# MUSICO-DRAMATIC SPATIAL ANALYSES OF AERIAL CIRCUS ACTION IN CONTEMPORARY OPERA PERFORMANCE

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Any omissions or errors in this thesis are the fault of the author.

## DEDICATION

—For Devereaux and Kevin

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# MUSICO-DRAMATIC SPATIAL ANALYSES OF AERIAL CIRCUS ACTION IN CONTEMPORARY OPERA PERFORMANCE

ABSTRACT

Operatic performances invoking circus action have gained prominence since the late twentieth century. This thesis argues for the musico-dramatic contribution of aerial circus action in contemporary opera performance. There are two central claims of the thesis. One, that the spatial relationships created by the actual aerial circus actions in an opera performance contribute to musico-dramatic interpretations of an opera. Two, that the interdisciplinary study of opera and circus can offer insights into our understanding of how an opera in performance creates and communicates meaning.

By adopting a performative approach to the analysis of opera in performance, I isolate the musico-dramatic functions of spatial relationships produced by and complicated through the execution of circus action by an aerialist with a circus apparatus. Through an examination of a high-wire act in Alvis Hermanis's 2012 Salzburg Festival production of Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten* (1960-64), aerial rope and aerial harness ensemble actions in Louise Moaty and Raphaëlle Boitel 2017 staging of Marin Marais's *Alcione* (1706), and Japanese bondage in suspension and aerial contortion in Romeo Castellucci's 2011 production of Richard Wagner's *Parsifal* (1882), the thesis demonstrates the musico-dramatic contributions of spatial relationships created through aerial circus action in opera performance.

## Chapter One. Analysing Opera and Circus Together

### *Defining aerial circus action*

Opera repeatedly turns to the circus to create thrilling scenes of raw communicative emotion. Circus acts in contemporary opera productions present a vast subject as modern opera practitioners have embraced the physical language of the circus to startlingly interpretive ends. Notable examples include the unapologetic and frenetic use of acrobatics, juggling, clowning, and balancing acts in Achim Freyer's groundbreaking 1997 Salzburg Festival circus staging of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte,* Sean Gandini's trance-inducing juggling choreographies for Phelim McDermott's 2016 staging of Philip Glass's *Akhnaten,* and Robert Lepage's 2012 *nouveau cirque* staging of Thomas Adés's *The Tempest* (2004) with its recognisable transference of the director's history with the global circus juggernaut Cirque du Soleil in the actions of an aerial acrobat nimbly performing from a chandelier.[1] Beyond inspired directorial uses of circus arts on the opera stage, composers and circus companies have collaborated together to create operas specifically for circus actions, including the recent 2021 Philip Glass opera *Circus Days and Nights* which was written for and performed in collaboration with the politically-charged Swedish circus company Cirkus Cirkör.[2] And, yet, despite these inspired stagings and astonishing collaborations between the two art forms, the circus rarely features in the critical analysis of opera in performance.

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[1] Achim Freyer's 1997 staging of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* embraced the circus from the onset of the production as it began with an Auguste clown performing acrobatic splits across the circus set. The staging was initially divisive with audiences as it received a spectatorial reaction of equal excitement and anguish, incredulity and derision. Critic Bernard Holland's review pitted composer against directer, decrying circus as a detractor from the legitimacy and integrity of the musico-dramatic interpretation of the opera in performance stating that 'not even the sober, stately hand of Christoph von Dohnányi in the pit could tone down the circus (literally) in front of him….and turning it into a clown show, albeit a clever one, displeased many. Here the boos had a point. The use of magic is, indeed, validated by the opera's very title, but beneath the jokes the solemn sense of trial and initiation makes "The Magic Flute" more like "Parsifal" than Barnum & Bailey'. See Bernard Holland, "When Opera Can Seem Like a Contest Between Composer and Director", *The New York Times* (5 August 1997), 9. For more on Achim Freyer and his work in opera, see Ewa Kara, 'The Disruption of Order: Achim Freyer's Scenography for Opera', *Theatre and Performance Design,* 1, 4 (2015), 298-320. For more on the work of Sean Gandini and his juggling troupe, see Thomas J. M. Willson, *Juggling Trajectories: Gandini Juggling 1991-2015* (London: Gandini Press, 2016).

[2] Cirkus Cirkör, *Circus Days and Nights*, < https://cirkor.se/en/circusdaysandnights> [accessed 13 December 2020]. *Circus Days and Nights* was a co-production by Cirkus Cirkör and Malmö Opera. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, all live performances of *Circus Days and Nights* were live streamed online. Tilde Björfors, the artistic director of Cirkus Cirkör, also directed Philip Glass's *Satyagraha* (1979) in a 2016 collaboration with Folkoperan.

Often the phenomenal relationships between opera and circus are relegated to discussions of technology, scenography, and excess spectacle, devoid of any serious interrogation of its action-based, circus identification in opera scholarship, and seemingly altogether absent in the burgeoning field of circus studies. Thus, this thesis explores the relationships between opera and circus in opera performance, and argues for the musico-dramatic contribution of aerial circus action in the analysis of opera in performance. To limit the scope of the thesis, I have chosen to focus on the musico-dramatic contribution of spatial relationships produced by aerial circus action in an opera performance. As such, the thesis will be of particular interest to researchers in musicology, circus studies, and theater and performance studies as well as appeal to lovers of opera and circus.

Aerial circus action, for the purposes of this thesis, is the physical execution of aerial circus skills and disciplines requiring the use of a rigged apparatus that are broadly associated with the circus by a circus technician.[3] My terminology adopts the circus distinction from circus scholar Peta Tait. In her seminal text *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance,* Tait asserts that 'circus skills are *physical actions* performed to extremes of dexterity, velocity, and height, and aerialists perform gymnastic action on and off apparatus suspended in the air…crucially, then, aerial acts are created by trained, muscular bodies.'[4] The circus as a stand-alone art form is commonly acknowledged to have western origins in the eighteenth century when Philip Astley combined various entertainments, including rope dancing and acrobatics from fairgrounds with his equestrian

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[3] This thesis does not engage with the technological and creative advancements in technical theatre. There have been considerable developments in technical training for riggers that specifically focus on creative and dramaturgic approaches to circus rigging since the end of the twentieth century. For example, as of January 2021, there is a course entitled *Introduction to Creative Rigging within Circus* offered at Stockholm University of the Arts. Regardless of creative rigging practices, from both technical and performance perspectives, the physics of the rigging site and the biomechanics of the artist and the apparatus in action together are the founding principles in rigging practices. For insight into the complexity in rigging points of circus apparatus, see Marion Cossin, Annie Ross and Frédérick P. Gosselin, 'Making single-point aerial circus disciplines safer', *Journal of Sports Engineering and Technology*, 231, 4 (2017), 362-373.

[4] See Peta Tait, *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 2.

ballets. There have been many developments and reactionary movements throughout its global histories, from the French *nouveau cirque* movement in the late twentieth century which embraced transgressive, narrative-based approaches to staging circus acts to what Magali Sizorn calls the current 'artification' of the circus.[5][6] For Sizorn, the formation and global expansion of artistic and higher education training centres has led to a revolutionary development of circus arts as an art form rather than a purely athletic and gymnastic skill for exhibition. A cursory review of global training schools reveals a wide range of approaches to the classification and definition of individual aerial circus disciplines.[7] Disciplinary practices and their associated terms often contradict one another depending on the adopted training traditions from global training centres since each institution often operates according to distinct pedagogical and cultural perspectives. For the elite circus school, L'École national de cirque (ENC), there are six broad classifications, including aerial acrobatic, balancing, juggling, clowning art, equestrian art, and floor acrobatics.[8] These groupings remain fairly constant, though they are not exactly the same, across global higher education training centres. For instance, the UK's National Centre for Circus Arts identifies four disciplinary categories — aerial, acrobatic, juggling and manipulation, and big space. The latter, big space,

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[5] See Magali Sizorn, 'The Artification of Trapeze Acts: A New Paradigm for Circus Arts', *Cultural Sociology*, 13, 3 (2019), 354-370. For a comprehensive survey of *nouveau cirque* from the French perspective, see Martine Maleval-Lachaud, *L'émergence du Nouveau cirque, 1968-1998* (Editions L'Harmattan, 2010). For an excellent consideration of *nouveau cirque* and the contributions of French circus company Archaos, see Kenneth Little, 'Surveilling Cirque Archaos: Transgression and the Spaces of Power in Popular Entertainment', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 29, 1 (2004), 15-27.

[6] Admittedly, this is a reductive history of the circus art form. For in-depth information into the specific developments and historic periods of the circus, see Louis Patrick Leroux and Charles R. Batson, *Cirque Global: Quebec's Expanding Circus Boundaries* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016); and Peta Tait and Katie Lavers, *The Routledge Circus Studies Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

[7] Patrick Louis Leroux, 'Avant-garde gestures and contemporaneity in today's circus', in *Circus and the Avant-Gardes: History, Imaginary, Innovation,* eds. Anna-Sophie Jürgens and Mirjam Hildbrand (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 232-245, (p. 239).

[8] For more on global circus higher education institutions and the aerial specialisms each institution offers to their students, see the European Federation of Professional Circus Schools, 'List of Members' <http://www.fedec.eu/en/members/> [accessed 18 December 2020]. For a useful reference into disciplinary terminology, see Anna-Karyna Barlati, 'Glossary of Circus Terms', in *Cirque Global: Quebec's Expanding Circus Boundaries*, eds., Louis Patrick Leroux and Charles R. Batson, trans., Susan Kelly (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), pp. 294-307. For insight into ENC's pedagogic models and development connection with circus company Cirque du Soleil, see Edson Filho, Patrice Aubertin and Bernard Petiot, 'The making of expert performers at Cirque du Soleil: A performance enhancement outlook', *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 7, 2 (2016), 68-79.

comprises individual disciplines that are an amalgamation of the other classifications in which large expanses of space are required for the training and execution of the apparatus-based disciplines. Yet higher education circus institutions are not the only source for approaches to classifying and defining aerial circus practices as individual disciplines also evolve through familial historiographies taught from one generation to the next through relational practices that are often not documented beyond oral histories. There are also circus disciplines that may belong to these commonly ascribed disciplinary classifications that are not taught and promoted within circus training institutions. For instance, hair hang, an aerial acrobatic discipline in which the circus aerialist specialises in hanging from their hair most commonly with the aid of a hook or ring at a fixed or swivelled rigging point, is rarely taught in higher education training programmes. Further types of aerial disciplines not covered by training institutions' classification systems also include disciplines and apparatus that have been invented by individual circus artists through their creative and professional practice.  For example, aerialist Samantha Ellen Pitard specialises in hair hang lyra which is a fusion between hair hang and lyra, also commonly referred to aerial hoop.[9] While there is no definitive or authoritative text on the classifications and categorisations of aerial circus disciplines, nor would many circus practitioners welcome one, there are general agreements, consistent ideologies and significant overlaps in leading systems. A notable reference is Hovey Burgess' 1974 adaptation of the 1970 Gurevich System by the Moscow Circus School.[10] Regardless of the classification system referenced, aerial circus disciplines in practice defy clear definitions as the overwhelming majority of circus practitioners combine disciplinary skills, traditions, and cultural lineages into their specific acts. This practice can, and often does, result in contradictory classifications.[11] Rather than find this as a deterrent, I, like 'advocates of development' as circus

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[9] Samantha Ellen Pitard has performed for Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus and Cirque du Soleil.

[10] Hovey Burgess, 'The Classification of Circus Techniques', *The Drama Review: TDR*, 18, 1 (1974), 65-70.

[11] While I have decided to adopt these specific terms for consistency and clarity, I acknowledge that circus terminologies and definitions are, ultimately, dependent on the circus artists and their respective practices.

historian Pascal Jacob points out, find a renewed investigation into the specific technical and cultural aspects of individual disciplines that have been categorised as art forms belonging to and associated with the circus.[12] Attesting to the importance of an apparatus on circus action and performance, the editors of *Contemporary Circus* dedicate their first chapter to examining the role of the apparatus in current circus practices.[13] An aerialist's 'circular responsive' relationship with a circus apparatus is developed and achieved through exhaustive repetition rather than an 'interaction' with an object that is placed before a dancer's trajectory.[14] Circus researcher and archivist Cyril Thomas sees a circus aerialist's intense relationship with an apparatus as one that spatially structures an aerialist's approach to the enactment of 'new visual and technical styles.'[15] Thomas declares that space is significant to contemporary circus actions since space 'conditions and at the same time challenges both the necessity and the accuracy of the action as it initiates the movement.'[16] For many circus artists, their conceptualisation of their apparatus is indistinguishable from how they move in and relate to space around them. According to the noted funambulist and provocateur Philip Petit, the action of circus is a movement practice in 'spatial chemistry', or more

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[12] Pascal Jacob, *The Circus: A Visual History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). The full quote provides further context for grounding my analysis of aerial circus in opera performance on performative actions: 'According to the conventions on which a number of circus companies are based, the circus is categorically "one and indivisible". Advocates of development, however, favour an approach founded on complete diversity. They share the same vocabulary, but the sentences constructed from this common basis are very different. The challenge no longer lies in "running a circus", but in devising a circus that resembles its creators, who must appropriate its codes purely in order to transcend them. This has resulted in a situation of fractured identity, but it also confirms the extraordinary richness of the "circus arts". This term relates to the origins of each discipline, from acrobatics to clowning, thereby separating them from one another. In this way, it restores the individual integrity these practices arguably lost in the eighteenth century, when the circus unhesitatingly engulfed them in order to forge a singular, comprehensive language', p. 228. For technical discipline-specific approaches to analysing contemporary circus acts, see Sebastian Kann, *Taking Back the Technical: Contemporary circus dramaturgy beyond the logic of mimesis* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Utrecht University Repository, 2016).

[13] Katie Lavers, Louis Patrick Leroux, and Jon Burtt, *Contemporary Circus* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 7-14.

[14] Peta Tait, *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005). This is in contrast to dance theorist Gretchen Schiller's conceptual framework and research into the relationships between dancers and objects in contemporary dance practices. See Gretchen Schiller, *Choreographic dwellings: practising place* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014). Schiller's use of the term 'interaction' signals that there is a 'transformation of place into action' when a dancer meets and utilises an object in their choreography, which does not adequately depict the action-oriented and interdependent relationship between an aerialist and a circus apparatus.

[15] Cyril Thomas, 'Transforming Form', in *Acrobates*, ed. Pascal Jacob (Châlons en Champagne: CNAC, 2018), p.68.

[16] Ibid., p. 68.

specifically, a practice in 'the relationship of your body to the space' and that this relationship should be 'cultivated', not encountered.[17] Circus scholar and pedagogue Agathe Dumont also highlights this intense connection by advising that circus performers 'develop a body awareness that makes sense in relation to the equipment', and as such, their concrete actions are inseparable from their circus apparatus.[18] Circus aerialists, regardless of aerial discipline, 'perform cultural ideas: of identity, dangers, transgression—in sum, of circus.'[19] Thus, each of the case studies acknowledge the unique technical, cultural and historic significations of the particular aerial discipline enacted on the opera stage. Aerial circus action differentiates the subject of this thesis from other forms of aeriality on the operatic stage, including aerial dance and aerial acrobatic action. Not all aerial acrobatic actions are associated with the circus, and not all acrobatic disciplines associated with the circus employ acrobatic maneuverers in a particular choreography. Operatic choreographies that feature acrobatics which exist outside of the circus tradition include Trisha Brown's remarkable aerial dance interpretation of Claudio Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (1607) and Sasha Waltz's soaring and physically challenging choreographies of Toshio Hosokawa's *Matsukaze* (2010).[20]

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[17] Philippe Petit as quoted in Katie Lavers, Louis Patrick Leroux, and Jon Burtt, *Contemporary Circus* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 15-21.

[18] Agathe Dumont, *Verticality, Weight and Gravity: A Pedagogical Guide* (FEDEC, 2015), p.53 <http://www.fedec.eu/en/articles/514-verticality-weight-and-gravity> [accessed 14 December 2020].

[19] Ibid., p. 6.

[20] For an introduction to the difference between aerial dance and aerial circus in contemporary aerial practices, see Lindsey Butcher, 'Dancing on the ceiling: aerial dance is an artform in its own right', *The Guardian*, 14 April 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2014/apr/14/dancing-ceiling-aerial-artform-circus> [accessed 10 January 2021]. For more on the operatic choreographies of Trisha Brown and Sasha Waltz, see Guillaume Bernardi, 'Trisha Brown's *L'Orfeo'*, *The Opera Quarterly*, 24, 3-4 (2008), 286-292; Susan Rosenberg, 'Trisha Brown: Between Abstraction and Representation (1966-1998)', *Arts*, 9, 43 (2020); and Christiane Riedel, Yoreme Waltz, and Peter Weibel, *Sasha Waltz. Installations, Objects, Performances* (Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2014).

***Methodology***

The decision to focus on aerial circus action was inspired by David Levin's influential book *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky.*[21] In the Preface to *Unsettling Opera*, Levin utilises a discussion of Philip Himmelmann's 2004 production of Giuseppe Verdi's *Don Carlos* at the Staatsoper Berlin to demonstrate how one might stage a reading of an opera text.[22] Levin focuses on a striking scene from Act II in which two scenic spaces were presented on stage concurrently, juxtaposing the royal family privately dining below the auto-da-fé physicalised action of burning the infidels. In the production, this juxtaposition isn't static. The aerial bodies are in constant motion, and the witnessing of this corporeal action is sensationally affective to the spectator. Jeremy Eichler's review of the production in *The New York Times* is absorbed by the linear progression of movement as the bodies are 'strung up by their ankles and hoisted high in the air, spinning preciously as they go.'[23] This is a spatial juxtaposition of action, not stasis. The specificity of the motion of these physicalised actions enriches the juxtaposition, and yet, these actions and their relation to the musico-dramatic context in the staging are missing from Levin's treatment.[24] And, while admittedly the actions Levin references in the production of *Don Carlos* are

[21] David Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007). Levin's book centred on questions of staging interpretations of opera texts, which followed from an academic debate between himself and James Treadwell. The extent of the debate can be read in the following articles (referenced in chronological, sequential order): David J. Levin, 'Reading a Staging/Staging a Reading', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 9, (1997), 47-71; James Treadwell, 'Reading and Staging again', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 10, 2 (1998), 205-220; and David J. Levin, 'Response to James Treadwell', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 10, 3 (1998), 307-311. For a similar approach, see also Roger Parker, *Remaking the Song: Operatic Visions and Revisions from Handel to Berio* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2006).

[22] David Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. xiv-xvii.

[23] As quoted David Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. xv-xvi.

[24] Answering *New York Time's* critic Jeremy Eichler's question of why the audience was presented with swinging naked bodies overing over the dining table, Levin proposes that 'the picture (that) emerges from Verdi's score is *utterly* harrowing' and that the scene visually represents 'the private and public, personal and political' readings at play within the textual narrative of the opera. While Levin solidly argues that stagings can *unsettle* a 'history of interpretation' of an opera text and that 'unsettledness is a dramaturgical quality that variously characterises the opera text and the performance text', he does not investigate nor address the musico-dramatic impact of the aerial actions in the scene that are vital to this production's staged interpretations. See David Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. xv-xvi.

not aerial circus actions, the absence of a critical engagement with the executions and actions of this aerial moment led me to dwell on the multitudinous ways in which aerial circus actions are enacted in contemporary opera performance. Thus, the thesis explores the following questions:

How do the spatial relationships created through aerial circus actions relate to opera in performance? What are the spectatorial links in perceiving opera and aerial circus? What can we learn about spatial relationships in an opera performance from studying opera and circus together? How does the use of spatially-centred circus metaphors in relation to actual circus actions impact opera in performance?

As Levin assertively argued, we, as musicologists, must seek out all possible analytic strategies and vocabularies to understand and further investigate how to analyse opera in performance. I believe that this lexicon must include technical and cultural vocabularies adapted from circus studies, and I explore how these vocabularies can operate within musicological discourse to explore the musico-dramatic contribution of aerial circus action's spatial relationships in three case studies.[25] The case studies examine a traditional high-wire act in Alvis Hermanis's 2012 Salzburg Festival performance of Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten* (1960-64), contemporary aerial rope and aerial harness ensemble actions in Louise Moaty and Raphaëlle Boitel 2017 staging of Marin Marais's *Alcione* (1706), and enactments of shibari-tsuri, Japanese bondage in suspension, and aerial contortion in Romeo Castellucci's 2011 staging of Richard Wagner's *Parsifal* (1882).

I approach each case study by isolating the physicalised actions of aerial circus, then analyse the spatial relationships produced through these actioned movements in the context of the opera

[25] Another text which has influenced this thesis is Gundula Kreuzer, *Curtain, Gong, Steam: Wagnerian Technologies of Nineteenth-Century Opera* (University of California Press, 2018).

performance. This decision is drawn from both musicology and circus studies. Rather than build on Levin's interpretative approach, that of an opera text (libretto and score) informing a staged interpretation, I instead adopt Clemens Risi's performative approach.[26] One of the most dynamic contributions to recent opera scholarship is Risi's belief that an opera in performance is comprised of *active relationships* and that an analysis of opera in performance must stem from the exploration of the relationships between all participants in an opera performance—including that of the spectator.[27] Aerial circus action, like all human action, does not exist in a void. It is relational. Circus aerialists' spatial communication begins with their intense relationship with their apparatus. All of an aerialist's spatial identifiers—their rate of action, range of motion, orientation, and directional proximity—are impacted by the apparatus, which then informs how an aerialist relates to other performers and how a spectator relates to an aerial circus performance in a musico-dramatic context.

Clemens Risi advises that we must resist the 'hierarchy between score and performance—a hierarchy that codifies the score as the starting point and goal for analysing interpretations or performances.'[28] Risi does not advise that the score and libretto—-which he terms as an 'opera's

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[26] See Clemens Risi, *Opera in Performance: Analyzing the Performative Dimension of Opera Productions* (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 45-46; and David Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[27] Clemens Risi, *Opera in Performance: Analyzing the Performative Dimension of Opera Productions* (London: Routledge, 2021), p.7. Risi is primary concerned with analysing relational questions in Regietheater. While some instances of aerial circus action are featured in productions that could arguably be classified within the artistic output of Regieteheater, these are not the only stagings where collaborations between circus and opera are evident. The concepts Risi explores in *Opera in Performance* are drawn from his previous research which are published in several articles, most notably for this thesis see Clemens Risi, 'Opera in Performance—In Search of New Analytical Approaches', *The Opera Quarterly*, 27, 2-3 (2012), 283-295. My understanding of spectatorial participation is drawn from Clemens Risi, 'The Diva's Fans: Opera and bodily participation', *Performance Research*, 16, 3 (2011). This is radically different than Megan Steigerwald Ille's 'doubled subjects' concept, which builds upon the work of Karen Zaiontz to she critically acknowledge the interactivity required from audience members spectating The Industry's 2015 *Hopscotch.* See Megan Steigerwald Ille, 'Live in the Limo: Remediating Voice and Performing Spectatorship in Twenty-First-Century Opera', *The Opera Quarterly,* 36, 1-2 (2020), 1-26. However, there is certainly a blurred line of spectatorial participation in site-specific performances where the actors are performing in the audience space yet which do not require any participatory action from its audience members, for instance Graham Vick's 2015 immersive staging of Michael Tippett's *The Ice Break.* All case studies analysed in the thesis are presented in a proscenium theatre and not an immersive setting.

[28] Clemens Risi, *Opera in Performance: Analyzing the Performative Dimension of Opera Productions* (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 45-46.

template'—are meaningless, rather, that any investigation and interpretation of an opera in performance must begin with the physicalised live staging to avoid any submission to a hierarchical dominance of text over performance. Drawing from Erika Fischer-Licthe's definition of staging, Risi builds his performative approach to the analysis of opera in performance 'on the unique, unrepeatable interaction between performers and audience members that occurs only in each unique constellation'.[29] This is a significant distinction for the analysis of circus in opera performance and has deep ramifications for a critical interdisciplinary approach which seeks to bridge and combine analysis of the two art forms.

Many aerial circus actions are conceptualised and perceived as a linear succession of movements. As such, each of the case studies are able to identify moments of choreomusical significance by aligning aerial actions to their musical counterpoint in performance. The dramatic conventions and acrobatic innovations of aerial circus arts, according to circus semiotician Paul Bouissac, are 'governed' by an individual circus artists' body mechanics that actively support an aerial trajectory's structural integrity in a succession of linear movements.[30] Even as artists and spectators attempt to consolidate this dynamic experience into iconography, it is often conceptualised through an image of motion and not stasis which parallels the spectatorial desire to understand the flow of aerial circus action within a structured act, and plot its spatiotemporal location. In an unknown artist's

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[29] Ibid., p. 158.

[30] Paul Bouissac, *Circus as Multimodal Discourse : Performance, Meaning and Ritual* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012). Boussiac states that: 'The training of an acrobat, a juggler, or a magician develops to some extreme limits natural skills which are based on the abilities of the human body. This potential is comprised within lower and upper thresholds which cannot be transgressed if the body is to maintain its integrity. Moreover, the body is ruled by the laws of gravity, which further restrain the range of movements if it is to keep or restore its balance. It ensues that only one state of the system of the body can be achieved at a single moment. From this point of view, the building blocks of an acrobatic act are dynamic configurations governed by biological constraints which determine the successful outcome of each trick and for which there are no alternative paths. The observer is presented with a necessarily linear dynamic which can be described adequately as only one string of events whatever the level of resolution of the description. Naturally, each acrobatic moment is a complex set of complementary biological factors but they form a vector which leads to the conclusion of the act. In acts which involve more than one actor, such as those performed by acrobatic duos and teams, trainers and their animals, or clown dyads or triads, the complexity of the combined constraints does not alter the linear, hierarchical unfolding of the acts. All the threads are integrated into a unified dynamic process and they all converge toward the same end point', pp. 30-31.

rendering of the acrobatic troupe Original Flying Zoe's, the dotted lines indicate the twisting, turning, somersaulting and lofting motion of the body from one trapeze to the catcher's arms, as well as showing in which direction the body undulates and flows through its motions (Appendix B, 1.1). This type of depiction is customary in billboards and advertisements lauding acrobatic feats on the trapeze, but, compellingly, it also shows the integral aspect that the apparatus plays in the physiological movements by the body in relation to the orientational presentation of the body in the air. In the main two passes illustrated, the first one depicts the swinging motion of the trapeze bar, and the exact moment and position of the bar when the performer leapt from the bar and into the air in order to make the catch to land hand in hand. A poster advertising a performance by the comedic troupe The Flying Opes shows the dual purpose and implied continual motion of the bar back and forth, and the precise, rhythmic timing required for the performer to swing towards their catcher and then to be released into the aerialist's trajectory that lines up with the trajectory of the apparatus to successfully conclude the trick (Appendix B, 1.2). It is not just the performer's trajectory that is being indicated for the spectatorial view: it is also the apparatus' trajectory.[31]

These two examples showcase not only the elongated and skilled postures that one would expect to see in a flying trapeze act, but also include the longitudinal, sequential pathway that the aerialist would take to complete the entire trick and not just one isolated movement in the awe-inspiring succession of bodily movements. In each of these examples, whether pictorially indicated or not, the physical movements of the aerialist are intricately connected to their relation to the apparatus. This relation dictates the flow of the aerialist's trajectory and perspective viewed by the audience, or not viewed by the audience. Artistic renderings of aeriality in action not only convey the importance of proximity and perspective in aeriality, but also the trajectory of the body in motion and its

[31] While there is no provenance or further details on the date of this particular poster, a trapeze troupe performed as the Original Flying Zoe's with the Hull and Grimsby Circus in 1898, however, I have been unable to trace whether they are the same or if the name had been co-opted, which is common of circus acts active in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

gravitational orientation, conveying both proportional range of motion and the durational flight path of this ephemeral and visceral action in and through space. Paul Bouissac alleges that the comparison of the *unfolding* of aerial circus actions ‘to the actualization of a memorized [sic] list of musical notations is indeed an appropriate metaphor.’[32] Circus artist Elizabeth Streb also conceptualises the aerialist’s spatial domain in musical terms, describing that:

> —if you think of how investigative the field of music has been—they have names for every sound, and octave, and keys, and tones. So what we try to figure out is what about if you could name every spot in space, give it a name, an accurate lexicon, nomenclature, so people will notice that it matters where you are. So the apparatus is really like a musical instrument for me, and the action cannot survive without the equipment.[33]

This useful spatiotemporal conceptualisation informs how I situate the actual actions of aerial circus in the musical context of the opera performance, and how I identify aerial circus action’s relationship with other participants and elements in the opera performance. In each of the case studies, I seek out moments where aerial circus action’s spatial relationship with other participants in the opera performance are of musico-dramatic importance. If any participant in this relationship would change—-for example, the rigging of an apparatus or the conductor’s tempo or the singer in a principal role—then the spatial impressions produced by aerial circus action in an opera performance would dramatically alter the opera performance under investigation. This affirms that aerial circus action is fundamentally structured anew each time an aerialist corresponds with a

[32] Paul Bouissac, *Circus as Multimodal Discourse : Performance, Meaning and Ritual* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), p. 37.

[33] Elizabeth Streb as quoted in Katie Lavers, Louis Patrick Leroux, and Jon Burtt, *Contemporary Circus* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 31.

circus apparatus in an opera performance and supports my adoption of the performative dimension of analysing opera in performance. It is through this performative dimension that aerial circus action visibly and physically impacts the musico-dramatic enactment and spectatorial reception of the opera in performance.

For example, chapter two analyses a specific performance of Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten*. This production was a co-production between Salzburg Festival and Teatro alla Scala. While the high-wire act was performed by the same aerialist in both performance runs, the individual venues altered the height at which the high-wire was rigged, the length of the high-wire, and the architectural setting of the high-wire. All of these structural factors impact the spatiotemporal enactment of the executed aerial circus action as well as the spectatorial impression communicated through these actions. The analysis of the Salzburg performance in chapter two specifically engages with the aerialist's spatiotemporal relationship to the culturally-significant architecture of the Felsenreitschule theatre. Yet, it is not only an aerialist's cultural and technical relationship to architectural structures that is dependent on a given performance, it is also the unique biomechanic and circularly-responsive correspondence of an specific aerialist with an apparatus and the other aerialists they relate to in a duo or ensemble act. In the performance of *Alcione,* analysed in chapter three, the aerial circus choreographies were devised based on the specific circus bodies of the aerialists contracted for the circus ensemble and their collective bodily knowledge.

In the pivotal aerial circus moment that I analyse in the case study, there is a dynamic musico-dramatic moment in which many of the aerialists's performative histories and individual biomechanics were instrumental in devising, choreographing and enacting in the performance. One of the aerialists began her research into the specific actions while she was a student in circus school, and then further engaged with this choreographic material with the other aerialists in the

production's circus ensemble. This collective and collaborative process enabled her to morph her individual actions into the work presented in the opera performance. This section was altered again during rehearsals and in during performances as the aerialists adapted the rate of their motion and their relational movements to each other in order to adjust to the fluctuating tempos set by the conductor and singers.[34] A similar performative situation happened in two stagings of Castellucci's production of *Parsifal*, which is analysed in chapter four. Here, the bondage choreography was altered from its premiere in Brussels to its remount in Bologna due to Lucio Gallo taking on the role of Klingsor from Tómas Tómasson. With Gallo's interpretation, the choreography was altered due to his elongated timings in relation to his musical interpretation of the vocal lines. As a result, the aerialists expanded their set choreography to include moments of improvisation which required stagehands to make visual communication cues with the bondage aerialists to ease pressure off of particular parts of the body while in suspension.[35]

By adopting Risi's performative approach, the irreducible circus relationship between apparatus, body and space becomes a central feature in understanding how aerial circus action relates to other participants on the opera stage—-such as the operatic voice and the bodies of the singers, the architectural and technological space of the theatre, and the spectatorial imagination.[36] As such, circus actions in an opera performance, and this thesis's engagement with them, contribute to issues concerning the voice-body relationship, the interplay between affective spectatorship, architecture and opera performance, ontological discussions on musicological discourse, and the musico-dramatic impact of technological advances in stagecraft. The second half of the introductory chapter

[34] Emily Zuckerman is an aerial circus artist, and was involved in the creation and performance of this production of *Alcione*. With thanks to Zuckerman, my interview with her regarding her circus practice and her involvement in *Alcione* is included in Appendix A.

[35] See Dasniya Sommer, 'The White Act in Castellucci's Parsifal', *Dasniya Sommer*, 7 February 2014 <https://dasniyasommer.de/2014/02/the-white-act-in-castelluccis-parsifal> [accessed 5 January 2021].

[36] Clemens Risi, *Opera in Performance: Analyzing the Performative Dimension of Opera Productions* (London: Routledge, 2021), p. 7.

identifies further analytic approaches for the tandem study of opera and circus and sets the foundation for the three case studies.

But first I must acknowledge the challenge that examining a live performance presents for my research. Each of the case studies analyse a live performance of an opera by consulting a recording of the performance.[37] Levin, too, approached this challenge in *Unsettling Opera*, and he believes that the use of recordings in analysing an opera performance is ‘a question of openness and approach’.[38] Accessing live recordings of the performances under analysis does not change the performative conditions and spatial relationships of enacted aerial circus action on the opera stage. Rather by opening up the analysis of opera performance to live recordings, it provides clarity and confirmation to the analysis of rapidly executed aerial circus movements.  Recordings have provided me with the ability to pause a transitory moment of music and circus action to isolate, identify and triangle unique spatial relationships between aerialist, apparatus and the musical moment. I could not do that in a live performance. This fact cannot be underestimated when analysing rapid movements of successive acrobatic aerial actions, as is the case of the intricate, ensemble aerial choreographies performed in the staging of *Alcione* analysed in chapter three. Any limitations due to the cinematic direction of a given recording are acknowledged. Admittedly, this aspect does impact my personal spectatorial experience of the live event, but it does not alter all of the spatial relationships created through an aerialist’s spatiotemporal placement on the stage and in relation to the other dramatic elements on the stage. The vital aspect of my subject—-the correspondence between aerialist, apparatus and other unique participants in a given performance—is unchanged by accessing a recording of the performance.

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[37] David Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007). Levin amends Carolyn Abbate’s proposal for the analysis of opera in performance by ‘allow(ing) for live performance *and recording* to serve as the objects of *all manner* of absorption, critical and experiential’, p. 10.

[38] David Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 9.

***Theatrical aeriality: antecedents of musico-dramatic space of aerial circus action***

If 'opera's debt to dance is as old as opera itself', as joint guest editors Majel Connery and James Steichen stated in the preface of *The Opera Quarterly*'s 2015 special edition on the tandem study of dance and opera in musicology, then opera is just as indebted to aerial spectacle as it is to dance.[39] Theatrical aeriality, beyond the disciplinary tether of circus arts, held a pivotal role in opera's inception and development.[40] Spectacular cloud machines would replicate the heavens enabling performers to sing from the highest heights during stagings of *intermedii* in the sixth century. Alessandra Buccheri, in her brilliant study *The Spectacle of Clouds, 1439-1650: Italian Art and Theatre*, notes that 'music permeated the whole play deeply: each movement on stage—of both stage actors and machinery—followed its rhythm'.[41] The extravagant theatre machines of the *intermedii* gave way to lavish architectural and scenic machines as opera emerged as an art form in the early seventeenth century. Musicologist Ellen Rosand identifies that the invention and rapid development of stage machinery and technologies was directly aligned to the commercialisation and societal popularity of early opera in Venice. Spectators were awed by spectacular and impressive machines that carried performers up and down and across the stage.[42] The presence of theatrical aeriality and stage machinery enabling performer flight in early Venetian opera influenced varied aspects of opera production from joint innovations in stage technology and scenography to devising plots that necessitated machinations of flight to inspiring choreomusical motifs replicating aerial

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[39] Majel Connery and James Steichen, 'Between Opera and Dance', *The Opera Quarterly,* 31, 3 (2015), 151-154. This thesis follows on from Majel Connery and James Steichen, and from the musicologists mentioned in their article, including Daniel Albright, Irene Alm, Rebecca Harris-Warrick, Bruce Alan Brown, Wayne Heisler, Wendy Heller, Mary Ann Smart, and Marian Smith.

[40] Alessandra Buccheri, *The Spectacle of Clouds, 1439-1650 Italian Art and Theatre* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); and Orville K. Larson, 'Vasari's Description of Stage Machinery', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 9, 4 (1957), 287-299; and Jeffrey Pulver, 'The Intermezzi of Opera', *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, 43rd session (1916-1917), 139-163.

[41] Alessandra Buccheri, *The Spectacle of Clouds, 1439-1650 Italian Art and Theatre* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 85.

