of time and space. Some disciplines require more than others (i.e. trapeze (aerial acrobatics), conventionally requires a vertical space). Academia and the circus community understand these needs and demands differently. As a result, I faced many obstacles that impacted my choices. Educating both the circus world and academia on their respective specificities involved intensive invisible labor.

While my theoretical and practical research carry equal weight, I began with practice. However, at this point in my research, it is difficult to distinguish the starting point and what has influenced the research more – practical or theoretical investigations. Physical interrogations and critical reflection continue, even when I am not actively engaged in the process. Both are integral to my research methodology and will continue to be in dialogue.

Chapter Four: Research

Introduction to Research

The need to identify and articulate foundational concepts became clear early in my investigations. Before being able to understand its knowledge, understanding my body forced my research focus to shift to the body under examination, my circus body. I explored the essence of my circus body as a medium for practice and performance. I sought to understand my body and its essentials, what distinguishes it from other performative bodies. My circus body theory was generated by my singularity, but speaks to a universal understanding of circus bodies in trying to delineate the essentials that apply to all of us in our circus community.

In my theoretical discussions of a circus body, I oscillated between the possessive pronoun *my* and the articles of *a* and *the*. I use *my* to distinguish my hermeneutic experience, which informs the theoretical proposition of *a* circus body. *The* circus body is a universal circus body. The *my* informs the *a* and serves as a point of departure and a working theory to inform a more universal understanding of *the* circus body. Being socialized by circus, *my* circus body and its experience speak to *a/the* circus body.

Here, I present a brief historical review of the assimilation of my body into contemporary circus practice. I came from sports acrobatics. I trained as a gymnast since the age of five and practiced competitively until my young adult life. My acrobatic body, not born of circus, went through a shift of acculturation when I transitioned from my acrobatic practice of competitive sports to circus. From a technical skills perspective, the leap between the two worlds was not a difficult one. However, in order to become a circus body, the transition from one to the other did necessitate significant re-socialization in terms of assimilating circus codes, traditions, and cultural practices.

Typically, I worked under the prevailing codes and traditions of a solo circus practitioner. As a benchmark in the transition process from amateur to professional, a kind of coming out ritual manifested itself in the premiering of a polished, virtuosic act, complete with all the bells and whistles. The costume, music, and professional-level virtuosic technique were all in place, packaged and ready to sell to the highest bidder—festival, company, or cabaret. Over the course of my career, I naturally distanced my work from commercial circus and pushed back against the normative, mainstream ways of practicing and performing circus. A professional contemporary solo act was/is typically performed between five to seven minutes in length and adorned by music, costume, and lights. Often, the solo was played in a cabaret or worked into the plot of a full-length show. Usually, there were modifications made to the original intent of the act once integrated. For example, a common marketing technique in my circus community involved advertising my act as technically and artistically modifiable to fit any potential show.

Through practice, I initially identified the embodied knowledge of my circus body as its way of doing, an embodied technical practice and its habits. This informed my examinations of my socio-

political embodied knowledge: how I operate as an artist, woman, mother, citizen, and circus body in the larger context beyond my immediate circus community. I allowed my examinations of doing, practices, and habits as a circus body and its performances to extend to my broader socio-political context – *pharmacopornographic capitalism*. I examined the dialogues and tensions between my subjectivity and the paradigms in which my circus body and circus community are situated. Ben Spatz supports the notion of embodied technique as knowledge, stating one “gains knowledge of what a body can do – through *technique*” (p. 26).

Spatz, Mauss, and Bourdieu recognize the connection between embodied practice and its contribution to self and social formation. Spatz (2015) explains “we come to know ourselves, other, and the material world through the myriad pathways of technique” (p. 180). My technical practice, as well as the habits (or *habitus*) of such practice, served as mechanisms and tools for shaping and sculpting the material and immaterial aspects of my circus body. The technique of my circus practice, laden with codes and traditions acquired from previous generations of circus bodies, served as the basis of my inquiry into my current embodied knowledge. Identifying the contexts in which my circus body was situated and how it was contoured by such contexts was an important consideration and pushed me to explore what my circus body *UNdoes* and how this *UNdoing* influences my current ways of *doing* in my circus practice. This deconstruction of technique and habits provided a mechanism for new knowledge in the form of new embodied practices and performances.

Paul Preciado proposes that society is currently living under a new regime of bio-politics. He presents a radical proposition of a paradigm shift in Foucault’s notion of “bio-power” from a disciplinary regime to a pharmacopornographic capitalist regime. Under this new regime, the political management of body technologies that produce sex and sexuality have progressively mutated current day capitalism:

The mutation of capitalism that we witness in our time can be characterized by the conversion of ‘sex,’ ‘sexuality,’ ‘sexual identity’ and ‘pleasure’ into objects used for the political management of life, and also by the fact that this ‘management’ itself takes place through the innovative dynamics of advanced techno-capitalism (Preciado, 2008, p.105).

Under this new regime, the manipulation of desire, the pharmaceutical industry, the normalization of gender, sex, and sexuality by pornographic culture and their commodification has created new societal control of subjectivities. The pharmacopornographic regime normalizes femininity and masculinity through the sterilization and aestheticization of sex, gender, and sexuality (Preciado, 2008, p.109). The primary function of desire manipulation is to secure control of subjectivities to increase capital production.

As an American woman, artist, and mother, I have an intimate embodied understanding of this pharmacopornographic capitalist regime, a “new kind of capitalism that is hot, psychotropic, and punk”; a

capitalism which manifests not only externally like in Foucault's bio-power, but now also internally, emerging from "advanced bio-molecular techniques and media networks" – pharmaceuticals and mainstream pornographic images (Preciado, 2008, p. 107). My body has been "disciplined" toward compliance and obedience to this social hierarchy by mechanisms that normalize sex, gender, sexuality, race, etc., through the manipulation of desire. These mechanisms dictate what is acceptable and what is not. To be accepted into the mainstream, compliance is imperative.

The mechanisms that feed this heteronormative, cisgender hegemony include: the Pill, pink, bras, high heels, plastic surgery, cosmetics, Martha Stewart, Barbie, Disney, Playboy and others. The relentless onslaught of these insistent mainstream mechanisms compromises self-determination and marginalizes the body through social conditioning. The impact of this broader socio-political framework infiltrates daily life and is relentless in its continuous pursuit of financial gain. This is the globalized capitalist bio-molecular and semio-technical governing of subjectivities that my political body¹² and those of my circus community must navigate in order to thrive. Personal experiences of these mechanisms include gender bias, ageism, persistent sexualization that results in violence, and fetishization. In this research, my circus body immersed itself in (dis)obedient dialogues with these mainstream mechanisms. In response, my body was able to resist, transgress, and subvert this through undoing (the concept and practice of (dis)obedience) in the pursuit of a free, liberated, more utopic perspective.

In my research, *(dis)obedience* – critical subjective disobedience – emerged both as a principle and a motivation (concept and practice) to *UNdo*. When undoing, an impulse of disobedience emerged toward circus practice and its community. The act of disobedience activated my circus body's self-determination, allowing me to examine, undo, and deconstruct. In turn, I discovered, re-imagined, and constructed new forms of embodied knowledge. The origin of (dis)obedience emerged from the notion of permission, to question my obedience and defy the authority of my circus practices and performance.

Disobedience cannot exist without obedience. If obedience requires conforming to mainstream mechanisms that oppress one's subjectivity and stifle innovation, disobedience of socio-political paradigms might be seen as a possibility for liberty and evolution away from the status quo. Inherently transgressive, the notion of disobedience challenges that which requires obedience; it functions as a critique of obedience. (dis)obedience employs the self-reflexive practice of examining the self and one's habits. For (dis)obedience to occur, one must understand one's obedience (i.e. habits, ways of doing, and compliance). One must consider how and if (dis)obedience serves self and the greater community, and

¹² "Bodies are sites in which social constructions of difference are mapped onto human beings. Subjecting the body to systemic regimes – such as government regulation – is a method of ensuring that bodies will behave in socially and politically accepted manners. The body is placed in hierarchized (false) dichotomies, for example, masculine/feminine; mind/body; able-bodied/disabled; fat/skinny; heterosexual/homosexual; and young/old" (Brown & Gershon, 2017, p. 1).

whether it liberates from oppressive sociopolitical paradigms, and re-imagines the future by subverting and disorienting the conventional. My artistic and social (dis)obedience is art (practice and performance) for social awareness and innovation.

A circus body: my circus body

To adequately research and understand the embodied knowledge of my circus practice and performance, it became necessary to articulate the specificities of my circus body and its theoretical and physical landscape. The circus body, in existing critical discourse, was under-explored. My theoretical proposition of a performative circus body is a work-in-progress. Thus far, I have articulated the following essentials of the circus body: the body itself (material and immaterial), prosthesis, technique, and audience. Prosthesis came first in my thinking, followed by technique, and audience. Investigating these embryonic essentials made others appear, including time and space, risk, prowess, virtuosity, and identity, which will be considered for future research. These essentials are mutually dependent--all must exist in order to have a circus body.

Given the scope of this type of investigation and the time limitations, I chose to only investigate these four essentials in my case studies, which were necessary for understanding my embodied knowledge. I constructed a working theoretical proposal of a circus body from the discourse that references attributes, elements, and descriptions of the circus body, along with practical discoveries of my own. My theory affirms only *my* body's perceptions, actions, thoughts, and critical reflections about a circus body. However, as a phenomenological, hermeneutic theoretical proposal, while singular in source, I believe it carries the capacity to speak to the multiplicity of circus bodies.

Through my experience and perception, I uncovered, discovered, and identified the essentials of my circus body. A desire to better understand my circus body and question what distinguished my performative body from other performative bodies prompted inquiries into the essentials of my circus body. My theoretical proposal functions as a baseline model before layering in identity and subjectivity. It strives to embrace the multiplicity of singularities, honoring both my individual and collective experience.

The body itself: my human body

First I began with the form--the *body* itself--both material and immaterial. My body is a being with critical consciousness; this is implicit. Fleishy materiality and cognitive immateriality both reside within its boundaries. My body is more than just flesh and bones; it acquires and produces knowledge. The physical manifestations of such knowledge are its embodied knowledge. That flesh is also the site where the conscious and unconscious mind experience and engage in creativity, reflection, and perception. The circus body cannot exist without its human, material form. The body itself, my human body, serves as the foundation of my circus body form.

I do not situate my body in a single theoretical framework. The purpose of articulating these essentials is to assist in constructing my circus body form (a shape and configuration) and establishing it as a fundamental element. The complete form of my circus body exists through my human body in relation to an object, something other than its subjective material self. In my artistic practice, my circus body has a material form and engages with or in relation to my trapeze or my prosthesis.

Prosthesis: extension and in dialogue (primary and secondary)

To complete the form (shape and configuration) of a circus body, an in/animate other (material or immaterial), object, and/or apparatus is in constant relation to the material form. (i.e., jugglers: objects manipulated; clowns: emotion; acrobats/contortionists: to their bodies or another body or space; aerialist: aerial equipment, etc.). I begin with proposing the term *prosthesis* when speaking about the other, material or immaterial, in relation to the circus body form.

The word “prosthesis” is derived from the Greek word *prostithenai* meaning ‘add to.’ It is an addition to something. Its quotidian use refers to artificial limbs replacing a missing/injured body part. I propose the notion of prosthesis as an animate or inanimate object, apparatus, and/or other with which the body engages through skilled physical action (technique). My body works, practices, and engages with another material object; in my main discipline, my trapeze is my prosthesis. Fixed trapeze is a member of the aerial acrobatics family. It is a “discipline using a simple [t]rapeze hung at various heights upon which [I]...execute moves...without using the trapeze's swinging movement” (Barlati, 2018).

Prosthesis and its relationship to my body (material/immaterial) help me understand my circus body’s physicality and form as it stands apart from other performing bodies, such as theatre, dance, music, and performance art. Haraway’s definition of technology as prosthesis operates in a similar vein to my proposal. Haraway (2015) states,

Prosthesis becomes a fundamental category for understanding our most intimate selves.

Prosthesis is semiosis, the making of meaning and bodies, not for transcendence but for power charged communication (p. 249).

I build on Haraway’s notion of technology as prosthesis, an extension of our materiality, to better understand the self and its powerful capacity for expression. Like Haraway’s technology as prosthesis, the object, other, and/or apparatus as prosthesis serves as a kind of extension of the circus artist’s materiality. Like Haraway, I employ the term prosthesis to describe the object as an addition to the body in terms of an extension, not as a replacement of a body part. Through practice, my circus body integrates the prosthesis through technique to complete the form and function as a circus body. I push the limits of Haraway’s use of prosthesis, in that my circus body prosthesis appears to exist independently of my body but continues to serve as a tool for expression, either by extension or in dialogue.

A circus body perhaps compares to that of a cyborg body.¹³ Haraway appropriates the cyborg as a metaphor for a being that transcends the human form as a way to reject the rigid normalized boundaries prescribed by society. Her cyborg breaks down boundaries between human and non-human, animal-human and machine, and material and immaterial. My circus body as a cyborg body, a body enhanced by its prosthesis, represents a being that inherently deviates, disorients, and transgresses prescribed boundaries. Beyond the apparent physical extension, the prosthesis and the material body can appear to exist independently from one another as separate entities at certain moments, but they continue in their cyborg form as their relation is in constant dialogue. My prosthesis is dual; it can exist both as part of my body and independently from it. Prosthesis is a tool for expression, an extension of my gesture of embodiment. Its integration is achieved through practice and disciplinary technique. It cannot function without engaging with a body in a gesture of expression or in dialogue with it.. A body + prosthesis = the form (shape and configuration) of a circus body.

