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A Rhythm of Bodies: Making the Impossible Plausible Through Physicality, Risk and Trust in *A Simple Space*

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Circus artists embrace the desire to achieve the impossible through exploration of the possibilities of the body. In the Australian milieu, contemporary circus performers put their bodies, their creativity and often their political agendas on the line. Contemporary circus relies on creative and ideological risk just as much as the physical risk encountered in the execution of tricks. Nevertheless, it is the body that is central to the risk explored within circus performance. In this article, I will position my theory of "A rhythm of bodies," which explores how notions of embodiment, as well as creative and physical risk, play out in the works of award-winning and internationally renowned Adelaide-based circus company Gravity and Other Myths—how impossibility is made plausible through risk and authenticity on stage.

Looking to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of a "body without organs" and Jondi Keane's "Embodied cognition is a special kind of movement," I will argue that in circus, bodily "impossibilities," or the usual limitations of the body, are effectively disregarded. In drawing their own greatly extended limitations and boundaries around their bodies, circus performers do not—indeed, cannot—subscribe to the limitations that most people accept as normal. This article will discuss how circus artists use their bodies to explore the extremities of not only what a body can do, but also what a body can say.

Keywords: embodiment, risk, trust, circus, Deleuze

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Les artistes de cirque ont à cœur de réussir l'impossible en explorant les possibilités du corps. En Australie, les circassien·ne·s contemporain·e·s engagent leurs corps, leur créativité et souvent leurs intérêts politiques. Leur performance repose sur la prise de risque, tant d'un point de vue créatif et idéologique que sur le plan physique pendant le spectacle. Néanmoins, dans cette discipline, le corps reste l'élément central en matière d'exploration des risques. Dans cet article, je présente ma théorie baptisée « *A rhythm of bodies* » (Corps en rythme), qui analyse le rôle des notions d'incarnation ainsi que la prise de risques créatifs et physiques — c'est-à-dire, comment l'impossible est rendu plausible par le risque et l'authenticité sur scène — dans les performances de la compagnie maintes fois récompensée Gravity and Other Myths, originaire d'Adélaïde en Australie et célèbre dans le monde entier.

En m'appuyant sur le concept de « corps sans organes » imaginé par Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari, ainsi que le corpus « Embodied cognition is a special kind of movement » de Jondi Keane, j'affirme que les artistes de cirque ne tiennent effectivement pas compte des « impossibilités » physiques ou des limites habituelles du corps. En repoussant considérablement leurs propres frontières physiques, les circassien·ne·s n'acceptent pas — et plus précisément, ne peuvent accepter — les limites considérées comme normales par la plupart des individus. Dans cet article, j'évoque la manière dont ils·elles utilisent leur corps pour expérimenter non seulement jusqu'où il peut aller, mais aussi ce qu'il peut exprimer.

Mots-clés : incarnation, risque, confiance, cirque, Deleuze

Introduction

This article applies philosophical concepts developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Erin Manning and Jondi Keane to the analysis of the work *A Simple Space* by Australian contemporary circus company Gravity and Other Myths (GOM). It focuses on the concepts of chaos, embodiment and spatiality to explore how the ensembles of *A Simple Space* perform "impossibilities" through controlled chaos and embodied cognition. It also considers the intrinsic role chaos plays in creating an acrobatic rhythm on stage through the repetition of embodied muscular action.

Chaos matters in circus, as part of both the creative process and the affective impact of performance. For the audience, chaos is represented in the performance of the "impossible" playing out in front of them as they watch bodies in action, seemingly in a state of disordered spectacle. Disorder and chaos go hand in hand in the layers of creation and performance of contemporary circus art. In contrast, such an appearance of chaos in performance relies on a very high degree of organization and split-second ordering of what happens when