[42] Mark Radice, *Opera in context: essays on historical staging from the late Renaissance to the time of Puccini* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1998).

ascents and descents.[43] A towering figure in the rapid adoption and proliferation of theatrical machines and scenic ingenuity was the Italian machinist Giacomo Torelli.[44] His impressive stage technologies led the European craze for astonishing scenes of aerial spectacle. The public's fascination with performers soaring across the stage ensured that libretti contained dramatic sequences, elaborate scenes, and mythic characters that called for these machines to carry performers in theatrical flight. Very little attention has been paid in musicological scholarship on the musico-dramatic impact of theatrical flight and the technological mechanisms that enabled aerial flight in a live performance. Of particular note is Nina Treadwell's study of Vittoria Archilei's 1589 performance of 'Dalle più alte sfere', in which the Florentine soprano sang and accompanied herself whilst descending on a central cloud. In her article aptly titled "She Descended on a Cloud 'From the Highest Spheres': Florentine Monody 'alla Romanina", Treadwell presents a rare scholarly exception that critically engages with aeriality.[45] While Treadwell's main line of enquiry is discussing the musical integrity of the vocal line in the 1591 musical print commemorating the festivities' *intermedii*, Treadwell acknowledges the political and cultural meanings that were communicated by the specific spatial positioning and musico-dramatic context of Archilei's aerial descent. Treadwell also acknowledges the political and cultural context of the Medici couple's nuptials to the specific spatial placement of Archilei's aeriality, then continues to consider how the physical and logistical demands of this aerial staging altered the vocal interpretation and composition of the opening of the *intermedii.* Treadwell's analysis highlights two performative

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[43] Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991).

[44] Per Bjurström, *Giacomo Torelli and Baroque Stage Design* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962). For a broad overview of the impact of staging and spectacle throughout opera, see Evan Baker, *From the Score to the Stage: An Illustrated History of Continental Opera Production and Staging* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); and Nicholas Ridout, 'Opera and the technologies of theatrical production', in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies,* ed. Nicholas Till (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2008). For more on discussions on the auditory versus the visual in opera reception and criticism, see Carl Dalhaus, 'The Dramaturgy of Italian Opera' in *Opera in Theory and Practice, Image and Myth,* eds. Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[45] Nina Treadwell, 'She Descended on a Cloud "From the Highest Spheres": Florentine Monody 'all Romanina', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 16, 1 (2004), 1-22, (pp. 11-12).

concerns of current uses of aerial circus action in opera performance that have links to opera's historic use of theatrical aeriality: firstly, the musico-dramatic impact of an apparatus' materiality, technology and tempo, and, secondly, the social and cultural demarcations of musical space, architectural space and affective spectatorship. Modern opera's invocation of aerial circus arts often reaches beyond the genre's historic quest for verisimilitudinous presentations of mythic aeriality, yet these two core aspects of theatrical flight are essential to understanding and analysing aerial circus action's links to opera history.

***Circus metaphors and representations in opera performance***

> Rossini's imitators seem living on the slack rope, with him as the pole which keeps them up—everything is done upon one Leg, and that's the Melody, accompany'd only by the foolish grimaces of the Composer, which serve for harmony—. How different from the time when old Bach seem'd to go on all four's that he might move steadily, and Handel walk'd on two legs like a Man, and Mozart like a gentleman who had learn'd to dance, and knew how to keep his balance, and yet had no unnatural longings after the slack rope.—Now what can all this lead to but the ground, to which the sooner it comes the better.[46]

As an 'inherently metaphorical' art form, it is not surprising that the circus is often called upon to illuminate knowledge of operatic and musical performances, yet beyond its representational function, these metaphors often reveal cultural and performative truths of the intertwined relationships between opera and circus. For example, the quote above comes from painter Joseph

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[46] As quoted in W. Barclay Squire, 'Some Novello Correspondence', *The Musical Quarterly*, 3, 2 (1917), 206-242, (pp. 220-221).

Severn's 1828 correspondence to chapel organist Vincent Novello, and charts humanity's 'natural' progression from walking to baroque dance figures to then the perceived unnatural and illegitimate actions on the slack rope that mirrored the historic practices and cultural reception of dance and circus aerial arts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Or in this instance where Heinrich Schütz calls upon the trusting relationship of aerial trapeze artists to the utopian relationship between musicians in an ensemble— 'a circus aerialist: at any moment he may have to risk his musical life in mid-air, and he needs to know there is someone there to catch him'.[47] Metaphorical references to the circus in musicology are called upon when no other earthly experience can do, as evidenced by the oft-quoted ontological discussion of musical performance where Carolyn Abbate equates a 'musical performance's strangeness' to that of the circus to convey the complexity and unruliness of the *ineffability* of music in performance.[48]

Beyond musicology, circus references abound in our globally-shared colloquial phrases that cross linguistic and cultural boundaries. For example, circus director Lorenzo Pisoni references the metaphor of 'walking the line' and semiotician Paul Bouissac references the phrase 'playing with fire'.[49] Both of these aforementioned metaphoric phrases have been utilised in the circus dramaturgy employed by Swedish circus company *Limits.* As circus artists and apparatus inventors Tina Koch and Charlotte Mooney attest, audiences have specific 'associations' with how a circus apparatus operates and represents meaning based on accumulated experiences and interactions with

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[47] Heinrich Schütz, '*Italienische Madrigale*, Capella Lipsiensis, directed by Dietrich Klothe, *Philips Living Baroque', Early Music,* (1983), p. 269.

[48] Carolyn Abbate, 'Music—Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry,* 30, 3 (2004), 505-536.

[49] Paul Bouissac, *Circus as Multimodal Discourse: Performance, Meaning, and Ritual* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012). For Bouissac, 'playing with fire' is both a metaphor which applies to the circus in general and a literal reference to some actual acts: jumping through fiery hoops of various diameters is indeed performed by acrobats, horses, and, more commonly, by lions and tigers; the clearing of burning barriers by various animals can also be observed in the ring; the climax of jugglers' displays often consists of manipulating torches alight; hula-hoop dancers at times undulate within a swirling metallic circle to which burning pieces of rope soaked in fuel are attached, a prop which replicates the wheel of flames of Shiva, the Hindu dancing god of destruction and death', p.2. Another notable text investigating circus metaphors explored in and through performance is Jonas Elkund, *The Sensational Body: A Spectatorial Exploration of the Experience of Bodies on Stage in Circus, Burlesque and Freak Show*, (unpublished doctoral thesis, Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2019).

circus representations and performances.[50] This discussion raises the question: can circus aerialists ever fly free of metaphor and symbolic identification? I believe there are occasions in contemporary circus performances where aerialists defy symbolic expectations that astound with such effect and subtle nuance that yes there are occasions. However, in the dramatic context of an opera performance, opera's long engagement with the circus tends to embrace the mythic symbolism and cultural identifications of the art form. For instance, Jean Clair attests that 'the myth of the sad clown has been fuelling our imagination uninterruptedly since about 1860', yet one could honestly argue that opera's imagination became infatuated with this myth thirty-two years after with the looming operatic presence of Ruggero Leoncavallo's eponymous clown *Pagliacci*.[51]

Research into how representations of the circus and the 'circus imaginary' act as a contributor to 'mutual shaping' of other art forms, artistic mediums and cultural practices are at the forefront of circus scholars' investigations into the tangled nexus of spectatorial engagement with circus performances across its broad history, inclusive of contemporary practices.[52]

Historian Marius Kwint notes that 'the job of the historian today is to unpick these myths,' and, if we agree with him, as I do, then it is not enough to consider alternative models of analysing aerial

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[50] Charlotte Mooney as quoted in Katie Lavers, Patrick Louis Leroux and Jon Burtt, *Contemporary Circus* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020): 'When you walk on stage and you see a doubles trapeze, it's such a loaded object in its own right. It has associations, what we wanted to do was to create a piece of equipment that also worked like a set, so it was open and had its own associations…So by transforming the equipment it opened things up choreographically, it opened up associations…Also there's something that we've discovered along the way about creating space around the body…there's something about seeing the body in space which creates vulnerability…Part of that visually is about having the space around the body in the air', p. 26.

[51] Jean Clair, 'Parade and Palingenesis: Of the Circus in the Work of Picasso and Others', in *The Great Parade: Portrait of the Artist as Clown,* ed. Jean Clair, trans. Marcia Coulle (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 29.

[52] Anna-Sophie Jürgens and Mirjam Hildbrand, *Circus and the Avant-Gardes* (London: Routledge, 2022). For a practice-led perspective into how cultural representations impact circus creation, see Camilla Damkjær, *Homemade Academic Circus: Idiosyncratically Embodied Explorations into Artistic Research and Circus Performance* (Iff Books, 2016).

circus action that resist metaphorical meanings.[53] We must untangle how the myths are staged and by what actual actions in the musico-dramatic spatial context of an opera production, then follow its various strands into the multilayered entanglements between opera and circus. This thesis offers a perspective in the ways in which opera and circus are mutually influencing and moulding each other, and seeks to understand how the spatial relationships of aerial circus action on the opera stage become an interpretive tool that visualises and physically manifests criticisms of operatic works and of the operatic art form. Dance theorist Rachel S. Chamberlain Duerden's offers a useful method to dissect comparative metaphors of artistic mediums to serve as an analytical ground for 'illuminating some of the potential for subtlety and depth in their relationship'.[54] Deurden uses the 'metaphorical function' of a singular term (gesture) to explore the relationship between music and dance. For the purposes of the thesis, I expand this and draw from metaphors in critical and academic discourse that convey particular significance with the given performances, and whereby through this method, enables discussion to engage with varying issues across opera, circus and performance studies that are situated at the nexus of the metaphoric invocation and the shared performance practices of opera and circus situated in the dramatic context of the production.

I approach circus as 'a versatile frame' for interpreting opera performance, using circus actions on the opera stage to reflect upon performance practices of opera and engage with broad issues of analysing opera in performance.[55] By focusing on the circus actions in the opera performance, I am in alignment with Kate Holmes's approach as she seeks to explore 'the illusion cast and the reality of doing'.[56] In my approach to circus metaphors and representations that appear in opera

[53] Marius Kwint, 'The Circus', in *Cambridge Companion to Theatre History*, eds. David Wiles and Christine Dymkowski (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2013), pp. 210-230.

[54] Rachel S. Chamberlain Duerden, 'Dancing in the Imagined Space of Music', *Dance Research*, 25, 1 (2007), 73-83.

[55]Anna-Sophie Jürgens and Mirjam Hildbrand, 'Arts for all senses', in *Circus and the Avant-Gardes,* eds. Anna-Sophie Jürgens and Mirjam Hildbrand (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 1-15.

[56] Kate Holmes, *Female Aerialists in the 1920s and Early 1930s: Femininity, Celebrity, and Glamour* (London: Routledge, 2022), p. 29.

performance, I share a method with the authors of the recent edited collection *Circus and the Avant-gardes* as I, too, strive to 'trace the actual circus practices and circus imaginaries explored in, and emerging from' other art forms, and 'to dive deeper into circus and avant-garde history to uncover their connections, interrelations and influences in more detail'.[57]

***The case studies***

Theatrical conceptions of circus space are vast from perceiving the circus as a microcosm for societal interactions to isolating spatial relationships between an aerialist and her apparatus as a communicative, relational dialogue without language to identifying circus aerialists as an emblematic symbol through their physical localities in cultural demarcations of space. As such, this thesis contributes to these discussions in circus studies by questioning the impact the representation and performances of circus metaphors have in an opera performance by isolating physicalised actions of the circus act in its musico-dramatic context. I then employ a wide range of analytic theories, including but not limited to architecture, gender studies, queer studies, cultural reception, history, and philosophy, that engage with the individualistic aerial circus actions and the 'multiplication of communicational factors' that work simultaneously in and through its identification as a circus entity.[58]

In chapter two, I explore the symbolic cultural histories of aerial circus action in order to frame a high-wire act as an enacted musico-dramaturgic manifestation of the opera text. Musicologist Mark Berry, while 'enthralled' by the visual spectacle of the high-wire act, ultimately disregarded the dramatic inclusion of the traditional circus discipline in Alvis Hermanis's 2012 Salzburg Festival production of Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten* (1960-1964) as being not 'the most subtle

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[57] Ibid., p. 3.

[58] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London and New York: Routledge, 1980, 2005), p. 22.

of metaphors'.[59] The presence of Marie walking on a high-wire, performed by funambulist Katharina Dröscher, was overwhelmingly perceived to allude to the archetypal character's situational balancing act, and her inevitable tragic demise. Musicological discourse, particularly regarding operatic voices and coloratura vocal lines, routinely invokes the circus performer's visceral acrobatic heights to analyse vocal virtuosity as emblematic as the feminine character's desire for freedom. Marie's steady walk across the breadth of the stage presents a traditional horizontal arrangement for high-wire and tight-rope acts. Drawing from cultural history, gender studies, and musicology, I endeavour to explore the musicological device of 'vocal acrobatics' through a narratological reading of Marie as female funambulist.

In chapter three, I connect the historic and ideological links of opera and circus arts through a discussion on how aerial circus action philosophically invents upon French baroque dance practices. Often in dramatic representations of traditional aerial circus arts, inclusive of the tight-rope, the aerial realm of the circus performer is visually and metaphorically segregated from the spectatorial society by the horizontal positioning of the apparatus. The first case study explored how cultural enactments of horizontally rigged tight-rope performances have come to symbolise an aerialist's (in)ability to conquer socio-political terrains that come under their spatial domains. However, the tight-rope, and other rope-based aerial acts, can have multiple rigging variations that enable the circus artist to perform on a vertical, diagonal or horizontal. These alternative rigging arrangements dissolve the demarcation between an aerialist's domain and a societal domain, and emphasise the radiating centrality of an aerialist's orientational direction and symmetries. This dissolution of spatial realms—above for the circus artists, below for society—is further deconstructed when communal aerial circus actions burst forth from all directions in a continually evolving spatial arrangement of networked apparatus. Louise Moaty's 2017 direction of Marin Marais's *Alcione*

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[59] Mark Berry, 'Salzburg Festival, Die Soldaten', *Seen and Heard International* (25 August 2012), np.

(1706) features an ensemble of acrobatic aerialists sliding, running, twirling, and flipping from aerial harnesses, poles, and an interwoven series of vertical, diagonal, and slack rope. I turn to André Lepecki's concept of 'invention' and Michel Serres's *Les Cinq Sens* to offer a philosophical reading of the aerial spatial trajectories in the production. By focusing on the ideological importance of the interrelated French baroque concepts of *le mouvement* and moderation in the execution of baroque dance, I focus my analysis on how aerial circus action invents upon French baroque dance ideologies to create spherical symmetries of communal joy at the moment the aerialist lifts their foot off the floor. I explore how this moment occurs through communal aerial actions, which ultimately signifies the ensemble's dramatic role in the opera as a joyful, ensouled society.

In chapter four, I consider the communicative power of aerial circus action to investigate and challenge dramatic actions in the interpretation of an opera text through a live opera performance. The final case study moves away from western traditions of aerial circus disciplines previously analysed in the first two case studies to explore how global circus disciplines and practices operate with other aerial forms, and how aerial disciplines that fluidly defy cultural and technical classifications, which require us to unpack entwined cultural and historic identifications and impact spatial stagings of these practices, can enrich narratological readings of canonical operas. Act II of Romeo Castellucci's 2011 production of Richard Wagner's *Parsifal* commences with Klingsor and a body double clad in butcher's aprons binding and rigging three bare-chested flower-maidens in an act of *shibari-tsuri*—Japanese rope bondage in suspension. The fetishistic depiction viscerally renders the flower-maidens as hung flesh, slowly rotating and contorting above the stage, in erotic choreographies of aerial bondage contortion. It is a startling departure from conventional representations of the flower-maidens visually replicating the sonic *femininity* and floral lushness of *'Komm, komm, holder Knabe!',* yet one that visually manifests Theodor Adorno's Wagnerian

*phantasmagoria*. By highlighting the ritualised, physical actions of *shibari-tsuri,* Klingsor and the flower-maidens perform and execute the actions of tying and untying shibari ropes. I explore how the enacted spatial relationships between Klingsor, the flower-maidens, and Parsifal through these tying actions stage a dramatic interpretation that raises narratological questions of queer sensualities and passive power dynamics within the opera text.

## Chapter Two. Onward into the vortex: Marie's high-wire act in Alvis Hermanis's 2012 Salzburg Festival production of Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten* (1960-1964)

Bernd Alois Zimmermann's opera *Die Soldaten* was presented at the Felsenreitschule theatre for the 2012 Salzburg Festival.[60] The imposing backdrop of the stage was initially carved out of a rock face to create spectatorial arcades for horse riding exhibitions in the seventeenth century. When the venue was converted into a theatre in the 1920s, at the suggestion of Max Reinhardt, the audience's position was switched. Rather than have spectators seated in the ninety-six spectatorial arcades arranged over three tiers, current audiences sit across from the empty alcoves. For his staging of Zimmermann's operatic adaptation of J.M.R. Lenz's play, director Alvis Hermanis sets a high-wire rigged across the length of the stage, above the tiers of the now-empty alcoves. Capitalising on the haunting spectre of spectatorship, Marie's body double, funambulist Katharina Dröscher, performs a long, methodical procession across the wire during the intermezzo between scenes I and II of Act II (Appendix B, 2.1).[61]

[60] Based on and adapted Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten (1960-1964)* was based on and adapted from J.M.R. Lenz drama of the same name. The 2012 staging at the Salzburg Festival was a co-production between the Salzburg Festival and Teatro alla Scala, and was under the direction of and sets by Alvis Hermanis. Following these two productions, it then premiered as a new production in Milan in 2015. The Salzburg production under discussion was recorded and distributed by Unitel Classica label on DVD and Blu-Ray with video direction by Hannes Rossacher. All references to this production are in reference to this recording. In this production, I use high-wire and tight-rope interchangeably as the history of female high-wire acts in western culture is aligned with that of female tight-rope acts. The difference is predicated on the significant height of a high-wire act and the materiality of the apparatus. In this case, while it is a high-wire act, it references both historic and cultural identities from high-wire and tight-rope performances and practices.

[61] Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Elaine R. Fitz Gibbon, and Emily Richmond Pollock, 'The Future of Opera', *The Opera Quarterly,* 30, 1 (2014), 144-151. Circus and acrobatics were directly named amid the many art forms in Zimmermann's non-hierarchical, pluralistic opera of the future.

For Bernd Alois Zimmermann, *Die Soldaten,* as an operatic composition, does not exist apart from the staged performance.[62] His devotion to his 'musico-dramatugrical' vision was uncompromising, even to the point of staging an incomplete extract from the opera to show that it could and should be performed.[63] He had an unerring, Wagnerian-like fidelity to the architectural and dramatic designs he envisioned for *Die Soldaten* and opera's future.[64] Zimmermann's belief in *Die Soldaten's* role in redefining and redeeming the art form was not founded on the narrative's quality. Quite the opposite, as in his writings, Zimmermann acknowledged that there is nothing special about the plot nor the situations that occur throughout Lenz's drama.[65] Zimmermann saw not a poignant story, but a definitive, archetypal structure that presented reality as it was, is, and will be. He frequently wrote about the importance of Marie being representative of any individual in his operatic adaptation of Lenz's work. In each of Zimmermann's writings on *Die Soldaten*, Marie is figured as a convoy for his compositional and dramatic inspiration. Most notably, Zimmermann states that:

> Marie's "story" may perhaps appear meaningless: an everyday tale that belongs to all eras; the stories of Maries, Magdalenas, Maggies. It doesn't matter what name is inserted, even the other "characters" involved are inconsequential: one name stands for all—and all are affected, and it is this very process that makes Lenz's *Die Soldaten* so exemplary.[66]

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[62] Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Elaine R. Fitz Gibbon, and Emily Richmond Pollock, 'Three Scenes from the Opera *Die Soldaten*', *The Opera Quarterly,* 30, 1 (2014), 140-141. Zimmermann: 'Only the performance of my entire opera, however, can give the conclusive answer', p.140. Richard Toop suggests that Karlheinz Stockhausen's own attempts at devising a musico-dramatic conception of theatrical architecture was inspired by the scenic and projection design of *Die Soldaten's* performance in Cologne. For Stockhausen's architectural designs and ideologies, see Richard Toop, 'Stockhausen's Secrete Theater: Unfinished Projects from the Sixties and Early Seventies', *Perspectives of New Music*, 36, 2 (1998), 91-106.

[63] Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Elaine R. Fitz Gibbon, and Emily Richmond Pollock, 'On Die Soldaten', *The Opera Quarterly,* 30, 1 (2014), 143. For evidence of a notational system for the transcription of sounds related to scenographic and actions with props, see Emily Richmond Pollock, 'To do justice to opera's "monstrosity": Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten*, *The Opera Quarterly*, 30, 1 (2014), 69-92.

[64] Emily Richmond Pollock, 'To do justice to opera's "monstrosity": Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten*, *The Opera Quarterly*, 30, 1 (2014), 69-92, (p.71).

[65] Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Elaine R. Fitz Gibbon, and Emily Richmond Pollock, 'Lenz and New Aspects of Opera', *The Opera Quarterly,* 30, 1 (2014), 135-140: Zimmermann explicitly states, 'The plot of *Die Soldaten,* its fable: nothing special', p.135.

[66] See Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Elaine R. Fitz Gibbon, and Emily Richmond Pollock, 'Four Texts by Bernd Alois Zimmermann', *The Opera Quarterly,* 30, 1 (2014), 135-151, (p. 143).

Zimmermann specifies that the operatic adaptation of Lenz's drama is to show how all of the characters, in extension all of humankind, are 'inescapably forced into a situation'.[67] It is composed in order to convey that Marie's situational outcome, even in the circular dramatic timeline of Lenz, is inevitable. She cannot escape it. When an artist is on the tight-rope, or high-wire, there are undeniable predictable paths of execution.[68] There is only forward or backward, or down. The physicalised execution and visual manifestation of Marie's body double as she is 'inescapably forced' to walk the wire is a force that neither she, nor any of the characters in the drama, nor anyone, can overcome, alter, or escape. Marie's tragic demise is inevitable. Her steady progression towards the final moments of the opera is a driving force from the beginning to the end of her role in the opera, and in her walk in this scene.

There is an anxious determination in how Katharina Dröscher executes her rhythmic walk across the high wire. A simplistic reading of the high-wire act could argue that the dramaturgic appeal of the tight-rope communicating tense life-or-death scenarios represents Marie's precarious moral balancing act between tempting her situational fates as she strides into the dangerous abyss in a pictorial invocation of Nietzsche's rope walker in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.[69] There are, of course, immediate similarities between Nietzsche's infamous rope-walker and Marie's ambulations across the tight-rope in this production as her presence on the wire can easily serve as her 'bridge' between past, present and future. Yet, for art historian Janice McCullagh, 'the time of the tightrope [sic]

[67] ernd Alois Zimmermann, Elaine R. Fitz Gibbon, and Emily Richmond Pollock, 'The Future of Opera', *The Opera Quarterly,* 30, 1 (2014), 144-151.

[68] Linguistic actions, much like acrobatic ones, are guided by and formed through executed rhythms, societal interventions and interactions, especially in the ideologies of discipline and learned action-based behaviours. Gesture like language has both sociopolitical and aesthetic, creatively qualities to extend past the controlled codification, invoking yet another traditional symbolism in tight-rope walking of physically exhibiting one's balanced discipline.

[69] Research in circus dramaturgy in the creation, performance, and reception of equilibrium-based circus disciplines has gained momentum since the late 1980s. A notable recent exploration in circus studies includes Jonas Eklund's conference presentation at the 2017 UpsideDown Circus and Space International Conference 'Breaking Boundaries—Exploring and Defying Borders and Limits with Circus Cirkör', which investigates the role of materiality, circus act construction, political activism, and audience expectation in reinventing dramatic techniques in tight-rope act creation and performance. A significant scene under Elkund's analysis is a tight-rope constructed of rope fibres that is positioned over a flame to represent the dire situations refugees encounter.

walker is the intensity of the present moment' as each step the funambulist executes symbolises the momentary inherent risk in the art form.[70] As the disjointed mechanisms of time and geographic space are pulled apart throughout the opera, the image of Marie pinned to a specific place and time hovering above the cyclical action reinforces her demise of her inevitable fate.

This staged image of Marie walking on the high-wire, face-forward in austere resolve is reminiscent of Jean Louis Forain's 1923 tight-rope walker (Appendix B, 2.2). In the oil painting, a tight-rope walker stands fixed at the bow of the rope, head held high and back straight, arms holding the balancing pole in complete equilibrium.[71] The female tight-rope walker is featured at the centre of her rope as it bows beneath her weight. She is perfectly balanced, seemingly without effort, perfectly at ease as her balancing pole seems to effectively bring to life Paul Klee's belief that the tight-rope artist represents the perfect balance of all forces.[72]

Yet, this tight-rope walker is not presented in isolation—in fact, quite the opposite is true. She is completely surrounded by a cacophony of patrons, none of whom look particularly enthused or engaged with her feats of equilibrium. She seems determined and fixated on her path before her, not paying any attention to the crowd below, seeming to comprise all of society as it is densely packed in stark contrast to the realm of the circus artist above. For Marie, in this specific production performed at the historically-rich Felsenreitschule in Austria, her funambulistic actions are performed over the dramatic space of the production, which encapsulates all geographic locations and timelines in simultaneity, and the real space of the once filled, now empty theatrical alcoves.

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[70] Janice McCullagh, 'The Tightrope Walker: An Expressionist Image', *The Art Bulletin*, 66, 4 (1984), 633-644.

[71] Jean Louis Forain's 1923 oil-on-canvas painting, *Tight-Rope Walker*, is currently held at the Art Institute of Chicago.

[72] The tight-rope artist, especially one utilising a balance pole, often represents a physicalised metaphor for finding balance in a situation, including but not limited to, societal structures and psychological states. Bauhaus artist Paul Klee depicted tight-rope artists as a symbolic representation for balance. Klee's abstract work frequently prioritised tight-rope walkers in a satirical fashion, including the most famous work of his collections, *Seiltänzer*, Tightrope Walker (1923), in which the funambulist appears to have a pointed, comical nose. The colour lithograph on paper is located in the Print Room at National Galleries Scotland.

This image of Marie as funambulist calls attention to the symbolic representation of the circus aerialist as visually emblematic of bodily escape. A striking choreographic element of Marie's high-wire walk in this production is that there are no spectacular tricks or death-defying manoeuvres—only a slow, rhythmically-precise journey across the wire, seemingly devoid of circus theatrics and spine-tingling acrobatics. This physicalisation of Marie appears at odds with the symbolic image of the circus aerialist typifying ebullience and social freedom that is so often invoked in musicological scholarship and artistic representations of tight-rope walkers and circus aerialists. The symbols of the circus, everything from its aerial disciplines to its itinerant locations, are far-reaching, contradictory, and, as discussed in the previous chapter, inherently entwined with the spatial relationships produced from their performances.[73] The spectatorial perception of the aerialist—outmanoeuvring physical limitations and gravitational forces through fleeting moments of suspended aeriality—is inspiring and cathartic as it viscerally represents humankind's desire and projected ability to physically enact one's freedom from one's reality.[74] The spectator can envision what it must feel like to escape from the confines of their embodied situations while witnessing the human form soar above—completely untethered as it taunts gravitational laws that consign us to be earth bound. As such, the circus aerialist often comes to symbolise a heroic figure, evading reality and societal structures through a fantastic display of acrobatic flight that affectively unites spectatorial crowds in political and cultural identification.

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[73] See Paul Bouissac, *Semiotics at the Circus* (Boston: De Grutyer, 2010); and Helen Stoddart, *Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

[74] Helen Stoddart, *Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2000), p. 175. My utilisation of these terms are heavily influenced by Helen Stoddart's work on circus representation.

Kate Holmes has persuasively demonstrated that the figure of the female aerialist had ‘powerful grip on the cultural imaginary’ in the twentieth century.[75] The female aerialist came to represent all of the aspirational tenets of aerial circus performances that inspired and unified spectatorial audiences as a collective society. By embracing nationalism in her performances, as will be explored in the chapter, American female aerialists became representative of not just ‘the circus as a space of exceptionalism’ but that of American exceptionalism.[76] In the below quote, Wilson Koh explains the unique transference of American exceptionalism into celebrated athletic figures throughout the twentieth century:

> American exceptionalism is a mutable rhetoric which nonetheless remains at its core a comforting fantasy: it isn’t so much about what America is actually like, but what it is optimistically imagined as. By virtue of an easy and transitively fallacious association, such rhetoric fosters loyalty to whichever hero-figure most convincingly articulates and embodies the apparently immutable and transcendental ideology of American exceptionalism.[77]

Instead of the archetypal vision of the tight-rope artist as unifying hero, Marie’s portrayal in *Die Soldaten* is fatalistically focused on the fragility, precariousness, and danger of her situation. As she traverses the wire high above the stage, stretching the breadth of the vacant arcades below her spectator-less walk, she does not leap metaphorically or even physically into space. Lenz’s dramatic characterisation of Marie as anti-hero is underlined by the negation of spectatorial catharsis through affective unification, which is the definitive opposite of the emblematic figure of the American female aerialist in the mid-twentieth century. It is this startling image of Marie cast as a funambulist, seemingly defying the symbolic legacy of cathartic freedom, that offers an opportunity to question the image of

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[75] Kate Holmes, *Female Aerialists in the 1920s and Early 1930s: Femininity, Celebrity, and Glamour* (London: Routledge, 2022).

[76] Helen Stoddart, *Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2000), p. 175.

[77] Wilson Koh, ‘A Real American Hero: WWE Wrestling from American Exceptionalism to Commercial Transnationalism’, *Television & New Media,* 23, 1 (2022), 61-80, (pp. 62-63).

female circus aerialists cast as symbols of bodily freedom, as well as an opportunity to question the analytic devices for examining feminine freedom in coloratura passages that rely on this symbolism as an analytic basis for musicological interpretation. This chapter is formed of four sections. First, I introduce a contestation to the critical applications of the term 'vocal acrobatics'. In the second and third sections, I reframe Peta Tait's reading of the cultural symbolism of aerial freedom through Lenzian dramatic principles. Then, I support this reframing through a historical survey of western cultural reception of American female aerial acts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and situate it within the Salzburg production.

***'Vocal acrobatics' and the symbolic figure of the female aerialist***

The inspirational signification of the circus aerialist as breaking free from gravitational restraints, drawn from aeronautics and circus arts, has often served as an analytic metaphor in musicological discourse to examine the dramatic significance of coloratura passages of women in opera.[78] Marie's vocal lines are demanding, requiring the soprano to enact destabilising rhythms against the orchestra while leaping to the extreme limits of her tessitura. Consistent from Lenz's dramatic principles to Zimmermann's compositional impetus, Marie's utterances, vocalic and bodily, are intentional. A brief appraisal of Marie's initial moments on stage affirm this idea. Marie is first presented to us composing a letter to her fiancé's mother in the company of her sister. Hegla Stipa Madland persuasively argues that this dramatic scene contributes to Lenzian characterisation techniques by 'represent(ing) the individual in his totality'.[79] As Madland has asserted in a close reading of the language between Charlotte and Marie, Marie's alienation has already begun and we

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[78] While many descriptive and analytic accounts compare vocal virtuosity with aerial acrobatics, the earliest account I found dates from 1850 and invokes aeronautics and ballooning. Fromental Halévy remarks in *La Revue et Gazette musicale* on 28 July 1850 that 'the third act opens with a brilliant aria, admirably performed by Félix-Miolan. Have you not noticed that her name, Félix, suggests happiness? Félix's voice is a high soprano: she likes to soar at the top of the musical scale, and, like an intrepid aeronaut, takes pleasure in being sky-high. Rounds of applause follow such moments', as quoted by Sean M. Parr, 'Caroline Carvalho and nineteenth-century coloratura', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 23, 1/2 (2011), 83-117, (p. 89).

[79] Helga Stipa Madland, *Image and text : J.M.R. Lenz* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994).

are in the midst of the inevitable frustration of the central character and situation. Madland's reading is upheld in Zimmermann's voice lines for Marie as her vocalisations are erratic and grasping articulations that Ian Pace has described as 'fearsome vocal writing'.[80] While Marie's vocalic actions certainly require muscular endurance, I caution against the the invocation of the phrase 'vocal acrobatics' as it appears at odds with the physical enactment and representation of Marie cast as an aerialist.

The analytic device of comparing virtuosic coloratura to acrobatic flight has been used to explain varied musico-dramatic moments from intense, dizzyingly intoxicating moments of love and lust to the untethered mind of a woman teetering at the precipice of her mental limits. In Susan McClary's landmark feminist work *Feminine Endings: music, gender, & sexuality,* Lucia di Lammermoor's vocal ascent into madness signals that she has left 'the mundane world of social convention behind as she performs high-wire, nonverbal acrobatics that challenge the very limits of human ability'.[81] Madness, eroticism, and freedom are entangled within the suspended voice teetering at the edge of the void, refusing to be contained. As McClary states, it is not the 'text' that communicates this entanglement, it is in the heroine's music in which 'she spills out in the only direction available: upward into coloratura delirium'.[82] In McClary's metaphoric use of acrobatic funambulism, there is a link to escaping reality and being freed from societal and mental states of being from her explicit invocation of circus actions. She is not alone in this musicological linking. Mary Ann Smart rightly questions Catherine Clément's assertion that the coloratura passages in Lucia's infamous mad scene are understood as an emancipatory 'leap into space'.[83] Smart states that this analytic inquiry

[80] Ian Pace, ''Die Soldaten' in London', *Tempo*, 200 (1997), 41-42, (p. 41).

[81] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings*: *music, gender, & sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

[82] Ibid., p. 92.

[83] Mary Ann Smart, *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 124-125.

'assumes that there is a space for Lucia to leap into, that her musical excesses exist in a void' and raises attention to the musical fact that the space in which she ascends is limited by operatic forms.[84] However, Smart only goes on to interrogate the formal compositional structures inherent in the traditions of Italian opera, and does not dive further into the symbolic comparison of voice ascension into harmonic space to the physical circus act of bodily ascension into an atmospheric space.

If our vocalic escapes into musical space are attached to our socio-political and cultural realties, then our corporeal escapes into stratospheric and topological domains are also attached and grounded in our pervasive societal structures. We risk abandoning a nuanced appraisal of the dramatic vocal line by assuming acrobatic space is neutral and that its circus identification does not add any analytic depth in its invocation. Invoking aerial acrobatics as a musico-dramatic interpretive metaphor becomes highly questionable, and increasingly tenuous, when investigating the transnational historic reception and reproduction of female aeriality.[85] Furthermore, as evidenced in the brief discussion of musicological discourse invoking this symbolism, applications of this analytic device often do not take into account the complex historical accounts of female circus aeriality, and, thus only offer a reductive and simplistic characterisation of emancipation though feminine vocalisation. Integral to this discussion of Zimmermann's operatic adaptation of Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz's *Die Soldaten* is how the musicological device of 'vocal acrobatics' has been utilised to understand compositional and dramatic expressions of female emancipation. Rather than apply an analytic assertion that Marie's aerial actions indicate an emancipatory attempt

[84] Ibid., pp. 124-125.

[85] Of all the researchers working in the burgeoning field of circus studies, Peta Tait has conducted several inquiries into the public perception and imagination of the male aerialist as a mythic superhero and, in the twentieth century, as an action star. For her work in this area, see —'Blondin conquers nature and invents the circus celebrity', *Early Popular Visual Culture,* 11:3 (2013), 205-217; —'Circus Performers as Action Hero: Codona and Leitzel', in *The Many Worlds of Circus*, ed. Robert Sugarman (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 37-45; and —*Circus Bodies: Cultural identity in aerial performance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005). See also Paul Bouissac, 'The staging of actions: heroes, antiheroes and animal actors' in *The Routledge Circus Studies Reader*, eds. Peta Tait and Katie Lavers (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 37-49.

to escape her situational fate, I investigate how the physical enactment of an operatic heroine as a funambulist impacts a musico-dramatic interpretation of a performance of Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten.*

***Understanding Marie as funambulist: Marie's futile desire physicalised***

J.M.R. Lenz is accepted as an early forerunner for the invention of the modern antihero. The *Sturm und Drang* writer's characters are painstakingly and brutally realistic, in action, gesture, language, and moral instability in the face of daily struggles. Helga Stipa Madland, arguably a driving force in bringing Lenzian scholarship to an English-speaking audience, suggests that 'critics' supposedly aesthetic evaluations were affected by their image of a moral character of a specific kind of hero, a hero not present in *Die Hofmeister* and *Die Soldaten*'.[86]

Audience members of Lenz's *Die Soldaten,* or Zimmermann's operatic adaptation derived from Lenz's drama, are denied the slightest inclination that the conclusion will reveal a tidy and happy ending for Marie. Madland contends that Marie's portrayal, neither morally nor situationally redeemable, was startling to Lenz's contemporaries and critics, because Marie was not presented at a 'distance' or as an 'aristocratic, exotic' person, but that she was immediately recognisable as a common woman.[87]

The character of Marie is central to Bernd Alois Zimmermann's operatic adaptation of *Die Soldaten.* Marie, in Lenz's drama and in Zimmermann's opera, is continually subjected to unyieldingly cruel situations. There is no dramatic catharsis for the spectator as she un-heroically succumbs to each of her situational predicaments. She is sexually and verbally accosted by the male

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[86] Helga Stipa Madland, *Image and text : J.M.R. Lenz* (Amsterdam: Rodopi: 1994), p. 66.