A variety of body/prosthesis relationships exists in circus. Some prostheses are not clear material objects like a trapeze. Six general families of circus disciplines exist: ground acrobatics, aerial acrobatics, balance, clowning, juggling (object manipulation), and animals (typically equestrian). These families are broadly organized by their specific prostheses, the corresponding technical training or practice, and the required rigging. Within each of these, there are specific disciplines. The trapeze is a member of the aerial acrobatics family. Another example is hand balancing, which belongs to the balance family, where the floor is the prosthesis. Other examples include contortion from the ground acrobatics family and is characterized by “exaggerated positions using extreme stretching, flexing and bending of the arms and legs. The practice of contortion is divided into three categories: back bending, front bending and dislocation” (Barlatti, 2018). The prosthesis of contortion is identified as the ground, the body itself, and possibly an object that functions as an extension of the ground. For example, a contortionist often uses a platform or hand balancing canes in practice and performance. Clowning, a family in and of itself, is typically a “comic character, a country jester. Clowning arts combine acting, mime, farce, and slapstick to create sketches that make audiences laugh” (Barlatti, 2018). However, in this research project, I discovered clowning practice and the performance pushes beyond the limits of simple laughter, carrying the potential to offer a catharsis for a range of emotions. A clown’s prosthesis is emotion, any emotion. A clown engages with a prosthesis of emotion(s), originating from the audience, fellow performer(s), and/or themselves.

¹³ “a person whose physical capabilities are extended beyond normal human limitations by a machine or other external agency that modifies the body’s functions; an integrated man-machine system.” Santone, J. (2003). Cyborg. <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/mediatheory/keywords/cyborg/>

Each discipline has a primary prosthesis. A circus body can also employ a secondary prosthesis to further extend expression and dialogue in both practice and performance. In my piece *(trans)FIGURation*, my primary prosthesis is the trapeze, but I sometimes work with a parachute, a secondary prosthesis.¹⁴ In the case of the parachute, I borrow from juggling and the technique of object manipulation.

The relationship between a body and its prosthesis is intimate and intricate. A body is in confrontation with something other than itself. Tait argues that “[s]killed physical action with recognizable equipment sets circus apart from other body-based performance such as physical theatre and dance” (Tait, 2005, p. 2). However, in certain disciplines, such as contortion or clown, a prosthesis or equipment as Tait describes, is not so recognizable. I use the notion of prosthesis as a way to identify the *animate* or *inanimate* object engaged in skilled physical action or technique with the body.

Tait (2005) also refers to the body in relation to object citing Michel Foucault, who states that “a body is a ‘body-tool’, part of a ‘body-machine complex’ (p. 153). Tait builds on Foucault’s concepts of ‘body-tool’ and its relation to the ‘body-machine complex,’ stating that “an aerial performer is not separate from his or her mechanical equipment” (Tait, 2005, p. 7). With my proposal of prosthesis, I expand on Tait’s notion of the “body-tool” relationship beyond the aerial disciplines to include all disciplines. Understanding prosthesis and its relationship to the body is key for conceptualizing what a circus body communicates and embodies. The circus body does not enter the world with its prosthesis but acquires it through technical practice. The prosthesis relates to the body as an extension of its form or in dialogue with it.

¹⁴ An object (animate/inanimate, material/immaterial) often appropriated from another circus discipline and used in conjunction with a primary prosthesis.

**FIGURE 1. PROSTHESIS IN DIALOGUE**

photos by: Jim Mneymneh (*Dialogues of Disobedience*, 2018)

**FIGURE 2. PROSTHESIS AS EXTENSION**

Technique

Within each of the six circus families exist many disciplines. Each discipline has codes of technique and physical training or practice that impact its aesthetics and performance--“Clowning, tumbling, object manipulation, animal, and equestrian...at their best are highly specialized and technical...circus performance. Hence the bodies who perform, present artistic and physical displays of skillful action by highly rehearsed bodies” (Tait, 2005, p. 6).

Technique is at the heart of a circus body. It breathes life into it through the assimilation of a prosthesis. This assimilation demands highly specialized and skilled practice to achieve mastery of the discipline. A circus body’s “discipline is defined by the instrument and technique the body employs (Purovaara, 2012, p.113). The body “becomes an instrument plugged into a circus apparatus” (Zaccarini, 2013, p. 29). Zaccarini’s reference supports my notion of prosthesis. Here, Purovaara and Zaccarini speak to the mutually dependent relationship between a body, its prosthesis, and technical practice.

Technique develops through the investment and maintenance of practice or training, which eventually manifests as rituals and habits that become reflexes. Technique is what a circus body can do. Technique is the driving force behind a circus body’s epistemology (embodied knowledge) and aesthetics.

My circus body, transformed from competitive sports acrobatics (diving and gymnastics), assimilated the techniques of circus through oral tradition and cultural immersion. The transition between my two bodies through technical practice occurred quickly as the two share similar biomechanics. The greatest difference rests in the circus codes and traditions embedded in those biomechanical practices. The intent of my body shifted--sports acrobatics is competition for an audience while circus is performance for an audience.

Audience

Visible or invisible, the audience is always present for a performing circus body. In performance, the audience is visible. During the process of creation and practice, the audience is invisible but still taken into consideration. Audience exists in all performing genres. While this essential does not distinguish a circus body from other performing bodies, it is key to a performative circus body. As Marcel Duchamp (1975) states, the performer cannot exist without the audience, and vice versa:

[a]ll in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act (p. 140).

I do not ascribe to the notion of making art for arts' sake. When considering audience, it is essential to understand what we are creating, whom it is for, and why we are creating. My circus body seeks to communicate and engage with other humans, with an audience. As it is an ephemeral performance genre without an artifact or living document and its message and acts exist momentarily, the counterpart of audience is essential for the performer/performance to exist, communicate, and connect. In my performance, the audience is integral to completing my performance.

Borrowing from visual art, I transposed the practice of surreal collage in my thesis performance, *Dialogues of Disobedience*. This performance integrated the audience at different moments to weave the dramaturgical thread and quilt the entire piece and its individual parts. Given the dynamic structure of my performance, the audience played a different role at different moments over the course of the piece. In *MEATmarket*, the audience was required to walk around me in a circle bound by a plastic rope while I hung from the trapeze. In another instance, a single audience member became part of the performance of my clown piece, *Cazzo*. However, two audience members were always essential for completing the performance. As one audience member was integrated into the performance, the second had to remain as audience in order for the performance to take place.

The relationship between performer and audience can vary significantly from one performance to another. Each show is distinct. This distinctness is not only because of the performer's phenomenological experience but also because the audience has its own phenomenological experience; each audience is unique. A multiplicity of phenomenological events occur during a performance. With each one, the

composition of those variables in the shared experience between audience and performer(s) fluctuates. As a performer, my perception of each presentation varies drastically, as well as my experience with the audience from one performance to the next. Perception operates on multiple levels such as audience and performer/performance; audience to other audience; performer(s) to audience; and possibly between performer(s).

Intimacy was a critical overarching dramaturgical element of my thesis performance. I define intimacy as achieving proximity and granting access both physically and intellectually (material and immaterial intimacy). Intimacy manifested in different ways and impacted my relationship with the audience throughout the performance. The audience did not have access to chairs (a typical convention of black box performance). This dramaturgical element enabled the physical proximity to be dynamic and not static. There were moments when the audience was close enough to touch me, and a few audience members were obliged to make physical contact with me while I was nude or almost nude. This was an example of physical intimacy. Intimacy also manifested itself in less material or tangible moments created by giving the audience access to my thoughts through speech. The spoken word did not serve as an explanation, but as a means for exposing the thought process I was experiencing in those moments of the performance. The performance was about giving access to process versus product.

While presenting my research, I found myself slipping back into my old habits and patterns typical in my circus practice and community. Habitually, product appropriates the focus in the production phase of creation. Hyper-vigilant, (dis)obedience guided and assisted in the breaking of habits of product-focused presentations rather than process-oriented work.

Also, (dis)obedience impacted my relationship with the audience. As (dis)obedience served as both a concept and practice (method), I engaged in acts of (dis)obedience or dialogues of disobedience through the research. I employed (dis)obedience among other reasons to challenge my relationship to the audience. Codes and conventions of performance spaces create expectations for both audience and performer. I challenged these by constructing and proposing a performance borrowing from the visual art genre of surreal collage. The performance is a surreal living collage.

Performance necessarily involves communication between performer and viewer. In my practice, I engaged in self-reflection guided by questions on audience perception, asking myself what we do, why we do it, and what we are trying to say.

Dialogues of Disobedience

Prologue

(read aloud)

Evening, 5:23pm

Hexagram Black Box Concordia University

Verdi's requiem greets invitees

Water, mirror, shoes, makeup, hairspray-her dressing room
WELCOME! COME IN! TAKE YOUR SHOES OFF, COATS ON THE LIFT....YES THE LIFT
An older female with unusual punk rock silver kissed hair in a candy apple red jumpsuit and deep orange socks greets the visitors
Is she the artist? The scholar? She must be
A black box lightly dressed
Intentionally sprinkled with artifacts- a quilt of books, white chalk, clear plastic, crumpled papers, a parachute, words
Invitations to investigate, explore, dig into the “performer-artist” space.
WALK, EXPLORE, GET CURIOUS!
MI CASA ES SU CASA!
Encouraging the soon to be audience to resist their preconceived notions of their role....conditioned to keep a distance
A trapeze hangs from another trapeze across the room. Oh, this is a circus show! Cool.
What a trapeze from a trapeze? Ok
A queer pink space on the margins breaks up the blackness
The host on all fours, ‘habit’ appears as she skates the block of chalk across the black wooden floor
An idiot box to her right with two tasseled eyes peering center stage. Is that supposed to be a TV? Haha!
Blue suede stiletto nestled, trailing nude panty-hose and plastic complete the “TV” sculpture
No chairs in sight
What no chairs? Is this a performance?
Calm yet frenetic movement fills the space as she moves from guest to guest like a proper hostess
Some are standing, some are strolling, some are seated, some are squatting.
Taking in the space
Reading books, papers
Chatting with other guests
They are engaged in, with, on, for the space
Words in chalk carpet the floor-
Permission
Counterpoint
Desire
Utopia
UNDO
Hmmm....contemplation
A long plastic rope divides the room
A pile of forgotten writings crumpled in the dead center of the room.
Guests are reading
OH BOY, I DIDN'T THINK ANYONE WOULD READ THAT. YIKES!
5:37pm
The last few stragglers enter
Checks with her tech team
READY
She hugs her kids.
I LOVE YOU AND THANK YOU
Pulls the plug from the wall. Verdi's Requiem dies off as the record
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! CAN I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE
WILL YOU ALL PLEASE RISE FOR THE NATIONAL ANTHEM!
Bon spectacle!



FIGURE 3. *PROLOGUE*, PHOTO BY: JIM MNEYMNEH
 photos by: Jim Mneymneh (*Dialogues of Disobedience*, 2018)

My practical and theoretical research culminated in a performance presentation based on three case studies called *Dialogues of Disobedience* touching upon six disciplines of circus: static trapeze from the aerial acrobatics family, hand balancing from balance, and clown. Each case study stands alone as a fully realized work, and involves working at different levels of expertise – expert, amateur, novice. I used my trapeze expertise to inform the inquiry of the other two case studies. As each case study was developed through explorations of (dis)obedience and intimacy, I succeeded in dramaturgically unifying collages of dialogues that unfold in a unique performance of autofiction.

Researching as an artistic scholar, I developed a style of presentation that straddled both the academic and artistic spheres. Focusing on process rather than product, I blended my physical and theoretical explorations into a performance. This performance form naturally emerged in the process. This experimental performance piece whose form resembled a surreal collage, challenged mainstream notions of circus performance (commodified entertainment and spectacle), its form, relationship to the audience, and current narratives.

Based on my professional artist experience, circus narratives typically, but not always, emulate an aestheticized body that reinforces normalized canons of femininity and masculinity, gender roles, sexualization of the female body, misappropriation of culture, racialization, fetishization, and ageism.

Dialogues addresses gender norms, the aging female body, and objectification of women paired with the normalized notions of gender, sex, and sexuality existing under pharmacopornographic capitalism, an issue that is reflected in the current aesthetic of North American circus performances.

idiotBOX

(read aloud)

...AND THE HOOOOOOOME OF THE BRAAAAAAAAAAVE!

Still dressed in a fire truck red jumpsuit, she tears down the upside down, homemade, ragtag, crudely painted vinyl American Flag and throws it irreverently on the floor.

She grabs the remote from the idiot box and points it toward the "tech booth"

LIGHTS!