and who does it. Peta Tait suggests that circus as an art form personifies danger and risk-taking through the presentation of extreme physical action, while also acknowledging that "contrary to public perception of daring and the way in which the circus promotes itself, circus artists are necessarily focused on mastery and judgment about the safe execution of action" (*Routledge Circus Studies Reader* 528). It is, in fact, an ordered chaos, or what can be understood as "Chasomosis," a concept that Deleuze and Guattari refer to in relation to the virtual worlds of creativity. The term itself was coined by James Joyce, but for this instance, Rob Pope's use of it can effectively unpack the chaos of circus and how it is intrinsic to the creative process. Pope suggests that "[Chaosmosis] neatly captures the paradox of many visions of creation and versions of creativity, both ancient and modern: the ways of which kinds of order (cosmos) emerge from kinds of apparent disorder (chaos)" (5). In this way, it could be said that circus is the "impossible" in action, enabled through risk (chaos) and the authenticity of creativity. There is the matter of artists knowingly letting go of ordered thinking to recognize their creative potential and lines of flight (Deleuze and Guattari), which can be generated from disorder; likewise, there is also the extent to which many performances rely on creating a sense of disorder and disorganization to increase the impact of riskiness to pull off the impossible.

Chaos and authenticity

Beyond admiration for the skills and technicalities that are the product of training and rehearsal, the added layer circus bodies offer to audiences is how they appear to defy and defeat gravity; thus, the possibilities of the human body are revealed. For successful contemporary circus productions, creative and ideological risks are as important as the physical risks encountered in the execution of tricks. Nevertheless, it is the body of the circus performer that literally puts itself at risk in every training session, every rehearsal, every performance. Circus performers, from jugglers and sword swallowers to acrobats and aerialists, take the perception of "that cannot be done" and, to use a circus metaphor, turn it upside down. They create their own bodily "rules," their own ways of being and becoming. I argue that the leading artists and companies all possess a willingness to explore and take creative risks alongside the high degree of physical risk that circus already offers. Further, my analysis posits that the "authenticity" embedded in that risk-taking informs the work that provides audiences with an experience that goes beyond a display of high-level circus skills.

Those who gain a sense of authenticity in/from a performance are precisely responding to the performer's choice to take the enormous personal risk of doing rather than watching, of facing an audience rather than being an audience.

In this sense, there is an intimate relationship to be discerned between authenticity and risk in performance. To spell this out in more detail, to perform is, in itself, risky. Further, what occurs in contemporary circus—which relies almost entirely on the human body for its performative elements—multiplies risks by the nature of the performance, putting the bodies of performers at risk of serious injury. At the same time, if this is combined with the creative risks taken in any artistic performance, the sense of risk is intensified, and so is the feeling of having encountered authenticity.

This understanding of the body—in terms of what it can do and how it can relate—can also offer a better understanding of circus bodies, including their relationships with each other and the spaces they inhabit and transform. Developing authenticity and creative risk begins with training the circus body to go beyond itself in finding a connection to narrative and/or emotion, to transcend the mere repetition of techniques on stage. In this sense, circus arts are always a question of becoming-otherwise. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that there is often a vernacular reference to "the magic of circus."

In *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*, Erin Manning reminds us that movement creates the space we encounter: "[w]e move not to populate space, not to extend it or embody it, but to create it" (1). Later, she observes that "[t]here is no 'body itself' here because the body is always more than 'itself,' always reaching toward that which it is not yet" (15). This can go a long way in helping us understand how and why the risk to circus bodies is especially central to the artistic processes of creative development and performance. The question of circus bodies and spaces should also be thought of in relation to degrees of becoming, or what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as "the principle of proximity," which suggests that no particle is entire unto itself but is always in proximal, co-present relationship to the movement of other particles (272–3). This concept can be useful in understanding the importance of the connections (both physical and creative) made between multiple bodies on stage together, working in synchronicity through a sort of rhythmic chaos to create acrobatic movements. We can explore this further through the works of Australian contemporary circus company Gravity and Other Myths, particularly their seminal work, *A Simple Space*.

Gravity and Other Myths, or GOM, as it is known among industry peers, is a circus company based in Adelaide, Australia, formed in 2009 by young graduates of the well-respected Cirkidz Program. As a collective of acrobats with a self-regulating creative process and autonomous company structure, they describe their work as follows: "The ensemble creates and directs their own work with emphasis on an honest approach to performance, moving away from traditional circus and theatre models, towards a fusion of acrobatic physical theatre" ("Gravity and Other Myths").