[87] Ibid., p. 63.

characters, in particular Desportes, throughout the duration of the opera text. Each of her attempts to alter her situation is thwarted, resulting in a compendium of frustrating scenes that deny the audience even an infinitesimal shred of hope. There is no illusion that she is an aspirational figure. She could be anyone. Her situation could happen to anyone. There is no skill or knowledge that can redeem her from her situation and enable her to escape her impending fate.

Marie's identification as a funambulist does not invoke the brilliant assuredness of a performer executing daring and dazzling feats for adoring crowds as they collectively await a unifying victory. This perilous depiction, one foot in front of the other, rejecting feminine choreographic ambulations involving two-steps, leaps, and acrobatic plunges and other heroic choreographic actions, represents the realistic internal and external struggles Marie experiences throughout the opera. It is this rejection of the funambulist's symbolic identification as a heroine evading gravitational confines that identifies Marie in this production as an everyday person controlled by external forces, and aligns her actions to Lenz's anti-Aristotelian dramatic ideals. The attainment of acrobatic release into the atmosphere is eternally elusive. I argue that Marie's characterisation as a funambulist in the Salzburg Festival production remains true to Lenzian dramatic principles evident in his *komödie*: Marie is unbearably human. Witnessing Marie's unfolding situation is at odds with both the eighteenth century dramatic conventions of providing a heroic, redemptive and cathartic arc, and the prevailing cathartic release in witnessing an aerialist successfully conquer atmospheric heights. My use of catharsis is in the dramatic sense derived from J.M.R. Lenz's dramatic principles, by which the playwright sought to purposefully frustrate and increase spectatorial anxieties that aimed to disillusion and disrupt society's collective belief in societal class structures.[88] This dramatic

[88] For further information on anti-Aristotelean ideas in both Lenz's dramatic techniques and theoretical writing, and J.MR. Lenz's beliefs on dramatic catharsis, see Alan C. Leidner and Helga Stipa Madland, *Space to act : the theater of J.M.R. Lenz* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1993); Helga Stipa Madland, *Non-Aristotelian Drama in Eighteenth Century Germany and Its Modernity: J.M.R. Lenz,* (Oxford: Peter Lang Ltd., 1982), p.197; Helga Stipa Madland, *Image and text:J.M.R. Lenz* (Amsterdam: Rodopi: 1994); Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz, *Dramatischer Nachlass von J.M.R. Lenz* [microform] (Frankfurt: Rütten & Loening, 1884); and Brigitta O'Regan, *Self and existence: J.M.R. Lenz's subjective point of view* (New York: P. Lang, 1997).

understanding of catharsis is furthered and complicated by how the ideological, and indeed emotional, concept of catharsis has shaped circus dramaturgy. For the circus spectator, catharsis is achieved through the unification of the crowd in witnessing an act come to a successful conclusion, which includes an aerialist's ability to conquer seemingly fatalistic situations.[89] As Marie slowly traverses the high wire during the Intermezzo, the spectatorial perception is that she is fragile and, unmistakably, common.

There is no exultant moment of an awe-inspiring aerial trick to bring the act towards a spectacular conclusion that enables the audience to sigh in collective relief and unified adoration that the aerialist has once again safely executed the impossible. The veneer of self-fulfilment and ability to transcend class structures through the enactment of a series of values and demands is revealed to be an illusion, a false hope.

According to Peta Tait, illusion is the central identifying element of the symbolic meaning of bodily freedom in aerial acts:

> The aerialist signifies how a material body is transposed into a non-material condition whereby categories of gender which mark the material body can be erased and resignified. This is not a performance of the material freedom of physical bodies but, rather, the illusion of freedoms. It is bordering on Žižek's "fantasy-construction," which supports reality by alluding to the desire for a free fall from social categories… The flier momentarily acts out the desire of physical bodies to defy the gravity of social categories, before retuning to familiar territory when he or she halts the free fall and reinstates gender identity and the material order of bodies. Physical bodies in circus are viewed with the spectator's perception of physical freedoms which extend beyond social categories.[90]

While I agree with Tait's assertion that aerial fliers 'act out the desire' to transcend societal classifications and restrictions, it is the generalisation that all classifications of 'the material order of

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[89] For more on circus dramaturgy and catharsis, see Bauke Lievens, 'Dramaturgy: From Aristotle to Contemporary Circus', *Disturbis*, < http://www.disturbis.esteticauab.org/Disturbis567/Bauke.html> [accessed 5 March 2021].

[90] Peta Tait, 'Feminine Free Fall: A Fantasy of Freedom', *Theatre Journal*, 48, 1 (1996), 27-34, (pp. 33-34).

bodies' are momentarily detached from the aerialist and only become reattached once they return to the ground with which I particularly disagree.[91] It denies how the aerial performer has been historically perceived in the cultural reception and reproduction of circus aerialists, because any perspective of an aerial performer is from the 'spectator's perception'; what is signified as aspirational, cathartic, and exemplary of 'physical freedoms' is dictated by the culture in it which it is produced and consumed.[92] The social and cultural categorisations cannot be reinstated, to borrow Tait's terminology, upon the flier's return to the ground, because they were never erased or absent from the physicalised act or the spectatorial perception of the performance. Any projection of societal declassification is a carefully constructed illusion. This illusion or 'fantasy-construction', to reference Tait's use of Slavoj Žižek's theories, is never free from the social categories in which it projects emancipation, regardless of the aerialist's untethered revolutions towards the sky.

Once the painstakingly applied illusionary veneer of the aerial acrobat, which is both based in and perpetuates reality in the air, is identified and revealed from its connections to a specifically constructed ideation, all that remains of this signification projecting bodily freedom is the *futile action of desire* to transcend systemic societal restrictions. Katrina Carter, similar in my disavow of the symbolism of heroic acrobatic flight, replaces this cultural construction with the declaration that any 'canonical aerial actions therefore perpetuate the aesthetic of and potential for corporeal damage'.[93] For Carter, an aerialist's submission to the risk of bodily harm is firmly rooted in the social, political, and biological affirmations of reality, and, by executing aerial actions, the aerialist

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[91] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

[92] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

[93] Katrina Carter, *Suspending Conventions: How 'disabled aerialists' are challenging aesthetic and methodological practice es in 21st Century aerial(ism)',* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Royal Holloway University of London, 2015), pp. 86-89. This is a decidedly different concept to Steven Connor's assertion that one 'must risk death precisely in order to attain the condition of being beyond or outside life while still in its midst', See Steven Connor, 'Man is a Rope', in *High Wire,* ed. Catherine Yass (London: Artangel and Glasgow International Festival of Contemporary Visual Art, 2008). For Connor, submission to corporeal damage is representative of an emancipation in limbo, not quite free yet not quite firmly tethered.

willingly submits to the realities projected upon them. Accepting Carter's assessment, then the physicalised action and presence of a high-wire act can be read as encapsulating the performer's willingness to succumb to the potential, and eventual, corporeal damage inherent in their inability to attain their desire. It also becomes a physical and visual acknowledgement that any cultural prescriptions that are created on the ground also exist in the aerial realm. The unwillingness to participate in the construction and perpetuation of this fantasy and illusion, knowing that what is prescribed on the ground follows the aerialist up into their flight, invalidates one from being an Aristotelian hero, and instead, aligns them within the dramatic principles of a Lenzian anti-hero.

***Reality ascends: reframing the symbol of feminine aerial emancipation***

This next section explores how the historic arc of feminine autonomy and structural sexual inequality is mirrored in the treatment, depiction, and performance practices of female aerialists throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[94] Female aerialists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were expected to maintain gendered performance practices. Prevailing societal standards regarding morality, sexuality, and feminine guiles were transferred from the street to the tight-rope, regulating the (in)appropriateness of a flash of toned thigh, arched back, or flexed bicep. They received harsh moral criticisms for their acrobatic skills and career choices that their male aerialist counterparts often avoided. Due to the spatial propinquity of their audiences, the female slack-rope and tight-rope walker was subjected to insinuations that she lacked moral virtues and sexual proprietary from the decision to publicly project her figure in 'indelicate positions' for male spectatorial pleasure.[95]

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[94] Brenda Assael, *The Circus and Victorian Society* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005). See also Helen Stoddart, *Rings of Desire: Circus history and representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

[95] Brenda Assael, *The Circus and Victorian Society,* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), p. 121. There was an assumed acknowledgement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that 'male enjoyment meant female vice' and that any public performance of female aeriality was intended and directed towards 'men's eyes only', p. 121.

The startling contrast between the perception and reception of female versus male aerialists—including equilibrists and funambulists—challenges the enduring heroic symbolic myth's assertion that to reach physical heights translated into reaching, surpassing, and escaping societal and gender constraints. In the nineteenth century, a male tightrope walker's reputation was built on the combination of accruing financial successes and exhibiting the mental fortitude to ensure his corporeal safety. His mental acuity was only called into question if a *daredevil* act did not go as planned and ended in either personal injury or death. If he was successful, then he was believed to not only conquer his physical limitations, but also the physical locations and societal structures in which he performed his acts. This relation reached a metaphorical peak with the journalistic appearance in the description of a divorce case settlement, in which the man had to pay a large sum of money thus thrusting the man into 'Blondinian peril' in 1863.[96] Referring to the international celebrity funambulist Charles Blondin, famous for his captivating acts crossing Niagara Falls, this phrase references the increasing precariousness and danger the Frenchman attempted in his successive acts to maintain and exceed his previous financial successes. This comparison was routinely advertised in connection with Blondin's acts, including this call to young men in *The New York Times* that aspired to alter their financial prospects: 'Is there a clod-hopper or a rail-splitter in the country, endowed with mere physical strength, who, if he had the requisite boldness and skill, would not become a politician or a tight-rope dancer, without delay, if he thought he could "better his condition" by the change?'[97]

[96] Anonymous. 'Untitled Correspondence from London 7 November 1863', *The New York Times* (21 November 1863), 4. The first time I have found this phrase utilised is in reference to the divorce proceedings of Lord Palmerston, the British Prime Minister from 1855 to 1858 and 1859 to 1865. Lord Palmerston was required to pay £35,000 'damages for ruined virtue and domestic peace' in the *New York Times* on 21 November 1863, with original correspondence from London on 7 November 1863. With inflation, this amounts to approximately £4,500,000 in February 2021.

[97] Anonymous, 'Blondin at Jones' Wood', *The New York Times* (29 September 1860), 8.

In addition to the aforementioned journalistic descriptions, male equilibrists were lauded as *intrepid*, *extraordinary,* and *courageous*.[98] Of the attributes bestowed upon male rope-walkers during this period, none was as pervasive and indelible in the public's imagination as *daring*. The term became synonymous with the inventor of the leotard Jules Leótard (1838-1870). He became a celebrated figure in the London music hall scene in the mid-nineteenth century, both from his pioneering trapeze performances and as a pop cultural reference for charming, masculine seduction in aerial circus arts. His first London performance at the Alhambra Theatre inspired the hit song *Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze.*[99] Much like Blondin, Leótard's fame took on metaphoric proportions, and references to him in cultural and political discussions often represented one's ability to conquer not only physical limitations and unbelievable feats, but also the ability to conquer geographic localities and socio-political systems. The most notable political cartoon to invoke this description was drawn by cartoonist Vaughn Shoemaker and appeared in Chicago's *The Daily News* in 1941 (Appendix B, 2.3). The cartoon depicts Adolf Hitler attempting to conquer a series of suspended trapeze bars as if setting out to conquer Europe as Jules Leótard had done 'with the greatest of ease' on the flying trapeze, much to the horror and dismay of the Allied forces shown as audience members.[100]

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[98] Anonymous, 'Blondin at Niagara', *The New York Times* (9 June 1860), 8.

[99] Lyrics written and performed by George Leybourne (1842-1884), composed by Gaston Lyle and arranged by Alfred Lee. The song's popularity continued well into the twentieth century, and was notably featured in the Fleischer Studios' 1934 Popeye the Sailor cartoon 'The Man on the Flying Trapeze', in which Popeye must save Olive Oyl from the masculine charms of a trapeze aerialist modelled and caricatured after Leótard. The themes of the 1934 short were repurposed, without the song, in the 1945 short *Tops in the Big Top*. The song was also featured in the Paramount Studios' 1947 *The Circus Comes to Clown*, along with explicitly racist overtones, and then again in the 1954 United Productions of America short theatrical cartoon *The Man on the Flying Trapeze*, the latter of which will be discussed at length later in the chapter.

[100] The Ohio State University, The Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum, NC1429 .S55, Vaughn Shoemaker, *With the Greatest of Ease?*, 1940. Acrobatic flight became symbolically synonymous with one's ability to evade political and societal structures. This symbolic metaphor for political and militaristic manoeuvres was quite popular in the twentieth century. For example, see John Collins' cartoon entitled *The Daring young Man on the Flying Trapeze,* which depicts a political leap from Civil Service on one trapeze bar to a Cabinet Post on the next., McCord Stewart Museum, M965.199.7335, John Collins, *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*, circa 1953.

Yet if one were to lose his life in risking financial success or geographic conquests, the male equilibrist and aerialist was depicted as lacking intellectual wisdom and sound decision-making skills. One anonymous commentator in *The New York Times* advises Monsieur Blondin to learn from the 'foolishness' of one of his contemporaries, Sam Patch, who had leapt to his death while attempting a cross over the Genesee Falls in Rochester, N.Y., and states that 'if he [Blondin] wishes to maintain his reputation, do not let him lose his life'.[101] Mortality and financial ruin, not moral impropriety, are at stake for the male aerialist.

In stark contrast, the description of a female tight-rope walker by Hugues Le Roux and Jules Garnier, in *Acrobats and Mountebanks,* implies a direct correlation between the prettiness of a female aerialist's visage and form to her moral reputation and her acrobatic determination:

> A proverb is current behind the scenes of the circus, to the effect that love destroys the centre of gravity in tight-rope dances, and as a rule equilibrists—that is to say the true artists, not the pretty girls who use the cord as a springing-board—might rank with the Roman vestals. Their reputation is their fortune, and they are carefully guarded by their parents. It is not only a question of averting the danger of maternity, which ends the artistic career of an equilibrist. No risk must be encountered of anything that could damage the artist's health; and, therefore, those who are particular on these points can enjoy the performance of an equilibrist without any uneasiness about her private life.[102]

According to Le Roux and Garnier, a female circus performer's fortune is not financial, but, at this time, her reputation in society was dependent on her physical presentation in performance and her carefully constructed illusion of remaining morally pure in accordance with societal norms. Regardless of the acrobat's precise and virtuosic attention to 'the life-and-death struggle on the wire', it was impossible for female aerialists to escape the moral equivalency of their 'physical risk

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[101] Anonymous, 'Monsieur Blondin's Backers', *The New York Times* (4 July 1859), 4.

[102] Hugues Le Roux and Jules Garnier, *Acrobats and Mountebanks,* trans. A.P. Morton (London: Chapman and Hall, LTD., 1890), p. 210.

taking' to sexual and moral risk-taking.[103] The spatial orientations and perspectives of the artist in relation to her spectators shapes how an act is perceived by audience members and, especially poignant to nineteenth-century aerialists, how a female performer's morality is perceived by society as a whole.

This association only grew in the transnational cultural imagination as female acts of the twentieth-century were formulated and constructed to present specific illusions that appealed directly to particular subsets of society.[104] Regardless of these choreographic and situational presentations, the spatial relationships created through a female aerialist and funambulist were central in the formation of society's moral view of female circus artists. Societal beliefs equated the feminine act of physical risk-taking inherent in acrobatic performances that highlighted one's sex to being sexually promiscuous and apt to gamble with one's moral representation.[105] As such, a responsibility to counteract their daring stunts with performances of overt femininity that aligned with a white, patriarchal definition of the feminine was hoisted upon many American female aerialists in the early twentieth century.

A persistent illusion of pure beauty and domesticity then became part of the circus performance in the big top, the space beyond the apparatus, and in the aerialist's everyday life, as evidenced in an article advertising the upcoming 1927 appearance of the Ringling Brothers-Barnum & Bailey circus. In the write-up by an anonymous correspondent, the reader is introduced to the many

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[103] See Brenda Assael, *The Circus and Victorian Society* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), p. 135.

[104] Helen Stoddart, *Rings of Desire: Circus history and representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 174.

[105] Female aerialists were not the only professional artists of this time to conscientiously refine performances and their careers according to the public's perception of their perceived gendered (im)morality. Like female circus artists, female opera singers were acutely aware of how their repertoire selections and performance venues reflected upon their moral reputation. Tili Boon observes that 'the term "fille d'opéra" carried a connotation that "comédienne" did not, for the lyric stage, which appealed to the spectators' senses both aurally and visually, was thought to pose a greater threat to their morals than did the spoken theater', Tili Boon, 'Women Performing Music: Staging a Social Protest', *Women in French Studies,* 8 (2000), 40-54.

talented and skilled women who will be featured in that year's line-up, and thrusts the importance of a certain visual appearance, alongside technical skill, of the beautiful circus woman: 'For skill is what the circus demands—skill at tumbling, trapeze flying, horsewomanship, or even skill at clowning, just as among the animals it demands either rarity or intelligence. Nevertheless, the circus has its beauties, and they are no faint stars'.[106]

Apart from the assurance of their moral fortitude by making direct references to their respective husbands, attention is paid to specific physical features that demarcate how they each represent an aspect of a westernised, racialised ideal form of white femininity.[107] As Nichole R. Philips demonstrates, societal construction and representations of American exceptionalism were and are racially impacted.[108] For example Jennie Rooney with her 'big blue eyes, which achieve a dissolving sort of glance without the use of accentuating mascara' to confirmation of Lillian Leitzel's advertised 'dainty', petite stature as 'no exaggeration'.[109] These representations instil an image that in order for the female circus star to maintain her notoriety as an aspirational figure, emblematic of American exceptionalism, then she must retain a particular image of feminine idealism that the audience members may admire and aspire to replicate in their everyday lives. This concocted and perfected image existed on the ground and in the air.

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[106] Anonymous, 'Circus Combines Beauty and Beast', *The New York Times* (29 April 1927), 25.

[107] Angie G. Liljequist, 'Soft, glossy tresses': White women's hair and the late-and-post-World War II American domestic ideal', *Critical Studies in Fashion &* Beauty, 8, 2 (2017), 185-218.

[108] Nichole Renée Phillips, *Patriotism black and white: the colour of American exceptionalism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018).

[109] Anonymous, 'Circus Combines Beauty and Beast', *The New York Times*, 29 April 1927, 25. Jennie Rooney's advertisements and promotional materials were notoriously focused on her feminine appearance and her idealised marriage. The Hartford Courant dedicated an entire full-page spread in the 3 June 1923 paper to discussing her marriage, and how she is able to remain the woman of the household while performing and traveling with the circus. In the article, Jennie insists that 'you see, a circus girl is the most rigidly chaperoned of any girl of the present day. She isn't left free to go and come as she pleases, the way other girls are', p. 25. My initial research on American female circus artists and their acts was presented in a public lecture entitled 'The Greatest Show on Earth' at the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, UK on 29 June 2018.

One such aspirational female circus identity rose to American notoriety in the emblematic physical form of a woman ascending the ladder to defy gravity on the tight-rope, rings, and trapeze. 'Pretty' Bird Millman O'Day, Colorado-born Jennadean Engleman (1890-1940), clad in flowing skirts and utilising delicate parasols to assist her balance, danced her way along the tight-wire to physically embody early twentieth-century American nationalism.[110] Her act projected the quintessential American Dream that each person could defy their personal odds and soar through the air untethered by social and political classes. Upon retrospective inspection, her choreographic acts, capitalising on an interplay between innocuous white patriarchal femininity and patriotism, reveal and reinforce the racial contradictions inherent in the ability to fulfil the aspirational belief that race and class are not barriers in pursuing the American Dream.

While her routines relied on the popular conventions in feminine tight-rope acts of the time—graceful waltzes and posture-enhancing dances *en pointe*—Millman was noted for interspersing these dances with aspects of popular Black cultural dances, including the cakewalk. The *Pittsburgh Press* published a racist comment when describing the figures Millman's act as 'eccentric and grotesque yet graceful', which reflects how systemic racism in the United States impacted the creation and reception of American circus acts, and how Millman's performances and persona were constructed to perpetuate an ideal that operated within white nationalism.[111] Accepting Danielle Robinson's analysis of white appropriation of Black dancing in the early twentieth century, Millman's inclusion of the cakewalk 'visually' reads as 'highlight(ing) the whiteness of the dancer

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[110] Anonymous, 'Pretty Bird Millman Does Cake Walk on Wire', *The Pittsburgh Press* (4 September 1910), p. 3. Bird Millman retired in 1923. Her high-wire act was replaced with 'the Julian Eltinge of the Wire' Berta Beeson, born Herbert Beeson (1899-1969). Beeson was one of the most famous drag circus acts of the era, in addition to Vander Clyde's Barbette. Beeson's moniker references William Julian Dalton's prominent female impersonation act of the era.

[111] Anonymous, 'Pretty Bird Millman Does Cake Walk on Wire', *The Pittsburgh Press* (4 September 1910), p. 3.

and the blackness of the dancing' and presents 'an illustration of white mastery of black dancing and, by extension, a white mastery over black people and culture'.[112]

This reading, coupled with Millman's active involvement as the inaugural secretary to the 1914 Professional Aid Society to American Girl Circus Performers and her politicised performance to raise war bonds in New York City accompanied by 'martial airs' problematises her perfected veneer of 'youth, happiness, good health and good humor' [sic], and shows how her illusionary spectatorial appeal operates, (un)intentionally, within feminine ideals set out in the white nationalist beliefs of the era.[113] Even while projecting a specific illusion of cathartic freedom, as she ascends the ladder to step onto the high-wire, so too do the nationalistic, racialised, and gendered ideals that shape and regulate how her death-defying performances are perceived by society. Her illusionary and symbolic figure, informed by and perfected to the societal and political associations of white nationalism, confirms that the fantastic illusion of the aerialist attempting to inspire audiences into a cathartic escape of the world beyond the circus tent is a product of their reality, and that this

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[112] Danielle Robinson, *Modern Moves: Dancing Race during the Ragtime and Jazz Eras*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). In relation to the intersectional discussion on gender and race in circus history and performance, Micah Childress has presented important historical information on African American employment in circuses and the racism Black circus performers experienced on the road in America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See Micah Childress, 'Life Beyond the Big Top: African American and Female Circusfolk, 1860-1920', *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progress Era*, 15 (2016), 176-179. Also see, Sara M. Hughes, 'Walking the tightrope between racial stereotypes and respectability: images of African American and Native American artists in the golden age of circus', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 15, 3 (2017), 315-333; and Matthew McMahan, The Robert A. Schanke Honorable Mention Essay, MATC 2019, 'Projections of Race at the Nouveau Cirque: The Clown Acts of Foottit and Chocolat', *Theatre History Studies*, 39 (2020), 225-235.

[113] Anonymous. 'Circus Girls to War on Foreign Invasion', *The New York Times* (12 April 1914), 9. The notice of the establishment of the PAS appeared in the *New York Times* with a decidedly anti-immigrant, nationalist position written in the title and byline: 'CIRCUS GIRLS TO WAR ON FOREIGN INVASION…BETTER THAN CHORUS WORK Says Miss Millman, Promoter of the New Society—English Rider Asserts Our Women Lack Nerve. One performer present stated, 'All American girls will be stimulated, I am sure, if word goes forth of the supremacy attained and maintained by the girls of other countries. Why, last season, although 250 girls had their quarters there, the English language was almost never heard in our dressing room at Madison Square Garden', p. 9. My attempts to locate further documentation or reference to the continuation of the society have not been successful and continue. Given the political events in the United States of America since the election of President Donald Trump, it is imperative that circus studies, and in particular, American circus studies, thoroughly researches and acknowledges the impact of white nationalism in our history. This chapter, with its intentional calling out of systemic racism and antisemitism in female aerial acts in the twentieth century is not enough, and we as a collective academic field need to continue this work. Circus practice as research has begun to tackle this through online events highlighting how modern circus artists are responding to racism in the field, for example see *Color in Centre Ring: Cultivating Inclusivity in Circus,* Circus + Its Others Digital Panel*, 14 November 2020;* and *People of Color in Contemporary Circus*, Gibney Dance, 6 November 2019. For a historic analysis situated at the intersection of race, fine arts, and circus reception, see Marilyn R. Brown, "Miss La La's" Teeth: Reflections on Degas and "Race", *The Art Bulletin,* 89, 4, (2007), 738-765.

illusionary metaphor is impossible since the aerialist is never detached from its identity predicated on its socio-political context.

The enduring appeal and national popularity of the circus and its performers makes it a natural vehicle for storytelling across all mediums beyond the big top. Theatrical and cinematic American representations of circus performers and spaces during this period range from a psychoanalytical application in Kurt Weill's *Lady in the Dark* (1940) to the economic appropriation of circus spectacularity in *The Great Ziegfeld* (1936).[114] Circus stars and circus settings appeared in a variety of entertainments, including Emmerich Kálmán's mixed identity operetta caper *Die Zirkusprinzessin* (1926)*,* which drew from an amalgamation of Viennese operetta traditions including mistaken identity, class reversals, and waltz spectacles.[115]

In contrast, the portrayal of the American female aerialist with her pristine packaging of white femininity and physical precision fuelled through the refinement of Hollywood glamour became an international vehicle for exploring and deconstructing the illusion and myth of American idealism and the country's continued racism that directly contradicted the American Dream. The location of the circus's role as a symbol in the creation, dissemination, and embodiment of this myth, given J. Emmett Winn's assessment of the cinematic involvement in 'aiding people in understanding their place in the conflicting myths of a classless American society and the American Dream of upward mobility', is evident in the cooption of the white female American aerialist in the 1936 Grigorii

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[114] A recurring theme is the challenge that the theatrical delights of the circus on the broadway stage is that it out-circuses the circus, a particular problem for the musical *Jumbo. Jumbo*, produced by Billy Rose with music and lyrics by Rodgers and Hart, put the spectacle of the circus centre stage. Perhaps too central for many of its collaborators as many opined that the substance of the book and music were secondary to the scenes featuring circus skills and acts. Rodgers brought up a question regarding circus scenes in musicals and the perceived expectation, and most often then not, actualisation of large in scale.The musical became the film with Billy Rose's Jumbo in 1962.

[115] I have researched this overlap in opera, operetta, and musical theatre history outside of this thesis. For more, please see my presentation, "Die Zirkusprinzessin  and the Transnational Cultural Imagination of the Traditional Circus Performer" at the *Gaiety, Glitz and Glamour: Reawakening the "Silver Age" of twentieth-century Operetta RMA-IMR Research Study Day,* Senate House, University of London, UK, 2017.

Alexsandrov propaganda film *Tsirk*.[116] The fictional American circus star Marion Dixon, adopting stylised packaging similar to that of Millman, seeks and finds gender and racial refuge in the USSR after receiving racist and sexist backlash in the United States upon giving birth to her Black son. Yet, even with exposing the contradictions inherent in this perfected presentation of the female American aerialist, the film relies and leans in on the accepted symbolic representation that the aerialist signifies freedom from societal restrictions by repackaging it for a radically different aspirational ideal.

Political historian Richard Taylor states that 'Soviet audiences wanted escapism, yearned for illusion, for something to escape into, but also to give meaning and value to their difficult everyday lives. That was the motivation for their willingness to be deceived, their boundless desire to be seduced.'[117] This propagandistic command to assume a perfected veneer went beyond merely political means to secure, maintain, and inspire an audience. For Jewish circus artists performing in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s, the necessity to enact the complex socio-political realities on the ground in the air was essential to their survival as over six million Jewish people were systematically killed in the Holocaust. Historian Paula Lee's archival iconographic research reveals that 'images tell a different story of performers' survival strategies' through the analysis of 'a series of headshots reveal aerialist sisters, Marion and Irma Schroder' in which they appear to be 'gradually lightening their brunette finger-wave bobs until they were white-blonde, setting off dyed brows plucked as thin as Marlene Dietrich's.'[118] These examples only represent the transformation,

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[116] Emmett Winn, *The American Dream and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (Continuum, 2013), p. 7. See also D.C. Gillespie, 'The Sounds of Music: Soundtrack and Song in Soviet Film', *Slavic Review*, 62, 3 (2003), 473-490; Majorie Hilton, 'Gender and ideological rivalry in Ninotchka and Circus: the capitalist and communist make-over', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 8:1 (2014), 2-23; Beth Holmgren, 'The Blue Angel and Blackface: Redeeming Entertainment in Aleksandrov's Circus', *The Russian* Review, 66, 1 (2007), 5-22; Alexander Prokhorov, 'Revisioning Aleksandrov's Circus: Seventy Years of the Great Family', *The Russian* Review, 66, 1, (2007), 1-4; and Rimgalia Salys, 'Art Deco Aesthetics in Grigorii Alexsandrov's 'The Circus', *The Russian Review*, 66, 1 (2007), 23-35.

[117] Richard Taylor, 'The Illusion of Happiness and the Happiness of Illusion: Grigorii Alexsandrov's 'The Circus', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 74, 4 (1996), 601-620, (p. 619).

[118] Paula Lee, 'The Circus Hitler Said He Loved', *Contingent Magazine* (19 March 2019), np.

and deterioration, of one dimension of the multi-faceted presentation and representation of female aeriality that has become embedded as a symbol in the creation and dissemination of transnational cultural memories and metaphors. They reveal, at times comically and at other times devastatingly and horrifyingly so, that the fantasy of the aerialist above their apparatus is still defined by and tethered to the realities of the society below.

While a popular vehicle for live action melodrama, slap stick comedy, and political propaganda, the circus was prominently featured in American mid-century theatrical short cartoons.[119] The oft-overlooked 1954 United Productions of America theatrical cartoon *The Man on the Flying Trapeze* is an animated adaptation of Gaston Lyle's nineteenth-century music hall hit.[120] The short depicts the stratospheric rise of a female circus aerialist, Fifi, from demure circus audience member on the arm of her beau Wesley to glamorous circus aerialist, by way of advantageous sexual couplings from star aerialist Alonzo to the unnamed circus manager.[121] Within a seven-minute runtime, the cartoon also makes historic references to the popularity of female aerialists superseding male aerialists, the association of glamorous female aerialists with sexual risk-takers for the sake of monetary and societal gain, the use of nationalism in the creation and performance of aerial circus

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[119] For more information on the global integration of live action representations of circus tropes and performers, see Helen Stoddart, 'The Circus and Early Cinema: Gravity, Narrative, and Machines', *Studies in Popular Culture*, 38, 1 (2015), 1-17.

[120] The American theatrical release of the cartoon short was on 8 April 1954. The short, which was released five years after UPA was acquired by Columbia Pictures, has been largely forgotten and overshadowed by the company's Oscar-nominated outputs and the Mr. Magoo cartoons. According to records made available from Adam Abraham's extensive research on UPA, the creative team began work on the cartoon prior to *Ballet-Oop*, but was released after the balletic parody of the animation process. For more information on the company's history, see Adam Abraham, *When Magoo Flew: The Rise and Fall of Animation Studio UPA,* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2012). Mention and information of *The Man on the Flying Trapeze* is absent from the otherwise thorough and comprehensive book. Limited information on the cartoon is found on Abraham's website accompaniment <whenmagooflew.com> .The cartoon is featured on the *UPA: The Jolly Frolics Collection DVD* set, digitally restored and released by Turner Classic Movies in 2012. Original production credits: story adaptation (from the song *The Man on the Flying Trapeze*) by Bill Scott and Fred Grable; directed by Ted Parmelee; assistant directed by Ray Thursby; animation by Pat Matthews and Casey Oniaitis; production management by Herbert Klynn; design and color by Paul Julian; music by Lou Maury; and voice work by Jack Mather.

[121] Popular and classical music played an influential role in the creation and popularity of mid-century American cartoons. For further information, including detailed analysis on opera and cartoons, see Daniel Goldmark, *Tunes for 'Toons*: *Music and the Hollywood Cartoon* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005); and Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer, and Richard Leppert, *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).

acts, and the indelible impact of advertisements on the public imagination of a circus performer's identity.

The animated adaptation depicts Fifi's stratospheric rise Fifi's aerial career taking flight is pictorially communicated through three performances and their accompanying advertisements, which reflect historically-accurate gender representations and illusionary ideals of star aerialists.[122] Prior to running away with the circus, she first sees Alonzo's solo bill emblazoned with *The Great Alonzo Death-Defying Daredevil of the Canvas Top!* accompanied by an image of him deftly holding onto a trapeze bar with one, muscly-defined arm. Fifi's first appearance on an advertisement features Alonzo as she is relegated to a corner position on the far right as she is simply titled *Mlle. Fifi*. Her second appearance sees her taking up more space on the billboard and her name being elongated to the full *Mademoiselle Fifi;* however, her image is still overshadowed by Alonzo as his body supersedes hers. Finally, in the last advertisement, Fifi receives top bill and the *Great* describing Alonzo is crossed out and replaced with *The Gorgeous* in script as Fifi's figure takes precedence over Alonzo's body, now being hidden by her overtly sexualised form. A significant departure from Lyle's original song occurs in the final verse which highlights the transformation of illusionary ideals female aerialists must uphold to maintain the symbolic form projecting the myth of acrobatic freedom:

> He taught her gymnastics and dress'd her in tights,
> To help him to live at his ease,
> And made her assume a masculine name,
> And now she goes on the trapeze.
> She floats thro' the air with the greatest of ease,
> You'd think her a man on the flying trapeze,
> She does all the work, while he takes his ease,

[122] Circus advertisements and playbills have a fascinating history with serving as both a public record of specific moves and of cultural presentations of the performers. How the performer was posed and displayed on the poster heightened the expectation of what the audience member was going to witness, from how the performer would conduct themselves or by the specific acts that they would perform.

And that's what's become of my love.[123]

Fifi's transformation to circus starlet in the theatrical cartoon is entirely devoid of twentieth-century masculine traits. Instead, as she eclipses Alonzo's star power, she becomes hyper-feminized and is given a glamorous makeover, which is representative of mid-century white idealisations of femininity. The makeover, like the billboard advertisements, reflects how the prevailing attitudes to femininity and morality informed and impacted female aeriality, both on the ground and in aerial flights. Her initial form-fitting and modest costume that covers her hips, shoulders, and chest is successively replaced by a revealing low-cut, strapless leotard accompanied with laces on her acrobatic shoes. As she arranges her next ascension in the circus realm in her final act, by setting Alonzo up for a dramatic fall, she seductively bends over placing emphasis on her tightly cinched waist and derriere. Her exaggerated carriage is clearly linked to her sexual proclivities, and in this glamorous portrayal, her *desire* to not conform to feminine standards is communicated through a perfected excess of femininity that straddles the line between assertive glamour and overt sexuality.

Kate Holmes posits that the female circus stars of the mid-twentieth century in America turned the circus into a 'glamorous space of glorification' to protect the aerialist from 'run[ning] the danger of slipping from glorification founded on transformation, transgression and excess to degradation' once they were disassociated from the big top.[124] Glamour historian Stephen Gundle insists that by donning 'the trappings of glamour' the aspirational feminine form assumes a new illusion of bodily

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[123] Gaston Lyle, *The Flying Trapeze Waltz* (New York: C.H. Ditson, 1868). In addition to those mentioned in the main text, there are many consistencies in the adaptation from the song to the cartoon. Notably Fifi's departure from her familial home is also a direct illustration of the song's fourth verse as Alonzo assists with her escape by way of rigging his trapeze by the second-story window: 'One night I as usual went to her dear home, Found there her father and mother alone, I ask'd for my love and soon they made known To my horror, that she'd run away! She'd pack'd up her box and elop'd in the night, With him with the greatest of ease, From two storys high, he had lower'd her down To the ground on his flying Trapeze!'.

[124] Kate Holmes, 'Aspirational circus glamour: rethinking the circus grotesque through female aerialists of the inter-war period', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 15:3 (2017), 299-314, (p. 311).

freedom that fantastically projects the illusion that 'give[s] everyone a chance in theory of defying the effects of age and the limitations of the physical body'.[125]

One needs only to look at advertisements in the mid-twentieth century to see Holmes' protective glamorisation and its cultural hold on female circus artists of all disciplines whether on the ground, in the air, or on horseback. A dominating star of the big top, screen, and advertising was equestrienne Dorothy Herbert (1910-1994). Challenging both feminine standards of dress and physicality, she performed dazzling and dangerous trick stunts, including her signature move the 'layback'. During this time, she perfected a series of challenging moves that earned her a national reputation for her daring skill, from jumping on a horse blindfolded with her hands tied to her signature move featured in this part of the 1940 serial film the *Mysterious Doctor Satan*. Nationally recognised, she was one of the circus stars seen on the cereal Wheaties circus box set in 1935 and in the following year was featured in a string of circus ads for Camels Cigarettes, through a revue of her famous hits, in which the dietary and digestive benefits of cigarettes invoked the high stakes routines of the stars of the day.