The room goes dark and the curtains open to reveal an enormous white screen

The familiar sounds of the opening movie montage

It's a mashup of every major American film studio-Universal, 20th Century Fox, Disney, Columbia, Sony, Miramax, MGM, Warner Brothers, Fox Search Light, DreamWorks, Lion's Gate, Tri-Star

Oh wait, another? A giant revolving banana appears with pirated music from Universal Studios

Banana Studios? This must be an Indi studio

The shadows of the audience in a line project on the giant screen

The female appears amongst the shadowed audience, center screen

She is seated in front of the idiot box and under transformation

Darkness, "I PUKE IN MY KIDS MOUTH" stretches across the screen followed by

DIALOGUES OF DISOBEDIENCE

DANA DUGAN. Artist. Mother. Lover. FUCK THE REST! Scrolls up like the Star Wars opening crawl

What is about to happen?

Opening credits scroll floor to ceiling...it's almost all her...performer, director, producer...Dana Dugan

This includes the typos and disobedience

A glowing white screen flashes, the audience still doing their part diligently, obeying and standing

The punk female still seated at the threshold of the idotbox is now completely disrobed except for blue suede stilettos

The GOOGLE search engine appears and the sound of marching cellos fill the big black illuminated space

Typing...OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN...into the search engine

The seated silhouette with wild hair willfully slips her arm into slink pair of hose

Mainstream images of objectified women flood onto the screen...American Apparel, Budweiser, Tom Ford, and so on

Female voices chime in....

I LOVE GIVING BLOW JOBS TO SANDWICHES....Burger King

I LOVE SACRIFICING DIGNITY FOR A DRINK...Skyy Vodka

She slides the hosiery one leg at a time

I LOVE SLEEPING WITH GUYS WHO DON'T KNOW MY NAME...Post it

She disappears behind the idiotbox

THE KEY TO MY HEART IS A MAN THAT SMELLS LIKE A VAGINA...Tom Ford

A headless fleshy mound sprouts from idiotbox. What is that?

I'D SELL MY BODY FOR A BURGER...Carl's Jr.

In the flashing images, a single blue stiletto wrapped in hosiery sprouts and cast an insect like shadow

As if witnessing the emergence of a butterfly from its chrysalis

I'M ONLY HERE FOR YOUR ENTERTAINMENT (female marionette)...Direct TV

The headless being adorned in ubiquitous artifacts of mainstream femininity-hosier, heels

Extends, stretches, bends, articulates, flexes, explores a range of movements and way of being feminine

OBVIOUSLY MY CLEAVAGE CAN SELL ANYTHING...Pressed Juice
Legs descend, displaced by the shadowed profile of lush hair.
A blessed event, a self-birther
The fully realized woman takes her first breath as a sexually charge female.
I'M ONLY HERE FOR YOUR ENTERTAINMENT (female marionette)....Direct TV
The point is made...its sobering...as each example flits across the screen.
The lurid female stands proudly, tits bare, soft orange merkin, and blue suede heels
Her pharmacopornographic transformation is complete
The smorgasbord of de-humanized women closes with poignant text stretch piecing center screen
I am your...
 MOTHER
 DAUGHTER
 SISTER
 CO-WORKER
 MANAGER
 CEO
 DON'T TALK TO ME THAT WAY!
 CLACK, CLACK, CLACK
She struts down her runway into the light and becomes larger than life



FIGURE 4. IDIOTBOX, PHOTO BY: JIM MNEYRNEH
(Dialogues of Disobedience, 2018)

Saturated with a plethora of American nationalist artifacts and pop culture icons, this opening piece set the tone for my autofiction performance, *Dialogues of Disobedience*. Situating my socio-

politicized circus body and its subjectivity in the broad context of American culture established the foundation for the dialogues between my circus body and the normalizing mechanisms of (American) pharmacopornographic capitalism.

The conception of *idiotBOX* developed from the hand balancing case study. While forging the full-length piece, I deconstructed the hand balancing piece into dynamic elements to accommodate the dramaturgical flow of the piece. Experimenting with collage as a model for the thesis performance, I constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed the hand balancing piece several times. As a practice, the deconstruction served as an act of (dis)obedience towards mainstream conventions of hand balancing performance creation.

Despite the deconstruction, the conceptual link remained between my hand balancing circus body and the pharmacopornographic body. The technical link is evident in my circus body's physical inversions in *idiotBOX*. While *idiotBOX* conceptually and technically deviated slightly in its deconstruction and appropriation, it served as a dramaturgical precursor to *CUNT-fessions*. For example, the devices of the pharmacopornographic – the stilettos, hosiery, merkin, clear vinyl, titty scarf and corset – seeped in from the *idiotBOX*, the disseminator of pharmacopornographic culture in *Dialogues of Disobedience*.

Seemingly seduced by the pharmacopornographically normalized notions of femininity, I sexualized and objectified my body and consequently subjugated myself. Hypnotized by the idiot box (television), I embodied a topsy-turvy transformation, turning myself inside out and upside down to embody mainstream notions of femininity. Victim of a momentary lapse of awareness and the subconscious manipulation of my desire, I fell victim to these powerful cultural enticements. As a satirical cautionary tale of the conditioning and seduction of the relentless onslaught of hyper-sexualized images that objectify women and reiterate the normalization of femininity, the dialogue between my feminized circus body and its cultural context speaks to the dehumanization of the female form. Dehumanization leads to an increased probability of violence. In the hierarchy of social behavior, “less human” can lead to a marginalized socio-political status, and vulnerability to abuse and violence.

MEATmarket

(read aloud)

CLACK, CLACK, CLACK

The shadow of a female figure gradually reveals its true human form.

The form collaged in a punk rock mullet, tits exposed, nude colored pantyhose worn over blue stilettos and an oversized ornate carpet like fur over her pussy (merkin), struts. It is both alluring and repulsive. Soft and inviting yet all strangely situated. She is a site of consent?

Carrying a crumpled sheet of clear plastic vinyl, the shadowed female figure gently leads the line of audience connected by a plastic tug-a-war like rope toward a light in the southeast corner

FOLLOW ME, she commands

The audience forms a circle in close proximity around a trapeze oddly hanging only 4 feet off the ground I thought trapezes were supposed to be high off the ground?

It's hanging from another trapeze just above with ropes cinched. Gold, industrial hooks dangle from the excess rope draping down the perimeter of the trapeze.

Like a teacher leading her preschoolers on a walking rope, she sets the pace and circular path
WALK!

A stark white light showers the trapezes as it casts a rectangle onto the ground.

KEEP WALKING!

What?! Must the audience walk? Participate?

The audience completes the design of the piece, they serve as duo partner

CLACK, CLACK, CLACK

She continues to walk with the audience

WALK!

KEEP WALKING!

The audience obeys. The audience is engaged. The audience is part of the performance.

KEEP WALKING

She breaks away

On all fours, she prepares

She lays the clear vinyl sheet directly under the trapeze in the rectangular light

What is that plastic?

Sounds of feet in socks caressing the ground as the audience circles and the boisterous screams of the vinyl fill the air as it is smoothed and laid flat

She squats directly under the trapeze on the plastic

A large Celtic cross tattoo resides on her lower back

One plastic glove.

A second plastic glove.

The circling audience peers down at the squatting body

She bathes herself with blue paint, then red.

What is the paint for?

It represents the red of lipstick, and blue eye shadow, but also the color of dead and living flesh

There is a restlessness in her pace and application

First her back, then her arms

Gloves off

Glistening with swirls of red and blue, she stands before her trapeze, head down, wrists resting on the grungy, white tape covered steel bar- the guillotine

CLANK, CLANK, CLANK

Sounds of the gold, industrial hooks chime

A nudge, a hint, foreshadowing of violence

The audience continues to walk

MUSIC!

The sinister sound of the banjo engulfs the space

Wait? What is this music? It sounds familiar

Oh yes, it's Bach's Suite for Unaccompanied Cello No1.

Played on a banjo? Intriguing

Her hand slides to grip the bar

Her body activates

Effortlessly, her body lifts off the ground. Legs float off, over, and drape as her body collapses onto the steel bar at her hips

CLANK, CLANK, CLANK

Eye-level with the audience, body suspended, folded, face down, she pulls down the waist of her pantyhose to her knees

Vulva and anus unveiled like a flower bud opening revealing its stamen and pistol

The most guarded treasures of her female body exposed, revealed, vulnerable, intimate. A historical site of procreation and pleasure, but also violence. It has a story to tell. The pussy is political
Another pair of panty hose appears draped from her hands
The hose stretch over her head,
Her face disappears as if silenced and gagged
No longer human, a carcass fileted.
Unrecognizable to itself, on display, suspended, exposed, frozen in time while the world around continues
Some heads looking away, some don't
The confronting image is not for the faint of heart
One minute passes suspended, six more to go
Living in the abject, somewhere between familiar and foreign
The body grasp for its humanity as it floats the head up to reveal a distorted face not quite human
A dehumanized being continues, trapped and pierced by the metal bar of the trapeze, for five more minutes (the length of a typical solo circus act)
The audience obediently continues connected, circling
When will this end? How long must we continue to witness such atrocity?
Bach cycles through again. Is this sound track on repeat?
It represents the passing of time
A small swinging motion emanates from the body
It builds with intensity to a full swing, anchored at the hips
Is the being alive? Does it want to break free?
The dangling ropes with gold industrial hooks writhe like shuffling shackles
CLANK, CLANK, CLANK
The sounds of the hooks echo as the voice of the oppressor
CLANK, CLANK, CLANK
The being relents and the swaying carcass slows to a halt.
Bach dissipates and room fills with the pitter-patter of shuffling feet
The audience circles almost in unison. It's dizzying
The carcass animates, slowly reaching for the ropes
Gripping tightly, the carcass dives forward and unrolls from the trapeze
Dangling like from a noose, the carcass pauses, legs curled on the floor
The being releases and falls to the vinyl sheet like rag doll
Escape
Sprawled, tits up, face masked, female sex exposed, fleshy bony hips red and bruised
Resting or dead?



FIGURE 5. *MEATMARKET*, PHOTO BY: JIM MNEYMNEH
 photos by: Jim Mneymneh (*Dialogues of Disobedience*, 2018)

MEATmarket was one of two pieces resulting from my case study of trapeze. Static trapeze is one of the oldest aerial acrobatics disciplines in circus, but one of the least performed. As it is static, I, the performer, am left exposed. The static nature of the apparatus and the performer naturally draws focus to the body without the mask of a flourish, a spin, a swing, a pull, and in the case of a soloist like myself, another body. Inherently minimalist, it leaves me vulnerable, exposed, and honest; it is a hanging truth serum.

In this case study, I worked with a series of constraints and tools to stimulate the embodied research. Based on impulse, curiosities, and questions, I researched starting from within, through active listening without bias or preconceived inspiration. The constraints used during exploration included:

durational and sustained single positions, a released body, and an unusually low hanging static trapeze. Counterpoint surfaced as a central concept in the research. Counterpoint, typically known as a musical compositional tool, can also mean an argument, idea, or theme to create a contrast with the main element,¹⁵ or, in the case of my research, culture and practice.

In *MEATmarket*, counterpoint affected rhythm, pace, quality of music and movement of my body, audience, and conventions of both circus and pharmacopornographic practices. My embodiment of the carcass in *MEATmarket* illustrated layers of interlaced counterpoint as a subversion to mainstream circus and pharmacopornographic capitalism. Examples of counterpoint include:

- Stationary trapeze and audience circling
- Hanging, loose body in single position over the course of a typical act length
- Music and movement in diametrical opposition
- Non-idiosyncratic interplay between body and sound
- Bach performed on an American folk instrument, the banjo

Hanging, suspended, mutilated, almost lifeless, I was a carcass. My circus body suspended in the in-between of human and non-human. The image lay between human and non-human. As the unwitting victim of pharmacopornographic capitalism, the carcass was the byproduct. Dehumanization, trauma, violence, isolation, and shame manifested as byproducts of the pharmacopornographic regime through the normalization of desire. By exposing the “true products” of the pharmacopornographic, my circus body delivered a counterpoint, a counterculture into the public arena, the stage – point (mainstream circus and pharmacopornographic capitalism) versus counterpoint (subversive, queer, feminist, counterculture). The concept and practice of counterpoint embodied the tenets of counterculture via (dis)obedience, its driver.

My CIRCUS BODY

(read aloud)

The audience still connected by the plastic rope patiently continues to circle the being.
A sign life bubbles
The almost lifeless female pulls back the tassel adorned hosiery mask to unveil her face
She returns the hosiery around her knees to their proper place
She stretches her limbs like a starfish and reaches for chalk
Lying on her back, she outlines her form-head, arm, other arm, leg, other leg
STOP. YOU'RE MAKING ME DIZZY.
Catching her breath, she rises to her feet
“a chalk outline of a murder victim” appears on the clear vinyl sheet
Who died? What died? What remains?
The white, American, aging female returns
YOU CAN DROP THE PLASTIC
DROP

¹⁵ Hobson, A. (Ed.). (2004). *Oxford dictionary of difficult words*. Oxford University Press.

