

THE MONTREAL
WORKING GROUP ON

circus
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RESEARCH

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This Wednesday:

CALL FOR PAPERS (15 Dec)

**Circus and its
Others II, Conference
27-29 August 2018,
Prague, Czech Rep.**

From powerhouse stage and television shows to Cirque du Soleil's status as the world's most successful live performing arts company, circus in the early 21st century has undeniably gone mainstream. While this is positive news for circus companies, artists, and audiences with a taste for thrilling, high-performance entertainment, it also raises questions about circus's historic status as a site for the celebration and exploitation of differences. To what extent and in what ways is circus always-already different, and *about* difference? How does the mainstreaming of contemporary circus affect its status as a haven for the different, the outsider? In what ways are contemporary circus artists and companies embracing and exploiting (or not) difference in their practice? How do we discuss, stage, theorize, and practice

(Unexpected) Circus Mobilities

Two talks by Dr. Jessica Kendall and Elena Kreusch, with discussant Dr. Tracy Zhang.

**Wednesday 11 October,
10 a.m. Concordia University**

(Richler Room, LB 665, 6th floor, department of English, Library Building; métro Guy-Concordia)

***“African Fever”; a Corporeal Economy of
'African' Circus in China?***

Dr. Jessica Kendall

Dr. Jessica Kendall's research is based on multi-sited fieldwork through six different countries in which she tracked the movements of a troupe of circus performers. Informed by the causes and conditions that have contributed to the recent growth of 'African' circus as a unique niche within the broader global economy of spectacle, her research focuses on how the rise of Ethiopian circus performers working as independent players within an increasingly international circus industry, involves strategically (and precariously) operating for the sake of building successful careers. Dr. Kendall explores how, within the liminal spaces of 'Otherness' present in the ambiguous realm of circus, articulations of cultural differences cut through assemblages of extreme bodily practices, negotiations of ethnicity (on stage and off), and experiences of brutal moments of racial segregation. Within these happenings and processes, she claims, new and creative strategies of selfhood are produced that are initiated and elaborated across time and space (Bhabha 1994: 2). These hybrid and extreme forms of habitus reflect new and flexible ways in which culture,

such differences including questions of gender, sexuality, embodiment, ability/disability, ethnicity, class, and species?

The Circus and its Others research project was launched in 2014 under the aegis of the Montréal Working Group on Circus Research to explore these questions. The scholarship and conversation during our exciting conference in the context of the 2016 Montréal Complètement Cirque festival proved lively, provocative, and vital, with work showcased there being published in an upcoming issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Performance Matters* (May 2018, vol. 4.1).

We are thrilled to announce the expanded international exploration of these concerns with the organization of the second Circus and Its Others conference to be held in Prague, Czech Republic, 27-29 August 2018, during the Letní Letná circus festival, who joins us as a partner along with Cirqueon and Charles University.

We invite proposals for research talks that address questions of difference and otherness in the context of contemporary circus. We further make explicit invitation for presentations from artists and practitioners who address such questions in their work, practice, and/or research-creation (our conference venue also includes some space for performance).

Possible areas of inquiry might include, but need not be limited to:

Histories of circus and its others

- What hidden histories of circus practice may be located in the visual archive?
- What are the histories of areas of circus practice that today are considered other to the mainstream, such as the use and display of animals?
- How do the histories of circus practice intersect with histories of colonialism and imperialism?

Periphery and center

the body and politics collide in the production of the body and self within drastically shifting global, and culturally spectacular, contexts.

Jessica Kendall holds a PhD in Social Anthropology from SOAS, University of London. As a visual extension of her multi-sited anthropological research, Dr. Kendall's photographs have been displayed in galleries (Brunei Gallery, London) and published photographs in books (Wiley-Blackwell), Journals (JRAI) and online (BBC). She has also toured for several years in the circus industry, working most recently as a manager within the area of Talent and Production.

"Circus Mobilities" Elena Kreusch

Elena's current research project in the field of contemporary circus focuses on the interface between mobility life style and artistic practice. In her research she touches upon questions of artistic mobility, identity, belonging, negotiations of spaces and meanings while navigating between theory and practice.

Elena Kreusch is a PhD candidate at the Department of Theatre, Film and Media Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria and a producer to different contemporary European circus companies.

Discussant: Dr. Tracy Zhang

Dr. Tracy Zhang, Post-doctoral Fellow in the Department of Film and Media at Queen's University. Dr. Zhang's research is situated in the fields of cultural studies and feminist political economy, focusing especially on issues of labour, gender, race, nationalism, and cultural production in the global creative industries. Her current project examines Chinese acrobatics as both an institution and a cultural medium. She has taught interdisciplinary courses on gender, labor, activism, feminist media and postcolonial geographies at Concordia University. Currently, she teaches a course on Performance and Media at Queen's University.