A Simple Space, which debuted at the Adelaide Fringe Festival in 2013, has since had numerous national and international performances, including shows in Montreal, Edinburgh and London, as well as tours of Germany and New Zealand. It has toured for over ten years and has been presented at numerous festivals and independent venues across the globe. It has also won multiple awards and seen several ensemble changes along the way ("Gravity and Other Myths"). For a work to maintain authenticity over this length of time, in so many formats and with so many ensemble changes, speaks to its core creative value. *A Simple Space* is just that in terms of production, lighting and costumes. It has no extravagant set design, sequins or high-tech rigging. The stage is set with only seven acrobats, one musician and one or two props. The beauty of the work lies in the fact that this is all the highly technically proficient performers need to keep audiences mesmerized, thoroughly entertained and deeply impressed for the duration of the one-hour show. An early review of *A Simple Space* on arts travel website Culture Trip UK describes it thusly:

> True to its name, A Simple Space rejects the glitter and glam characteristic of circus in preference of un-embellished physical production. Australian acrobatic troupe Gravity and Other Myths amazes audiences as bodies are used as props in this stripped down and astounding display of near impossible [*sic*] physical feats, agility and sincere trust. ("Review of Gravity and Other Myths")

The final words, "sincere trust," capture the sense of authenticity and risk to which I referred above. The production's minimalism undoubtedly contributes to GOM's connection with its audiences, but the performers' obvious commitment to risk and trust in each other are paramount. Circus relies on apparent extremes of risk-taking to set itself apart from related performing arts, such as dance and theatre; in any given circus performance, whether traditional or contemporary, the presence of physical risk is assured. It is also important to note that Australian contemporary circus works often introduce an element of social/political riskiness. Tait captures all of this and the effect of what the Culture Trip UK reviewer refers to as the "near impossible" in the following remarks:

> Firstly, all circus performs ideas of freedom and risk [*sic*] but its adventurous action also defies social norms. In this way, circus acts present constant reminders that physical risks are inherently also social ones. Secondly, a perception of freedom and risk intersects in circus with a vague perception that circus artists are physically exceptional, a suspicion that they are not quite human. Risk-taking with social identity ultimately

> challenges even the limits of human embodiment. (Tait, "Circus Bodies Defy the Risk")

From the start of the show, performers launch themselves "randomly" across the stage, diving, leaping and tilting their bodies into precarious positions, loudly exclaiming "FALLING!" as their fellow acrobats frantically race to catch them before they land face-first on the stage or another performer. This dynamic builds as the skills escalate, not only in risk but also in technique. The acrobats literally throw themselves and each other around for the duration of the performance. Unlike the polished veneer of most physical performances, timing and movement-initiating calls are not masked; they are made loud and clear, rendering the level of risk involved in the movement transparent. GOM draws attention to risk, trust and embodiment through a transparent, meta-performative process that highlights the performance's performative scaffolding. In these ways, demystifying the "magic" produced by circus skills becomes part of the production value of *A Simple Space*.

Embodiment and physical risk

In *A Simple Space*, the acrobats openly challenge their capacity to maintain focus on their embodiment and thus their safety—for example, by handing out milk crates filled with coloured plastic balls and inviting the entire audience to hurl the balls at them during a group handstand act. This invites chaos into the performance. The ensemble's rhythm extends to the audience as they participate in the ball throwing, which, in turn, breaks the audience's spectator-only role as its members actively become part of the physicality of the handstands, aiding the demonstration of the acrobats' ability to hold a handstand despite physical distraction. This addition of an outside force contributing chaotic, at times unpredictable, elements to the scene amplifies the chaos of bodies in action.