*Chalk and plastic “victim” in hand, she walks through the audience and disappears into the darkness
The sound of the vinyl sheet snaps, she floats it neatly on the ground next to the word ‘permission’
LIGHTS*

*Mic in hand, she squats and adjusts the dangling tassels in her face
COME AROUND, inviting the audience to join her around the outlined body
They comply
Sniffing and short of breath, draping breasts exposed still layered in her pharmacopornographic armor,
crawls and talks
The audience tentatively gathers around,
some seated on the floor,
some standing, some kneeling
They exercise their will
SO, I’VE BEEN DOING SOME RESEARCH OVER THE LAST YEAR AND HALF
The scholar is present, it’s an odd bird, an odd sort of scholar
The audience in close proximity
The nimble story of her impetus to return to school reverbs from the speaker*

*She continues...
A quest for embodied knowledge...blah blah blah...kinetic vocabulary
What is the source of such knowledge...blah blah blah....my circus body
WHAT IS A/MY CIRCUS BODY?
The absurdly half-dressed scholar, chalk in hand, mic in the other on all fours, writes the essentials of her
circus body on the vinyl with her outline
M+B, MIND-BODY, in the head-neck of the gingerbread (wo)man chalk body
OH (btw)THIS IS MY CIRCUS BODY, acknowledging the shadow of her former self, the ‘victim’ outline
Writing earnestly, while her floppy bunny ear-like hose drape over her shoulder and back
PROSTHESIS, in one arm
TECHNIQUE, in another arm
PROWESS, VIRTUOSITY, RISK, in the torso
Continues to crawl all fours, unapologetically ass to audience with only the sheer hosiery as barrier
between the two
It’s disorientating, but charming.
TIME & SPACE, in one leg
She stands, contemplating
I’M FORGETTING ONE
OH YEAH, AUDIENCE, THAT’S YOU
Again, on all fours, AUDIENCE, in the other leg.
Unaware of her absurd appearance and gestures, she is engrossed in her scholarly disseminations
IDENTITY-
SEX, GENDER, SEXUALITY, RACE, AGE, SOCIO-POLITICAL EXPERIENCE
Summarized, these constitute SUBJECTIVITY, WE EACH HAVE ONE AND IS UNIQUE
Revisiting each essential investigated thus far...circling each, traversing the body like a spider
M+B, TECHNIQUE, PROSTHESIS
A voice emerges from the audience, “Can I ask a question? What’s that word?” referring to prosthesis
AUDIENCE circled
Quietly with a smile, I’M ABOUT TO TALK ABOUT THAT
I LIKE YOUR QUESTION. SO, IF ANYBODY WANTS (to ask a question), THAT’S GOOD
Curiosity sparked, a single audience member exercised agency,
Marking a clear schism in the performer-audience relationship*

*The audience has embraced the bi-polarity of the performance between artist and scholar
The scholar continues perched on her heels, spread eagle...
PROSTHESIS....blah blah blah...Haraway and Preciado....blah blah blah....body in relation to the
object*

Checking in with the audience...

DOES THAT MAKE SENSE? DO YOU UNDERSTAND BETTER?

Audience replying with nodding heads; a quiet dialogue emerges

The crouched scholar stands, stretching her legs

AUDIENCE

CLACK, CLACK, CLACK

The scholar walks through the audience, arms stretched in exaltation toward the pink oasis

FOLLOW ME INTO THE PINK SPACE

The audience, again, willingly migrates to the beckoning pink arena

I LIKE TO CALL IT THE VAGINA

WE ALL CAME FROM ONE

NOW GO BACK

Audience nestled

EVERYBODY COZY?



FIGURE 6. *MY CIRCUS BODY*, PHOTO BY: JIM MNEYMNEH
photos by: Jim Mneymneh (*Dialogues of Disobedience*, 2018)

In this section of *Dialogues of Disobedience*, the artist seamlessly slipped into the scholar role. The idea of collage¹⁶ emerged over the course of my research. This experimental approach granted the audience access to my thoughts and offered entry into the process versus simply witnessing a “finished” product. A new form of performance that deviated from the norm emerged. I call it a living surreal collage, borrowing from the visual art practice of surreal collage in which I assemble a cohesive piece of work from different performative genres of different registers. I was only able to articulate and name this emerging technique of presentation in the last phases of my practical research. In previous research presentations, I experimented with the integration of my scholarly, theoretical investigations into my artistic practices. In my presentations, I attempted to straddle the performative worlds of both artist (stage performance) and scholar (lecture). Each represents a kind of research, but does not reside in a single, cohesive performance.

With sections where the scholar emerges, this performance model offered access to my theoretical investigations and reflected the oscillation between practice and theory in my research methodology. These in-between moments were not arbitrary. Each supported the central thread of (dis)obedience and intimacy while creating the necessary connective tissue binding the case studies into a cohesive form. Although I playfully tottered between artist and scholar, both were always present, in different degrees. The audience willfully and graciously surrendered to the duality of the performance.

CUNT-fessions

(read aloud)

CLACK, CLACK, CLACK

To the idiot box-PUTS ON THE PLASTIC CORSETTE UPHOLSTERED WITH TASSLED TITS (six TITS to be exact), DRAPES THE TASSLED TIT SCARF

While dressing, she continues to speak of her scholarly journey in search of new knowledge-

Back to the audience-CLACK, CLACK, CLACK

STUFFS HER ASS WITH PILLOW STUFFING

-doing to Undoing.

On all fours breast swing dragging on the floor, ass to audience, she writes with a block of white chalk on the ground-what can a body do?

Habits.

She is questioning what is the knowledge of her body. Technique? Gender? Sexuality?

CLACK, CLACK, CLACK

Hunched over, she draws a diagonal line-

Habit

Permission

Disobedience

¹⁶“a creative work that resembles such a composition in incorporating various materials or elements” Collage. (2018). Retrieved December 30, 2018, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/collage>

Failure

Undo

-across the stage creating a continuum from do to undo.

It's the journey to the unknown, new knowledge, new ways of doing.

CLACK, CLACK, CLACK

PROMENADES FOR THE AUDIENCE GLORIOUSLY

She inserts a plug into the wall. The sound of Verdi's requiem returns echoing into the black box from her dressing room/foyer.

To the idiot box-A POSE

CLACK, CLACK, CLACK

DRAPES HER TITTY SCARF AROUND HECK, COVERS HER FACE LIKE A BANK ROBBER

Her form changes, modified to a techno-political body.

But why? To be more desirable to herself or to others? To subscribe to the ideal body of the pharmacoporn or to her own ideal body image?

She is fully armored in a pharmacopornographic feminized and objectified body. She is now more object than subject. Is she finally desirable? Has she achieved the mainstream notions of femininity? OR is her aging fleshy human form barely recognizable? Is she shackled and condemned by these mechanisms of control through mainstream constructs of desire?

CLACK, CLACK, CLACK

A light appears from nothingness as she plugs another cord into the wall opposite the audience

She disappears into the light of the cave like space

The scholar reappears transformed into a cat like seductress

The energy shifts. She entices her audience

Backlit and crouched in the doorway of the cave, breast dangling on the floor, she playfully grinds her cunt like a pussycat in a mint bush. What is this creature? Is she human? Animal? Is she a tabby or a taboo?

She is a grotesque body

She is a mother. The tits dangling and protruding from her torso indicate as much

The cunty cat preps, swaying back and forth on all fours over the word 'habit'.

SHIFTING WEIGHT, FRONT TO REAR, BACK AND FORTH, AGAIN AND AGAIN

The mother inverts-voila! Hand balancing



FIGURE 7. *CUNT-FESSIONS*

photos by: Jim Mneyrneh (*Dialogues of Disobedience*, 2018)

Hand balancing was one of the three case studies in my research. The hand balance case study represented an amateur level of proficiency and experience. I employed active listening and a series of constraints generated by questions and curiosities about my hand balancing practice. The constraints were proximity, duration, single position, silence, exploring “the head” and falling. The result of this case study was a piece called *CUNT-fessions*.

I am merely an amateur hand balancer. I pursued hand balancing for pleasure and for variety in my circus practice. I have used my hand balancing skills in professional performance, but have never performed a solo act like that of my specialty, static trapeze. I am skilled enough to create an act, and have performed solo moments of hand balancing, but my technical proficiency is not of professional level. The one-arm¹⁷ is one the major professional/technical benchmarks for an expert hand balancer. I cannot do a one-arm handstand, but do have some technical control, consistency, and confidence in the discipline.

The best way to describe my level of proficiency is that of a generalist. In my profession, to be legitimized, standards based on the codes and traditions of circus dictate if a circus body is an expert or

¹⁷ A one-arm handstand is the ability to be balanced in an inversion on a single hand.

not. These technical and aesthetic codes exist for the multiplicity of disciplines in circus. I chose to challenge whether or not I needed a professional level of expertise (or a one-arm) to create a meaningful, thought provoking artwork that speaks to larger socio-political issues.

CUNT-fessions (continued)

(read aloud)

Verdi's requiem continues to quietly spill into the large black box.

The inverted cunty cat creature with its plethora of tits drooping toward the floor, floats its extended legs effortlessly over 'permission'

Is this animal testing gone wrong?

After some time, the legs descend and the four-legged creature reappears

A sound emanates from the lower region of the creature

PfphBlphbFLIPpopfph-PUSSY FART

The creature pauses for a moment

Discomfort and uncertainty emanates in a single muffled laugh from the audience closely nestled in the pink box

Are they surprised? Confused? Unsure? Where did the noise come from? From the creature or a fellow audience member?

What was that noise? A fart? A pussy fart?

It is clear the audience is caught off guard and unsure

With no regard for the discomfort of its onlookers, the creature continues on-all-fours across the chalk line toward 'disobedience'

INVERSION!

Closer to the audience, center stage, she floats inverted with squatted cat legs

DESCEND

PUSSY FART!

The pressure of laughter is mounting in the audience. A small titter of laughter erupts.

The audience is still unsure if its permissible to laugh. Does the audience need permission? Didn't the creature already give consent? It's releasing, letting go, freedom, liberation, pleasure!

The creature's pace accelerates to encourage her audience to simply release

INVERSION

DESCEND

PUSSY FART!

Collective laughter bursts forth from the audience

Awwwwwwwwwwwwww-the release

INVERSION

DESCEND

PUSSY FART

LAUGHTER

Continuing along the chalk line to the word 'failure'.

Again, lessening the gap between creature and audience

INVERSION

DESCEND

NO PUSSY FART?

What?! No pussy fart?! The creature is saddened and disappointed by its failure.

LAUGHTER

The creature moves across the line into UNdo, new ways

Again, even closer to the audience

INVERSION

DESCEND

PUSSY FART

LAUGHTER

The creature is relieved, satisfied, and accomplished

Mission success, subversion complete

The scholar reappears as the creature plants the stilettos and stands

Staggering, she promenades for the audience

My primary objective as a hand balancer was not to fall, but to balance, inverted, on my hands, for a designated period of time with effortless elegance. Falling was my biggest fear as a hand balancer. Falling as failing was one of many explorations in my research. The research focused on undoing failure in order to forge falling as useful and purposeful. I sought to subvert the desired, perfect inversion to embrace the falling failure. This search was long and arduous. The answer appeared late in the process through a most unlikely place of the body.

In my initial hand balancing body study, as mentioned previously, I used active listening as a creative research method. I deviated from my typical creative process of being inspired by external elements. Listening was fundamental for dialogue, including a dialogue with self. I searched for inspiration from within by listening to what naturally emerged by simply doing my hand balancing practice. Alone, free of music, immersed in quiet, I practiced. I listened. Words, images, and sounds materialized in my thoughts. This act of listening was a conscious act to employ my mind muscle (creative, reflexive, academic) in my practice and develop a new foundational approach to my reflexive practice. In turn, images of Picasso's cubist women and female cyborgs emerged. I reflected. These avant-garde images mutate the classic female body and offer a transformation into the uncanny, magical, non-human. They also sexualize and dehumanize the body. These reflections fed the conceptual development of *CUNT-fessions* and my dialogue with the critical theory of pharmacopornographic capitalism.

"Impossible," "perfection," "frustration," and "anxiety" were words and emotions that surfaced in my practice. I experienced an inherent impermanence and unreliability because of the inconsistency in my practice. I felt enslaved by these words that point to failure within pharmacopornographic capitalist and mainstream North American hegemonies. My amateur proficiency might have contributed to this persistence; regardless, I embraced my embodiments. These sentiments echoed my experience as an American mother and artist. My being, my body, my subjectivity was a failure by pharmacopornographic standards. As a tomboy, bisexual, artist, and mother, I deviate from normalized notions of femininity and motherhood. My body does not conform to the sterile mainstream classic hand balancing circus body, nor did my motherhood or femininity. These manifestations also motivated the vision of the piece and a

desire for liberation and freedom from the oppressive (technical) constraints of hand balancing and normalizing hegemonies.

In *CUNT-fessions*, my hand balancing circus body was not that of the “classic” circus body. The North American mainstream, classic circus body embodies a narrow, idealized aesthetic derived from technical athletic practices and traditions. These ideals manifest as sterile perfection characterized by hyperextended/straight legs, ultra-pointed (or flexed) toes, impeccable execution of virtuosic technique dressed in enticing, gender normative costuming, with complementary music or sound. The performance satiates its audience. My circus body subverted this “classic” circus body with its floating, bent legs, unpointed toes draped in Dollarama hosiery and dressed in a vinyl titty corset accompanied by the sounds of the taboo pussy farts. Bodily hierarchy turned upside down. The hand balancing intent was no longer to stay inverted, but to revert to its natural state of unbalance to produce the boisterous sound of the pussy fart.