A Brief History of The Golden Age of Stage Conjuring, Vaudeville and Circus in Montreal (1880-1930)

Guided tour and discussion animated by Dr. Joseph Culpepper (Concordia University) at the



The Apparatus and the Artist--L'appareil et l'artiste

- What might the Czech context tell us about the place of circus and its others in European or global perspectives?
- To what extent do hierarchies in academic research, funding practices, and artistic recognition affect the place and presence of “the other”?
- How do differing regional or national practices affect recognition on the world’s stages?

Travelling otherness

- What happens when circus talent and circus acts travel outside their cultures of origin and become “other”?
- To what extent do circuses use their national/regional/linguistic/ethnic difference as branding to enable their circulation in the global entertainment market? What practices of exotification and self-exotification may be employed in this?

Circus bodies: Normal, extraordinary, other?

- What are the implications of shifts in the mainstreaming of contemporary circus and related changes in skill, artistry, and training for circus artists including those who may carry historical baggage of “born otherness” with them?
- What is required and expected of the bodies of today’s elite circus artists? With their toned, strong bodies do they now represent a societal ideal rather than society’s outsiders? How do circus trainers as well as circus artists deal with questions of body image?

Gender and queerness in contemporary circus

- How are circus artists and companies resisting commodification and mainstreaming to keep the freak and queer in contemporary circus?
- Are women circus’s perennial other?

McCord Museum.

Wednesday 8 November, 10 a.m.
McCord Museum (McGill University)

* A very much reduced admission rate of 11\$ will be charged to enter into the museum upon confirming your presence in advance.

RSVP: patrick.leroux@concordia.ca

The Golden Age of Stage Conjuring (1880-1930) in North America and Western Europe encompasses a period of rapid technological advances in the performing arts, cinema, photography, lithography, and transportation. It also marks a fifty-year period of social and cultural transformations across the globe: power shifts in Europe and North America’s colonial empires, a new wave of Orientalism, disillusionment during WWI, the zenith of spiritualism, victories in women’s suffrage, and the stock market crash of 1929. How did the work of stage conjurers and circus artists mix during this tumultuous period? How do we see illusions from this period adapted to contemporary circus productions — *Raoul, Queen of the Night, Le soir des monstres, Rêveurs définitifs, Particle # B* — today?

Dr. Joseph Culpepper is a performance scholar, magician, and magic consultant. He teaches magic history and its adaptation to the circus arts at Montreal’s National Circus School. He is an Affiliate Assistant Professor at Concordia University, a cofounder of the performance troupe *Ars Mechanica* and consults for both private and public organizations.

The talk given by engineer Marion Cossin and the presentation and discussion led by LEGacy co-founders Erin Ball and Vanessa Furlong about their work with prostheses are now available for online consultation for those interested. Please email patrick.leroux@concordia.ca for access.

La conférence donnée par l’ingénieure et doctorante Marion Cossin et la présentation et la discussion animées par Erin Ball et Vanessa Furlong de LEGacy autour de leur travail avec les prothèses est disponible pour consultation en ligne. Pour avoir accès, svp écrire à patrick.leroux@concordia.ca

- What and where are queer circus performances?

Creation, pedagogy, and practice

- What place is or should be granted “the other” in our schools and training facilities?
- How are differences given space and form in creation and practice-based research, and what are the related roles of dramaturgies and direction?
- How does doing the “business” of circus affect the role of difference in the art?

Social circus – the other of professional circus?

- How are circus artists and researchers using the circus arts to intervene in the lives of, and support, those othered by mainstream society?
- What are the power relations between social circus and professional circus, and how do questions of race/class/gender/ability figure in this?
- If social circus has become a conduit for those still considered other from the largely white European talent base to enter professional contemporary circus, what is the relationship of this flow of bodies to historical and current power relations between Global North and South?

Please send 300-500 word proposals for 20-minute presentations to CircusOthersPrague@gmail.com by **15 December 2017**. Please articulate clearly in your proposal if you plan to make a formal paper presentation or if as a practitioner/creator/researcher you wish to engage in a hybrid practice/talk/research/creation exploration. We hope to reply to all applicants in January 2018. The organizers are applying for financial support for the conference, but we regret that we cannot promise bursaries or travel grants at this time.

Circus and Its Others Prague Academic Committee / Comité scientifique

- Charles Batson, Union College, USA
- Michael Eigtved, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
- Karen Fricker, Brock University, Canada
- Louis Patrick Leroux, Concordia University, Canada
- Martin Pšenička, Charles University, Czech Republic
- Veronika Štefanová, Cirqueon, Czech Republic

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