Aerialist Jennie Rooney also appears in the 1935 Wheaties circus set. Jennie is noted for both cloud swing and elephant riding as well as becoming famous for portraying Cinderella in Barnum's lavish spectacle.[126] Like Herbert and many of their contemporaries, Rooney had to walk a thin line between performing her daring stunts and maintaining a pristine, glamorous appearance in calculated marketing campaigns that always aligned with her performative acts. Yet, I advise against reading both realms of fantasy—and the complex combination of glamour and circus in the female form—as the successful achievement or even the plausible attainability of an emancipatory physical

[125] Stephen Gundle, *Glamour: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 4. This is consistent with the mid-century advertisements that projected and sold glamour to mass audiences across America.

[126] It was and still is common for aerialists to cross-utilise in many disciplines within a circus categorisation.

release from societal constraints. The glamorous fantasy presented in the form of the female circus aerialist was the same as before, just in a new aspirational package for a new socio-cultural context. Holmes states that ‘the allure generated by aerial movement is a transformative fantasy founded on how aerial action is perceived within the body and mind’ and protects the aerialist from her ‘otherness’; however, this perspective focuses on the physical actions of an aerialist during a performance and disregards that an aerialist comes to their performances in front of spectators after making intentional decisions on their physique, their postures, and their presentation of their image in regards to their overall act.[127] Every aspect of the performer—the tone of muscle, costumes to hide or enhance, technical and choreographic executions—is now carefully and precisely chosen to construct and define the circus performer’s individualistic physical and performative identity to project a cultural ideation of perfection and respectability.

Even with the acceptance of glamour as a transgressive force of reclaiming feminine power, the dual projections of fantasy pervading societal gendered classes is still created and communicated through a perfected veneer that is enacted during aerial flight. This glamorisation that Holmes sees that ‘protects’ the female aerialist in the 1920s and 1930s ultimately preserves the illusion of what Tait sees as ‘perfected femininity’.[128] As evidenced in the above cultural and historic survey of female aerial performances, this visceral and visual embodiment of escape in the female aerialist only becomes an aspirational site of suspended belief in reality *if* the illusionary heroic veneer is kept intact, and, even when intact, it is informed and dependent on the social and political machinations in which it is produced and received to achieve a very specific, and often times strategic, spectatorial catharsis.

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[127] Kate Holmes, ‘Aspirational circus glamour: rethinking the circus grotesque through female aerialists of the inter-war period’, *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 15:3 (2017), 299-314, (p. 301).

[128] Ibid., p. 311.

These choreographic actions displayed not only the fine line between 'the distinctions of glamour and soft pornography' that glamorous subjects teeter between, but also the reality that a woman soaring through the air carriers with her the societal constraints of reality in how she is perceived. She can never evade the 'gorgeous' or the 'the dainty'. In order to maintain her aspirational visage, she must be a perfected projection of the fantasy at all times. She could never reveal the illusion as the 'Entrepreneur of Enchantment' Barbette did in her wildly popular aerial act.

The androgynous drag circus act created by Vander Clyde consisted of a series of seductive, acrobatic acts from tight-wire to trapeze, which would finish with the male aerialist revealing himself in a defiant removal of his wig thus revealing that all of the feminine movements were as perfected a skill as the acrobatic twists he performed in the air.[129] Jacques Cocteau writes that 'the truth itself must be translated, if it is to convince us as forcibly as did the lie. That is why Barbette, the moment he has snatched off his wig, plays the part of a man'.[130] To exist in the aerial space and to fully occupy that space in its fleeting moment to escape the political and societal boundaries, the female aerialist would need to exist outside of these protective constraints and be able to reveal the illusion in the air. This was not the case for female aerialists before the end of the twentieth century, and this historic fact has influenced contemporary circus artists creatively reflect on their performance lineage.[131]

This historic survey of cultural reception of the female aerialist from the nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century confirms that not only is this circus presentation of Marie indicative of her futile desire to escape her confines, but that the desires she projects are not even her own to

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[129] Bieke Gils, 'Le Numéro Barbette: Destabilising Gender on the High Wire and the Flying Trapeze', *Sport in History* (2015), 1-21, p. 15.

[130] Anonymous, 'Vander Barbette is Dead at 68; Trapeze Artist in the Twenties', *New York Times* (10 August 1973), 34.

[131] See Ivan Kralj, *Žene & Cirkus, Women & Circus* (Mala Performerska Scena, 2011). The book documents the conference programme of the Women & Circus presented alongside the Festival Novog Cirkusa.

control. Reality always ascends with the female circus artist from the ladder to the tight-rope to any momentary moments of acrobatic flight. The presentation of Marie as funambulist can never be the symbolic ideation of the tight-rope walker evading societal constraints, because the female funambulist can never evade cultural constraints when aloft in the air or traversing great heights. By keeping her feet firmly one in front of the other in no spectacular moments of aeriality apart from the high-wire itself, she is refusing to become an illusionary embodiment for spectatorial catharsis and fantastic vehicle of man's ability to escape societal confines. There is no hope to which the spectator can ascribe with an aspirational, fantastical image of emancipation.

Does Marie ever conquer her space to find emancipatory freedom? Decidedly and, confidently, that answer is no. While Marie attempts to enact the performed actions to complete the illusion of freedom or even any semblance of freedom from her societal constraints, she is shown miserably failing. Marie demarcates an aerial space to visually succumb to the reality of her situation with no illusion of it being anything other than that. There is no illusion in her depiction as she fumbles, grasps, and struggles to make sense of the double standards and contradictions that line her navigation throughout the opera. I began this case study by challenging the symbolic invocation of vocal acrobatics to discuss feminine emancipation in opera.[132] The intermezzo between scenes I and

[132] This reframing and evaluation of the female operatic character's vocal acrobatics as being emblematic of her emancipation could prove useful in exploring possible dramaturgic interpretations of other operas, and how incorporating aerial circus actions could inspire further staged readings. For example, one might apply this current musicological investigation into the physical action of tight-rope walking to an underexploited dramatic convention in the staging of Vincenzo Bellini's canonical opera *La Sonnambula* (1831). The work was produced at the height of theatrical sleepwalking and funambulistic actions that replicated dramatic episodes of feminine voyeurism. An aerial staging of this sequence, comparative with the height and expansion of isolated space between Amina and those gazing below her would visually interpret Amina's situation. The female aerialist in this context would be staging Amina walking out into the depths unconsciously searching to fully escape and surpass the mundane reality, not unlike Marie's acceptance of her fate regardless of her frustrated actions to support otherwise. Teetering on the edges of virtuosity and human capability, the ultimate vocal balancing act representing her dire, physical and moral, situation. Jenny Lind's London performance at Covent Garden in 1848 was the first to employ a bridge structure between the mill house and wheel in the staging, imitating a funambulist-like execution of the morally and physically harrowing scene. Though, this staging and the singer's theatrics were not well-received as one reviewer had to 'protest most strongly against the superabundance of action indulged in by Mademoiselle Lind in the sleep-walking scene'. See 'Her Majesty's Theatre', *The Musical World*, 24, 17 (28 April 1849), 260-261. For further reference, see Sarah Hibberd, 'Dormez donc, mes Chers amours': Hérold's *La Somnambule* (1827) and dream phenomenon on the Parisian lyric stage', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 16, 2 (2004), 107-132; Blasé Samuel Scarnati, Jr., *Bellini's "La sonnambula"* in America and the gendered gaze' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of. Pittsburgh, 1998); and Fabrizio Della Seta, *Not without Madness: Perspectives on Opera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

II in Act II of *Die Soldaten* does not feature any vocalisations, acrobatic or otherwise, by Marie; however, through Hermanis's circus-inspired direction of the intermezzo, it does put forth an analytic foundation to negate any emancipatory symbolism in her vocal utterances throughout the opera. If the female funambulist visually and physically signifies her corporeal acceptance of the gravitational pull to willingly submit herself to her perilous fate, then what does this mean for operas in which vocal emancipation has been assigned without any consideration of its circus invocation? Are their heroines submitting themselves to their preordained, inescapable deaths rather than serving as a musicological means to escape 'seduction and death'?[133] If Marie's vocalisations are in alignment with her circus actions, which physically and technically affirm her dramatic signification within her narratological and dramaturgic importance, then this circusified staging of *Die Soldaten* calls into question any analytic invocation of vocal acrobatics as indicative of feminine emancipation.

***Conclusion: Marie's corporeal continuo into the sonic vortex: a 'sticky' situation***

This case study demonstrates how the western cultural reception of historic and traditional female tight-rope and high-wire acts provides a contextual foundation to conduct a dramaturgic examination of the opera text in performance. In doing so, I offer a challenge to musicological discourse that invokes circus metaphors as an analytic device without grounding it in the tandem study of circus arts and opera. This case study examined how the horizontally-oriented tight-rope and high-wire acts project the aerialist's (in)ability to conquer the societal terrain demarcated above and below their apparatus.  The spatial signification of the rope's rigging arrangement demarcates the spectatorial space from Marie's isolated space, however, circus rigging configurations are not always fixed in a linear arrangement from point A to point B. As circus aerialists experiment with

[133] Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women,* trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: Virago, 1988), p. 89. Catherine Clément views that female madness in opera is a means to escape 'seduction and death' and to which she says 'madwomen's voices sing the most perfect happiness', p. 89.

new postural figurations, they also experiment with the structural and spatial arrangements of their apparatus. The next case study considers how apparatus configurations dissolve a clearly defined linear boundary of aerial space and societal space through communal actions of aerial circus amid a continual reorganisation of apparatus. I also move from a cultural and literary framework to explore a philosophical understanding of aerial circus action. I contend that aerial circus actions stage ensouled spherical symmetries of societal joy in an invention on French baroque dance practices in Opéra Comique's 2017 production of Marin Marais's *Alcione* (1706).

Yet, first, this case study calls attention to the complications that arise in studying the *performative dimension* of opera in performance.[134] In 'Music—Drastic or Gnostic?', Carolyn Abbate compels us to not fear the 'stickiness' that may arise in analysing musical performances, and so I wade into this stickiness by acknowledging a musical implication of the specific actions of Marie in the performance of *Die Soldaten* that negate authorial intent and complicate musical analysis of the opera in performance.[135] The intermezzo, at which Marie performs her high-wire act, is of compositional significance.[136] Zimmermann composed and inserted this intermezzo between 1960 and 1964. Zimmermann was determined to prove that the opera in performance was consequential to the future of opera as a genre. Separating scenes one and two in Act II, this intermezzo is a prime example of the pluralistic, collage composition as the intermezzo packs in a continual stream of original and secondary references in the approximately three minute long piece.[137] The positioning of the intermezzo also adds to its significance as it follows the second toccata in the opera, which,

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[134] Here, I acknowledge the use Clemens Risi terms as discussed in Chapter 1.

[135] Carolyn Abbate, 'Music—Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry,* 30, 3 (2004), 505-536, p. 523.

[136] Laurence Helleu, 'Literal and Musical Commentary', in *Les Soldats*, Bernd Alois Zimmermann (L'Avant Scène Opéra, 1993), p. 54.

[137] For more on the musical investigations into the score, see Emily Richmond Pollock, 'Explosive Pluralisms' in *Opera after Zero Hour: The Problem of Tradition and the Possibility of Renewal in Postwar West Germany* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2019), pp. 137-173. Pollock has been pivotal in advancing musicological scholarship on Bernd Alois Zimmermann's oeuvre.

according to NamHoon Kim, exemplifies Zimmermann's spherical approach to the dramatic simultaneity of time and place.[138]

Zimmermann's unshakeable embrace of his totalistic vision extends to the clattering sounds of dishes and the scrapes of the furniture against the stage floor. All sounds and actions were integral to the Zimmermann's theatrical conception of *Die Soldaten's* composition achieving a sonic structure replicating the violent disruption of spherical vortex. Zimmermann states that:

> Everything interacts according to the rhythm of the overlapping layers of time and experience, creating that simultaneously spatial-temporal rotation of scenes, out of which scraps of conversation, splinters of dramatic action, singular and multiple parts of the entire plot are thrown as if from a vortex. From the whispered word to the primal scream, all forms of human vocal expression are put to use: the spoken and the sung word merge with one another, exchange places, and become noise actions, which rhythmically transform into knocking, hitting, kicking, and stamping, indeed, going so far as to become dance movements, where the overlay of simultaneous speaking, declaiming, screaming, singing, and rhythmic noise actions alternates with phases of individual musical and scenic action, a constant fluctuation between the apparent chaos of a vortex and molecular structure.[139]

For all of the varied musical references, both originating from the opera itself and external secondary sources, such as military marches and Bach chorales, the intermezzo does not offer a consistent downbeat, which contributes to the practical difficulties in temporally aligning the expansive and distributed orchestra in performance.[140] The lack of a downbeat is one of presumed muscio-dramaturgical significance since it adds to the disorienting and rupturing effect of what

[138] Kim offers a musical examination specific to the three toccatas in the opera, with an intense focus into Zimmermann's spherical approach to composing the opera. See NamHoon Kim, *Spherical Structured Time in the Three Toccatas of Die Soldaten* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Brandeis University, 2020).

[139]Bernd Alois Zimmermann, 'Lenz and New Aspects of Opera', *The Opera Quarterly,* 30, 1 (2014), 135-39, (p. 138).

[140] For an excellent insight into the practical concerns of rehearsing and staging scenes that feature the *Bühnenmusik* in *Die Soldaten*, see Geoffrey Nicholas Gardiner Pope, *Auf der Bühne: Culture and History in the Performance of diegetic Music in German Opera* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California Los Angeles, 2017). In the chapter on *Die Soldaten,* Pope discusses how the 2014 Payerische Staatsoper production approached the technical, practical and staging approaches to the rhythmic coordination of massive orchestra and their spatial organisations. This work is invaluable for further documentation, and points to an additional aspect of incorporating aerial circus actions, should circus be incorporated into further productions. This production, with its sole aerialist and relatively technically simple rhythmic choreography, does not add to these challenges, but further aerial acrobatic performers could. If this should occur, a joint documentation and investigation would be invaluable for mounting directorial interpretations of *Die Soldaten* and for the musicology sub discipline of opera and circus.

Zimmermann depicts as ‘a vortex that sweeps away everything in the same instant; to reiterate: the future menacingly eats into the past and presents an image of the present, with which we are all—in the end—confronted’.[141]

Given this musical context, Marie’s walk enacts a challenge to authorial intent since Marie’s unyielding, steady march provides a through line that, rhythmically and dramatically, anchors a forward direction: a corporeal continuo. Her footfalls create a sonic guide for the spectator to make rhythmic sense out of the swirling chaos of the intermezzo’s, and the opera’s, sonic vortex. Given Zimmermann’s fervent belief in all utterances and sounds contributing to a compositional totality, as evidenced in his writings and in the libretto, then Marie’s walk sonically and visually structures the discordant spiral as it attempts to descend towards the opera’s impending apocalyptic denouement. This musical reading does not negate the earlier interpretation and analysis of Marie’s symbolic status as Lenzian anti-hero nor the contemplation of the musicological analytic term of ‘vocal acrobatics’ in the experience of the opera, rather it acknowledges that opera in performance is a contested site because of its constituent parts. It also calls attention to the question of authorial intent and what or who determines the legitimacy or illegitimacy of a performance since any action, inclusive of aerial circus actions, contribute to a musico-dramatic interpretation through how it is enacted in is musical context. What it does do is offer an insight into the multiple ways in which aerial circus action affirms, complicates, disrupts and realises integral relationships in an act even one which is seemingly as simple as walking a straight line.

[141] Bernd Alois Zimmermann, ‘On Die Soldaten’, *The Opera Quarterly,* 30, 1 (2014), 142-44, (p. 143).

# Chapter Three. Spherical symmetries of communal joy: aerial rope and harness in Louise Moaty's 2017 Opéra Comique production of Marin Marais's *Alcione* (1706)

## *Introduction*

Circus aerial action is prominently featured in Opéra Comique's 2017 production of Marin Marais's *Alcione* (1706).[142] Rising from its dualistic origins in pre-traditional circus exhibitions and baroque theatre machines, aerial circus action is an unapologetic aerial invention of the dramatic ensemble action in this staging. The production, which celebrated the reopening of Opéra Comique in Paris, features a chorus of acrobatic aerialists soaring above the stage in undulating revolutions of celestial divinity, as well as sliding, running, twirling, and flipping from an interwoven series of vertical, diagonal and slack rope. Rather than take a constructivist choreographic approach to the crucial dramatic role of baroque dance, director Louise Moaty and choreographer Raphaëlle Boitel rhythmically and dramatically weave baroque ideologies into the corporeal circus actions that dominate the prescriptive ensemble dance scenes. The contemporary circus artists demand to be seen. The result is a spectatorial feast that assuredly meets Jean de La Bruyère's instruction that French baroque opera must tantalise *'les esprits, les yeux et les oreilles dans un égal*

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[142] *Alcione*, often spelled *Alcyone* in reference to its dramatic origins in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is a traditionally structured *tragédie en musique* of a prologue and five acts. This particular staging was a co-production with Gran Teatre del Liceu, Opéra Royal/Château de Versailles Spectacles, Théâtre de Caen, with the collaboration of CRAC de Cherbourg. The production was broadcast by Mezzo Live HD and Culturebox on 6 May 2017, and then again by France Musique on 21 May 2017. The production was available for streaming online for six months after the initial broadcast on 6 May 2017. The broadcast was directed by François Roussillon. All references to this production are in reference to the broadcast and subsequent streaming by Mezzo Live HD. Production credits include music direction by Jordi Savall, staging direction by Louise Moaty, choreography by Raphaëlle Boitel, circus management and rigging by Nicolas Lourdelle, and choreography collaboration by Gudrun Skamletz and Caroline Ducrest. It was set to be performed in Barcelona in May in 2020, but was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The original circus troupe in the production featured Pauline Journe, Tarek Aitmeddour, Alba Faivre, Cyril Combes, Emily Zuckerman, Valentin Bellot, Mikael Fau, and Maud Payen. For a history of the opera house L'Opera Comique, see Albert Soubies and Charles Theéodore Malherbe, *Histoire de l'Opéra-Comique: La seconde Salle Favart, 1860-1887* (Paris: Librairie Ernest Flammarion, 1893); and Nicole Wild and David Charlton, *Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique Paris: répertoire 1762-1972* (Sprimont: Mardaga, 2005). The opera was favourably received in its time, including at least five revivals from 1706 to 1771—1719, 1730, 1741, 1756, 1757. For an explanation of the importance of operatic revivals during this period, see Michel Noiray, 'The Practical and Symbolic Functions of Pre-Rameau Opera at the Paris Opéra before Gluck', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Operatic Canon*, eds. Cormac Newark and William Weber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 27-48.

*enchantement'*.[143] Rather than attempt a reconstruction—which would be near impossible given the lack of surviving dance and staging resources associated with *Alcione*—or a pastiche of baroque dance figurations of the period superimposed onto circus trajectories, Boitel's circus choreographies develop on baroque ideologies in a dual invention on the dramatic action of the dance ensemble and the spectacular fantasy of stage machines in French baroque opera.[144]

This case study will explore how the prescribed ensemble dance sequences, essential to the French baroque *tragédie en musique*, and its close contemporary relative the *opéra-ballet*, find invention, not replacement nor reinvention in the seemingly spontaneous, yet geometrically ordered trajectories of aerial circus action in Opéra Comique's production of *Alcione*. Here, 'invent' is in opposition to 'replace' and 'reinvent'.[145] My use of invent derives from André Lepecki, who asserts that 'actualization is different than reinvention: it is rather an *invention* whose possiblization

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[143] Jean de La Bruyère, 'Des ouvrages de l'esprit', *Les Caractères* (Paris, 1688), p. 97. An English translation of this sentence is included within a larger excerpt from Bruyère in Caroline Wood and Graham Sadler, *French Baroque Opera: A Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017): 'To claim, as some have done, that stage machines are merely for the amusement of children or appropriate only in puppet shows is misguided and encourages bad taste. [Machines], where they provide opportunities for the supernatural, heighten and beautify the story and, for the audience, bolster that agreeable suspension of disbelief (*douce illusion*) which is the theatre's principal pleasure. In spoken plays like [Racine's] *Bérénice* and [Genest's] *Pénélope* there is no need for flying machines, [descending] chariots or changes of decor. In opera such things are essential, and the distinctive feature of this genre is that it holds the mind, eyes and ears in an equal enchantment', p. 59.

[144] As this production is not a reconstruction, I am not interested in debating the merits of early opera reconstruction. Rather, like the production's approach, I aim to examine the ideological invention of baroque dance into the execution of aerial circus action trajectories. According to Opéra Comique, the interplay between stage machines, rigging, and aeriality was central to this production. See Opéra Comique, 'Zoom sur Louise Moaty / Alcione' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZTKcVsGFRxM> [accessed 5 January 2021]. For an example of the challenges and issues of using original sources for performance reconstruction, see Antonia Banducci, 'Staging a tragédie en musique: A 1748 Promptbrook of Campra's "Tancrède", *Early Music*, 21, 2 (1993), 180-190. For information on the impact and importance of stage machines in the development of French baroque opera, see Barbara Coeyman, 'Theatres for Opera and Ballet during the Reigns of LouisXIV and Louis XV', *Early Music*, 18, 1 (1990), 22-37, and Tili Boon Cuillé, 'Marvelous Machines: Revitalizing Enlightenment Opera', *The Opera Quarterly*, 27, 1 (2011), 66-93. For information on alternative modern approaches to ideological and aesthetic stagings of baroque opera, see Ewa Kara, 'Baroque theatricality reinvented: contemporary design for baroque opera', *Theatre and Performance Design,* 4, 3 (2018), 222-241. A notable production that occurred after Kara's article is Romeo Castellucci's 2018 La Monnaie De Munt production of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte.* The staging featured an extravagantly fantastic scenographic design and 3D modelling creation by Michael Hansmeyer. Hansmeyer drew clear inspiration from the baroque fascination with symmetry as the primary set is an ornate object with intricate and precise balanced and proportional symmetries.

[145] André Lepecki, 'The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances', *Dance Research Journal,* 42, 2, (2010), 28-48, (pp. 45-46). Lepecki also states that 'any concrete acualization [sic] of an artwork is constitutively composed by the reality of the virtual cloud surrounding it—a virtual cloud activating incompossibles and compossible already in the work but that may not have been actualised yet, may not have found a corporeal manifestation in the work's "origins" expression,' p. 45.

nevertheless rests with the work itself. It is the task of the re-enactor to pick up a work's virtual (yet very concrete and specific) forces and to actualize that work's always incomplete, yet always consistent, multiple, and heterogeneously singular plane of composition'.[146] Lepecki perceives that a work's inventiveness is through 'the choreographic activation of the dancer's body as an endlessly creative transformational archive' and that by 're-enacting we turn back, and in this return we find past dances a will to keep inventing'.[147] I note that Lepecki's terminology of invention refers to re-enactments of specific choreographic works and not of staging original choreographies for the interpretation of operas; however, I contend that the ideological impetus rooted in the prescribed ensemble dance sequences are essential consistencies that define the integrity of the opera's composition. I further address this later in the case study during my close reading of a particular scene in this production of *Alcione,* in which I also consider Lepecki's belief that 'the body is archive and archive is the body' which underpins his use of invention.[148]

Following from Lepecki, I do not believe that aerial circus action replaces baroque dance in this production. I believe, as will be explained in my analysis, aerial circus action enables baroque dance to invent a new possibility that has always rested, to borrow Lepecki's phrasing, within the work that comes into being with the corporeal execution of circus aeriality. It is a new possibility that embraces aerial circus action's dualistic and distinctive originations of baroque rope dancing aerialities and *le merveilleux* on the French baroque stage to invent a new spatial dimension—one that erupts from, in, and through communal action.[149] The ensemble as a joyful, ensouled society in this production executes and signifies the Platonic ideologies of French baroque dance in Marais's

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[146] Ibid., p. 45.

[147] Ibid., p. 46.

[148] Ibid., p. 31.

[149] Here, I reference the pivotal role of *le merveilleux* in the development and reformation of French opera. The aerial circus action presented in *Alcione* owes its operatic lineage and its dramaturgic invention to the spectacular stage machines. See Aubrey S. Garlington, Jr., '*Le Merveilleux* and Operatic Reform in 18th-Century French Opera', *The Musical Quarterly*, 49-4, (1963), 484-497.

operas through their aerial circus actions. The aerialists in this production of *Alcione* dissolve conventional symmetrical spatial orientations to physically reclaim their individual and collective cosmological centres in a continual societal (re)organisation of the apparatus.

First, I establish the musico-dramatic importance of the ensemble's societal action in traditional *tragédie en musique,* and discuss the integral role of collective action in the presentation and execution of large ensemble dance scenes in French baroque opera, inclusive of the opera *Alcione.* These dynamic theatrical dance figures, inspired by Platonic ideologies and informed by a circular relationship with court and social dance practices, could simultaneously reveal an individual's subservience to the court, romantic inclinations, moral virtue, and acceptance of one's position in society. Both professional and social dancers were highly trained. Every articulation and each slight differentiation in their movement was scrutinised for its harmonic and symmetrical contribution to the structural configuration created from all of the dancers engaged in the action. This leads to a brief discussion on the importance of the interrelated concepts of moderation and *le mouvement* for a dancer's ability to execute movements of quality that harmonically reflect their individual positioning within the rhythmic-spatial structure of the dance figuration. I consider these two core tenets of baroque dance alongside the historic development and execution of baroque dance figures in regard to Plato's cosmological ideologies as presented in the *Timaeus*, and the consequential impact of presenting this danced ensemble in *Alcione* as a circus troupe collectively united in communal action. I then focus my analysis on the execution of lifting off the floor, whereby the ensemble are unable to contain their collective exuberance as their circus actions burst forth, rising in geometrically-structured, spherical symmetries of aeriality in new spatial possibilities for baroque Platonic action.[150] I frame the dissolution of the verticality of baroque dance and aerial apparatus

[150] While not explicitly referenced, my approach in this case study has been informed from my readings of Will Daddario's performance and philosophy research. In particular, see Will Daddario, *Baroque, Venice, Theatre, Philosophy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). This case study should be of particular interest to scholars working across the fields of performance philosophy and circus studies.

through Michel Serres's philosophical concept that the soul comes into existence and knowledge of itself through *spherical symmetries* of joyful and communal action located at the moment the body reorients itself around a celestial centre and  jumps from the ground into the air.[151] My philosophical exploration and application of Platonic cosmologies presented in the *Timaeus* follows philosopher Sarah Glenn's approach. Glenn focuses her 'discussion of proposition not on the significance of the details of the proportions themselves but rather the function of proportion in the creation of the cosmos'.[152] My present interest lies in the exploration of the moment the baroque dance ensemble in *Alcione* lifts from the ground into airborne, orbital trajectories, in and through correspondence with the apparatus and the biomechanics of the ensemble's moderating actions. As such, it is not fruitful, nor admittedly within my expertise, to examine and discuss the precise mathematical divisions and detailed geometric properties of a body's spherical symmetries in motion and the resulting proportional tensions exhibited during the executed trajectories of the aerialists.

Second, I demonstrate this invention of baroque dance actions in a discussion of two scenes in Opéra Comique's 2017 production of *Alcione*. I turn to a close reading of specific aerial trajectories in this staging of *Alcione* in order to demonstrate my belief that aerial circus action corporeally exemplifies the dramatic and ideological impetus for dance in *Alcione*, and, as such, is an invention of French baroque dance. I contend that the moments of invention occur when the ensemble aerialists lift their bodies from the floor in spiralling symmetries that burst forth in exhilarating moments of communal aerial circus action that, in turn, lift baroque dance ideologies into an airborne joyful cosmological plane. I explore how the precise weaving and moderating of aerial acrobatics from individual spatial organisations flowing to collective aerial feats of societal

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[151] Michel Serres, *The Five Senses*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley with an introduction by Steven Connor, (London, Oxford and New York: Bloomsbury, 2008, 2016).

[152] Sarah Glenn, 'Proportion and Mathematics in Plato's Timaeus', *Hermathena*, 190, 1 (2011), 11-27, (pp. 11-12).

ebullience create these moments of invention.[153] Interspersed in my analysis, I also offer a brief historical overview on the spatial arrangement of apparatus and historic practices of rope walking, dancing, and exhibitions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to contextualise how this production dissolves these historic orientational attributes of the apparatus through its airborne invention of baroque dance ideologies.

### *The dramatic action of the ensemble in French baroque opera: the importance of moderation and le mouvement in baroque dance action*[154]

This section discusses the musico-dramatic importance of the ensemble's action—dance, acrobatics, and flying—in their integral, multifaceted roles on the French baroque opera stage. My aim is not to provide a historical survey or analysis, but rather to establish that the aerial circus action of the ensemble in the 2017 production of *Alcione* is historically linked to baroque ideologies that are embedded in the societal action and performance practices of danced ensemble scenes in the opera. In the following section, I aim to explore how the underlying principles of *le mouvement* and moderation of movement in French baroque dance are central to executing the ensemble's aerial

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[153] I do not believe all stagings of circus arts and baroque opera are inventions on baroque dance. For example, Australian circus company, Circa, has staged several productions fusing baroque opera and contemporary circus arts. Circa has presented three concert-style productions in collaboration with the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra—*French Baroque* (2015)*, Spanish Baroque* (2017), *and English Baroque* (2019)—in which the acrobats perform a sequential narrative set to a pastiche of famous airs drawn from the geographic locale of which the production draws its name. In this case, the accompaniment of baroque music is solely that—a live accompaniment to a display of contemporary circus arts choreographies and narratives. Circa's *The Return* presents the dramatic action of Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* (1639-1640) alongside a split stage performance of excepts from the opera interspersed with original and other excerpted music, including Mahler.

[154] I acknowledge that there are contentious debates as to what styles, practices, and developments are included under the broad use of the term 'baroque dance' and also to what dates this term references. I, in alignment with Jennifer Nevile, utilise the term baroque dance to broadly reference court and theatrical dance practices from 1630 to 1750. As the French noble style was integrally influential to French baroque opera, all references in the main text, unless directly specified, refer to the French style and, in particular, in relation to baroque dance practices at the French court and the Opéra. For an overview on the history of baroque dance, and in particular French baroque dance, see Jennifer Nevile, 'Baroque Dance' in *The Oxford Handbook of the Baroque*, ed. John D. Lyons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 263-279. Obviously, social and theatrical dances during this period were practiced and performed beyond France. The following resources offer valuable insight into the practical and theoretical aspects of baroque dance elsewhere: Tim Carter, 'Music and Dance', in *A Cultural History of the Emotions in the Baroque and Enlightenment Age*, eds. C. Walker, K. Barclay, and D. Lemmings (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); Jennifer Thorp, *Dance, Spectacle, and the Body Politick, 1250–1750* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Jennifer Thorp, 'Dance in Opera in London, 1673–1685', *Dance Research,* 33, 2 (2015); and Dorothйe Wortelboer and Horringa Dirkjan, *La Baroque:Dances for the Dutch Court, C. 1765* (Utrecht, 2004).

circus choreographies throughout the production. *Le mouvement* and moderation were ideologically-rooted aspects of baroque dance are practiced and displayed in the execution of dance figures, and actively contribute to a dancer's aspiration and ability to reflect the Platonic harmonic order of the cosmos. The enactment of these two interrelated principles are essential to the performance of baroque dance figures, and are situated at the moment the dancer exerts their weight downwards in order to vertically rise as they lift off the floor.

*Le mouvement*, as depicted in historic accounts and dance treatises, refers to the bends and rises of the dancer, and it specifically relates to the rhythmic and technical quality of a dancer's executed movements as the dancer executes the bends and rises of the choreographic steps in rhythmic alignment on the upbeats and downbeats, respectively.[155] Moderation refers to how the dancer assumes a moral and societal position by adjusting one's inner and corporeal actions to a variety of external factors, including but not limited to the accompanying music, to their partner's movements, to the room, and to the overall spatial configuration of the dance.[156] In practice, the two principles of *le mouvement* and moderation are inextricably linked and are vital to understanding and interpreting ensemble dance sequences in French baroque opera. As both actioned principles are corporeal enactments of the Platonic belief that one's physical actions locate and reflect their ensouled virtue, the moment one lifts up off the ground and into the air can be understood as a

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[155] For a succinct historic account of *le mouvement*, Jennifer Nevile, 'Baroque Dance' in *The Oxford Handbook of the Baroque*, ed. John D. Lyons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 264-279. For practical considerations for the execution of *le mouvement*, see Wendy Hilton, *Dance and Music of Court and Theater: Selected Writings of Wendy Hilton* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1997), and Catherine Turocy, 'La Cosmografia del Minor Mondo: Recovering Dance Theory to Create Today's Baroque Practice', in *Dance on its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies*, eds. Melanie Bales and Karen Eliot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 157-172.

[156] The spectatorial moral response of witnessing moderation in French danced figures draws similarities to contemporary notions of sympathy as an auditorial moral response to the reception of music towards the middle of the eighteenth century. Drawing upon Scottish philosopher Adam Smith's 1759 book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* musicologist Jonathan Rhodes Lee posits that eighteenth-century 'English music sermons positioned sonic harmony as a perfect instance of the sympathetic vibrations that linked human beings to the natural world, to each other and to the divine'. Whereas opera scholar, Downing A. Thomas applies the moral tenets of sympathy to the spectatorial attendance at the *opéra comique.* Thomas argues that sympathy in this spectatorial action 'encompassed both the relationship of the listener-spectator to the operatic spectacle and the bond established between spectators'. In order of quotation, see Jonathan Rhodes Lee, 'Music, Morality and Sympathy in Eighteenth-Century English Sermon'*, Eighteenth-Century Music*, 17/1 (2020), 9-35, (p. 29); and Downing A. Thomas, *Aesthetics of Opera in the Ancient Régime, 1647-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 202.

corporeal realisation of one's reconnection to their soul's cosmological origins—a visible action of the invisible cosmic state of being and one that impels others to rediscover their own ensoulment.[157]

Dance was heralded as the pinnacle of artistic expression and thrived as a multilayered cultural art form during the reign of Louis XIV.[158] According to Ellen R. Welch, balletic performances at the French court were capable of 'reflecting the ideologies of the monarchical patron', 'representing the interests of aristocratic performers' and of drawing 'attention to the performative and formal qualities of the concept of a national character'.[159] The spectatorial importance of enacting social and theatrical figures at this time cannot be underestimated as exemplified in Barbara Coeyman's analysis into the impact architectural space had on the spectatorial impression of the dance performances at court.[160] Coeyman notes that 'spectators and dancers occupy the same general area, collectively gazing from all sides of the hall towards the dance floor', affirming that dance at this time was meant to be witnessed as a social action. [161] Dance also defined the musico-dramatic action of the ensemble on the French baroque opera stage, regardless of whether the opera was an *opéra-ballet*, a *pastorale héroïque*, or a *tragédie en musique*, like *Alcione.*[162] Rebecca Harris-

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[157] In this case study, I use the terms ensoul, ensouled, and ensoulment to reflect the Platonic belief that the one's soul is a separate invisible being that is thrust into the corporeal body and only inhabits its fleshy, mortal vehicle.

[158] Esther Coorevits and Dirk Moelants, 'Tempo in Baroque Music and Dance', *Music Perception*, 33, 5 (2016), 523-545. Coorevits and Moelants note dance's superiority over music in their empirical and rhetorical research into tempo and rhythm of baroque dance music. They describe that 'an important share of Baroque music was composed with the intention to serve as dance music in a social context or in theatrical settings', p. 526.

[159]In order of quotation, Ellen R. Welch, 'Fictions of the Courly Self: French Ballet in the Age of Louis XIV', *Early modern French Studies*, 39, 1 (2017), 17-30, (p. 30); and Ellen R. Welch, 'Dancing the Nation: Performing France in the Seventeenth-Century *Ballet des nations*', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 13, 2 (2013), 3-23, (p. 8).

[160] Barbara Coeyman, 'Social dance in the 1668 *Feste de Versailles:* architecture and performance context', *Early Music* (1998), 264-285.

[161] Ibid., p. 278.

[162] This present case study does not offer a detailed analysis of the overall dramatic role of the myriad characters that the ensemble portrays in *Alcione*. This would be useful to connect Marin Marais's opera to other contemporary works, and contribute to the valuable work on ensemble representation in French baroque opera. For example, see Rebecca Harris-Warrick, 'Lully's on-stage societies' in *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, eds. Victoria Johnson and Jane F. Fulcher, and Thomas Ertman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 53-71; and Catherine Kintzler, 'Representation of *le peuple* in French opera, 1673-1764' in *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, eds. Victoria Johnson and Jane F. Fulcher, and Thomas Ertman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 72- 86.