The pussy fart emerged late as a focal point and quickly rose as the prominent act of (dis)obedience in the piece. The pussy fart quietly dwelled as a secret “weapon” within my circus body. I intended to utilize it in another creative endeavor, but it appeared as an undeniable voice; it could not be ignored. The pussy fart was unmasked and demanded recognition so rather than stifling its voice, I encouraged it. The pussy fart revealed itself as the missing link in my dialogues with disobedience in both my circus body and its pharmacopornographic context.

The pussy fart speaks from the female sex (versus the mouth), and empowers the female body. The male phallus or patriarchy cannot produce such a sound or speech of the body. This act, specific to the female sex much like childbirth, shifts from taboo to super-power. It works as a simple inhale and exhale yet is considered taboo and typically a source of discomfort and shame. The pussy fart carries a horrifying stigma, not just socially, but also in the context of circus. Improper and unwelcome, it provoked a laugh that was fueled by the irreverence of the deviant and disobedient. The transference from the apparatus of speech to a sexualized organ, more specifically a female sexualized organ: the pussy, uncrowns the patriarchy-imposed taboo. Additionally, the pussy fart of the sexualized material body not only uncrowns shame, but also renews the power of the female body. Living in a paradigm of puritanical and patriarchal shame commonly manifested in pornography and sexuality, the pussy fart directly denounced the taboos that harbor shame and disgust. It subverted idealized representations and disrupted the established order of femininity that not only exists in the larger socio-economic paradigm, but also in my immediate circus culture.

Failing is intimately understood by most humans. It is one of our many human conditions. Falling (without control) represents failure in the “classic” hand balancing circus body. The pussy fart marked the death of failure and a transformation, a rebirth through habits undone. The degradation of the intent of

hand balancing from perfect inverted balance – doing – to pussy fart – undoing – completed the subversion.

The strict codes and dignity of hand balancing technique juxtaposed with the horrifying sound of the pussy fart, created the phenomenologically absurd. The death of the classic, narrow, and quotidian steered my circus body, its practice, and performance towards a queer feminist vivification – new embodied knowledge, ways of doing, and aesthetics emerged. The pussy fart was a willful voice that surfaced as an act of self-determination in its (dis)obedience.

unHinged

(read aloud)

Staggering

CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK

Corset draping off her hips

Peeling down the hosiery to her thighs

CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK

Away from the audience

One fluffy butt stuffing falls and then another

Bends over displaying the site of so much history-childbirth, rape, oppression, violence

She grabs the clarinet

Stumbling in a circle, center room

CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK

She pulls back the hosiery face-mask

Picks up a block of white chalk

Arms flailing, clarinet in one hand and chalk in the other

CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK

She mashes the white chalk on her knee, it crumbles to the floor

The hosiery inches down to her ankles

Bound at her ankles she plays a long low sound from her clarinet

CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK

Ankles bound as if in shackles, she continues in a circle

The single note bouncing with every passing stride

STOMP, STOMP, STOMP

On another block of chalk

Her pace picks ups as she shuffles and drags her feet over piles of smashed white chalk

Now running, she continues to play a single long note

Her titty scarf falls to the floor

A train wreck, an unraveling, a melt down

CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK

She continues in circles, running like a hamster

She pauses playing at moment gasping for air

The desperation, the suffocation, evident in the struggle

Is she running from something or toward something?

She is bound and trapped by the clarinet, the hosiery, the heels, the plastic binding titty corset

CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK

Running relentlessly, she continues, despite her degrading state, playing the same single note

Is she drunk with despair? Is it a cry for help?

CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK

*Pulverized white chalk trails echoing her histories
A woman forlorn, she pushes forward through the misery
CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK*

*The running slows, gasping for air between her undying commitment to play that fucking clarinet
With each circling, she embodies the paradox of fiery perseverance and inevitable defeat
She becomes unhinged, breaking away from her hamster wheel, tearing away the hosier head-piece
Clawing at the air for breath, stumbling like a drunk still bound at the ankles
Is it defeat or transgression?
Self-determination, disobedience*



FIGURE 8. UNHINGED

photos by: Jim Mneymneh (*Dialogues of Disobedience*, 2018)

In this section of *Dialogues of Disobedience*, the clarinet segment developed through my theoretical investigation of Paul Preciado's socio-political theory of the pharmacopornographic regime. I sought to integrate a practice from a past life: the clarinet. I once had committed my life to the uncompromising, inhospitable, rigorous profession of classical clarinet. The climate of the classical music community forced a willful departure from clarinet. Though I loved it, it suffocated my creative soul. Over the last two decades, I have had a dichotomous, love-hate relationship with my clarinet. Born of catharsis, this piece provided a long overdue push against the oppressive and abusive authoritarian monolith of classical music that parallels pharmacopornographic capitalism and also echoes current circus practices. This particular section served as a transition between undoing, the unraveling of prevailing

authoritarian normativity and the movement towards a new trajectory--an anti-normative, anti-pharmacopornographic, queer space that embraces Others.

p-h-a-r-m-a-c-o-p-o-r-n-o-g-r-a-p-h-i-c b-i-o-c-a-p-i-t-a-l-i-s-m

(read aloud)

A room in complete disarray

She redirects the free-standing light away from the hamster wheel toward the audience in the pink "box"

She collapses to all fours, clarinet abandoned

As she grabs a piece of white chalk, she crawls toward the direction of the audience.

Crawling, she writes on the floor closing the distance to her audience

p-h-a-r-m-a-c-o-p-o-r-n-o-g-r-a-p-h-i-c b-i-o-c-a-p-i-t-a-l-i-s-m

Sniffing, catching her breath, she plops to a sit

CAN EVERYONE SEE?

Peeling away, stripping, shedding her pharmacopornographic shackles, the scholar re-emerges still coated in paint

She beckons two audience members to assist in wiping away the remnants of the red and blue paint from her back

Naked and still a bit breathless, she squats in front of her big word while being bathed

PHARMACO-PORNOGRAPHIC-BIO-CAPITALISM, IT'S A BIG WORD

I'M GONNA TRY TO UNPACK THIS FOR YOU A BIT

She takes the audience on a brief historical review of the control of subjectivities since the dawn of the patriarchy

As she gathers her bearings she is stumbling over her words

YOU GUYS ARE DOING GREAT (to the bathers)

She explains how a rift in epistemological truth shifted how reigning powers socially and politically normalized subjectivities for control

WOW THESE GUYS ARE GOOD; IT'S LIKE A MASSAGE

Foucault...blah, blah, blah...biopower regime...blah, blah, blah...enlightenment & heteronormativity

Institutionalized disciplining mechanisms

AM I LOSING ANYONE YET?

The bathers return to the audience.

Paul Preciado....blah, blah, blah...pharmacopornographic...blah, blah, blah...post WWII

She continues, a shift,, new mechanisms, pharmaceutical (The Pill) and mainstream pornography (Playboy)

No longer pathologizing homosexuals, normalization of desire for the purpose of making money

Fully human, the naked and exposed scholar, stands, sits, crawls, underlines and circles with chalk, arms waving with explanatory emphasis

The scholar retrieves her plastic circus body and places it in close proximity to the chalk-scrawled pharmacopornographic

She questions....

How can the circus body understand its subjectivity in relation to such a regime?

Does the circus body acknowledge it or not?

What is its agency?

What kind of dialogue can the circus body have with pharmacopornographic biocapitalism?

CHEW ON THAT FOR A MOMENT

The audience is patience and silent as the scholar give the tech crew two thumbs up.



FIGURE 9. PHARMACOPORNOGRAPHIC CAPITALISM
 photos by: Jim Mneymneh (*Dialogues of Disobedience*, 2018)

CAZZO: finding my way to pink

(read aloud)

The naked, forty something year old circus body, scholar, and mother of two, makes her way through the audience into the pink centric “box” or “vagina”
The energy shifts – a shift to the queer space

Unapologetically she cues, MUSIC

The provocative sounds of Scissor Sisters consume the space

The mood is moving into another register

Pushed to the perimeter of the pinky “box”, the audience, standing like spectators into an arena

Precariously balancing on a “do-it-yourself”, shiny pink plastic mini stool embellished with fuzzy pink ball trim

Dismantling the scenography from the pink felt wall, a costume awakens from a two- dimensional state.

The audience intimately witnesses the awkward transformation, pink layer by pink layer

Disobediently dressing for an audience

*Pink breast cancer socks
Hot pink vans
Blundering
Bubble gum men's briefs with pale pink fuzzy balls
Oversized, adorned powdered pink mechanic jumpsuit
Mini pleather pink boxing glove, clown nose-stache
Awkward fuchsia bandana
Mirrored blush aviator sunglasses
Bright pink boxing gloves
Wait, on the wrong hands, the thumbs face out....oh, failure
It's almost a reverse strip tease as the aging white female mother disappears with every folding layer of pink
Underway, the gender construct
A fantastical Elvis-esque emerges, a drag-king like being costumed in a quilted collection of stereotypical artifacts of normative masculinity feminized by their pink dressing
Clothed, for the first time since these dialogues began*

The naked scholar is reborn as a baby clown. But is it a boy? A girl? A they? Success? Failure? Does it matter? Who cares! Let the gender-bendy adventure with baby clown, Q, begin!



FIGURE 10. CAZZO: FINDING MY WAY TO PINK
photos by: Jim Mneymneh (*Dialogues of Disobedience*, 2018)

My third case study was *clown*. This case study marked the conception and birth of my baby clown, Q. I am a baby clown, a novice in the discipline of clown. It was my first attempt at clowning, or at any kind of humor. I typically worked in the deep, dark registers of the human condition. The choice to study clown naturally emerged through a series of serendipitous events that began with a banana and a playful act of rebellion in a workshop in my first semester of school. At the time, I was unaware clown

would be integrated into my practical scholarly research. I had always wanted to explore humor through clown and now, finally, it had come to be in my creative work. As this was my first attempt, I worked with a few prominent circus clowns such as Jesse Dryden and Nathalie Claude who are from different backgrounds, and read several books about clown. The books supported the physical work but the true learning came from doing.

CAZZO (continued)

(read aloud)

The stool, a pink metal bucket, pink water bottle, haphazardly placed off center in the "box"
Q transformation complete. The centric scene is set
Q disappears into the dressing room-foyer
What's going on?
I mean we all have to have a few secrets, right?
Q's head pokes out...ALMOST READY!
It's an awkwardly long wait....failure?
Q reappears in full regalia skipping around the space....OK!!!!
Music shift...Bongolio
Skipping like a maniac in and out of the black and pink space through the audience
WHOOOOO! YEAHH!
Q is high as fuck!
Spreading the joy, the high, the excitement
HEEEEEYYYYY!
Q is feverish, crazy, silly
Humping the audience, shadow boxing the crowd
High fives, blowing kisses
DING! DING!
The sound of a boxing bell
Q halts in the silence, sunglasses dangling from a single ear
Soft giggles from the crowd
Q calmly walks toward the stool, bumbling to remove the sunglasses while wearing boxing gloves
Sits on the stool, places the sunglasses under the stool
Floundering to grab hold of the water bottle to satiate a breathy thirst
SQUIRT. AHHH. SQUIRT.AHHHHH
Gracelessly but carefully places the bottle next to the stool
Sliding to face the pink felt wall, Q prepares-neck rolls, arms stretches, deep breathes
DING!
Jon Spencer's rock'n'roll swells in the air
Q swings to face the crowd then elevates bouncing to the beat
Q is on the prowl, flirting with the spectators-shadow boxing, dancing, hopping, grinding,
Looking to fight? Looking to fuck?
It's a sight
The crowd is uncertain
Suddenly Q locks his/her knees
Raising the backward boxing glove as if flagging a cab
Hey, PAUUSE! PAUUUUSE! Beckoning to the sound crew
PAUUUUUUUSE! Something is wrong
Silence
A phenomenological moment
Q quietly walks, knees locked, into the dressing room

Apologetically, EXCUSE ME

Failure...but this is what clowns do, isn't it their thing?

Defeated Q disappears into the dressing room.

Is this part of the show? Unplanned? Is something wrong? It's not clear.

I HATE IT WHEN THIS HAPPENS, echoes from the foyer

Giggles again

At least they are laughing. Isn't that the point of clowning, laughter and joy?

Disdainfully, SHIT!

Q is not laughing or feeling joy

Suddenly, OK!!!

Q reappears dancing the running man as the music resumes

Let the show continue!

Making eye contact with each spectator, Q selects "the victim" or "the lover" by cordially offering an arm

It's a gentleman

Oh yeah, clowns love playing with "the victim"

Promenading the gentlemen of choice proudly for the crowd

Side-by-side in a circle, it's the first contact

Q has butterflies, no words exchanged, only chemistry

Does this make Q straight? Or wait gay? Hmmm.....does it matter?

Seats the gentleman on the stool

Q elbow pumps with YESSSS! and hops a victory lap

Thrusting the pelvis, the deep pink fuzzy balls that were once at the neck unzipped to the crotch

Q peacocks his/her big balls, chest peeking out as the lapels swing open with each bounce

DING! DING!

Silence

Q takes a moment

Sits on "the lover's" knee for rest

But only for a moment

DING! DING! -Screaming Jay Hawkins, I put a spell shifts the mood.

It's sexy time

The seduction

Q begins a clumsy but confident burlesque lap dance and partial strip tease employing the help of her lover

Q has plans for "the lover"

Menacing as a lion cub, Q slips between coy and lewd

Q watches the "lover", "the lover" watches Q, the crowd watches the Q and "the lover"

DING! DING!