One of many standout moments in the show is a back somersault challenge, in which the cast undertakes a contest to see who can perform the most back somersaults in sequence without collapsing. As they throw themselves backward into the air, a poetic movement akin to a wave pattern occurs as they follow each other one by one—*flip, land and repeat*—until they can no longer continue. The balletic effect produced by this intensely physical segment requires a temporary lull in the apparent chaos that both precedes and follows it, during which many bodies move at once from many directions. At the same time, the focused period of the contest (individual against individual) gives the audience insight into the extreme physicality of performance as the acrobats relentlessly test the limits of their bodies and mental endurance. When fatigue begins to surface, audience

members witness each acrobat deliberately pushing at the edges of what a body can do. The contest also invites the audience to witness the authenticity of the circus artists and their bodily limits as it plays out in real time on stage, and at times, the under-rotation of a backsault brings forth more chaos . . . will the artist land safely despite not completing a rotation? Or will they fall on their head?

Furthermore, this display of acrobatic endurance demonstrates the numerous hours of repetitive-action training that have occurred to enable the acrobats to perform a trick multiple times in sequence without injury. Rosemary Farrell explains the relationship between training, performance and audience as follows:

> Although a spectator views a performance resulting from a rehearsal, it is argued here that high skill levels and originality of an act seem perfect for the spectator who does not witness a repetitive process of enduring self-discipline over times of practice and rehearsal. The framework for how to build this practice over time is laid down by tradition, itself evolving from repetition. The spectator sees the end result removed from the core function of tradition as repetition. (Farrell 215)

Clearly, what interests Farrell here is the part played by "tradition as repetition"—and, indeed, repetition as tradition—in producing "enduring self-discipline." This can also be viewed in terms of "the refrain" (Deleuze and Guattari), especially in how the refrains of classical/traditional circus and Chinese circus skill training continue to inform contemporary performances. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that "From Chaos, *Milieus* and *Rhythms* are born [. . .] Chaos is not without its own directional components" (313). This is beneficial in considering how the repetition of physical methods creates a rhythm for the performers within the chaos of risk. Elaborating on the concept of the refrain, they continue by proposing that "Rhythm is the milieu's answer to chaos. What chaos and rhythm have in common is the in-between—between two milieus, rhythm and chaos or the chaosmos" (313). Repetition creates the rhythm required to master chaos and perform high-level partner acrobatics on stage.

In undertaking repetitive execution of a high-risk skill, circus artists take not only a safety risk but also an emotional risk, as allowing their bodies to fatigue on stage could result in undercutting their landings. All this tests the limits of their bodies while also pushing the boundaries of what audiences might expect from a circus show; it goes beyond the "ta-da!" moment into uncomfortable territory where failure is a possibility. Authenticity is once more revealed, with the effect of a more intimate performance. Although the acrobats are presenting an "astounding display of near impossible [*sic*] physical feats" ("Review of Gravity and Other Myths"), they are simultaneously revealing their humanness, which creates a deeper sense of connection to their audience. In this way,

the stripped-down, high-risk performance, which could be seen as simply an extravagant display of technical skill and strength, becomes a space in which affect comes strongly into play between those who perform and those who engage with the performance—where affect contributes significantly to a sense of authenticity, just as a sense of authenticity produces more intense affective experience. Performers and audiences come to constitute a temporary "assemblage" (Deleuze and Guattari) through bodily, spatial and temporal exchanges of affective relations. Although each person remains open to whatever other affects they brought into the space—each trailing their individual and shared rhizomatic expectations, preconceptions, memories and desires—for now, performers and audience members are in a zone of proximity; they have entered into proximal relations with each other. This connection between performer and audience, ensemble and space, is rhizomatic in its interrelated parts, as Deleuze and Guattari explain: "[. . .] the rhizome pertains to a map, that is always detachable, connectable, connected, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight" (21). The continuous movement and rhythm of the acrobats on stage, as well as the moments in which the audience is invited to participate, extend the rhizomatic nature of the performance.

This experience is strongly reinforced by the creative risk GOM takes in avoiding entrances and exits for the acts in the show. Obviously, this builds on the transparency of performance quality for which the company has become renowned; however, it also reinforces the affective intensity. No one leaves the stage. All seven acrobats remain on stage for the duration of the show and rarely stop moving. Even when the focus is directed toward one or two performers, the others are always on stage and remain connected via eye contact and their overall connection to the extraordinary degree of physicality that unfurls in the performance. There is a sureness of presence within the ensemble that constitutes a steady link, even when their bodies are not physically connected by touch. The performers maintain an energy that connects them and reminds us that, as an ensemble, they are unshakably allied. Further, an embodied intimacy is rendered more apparent through the percussive nature of the performance, which is reinforced by the bodily rhythms engendered as the performers move together and independently across the stage. Audience members are drawn into this intimacy, even as they are inevitably, as "audience," outside of it—although, as discussed below, GOM's audience is seated much closer to the stage than most.