Warrick, a leading scholar in French baroque staging and dance practices, consecrates the musico-dramatic importance of the ensemble in Lully's operas:

> In contrast to a visible but mute community that may be imposed by a modern director, the societies in French opera were constructed into the drama. Moreover, they get the richest music. The group characters have three means of communication—words, music, and dance—and their sound-world involves not only their own joined voices, but the full resources of the orchestra, in the most musically extended pieces of the opera. This distinguishes them from the protagonists, who have only two modalities available —they lack the medium of dance— and whose words, closely wedded to the rhythmic patterns of poeticised speech, are usually accompanied only by the continuo. On musical grounds alone, then, the group scenes command attention, and the dance that they virtually always include provide a kinetic medium of communication that begs to be taken into consideration in any serious account of this style of opera.[163]

The ensemble in Marin Marais's *Alcione* is no exception to this description. As a member of Louis XIV's court and a student of Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687), it is not surprising that Lully's influence on Marin Marais's operatic output is undeniably evident in his compositions. In his four operas, the first of which, *Alcide* (1693), was in collaboration with Lully's son Louis Lully (1664-1734), Marais adheres to Lullian dramatic and dance structures which dictate the dramatic action of the ensemble.[164] However with *Alcione*, Marais diverges from established Lullian conventions and composes three *tambourins* for pivotal dance scenes. Marais's contributions in the arc of French baroque opera are often overshadowed by his predecessor Lully, his notably more successful contemporary André Campra (1660-1744), and his successor Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764); however, the addition of the *tambourin* is a signature of his that had a lasting impact on the development of French baroque opera that eventually became a quintessential aspect of Rameau's operas.[165] All of the *tambourins* in *Alcione* are ensemble scenes that signal dancing in the stage directions for the sailors. While large ensemble dance sequences are a hallmark of pre- *and*

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[163] Rebecca Harris-Warrick, 'Lully's on-stage operas' in *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, eds. Victoria Johnson, Jane F. Fulcher, and Thomas Ertman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 53-71, (pp. 53-54).

[164] Julie Anne Vertrees Sadie, 'Marin Marais and His Contemporaries', *The Musical Times,* 119, 1626 (1978), 672-674.

[165] I am not the first to make this connection. See Barker, 'Marais: Semele Overture & Dances', *American Record Guide*, 70, 3 (2007), 125.

post-Lullian French baroque opera, they are especially indicative of librettist Antoine Houdar de la Motte's (1672-1731) fondness for interspersing movement throughout the dramatic action of the operas he wrote.[166]

The ensemble, and its role as a society that exists as a community in and through action, is thrust centre stage in *Alcione.* The ensemble fluidly portrays diverse characters from multiple realms, including magicians, shepherds, fauns, sailors, and divinities of the sea. Regardless of the ensemble's character identification in the opera's plot, the ensemble's aerial movements in the 2017 production under examination create a complex architectural tapestry of aerial trajectories that visually and physically position the ensemble as a driving dramatic force throughout the opera's action. The complexity in the circus choreography moves beyond the mere presentation of virtuosic aerial acrobatic tricks and expertly honed skills of each circus artist in the troupe. Individual virtuosic airborne manoeuvres are intricately woven and situated within a societal spatial structure and, at integral moments, are a direct action of the interwoven, moderating aerial trajectories crafted by the individual artists, who are all acutely aware of their positioning within the ensemble's collective aerial arrangements. It is this complex active collection of societies—engaged in highly organised circus choreographies and using aerial apparatus as a corresponding spatial conduit for baroque ideologies and societal communication—that invents new baroque dance possibilities for the societal action in *Alcione.* Yet before I go into specific discussion into the role of the ensemble in Marais's *Alcione* and the aerial choreographic action of this particular staging, I want to further explore Harris-Warrick's prominent and well-argued claim of the integral dramatic action of the dance ensemble's 'kinetic medium of communication' in French baroque opera and focus on two

[166] Lois Rosow, 'Opera in Paris from Campra to Rameau', in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Music,* ed. Simon P. Keefe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 272-294.

interrelated aspects of the execution of this corporal communication: that of *le mouvement* and moderation.[167]

Baroque dance, 'as a reflection of the harmony of the universe', adheres to the cosmological Platonic order of celestial spheres. As such, the spatial execution of a dancer's movements within the overall structure of a dance figure, in both theatrical and social settings, was widely believed to visually and physically communicate one's virtuous internal composition.[168] Exactly how a dancer executed movements and shifted the weight of their body from one moment to the next—for example from the wrist to rounded arm in *port de bras,* to the postural connection from the elongated torso to the measured bend in the knee that fluidly links to the ankle—was essential to perfecting the intricately complex sequence of steps. These delicate connections were expected of both theatrical and social dances, and, as the late Wendy Hilton showed, even though 'a couple dance might be performed first by professionals in the theater [sic], and then adopted as a ballroom dance; this did not mean that theatrical dance was simple, but that social dance was complex'.[169] A majority of baroque dances were not choreographically aligned to a particular score but were rhythmically and structurally aligned with common dance types that adhered to a particular cadence and 'typical musical gestures'.[170] How a performer executed the movements within a composition's rhythm and metrical engagement was tantamount to the quality of their danced actions. In her influential contributions to our practical and historic knowledge of baroque dance techniques, Hilton advised practitioners and scholars alike that *le mouvement*, or the bend and rise of step-units,

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[167] Rebecca Harris-Warrick, 'Lully's on-stage operas' in *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, eds. Victoria Johnson, Jane F. Fulcher, and Thomas Ertman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 53-71.

[168] Jennifer Nevile, *Dance, Spectacle, and the Body Politick, 1250-1750* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 1.

[169] Wendy Hilton, *Dance and music of court and theater: selected writings of Wendy Hilton* (Stuyvesant, NY:Pendragon Press, 1997), p. 9.

[170] Julie Andrijeski, 'Baroque Dance for Musicians', *Early Music America: The Magazine of Historical Performance*, 24, 1 (2018), 10-14, (p. 13). See also Betty Bang Mather and Dean M. Karns, *Dance Rhythms of the French Baroque: a handbook for performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

was essential to the quality of the dance.[171] A dancer was meant to prepare for the next step by bending on the upbeat in order to rise on the following downbeat. These moments were to occur in fluid yet quick succession and enabled the dancer to gracefully and rhythmically execute their movements. Baroque dancer and pedagogue Catherine Turocy points out that *le mouvement* is inclusive of the modern understanding of the plié and relates to successive bending actions that enable a performer to execute a series of moves, from pivots to lifts, from bows to small lifts, and frames that the bend through the knee to the ankle in preparation for the lift.[172] Any lifting action of the body into the air, however seemingly brief, must begin with a preparation beginning with the bending of the knees with the foot firmly rooting into the ground in order to step on the downbeat, and, according to Hilton, 'the end of one unit flows into the bend of the next, leading to the downbeat'.[173] The fluid, rhythmic execution of *le mouvement* did not relate to springing actions, such as jumps, leaps, and chasses. This is an essential distinction as we relate this kinetic principle to aerial circus actions. The importance of the enactment of the rising in relation to the upbeat/downbeat cannot be overstated as it was central in executing the dance steps with a graceful quality that allowed the virtuosity of the steps to appear seamless within the overall societal structure of the figure's pattern. This concept turns a dancer's quality of a movement into a defining action that presents 'a caught moment between two opposing forces', and this moment is a 'moment of motion,

[171] Ibid., p. 169. For example, Hilton explains that: 'In his *Traité de la cadence (ram. 2 p. 108)*, Rameau provides a detailed account of the upbeat/downbeat relationship of the demi-coupé. Rameau says that the note which precedes the measure, the upbeat, is used to lift the stepping foot, while bending the knees, and to pass it to the finishing position. The rise is then made on the downbeat, on [demi] pointe. Rameau adds the precise instruction to "remain on the pointe…for the space of rite of the quarter note." Rameau is specifically discussing the pas de minuet but his remarks apply to the demi-coupé in all contexts. His revelation that the process of rising should not take the full duration of the downbeat is of the utmost importance. If the rise is completed one half or three quarters of the way through the first beat (depending on the pas composé), the performance gains in vitality; the dancer has time to emphasize [sic] the beat with a subtle pause in the position of equilibrium…In order to rise as the downbeat sounds, the dance must ensure that the passage of the foot to the stepping position takes place on the second half of the upbeat', p. 169.

[172] Catherine Turocy, 'La Cosmografia del Minor Mondo: Recovering Dance Theory to Create Today's Baroque Practice' in *Dance on its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies*, eds. Melanie Bales and Karen Elliot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 157-172.

[173] Wendy Hilton, *Dance and music of court and theater: selected writings of Wendy Hilton* (Stuyvesant, NY:Pendragon Press, 1997), p. 164.

not stasis'.[174] A dancer must place emphasis on bending and rising, and the extensions that differentiate vertical dimensions of rising and falling as dancers move through the successive patterns and partnering. An individual performer's movements were scrutinised for grace and successive continuity through their execution of the figures; their movements were not performed or received in isolation. This basic element of baroque dance is to be in rhythmic congruence with one's partner, and, if in a linked succession or collective group, with the entire danced ensemble. It provides rhythmic grounding for individual dancers to moderate their actions in service to the overall harmonic structure of the dance configuration. Thus, *le mouvement* is directly connected to the quality of the performer's movement, to a dancer's ability to execute the steps with grace, and to how an individual dancer rhythmically moves along a vertical and longitudinal plane. The dancer then aligns to form an interconnected trajectory with one's fellow dancers that aspires to emulate the celestial bodies in a divinely and geometrically organised orbit.

Baroque dance is a cultivated and moral action that reveals one's soul through their moderated danced movements.[175] As such, the core tenet of moderation, and its role in executing movements of quality in baroque dance, is an harmonious action—one that envelops the beauty and virtue of the soul in the moderating comportment of the body in a cyclical action. According to dance historian Jennifer Nevile, the dance configurations and patterns, often informed by symmetrical garden paths, were crafted to showcase the importance of an individual's actions to the collective group—each precise action in its corresponding place contributes to an ordered and virtuous society.[176]

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[174] Catherine Turocy, 'La Cosmografia del Minor Mondo: Recovering Dance Theory to Create Today's Baroque Practice' in *Dance on its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies*, eds. Melanie Bales and Karen Elliot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 157-172, (p. 165).

[175] It should be noted that this was widely accepted and believed through this period. Mark Franko succinctly summarises the debate as 'for the Protestant tradition, dance exemplified morally reprehensible action symbolised by the quest for variety in movement. Proponents of dance, on the other hand, discerned the order and consistency of dance movement,' Mark Franko, *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2015), p. 63.

[176] Jennifer Nevile, *Dance, Spectacle, and the Body Politick, 1250-1750* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp. 295-309.

Moderation is the action that links a dancer's vertical movements to their structured role within the figuration. It is a rhythmic act that gracefully unites and consecrates the harmonious integration of the individual to the collective through and in rhythmic action. As one cultivates their physical actions, one is simultaneously cultivating their soul and encouraging the witnesses of their dance to cultivate their own souls on a physical quest for continuous improvement.

Dance, then becomes, an exterior action that, through its intentional, precise, and moral execution, visualises one's invisible and indivisible soul. Indeed, as dance philosopher Graham Pont notes, Platonic pedagogies included music and gymnastics to ensure that the soul was cared for to aspire to and inspire moral virtue, goodness, and beauty.[177] While caring for one's soul is integral to Platonic pedagogies of dance, gymnastics, and music, Pont does not discuss the essential Platonic aspect of discovering one's soul within the tomb of their corporeal body. Plato's speculative cosmological origins of the human-soul, and the universe-soul, is fundamentally explained in the *Timaeus*.[178] The ability to internalise cosmological order is rooted within one's intellectual knowledge of one's soul within one's body. As an irreducible and indivisible entity of being, the soul cannot become—it is and it was. It is only in the action of discovery and the action of cultivation can one embark on the journey of 'becoming' (37e-38a).[179] Timaeus explicitly states that this action of discovering one's soul is the ultimate quest towards realising celestial harmony and order since 'a creature whose soul and body are in balance is a vision of the utmost beauty and attractiveness' (87d).[180] For Plato,

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[177] Graham Pont, 'Plato's Philosophy of Dance', in *Dance, Spectacle, and the Body Politick, 1250-1750,* ed. Jennifer Nevile (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp. 267-281.

[178] Plato, Robin Waterfield, and Andrew Gregory, *Plato: Timaeus and Critias* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), (62a-63c), p. 59. All references to *Timaeus* are from this translation.

[179] 'We say it was and is and shall be, but, if we would speak truly, only 'is' belongs to it; 'was' and 'shall be' should be said of becoming that proceeds in time, since they are motions', Plato, Robin Waterfield, and Andrew Gregory, *Plato: Timaeus and Critias* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37e-38a, p. 34. For more on interpretation of this section of the dialogue, see Gabriela Roxana Carone, *Plato's Cosmology and its Ethical Dimensions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 53-78; and Thomas Keller Johansen, *Plato's Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[180]Plato, Robin Waterfield, and Andrew Gregory, *Plato: Timaeus and Critias* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), (87c4-d3), p. 91-93.

through Timaeus, the body and soul must be in proportion. Then, the ability to action this self-discovering—this action of creating ordered, harmonious balance between one's soul within one's body—is an essential visual and kinetic manifestation of the internal, invisible action that ultimately reflects and inspires others to reflect the cosmological harmony within. The knowledge of being ensouled is one of the central aspects of a human's moral instruction toward celestial virtue, since one cannot action the mandate to care for one's soul if one has not discovered it within one's body.

Then, several questions arise: how does one corporeally *discover* their soul through danced steps? Where is this action situated amid the precise, geometrically arranged and executed symmetrical patterns? How does this action simultaneously enable the dancer to internally discover their ensouled nature while also encouraging their spectators to aspire to the same virtuous action? I answer these questions by first addressing the previous discussion on *le mouvement* and moderation, integral to the physical execution of baroque dance figurations, to that of aerial circus action. This discussion ultimately leads me to uncover the spherical aerial circus action that invents new possibilities for baroque dance action as a societal, joyous action of ensouled discovery.

Circus aerial actions seem like the opposite of moderation. They explode, ignite, and excite in the body's musculature—limbic exuberance propelling the artists as far it is physiologically possible in that moment, only to go further the next moment. Yet the technical execution of aerial circus action is founded on the body's ability to perfect precise movements and moderate within itself and within its corresponding relationship with its apparatus.[181] This requires the circus artist to continually exhibit the mental fortitude to remain disciplined in their physical actions regardless of the apparatus set-up, performance environment, or, in the case of travelling circuses, geographic

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[181] Marion Cossin, Annie Ross and Frédérick P. Gosselin, 'Repeatability of force signals in aerial circus straps', *Journal of Sports Engineering and Technology*, 232, 3 (2018), 225-235.

location.[182] Moderation is not a consideration as multiple aerialists work in tandem to create aerial circus actions—it is an essential requirement. The ideological and physical conception of circus communities is in alignment with Platonic ideals of the body politic exhibited in the execution of baroque dance, since the immediate nature of circus arts demands artists to anticipate momentary and durational adaptability.[183] The tactile binds of circus are individual and communal, linked in rhythmic and technical executions. Even when ensemble artists do not physically touch in an act, for example two catchers in a swinging trapeze trio or quartet, the collective trace-form of the act envelops all performers and apparatus. Any shift in an individual's movements impacts the collective spatial organisation, and all artists must correspondingly moderate their actions to maintain harmony among their collective actions. Aerial circus trajectories also share the compositional importance and appreciation of how individual actions contribute to an ordered and beautiful pattern in baroque dance figurations. As discussed in chapter one, the spectatorial perception of aerial trajectories is occupied with the durational path of the aerialist in motion and how each of aerialist's tricks successively align to reveal an inspirational and virtuosic airborne pattern. It is not in the isolated revolutionary manoeuvres that compels audiences to collectively gasp in wonderment; it is witnessing and tracing a sequential aerial trajectory unfold in time just as a baroque dancer's movements link up to create beautiful and ordered spatial configurations.

Circus action is ideologically synonymous with communal action. According to Tilde Björfors, of renowned Swedish circus company Cirkus Cirkör, each circus artist must recognise that they belong

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[182] Shona Ferguson, 'Becoming Circus: Rules, Transgression and Self-Representation', *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 24, 2 (2004), 51-74.

[183] Philip A. Loring, 'The Most Resilient Show on Earth: The Circus as a Model for Viewing Identity, Change, and Chaos', *Ecology and Society*, 12, 1 (2007).

to ‘something larger than oneself’.[184] The presentation of a dance ensemble as a circus troupe, like that in the current discussion of the 2017 staging of *Alcione,* symbolically conjures up romanticised, familial attributes of the circuses past. Circus semiotician Paul Bouissac surmises that ‘the circus projects itself as a perfectly functional body politic which reproduces on a smaller scale the orderly system within which it exists without totally coinciding with it’.[185] The act of training and devising acts within the circus is an act of intimacy and communication.[186] This enduring cultural identification of the circus, fostered and developed through communal kinetic action, persists, because it is an intangible, undeniable aspect of rehearsing, creating, and performing aerial circus acts, regardless whether a circus artist descends from a traditional circus family or troupe. The expansion of this intimate and tactile network of the circus troupe, predicated on muscular exhaustion regardless of professional identification, is, for circus scholar Charles Batson, a joyful transformation which occurs for both the circus performer and the spectator within social-circus spaces:

> This circus, this art, is a “vecteur de joie,” a vehicle, a carrier, of joy—joy-giving, joy-provoking, joy-depending, not (only) for the performer-participants but for the

[184] Tilde Björfors, *untitled*, Circostrada 13, 2, (2019). This dual aspect of circus connection through physical action and cultural identification within a community has led to the emergence of social circuses and social circus as therapeutic practice. For more on social circus, see Ilaria Bessone, ‘Social Circus as an Organised Cultural Encounter Embodied Knowledge, Trust and Creativity at Play’, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 38, 6 (2017), 651-664; Stephen J. Cadwell, ‘Falling together: an examination of trust-building in youth and social circus training’, *Theatre, Dance, and Performance* Training, 9, 1 (2018), 19-35; and Jennifer Beth Spiegel, ‘Social Circus: The Cultural Politics of Embodying “Social Transformation”, *TDR/The Drama Review*, 60:4 (2016), 50-67.

[185] Paul Bouissac, *Circus as Multimodal Discourse: Performance, Meaning, and Ritual* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 184.

[186] While the advent of circus training schools offers formal routes into the circus profession, some modern circus artists can still descend from circus families and can trace their circus family tree for over centuries. For example, see Episode 1. David Konyot (Hungary) and Episode 4. Bianca Renz (Luxembourg) of Laura Murphy’s *Circus Futures* Podcast, in which both artists are descended from circus families. The Circus Futures: European Circus Voices podcasts are accessible via Apple Podcasts. Also see, Ezra LeBank and David Bridel, ‘David Konyot’ in *Clowns: In Conversation with Modern Masters* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

> spectators, who are, in this language, also called to become active participants in the joy making enterprise.[187]

It is the joy in *executing* the act and the joy in *witnessing* the act—of a community physically coming together in space—that transcends a circus act's signification of mastering skills to become a societal site of civic and interpersonal communication. Ensemble work in circus is dependent on spatial and tactile communications—forging societal bonds through corporeal exertions in which the communal identity is synonymous with tactile contact and a collective muscular effort to achieve the (im)possible. Inherent in ensemble circus action is the idea and physical reality that to cultivate one's actions is to cultivate one's place within the societal structure of a circus act and troupe.

Yet, as in the previous discussion on baroque dance actions, I still have not located the moment at which the physical actions visibly manifest one's internal actions of discovery their soul. The fluid connection to the floor and the articulated thrust into the ground seems to be the proportional moment I am circling around throughout this discussion. For example, a dancer must be centrally balanced to successfully and gracefully rise on the upbeat within the sequence of step-units, and the spectatorial joy from witnessing an aerialist launch into the air can only be an inspirational sight if the aerialist adequately prepares their launch by engaging with their connection to the floor prior to their flight. A dancer and an aerialist must find balance as they prepare to vertically rise up. It is a moment that is central to both the enactment of one's quality and moderation of movement, and one that is also central to any circus action with an apparatus—the moment which the body engages the

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[187] Charles Batson, 'Circus as Transformation: Musings the Circus Arts as Agent and Medium for Change' in *Extraordinary Partnerships: How the Arts and Humanities are Transforming America*, ed. Christine Henseler (Lever Press, 2020), pp. 73-88, (p. 85). There is a diverse range of excellent scholarship and practice-based research in the field of social circus, of which most notably is the work of Australian circus researcher Kirsty Seymour. An interesting path to investigate would be the application of Plato's civic education of gymnastics and dance to the philosophical examination of the physiological and psychological impact of social circus training and performances. A starting place for the transference of Platonic's education onto circus could be drawn from this perspective on dance education. For example, see Joshua M. Hall, 'Core Aspects of Dance: Aristotle on Positure', *Journal of Aesthetic Education,* 53, 1 (2019), 1-16.

muscles downward to achieve an airborne lift; the moment of an explosion from the one dimensionality, from the flat, from the earthen, from the grounded singular effort of one person alone held bound by gravity to the physical discovering of being ensouled in the reconnection to one's central point of symmetry. Verticality in aerial circus action is a technical means for spatial exploration rooted in the aerialist's connection to the earth.[188] Essential to an aerialist's trajectory is 'constantly maintaining the link between the floor and to pass through verticality and feel its effects'.[189] Agathe Dumont, dance and circus pedagogue and scholar states that:

> Verticality is a reference point, both in relation to one's body and to elements in space. Verticality is what fundamentally defines us, as a result of evolution; it is a reference point. Our proprioceptive sense allows us to orientate ourselves in relation to that verticality when we perform aerial figures. Circus forces us to put our verticality into question, to lift it off the floor and reinvent it. Like Roberto Magro, we could think that "everything is related to verticality and weight. Verticality is above all a shift between different levels: the floor, standing and working on the equipment".[190]

This 'reference point' that Dumont refers to is reminiscent of the Platonic centre: a verticality and orientation derived from a cosmological 'centrality'.[191] The cosmos as a spherical entity is not directionally bound to the vertical oppositions of 'up or down' rather a Platonic cosmological conception of directional orientation, as derived from the Timaeus, is a relative centrifocal of the object in question (62d-63e).[192] There is no opposite—only the centre.[193] With this Platonic understanding of one's spherical centre, then the circus performer shifts their weight to lift off of the ground and, in doing so, reorients their symmetrical axis to become a spherical, celestial body that

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[188] For a creative perspective on metaphors of verticality in regard to vertical rope practice, see Matilda Leyser, 'Righting the Self', *Life Writing,* 9, 3 (2012), 339-345.

[189] Agathe Dumont, *Verticality, Weight and Gravity: A Pedagogical Guide* (FEDEC, 2015) <http://www.fedec.eu/en/articles/514-verticality-weight-and-gravity> [accessed 14 December 2020], p. 30.

[190] Ibid., p. 16.

[191] Ibid., p. 64.

[192] Plato, Robin Waterfield, and Andrew Gregory, *Plato: Timaeus and Critias* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 62d, pp. 58-61.

[193] Ibid., p.59. For more on the interpretation and understanding of directional orientations, spherical symmetries, and the invisibility and indivisibility of the soul in Plato's *Timaeus,* see Christopher J. Rowe, "On the 'Soul", *Plato* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003), pp. 163-178.

does not exist in differential orientations of verticality. For French philosopher Michel Serres this moment—the moment of the downward motion to catapult the body airborne—forms the foundation for his sensorial philosophy underpinning his joyful experiences in and through one's corporeal existence. According to Serres, there is a spiritual shift that occurs when one leaps up into the air, which is a physical enactment of discovering one's ensouled nature:

> Le saut, élément de course d'abord, fait le second plaisir du corps après le souffle, passé les vieilles relevailles et les joies des premiers pas. L'animal se rase, il rassemble en plis ses ressorts. La prise d'élan, immobile ou, au contraire, rapide, noue le virtuel du vol, le blanc de son apex, sa décision, sa certitude dance l'espérance, son inquiétude, une mise en porte à faux. L'élan, plus délectable que l'envol, donne à la densité musculaire un frisson aigu plus allègre que le déploiement, comme si la puissance, à terre, l'emportait en force sur l'acte, en l'air, promesse d'ivresse plus enivrante que l'extase. L'extase, exactement parlant, termine les petits sauts répétés, à ras de terre, de la course longue, le jet vif de l'entre-deux, ou le lancer de la balle au panier, l'arrêt du gardien de but, en haut, vers la lucarne, mais surtout les lentes épousailles du ventre et du dos avec le fil tendu au milieu du sautoir.[194]

Serres's joyous action of discovering and nourishing one's soul is in alignment with philosophy scholar of Platonic cosmology Dominic J. O'Meara's understanding of one's bodily enactment of circular and spherical symmetries to be of the soul, since 'cosmic symmetries' of the circle are resolutely retained for the description and advisement of the soul.[195] Descriptions of the spherical

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[194] Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies,* trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley with an introduction by Steven Connor (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1985, 2016), p. 349. Serres states that 'jumping, first of all an elemental part of running, constitutes the second bodily pleasure after breathing, after the rituals of early childhood and the joy of our first steps. The animal makes itself as small as possible, crouches ready to spring. The build-up for the standing or running jump brings together the conditions for potential flight, the zero point at its apex, the decision to jump, hoped-for success, anxiety— the momentary loss of balance. The build-up, more pleasurable than the actual jump, thrills, the muscles more intensely than does the jump itself- as if the force of the potential on the on the ground, outweighs that of the act, in the air- the promise of intoxication being more intoxicating than the ecstasy itself. In a long race, ecstasy, strictly speaking, comes at the end of the sequence of small repeated jumps, low to the ground- it is the rapid intermediary leap; or the throwing of the ball into the basket, the goal keeper's flying catch, at the top corner of the net; but more especially the slow marriage of the stomach and back with the taut wire in the jumping pit,' pp. 316-317.

[195] Dominic J. O'Meara, *Cosmology and Politics in Plato's Later Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 74. For more on the circular and spherical proportions of ensouled entities, see Dominic J. O'Meara, 'The Beauty of the World', in *Cosmology and Politics in Plato's Later Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 65-84. In particular, O'Meara's clear and simple explanation on the virtuous order of geometric principles: 'In the progression of geometrical figures, the line flowing out from the point introduces indefiniteness, which is limited by a drawing back of the line to form a circle around the point. The circle is the first, most perfect figure, expressing in its unity, simplicity (one line), definiteness, equality of (radii), the absolute unity and simplicity of the point. After circles come figures made of two lines (semicircles); figures made of three lines (triangles); quadrilateral figures (squares and oblongs) and figures with yet more lines. At each level in the progression, equality is prior in value to inequality', p. 80.

and circular actions of celestial bodies occurs multiple times throughout the *Timaeus,* which include depictions of celestial bodies—planets including Earth—involved in carefully juxtapositions of *retrogradations*, *progressions*, revolutions, and orbital arrangements.[196] One's soul was created in correspondence to a specified celestial body, and it is the divine instruction to discover one's soul and find harmony within its divine order, including the actions of revisiting one's steps within its orbital pathway (39d-40a).[197] One's cosmic symmetry is not bound to earthen gravitational forces—for the celestial bodies that the human soul is descended from and aspires to ascend to once more is ruled by radial symmetries. Serres's linking of acrobatic virtuosity equates the discovery of one's soul to the physical enactment of spherical symmetries—radiating out and consecrating its existence through exuberant, athletic aerial actions derived from a central axis of symmetry unconstrained by gravity.[198] This moment is located in the action of launching oneself into the sky. For Serres, Platonic knowledge is an action: it is only an allegorical abstraction until it is lived and in the action is where this cosmic knowledge resides. As Steven Connor surmises, 'this is a moving, active body, expressing itself in exertion, movement, gesture and dance, rather than in sensibility alone'.[199] To exert athletic, physical energy that enables the body to break from vertical symmetries is a physical and visual manifestation of soulful ebullience as the body discovers its celestial origins and reclaims its spherical symmetries in and through exhaustive action. Serres conception of the one's discovery of their soul differs Plato's description of the implementation of one's soul. Plato depicts it as a

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[196] Plato describes in the *Timaeus* the inherent craftsmanship of the stars and their specific movements in relation to their divine and virtuous status, which is integral to the divine spherical and circular actions of the human-soul. See James Miller, 'Chorus and Chronos' in *Measures of Wisdom: The Cosmic Dance in Classical and Christian Antiquity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), pp. 414-482. See also Françoise Syson Carter, 'Celestial Dance: A Search for Perfection', *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research,* 5, 2,(1987), 3-17; and Zacharoula A. Petraki, 'The Soul 'Dances': Psychomusicology in Plato's Republic', *Apeiron*, 41, 2 (2011), 147-170.

[197] Plato, Robin Waterfield, and Andrew Gregory, *Plato: Timaeus and Critias* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 28-29. This 'doubling' back effect of traversing one's former pathways is exhibited in baroque dance figurations. See Thomas M. Greene, 'Labyrinth dances in the French and English Renaissance', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 54, 4 (2001), 1403-1466. This is of course also exhibited in aerial trajectories and can be easiest to identify in the aerial trajectories of flying trapeze acts, as discussed in chapter one.

[198] See Heather L Reid, *Athletics and Philosophy in the Ancient World: Contests of Virtue* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

[199] Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies,* trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley with an introduction by Steven Connor (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1985, 2016), p. 14.

horrific, cataclysmic moment that one must reckon with its violence in order to reclaim its central positioning in order to become like the celestial bodies which it strives to imitate and mirror in its actions:

> The point of spherical symmetry, around which swimming, diving or dance unfold their flight, and the existence or soul of which is revealed by birth, or by passing through the crack opened up in the side of the burning boat, moves outside the body as a result of positions, movements, exercises. From our foetal origin, we have known how to move around this pole, we know how to bring it into existence outside ourselves.[200]

Thus, any movement in which the body reasserts its central orientation—derived from a celestial, spherical concept of verticality—becomes an actioned manifestation of one's internal discovery of its ensouled nature. The apparatus is essential in the aesthetic discovery of this cosmic orientation. Similar to the production of spiralling, spherical and symmetrical figurations of baroque dance trajectories, the aerialist produces aerial trajectories that imitate the celestial pathways of the cosmos. Yet it is through its correspondence with the apparatus that the aerialist also imitates the axial symmetries of celestial orbs as they rotate, revolve, and undulate in a series of revolutions while simultaneously embarking on their individual aerial trajectories. The aerialist must also adhere to structural arrangements of their apparatus, and adapt to a space and others' actions, spinning in a celestial order of acrobatic harmony in action.

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[200] Ibid., p. 324. The full English translation of the paragraph, which underpins my analysis, follows: The lift for which, in your usual form of locomotion, the sole of the foot alone is responsible, is distributed over the whole surface of the skin when we swim. The responsibility for porterage, in a medium that would doffer no resistance to weight its it were concentrated on the banal polygon, is transferred to the body which suddenly, in its entirety, becomes a foot…It could be said that standing and walking, because of gravity, impose on us the axial symmetry that sculpts our form and appearance, linking us all to the centre of the earth. Swimming in water and dancing in air release us from this commonplace, and replace the straight line with a point in that indeterminate place, constituted by passing through the birth scuttle, that I previously called the soul. All our symmetries change. Breaststroke, glissades, jetés, diving, transform us into radiant beings- or rather radiolaria. If we lived in the water for several million years, would we become starfish? We've all seen danders whose torso disappeared as they moved. Cylinders set on the ground, eyes and knees as symmetrical as backs and breasts: the solid imposes a heavy architectural angularity, whereas we become spheres around a point in the voluble fluid which naturally inclines towards roundness. Everything that decreases gravity, or nullifies it, leads back to this centre that comes out of the earth and is incorporated in our autonomy, that is encircled by our movements in the water and controls jumping…So, curled up, slowly swimming in the mother's womb, the fœtus is wrapped around the same point; curls around its soul before birth, determines it at the moment of birth, rediscovers it when swimming or dancing, in the magic of a thousand spherical symmetries. Don't swim overarm, don't dog paddle, don't obediently maintain the competitive and proud posture of axial symmetry; coil up in the liquid you remember from your embryonic days, in search of the buried soul- it is there that true progress is to be found, pp. 323-324.

The apparatus, while outside of the body, is no less central to this invention of Platonic ideology in baroque dance. Philosopher Heather Reid believes Plato's soul references to the chariot across the Platonic diaologues represent the importance of communication between the invisible and visible entities of one's composition as one aspires to proportional balance between the soul and the body.[201] Cleo Bradshaw also reminds us that in Platonic metaphors of ascension of the soul, that:

> consistently missing from this analogy is the symbolic value of the charioteer's reins, which are the tool used to steer and control the horses and ascend to the heavens. Without the reins, the charioteer is not able to ascend…Thus, they function as the instrument of communication. The reins symbolise the conduit or channel through which the charioteer's directives flow through the whole soul, and the motion of the horses is also fed back through the reins to the charioteer.[202]

Likewise, it is through the apparatus that the aerialist, like the metaphoric charioteer and their reins, can direct all parts of its soulful existence into virtuous discipline and order to imitate celestial flight rather than allow the 'heaviness' of disorder bring back down to earth, to the bad and undiscoverable soul. The apparatus enables the body to reclaim its central orientation and spherical symmetries, and the lift of aerial circus action harmonises the body to the soul. As discussed in chapter one, the aerialist is in continual correspondence in and through their apparatus—a continual moderation of energies at which the body reorients oneself around a new centre, which with the application of Serres, is in a continual moderation to seek its soul and be born in the moment of airborne action.

In this production of *Alcione*, not only do individual members of the ensemble act out the corporeal recognition of having a soul, but they incite others to discover their ensoulfulness through inspiration and through action. In a statement which calls to mind Platonic virtues of moral

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[201] Heather L. Reid, 'Plato's Gymnastic Dialogues' in *Athletics, Gymnastics and Agon in Plato*, eds. Heather L. Reid, Mark Ralkowski, and Coleen P. Zoller (Parnassos Press, Fonte Aretusa, 2020), p. 19. See also Heather Reid, 'Athletic Beauty in Classical Greece: A Philosophical View', *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 39, 2 (2012), 281-297.

[202] Cleo Bradshaw, *Soul-shaping: Spatial metaphors in the development of subjectivity in Plato*, (unpublished doctoral dissertation, York University, Cananda, 2011), p. 276.

responsibility that Michel Serres insists that ‘flying is nothing if you cannot make others fly’.[203] The apparatus enables the aerialist to not only correspond with celestial space and use it as a conduit for dissolving their axial symmetry, but also act as a conduit between the community for a collective rebirth of their souls. By choreographing and staging the moment of departure, the foot leaving the ground to become airborne, as a communal action as a societal action that requires intense proportional consideration of non-axial symmetries, the very act of being—of existing and acknowledging the virtuous, celestial soul in one’s body—becomes a communal act. It consecrates the ensemble as a joyful, ensouled celestial body reigning over the stage in its presentation to incite and entice one to invigorate their body in spherical symmetries and find ebullient peace as a collective. It is wild with abandon, effervescent in its liveliness—ebullience in its corporeal definition. It is a presentation of the rejuvenation of the soul, in virtuous action of improvement, in and through its geometric (and biomechanic) positioning within an ordered society. It is pure spherical joy as the ensemble comes together in their coordinated and moderated actions to lift up off the floor into bursts of acrobatic aerial action—it is the discovery and the restoration of the ensemble’s collective soul. In the next section, I discuss three aerial trajectories of communal circus aeriality in Opéra Comique’s production of *Alcione*. I explore how the aerial circus actions of the ensemble invent new possibilities of communal joy where their airborne manoeuvres lift out of and into a new baroque identity untethered by gravitational restraints of verticality.

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[203] Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies,* trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley with an introduction by Steven Connor (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1985, 2016), p. 322.