Silence

AWWW...Chest exposed, pants dangling by suspenders, Q takes a knee

DING! DING! -James Brown's, Man's world takes it to the next level

Here we go!

Q is prepared, handing "the lover"- yes of course-a pink condom, masculine and feminine in a single artifact

Snuggled in "the lover's" arms, Q places the "the lover's" hand in the crotch of the pants encouraging lascivious caresses

"The lover" is taking in the shape of what is filling his hand

Groping Q's crotch, he throws his head back in disbelief, his eyes disappear as his smile grows bigger

Oh my, what's this? Something unexpected

The audience giggles unaware of the surprise encountered by "the lover"

Q, smiling mischievously and nodding yes sagaciously

It's oooooonnn, like donky-kong!
The socially awkward thermometer rises
"The lover" disappears as Q rises
Q places "the lover's" hand on one hip, then on the other him, swaying hips to beat of a Man's World
Focused and oblivious to the awkward in the air, Q slips out of the suspenders
The seduction escalates as Q folds forward
Oh! "the lover" slides Q's pants to the ankles
Bent over, "the lover" gets an eye full of soft pink balls. Wait balls? Yeah balls.
"The lover" giggles at the sight nestled between the Q's thighs
Pants at the ankle, Q crawls clumsily like a seal
Ass up, down, up, down, Q pumps the floor seductively
Does "the lover" like what he sees?
A sudden flip to back, the pumping continues
Giggles erupt
The secret is out, there is a BULGE in Q's pants. Oh my!
Carnally caressing Q pumps the bulge with pride
What is in Q's pants? Hmmm...
Ok...wait....boy? girl? Tomboy??
Q suddenly flips and rolls, ass up tickling the powder pink fuzzy nestled in "the gap" of the thighs
This is for the audience. Hmmm....
The air is blushing
Tension is rising. Where is this going?
In full amateur stripper mode, crotch to "the lover" leg carelessly in the air spread, scoots closer
The jumpsuit finally removed leg by leg by "the lover"
Eyes locked they are both smiling
Like a gentleman, "the lover" assists Q to his/her feet
Q swaggers around "the lover" with a trailing finger
Placing a foot on the knee of "the lover" like Captain Morgan, Q splays opens, pumping
Q reaches into the bubble gum briefs, wrestling with the bulge
And here it comes, the reveal
A banana!
James Brown continues as the soundtrack for a series of classic banana gags
Closing with the bubble scenting application of a pink condom
Whoa! Where is this going?
Head thrown back, moaning humping "the lover" armpit, Q is in ecstasy
"The lover" is unsure what to do, but embraces the moment
A mixture of giggles blanket the air and shaking heads
DING!
Pee break
Back to audience, one arm leaning on "the lover", Q takes a leaking like a drunk
"The lover" watches and giggles
Oh, Q seems to have got a little on "the lover", oops!
DING!
The deep distinct seductive voice of Barry White heightens the mood
It's getting serious
Behind "the lover", tits pressed against his back, he/she threads her arms, the pinky phallus head on
Q whispers sweet nothing in "the lovers" ear, carefully instructing the steps to come (hold the banana, peel, feed when instructed)
Sensitively unpeeling, the flesh of the banana exposed, Q and "the lover" have a moment swaying in the
cuddle embrace
They are connected

*Intoxicated by Barry White's voice, Q leaves "the lover" with the banana in hand and passes the reigns
It's an offering, Q has surrendered his/herself to "the lover"*

DING!

Q is sobered by the bell

Searching for the pink bandana, Q prepares, Q is nervous, excited, like a kid at Christmas

It's time for the consummation, the feast

DING!

Tits covered by the bib, Q bounces like a bunny to "What is love, baby don't hurt me, don't hurt me no more...."

"The lover" joins in the bouncing, while reaching to feed Q the banana

Q plays hard-to-get, bouncing, hoping in a circle, "the lover" chases

Who's trying to get who now? The dynamic has shifted

"The lover" whole-heartedly, is committed to please Q...and maybe himself

To connect, to share, to reach one another in a moment of shared please

The strange mating ritual, phenomenologically awkward, unpredictable, chaotic, unique

The "feeding" proves challenging and fraught with failure-falling, broken, bruised banana

Is it love, is it research, is it artistic process, they all feel the same-going into the unknown

Q breaks out of the "box" and into the audience, the mainstream, the public

Q takes their relationship public, proud and playfully

DING! DING! DING!

Marks the end of the match

Saved by the bell...or not

But Q and "the lover" rejoice in the victory of their communion with arms raised like champions

Before departing, Q insists to spoon, sweetly, Q cuddles "the lover" tightly and thanks him for this special moment



FIGURE 11. CAZZO: FINDING MY WAY TO PINK
photos by: Jim Mneymneh (*Dialogues of Disobedience*, 2018)

Cazzo was collaged between my verbal thoughts on pharmacopornographic capitalism and failure. Q had no other agenda but love – for self and others. Loosely using a boxing match metaphor, the piece began as a search for love that unfolds through a childlike, seductive journey between the trans-

baby clown, Q, and “a victim” (audience participant). The soulful sounds of great American rock ‘n’ roll and funk artists like Jon Spencer, Screamin’ Jay Hawkins, James Brown, and Barry White filled the air as the soundtrack for this brief human encounter. The audience witnessed the progression of the encounter with each passing round – peacocking, flirting, lap dance, strip tease, and the finale—eat me. With each passing round, layers of Q’s performative exterior shed until the vulnerable, fleshy, almost naked body was revealed. The union was consummated through fornication with the phallus, the banana.

Q (my baby clown) was an eyeful of confusion garbed in a decadent explosion of normative masculine material artifacts and gestures colored in pink. The performance moved between masculine and feminine performances of gender and sexuality. It emerged as a gender-fuck that seamlessly slid along the gender binary continuum. My gender-bendy baby clown was clumsy and awkward and a living “failure”. Q embodied a failure at performing strict mainstream notions of gender norms, sexuality and circus clowning. Was Q a woman, man, trans, gay, straight, it, clown, no-clown? It was a journey that imposed questions about normality and mainstream notions of masculinity and femininity on the audience.

Q unapologetically displayed a disorienting embodied expression of gender and sexuality outside the normativity imposed by the pharmacopornographic. Q’s performance shed light on the cultural laws constructed by binaries (man/woman, hetero/homo). Q displayed a self-designed sexuality that transgressed mainstream notions of masculinity and femininity, shifting the optics of normativity and suggestively proposing an altered, socially constructed identity.

My baby clown was a gender renegade reborn from a failed pharmacopornographic body that wanted to celebrate and share their singularity. Q’s performance served to undo. Q sought to bring awareness through a deliberate amplified in-between-ness that embraced our multiplicities of gender and sexual expression. Q wanted their freedom of expression to be contagious.

Working with a banana in performance persisted as mischievous, irreverent desire. From food to playful childhood games and gags, this flirtatious, phallic fruit had been my companion in life since before I could walk. Impulsively, at the end of my second body study on trapeze, I decided to present a crude version of my banana explorations. My artist gut and experience as a creator compelled me to explore further. I followed my impulse. Shortly after, through closer examination, reflection, and intuition, it became evident the banana was in fact clown. It served a central role as the seed and secondary prosthesis. Before the banana explorations manifested as clown, jumping while being fed a banana was the catalyst of this creative journey. Over the course of the piece, the banana seamlessly slips between different roles.

I acquired my clown circus body through a technical and creative practice based on my initial explorations and discoveries with the banana. As a baby clown, through learning technique from two expert clowns and practice, I discovered the techniques of clowning I would employ and investigated my

clown prosthesis. In the process, I uncovered the difficulty in articulating the primary prosthesis of clown. This designation shifted from audience to emotion, to taboo, back to audience, and finally returned to emotion. Based on my practice and self-inquiry, emotion most adequately served as the extension of the body for expression, but also manifested as a dialogue able to manifest from any source.

At times, I momentarily hypothesized failure. However, failure is the technique of clown or, more specifically, clown technique is the practice of failure. It is the human condition of failure that has been technically practiced as an extension of expression or in dialogue for expression. In my practice of failure, rhythm, timing, focus, props, costume, music, make-up, and secondary prostheses, impacted the effectiveness of my extension of expression or dialogue with my prosthesis, emotion. At my novice level, practicing failure served the emotion of humor. I employed the tools of rhythm, timing etc. in service of my technical clown practice and its prosthesis to provoke a release in the audience's emotions through laughter.

The banana piece was born from an act of disobedience. Forced to attend a circus workshop, I refused to bring my trapeze. As an act of irreverence and disobedience, I arrived with only a banana. Practicing (dis)obedience was challenging as a baby clown. While equipped with professional circus body expertise on trapeze, as a clown, I encountered the need for a certain level of mastery of the technique before I was able employ (dis)obedience. Also, the primary nature of clown technique being the practice of failure, an inherent disobedience existed. To dialogue with that disobedience, I harnessed already existing embodied habits to explore practiced failure.

QUEERcess

(read aloud)

Post-coital, Q stumbles, slightly disoriented and breathless

Searching the space, Q repositions the clown nose to his/her forehead like a unicorn horn

Q melts away and the scholar returns

I WANT TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT SOMETHING

Walking through the audience into the UNDO space

Grabs a mini-megaphone, a remnant of broken chalk from the train wreck

Collapses to all fours, ass and fuzzy pink balls to the audience

Recaps the journey to UNDO

HABIT

PERMISSION

DISOBEDIENCE

UNDO

Into almost darkness, the UNDO space

MAINSTREAM MIGHT CALL THIS FAILURE

She pauses and look, writes again

FAILURE

FAILURE

FAILURE

Pauses squatting, contemplating- failure

Heavy breaths, she continues with the megaphone
 PHARMOCO TELLS US WE SUBSCRIBE TO ITS NOTION OF SEX, GENDER, SEXUALITY, WE ARE
 FAILURES
 IF WE DON'T KEEP OUR HABITS AND PERFECT WAYS OF DOING THEN WE ARE FAILURES
 Chalky circling FAILURE
 Dispersed audience gathers around as if its story time
 BUT...I SAY IT IS A QUEER RICH PLACE
 Dragging the chalk over the PUSSY FART line
 THAT COMES FROM DISOBEDIENCE....OR AT LEAST I FIND THAT
 Circling DISOBEDIENCE
 Returning to the QUEER, FAILURE, UNDO space
 RICH IN POSSIBILITY THAT IT ALMOST MAKE A UTOPIA
 A queertopia where failure in the eyes of hegemony melts away
 Passionately with the megaphone, tits bouncing, the unicorn marches to
 PHARMCOPORNOGRAPHIC
 Grabs her vinyl circus body, dragging diagonally across the DISOBEDIENCE
 TO SUBVERT AND ENTER
 THE Q-U-E-E-R SPACE
 Then, returning to UNDO
 The audience heads bending to follow the mania
 Writing fervidly
 EMPITNESS
 UNKNOWN
 ISOLATION...SOMETIMES
 NOTHINGSNESS
 Proclaiming and writing madly
 BUT HERE, HERE IS WHERE
 THE NEW WAYS DOING
 THE UNDOING
 NEW PRACTICES
 Her mind and voice moving faster than her hand
 Is this the scholar or artist?
 Maybe she's both as well as the artist, mother, lover, and so on
 She pauses
 I LOVE IT!
 Becoming a tornado in the space, crawling, squatting, walking,
 Writing and declaring
 Circling around center stage where DISOBEDIENCE RESIDES
 NEW TRUTHS
 NEW INTIMACIES FROM DISOBEDIENCE
 DISORIENTATING
 The audience witnesses the chaos of her mind
 Inspired her pace picks-up
 UNDO TO MAKE NEW
 BY WAY OF DISOBEDIENCE
 Standing in the UNDO, she takes a moment.
 The place is an ABSOLUTE failure and she loves!
 The audience is soaking it ALLLLLLL in



FIGURE 12. “TO BE ALIVE AND OBSOLETE”
 photos by: Jim Mneymneh (*Dialogues of Disobedience*, 2018)

(trans)FIGURation

(read aloud)

Failure....failure as what? As a gender conformist, ageless woman, in the mother gender role, femininity?
The body becomes a shared space of Q and the scholar
Are they the same?
The topless scholar in the remnants of Q's costume rises, megaphone in hand
TAKE SOME SPACE

MOVE

FIND YOUR PLACE

AN ARTIFACT, A WORD, A SPACE, A PLACE YOU LIKE...OR MAYBE NOT LIKE.

The audience is receptive and open to the deviation from traditional audience codes.

The collective, the audience as a unit held together by codes or "the job" of the audience crumbles as permission has been granted

They have always had the choice, the power, to engage in choice.

Agency is activated

The audience slowly disperses as they retreat into self and self-determination. Their singularity is activated

Bodies gradually fill the space

The scholar selects an audience member

Hand in hand, a young female adult, her daughter walk toward the trapeze

A microphone, a book

Power of the Sisterhood, the first anthology of feminist literature from 1970.