Spatiality and embodied cognition

The simplicity of GOM's staging and framework, combined with the complexity of their acrobatic technique, demonstrates how simplicity and complexity

complement each other to create fluidity in the performance space. This is true of all performance, but it becomes more obvious when GOM strips it down to the bare essentials. A significant proportion of *A Simple Space* consists of group acrobatics in which the artists use the bodies of other cast members as something akin to stepping stones and landing points. In group acrobatics, technical precision is essential, as you relinquish the safety of your body to your troupe. As the flyer, you can control your body tension and initiate your rotation or acceleration, and beyond that, you must rely on your base(s) to pitch, catch or spin you sufficiently. For GOM, the lack of apparatus highlights simplicity but allows bodily complexity to occur through intuitive movements and extraordinary transitions across the performance space. The nuances in their work emphasize the importance of embodiment and trust in circus. As an ensemble, the performers can be understood to embody each other, and in performance, they frequently undertake moves that involve a significant degree of becoming-other. In these ways, a deeper level of skill in performance is enabled.

Jondi Keane's "Embodied cognition is a special kind of movement" invites us to consider the relationships between the characteristics *of* the body (in space and touch) and the subtle and nuanced movements *in* the body. "Embodied cognition, and perception in particular," he writes, "consists of movements-within-movement that twist, contort and shift the gross and subtle connections and relationships previously held in place" (19). The "movements-within-movement" in *A Simple Space* articulate the finer details of the acrobats' connections to their own bodies and the bodies occupying the space around them (both those of the other cast members and those of the audience). The show is performed in an intimate setting with the audience in close proximity. This creative choice removes the fourth wall that theatre so often relies on and further enhances the level of intimacy between performers and audience members. Reviews of *A Simple Space* regularly refer to the rawness of the performance quality and the transparency of the process. Vocal grunts are openly expressed, and another creative choice to avoid the use of heavy makeup means that sweat is visible. The extreme effort of the body is exposed rather than concealed, as one review notes: "The audience is seated on three sides, so close to the action you can almost feel every deep, guttural breath. And that only makes this show even more terrifyingly, jaw-droppingly impressive" (Buchan).

A rhythm of bodies

A fundamental characteristic of trust is the performers' relationship to the unknown, which is exemplified by their letting go and giving in to the body's

movement in space. In the context of circus, the element of the unknown is minimized by extensive training and numerous hours spent standing on, falling off and leaping onto each other's bodies. Through this, a deeper, knowing connection develops beyond trust; it becomes an embodiment of not only the circus skill involved but also the movement of other bodies within that skilled moment. This involves knowing where the hands that catch you will be. It involves adjusting your stance to accommodate an over- or under-rotation of a front 'sault to put your shoulders right where the flyer needs them so that they can land safely each time. Through this embodied connection, a *rhythm of bodies* is produced. The performers compensate for and counteract each other's technical errors so that they are never truly errors—only a meeting of bodies in space and time to execute something they have done numerous times before, often slightly altered to minimize risk for each other. In this instance, rhythm and chaos are not in opposition but interconnected. Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that chaos and rhythm are in sync:

> In this in-between, chaos becomes rhythm, not inexorably, but it has a chance to. Chaos is not the opposite of rhythm, but the milieu of all milieus. There is a rhythm whenever there is a transcoded passage from one milieu to another, a communication of milieus, coordination between heterogeneous space-times. (Deleuze and Guattari 313)

That is, the chaos of the acrobatic movements played out by the ensemble, accompanied by the artists remaining on stage and therefore constantly "in" the performance, maintains a coordination and connection of milieus and layers that results in a rhythm unique to the show—a rhythm of bodies that continues across multiple presentations in various venues with ever-changing casts.