***Establishing spherical symmetries of ensouled aerial action in Alcione***

*Alcione* found fame in the early eighteenth century primarily for its well-loved and often performed and parodied tempest scene.[204] An instantaneous hit after the premiere, *la tempête* routinely featured as a concert piece, and ensured Marais's most successful opera received five revivals in the period from its premiere in 1706 up to 1771. Although *la tempête* in *Alcione* is considered Marin Marais's most popular and well-known musical imitation of a natural event, he also emulated an earthquake in his last opera, *Semele* (1709). While Marais was certainly not the first to extravagantly render a musical storm, it is arguably the catalyst for a renewed fascination in musical translations of natural phenomena into intense scenes of stage theatrics and sumptuous design that endured for centuries to come.[205] Marais's operatic storms plausibly inspired his contemporaries and immediate operatic successors, including André Campra's *Idoménée* (1712) and Jean-Philippe Rameau's *Les Indes galantes* (1735), the latter of which, a highly colonialist *opéra-ballet*, prominently features a volcanic eruption in Act II.[206] While we can reliably ascribe performer flight to these scenes, based

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[204] Marin Marais's *la tempête* proved an instantaneous success following the opera's premiere in 1706. With the opera's success, given Parisian theatrical conventions of parodies and societal references, parodies of the famous extract from the opera also became a notable hit. For the cultural appreciation of the tempest in *Alcione*, see James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: a cultural history* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1995). For historic examples of parody and imitation pieces of Marais's compositions, see Judith le Blanc, *Avatars d'opéras: Parodies et circulation des airs chantés sur les scènes parisiennes, 1672-1745* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014); Michael Fend, 'An instinct for parody and a spirit for revolution: Parisianopera, 1752-1800', in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Music*, ed. Simon P. Keefe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Donald Jay Grout, 'Seventeenth-Century Parodies of French Opera, Part I', *The Musical Quarterly,* 27, 2 (1941), 211-219; Donald Jay Grout, 'Seventeenth-Century Parodies of French Opera, Part I', *The Musical Quarterly,* 27, 4 (1941), 514-526; Susan Louise Harvey, *Opera Parody in Eighteenth-Century France: Genesis, Genre, and Critical Function* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Stanford, 2003); and John S. Powell, 'The opera parodies of Florent Carton Dancourt', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 13, 2 (2001), 87-114.

[205] For example, by 15 September 1904, the London Times published a review of Herbert Beerbohm Tree's production of *The Tempest* at His Majesty's Theater, London, that confirmed the question of whether or not lavish spectacle was dramatically legitimate in rendering productions and adaptations derived from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: 'Above all Prospero is a man of words. Ariel is a sprite of words... They made their set speeches, and sang their songs, and the imagination of the audience had to do the rest. This can not be so today. It is the manager and his stage mangers who had to do the rest. And the 'rest' is now the chief part. All the sensorial elements of drama become prominent and all the words take second place... The atmosphere of enchantment has no longer to be suggested; it has to be realized,' As quoted in Mary M. Nilan, 'The Tempest at the Turn of the Century: Cross-Currents in Production' in *The Tempest: Critical Essays*, ed. Patrick M. Murphy, (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 341-357.

[206] See Mitchell Cohen, *The Politics of Opera: A History from Monteverdi to Mozart* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018); Snait B. Gissis, 'Visualizing "Race" in the Eighteenth Century', *Historical Studies in the Natural* Sciences, 41, 1 (2011), 41-103; and Joellen A. Meglin, "Sauvages, Sex Roles, and Semiotics": Representations of Native Americans in the French Ballet, 1736-1837, Part One: the Eighteenth Century', *Dance Chronicle*, 23, 2 (2000), 87-132.

on surviving promptbooks, set designs, libretti, and spectatorial reception, we are, sadly, unable to deduce with certainty if acrobatics were involved, and if they were the level of fluid incorporation of acrobatic or circus aeriality, in the historic aerial stagings of the operatic convention of tempests. In Moaty's 2017 production, aerial circus action features prominently in bringing Alcione's phantasmic nightmare to the stage.

Presented behind cloth-like curtains, as if we are witnessing the turbulent storm from behind the sails of the ship itself, the acrobats in the ensemble portray the sailors caught in the musical and visual storm. Glimpsed through flashes of lightning, scattered shadows of the acrobats dart across the stage in a flurry along with Marais's famous composition. The sailors struggle against the imposing gale, then engage in whirling acrobatics, scaling the poles behind the curtain and dashing across the stage, tightening ropes as they run and as the storm rages on. The scenic effect is reminiscent of another tempest: Charles Kean's 1857 production of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which was two years prior to Jules Léotard's invention of the flying trapeze in Paris, and four years prior to Léotard's premiere performance at the Alhambra Theatre in London in 1861. Kean's production relied heavily on theatrical lighting and shadowing effects to frame the turbulent action of the shipwreck at the start of the play.[207] Yet the incorporation of aerial circus action in this production moves beyond spectacular theatrics to invent upon French baroque ideologies in which the airborne actions of the ensemble become an activated site at which the corporeal vehicle of the

[207] For depiction of Kean's 1857 production, see Mary M. Nilan, 'Shakespeare, Illustrated: Charles Kean's 1857 Production of The Teampest', *Shakespeare* Quarterly, 26, 2 (1975), 196-204. Contemporary aerial circus action has also been featured in a twenty-first century staging of a tempest. Robert Lepage's 2012 production of Thomas Adés' *The Tempest*, a co-production, between Festival d'opéra, The Metropolitan Opera, and Opera Wiener Staatsoper in collaboration with Lepage's own Ex Machina, features aerialist Jamie Verazin, portraying the role of Ariel as soprano Audrey Luna's body double, contorts and manipulates her body in an aerial acrobatic routine to invoke the turbulent tempest at the start of the opera. While visually spectacular, mechanised tempests are not new to the performance history of theatrical and operatic adaptations William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, this version's raising of the storm is an unmistakable imprint of the director's history with contemporary circus arts and signifies that the aerial Cirque identity will be an integral aspect of Ariel's identity in this interpretation evident in the image of a sparkly, nimble acrobat impressively dangling on a chandelier apparatus. For how Ariel's costume, which held clear significations with *nouveau cirque* practices, see Julie Lynch, 'Such stuff as dreams are made on: Exploring costume design's semiotic and scenographic potential in making meaning for performance', *Studies in Costume & Performance,* 1, 1 (2016), 41-57.

body discovers its soul through collective airborne actions. This ideological invention is established, not from the tempest but from the Prologue.

***The prologue***

The prologue's introductory presence establishes the theatrical ensemble as a central airborne force in *Alcione*.[208] The ensemble, comprised of singers, dancers, and circus artists, explicitly defines the parameters of their dramatic and interpretive roles. They portray a myriad of characters from fawns to shepherds, and their choreographic aerial circus actions firmly sets the foundation for a stylised 'circusification' of baroque ideologies (Appendix B, 3.1). The floor, and its earthen connection, are both vital to the moments of aeriality that are constant throughout the production and this is initiated right from the outset of the production in the prologue. According to Rodney Shewan, the Prologue's song contest between Pan and Apollo establishes 'the terms of reference: light versus dark, order and reason versus chaos and natural instinct. The opera develops them.'[209] Yes, the opera certainly presents these divisional poles that are then textually explored through the music, but, the opera also dramatically stages them according to theatrical and spatial topologies. To Shewan's list, we must add a vertical plane of dichotomous terms: celestial and earthen. The grounded figure of Pan initiates the topographic opposition contrasting the divine ethereal and aerial associations of Apollo. Apollo enters into the musical competition as he slowly ascends to a central position in the air, only to be followed by one of the circus aerialists in slow rotating harness work, then quickly accompanied by two further aerialists each undulating in a symmetrically ordered celestial revolution (Appendix B, 3.1). Apollo's traditional aeriality is cast in a halo of light to replicate the cloud machines and chariots that would plausibly allude to his descent and ascent in

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[208] Invocations of royal adoration were a frequent musico-dramatic force in compositional and performance practices of baroque opera. See Rebecca Harris-Warrick, 'Prologues', in *Dance and Drama in French Baroque Opera: A History,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). For a sonic appraisal of divine representations on the stage beyond theatrical aeriality, see Geoffrey Burgess, 'Enlightening Harmonies: Rameau's corps snore and the Representation of the Divine in the tragédie en musique', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 65, 2 (2012), 383-462.

[209] Rodney Shewan, '*Alcyone.* Marin Marais', *The Opera Quarterly*, 9, 2 (1992), 163-165.

the initial performance of *Alcione* in 1706.[210] There is a marked difference between Apollo's theatrical aeriality and the ensemble aerialists' circus aeriality yet they are not diametrically opposed. They both belong to the celestial frame. The ensemble uses the language of acrobatic aeriality drawn from the circus, whereas, Apollo, separate from the ensemble society and distinctly demarcated as a god, is statically derived from historic iterations of theatrical deities. Apollo's vertical alignment, with his rope elongated from heaven to earth, denies any alternative symmetries. This vertical alignment—indicative and synonymous of divine ordination and representation in operatic history—references the origins of stage mechanics and early technologies that enabled performers to ascend and descend from the heavens.[211] Born out of the fifteenth-century *Sacre Rappresentazioni*, and later expanded to include mythological characters, the ubiquitous presence of elaborate and expansive theatrical machinery was as much a stalwart in French baroque opera as dance.[212] On stage, operatic flight was by performers portraying gods, goddesses, and mythic creatures, whereas on the rope in public spectacles, the skilled acrobat served as a divine messenger signalling that the heavens had bestowed grace and approval over the event. Rope walkers across Europe were seen to collectively unite a public audience by visually manifesting heavenly

[210] Lucy Robinson, 'Musique française classique', *Early Music*, 45, 2 (2017), 337-340. Regrettably, to my knowledge, there is no record detailing the theatrical staging of the opera, yet we can reliably assume that stage machinery was employed in the original production to enable performer flight in the representation of divinities and mythical characters, which most assuredly included aeriality for the role of Apollo as was customary for French baroque opera of the period.

[211] Rebecca Harris-Warrick presented a paper entitled 'Flying phantoms and tumbling faunes: acrobats on the French Baroque musical stage' at the "Gods, Men, & Monsters" Oxford Dance Symposium at New College, Oxford in 2001, in which she proposed historic sleuthing methods and investigative avenues to determine if acrobatics were included in theatrical dances in Lullian operas.

[212] See Alessandra Buccheri, *The Spectacle of Clouds, 1439-1650 Italian Art and Theatre* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Per Bjurström, *Giacomo Torelli and Baroque Stage Design* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962); Orville K. Larson,. 'Giacomo Torelli, Sir Philip Skippon, and Stage Machinery for the Venetian Opera', *Theatre Journal*, 32, 4 (1980), 448-457; and Orville K. Larson, 'Vasari's Descriptions of Stage Machinery', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 9, 4 (1957), 287-299.

appointment and ordination.[213] While we may not have explicit acrobatic notations of aerial flight or acrobatic manoeuvres in the performance of formal and theatrical dances, we do have historic accounts of the presence of formal baroque dances in the predecessors of traditional aerial circus disciplines. The choreographic action of rope dancing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was an amalgamation of court dances, social reels, acrobatic manoeuvres, sliding and scaling ascents and descents, and integrations of secondary apparatus, such as hair hang, teeth hang, rings, and trapeze bars.[214]

Here, in this 2017 production of *Alcione*, contemporary circus aeriality does not further traditional baroque aeriality in divine ordination and representation—rather, it deftly exemplifies Serres's joyful spherical symmetries of the body in active discovery of one's soul through a reorientation and dissolution of one's axial symmetry to explore cosmic spatial orbits as an invention of baroque dance. Earlier, I referenced the term 'vehicle' for describing aerial circus action's corporeal role in presenting the dramatic action of the opera. This was no mistake as circus aeriality in this production has historic links to elaborate, mechanised stage machines that carried child and adult performers across the stage. Commonly engineered as chariots in the scenographic guise of clouds, these machines enabled performers to soar across the stage as the performer was either strapped in a seated or standing position whilst holding onto a safety bar. The staging draws attention to the

[213] The presence and action of aeriality in conscription and celebration has a rich western history. A significant event for the celebrations of the Venetian carnival is the 'Flight of the Angels', which has its historic originations when funambulists would scale the heights of St. Mark's Tower to perform acrobatic tricks on a diagonal rope at exultant heights to bestow flowers and gifts to the Doge. Rope dancing exhibitions were also prominent and thrilling performances held in honour of non-religious and aristocratic occasions. A notable example is the internationally-renowned French rope artist Madame Saqui, born Marguerite Antoinette Lalanne (1786-1886), and her four-year show stopping appearances at the Vauxhall gardens in London. Her performances gained notoriety for over the top theatrics and impressive feats, such as sliding down ropes attached from a hot air balloon alongside firework displays and orchestral accompaniment. The connection between earth and sky through apparatus and bodily stature was a link between the heavens and humanity in both early circus exhibitions and its role in theatre machines and performer flight. This vertical symbolism in aerial rope continues in modern approaches to circus dramaturgy and training. See E.H. Fairbrother, 'Rope-Dancing in Lincoln's Inn fields', *Notes and Queries*, 14 (1925), 349; Paul Ginisty and Madame Saqui, *Mémoires dune danseuse de corde: Mme Saqui (1786-1866)* (Paris, 1907); Grainne McArdle, 'Signora Violante and Her Troupe of Dancers 1729-32', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland Society*, 20 (2005), 58-78; and Edward Rosenheim, 'A Source for the Rope-dancing in Gulliver's Travels', *Philological Quarterly*, 31 (1952), 208.

[214] This was before the invention of the flying trapeze towards the end of the nineteenth century.

marked difference, and immediately transfers baroque gestures, spatial arrangements and ideologies of the dancing ensemble onto the contemporary circus aerial trajectories performed by the ensemble in contrast to its historic aerial predecessor associated with mechanised manoeuvres hoisting static, non-circus figures. This invention of aeriality is a dramatic vehicle and not mechanised vehicle as it once was. The circular rotations offer an alternative aesthetic and interpretation of aerial movement in Baroque opera's staging of the divine as it physically enacts the celestial revolutions and rotations both on their individual axial symmetries and their collective orbital arrangements.[215] The symmetrical positioning of the three aerialists is of particular note, as it initiates a recurring invention of baroque dance symmetries, patterning, and societal relationships through contemporary circus aerial action. The baroque dance spatial patterns become airborne, finding an invention into an aerial terrain that defies orientational definition. As the three aerialists move their body from their redefined centre, their positions reflect their ideological movements through joyful exuberance. This celestial affinity and spatially communicative alignment, situated opposite its operatic predecessor, sees aerial circus action's full capabilities on display as it embraces its operatic dualism and flows from its new position within and invention upon the societal role of dance. Retracing its celestial trajectories, the aerial body returns home in a perfect ordered journey, providing stability in its knowledge and actions, which is produced and reproduced as performers invent new aerial pathways on celestial ascents and descents in baroque opera.

### *Marches pour les matelots*

Preceding the infamous shipwreck is the most intense dance scene in the opera, and now with this production, the most intense circus scene. As a *tambourin*, the scene relies heavily on the metered form and accentuated thrusts of the percussive instruments, including instrumentalists performing

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[215] James Miller, *Measures of Wisdom: The Cosmic Dance in Classical and Christian Antiquity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

on stage to the side of the densely packed circus sequences and actions taking centre, and aerial, stage.[216] As per convention, dances were positioned around solos, duets and trios in which the music would repeat, with slight variations. The accompanying dance figures did not repeat and, instead, presented a progression in the dramatic action in relation to the vocal lines sung in between the danced actions. In the *marche pour les matelots* scene*,* each of the sections entitled *'danse'* in the libretto creates a moment for aerial circus action to seemingly spontaneously erupt from the stillness as the vocal refrains dominate, until the acrobatic hub of activity can no longer be contained. Befitting the directives of ensemble dance scenes, the aerial circus action revolves around poles and ropes that present a ship in continual (re)rigging.

The circus rigging featured in Act III imitates a ship's mast, in alignment with the original stage directions requiring 'a ship ready to sail'.[217] The rope circus apparatus are primarily set against these two poles, in which a network of ropes is constructed, with some ropes centrally anchored around the pole and others left free for the artists to interact with both in the air and on the ground. The enmeshed network of slack, vertical, and diagonal rope and pole in precise spatial and tactile arrangements creates the opportunity for the aerialists to enact varied spatial configurations. It is a rigging arrangement designed to be erected, dissolved, and reorganised over and over as the scene progresses.

The interwoven adaptable apparatus framework enables the performers to seamlessly shift from slack rope, to vertical rope, to pole, and back to slack rope, as the circus artists are simultaneously

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[216] It is unclear if the decision to have a trio of instrumentalists on stage is a nod to historic practices or if it is a choreomusical communication technique to align the orchestra and circus artists during the tricker technical skills executed during this scene, or both. For instrumentalists and their on-stage presence in baroque opera, see Rebecca Harris-Warrick, 'Magnificence in motion: Stage musicians in Lully's ballets and opera', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 6, 3 (2008), pp. 189-203.

[217] Alice Renken, *MARIN MARAIS'S "ALCIONE": AN EDITION WITH COMMENTARY* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Washington University, 1981), p. 145.

engaged in enacting circus figures and restructuring the rigging. This rigging structure certainly mimics the activity on a ship's deck prior to departure, but it also fosters novel spatial and figurative circus relationships in action. Social attributes of baroque dance are also present in the ensemble aerial circus action, as many of the relations explored in the circus actions are similar to those of baroque choreographies that acknowledged, and even promoted, romantic opportunities available to dancers from the specific arrangements and pathways in the dance figurations.[218] The aerial pathways of the performers are driven both by the apparatus and the successive communal trajectories, similar to the processional, architectural arrangements of baroque dances that would bring partners together and apart through their successions of figurations.[219] For example, in one brief interaction, an aerialist scales the pole with the end of a rope in his hand. This particular rope is attached to the opposite pole on the stage, on which a second aerialist is positioned at the top of the rope, close to its initial rigging point. As the aerialist on the pole climbs upwards, the rope in his hands moves from a vertical position to a diagonal position, and then, as he attaches it to a rigging point at the top of the second pole, the rope becomes a slack rope apparatus, which is similar to tight-rope; however, it is not taut and it loosely dips in the centre. The aerialist who is on the rope throughout this reorganisation of the apparatus fluidly adapts her movements from climbing up the vertical rope, to sliding down the diagonal rope, to turning a serious of revolutions on the slack rope before assuming a seated swing-like position at the end of this particular trajectory. The two aerialists under discussion are engaged in only what could be described as an aerial courting as their individual aerial trajectories bring them together for flirtatious moments of tactile and spatial interactions. Both aerialists enact historic steps and movements representative of early rope dancing including scaling ascents, twirling revolutions, and baroque dance figures, such as cabrioles and

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[218] Jennifer Nevile, *Dance, Spectacle, and the Body Politick, 1250-1750* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 88.

[219] Catherine Turocy, 'La Cosmografia del Minor Mondo: Recovering Dance Theory to Create Today's Baroque Practice', in *Dance on its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies*, eds. Melanie Bales and Karen Eliot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 165.

springing lifts. Throughout this interaction, the two aerialists position their bodies towards and away from each other as the apparatus shifts their respective positions in relation to the other due to their interconnected actions.

There are further aerial circus actions in the last sections of the scene following this sequence; however, I will now focus on one additional aerial trajectory that is particularly striking and most signifying of an invention of baroque dance ideologies that can only be produced from aerial circus action. This particular sequence emphasises the rhythmic and metrical importance of *le mouvement* and the tactile immediacy of moderation in aerial circus action's invention upon baroque dance ideologies. It begins as two pole artists climb up the one pole while playfully teasing each other, when a third aerialist, Emily Zuckerman, climbs onto a rope situated between the two poles (Appendix B, 3.2). The rope, initially unanchored to the ground, is then anchored by four, then five artists of the circus troupe. They control the increasing and decreasing tension as Zuckerman climbs and twirls around the diagonal rope in varying degrees of tautness.[220] She climbs up it and transitions from laying and dangling in various positions to descending revolutions as she arrives back to the bottom of the rope. Then, in rhythmic alignment with the repetition of the musical air, any sense of orientation or direction of order are disrupted through the exhaustive force of the ensemble anchoring her rope. The artists heave onto the end of the rope as it launches Zuckerman's body up and forward up the rope. Her body thrusts up and expands out—only her two hands attached to the rope as her elongated back and legs are perpendicular to the sky above and earth

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[220] To quote André Lepecki, this ensemble circus trajectory, which reorganises the spatial arrangement of the apparatus through communal action, creates a 'radical deterritorialization' [sic] of the traditional circus space, in which an apparatus is rigged to project a mastering of a geographic, societal, or corporeal space, as discussed in the previous case study. See André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 75-77. This has a particular resonance with Tim Ingold's philosophy of ecology of lines, in which there is nothing above, nothing below, and only a becoming in and through linear arrangements. Since my focus is on the spherical symmetries of the discovering one's soul in the moment of lifting from the ground, this exploration was not within the limits of the current analysis. Connecting Lepecki's analysis with Ingold's philosophy would prove a useful foundation for the theoretical and dramaturgic examination of creative rigging practices in and through aerial circus action which to intentionally deconstruct horizontal planes of tight-rope practices. See Tim Ingold, *The Life of Lines* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2015).

below. She breaks the tactile connection to her rope as she allows the thrust of the aerialists below to buoy her body up higher on the rope. She scales the rope like this in six rhythmically precise thrusts, executing not only awe-inspiring aerial actions, but a circusification of *le mouvement* as her body becomes airborne precisely on the downbeat. Then, just before the final thrust from the ensemble below, the male aerialist on the pole kicks upwards with a virtuosic cabriole, in opposition to Zuckerman's thrusts. Meanwhile, the communal action below waits for her up at the top in a lingering flirtation, as she swings her weight to dangle upside down at the top of the rope and as his legs wrap around the pole. The two tease a kiss before the artists at the bottom of her rope pull, and she slides down and away from her romantic partner—a quick tactile embrace and touch to the shoulder, cut short by the pull of the ensemble that forces her body to reorient once again as she slides down the dramatic decline of the taught, diagonal rope.

According to Zuckerman, the rope artist central to the creation and performance of this specific aerial trajectory, this sequence of aerial actions was based on prior years of individual and group experimentation. This particular sequence came into existence as the circus troupe workshopped their individual acrobatic inventions in collective coordination. This creation process, indicative of much aerial circus action, is written not through notation, but through live acts of corporeal inscription. It is a revelatory sequence in the production that simultaneously embodies André Lepecki's underlying principle of invention—that 'the body is archive and archive is the body'—and highlights the phenomenal notational distinction between baroque dance and aerial circus action.[221] Underlying the interrelated concepts of moderation and *le mouvement* is how one precisely executes the prescribed figures, steps, and spatial arrangements set out in dance notation. According to Mark Franko, notational inscriptions, as a written predecessor to the physical action of

[221] André Lepecki, 'The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances', *Dance Research Journal,* 42, 2 (2010), 28-48, (p. 31).

dance, act as 'pictorial guide maps' in which the dancer can cartographically trace the space in an act that harmonises 'the luminous planar space of Cartesian rationality, manifested in linear geometries and the perfection of the body as a machine'.[222] Yet aerial circus actions are the inverse. Circus actions precede inscription.[223] According to Peta Tait, the execution of aerial manoeuvres and trajectories are derived from aerialists physically exhausting their muscles by 'imitating the physical actions of other aerialists, and repeatedly pushing beyond the established limits of aerial athleticism' in collective acts of corporeal inscription.[224] The predecessor to aerial circus action is aerial circus action. It is an 'organic' action rooted in corporeal inscription that has never been historically restrained by notational prescriptions.[225] It is a coordinated act of invention that

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[222] Mark Franko, 'Inscribing Dance' in *Of the Presence of the Body,* ed. André Lepecki (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), p. 126. For more on the history of dance notation, with particular focus on French baroque notation systems, see Ken Pierce, 'Dance Notation Systems in Late 17th-Century France', *Early Music* 26, 2 (1998), 286–299; and John S. Powell, 'Pierre Beauchamps, Choreographer to Molière's Troupe du Roy', *Music & Letters,* 76, 2 (1995), 168–186.

[223] For information on circus notation and its role in training and documentation practices, see Katrin Wolf's creation of circus notations, adapted from Benesh Movement Notation, that are specific to each discipline, inclusive and exclusive of aerial disciplines. There are eight volumes and each volume can be accessed online via the Centre National des Arts du Cirque (CNAC) research centre, Katrin Wolf, (CNAC, 2017), <https://cnac.fr/article/1846_Publications-CNAC-et-Chaire-ICiMa> [accessed February 2021].

[224] Peta Tait, *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 147. See also Peta Tait, 'Body Memory in Muscular Action on Trapeze', *Scan Journal*, 2, 2 (2005), np; and —'Re/membering Muscular Circus Bodies: Triple Somersaults, the Flying Jordans and Clarke Brothers', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 33, 1 (2006), 26-28.

[225] Here, I intentionally reference noted dance theorist and historian Laurence Louppe. According to Louppe, dance movements must be organic in order to be '*birthed'* and flow from the body in and through action. There is no need to eradicate notational inscription to position a past within the danced body that exists outside of notational inscription, as posited by Louppe, since corporeal inscription is aerial circus action's historic past and present. Sally Gardner, who translated Louppe's informative work *Poétique de la danse contemporaine*, highlights the etymological importance of Louppe's birthing metaphor, which is particularly striking in its resonance with Michel Serres's swirling, spherical symmetries that arise from a body's soulful beginnings in the womb. Mark Franko calls into question Louppe's reading of Mallarmé, which supports her organic argument of danced movements. Like Franko, a full examination of these inconsistencies is beyond the focus of this case study; however, by furthering Platonic philosophies of the birth of the human-soul through an application of Michel Serres's spherical symmetries, that predate choreographic verticalities, I believe there is a theoretical perspective that supports Louppe's prioritisation of 'the body over choreography', as surmised by Franko, and should be explored beyond this brief case study in any serious remediation of Louppe's references to Mallarmé. See Laurence Louppe, 'Écriture littéraire, écriture chorégraphique au XXe siècle: une double révolution', *Littérature,* 112, (1998), 88-99; and Laurence Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance,* trans. Sally Garnder (London: Dance Books, Ltd., 2010). See also Mark Franko, 'Repeatability, Reconstruction, and Beyond,' in *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 133-152; — 'Writing for the Body: Notation, Reconstruction, and Reinvention in Dance', *Common Knowledge,* 17, 2 (2011), 321-334, (p. 330); and Sally Gardner, 'Translating Laurence Louppe', *Modern Language Studies*, 46, 4 (2010), 356-371.

launches the artist from the 'planar dimensions' of baroque dance figurations.[226] This communal thrust—with the preparation on the upbeat as Zuckerman's body lifts in caught moments of stasis on the downbeat— is an invention upon baroque dance ideologies that can only come into existence through aerial circus action. This is because 'much dance notation of earlier periods already has the quality of graphic presentation that is foregrounded in contemporary choreographic experimentation,' so the prescriptive identity of choreographic notation is still present.[227] Indeed, this moment is a microcosm of Platonic philosophies of the birth and rediscovery of one's ensouled being. The lift in *le mouvement* becomes a transformational site, articulating the soulful joviality that cannot be contained as it disrupts and defies a grounded, one-dimensional perspective of one's vertical centre.[228] The ensemble's active corporeal engagement in the arrangement, rearrangement and continual disruption of the directional orientation of the apparatus physically stages moments in which an individual artist is forced to visibly (re)discover their entombed soul—through the joyous lift up off the ground and into the air in acrobatic muscular effort—that is at the sole instruction of the communal and moderated collective action. The untethered apparatus effectively eradicates the vertical dimensionality of the earthen, non-spherical dimensions prescribed in baroque dance notations, and offers the material means for the ensemble to enact communal joy in an enmeshed structural action. It finds deviation from the grounded patterns of baroque dance into an airborne flight of joyful exuberance—a momentary joy in the aberrations from the baroque rise and fall to identify and reclaim one's ensouled existence within an ordered society.

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[226] André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 75. This presents a radically different interpretation of Lepecki's disruption of *planar dimensions* in his analysis of Trisha Brown's 'It's a Draw/Live Feed'. I note that this is needed and should be included in a theoretical analysis on the lack of notational prescription of aerial circus action in regard to the more nuanced, complex debate regarding writing in dance theory. This would be particularly useful in demonstrating the difference between aerial dance interpretations and aerial circus interpretations of operatic works in performance. A study of this nature would certainly include Trisha Brown's *L'Orfeo* and Sasha Waltz's choreographic contributions to the opera stage.

[227] Mark Franko, 'Writing for the Body: Notation, Reconstruction, and Reinvention in Dance', *Common Knowledge*, 17, 2 (2011), 321-334, (p. 332).

[228] This is informed from circus educator Roberto Magro, as quoted in Agathe Dumont, *Verticality, Weight and Gravity: A Pedagogical Guide* (FEDEC, 2015), <http://www.fedec.eu/en/articles/514-verticality-weight-and-gravity> [accessed 14 December 2020], p. 30. Magro states that when one works on transitions between aeriality, apparatus, and the floor the creative and technical focus shifts to the 'deconstruction and reconstruction of the gesture', p.30.

***Conclusion***

In this case study, my philosophical engagement with aerial circus action demonstrates that the shared ideological and historic links between circus arts and opera necessitates a tandem study of the art forms in order to explore aerial circus action's inspirational and virtuosic invention of operatic practices. The invention of French baroque dance into aerial circus action lifts opera to discover its unending adaptability for modern practices, and prompts me to think of what other early opera texts might be ripe for an aerial circus invention upon their shared spatial and ideological pasts?[229] After all, opera's developments are intrinsically tied to theatrical invention and innovation enabling celestial and mythic flights across the stage whereby the historic and ideological paths of opera and circus converge. Beyond this tantalising question, the case study broached an essential differentiation between dance and aerial circus action on the operatic stage: notational inscription. As noted before, the aerialist in tactile correspondence with the apparatus produces corporeal inscriptions upon and in one's body. In an introduction to Michel Serres's *Les Cinq Sens*, Steven Connor recalls an imagistic impression of how 'the body mingles with the world and with itself, overflows its borders'.[230] This statement, while not referencing aerial circus action, seems to allude to how the corresponding, communicative actions of aerialist and apparatus shape the artist's body.

[229] This production is filled with opportunities for further analysis. For example, this case study would benefit from a companion case study examining the use of aerial apparatus rope to bind the hands of Alcione and Ceix in an elaborate handfasting scene. Handfasting, routinely acknowledged as a Celtic pagan tradition, would often occur to informally acknowledge an engagement and could consist of either braided cord wrapped and tied around the couple's conjoined hands or the laying of a knot over hands. Yet in this production, the ropes that are tied and braided around the couple's hands are the ropes that enable the circus artists to lift off the ground in virtuosic aerial circus actions. The circus artists also use the handfasting ropes to frame a procession of the couple through the lines of ensemble in a choreographic pattern that mirror baroque dance figurations. The ensemble are not mere standbys witnessing and commenting on the action: they are integral to the consecration of the engagement and marriage of Ceix and Alcione. The circusification of this act, as each individual member of the ensemble connects their rope round the waist of Alcione, visually and tactilely connects one to each other through a symbolic and physical signification of communal joy. For more on the tradition and rituals of a handfasting ceremony, see Joanne Bailey, 'Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment', *The Journal of Legal History*, 32, 2 (2011), 241-244; B.A. Hanawalt, *The ties that bound: Peasant families in medieval England.* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Raven Kaldera and Tannin Schwartzstein. *Handfasting and Wedding Rituals: Welcoming Hera's Blessing* (Llewellyn., 2003). For an interesting look at how handfasting has been influential in theatrical staging practices and dramatic interpretations of Shakespeare's works, see Amy L. Smith, "Then we cannot be bought': Performing thwarted exchanges in *Love's Labour's Lost', Cahiers Élisabéthains: A Journal of English Renaissance Studies*, 95, 1 (2018), 40-61.

[230] Michel Serres, *The Five Senses*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley with an introduction by Steven Connor, (London, Oxford and New York: Bloomsbury, 1985, 2016).

This is the primary focus of my third and final case study. In Romeo Castellucci's 2011 production of Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*, I explore the dramatic impact of the apparatus rope as it constricts, restricts, and shapes the aerialists' fleshy contours in the hybrid performance art of circus contortion and shibari in suspension, a type of Japanese rope bondage. I look specifically at the corporeal inscriptions of two very specific actions in relation to this aerial rope practice—tying and untying. I examine how these distinct aerial circus actions instruct the corporeal overflow of the body, situated at the point of contact of rope to flesh, that raises narratological questions around power, action, passivity, and queer sensualities in a canonical opera text.

# Chapter Four. (In)action of (un)tying: shibari-tsuri and aerial contortion in Romeo Castellucci's 2011 La Monnaie De Munt production of Richard Wagner's *Parsifal* (1882)

## *Introduction*

From the epitome of 'beauty and disease' to the theatrical physicalisation of 'pure lust', Richard Wagner's flower-maidens are universally synonymous with the sonic and physicalised idealisation of woman as sensual and dangerous temptress.[231] Tyler Cole Mitchell is certainly not alone when he posits that 'the flower-maidens of the second act support the typical negative trope of the dangerous female siren, seeking to lure the hero with gentle song, gestures, and even scents'.[232] In an opera 'full of symbolism that does not symbolise', the flower-maidens are undisputedly the symbolic representation and operatic embodiment of destructive femininity encased in heteronormative performative tropes of the feminine.[233]

Traditional stagings of the flower-maidens throughout the late twentieth century have retained many similarities to the 1882 premiere's depiction of the flower-maidens as an exaggeration of westernised traditions of femininity.[234] In a letter to Ludwig II, dated 8 September 1882, Wagner detailed his impression of the magic garden scene featuring the flower-maidens in the Bayreuth

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[231] Richard Wagner's last opera, *Parsifal,* is an opera in three acts. In order of quotations, see Nicholas Till, 'An exotic and irrational entertainment': opera and our others; opera as other', in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies,* ed. Nicholas Till. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Simon J. C. Williams, 'From Wolfram to Wagner and Beyond: Sexuality, Freedom, and the Avoidance of Tragedy in Parsifal', *Arthuriana*, 11, 1 (2001), 11-29. See also Malcolm Davies, 'The Temptress throughout the Ages: Further Versions of Heracles at the Crossroads', *Classical Quarterly*, 54, 2 (2004), 606-660.

[232] Tyler Cole Mitchell, 'Unmasking Wagner's Grail: Homoeroticism, Androgyny, and Anxiety in *Parsifal',* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Tennessee, 2014), p. 59.

[233] Lawrence Kramer, 'The Talking Wound and the Foolish Question: Symbolization in Parsifal', *The Opera Quarterly*, 22, 2 (2007), 208-229, (p. 209). For relevant articles on the negative tropes of the feminine across Wagner's operatic output, see Barry Emslie, 'Woman as image and narrative in Wagner's Parsifal: A case study', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 3, 2 (1991), 109-124; Maria Euchner, 'The Ring's, Rhinemaidens: singing seductresses or women of wisdom?', *The Musical* Times, 153, 1918 (2012), 37-51; and Joseph Kestner, 'The dark side chivalry: women and men in Wagner's Parsifal', *Opera News*, 55, 14 (1991), 18.

[234] For a general overview of Wagnerian staging practices, inclusive of *Parsifal*, see Mike Ashman, 'Wagner on stage: aesthetic, dramaturgical, and social considerations' in *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 246-275.

production of that year.[235] Wagner's enthusiastic approval for the evocative floral and feminine rendering of the flower-maidens has been said to indicate the composer's own sensual fetish with floral scents.[236] Laurence Dreyfus, in *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse*, contextualises the seductive role of the flower-maidens in *Parsifal* with Wagner's own hidden sensualities, and surmises that a staged rendering of the flower-maidens' carnal seductiveness must be implicit, rather than explicit in order to remain faithful to the composer's exacting intentions. If, as Dreyfus states that Wagner forbade 'direct sexual overtures' in the staging and reproduction of the flower-maidens, then Romeo Castelluccci's 2011 directorial departure from these intentions would be shocking to the late composer, to say the least.[237] Castellucci's treatment of the flower-maidens is forceful in its display of overt eroticism, and is entirely devoid of lush floral and fauna, as called for in the libretto.

Castellucci exchanges the traditional representations of the flower-maidens, as exaggerated portrayals of feminine gaiety in sumptuous fabrics, for physicalised acts of shibari-tsuri, Japanese rope bondage in suspension, amid a permeating white haze (Appendix B, 4.1). Bare chested flower-maidens perform tangled, interwoven contortionist postures centre stage as three flower-maidens

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[235] David Cormack, 'Wir welken und sterben dahinnen': Carrie Pringle and the Solo Flowermaidens of 1882', *The Musical Times*, 146, 1890 (2005), 16-31.