"It hurts to be alive and obsolete: the aging woman"

A young tan blond beauty and a middle-aged silver crowned acrobat

Two generations side by side accompanied by the words of the generation before them

The passage is read aloud

The scholar molts, a shedding of Q's remnants reveals her total fleshy materiality

Now, fully naked, her body tells the story of her life and those before her

Scars, freckles, gravity stricken flesh, tattoos

Freckles, decades of life in the sun

A site that speaks to the history of the collective white female experience

A body that has given birth and fed babies

The scars of motherhood that echoes the gestation of life and feeding its young

Tattoo

Sun damage

Scars of abuse, violence, motherhood, accidents, and acrobatic life

Damaged aging Skin

A form overcome by gravity

Modified movements from the pain and injury of an extreme physicality sustained for more than four decades

Crouched and fully naked, she prepares honestly, vulnerable, exposed

The plastic, vinyl circus body flattened

"WE MUST TRY TO RESEMBLE PERFECT PLASTIC OBJECTS, SO NO ONE WILL NOTICE WHO WE REALLY ARE"

The white, rolled parachute meticulously layered onto the plastic circus body.

Her story, her experience, her identity, her history, her baggage

"ALRIGHT SAYS THE WOMAN, DON'T PUNISH ME! I WON'T DO WRONG! I WON'T GET OLDER!"

The exposed and naked body slips into the chute, her cocoon.

"DON'T TELL ME THAT IT IS HUMAN NATURE FOR WOMEN TO CEASE TO BE ATTRACTIVE EARLY"

The corners of the plastic sheet tied around the naked torso, the chrysalis/cocoon shaped mass engulfs her body

"I THINK STRIPPED DOWN I LOOK MORE ATTRACTIVE ON SOME ABSTRACT SCALE THAN MY EX-HUSBAND, BUT I AM SEXUALLY AND SOCIALLY OBSOLETE, AND HE IS NOT"

The young blond beauty returns to the audience leaving behind her mother in her metamorphosis

The vinyl circus body engulfs the rolled chute like an albino lady-bug

*A new form, a creature in-between human and non-human
 What is this creature?
 A human form in-between, in transformation without expectation*

*The trapeze from MEATmarket remains hanging
 The audience sprinkles the scope of the sparsely lit black box
 Spooky industrial cavernous sounds swell in waves alternating with long moments of silence
 Time has slowed into a space of emptiness and isolation
 Isolation, it's a gift
 The pace, the rhythm, the mood shifts to another dimension
 The creature casually walks to the hanging traps and chalks the limbs, a ritual, an instinct
 Steadily climbing like an insect on the wall defying gravity
 CLANK, CLANK
 The sound of the hooks, echoes from the past mix with stretched vinyl
 Sitting legs dangling at home
 BOOM!
 The creature lets go of trapeze below
 It's freedom, a breaking of the chain to trauma
 A moment, a pause
 The sounds build, not music but a quilting of high pitches, strings, breathing, cicadas, parachute, ropes, screams
 The vinyl bulge opens like a cassette player and the chute exhales
 The chute drapes to the floor, the vinyl shell dangling
 The wings unfold like morning arms
 It's a molt
 The vinyl shell remains behind like the cicada sheds after being its protective shelter for 17 years
 It's a rebirth
 A new perspective
 The hybrid insect like creature takes in the new air and the world one slow movement at a time
 Time, time, time, the creature takes its time
 Absorbing every texture, smell, sound, vision as the being creeps and crawls the scope of the trapeze
 Future or past don't exist, only this moment
 A Butoh like moving meditation of decaying white flesh
 Exaggerated release
 Excessively slow
 Discovery of self
 Contemplation of intent
 Reflection of being
 Slow release
 Is death lingering? Haunting? To what end?
 New re-imagined movements, aesthetics, knowledge, ways of doing manifest
 A living sculpture of flesh, bone, muscle, skin, hair, as the "wings"
 The "wings" explore their possibilities as they slip, slide over stretched flesh and sculpted muscles
 The sound scape builds with the layered chorus of the cicada songs
 The being is not alone but amongst others
 17 minutes 56 seconds
 Metamorphosis complete, a new being, a new embodiment
 Arms stretched and wings draping from the neck, the fully realized creature stands majestically,
 unapologetically fully realized
 A proclamation of agency, full acceptance, and self-love
 The creature melts behind the "wings"*

Trapeze hands grips, slide, burn until the head disappears behind the wings
A fall

A fall into the next cycle, the next journey, the next phase

The human creature emerges for a moment before retreating into the dim light from the cave

The nothingness

The dialogues recess....for now.



FIGURE 13. (TRANS)FIGURATION

photos by: Jim Mneymneh (*Dialogues of Disobedience*, 2018)

(trans)FIGURation manifested as one of two pieces that emerged from my trapeze case study. I approached this research differently from the other pieces in *Dialogues of Disobedience*. In the other studies, I chose to engage my practice and creation with the “blank canvas”. In this piece, I deviated from that approach. The new way of the “blank canvas” had become my “normative” way. The choice served as a small, nuanced act of (dis)obedience to challenge my own obedience of the “blank slate” practice. As (dis)obedience evolved as a concept and practice, it seemed appropriate.

The first conception of *(trans)FIGURation* developed around a fascination for parachutes and the notion of paradox. I was fascinated by the paradox within myself, a circus artist who felt saved by something that maintains a higher-than-average risk of death: circus. My circus practice “saved” me; yet, it was a practice that taunted death. I combined my trapeze with the parachute and began to explore the possibilities of movement. At the time, I maintained my “classical” technical trapeze practice for the most part, but shed most of my classically virtuosic skills. I questioned their meaning and relevance in the piece. If the skills acted as arbitrary implants or meaningless accessories, I eliminated their presence. By the first presentation of the piece (after two weeks of explorations), only a few “tricks” or skills remained.

I also performed the piece almost nude at that point. This was rare. Trapeze, like most aerial acrobatics, requires protection from burning, scraping, bruising, ripping flesh. I used the pain, exposing the reality of the human side of my super(latively) human (versus superhuman) appearance. My material history was unveiled as well – aging, white, mother, abused, scared, possibly connected to the material histories of audience members. The audience received the piece with open arms. However, I was challenged by colleagues with respect to the lack of my usual “bad ass” virtuosic skills.

Before integrating this previous work into my research, my initial trapeze inquiries into embodied knowledge were unnerving. I was lost and had no idea where to start. I barely had a theoretical understanding of embodied knowledge. I was insecure about the relevance of my practice in academia. I was an expert as a trapeze artist, but just a newborn academic. My initial explorations served to simply identify my current embodied knowledge. My way “in” materialized as my technical circus practice and the habits developed from that practice. Their embodied manifestations was the current knowledge of my circus body. The initial explorations began with basic technique; I did not work with high level, virtuosic skills or “tricks”. I explored the most fundamental skills taught on trapeze.

Knowing that the intent of my research was the pursuit of new knowledge, the doing became about undoing – undoing habits, undoing current ways of doing. Doing rigorous technical practice was necessary. Trapeze is the practice of calculated risk; therefore, I decided to explore falling. Falling from the trapeze typically means failure that might result in severe injury or death. Trapeze maintains its practice in order to avoid falling and failing. I explored falling as possibility versus failure. The exploration did not ultimately manifest in *MEATmarket* or *(trans)FIGURation*, but it did inform other

body studies like hand balancing. I developed self-preservation habits and ways of doing, and became interested in how to undo those.

While integrating a previous work marked a slight departure, I used active listening as a central method. I questioned and challenged the meaning of the aesthetic of my technical practice. This inquiry motivated me to undo and deconstruct for a more human expression. Deconstruction to achieve “in-between-ness” served as a main tool. I explored exaggerated body release (like a rag doll). Pointed toes, straight legs, precision of execution--all released as I embraced my phenomenological subjective experience and meditated on being human. I tested to see how far I could disengage my body before being unable to practice trapeze, the threshold before falling, the excessive limitation while hanging, and the length of time I could hang before releasing. I tested the physical thresholds of hanging – hanging from the knees, the hands, ankles. I was interested in minimalism as way toward honesty. These physical explorations were realized in both *MEATmarket* or *(trans)FIGURation*.

The cicada image revealed itself early in this process. The long hanging parachute draped over my neck embodied long wings like that of a cicada. I focused on the Magic Cicada that only exists in the United States. These sleeping agents survive underground in their chrysalis for 17 years before they emerge to live for only six weeks. Cicadas arrive in swarms, filling the air with the deafening sounds of their pulsating bodies. This pre-historic species has survived because of these swarms (a collective). Their molting (transformation and metamorphosis) and the power of the collective inspired many aspects of the piece, including the soundscape. For seventeen minutes, I exist outside myself as a cicada, prompting a rebirth of self – undone; a new circus body emerged.

The aging female body emerged as a central theme. The quote, “to be alive and obsolete” from the *Power of the Sisterhood*¹⁸ resonated with my contemporary existence both as a circus body and in the pharmacopornographic context. Faced with the choice to transform or wither away, I chose transformation, subverting the marginalization of my ageing female circus body through a disobedient refusal to accept social obsolescence.

As a result of my research, *(trans)FIGURation* molted and metamorphosed. The research not only transformed the piece, but my practice. A break from the pointed toes and straight legs, a new circus body emerged; a new form molted from the old. The slow exaggerated and released gestures embodied a Butoh-like aesthetic. My aging body became amplified as embodied decay. I chose to emphasize this and accentuate the history of my materiality by offering access to the intimate in-betweenness of each movement. A new embodiment resulted in an eighteen-minute piece, atypical of mainstream and conventional solo-acts (typically 4-6 minutes).

¹⁸ The first anthology of feminist texts from the Women’s Liberation Movement (1970)

Discoveries

Grotesque & Queer

Through (dis)obedience – critical subjective disobedience – and its ‘dialogues’ with my circus habits and their pharmacopornographic context, new embodiments of practice and aesthetics blossomed. My circus body, the subject of research, embodying both scholar and artist, worked as a site of continual disharmony in a single human form. The provocative, grotesquely queer circus body surfaced unintentionally, and organically materialized in the culmination of my practical research, *Dialogues of Disobedience*. I sought to challenge and re-imagine the reality shared with the audience through absurd, surreal, prophetic, plastic, excessive, deformed, mutated embodied performance. Through the willful embodiment of (dis)obedience in order to undo, transgress, disorientate heteronormative hegemonies, a grotesque and queer performance emerged, revealing new ways of doing and being against systemic naturalizing hegemonies.

My grotesque circus body challenged the narrow classical canons of the circus body and of pharmacopornographic capitalism. This new aesthetic deviated from the sterilized aesthetics of Vitruvian tradition with its classic, proportioned, ‘perfect’ body. The grotesque is:

Ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of ‘classic’ aesthetics, that is, the aesthetics of the ready-made and the completed. The new historical sense that penetrate them gives these images a new meaning but keeps intact their traditional contents: copulation, pregnancy, birth, growth, old age, disintegration, dismemberment... They are contrary to the classic images of the finished, completed man, cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development (Bakhtin, 1968, p. 25).

Mainstream cultural circus practices, codes, and traditions, anchored in pharmacopornographic capitalism, parallel strict, normative “classic body” codes and aesthetics. My grotesque aesthetic served as a sharp distinction from the sterile mainstream codes and traditions that characterize North American circus. My grotesque circus body not only deviated from, but satirically mocked the classic ideals of performance and beauty through a variety of transgressions – exaggeration, duration, abjection, disharmony.

To situate the estranged, de-familiarized, dislocated nature of grotesque, its broader socio-political context should be understood. “[I]ts effects of discomfort, discomposure and uneasiness are reliant on historical standards of ‘normalcy’ and what is ‘proper’” (Edwards & Graulund, 2013, p. 13). Pharmacopornographic capitalism and North American circus practices represent the backdrop and contextualize the dialogues of my (dis)obedient circus body in its hybrid, transgressive and dynamic grotesque embodiments. I set the tone at the beginning of the performance by situating my circus body in an American paradigm, mocking both the United States’ National Anthem and the movie industry, a

prominent disseminator of pharmacopornographic capitalism and its normalizing subjectivities (Edwards & Graulund, 2013, p. 15).

My material circus body was fundamental to my grotesque realism. As a result of the dialogues of disobedience between my circus body, its practice and pharmacopornographic precepts, my grotesque realism revealed itself as an act of uncrowning authority – achieved not through rejection, but through berating (Bakhtin, 1968, p. 26). Similar to the grotesque characters in Rabelais's work, the creature of *CUNT-fessions* was both physically excessive and socially transgressive. My circus body's form – intriguing and unnerving – sought to jolt the audience from the pleasure and comfort of their "polite" existences. This grotesque body in all its (dis)obedient glory subverted the shame-filled patriarchal constraints on a woman's body. The pussy fart served up a "fuck you" to the patriarchy.

Through (dis)obedience, the sexualized, abused, excessive, inhuman, transgressive manifestations of my grotesque emerged. Julia Kristeva locates the destabilizing power of the grotesque, namely with the supposed 'normal' body itself, or "classic body":

If the 'perfect' woman's body is a product of the male gaze and related power dynamics, then affirmations and displays of material bodies in all their diversity (shapes, contours, sizes, dimensions) and bodily functions (ingestions, excretions, menstruation, pregnancy, aging, sickness) have the potential to subvert patriarchal gender codes related to corporeality. Grotesque bodies can, in other words, resist absorption in the objectifying gaze that seeks to contain them. Having said that, it is not always clear how grotesque categories might be used positively to subvert the veneration of existing normative gender-based conceptions of beauty or to realign the mechanisms of desire (Edwards & Graulund, 2013, pp. 32-33).