Regardless of where the show is performed or who is on stage, each acrobat remains focused and centred on what their body needs to do, where it needs to move and who it connects with to make that journey. The rhythm of bodies is thus extended into the audience despite the apparent self-possession of each acrobat. Keane recognizes such moments in physical performance as examples of embodied cognition, suggesting that when the body's performance carries with it micro-movements that represent emotion, it can change the spectators' perception of what bodies can be and what they convey:

> Some performers, using images, emotions and specific intentions, create dispositions through micro movement in the body that appear in and through all their movements. In this way, cognition is a special type of movement that runs through the body, interacts with the surroundings and feeds back into the micro movements of perception. (Keane 1–2)

Considering the added layer of an intimate audience in *A Simple Space*, it is clear that the movements of the acrobats' bodies, though exceptional in their artistic athleticism, are not solely responsible for the success of the performance. The artists produce affective connections in, with and through their bodies—connections with themselves, each other and their audiences. Every expression of exertion, pain, fatigue and elation is a micro-movement that produces sensory and emotional responses, which "run through" the performance for all who experience it. This carries many implications for audiences' understanding of authenticity in performance and how they experience degrees of intimacy with the performers. For performers undertaking high levels of risk, micro-movements are crucial. Whether imperceptible or perceptible to audiences, these micro-movements occur as signals, corrections, calls and responses that are always perceptible to performers, and they are indicative of becoming involved in the rhythm of bodies that emerges in group acrobatics as undertaken by GOM.

Space and time are highly influential in how such a rhythm of bodies occurs in contemporary circus and how the performance is received or read. Rebecca Coleman explains:

> [. . .] "things"—bodies—cannot exist independently but rather are constituted through their relations with other things [. . .] However, bodies, in a Deleuzian sense, refer not necessarily to human entities but to a multiple and diverse series of connections which assemble as a particular spatial and temporal moment. (Coleman 150–151)

The bodies of the GOM acrobats and their movements plug into each other to generate an assemblage: several-bodies-becoming-one-body moving together through space and time. For audiences, such a movement-of-artists is usually perceived as "an artistic moment," which, knowingly or not, signals the importance of time perception in enabling a sense of movement *through* space—and, simultaneously, the importance of movement perception in enabling a sense of movement *through* time (as well as our perception of time passing). Here, it is extremely useful to revisit Manning's observation that we "move not to populate space, not to extend it or embody it, but to create it" (1). Space-creation-through-movement is what GOM does incredibly well, and in my analysis, they do it so well because they are aware that it *is* what they are doing. This meta-performativity and creation of space through movement is also present in their other works, such as their earliest show, *Freefall* (2009), as well as the more recent *Backbone* (2017) and *The Pulse* (2021).

By connecting their bodies across the performance space, moving around and across other bodies, and relying on the bodies of the ensemble to make a creative/physical choice to move as one, the acrobats create an assemblage of

bodies-as-art. In Keane's sense, the metacognition of movement that characterizes GOM's performances arises from endless hours of training to create a bodily precision which, in turn, delivers a level of embodiment that goes beyond expectations of "performing" an acrobatic sequence. The acrobats' exceptionally rigorous training frees them from the need to concentrate on *how* to do what they are doing, individually and together, so that they can allow the experience of becoming-other to unfold in performance. This enables greater alertness to the micro-movements of their own bodies and those of the rest of the cast, as well as other modes of relational communication that can emerge in ensemble work at such an exceptional level. To bring Keane's insights into contact with Deleuze and Guattari, GOM's extraordinary training facilitates openness to affect, which, far from being potentially distracting, becomes integral to the performance. The acrobats are alert to ways of "[entering] into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body [. . .] to join with it in creating a more powerful body" (Deleuze and Guattari 257). When we encounter this kind of fluid interaction, in which multiplicity is creatively productive to such a degree that it seems to operate as one thing, we are encountering something akin to what Deleuze and Guattari describe as follows:

> [A] plane of immanence, univocality, composition upon which everything is given, upon which unformed elements and materials dance that are distinguished from one another only by their speed and that enter into this or that individuated assemblage depending on their connections, their relations of movement. (Deleuze and Guattari 255)

It is important to note that this is not a description of unity, which Deleuze and Guattari distrust, but rather a transcendent Plane, a god-plane, an origin, a matter of processes of either/or rather than and . . . and . . . and . . . A plane of immanence that remains a multiplicity, which can thus create other multiplicities.