[236] Laurence Dreyfus, *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[237] Ibid., p. 153. This is not to say that he would disapprove of theatrical aeriality in the performances of his operas. Wagner was notoriously involved with the staging techniques of the Rhinemaidens in *Das Rheingold,* which involved wooden carts on wheels for the soloists to be strapped into and carted around on the stage by technicians. There is an interesting reflection upon Wagner's own staging practices for the Rhinemaidens and Robert LePage's highly technical and mechanised staging of the Rhinemaiden's introduction for the 2010 Metropolitan Opera production of *Das Rheingold* in the documentary *Wagner's Dream* (2012). The documentary was directed by Susan Froemke and can be accessed on Met Opera On Demand or on DVD, released by Deutsche Grammophone and The Metropolitan Opera. For more on Wagner and theatrical technologies, of which there is significant overlap with acrobatics and circus aeriality, see Wallace Johnson, 'Floating the Rhinemaidens, 1869-1913', *Theatre Survey,* 7, 1 (1966), 15-30; and Katharina Gundula Kreuzer, *Curtain, Gong, Steam: Wagnerian technologies of Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018). This mention of the Ring's Rhinemaidens also draws attention to some musicological assertions that *Parsifal* could be read and staged as the fifth opera in Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen,* which traditionally and canonically is a four opera cycle. While a parallel is not drawn between the Rhinemaidens and the Flower-maidens, Paul Schofield makes an argument that Alberich has been reincarnated in the form of Klingsor, which if to be believed, could enable one to make a case for the Rhinemaidens reincarnated as the flower-maidens. While I do not have a structured argument to agree or refute Schofield's analysis, it could prove insightful to bring in the aerial, circus or non-circus, of both the flower-maidens and Rhinemaidens. For more on Schofield's argument, see Paul Schofield, '*Die Sieger* and *Die Nibelungen*: How Parsifal is the Fifth Opera of Wagner's Ring', *Religion and the Arts*, 17 (2013), 246-270. For an overview of modern productions of *Parsifal*, see David J. Levin, 'Notes from the Stage: *Parsifal*', *The Opera Quarterly*, 22, 2 (2007), 345-362.

are tied up and suspended in a dramatic act of shibari.[238] After the three flower-maidens are bound and rigged into position by Klingsor and his doppelgänger, their suspended bodies slowly turn, revealing and concealing their sexual organs as they contort above their rigger as he continues to tie a fourth flower-maiden seated before him.[239] The majority of the bondage act occurs before the flower-maidens' chorus. The thrusts of the flower-maidens being hoisted into suspension punctuate the diminutive musical score as Kundry awakens. A grouping of mute flower-maidens begin to mirror each other's movements as the chorus of 'Komm, komm, holder Knabe!' sonically emanates from the orchestral pit. None of the flower-maidens on the stage sing in the chorus. The maidens engaged in suspended bondage are brought down to the stage floor, their bodies still wrapped in aesthetically arranged and tightly bound knots. Bondage paraphernalia litters the stage floor as a single flower-maiden spreads her legs atop a white pedestal, her vagina on display. The flower-maidens' aural soundscape, lush and sensual through the subdivision of the splits choirs into twelve parts, already musically illustrates Wagnerian phantasmagoria for Theodor Adorno.[240] The combined visual and aural effect can only be described as purely phantasmagoric.

Klingsor's orchestrated garden in this specific production becomes a 'hellish realm of sin and seduction', which for musicologist Axel Englund presents an opportunity to examine how the operatic stage actualises itself in dramatic acts of sexual misconduct, authoritative abuse,

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[238] Romeo Castellucci directed the 2011 production as well as devised the set, costumes, and lighting. The production was conducted by Hartmut Haenchen, and featured dramaturgy by Piersandra di Matteo, and choreography by Cindy Van Acker. The production was recorded on 20 February 2011 at the Theatre de la Monnaie, Brussels, and was released by Bel Air Classiques on DVD in 2013. All references to the production reference this DVD recording. The production was set to be performed again at Brussels La Monnaie from 15 June 2021 to 03 July 2021, but has since been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was set to be revived with music direction by Alain Altinoglu.

[239] Both Klingsor and his doppelgänger in this production wear butcher's aprons. This is not considered in this case study as it exceeds the limits of the focus on the aerial circus actions enacted in the bondage act. This presents an obvious opportunity to explore Daniela Voss's thought-provoking article, 'The Philosophical Concepts of Meat and Flesh: Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty', and in particular, her Deleuzian approximation of Francis Bacon's paintings to depict 'the acrobatics of the flesh on the trapeze apparatus of bones', Daniela Voss, 'The Philosophical Concepts of Meat and Flesh: Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty', *Parrhesia,* 18 (2013), 113-124.

[240] Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner* (London: Verso, 1981). See also Yunn-Shan Ma, 'The Chorus as a Dramatic Force in Wagner's Operas', *Choral Journal,* 60, 10 (2020), 20-32, (p. 32).

aestheticised torture, and opera house politics.[241] Englund's approach is admittedly 'iconographic' and not action-based. He centres his attention on Klingsor's dual identities of dominant bondage practitioner and operatic conductor, and convincingly argues that Castellucci's melding of operatic and bondage iconographies serves as a means 'to amplify opera's overtones of sadomasochism'.[242] For Englund, Klingsor's conducting arm is analogous to his rigger's arm that tightens and hoists the bondage ropes enabling him to simultaneously control the flower-maiden's seductive actions and Kundry's vocalic actions.

Englund acknowledges that the consensual actions of the flower-maidens challenge a 'simple' reading of the sadomasochistic scene, yet he does not offer an investigation into how the communicative aerial actions between Klingsor and the flower-maidens might further support his assertion that Castellucci's production is a 'radical anti-Wagnerism' staging.[243] Instead, he engages in a broad discussion into BDSM power dynamics to support his analysis. Though power relations and the entanglement of pain and pleasure is present in shibari and other forms of restrictive sensual play are glaringly apparent, Englund's approach does not acknowledge shibari's distinctive identification which is separate from and exists beyond the tether of BDSM practices. This case study departs from Englund's analysis to explore how the execution of tying and untying ropes in shibari-tsuri to present an alternative reading of Parsifal that challenges the enacted power relationship between Parsifal and Klingsor inherent in the opera's narrative and compositional structure.

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[241] Axel Englund, *Deviant Opera: Sex, Power, and Perversion on Stage* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), p. 123. Englund's interpretation of the present production under discussion offers critical insight into the troubling issues of sexual and abusive misconduct in the opera industry.

[242] Ibid., p. 120.

[243] Ibid., p. 150, p. 132.

Here, the spatial relationships created through aerial action are linked through corporeal and tactile sites of communication by how the rope is used between Klingsor, the flower-maidens, and Parsifal. I contend that the enacted tying and untying of the flower-maidens by Klingsor and Parsifal produce spatiotemporal actioned sites of queer ecstasy that provides insight into the opera's dramatic action. Parsifal's rejection of the flower-maidens is inexplicably linked to the communicative acts of aerial bondage as he signals his final rejection of Klingsor, and Kundry, through the physical act of untying a bound flower-maiden. While the unsuccessful seduction of Kundry results in the cataclysmic kiss, which many musicologists, if not all, see as the climatic peak of the opera, through this discussion, I posit a secondary, if not primary, resolute action of Parsifal's rejection—in the slow unravelling of the bound flower-maiden just as Klingsor is made aware of Parsifal's acquisition of the spear. First, I explore the practice of shibari, and the communicative, ritualised acts of tying and untying ropes.

### *Affective communication and the practice of shibari*

The cultivation of shibari as an aestheticised performance art is predicated on kabuki's dramatic reinvention of *hojōjutsu*, a martial rope art formalised and practiced in the Edō period.[244] Stagings of bondage entered the world of kabuki in characteristically extravagant choreographies, and were often featured alongside fantastic displays of acrobatic virtuosity. *Hojōjutsu* utilised rope as a means to capture and restrain captives in complex and intricate bindings, which acted as a lexical tool to relay information about the tier's expertise and the captive's crimes.[245] While it was utilised as a

[244] The Edō period, or known as the Tokugawa period within Japanese history, was a span of over 250 years in which the Tokugawa shogunate held dominance over Japan and ruled from Edō, which is now Tokyo, from 1603 to 1867.

[245] Daniel Botsman, *Crime, Punishment, and the Making of Modern Japan, 1790-1895',* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Princeton University, 1999), p. 17, p. 266. Botsman draws a historic connection between *hojōjutsu,* or contemporarily referred to as *torinawajutsu,* and the Japanese art of tattooing. Tattooing flourished during the Edō period as it became a corporeal inscription to identify which local shogunates a prisoner or criminal committed their crime as to also detail what type of crimes and the prescribed punishment. These tattoos utilised all visual identifiers from length of mark to colour and shading of the tattoo to physically inscribe the person with these significations similar to that of the patterns created through quick and formal rope bondage. See also Daniel Botsman, *Punishment and Power in the Making of Modern Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Stephen Mansfield, 'The Indelible Art of the Tattoo', *Japan Quarterly*, 46, 1 (1999), 30-41.

military tactic at the height of kabuki's popularity, it was not until the early twentieth century that the physicalised execution of intricate rope bondage was added to Tokugawan military-inspired plays in order to appeal to wider audiences.[246]

The excess of this militaristic code became simplified in kabuki as highly aestheticised knot formations were selected for their ability to be safely embedded into the trait-oriented performances. This appropriation into the theatrical space then manifested itself into sexual subcultures as artists and audience members alike were drawn to the creation, curation, and execution of postural shapes through and with the rope.[247] The popularity of this domineering aesthetic practice today is often credited to Seiu Ito, who in the early to mid-twentieth century utilised physical manifestations of the practice to serve as live models for his paintings. Seiu Ito's work became infamous in the 1930s, when he used his pregnant wife as a bound model to paint traditional and historic Japanese myths and stories drawn from kabuki.[248] Seiu Ito's work was heavily censored and much of it was irreparably damaged due to its erotic nature. Only as practices of bondage gained wider cultural acceptance in the late twentieth century, Ito's work has begun to receive positive reception, including a national signification of cultural achievement at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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[246] See James R. Brandon, *Kabuki's Forgotten War, 1931-1945* (University of Hawaii Press, 2008); Satoko Shimazaki, *Edo Kabuki in Transition: From the Worlds of the Samurai to the Vengeful Female Ghost* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2016); and Shōyō Tsubouchi, Jirō Yamamoto, and Ryōzō Matsumoto, *History and characteristics of kabuki: the Japanese classical drama* (Yokohama: H. Yamagata, 1960).

[247] Margot Weiss, *Techniques of Pleasure: BDSM and the Circuits of Sexuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). See also Staci Newmar, *Playing on the Edge: Sadomasochism, Risk, and Intimacy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011). The practice of shibari-tsuri can be performed as a solo practice, also known as self-suspension, in which the participant both ties and suspends one's body, or among multiple participants, for example a rigger who ties and suspends a second participant who serves as their model.

[248] Tying pregnant women in current kinbaku practices is common. For instance, in July 2016, Dasniya Sommer the choreographer and performer in Castellucci's production held a photoshoot/workshop with a pregnant participant. See Dasniya Sommer, *Personal blog*, <dasniyasommer.de>, [accessed 5 January 2021].

Current rope bondage practices, inclusive of both shibari and the closely related kinbaku, belie assimilation into a defined artistic or sensual practice. Shibari is practiced both internal and external to BDSM contexts. Within BDSM, erotically-centred contexts, Erotic practitioners of shibari relate different experiences, desires, and attitudes toward their individual practices. Some riggers have shared that they seek out the repetitive nature of tying and untying the ropes for a calming sensation, whereas others describe how the action of controlling and enforcing control through the rope as instrument provides sexual pleasure.[249] For yet another perspective is the late Yukimura Haruki stating that shibari is 'to express love and emotion entirely through the medium of rope. So shibari is not how you do this tie or that tie, it's how you use the rope to exchange emotion'.[250] The communicative properties of shibari transcend individual practices of the art form and provide a unifying trait to all variations of the practice. There are multiple levels of communication at play: between the rigger and the submissive through the rope; between the rigger and the rope; and between the rope and the submissive.[251] The intricacy of the knots, the positions of the rigger in relation to the submissive, the speed of tying the rope, the force at which the rigger hoists the model into suspension, and the pressure exhibited onto the ropes are all part of a highly choreographed language built around the relationship between flesh and rope.[252] Details such as particular fibres of the rope or the spatial arrangement and perspectives or the rate at which the rope is untied to slight changes in weight distribution and changing angles of the picture, can shift the dialogic relationship between practitioners. The rope is specifically positioned on the body to enhance the natural curvature and protruding flesh of the submissive, and figures are designed to enhance the submissive's individual fleshy topography as the body morphs into new features and caverns in

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[249] Cee, 'Shibari 101: Let's Talk About Japanese Rope Bondage', Autostraddle (3 May 2018), np.

[250] Osada Steve, 'Beauty in Rope—The Art of Yukimura Haruki', <osada-ryu.com>, np.

[251] Margot D. Weiss, "Working at Play: BDSM Sexuality in the San Francisco Bay Area," *Anthropologica,* 48, 2 (2006), 229-245.

[252] Anna Bones, *Rope as a Language,*< https://shibaristudy.com/programs/rope-as-a-language>, [accessed 5 January 2021], np.

correspondence with the rope. A student of Yukimura Haruki emphasises the importance of communication stating that in shibari ‘communication is not just what you share and impart with your rope, it is also an act of listening, of understanding what your partner is communicating with their movement, sounds, expressions, and body. Rope is not something you do to someone; it is something you do with someone’.[253]

Yet, not all performances of shibari are erotic in nature or connected to BDSM cultural practices.[254] Shibari as a performance art often hybridises other art forms like modern dance and circus and can shift between these genre distinctions in one performance. Classification is routinely dependent on the artistic perspective of the practitioner. As such, critical analysis of bondage acts become entangled in the blurred boundaries of sexual practice and technical artistic skill. For example, choreographer, dancer and bondage artist Felix Ruckert’s movement-based art seamlessly blends BDSM practices, modern dance and performance art in his choreographic presentations that question sensuality, touch, and the body through the action of binding. For circus academic and aerial kink artist Jordana Greenblatt, aerial circus and bondage artists experiment ‘with what is possible, tenable, and worthwhile for a body to do under restrictive conditions and while experiencing different types and intensities of pain’.[255] This experimentation is predicated on the communicative relationship in and through rope as actions of tying and tightening, and untying and loosening test the limits of the body. Shibari artist, educator and circus acrobat Fuoco utilises her

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[253] LA Rope Dojo, ‘What is Yukimura Style Shibari?’, 7 July 2021, <https://www.laropedojo.com/what-is-yukimura-style-shibari/>, [accessed 5 January 2021], np.

[254] As shibari practices become more mainstream in western cultures, practitioners of all variations ensure that all practitioners understand that there are many ways in which to perform and enact this type of bondage. For example, the shibari educational online platform advertises their courses ‘for all levels and types’ including casual—‘rope for platonic fun’, artistic -‘rope for creative expression’ and erotic—‘rope for pleasure and kink’, Anonymous, <shibaristudy.com>, [accessed 20 January 2021], np.

[255] Jordana Greenblatt, ‘Aerial, apparatus, assemblage: Pain, pleasure, kink, and the circus body without organs’, *Sexualities*, 0, 0 (2021), 1-21.

foundation in acrobatics as a means to find further expression and bodily expansion in bottom postures in her rope practices.

Dasniya Sommer, the bondage choreographer for the shibari-tsuri in Castelluci's production and one of the featured bondage performers, promotes a technical appreciation for the art form. For example, Sommer describes her 'Yoga and Japanese Rope Bondage: Nawa Shibari' workshop as:

> a workshop concept combining two seemingly mismatching practices. How does a purification practice fit with porn? Why doing the latter at all? And what can be extracted from those popularity gaining Asian rituals? The separation is obviously more blurry. Such questions tease my artistic research and have inspired many performances from subcultural events to choreographing in opera. During this process with my colleagues we use these practices as neutral tools, theatrical form and try to strip the techniques from there original context. We use them in an almost naive technical way, and by doing this the preconceived meaning falls away, and many parallels come to the surface. I approach ballet and other dance concepts in a similar way.[256]

Dasniya's theatrical works and performances are varied in their application of shibari, yet all invite and interrogate power relations that are inherent in the technical executions and practices of the art form. In her 2018 work *Nun on the Moon*, Sommer positions the physical relationships and communicative factors central to the practice of rope bondage in the spectatorial experience. Sommer begins the piece by engaging in poetic acts of self-suspension, in which she personally examines the relationship between the ropes, her body, and her intentional actions. Acknowledging that 'the inner perception is often different form the objective perspective of a bondage scene', Sommer then solicits audience volunteers to engage in bondage acts from both perspectives of tying her into sculpted postures as well as being tied by Sommer in front of the spectating audience.[257] Pivotal to the dramaturgic immediacy of the tactile power play from the contrasting positions of rigger and model in *Nun on the Moon,* Sommer relies on the vulnerability and responsibility of the uninitiated participant to create their response to the art work. She uses this interactive space to

[256] Dasniya Sommer, 'Philosophy', <dasniyasommer.de>, [accessed 10 January 2021], np.

[257] Ibid., np.

foreground her interior experience and experientially present it for witnesses to physically explore the many divergent and often paradoxical aspects of enacting shibari, from the volatile to the powerful, to the vulnerable to the erotic. The rope and how it acts as the tactile and sensual conductor of communication is an essential dramatic element in this work as it is through the execution of the art form in tying and untying that questions the very technical yet intimate act of bondage in suspension.

For Sommer, 'the speciality is that these complicated optics (feminism, identity, power) can run from the head into the body and can be traded there in physical and playful ways'.[258] Here, the treatment of inscription is neither theoretical nor purely academic, but actualised, as the tightening and fastening of the rope around the body creates inscriptions on the bound body of the model, directly fashioned and curated by their rigger around the protagonists' body—either in self-suspension or with a partner. There is an intentional focus and dramaturgic invention towards the technical processes and procedural relationships through communicative rope play that initially belies formulaic assumptions of the art form.[259]

Dasniya Sommer, the bondage choreographer for Castellucci's production, and Frances d'Ath , one of the suspended performers, explain that:

> It is almost as if we do something close to forbidden by taking an object of use and turning it to (sensual) play. Shibari, Japanese rope bondage does that. Because of its origin as a strand in martial arts technique, it needs to decisively dissociate from real methods for punishment. Instead it goes with consenting intensities of BDSM play or contemporary performance. Between two people the rope allows for a degree of deferral, both for and against communication. Depending on the actions and intentions at either end; however, the deferral in itself is somewhat neutral. It causes a possibility of communication that, by its tangible intermediary status, is not what or how one

[258] Ibid., np.

> would commonly interact with another. It instigates a pause in thinking, a space for interpretation.[260]

It is this 'space for interpretation' that I want to explore further, by focusing on the communicative actions with and through the rope in this production. I specifically aim to analyse how the actions of tying and untying rope operate as a dual physical enactment of queer world-making which impacts a reading of Parsifal's (in)action in the opera text.

Similar to Sommer's use of the art form's technical actions to explore its communicative ability to signify as a performance art, Heath Pennington and Iris-Carmina Ordean propose an *affective* approach to understanding and analysing the technical execution of shibari and other types of rope bondage that exists without ascribing to rope bondage's militarist history or sexual practices. Pennington and Ordean claim that 'rope bondage practitioners affectively orient themselves toward both rope and bodies— their own bodies, and the bodies of other practitioners tying, being tied, switching, or self-tying. Such affective orientations are directed materially, which has a noteworthy influence on rope bondage practitioners and practices'.[261] Untying a model requires the same care, precision, and knowledge of human biomechanics as the initial design and execution in tying the rope pattern. The act of untying, under an affective lens promoted by Ordean and Pennington, then becomes a series of sensations, revealed impressions of rope upon the marked body, releasing of pressures and slackening of rope across the skin. For the submissive, the act of untying, according to Pennington, signifies the end of their liminal subspace.[262] Pennington defines the transitory state of the subspace as 'the mental state of a submissive who has surrendered will, control, and power to

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[260] Frances d' Ath and Dasniya Sommer, 'The Anarchy of Knots or the N+2 Dimensional Space of N>1 or the Rope was a Plant', <dasniyasommer.de> [accessed 5 October 2016], np.

[261]Iris-Carmina Ordean and Heath Pennington, 'Rope Bondage and Affective Embodiments: A rhizomatic analysis', *Revista Corpo-grafías: Estudios críticos de y desde los cuerpos*, 6, 6 (2018), 64-77, p. 70.

[262] Heath Pennington, 'Kinbaku: The Liminal and the Liminoid in Ritual Performance', *Performance of the Real,* 1 (2020), np. Kinbaku is closely related to the practice of shibari, and the terms are often utilised interchangeably. As such, Pennington's analysis of the submissive's liminal subspace transfers across practices.

another'.[263] Thus, even as the ropes are being untied, the submissive is still within a transitory state until all ropes are removed and the ritualised experience has closed.

***Klingsor as rigger, flower-maidens as model: a communicative act of phantasmagoric hypnosis***

*Parsifal* as an opera text itself is a ritualistic text. Set out as a *Bühnenweihfestspiel,* 'stage consecration festival play', and often analysed within both staged and literary religious contexts, the presence of ritualised embodied practices of constraint and restriction on its visual appearance are not amiss.[264] One could easily mistake Brian Hyer's general description of Klingsor's castle as a 'locus of hypnotism' for that of a space ordained for transcendental bondage acts:

> The worksite is cluttered with sorcerer's tools and the instruments of necromancy. On the floor lies Kundry in a death-like trance, "whose grip," Klingsor tells us, "I have the power to loosen." As we watch and listen, Klingsor awakens her and summons her to her labors [sic]—"An's Werk!" {491}—using various incantations and occult gestures to move her into and out of fluctuating states and degrees of un/consciousness.[265]

Given Klingsor's own words mimicking bondage acts—such as 'grip' and 'loosen'— it is not beyond the directorial imagination to replace Klingsor's 'magical instruments and necromancy' for bondage paraphernalia of ropes and winches aimed at attaining a liminal state.[266] Central to the visual representation of Castellucci's flower-maidens is that they are unequivocally products of Klingsor's magic. From metaphorically orchestrating their movements to controlling their bindings, Klingsor is firmly in control of them. It is through the bondage apparatus that the flower-maidens are brought into existence and, literally, take physical shape as ritual apparitions of his hypnotic

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[263] Ibid., np.

[264] Ryan Minor, 'Wagner's last chorus: Consecrating space and spectatorship in *Parsifal*', Cambridge *Opera Journal,* 17,1 (2005), 1-36.

[265] Brian Hyer, 'Massenpsychologie und *Parsifal*-Analyse', *The Opera Quarterly*, 31, 1-2 (2015), 7-52, (p. 21). The article does not reference Castellucci's 2011 production.

[266] The close relationship in the cultural imagination of erotic fetishism and religious artefacts is fused together within the ritualistic practice of rope bondage. A discussion on the eroticism and mysticism inherent in religious artefacts, practices, and ceremonies, for instance the Eucharist which features prominently in musicological analysis of Wagner's *Parsifal*, is a useful companion to the ideas presented in this case study. See Timothy Hessel-Robinson, 'Erotic Mysticism in Puritan Eucharistic Spirituality', *Studies in Spirituality*, 19, 0 (2009), 93-112.

fetish object. The bodies of the flower-maidens are in continual motion as they perform aerial contortions. The slow revolutions of the suspended flower-maidens flow to new postures that conceal and reveal their bare chests and reproductive organs. One position seamlessly leads to the next.

For Karl Toepfer, contortionistic acts presents 'a complex, contradictory image of the body as a site of extreme pliancy, extreme strength (or boldness), and extreme vulnerability, and it is this tension between extremes of physical expression that accounts for the visceral *excitement* of the spectator—which has the power to make love of the performance drift into convoluted realms of obsession'.[267] Toepfer continues by explaining that when the contorted body performs revolutions that replace the head with its lower extremities, it exhibits a 'haunting' and 'uncanny power to draw the spectator closer to the body of performer; even the revulsion some spectators feel occurs because of this sense of intensifying closeness'.[268] This haunting aspect of witnessing contortion in action that Toepfer describes is in alignment and representative of Bakhtin's 'grotesque body'.[269] A core aspect of Bakhtin's 'grotesque body' that is particularly pertinent to the art of contortion, is that this body is never fully complete. Bakhtin outlines that:

> The grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation. This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body, the link in the chain of genetic development, or more

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[267] Karl Toepfer, 'Twisted Bodies: Aspects of Female Contortionism in the Letters of a Connoisseur', *TDR,* 43, 1 (1999), 104-136, (p. 134).

[268] Ibid., p. 104, p. 134.

[269] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). For example, Bakhtin states that 'an interplay, a substitution of the face by the buttocks; in another [sic] words, the theme of the descent into hell is implicit in this simple acrobatic feat', p. 397.

> correctly speaking, two links shown at the point where they enter into each other. This especially strikes the eye in archaic grotesque.[270]

The contorted body in Castellucci's production visibly manifests the flower-maidens' magical ability to haunt, to again use Toepfer's term, Parsifal through their contorted movements. It is this protruding and concaving flesh that becomes the identifying site of the flower-maidens as hypnotic illusion, and directs the spectatorial perspective to the lower stratum of the female body.[271] The fetishisation of the postures of a female contortionist exists due to how the postures, and the transitory movements between these postures, present an unending cycle of revealing and concealing the folds of human flesh in act of hypnotism.[272]

Contortion also draws an animalistic correlation of the body drawing unnatural power from the earth to mould into disorienting contortionistic shapes, which relates to shibari's linguistic and cultural history to bind and restrain unnatural, demonic and animalistic beings. This connection is present in diverse musicological readings of the animalistic depiction of Kundry and the flower-maidens. Katherine Syer connects the creature-like, sexual, and 'strangely bestial qualities' of Kundry, drawn from Carlo Gozzi's *La donna serpente,* to the failed seduction acts of the flower-maidens.[273] Whereas Benjamin Binder argues that the animalistic and serpentine musico-dramatic aspects of Kundry can be read as anti-Semitic by directly linking to Wagner's anti-Semitic writings that analogise Kundry to 'not just any temptress, but rather the first temptress in recorded history,

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[270] Ibid., p. 26.

[271] Ibid., p. 371.

[272] For a mathematical perspective on the erotic allure of folds and curves of the flesh, see Allan McRobie, *The Seduction of Curves: The Lines of Beauty that Connect Mathematics, Art, and the Nude* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017).

[273] Katherine R. Syer, "It left me no peace": From Carlo Gozzi's *La donna serpente* to Wagner's *Parsifal', The Musical Quarterly*, 94, 3 (2011), 325-380. William Kinderman, in his dissection of influences on Wagner's creation of *Parsifal,* also surmises links Carlo Gozzi's *La donna serpente* and other influential texts in the creation of Kundry's feminine seduction as destruction; however, he does not extend these conclusions to Klingsor's flower-maidens. See William Kinderman, *Wagner's Parsifal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

and a specifically Old Testament one at that'.[274] Regardless of analytical frame, Kundry's relation to the serpentine is alive, and slithering, onto the stage in Castellucci's production as Kundry, the sexual catalyst for Parsifal's singular dramatic action of rejection, walks amongst the contorted and suspended bodies of the flower-maidens with a snake coiled around her arm. This admittedly brief and reductive discussion of the serpentine references inherent in Kundry's and the flower-maidens' dramatic identities in the text presents a question: could the restricting shibari ropes tied round the bodies of the flower-maidens represent an attempt at restraining their serpentine actions and corporeal carnality that seek to sexually poison Parsifal within the aforementioned readings? Alex Englund has made a plausible and convincing argument that this live snake in the Castellucci's production is the animalistic embodiment of Wagnerian music and its venomous appeal to our sensual, sensorial appetites drawn from Nietzsche's repulsion of Wagner's compositions.[275] While one cannot ignore the symbolic visual transference of the serpentine inherent in readings of Kundry with that of the physicalised, actioned movements of the flower-maidens in this production, I do not think this is the only musico-dramatic impact the action of shibari-tsuri brings to an interpretation of the opera text.

***The (in)action of (un)tying queer worlds: unravelling the action of Parsifal***

Klingsor as rigger reinforces a common interpretation of Klingsor as fetishist, and affirms a reading of Klingsor as the creator of the flower-maidens' seduction of Parsifal and as voyeur of that seduction. Beyond the vast theoretical readings of fetishism drawing upon Freudian deficiency and disavowal of castration that have been frequently applied to the analysis of Klingsor and Parsifal,

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[274] Benjamin Binder, 'Kundry and the Jewish Voice: Anti-Semitism and Musical Transcendence in Wagner's Parsifal', *Current Musicology* (Spring 2009), 47-131.

[275] Alex Englund, *Deviant Opera Sex, Power, & Perversion on Stage* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020). For general insight into Nietzsche, Wagner, and *Parsifal*, beyond this specific production under discussion, see Dieter Borchmeyer, 'Critique as passion and polemic: Nietzsche and Wagner' in *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner,* ed. Thomas S. Grey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 192-202; and Sandra Corse, '"Parsifal": Wagner, Nietzsche, and the Modern Subject', *Theatre Journal*, 46, 1 (1994), 95-110.

musicologist Barry Emslie states that Parsifal is more 'pornography and blasphemy' than 'holiness', and ultimately that the work serves a 'hidden agenda' that aspires to the 'breaking of sexual taboos without psychological shame and social ostracism'.[276] Klingsor's castration adds to the dual polarities of acceptable and unacceptable forms of sexual pervasion within this dramatic world.

This identification demands that Klingsor find an alternative mode of gratification. In BDSM-related shibari practices, the rigger, or top, is sometimes referred to as a self-masturbatory position in bondage, since much of the rigger's pleasure is self-directed as they direct the positioning of and tactile engagement with the ropes— from the exerting control over their model, to arranging the aesthetics of the setup, to the physical tension of the rope between their hands and other extremities, to the voyeurism of bound flesh.[277] The physical action and dramatic manifestation of perverse, queer sensualities that reject prescribed cisheteronormative practices of Christian sexual virtues and practices, ultimately cast Klingsor as the cultivator of sensual pleasure and desire that is not predicated on 'masculine', for which read 'phallic penetrative pleasure', in order to abstain or gratify the normative and ordained sexualities.[278] Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon rightly lay out this historic lineage of sexual sin and Christian insistence on sexual purity within the origins and musical adaptations of Parsifal's source material.[279] If their stated intent was to 'bring the sexual back' to this opera, then certainly Castellucci's 2011 production has done that explicitly.[280]

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[276] Barry Emslie, 'Woman as image and narrative in Wagner's *Parsifal*: A case study, *Cambridge Opera Journal,* 3, 2 (1991), 109-124, (pp. 112-114).

[277] Brooke Larson, 'Unraveling the Mysteries of Kinbaku, the Erotic Art of Japanese Rope Bondage', *GaijinPotUnfiltered*, (n.d.), np.

[278] Barry Emslie, 'Woman as image and narrative in Wagner's *Parsifal*: A case study, *Cambridge Opera Journal,* 3, 2 (1991), 109-124, (p.123).

[279] Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, 'Syphilis, sin and the social order: Richard Wagner's *Parsifal', Cambridge Opera Journal*, 7, 3 (1995), 261-275.

[280] Ibid., p. 261.

With this technical and physicalised knowledge of the act of shibari, it furthers the idea that Klingsor, and in effect the flower-maidens, are beyond redemption—not because of the paradoxical religiosity set up within the opera, but because their actions are free from ordained restraint and guilt that requires redemption. For them, there is no need of redemption, only vanquishing of the rules that deem their perceived perversion to be cause for eradication.

Perversion, according to queer theorist Ariane Cruz's politics of perversion, 'relies on the plural and polymorphous resonance of perversion while recognizing [sic] the subversive, transformative power of perversion as the alteration of something from its original course and the *kink*—the sexual deviance—that perversion evokes.'[281] I adopt Cruz's queer definition of perversion, which 'enables us to read deviance not as a pathology but as a mode of "oppositional politics" that might enable us to see power, agency, resistance and pleasure differently'.[282] This enables me to challenge previous readings of Klingsor's perversion that see his actions as a means 'to cover the self-imposed flaw or seam of castration'.[283] My approach is also distinctly separate from the perversion implied in Englund's invocation of the #MeToo movement and sexual harassment, sexual violence, and abuse of power struggles in a cisheteronormative, patriarchal power structure. Klingsor routinely reads as a deviant, violent aberration from the 'traditional' in musicological and literary discourse, rather than from a theoretical perspective that prioritises and acknowledges the queer world-making actions inherent in the distinctly non-heteronormative sexual and sensual practices of shibari-tsuri.[284]

[281] Ariane Cruz, 'Playing with the Politics of Perversion: Policing BDSM, Pornography, and Black Female Sexuality', *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, 18, 2-4 (2016), 379-407.

[282] Ibid., p. 382.

[283] Lawrence Kramer, 'The Talking Wound and the Foolish Question: Symbolization in Parsifal', *The Opera Quarterly*, 22, 2 (2007), 208-229, (p. 222).

[284] Shibari has two additional perversions inherent in its practice: one, of the rope itself, and two, of the militaristic punishment. Both are transformed through the practice yet viably present in a rendering of the art form within a dramatic context. This intersects with current scholarship in queer theory on world-making and provides a practical foundation for the theories explored in the chapter. See Ben Bascom, 'Groping Toward Perversion: From Queer Methods to Queer States in Recent Queer Criticism', *American Literary History*, 32, 2 (2020), 396-404.

Linda Williams acknowledges that discussions of sexuality, sensuality, and sexual practices, even when considered within a conventional heteronormative perspective, become taboo due to a binary cultural belief that the sexual act 'is either a liberating pleasure or an abusive power'.[285] If it is seen as an abusive power, then it becomes difficult to normalise and difficult to understand, even within a theatrical context. And, certainly, regardless of Castellucci's directorial intent, the appearance of a sadomasochistic sexual behaviour explicitly relates this assumed violence onto the characterisation of Klingsor. The presentation of a non-conforming sexual practice reinforces the precarious intersections inherent in the practice of consensual acts of bondage: eroticism and violence; power and domination; and pleasure and torture certainly blur our spectatorial and critical analysis of a production that centrally stages bondage, like this production of *Parsifal*. Yet, when we analyse Klingsor's actions as creating new realities from sensorial bodily interactions constructed from the queer and perverse practice of shibari, a multilayered and complex rendering of Klingsor is presented that challenges and informs our understanding of Parsifal's (in)action at the end of Act II.

Lynda Hart believes that 'the "flesh" is a place toward which we reach that always exceeds our grasp, that indeed *must* elude us for it is the site beyond (or before) the "body" that permits us to continue *making* reality even as our desire disavows it [emphasis original]'.[286] This perspective is supported by shibari practitioner Frances d'Ath's reflections on the practice's transformational power to create a new reality which is particularly interesting when considering the communicative relationships created in and through tying rope in shibari:

> Rope, once become familiar comes alive, it flows and glides through fingers, dresses bodies and limbs, entangles without itself becoming tangled. For most who have never

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[285] Linda Williams. *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1999), p. 14.

[286] Lynda Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 10.

> handled rope, it evades the fingers, slips from limbs, twists and coils upon itself, knotting and snaring. Instead of being sublime, induces fear…With fingers, hands, whole body, rope, sounds, sensations, for those on the outside the new bodies every few minutes give a dramatic experience of how different one person can be from another, for those on the inside, the same, but in receiving. It can be a very emotional, physical experience and for me in such a short time gives a sense of what Shibari is; an opening into another world.[287]

As referenced earlier, Axel Englund describes the scenic invention of Act II as 'this hellish realm of sin and seduction'; however, it is potentially considered hellish only within the faux-Christian idolisation of sexual virtue, purity and atonement against the embrace of one's sensual, sexual nature. However, not all non-traditional sexual behaviours were too taboo for Wagner's inclinations—as Barry Emslie asserts that through this operatic composition, Wagner 'created a context in which the incest taboo can be violated in the apparent guise of religious devotion. Put bluntly, he turns a conventionally regarded cardinal sin into a supreme sacrament, freeing the romantic male artist from conventional restrictions'.[288] Emslie assuredly calls out the opera's inherent egotistical 'masculine virtue' and surmises why Klingsor's inability to receive redemption within the dramatic realm:

> Klingsor cannot be redeemed because he has castrated himself. Within the narrative this has two functions. Firstly, it is implied that the attainment of *evil* knowledge was dependent on the act of castration. Secondly it allows Klingsor to run his bordello like a madam untroubled by the attractions of the women in general and of Kundry in particular. Ideologically, Klingsor is evidence that the attainment of spiritual purity, even to the degree of peopling the stage with Christ-figures, is not, *per se*, dependent on a denial of sexuality…Clearly he is an implicit manifestation of a 'truth' that can never be voiced; namely, that the highest religious ideal is somewhere profoundly linked to physical gratification…The lance belongs to the man who is not only holy but sexual.[289]

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[287] Frances d'Ath, 'Parsifal La Monnaie Shibari', *Supernaut* (18 January 2011), np.

[288] Barry Emslie, 'Woman as image and narrative in Wagner's Parsifal: A case study', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 3, 2 (1991), 109-124, (p. 114).

[289] Ibid.,p. 124, p. 117.