In *(trans)FIGURation*, I embodied transgressive manifestations in an aging, abused, exaggerated, anthropomorphic, abject being. I 'grotesque' my circus body to uncrown and subvert the patriarchal gaze and its indoctrination of authority. I exaggerated the inappropriate, the aging, female circus body. Through an insect-like metamorphosis, new relationships and ways of doing (performing and interacting) emerged, thereby subverting, uncrowning, diffusing ruling patriarchal hegemonies.

As the grotesque manifested in my circus body, it became an *other*, a subversive being, queering the cultural space through its deviance. The grotesque was typically relegated to the margins of society, the *others*, the queer from which it was created. Queerness, in terms of my circus body, refers to deviations, to the undoing of both my normative circus practices and my circus body's pharmacopornographic context.

Throughout *Dialogues of Disobedience*, my circus body queered through (dis)obedience – disorientating, undoing. If habits, (current ways of doing in my circus body), represent normative orientation, undoing manifests as deviations, queering the normative.

We can certainly consider that when queer bodies do ‘join’ the family table, then the table does not stay in place. Queer bodies are out of place in certain family gatherings, which is what produces, in the first place, a queer effect. The table might even become wonky. (Ahmed, 2007, p. 174).

Here Ahmed uses the family table metaphor to illustrate the disorientating nature of the queer effect. With the family table as mainstream circus practices and the normalizing hegemony of the pharmacopornographic regime, my (dis)obedient circus body destabilized; it was unhinging, unraveling, and undoing through its queer disorientation. Ahmed (2007) adds, “shame is the primary queer effect because it embraces the ‘not’; it embraces its own negation from the sphere of ordinary culture” (p.175). Once taboo enters the normative register, shame rears its ugly head. As I embody rape, aging, nudity, pussy farts, gender-bending, failure, and so on, I claim ownership of my own vulnerability and truth, both to subvert the taboo and to highlight injustice. As a scholar, tits exposed, I disorientated through my queer, deviant circus body to confront the sexualization and objectification of the female body. Queering destabilized normative hegemonic values and the shame of taboo that manifests from such oppressions.

Queerness is a refusal. In *Cruising Utopia*, Jose Muñoz (2009) states, “this refusal that I describe as queerness is not just homosexuality but the rejection of normal love that keeps a repressive social order in place” (p.134). In the second half of *Dialogues of Disobedience*, a rupture, a queer intervention unfolded as an act of self-determination. This refusal manifested as (dis)obedience toward oppressive habits, practice, techniques, aesthetics, and sensibilities. I embodied a process of “shedding” and “cleansing” of my failed pharmacopornographic body. The entropic de-evolution, witnessed in *unHinged* concluding *CUNT-fessions*, acts as both a rupture and refusal of the mechanisms of oppressive practices. The shift into the marginalized pink space, the box, the vagina, marked the dislocation of my circus body from pharmacopornographic control. By investigating Preciado’s critical theory, I gained understanding or ‘consciousness’ of my habits within my own circus body and the pharmacopornographic paradigm.

In *Cazzo*, Q’s transformation into the drag king trans-baby-clown marked a rebirth, and a proposal for re-imagining a utopic or “queertopic” performance through acts of (dis)obedience. As Muñoz states: “We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness’s domain” (2009, p. 1). Q re-imagines social, technical, and aesthetic practices of circus and the pharmacopornographic through their nescient, unapologetic expression of self in gender, sex, sexuality, and the search for love. “Queerness... [was] thus potentially transformative of a natural order, allowing for new horizons and a vastness of potentiality” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 141). Against systemic sexism & sexualization, I undid (undo) the naturalizing authoritarian habits of my socio-political circus body, exercising (dis)obedience – critical subjective disobedience.

As a post-mortem on the baby clown act, I engaged in a self-dialogue on failure, embodying “failure” by heteronormative standards. The failure manifested as grotesque and queer. Grotesque in its excessive and exaggerated manifestations that refused to conform to a binary. Q performed a glorious “failure” of normative masculinity or femininity; “failure, insofar as some type of displacement, erasure or dislocation takes place, and thus previously constituted hegemonies are interrupted or challenged” (Edwards & Graulund, 2013, p. 21). Q disoriented my naturalizing hegemony; Q was no longer a cog.

I contemplated in the ‘UNDO’ space, the queer space, seeking to subvert mainstream binaries. I was in an unfamiliar liminal space, fighting two competing worlds--queer and normative. I longed to break out of the polarizing paradigm and remain in the “in-between,” blurring distinctions and boundaries by embodying both ends of the binary-male/female, success/failure, normative/queer. The “in-between” created vulnerability, resistance, and then possibility. Between artist/scholar, young/old, woman/man, failure/success, pharmacopornographic/queertopia, I unfolded normative notions of failure as possibilities for new embodiments and new knowledge. Cherishing my liminal queer space, I embodied Halberstam’s *Queer Art of Failure*. I “stroll out of the confines of conventional knowledge and into the unregulated territories of failure, loss, and unbecoming, [I] must make a long detour around disciplines and ordinary ways of thinking” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 7). Normative failure equals queer success. Failure subverted – counter-normative ways of doing and knowing manifest as empowered, self-determined, self-asserted, honest, grotesque, queer expression. In the case of Q, ‘failure’ was a “refusal of mastery of normative ways, a critique of the intuitive connections within capitalism between success and profit, and as a counter hegemonic discourse of losing” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 12). Failure functioned as a critical, disobedient practice leading away from a binary driven naturalizing hegemony, toward a liminal queer space – queertopia.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

In my research, I explored the embodiment of *(dis)obedience* through my circus body. My inquiries originated from my hermeneutic phenomenological circus practice and informed my theoretical investigations. Theory and practice became mutually dependent resulting in a positive feedback cycle. With this methodology, I investigated *through* my *circus body* as both researcher and the object of study. The initial goal of my research was to articulate the concept of *kinetic vocabulary* as a theory of embodied knowledge. Kinetic vocabulary remained elusive and the unpredictable path of research shifted the trajectory of my inquiries.

The existing literature in circus studies reflects a dearth of in-depth and inclusive (all six disciplines) investigations of the circus body. The need to understand the subject of study, my circus body, resulted in a working theoretical proposal that explored the fundamentals of a *circus body*. In an attempt to better understand the specificity of my circus body and its embodied knowledge, I investigated four of the nine essentials uncovered in my practice-based research. It is an attempt to embrace both the singular and the universal experiences of a circus body. This theoretical proposal offers a baseline understanding that is a foundational site for productive scholarly and artistic tension.

Disobedience emerged early in the research. However, it only became a key concept and practice later in the my investigations and eventually, kinetic vocabulary was abandoned (for the moment, though it might re-emerge in my future research). *(dis)obedience* – critical subjective disobedience – quietly materialized over time, and was only able to exist and become amplified through my reflexive, embodied, artistic practice-based research. The embodiment of disobedience revealed itself and later became a conscious choice to *undo* my obedience towards normative circus practices. The shift toward *(dis)obedience* as a concept and practice became evident through active listening, reflection, dialogues, writing, reading, and critical analysis. *(dis)obedience* as a practice prompted dialogues between my circus body and its habits – North American circus technique, and its larger socio-political context – pharmacopornographic capitalism. The research culminated in two parts: a performance thesis presentation entitled *Dialogues of Disobedience*, and a theoretical portion that articulates a working theoretical proposal of a circus body, an autoethnography, and analysis of the thesis performance.

Through my literature review, I established the existing context of circus discourse and am able to situate my contributions. The methodology sections grounded my subjective experience and its embodiment in academic discourse using hermeneutic phenomenology and case study methodology. Borrowing from ethnomusicology, I proposed my role as an ethnocircologist. The autoethnography articulated not only my phenomenological performance, but also granted access to the process through which each case study manifested itself in *Dialogues of Disobedience*, exposing my experience through a performative prose integrated into my critical reflections.

Dialogues of Disobedience was the performative culmination of my three case studies: trapeze, hand balancing, and clown. The piece reflected my technical explorations of the *undoing* of habits, techniques, and practices in my circus body as well as in its wider pharmacopornographic context. In this piece, I developed an experimental style of presentation attempting to integrate and reflect my critical inquiries – theoretical and practical. The presentation was a performance that offers unique and intimate access to the minutiae of the artistic-scholar. The presentation offered a new way of doing, a new understanding, a new embodiment of myself as artist-scholar that reflects their mutual dependency and exposes the process of dialogue between practice and theory.

The artistic-scholar journey, filled with uncertainty, truly embarks into the unknown, much like that of my artistic process – one driven by curiosity, questions, intuition, impulse, and often seen as chaotic and unpredictable. It was like sailing on a ship without a known destination. While artistic and scholarly research shared similarities, each operates in quite different, often opposing, registers and inertias. I experienced a challenging, yet transformative paradigm shift from artist to artistic-scholar. I molted into a new material and immaterial being. My artistic process will never be the same. My body was a material site that has learned to negotiate opposing inertias between my physical and theoretical practices – a renegotiation of time and space in an attempt to capture material and immaterial knowledge.

Through this experience, I strive to speak to both my scholarly and artistic communities, and to contribute to the burgeoning field of circus scholarship through an intimate understanding of my approach to artistic scholarly research. I have deepened my understanding of, and transformed my artistic practice and my circus body. My contribution serves as a critical example of artistic, practice-based research in circus academics, and contributes to an understanding of embodiment through a circus body, my body. The working proposal of a circus body, that articulates identified essentials, is a potential foundation that fills an area of circus research currently under-explored. The “art” of disobedience as a critical concept and practice contributes to the notion of embodiment for undoing, self-determination, and evolution in performance and practice, and speaks to my circus community as well as to its pharmacopornographic context. My practical agenda is hopefully to offer tools like (dis)obedience – critical subjective disobedience – for self-determination in a circus body, and research that advocates and cultivates for socially conscious performances and alternative, queer, feminist, political narratives on the circus stage.

From the undoing through disobedience, propositions of new performance forms that break away from convention in both artistic and scholarly performance emerged. These include: my proposition of a living surreal collage for full length presentation; long form solo act (atypical of circus conventions); and a melded, fluid performance where artist and scholar seamlessly interplay reflecting their mutual dependence. New embodiments and practices manifested as queer and grotesque aesthetics that serve

socially conscious practices and performances. Lastly, the research in its entirety contributes to circus discourse by offering an under-represented artistic practice-based perspective.

Looking toward the future, this research serves a critical role in my next steps as a scholar. I embrace the unpredictable nature of the artistic research process and the possibility that kinetic vocabulary might be re-animated in the next stages. My research discoveries will serve as a launching pad for further research at the PhD level. Specifically, I seek to 1) continue my investigations of the working theoretical proposal of a circus body to include other bodies as well as develop the remaining essentials under-explored in this phase of my research; 2) explore the relationship between (dis)obedience (as a concept and practice) and agency by placing them in dialogue in practice and theory; 3) continue theoretical and practical investigations of my discoveries of queer and grotesque in practice and performance; and finally 4) continue to experiment with form through designing disobedience to create speculative narratives.

I hope to impact my circus community's and audience's perceptions through the creation of meaningful work that addresses our greater socio-political context. I am interested in developing new possibilities for performance – not to replace current practices, but to develop, expand, and sophisticate engagement with the circus form. Through continued investigations of the circus body and its embodied knowledge, I hope to develop tools and theoretical considerations that open circus as an affective medium for activism that can impact audience (public) perception, and generate speculative propositions that encourage performative agency and cultural change.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Dialogues of Disobedience Post-mortem Self-Interview

1. What is your prosthesis?
2. Why do you identify this as your prosthesis? How did you acquire the prosthesis?
3. Did you have more than one prosthesis?
4. What is the technique of this discipline?
5. What is the “callus” that is produced in the assimilation process of prosthesis through technique?
What are the traces/artifacts (material or possible immaterial) that transform my circus body?
6. What is my relationship to the audience? Who is this for?
7. Why do I do what I do? Circus? The specific discipline?
8. What does it mean? Circus? The specific discipline?
9. How did embodied knowledge manifest? What meaning and/or questions emerged?
10. How did this knowledge influence my choices for my presentation to an audience?
11. How did the presentation for an actual audience impact my embodied experience and my perception of communicating meaning to the audience?
12. What is the language of my circus body in this discipline?
13. Is kinetic vocabulary an embodied knowledge that serves as a foundation for an embodied language?

Appendix B

Photo Release Form



PHOTO RELEASE FORM

I, _____, by signing below hereby give permission to Dana Dugan and Concordia University to use my image, both in photographic as well as in electronic form, taken on April 5, 2018 at Concordia University in publications, news releases, online, and in other communications related to the publication of *Dialogues of Disobedience* and *Art of Disobedience: A Study of Critical Embodiment Through a Circus Body*.

I understand that my image and name may be used in both written and electronic communications and presentations and that the recorded copyrighted artwork/performance pieces may be used for the sole purpose of promoting the University. I waive any and all copyright, including moral rights that I may have in my image and recorded copyrighted artwork/performance pieces only with respect to their use for the purposes of promoting Concordia University.

I further warrant that I own all the copyright and moral rights allowing me to execute the present waiver.

(Signature of Adult, or Guardian of Children under age 18)

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Address _____

Phone (day) _____ (evening) _____

Email Address (optional) _____

Thank you!