Having introduced the plane of immanence, Deleuze and Guattari move quickly to how "individuated assemblages" can come about, paying particular attention to the idea of the fold. This matters for the effects/affects I want to understand by discussing such extraordinary performances. They observe that:

> [. . .] for the vertebrate to become an Octopus or Cuttlefish, all it would have to do is fold itself in two fast enough to fuse the elements of the halves of its back together, then bring its pelvis up to the nape of its neck and gather its limbs together into one of its extremities . . . (Deleuze and Guattari 255)

It possibly occurred to them that some of us might find this difficult to imagine, so by way of immediate explication, they cite an example from Saint-Hilaire.

Interestingly, the example they chose is from circus, in the form of an acrobatic clown or a clowning acrobat. It is followed by an explanation of "the fold" as they deploy that idea in relation to the plane of immanence:

> [. . .] like "a clown who throws his head and shoulders back and walks on his head and hands." *Plication*. It is no longer a question of organs and functions, and of a transcendent Plane that can preside over their organization only by means of analogical relations and types of divergent development. It is a question not of organization but of movement and rest, speed and slowness. It is a question of elements and particles, which do or do not arrive fast enough to effect a passage, a becoming or jump on the same plane of pure immanence. And if there are in fact jumps, rifts between assemblages, it is not by virtue of their essential irreducibility but rather because there are always elements that do not arrive on time, or arrive after everything is over; thus, it is necessary to pass through fog, to cross voids, to have lead times and delays, which are themselves part of the plane of immanence. Even the failures are part of the plane. (Deleuze and Guattari 255)

This provides a means to think about how the "breathtaking" performance has become what it is *becoming* as we watch. Prior to this creative "moment," there have been countless hours of training, mis-timings, late arrivals, just-in-time arrivals, bruises, sprains, struggles to "make it work," sudden inspirations (*lines of flight?*), failures, successes and impossibilities. This is why in the "moment of performance," the micro-movements *are* read, bodies *are* becoming-each-other, and even the potential to fail—or actual failures—become part of the performance, which is consistently breathtaking, exhilarating and exciting for those who watch (and, indeed, for those who perform). It matters that once they are on that plane, on which it seems as if anything might be possible, the acrobats are freed from the consciousness of *how* they are doing what they are doing so that, as I suggested above, they can be as open as possible to what is immanent in or to that plane—which is also, at the same time, the space that their movements are creating. Folding and unfolding. *Plication*.

When acrobats deliver a performance so powerfully embodied that they could be mentally compiling a shopping list while executing a dangerous and highly skilled trick, this is often described as flowing from "muscle memory." Tait explains:

> The phrase "muscular memory" or "muscle memory" (Grayland) is [. . .] widely used in conversation by young aerial performers in Australia to describe how the body acquires bodily skills and heightened physical

> action through practice and repetition. Therefore, if a muscular body can be trained to develop a memory for action on its own accord, what does the performer think about or remember—what goes through the mind—during the performance? (Tait, "Body Memory")

The answer, of course, needs to be something like "the mind," as embodied cognition "runs through the body, interacts with the surroundings and feeds back into the micro movements of perception," as Keane put it. If we understand embodied cognition working in these ways, ensemble performers are simultaneously interacting with the embodied experiences of the rest of the cast. The simplicity of GOM's production aesthetic allows its audiences to share in the complexities of trained circus bodies in action. Creativity in contemporary circus is where simplicity, complexity and chaos meet fluidity, control and embodied cognition to produce a rhythm of bodies, where the boundaries of what a body can do provide an opportunity for an audience to experience the "impossible" in real time. The creative chaos of circus creates a space where the possibilities of the body can be explored in their most extreme forms, where impossibilities become plausible.

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