Emslie's passage is essential to my next point, which is that within this realm drawn from allegorical inspirations from Buddhism and Christianity, in which the disavowal of sanctioned illicit sexual interactions is encouraged, the narrative action revolves around the aspiration for and consecration of redemption. Who can be redeemed, and by what actions, performed by whom and in what context? By staging Klingsor as a castrated rigger who derives physical and sensual pleasure from sensorial actions sited at the flesh and not in cisheteronormative penetration, it furthers the narrative of Parsifal's rejection of the flower-maidens, the models of Klingsor's aesthetic fetishism, as a rejection of culturally perceived perverse sexual inclination and practices. From the menstrual identification of Amfortas's wound to the phallic drive of the spear, the realm of Parsifal is produced, enacted, and experienced through traditionalised, cisheteronormative perspectives of sexuality and sensual gratification.

Klingsor's, and by extension the flower-maidens', freedom, physicalised by the aesthetics of binding flesh, is beyond the opera's prescriptive doctrine of absolution and redemption, since it is not defined by or constrained to phallic penetration. The flesh of a model bound in shibari-tsuri overflows in actions that sensorially create hypnotic realities that in turn come into existence through the tactile friction between flesh and the rope. Klingsor and the flower-maidens create an alternative world that does not abide by the imposed restrictions of the external realm beyond Klingsor's garden, derived from and in the sensorial communication and corresponding relationship between the rope and one's flesh.

Rather than tying ropes around Parsifal's body, the flower-maidens perform movements that appear to compel him to move in correspondence with their undulating bodies. There is no physical nor tactile connection between them. Nor even a visual connection as for much of the scene Parsifal does not even look at the flower-maidens. While there is a semblance of a connection as their

movements do compel him into rhythmic movements to their vocal lines, yet, it does not work. They do not seduce him. The flower-maidens' intended potency in their attempted seduction of Parsifal is predicated on being believed to be a perverse illusion, and the belief of the shared liminal, illusionary realm. As a dramatic illusionary element, Hartmut Böhme theorises that:

> magical operations depend on the place, the instruments and substances used, along with the arrangements and ritual procedures to achieve their desired power. The things (fetishes) that are employed in these rites are not inherently magical. It is only in the context of a ritual setting, within a preconditioned social group that shares certain beliefs, sympathetic relationships and understand the symbolic process, that the fetishes unfold their power.[290]He is not transported to their illusory space where flesh meets rope. He does not believe in their magic.

Belief in the practice of shibari is essential for attaining an affective experience and communicative relationship through the conduit of rope. The inner state of those engaged in bondage feel as if they are transported to a separate place created in and through the fibres of the rope, but one must believe in it. One must believe in its illusory and sensual power. Parsifal refuses.

For much of Act II, Parsifal does not physically interact with the flower-maidens, that is until he removes the ropes tied around one of the flower-maidens. Following the pivotal action of Parsifal's refusal of Kundry's kiss, which according to Emslie is akin to a virginal penetration of Parsifal's latent sexuality, Parsifal turns his physical attention to a bound flower-maiden and begins to untie Klingsor's ropes. In the symbolic and communicative act of untying the bondage ropes of the flower-maiden, Parsifal effectively closes the communicative apparatus that enables Klingsor, and by extension the flower-maidens, to exist beyond the realms of redemption and consecration as ordained in the opera.[291] Thus, Parsifal's action of untying the flower-maiden, also severs the sensorial communication that binds and sustains Klingsor's world.

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[290] Ibid., p. 185.

[291] Glenn Stanley, '*Parsifal*': redemption and *Kunstreligion*' in *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner,* ed. Thomas S. Grey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 151-176.

With this staged rendering of Klingsor as rigger and the flower-maidens as model, Parsifal's ritualistic action of untying the flower-maiden's ropes from around her bound body challenge his notably passive action in the opera, and consecrates the second act of the opera, in alignment with the ceremonial acts of Act I and III.[292] According to John Deathridge and Carl Dahlhaus, Parsifal is a 'passive hero' since his only dramatic action in the three acts is 'a decisive action' of 'refusal'.[293] This action—of untying the rope wound round the flower-maiden—when viewed as a tableau is a striking and epic visual that in a strange way projects a tenderness as Parsifal delicately removes the wrappings of bondage from the flower-maiden. While dramatic action was not necessarily a required accompaniment to integral Wagnerian musical moments, the visuals of the drama are meant to reinforce the musical motifs.[294] Yet, this staged presentation of shibari is not a tableau. Thus, through the intentional and ritualistic action within the skilled art form of bondage in suspension, that harnesses the sensorial and spatial temporality of interpersonal communications of the flesh, Parsifal's passive action of refusal is now an assertive action of dismantling. The action is necessary. If an action cannot be enacted, according to Foucault, then the power relationship is not there.[295] This action of untying the flower-maiden is significantly more meaningful than a refusal of Kundry's kiss: it is a ritualistic act of closing of the queer world made from and in the interconnected communication of rope and flesh. This action renders not an interpretation of

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[292] Kenneth Reinhard, 'Articulations: Responses to Alain Badiou's *Five Lessons on Wagner*', *The Opera Quarterly*, 29, 3-4 (2014), 361-367.

[293] John Deathridge and Carl Dahlhaus, *The New Grove Wagner* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 162. Daniel Kletke extends Deathridge and Dalhaus' reading of Parsifal's inaction through an examination of Parsifal's medieval literary inspiration *Parzival.* See Daniel Kletke, 'Richard Wagner's Creative Processes: "Parsifal", *Arthuriana*, 11, 1 (2001), 83-92, (p. 90).

[294] John Deathridge and Carl Dahlhaus, *The New Grove Wagner,* p. 163. For instance, Deathridge and Dalhaus make it clear that a 'tableau' is perfectly acceptable in the passive action that connects that drama as a unified narrative. For an insightful examination of this concept from an illustrative perspective on Wagner's leitmotifs, see Stephen C. Meyer, 'Illustrating Transcendence: Parsifal, Franz Stassen, and the Leitmotif', *The Musical Quarterly*, 92 (2009), 9-32.

[295] Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', *Critical Inquiry*, 8, 4 (1982), 777-795: 'In effect, what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future', p. 789.

repression and punishment, inclusive of both the character of Parsifal and the opera, but rather a staged interpretation that runs parallel to a Foucauldian analysis of power relations that holds narrative implications for the (in)action of Parsifal.[296] Romana Byrne in *Aesthetic Sexuality: A Literary History of Sadomasochism* emphasises that 'pleasure is produced—rather than how desire is liberated' based on a consideration of Foucault's assertion that pleasure is cultivated and enacted.[297] Yet this scene, rather than producing a dramatic rendering of Foucauldian productions of power, stages a queer consideration of Foucauldian analysis that positions queer temporalities of the physical actions of power, control, and submission. Queer theorist and historian Elizabeth Freeman argues that a queer temporisation of Foucault's production of power must centrally position 'the work of organising the sensorium and the physical habits that give rise to it'.[298] Freeman contends that queer modes of production work 'toward connectivity, conjugation, and coalescence that produces new forms'.[299] Freeman's conceptual ideas find particular relevance in this dramaturgic situation and are particularly salient when applied to the sensorial communication enacted in tying and untying ropes as a communicative action of queer world-making.

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[296] For a thorough Freudian analysis of *Parsifal*, see Brian Hyer, 'Massenpsychologie und *Parsifal*-Analyse', *The Opera Quarterly*, 31, 1-2, (2015), 7-52.

[297] Romana Byrne, *Aesthetic Sexuality: A Literary History of Sadomasochism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 4-5.

[298] Elizabeth Freeman, *Beside You in Time: Sense Methods & Queer Sociabilities in the American 19th Century*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019). I specifically draw from Freeman's development of Thomas Lemke's biopolitics, in which Freeman sees queer relationships and societies as a 'work of organizing [sic] the sensorium and the physical habits that give rise to it' in order to provide of a narrative of queer 'social formations' in 'ephemeral relationalities organizing [sic] and expressing themselves through time', p. 13. I posit that this queer act of transcendental relationalities, that privileges queer sensations in order to communicate and relate to other bodies, presents a dramatised act of queer world-making.

[299] Ibid., p. 13.

Thus, at the end of Act II, Parsifal's act of defeating Klingsor kills sensual gratification by effectually eradicating the feminine and the queer from the consecrated space of the redeemed.[300] Parsifal must vanquish this ideal, non-dictated sensual, perverse ideation of sexual gratification—not sexual perversion within the Freudian sense. Parsifal, in this staging, vanquishes this perversion with the corporeal and linguistic language of the sensually queer. He uses the lexicon of the ritualistic act of shibari to signify his defeat over Klingsor's perversion in the sanctimonious and skilled act of separating the flesh from the rope. The act of Parsifal untying the bound rope from a flower-maiden is significant as it erases not only the power Klingsor had over Parsifal, but over the sensual and hypnotic power the flower-maidens attempted to use in their seduction of Parsifal. By unlinking the communicative connection between flower-maiden and Klingsor, their illusion of seduction and the construction of their multiple symbolic identities is undone. The removal of the rope, which is integral to their identification as Klingsor's non-penetrative fetish object and as a corporeal site of communicative seduction, removes the communicative power of the senses. This removal of the bondage apparatus is a visceral and physicalised rendering of Parsifal's final, and arguably only, action in closing Klingsor's power.

Parsifal, through the act of untying the ropes, reconstitutes the sexual ordination set out in the opera's realm, as he holds the flower-maiden to his chest in a physical flesh on flesh connection. This 'normative' action—denying the rope any sensorially perverse instrumentation—further disrupts the sensual, non-conforming communication between rope and flesh. It is a physical reaction to the queer world-making of sensual, communicative bodily interactions. Consequentially,

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[300] This is different from Hanns Fuchs's homoerotic understanding of Parsifal's (in)actions in Act II. Here, I posit Klingsor and the flower-maidens in act of queer world-making that is more in alignment with Wayne Koestenbaum's conception of queer sensualities and ways of being. See Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: opera, homosexuality, and the mystery of desire* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993). See also Hanns Fuchs, '*Parsifal* and Eroticism in Wagner's Music [1903]', trans. John Urang, *The Opera Quarterly,* 22, 2 (2006), 334-344. For more on *Parsifal* and homosexuality, see James Kennaway, 'Degenerate Religion and Masculinity in *Parsifal* Reception', *Current Musicology,* 88 (2009), 35-61; Mitchell Morris, 'Homosexuality and the Manly Absolute: Hanns Fuchs on Richard Wagner', *The Opera Quarterly*, 22, 2 (2006), 328-333; and Tim Pursell, 'Queer Eyes and Wagnerian Guys: Homoeroticism in the Art of the Third Reich', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 17, 1 (2008), 110-137, (p. 175).

when Parsifal unties the ropes binding the fourth maiden, he unravels the world that was created through queer sensualities through active participation in the act of shibari. This moment paradoxically reveals that only through the phantasmagoric can Parsifal's static action become dynamic—indeed 'no one can leave unscathed' from Klingsor's garden.[301]

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[301] Suzanne R. Stewart, *Sublime Surrender: Male Masochism at the Fin-De-Siècle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 101.

## Chapter Five. Conclusion: Affective spectatorship of opera and circus

The thesis set out to explore the relationships between opera and circus in an opera performance. It sought to establish the musico-dramatic contribution of aerial circus action in an opera performance by examining how it related to other figures and elements on the opera stage. Opera and circus are visceral art forms. They unite audiences with their virtuosic displays of humanity's excellence in action. Reflections and attempts to analyse the individual art forms of opera and circus in performance draw striking parallels, and commonly feature simultaneous invocations of the other art form when grappling with how best to capture what each art form actually is and does in a live performance. Together, opera and circus are able to explore the full breadth of what it means to inspire and ignite an audience to action. The three case studies demonstrated just how wide reaching and intricate the spatial relationships are of aerial circus action in opera performance yet through the individual investigations it became clear that each of the case studies staged the spectre of the spectator—-from Marie's demarcated social space high above an invisible audience to the ebullient actions meant to unify in joyous communal witnessing to becoming implicated in a bondage act.

Audiences of both circus and opera come to a performance craving and desiring for their emotions to be stirred. The participatory role of the spectator in both opera and circus presents a nexus of dramatic, cultural, and political impressions. As such, when staging a collision of the two art forms, connections and parallels into affective spectatorship arise. The three case studies engage in just some of the broad discussions with the historic, cultural, performative and dramatic roles of affective spectatorship in opera and in circus. By casting aerial circus actions as not merely an extravagant element in staging a visual spectacle on the operatic stage, but rather as an integral dramatic component that actively contributes to an interpretation of opera through performance, the thesis offers new perspectives and insights into broad issues in how opera performances interprets

an opera text and how opera is received and perceived by spectators. By implicating the audience as voyeurs in bondage acts to spectators of a nineteenth-century high-wire exhibition, the performances under review drew upon links between opera and circus' historic uses of architectural and spectatorial space, and turned these connections into dramatic and interpretive forces through the spatial relationships of aerial circus action.

Spectators flock to the hallowed venues of opera and circus in the anticipation of being physically and psychologically affected by the theatrical experience set before them. The material composition and the architectural arrangement of the apparatus dictates the multitude of possible bodily configurations and spatial relationships that the performer could enact in any given trick, act, or trajectory. A contentious debate in the academic field of circus is whether or not aerial circus disciplines are always connected to and confined within the historical understanding of traditional circus, and by extension, circus architecture. For Tom Gunning, the disruption of the centrality of the singular circus ring becomes a dramatic device for implicating the spectator through the utilisation of architectural and exaggerated forms of circus disciplines.[302] In the three performances analysed, the spectator became implicated and complicit in the actions on stage. They became engaged in an act of bondage, in an act of societal unification, and in an act of futile desire. The affective act of witnessing became a central question in each of the performances through how aerial circus actions were spatiotemporally enacted. Simply, each of the stagings questioned the very act of affective spectatorship by testing its limits across all levels, from the narratological to the musical. All of the performances also engaged in the ways in which our architectural spaces—-whether the court ballroom or the circus ring or an enchanted garden—-inform and encourage participation in the act of communal reception. Affective spectatorship, thus, is moulded by

[302] Tom Gunning, "Like a three-ring circus": The avant-garde appropriates the circus in the battle between distraction and attractions' in *Circus and the Avant-Gardes,* eds. Anna-Sohpie Jürgens and Mirjam Hildbrand (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 121-137.

architectural and spatial realms while simultaneously dictating and moulding these spaces to ensure one can be a witness and be witnessed. Whether it is the opera house or the circus ring—the spectator prepares to be moved.

Luciano Berio came to the resolute conclusion, while extemporaneously circling on Wagnerian stage design in a lecture, that theatrical stagings can never amount to the 'sacred' communion of the essence of music in opera.[303] Perhaps not, and perhaps that is not the intention of physicalised interpretations and dramaturgic stagings that seek to challenge or affirm a musical and dramatic discourse inherent in its harmonic, sonic design. Perhaps it can be both. Perhaps sacred, ritualistic actions can match the aural experience to further our understanding of the intangible and the ineffable that is inherent in transferring an opera text into an opera performance. Yet, aerial circus action produces an undeniable communicative spatial energy that can force a passive character to exert power and action, that can unify a society in joyous moral action, and that can viscerally rupture an aspirational hope into shreds. And while this contestation and discussion certainly exists in regard to the performances discussed in this thesis, it exists in other periods of operatic history, and exists in other opera performances which turn to the circus, and, fundamentally, raises the question: what of aerial circus action on the opera stage? Is it not a spatial curation of flesh in action, unfolding in skilled acts of correspondence with an apparatus in rhythmic and dramatic alignment to the musical score? Is it not a distinctive art form, rich and varied in its historic, cultural and philosophical iterations, that demands spectatorial and analytic attention to its musico-dramatic spatial enactment on the opera stage?

[303] Luciano Berio, 'Of Sounds and Images', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 9, 3 (1997), 295-299, (p. 298).

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**Appendix A: Interview with circus arts Emily Zuckerman**

The following is a transcript of an interview with circus artist Emily Zuckerman, a featured rope artist in the 2017 production of *Alcione.* Our conversation highlights practical areas of investigation for an integrated study of opera and circus, and offers further points of analysis beyond the remit of this thesis that are essential to our practical knowledge of staging aerial circus arts in opera performance.[304]

*Interview with Emily Zuckerman, circus artist in Opéra Comique's 2017 production of Alcione*

***Katie Gardner (KG):*** *If you could introduce yourself, and your interest in getting into circus.*

**Emily Zuckerman (EZ):** I am a circus artist working primarily in Europe. I'm originally from New York City, yet I started my circus career in San Francisco, where I moved to attend UC Berkeley. When I first discovered circus as a practice, I had been studying visual arts and cognitive science, as well as looking to transform my gymnastics practice, which had been my main physical activity for a long time. After university, I set out to pursue painting as my main path, yet I found myself diving deeper into a full-day circus practice. What first drew me in so fully was what I found in the community aspect of it. There was a more genuine personal nature in the interactions that I had in circus compared to the visual art world. I was also inspired by the potential circus had to combine holistically the arts, a study of human experience and perception, and acrobatics.

Recently, I've been back in the studio training with a few other acrobats, exchanging ideas and techniques. This was also how I first learned aerial, in a group of circus artists coming together and

[304] By including an edited transcript of our conversation, I aim to contribute to the important practical discussions on collaboration and interpretation in the choreographic compositional combinations across classical music and movement practices. Notable examples of scholarship in this area include Esther Coorevits and Dirk Moelants, 'Tempo in Baroque Music and Dance', *Music Perception*, 33, 5 (2016), 523-545; and Luke Styles, '*Handspun*, The Role of Collaboration and Embodiment as Compositional Process—A Transdisciplinary Perspective', *Contemporary Music Review*, 35, 6 (2016), 612-629. Ultimately, our conversation provides more questions than answers for us to consider as we further expand our knowledge in the practical and interpretive approaches to circus in opera performance.

researching together. You have one idea, one principle, and you see how it plays out in different bodies. You see the different possibilities— the differences that different bodies open up in an interaction with an object. Some people are going to be more flexible, some people have longer arms compared to their torso. There are a lot of differences that mean the exact same move will transform as it is expressed through different bodies. Where I am in my artistic path in performance arts is in leaving the more technical solo performance aspect of circus to the side, which it had started to bore me honestly because it was so predictable in its format. I think I also had this idea that the most interesting part of a show was the whole arc of the story, which was often lacking in a circus format that is individual acts. I met Raphaëlle Boitel in the circus school that I was at, and what always drew me in about her work was that she always started with research— a theme of a visual quality, of a physical quality, and then would see what you could pull out of that interaction with a circus body and a circus apparatus.[305] It was always coming from a conceptual feeling that it would give the audience, and then really take time to develop where that could go with a circus apparatus.

***KG:** Was this the process for Alcione or was it different working within and for an opera company?*

**EZ:** That was a lot of the process for *Alcione*. There is the element that each individual circus artist has their tricks that they already know, so there will be moments where we will see what that looks like and be open of how those elements of more traditional circus acrobatics fit within a more conceptual writing. We had a residency in a circus space early on before our big chunk of time at the opera house itself. We also had one week where the choral group came with us. You have these

[305] Emily studied at Académie Fratellini in France. Her principle apparatus was aerial rope. Académie Fratellini was founded by Annie Fratellini in 1974, and its pedagogical approach is rooted in offering its students apprenticeships and collaborative partnerships with professional artists and companies across all arts genres. Much like other higher education circus training schools, students can specialise in a range of disciplines, including aerial straps, teeterboard, Chinese pole, clowning, equilibristics, Cyr wheel, juggling, rope, silk, slack-rope, static trapeze, swinging trapeze, tight-rope, trampoline, and unicycle.

scenes where it was up to us (the circus and dance artists) to guide a group of singers, so you need to be able to have a reference point to keep people organised on stage.

***KG:*** *and safe.*

**EZ:** Yes, and safe. So, in the mariner's scene, the chorus group is around the outside, because we (circus artists) are moving very fast, and there are a lot of acrobatics that are happening in a short amount of time. In particular, (it can) become very dangerous for people who are not used to that and who didn't have as much time with us rehearsing, so there is a practical organisation (in the choreography). For the most part, the process came along quite naturally. In Baroque music, from what I learned in *Alcione*— I don't profess to be a music scholar—but the the rhythm, you don't have surprising accelerations. So, in that sense, it is very easy to get into a physicality that will just match. The places where we ran into challenges were because the groups were so split up between the musicians, the singers, the dancers, and circus artists for the majority of the creation and rehearsal time. We (circus artists) were working off of recordings and weren't necessarily updated on moments where there were other musical choices happening. Specifically, the Prologue where we had been rehearsing on one tempo and we found that the musical director's choice had been to have that much much slower than the recording that we had and since this was the element with the fauns who are very dynamic, very animal, very martial—we had very specific choreographies on counts for that moment that depended on a certain speed of music in order to have that kind of explosiveness in the body. So, it was an interesting learning experience, because as circus artists we're not necessarily working in that way with the music all the time. The challenge is how do you maintain that energy in the body, how do you adapt it in the way that is very special to this live music with a conductor—which is our greatest task to be with the conductor, to really fully embody

the music that he is leading. He is leading the show even if we have our preset choreography. That music is what has the power—what is leading the audience.

***KG:** It's apparent that there is crossover between modern circus arts and baroque dance in the choreography from flirtatious moments to weaving in and out of spatial patterns. Was this intentionally fostered in the rehearsal process?*

**EZ:** It was definitely intentional. We had Gudrun (Skamletz) baroque dancer and teacher who came and worked with us in that first residency in the circus space.[306] (She) taught us the basics of baroque dance and some traditional choreographies that she had adapted. We also worked on these elements of the body related to the plenus and the movement of astral bodies. In the chaconne, there was something very special about going into these baroque dances, especially for the circus artists we had never had any baroque dance before and Gudrun was really bringing that she wanted us to understand the core principles of and be able to embody that in our movement— in how we're holding space as holding the world. It was really beautiful the principles of the dance. It's true it ends up correlating quite closely to a lot of the aerial choreography— in the aerial harness work— these baroque influences on the way of using the arm and the way of leading with the fingers and always holding these round spaces— these were some of the elements that she (Gudrun) wanted us to be able to carry in how we would enact the different elements of the choreography throughout the show.

***KG:** Was there a different movement lexicon a language that shifted between the wide-ranging characters the circus artists portrayed or was there a movement language for the entire opera?*

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[306] Gudrun Skamletz is a dancer, choreographer, and teacher of historic and baroque dance practices. Previously, she choreographed Jean-Baptiste Lully's *Cadmus et Hermione* (1673) in a collaboration with director Louise Moaty. The production was produced by Vincent Dumestre's Le Poéme Harmonique, and was staged in the re-constructivist-style at the Opéra Comique in 2008. It is available on DVD (Opéra Comique, 2009).

**EZ:** No, there was very specific movement language for different characters. In the first act, working with the fauns and the muses, you know the fauns they are half man, half animal, so it was working as a pack of dogs and really moving from a sexual core— sniffing people out like an animal, sniffing out the singers who would be on stage. You would have the difference between slow stalking, then in an instant you would freeze, very martial. The muses on the other hand, of course, there is a different body quality that comes in aerial that is required for aerial. As creatures of the airs— very soft movements none of that fast and freezing. Pretty much the opposite body quality, so these two groups would rehearse at the same time in just very separate realms. We had one dancer who was very experienced in aerial harness work already and took time to share those techniques. It's a very different kind of body control— you're only suspended from one point and you need to organise your body movement from around that. Whereas with the faun, the influence comes much more from acrobatics and these freezes.

***KG:** In the mariner's scene (Act III, Scene III), you are doing aerial rope work and the other artists are pulling the rope. Do you mind describing the creation process of that moment, and how you physically approached that particular choreography?*

**EZ:** When we were in the first research process in Cherbourg, I had already done this format where I have this group of people holding the rope or pulling on it— otherwise it would've been attached to a fixed point. My speciality in circus school was aerial rope, which in general is vertical attached just at the ceiling. I was really interested in searching for what the narrative was inherently of what we were doing, so with rope you really have this climbing up falling down, climbing up falling down. Somehow with the diagonal, what spoke to me the most was the way it cuts space. (The diagonal) was much more architectural for me, and it gave this entire space underneath the rope to

work with as a visual setting. Instead of climbing up a rope where you're always just in relationship to how high or low you are and how the rope is wrapped around you, now you suddenly have an option to be above the rope or underneath the rope, in this contained space or hovering on the edge of it. I was more interested in combining work on the floor with work in the air, so this narrowing space towards the bottom also gave me space to explore. There was another big element of it (creative development of my rope work on the diagonal) in the second year of Fratellini. We do a group creation as a class and there's eight of us in a class. The idea is to visit your apparatus and your practice in a different way and as a collective. This is where I ended up having a group of people holding the rope (while I was on the rope) and researching what we could do with that. The second year show was one of the high points of my time at circus school as I really enjoyed that process as a group seeing what you can do with one object that each person brings. In that one I was wearing a dress as well, so I was really playing with the element of flying— it ended up going much more into the elements of the rebounds. The mariner's scene definitely is our most intensely circus scene. There's a lot of dense choreography. It was a very interesting process to write that Mariner's scene between us. There are so many of us that it feels like a juggling of bodies in space, because of who would pass under who and always weaving back and forth. A general theme that happened in the ground circus (work in Alcione) was that acrobatics would be very quick explosions, so there's more time in the end spent on creating how everything will weave together, and its up to each individual (circus artist) to throw their fastest figure with the most explosive effect that will fill the more poetic description that she'll (Raphaëlle) give us. We played around with few different organisations of the rope and the space. The creation goes instinctively you know you try a bunch of different images and the ones that flow the easiest and have the most visual effect becomes the scene.

Working with Raphaëlle in this mariner's scene, she has a very critical eye and to show her all our different methods of climbing. The task was then how are we going to make it most like a sailor who is just going up to fix some ropes up there and sliding down, so there's both a precision on the musicality of movements and a demand that the actions look like an every man— a normal sailor who is just getting their stuff down. Of course, there are times when we we may go into a body position that's a bit more presentational, more in a traditional circus image. But, the idea is always and to very quickly come back to that normal human on stage and keeping that everyday body of the relatable character.

***KG:*** *In regard to your personal practice, what is your philosophical approach to circus?*

**EZ:** I see the stage as a microcosm of general reality. That's the power of the stage is that it's this small box where we can play out dynamics that we experience in the real world—in a sense a petri dish for a scientist or even a thought experiment but an external thought so that its more easily shared with a greater number of people. I've always searched for how circus and through my body can express the complexities of reality— of what we are actually experiencing in the world. This comes back to the question of where are we limited in the format of circus acts, and even in the idea of just traditional entertainment— when we limit ourselves to entertaining people. Sometimes you want to experience something in a theatre that goes beyond entertainment. Sometimes that passes through moments that could be dismissed as boring, and you question what you should be paying attention to. What I really enjoy in mixing circus and physical theatre is where you have the narrative of the body— learning the stories our bodies tell subconsciously and making conscious decisions. The most relatable versions of that come from the great performers of silent film— we have Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton— they're already mixing the challenges of a very monotonous simple daily life with amazing acrobatics through prat falls and through carefully manipulated

accidents. I see these as narratives where we can rewrite what we want out of society, what we want out of our individual relationship to the world around us. This element of the clown is not there to entertain. The clown is a mirror for the shadows of ourselves. All of the awkwardness, all of the things we are not comfortable with, the things we want to do but we shouldn't— the limits that society imposes on us or that we impose own ourselves. The clown is there to *go there,* the clown does everything that he shouldn't and persistently—to the point that we find it funny *and* we question those hesitations that we have in our way of interacting with the world.[307]

***KG:*** *That's how you see circus— regardless of discipline, regardless of clown identification or not?*

**EZ:** This is my approach to circus. This is the value that I see in circus is this space to explore physically the limits of the human body and the questions that might come up for us in our physical interaction. This even applies to acrobatics to being curious about the capacities that a human body has. Of course, this requires persistent work. The acrobat has both this element of high performance that we see in an athletic development, and, at the same time, it is not so specifically goal-driven, so has the freedom to create accidental situations, to create intentional mistakes and discover new possibilities for that realm of movement. Circus is a way of of testing its (the human body's) capacities and exploring where we can go. The setting and the theatre will relate it back to life situations, but it also exists in its pure form of just the body, its experience in the world.

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[307] These following references are meant to contextualise the conversation I conducted with Emily, and are not exhaustive of clowning practices, techniques, and pedagogies. For more on the artistic practice of clowning, see James E. Caron, 'Silent Slapstick Film as Ritualized Clowning: The Example of Charlie Chaplin', *Studies in American Humor,* 3, 14 (2006), 5-22; Jon Davison, *Clown: readings in theatre practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); James Edward Hesla, *The idiosyncratic body: Contemporary clown theory and practice* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland College Park, 2016); William O. Huie, Jr., 'Buster Keaton and the Near-Miss Gag', *Journal of Film and Video*, 69, 4 (2017), 18-19; Louise Peacock, *Serious Play: modern clown performance* (Bristol, U.K. and Chicago: Intellect, 2009); and Richard Weihe, *Über den Clown: Künstlerische und theoretische Perspektiven* (Bielefeld: De Gruyter, 2016). For clowning as a pedagogical practice, see Richard Cumins, 'Ow that hurts! Clown and tumbling training with Johnny Hutch', *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 8, 2 (2017), 156-170. For history and practices of the acrobat clown, see Jennifer Forest, *Decadent Aesthetics and the Acrobat in French Fin de siècle* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

If you look at the history of circus, It’s long in the history that okay you’re going to do your biggest acrobatic tricks when you’re young and your body is still soft and resilient, but the whole point is that your going to be a circus body for your whole life if that’s your path then that’s your path until you die. Seeing performers in their fifties who of course their bag of tricks is different but the presence and the attention that they capture on stage is phonemail you really feel that they are in a complete dialogue with you they never detach its not about themselves anymore its about manipulating the audience’s psychology there are so many more subtleties that you get to as you get older.

I also very much enjoy I guess in opera that sometimes its reducing words to one phrase repeated over and over. I think it can be related to performance without text without words— what I really appreciate in that is the audience has more freedom to bring their own personal histories to what their seeing, so we create situations on stage— it can be a theatrical situation or it can be a situation of one body suspended in air. Its leaving the space for them to bring their own narratives. You might have very physical visceral feelings in watching an acrobat on stage or in air and that will bring up different memories for each person. Our bodies hold memories of both positive experiences and trauma. The circus space gives an external visualisation for people to have those physical experience— those memories come back and then rewrite the story around it.

***End of interview***

**Appendix B: Figures**

***List of figures***

1.1 Print advertisement for the Original Flying Zoe's by unknown artist, held at the John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Circus Collection.

1.3 Print advertisement for the Flying Opes by Louis Galice (1864-1935), held the John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Circus Collection.

2.1 Production image of Katharina Dröscher's high-wire act in the 2012 Salzburg Festival production of *Die Soldaten* by Ruth Walz.

2.2 Image of oil on canvas painting *The Tight-Rope Walker* by Jean Louis Forain (1880-1890), held by the Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Emily Crane Chadbourne.

2.3 Political cartoon 'With the Greatest of Ease?' by Vaughn Shoemaker, *Chicago: The Daily News*, 1941.

3.1 Production image of Apollo in the 'Prologue' for Opéra Comique's 2017 production of *Alcione* by Vincent Pontent.

3.2 Rehearsal image of two circus aerialists from Opéra Comique's 2017 production of *Alcione* by Vincent Pontent.

4.1 Production image of Act II from the La Monnaie/ De Munt's 2011 production of *Parsifal* by Bernd Uhlig.

Image 1.1 Print advertisement for the Original Flying Zoe's by unknown artist, held at the John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Circus Collection, no date. The illustrated image shows three different aerial circus trajectories on the flying trapeze by tracing the outline of the projected trajectories of each of the three aerialist in acrobatic flight. The title of 'Original Flying Zoe's' is written in the centre and then again in script. This depiction of an aerial trapeze act showcases the integral relationship between aerialist and their apparatus as it deftly illustrates how the aerialist's trajectory is dependent on the motion of the aerial apparatus in relation to their corresponding actions.

Image 1.2 Print advertisement for the Flying Opes by Louis Galice (1864-1935), held the John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Circus Collection, no date. The image shows the comedy acrobatic act of the Flying Opes in parody of traditional billboard and advertisements depicting aerial acrobatic trajectories of acts in the circus.

Image 2.1 Production image of Katharina Dröscher’s high-wire act in the 2012 Salzburg Festival production of *Die Soldaten* by Ruth Walz, photo number 10113. The image shows circus artist Katharina Dröscher as Marie on the high-wire in the the 2012 Salzburg Festival production of Bernd Alois Zimmermann’s *Die Soldaten*.

Image 2.2 Image of oil on canvas painting *The Tight-Rope Walker* by Jean Louis Forain (1880-1890), held by the Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Emily Crane Chadbourne. The oil on canvas painting depicts of a female tight-rope walker, in a grey tutu, and pink tights and leotard, balancing on a rope with a balance pole. She is positioned directly over a crowd of spectators with a theatrical scene presented in the background. The tight rope delineates the space below, the realm of society, and above, the realm of the aerialist. Jean Louis Forain, 1880-1890. Image from The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Emily Crane Chadbourne, Reference number 1951.208. On view in Painting and Sculpture of Europe, Gallery 226 as of January 2021.

Image 2.3 Political cartoon 'With the Greatest of Ease?' by Vaughn Shoemaker, *Chicago: The Daily News*, 1941. The cartoon drawing depicts Adolf Hitler leaping from a flying trapeze bar entitled Denmark to a succession of trapeze bars each etched with a country's name, from Norway to Sweden to question marks depicting the unknown trajectory of military conquests. Below the trapeze bars, a cartoonist rendering of the globe is dismayed alongside three other spectators identified as Great Britain, France, and the United States of America. Given that Hitler was a fan of circus artists, in particular trapeze and tight-rope acts as documented in declassified American's Central Intelligence Agency documents, this political cartoon has an especially unsettling quality about it as we can assume, that if he were aware of this depiction, he would've approved of it. Image from the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum at Ohio State University, Vaughn Shoemaker, published 1940 A.D: Cartoons by Vaughn Shoemaker (*Chicago: The Daily News*, 1941).

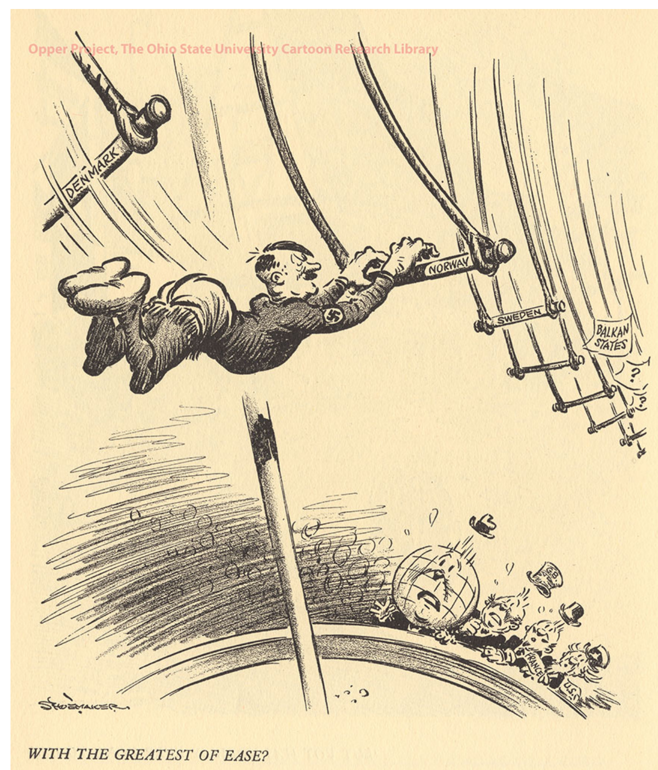

Image 3.1 Production image of Apollo in the ‘Prologue’ for Opéra Comique’s 2017 production of *Alcione* by Vincent Pontent. The image shows an airborne Apollo in a central position, symmetrically framed by two aerialists in aerial harnesses.

Image 3.2 Rehearsal image of two circus aerialists from Opéra Comique's 2017 production of *Alcione* by Vincent Pontent. The image shows one aerialist hanging upside down as their knees and feet are clasped around a diagonal aerial rope apparatus. The other aerialist is also upside down, but is facing and learning towards the first aerialist while one leg is wrapped around a pole as the aerialist's right hand also holds onto the pole. This image is drawn from the *Marches pour les matelots* in which the two aerialists portray sailors.

Image 4.1 Production image of Act II from the La Monnaie/ De Munt's 2011 production of *Parsifal* by Bernd Uhlig. The production image shows Klingsor, and his doppelgänger, rigging three flower-maidens in a dramatic act of shibari-tsuri. The women are bound in intricate knots which adorn the body in an intentional and communicative pattern that spatially and tactilely connects the rigger and model in an erotic practice. As the scene progresses, the models slowly rotate in an aerial contortions. Image from La Monnaie, Brussels, 2011 by Bernd Uhlig.