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Re-approaching community development through the arts: a 'critical mixed methods' study of social circus in Quebec

Jennifer B. Spiegel and Stephanie N. Parent*

Abstract Community arts projects have long been used in community development. Nevertheless, despite many liberatory tales that have emerged, scholars caution that well-meaning organizations and artists may inadvertently become complicit in efforts that distract from fundamental inequities, instrumentalizing creative expression as a means to transform potentially dissident youth into productive and cooperative 'citizens'. This article examines how social circus – using circus arts with equity-seeking communities – has been affecting personal and community development among youth with marginalized lifestyles in Quebec, Canada. Employing a 'critical mixed methods' design, we analysed the impacts of the social circus methodology and partnership model deployed on transformation at the personal and community level. Our analysis suggests that transformation in this context is grounded in principles of using embodied play to re-forge habits and fortify an identity within community and societal acceptance through recognizing individual and collective creative contributions. The disciplinary dimension of the programme, however, equally suggests an imprinting of values of 'productivity' by putting marginality 'to work'. In the social circus programmes studied, tensions between the goal of better coping within the existing socioeconomic system and building skills to transform inequitable dynamics within dominant social and cultural processes, are

**Address for correspondence*: Stephanie N. Parent, School of Population and Public Health, University of British Columbia. 429-2206 East Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T1Z3; email: stephanie.parent@alumni.ubc.ca

navigated by carving out a space in society that offers alternative ways of seeing and engaging.

While community arts projects have long been used in community development, the nature of the development sought has varied. Meade and Shaw (2007) argued that 'art offers an important antidote to resignation and cynicism' (p. 414), noting that community arts 'constitute important sites of counter-hegemonic struggle against limited and limiting accounts of human experience' (p. 419), while contributing to personal well-being as well as occasionally to broader economic development. Nevertheless, despite liberatory ambitions, scholars have cautioned that well-meaning organizations and artists could be inadvertently complicit in efforts that distract from fundamental inequities and even serve to homogenize diverse communities, depoliticizing and instrumentalizing creative expression as a means to transform potentially dissident youth into productive and cooperative 'citizens' (Duncombe, 2007; Matarasso, 2013; Plastow, 2015).

To contribute to the analysis of the relationships between individual well-being, social inclusion, and transformative community development through the arts, this article examines how social circus – the use of circus arts with equity-seeking communities – can affect the development of *social subjectivities* and *collectivities*. Building on the theoretical framework of community activist, social theorist, and psychoanalyst Felix Guattari, we analyse the ethico-aesthetic configurations developed through the process of engaging in social circus, and how the physicality, humour, and creative expression of circus arts are leveraged as a community development practice.

In *Chaosmosis: an ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, Guattari writes of engaging youth in the arts as a way of approaching one's larger social and cultural environment: 'Art is not just the activities of established artists but of a whole subjective creativity which traverses the generations and oppressed peoples, ghettos, minorities' (Guattari, 1995, p. 91). He refers to this notion as an 'aesthetic paradigm', altering ways of seeing and engaging with the world (p. 91). As such, it enables experimentation with different kinds of social configurations, ways of working together and of imagining possible futures and modes of both self and collective realization. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault on the production of subjectivity (Foucault, 1975), Guattari considered the role of institutional arrangements and discursive practice, arguing that transformation was not only a personal affair, but inherently tied to larger collective and political forces (Guattari, 1995). Guattari placed a further emphasis on the role of sensation, affect, and

desire, thus taking into account the ways in which different practices make one *feel*. In his own practice, Guattari deployed many arts forms to help individuals and groups transform the way they engage with the world in the hope of bringing about personal and collective change in what he dubbed 'micropolitical revolutions', altering power relations and feelings of collective worth (Guattari and Rolnik, 2007). Circus was amongst the activities he proposed to serve this goal. This study asks: what are the effects of social circus on the ways in which individual and collective well-being are experienced and what strategies and challenges are faced in altering the nature of the relational power dynamics that have cast so many aside?

Research sites and the goals of the social circus programmes

In 1995 the now multibillion dollar Quebec-based circus company Cirque du Soleil partnered with the non-governmental organization, Jeunesse du Monde, to launch a social circus initiative called Cirque du Monde, which supports social circus programmes across Quebec and worldwide. In addition to financial support, they provide tools for practitioners such as their *Community Worker's Guide: When Circus Lessons Become Life Lessons*, which explains social circus as 'a way of approaching social problems derived from an innovative fusion of circus arts and social intervention' (Lafortune and Bouchard, 2010, p. 13). This guide lists twelve objectives that infuse trainings and programmes: Offering a means rather than an end; developing self-esteem; autonomy and self-regulation; sense of belonging and solidarity; citizenship; good physical condition; good communication skills; encouraging fringe creativity; pride in diversity; supporting risk management; socioeconomic integration; and supporting resilience, defined as 'the dynamic process by which an individual adapts positively to a trauma or adverse situation' (Lafortune and Bouchard, p. 20).

Within Cirque du Monde, and the social circus community more broadly, the variety of circus arts – juggling, clowning, acrobatics, partner acrobatics, aerials, and balancing disciplines like unicycle and rola bola, amongst others – are promoted in a manner that allows particular ways of working together (for instance to create pyramids), keep one another from physical harm, and tell theatrical stories together through the language of physical expression (Spiegel, 2014). Advocates of social circus as an alternative mode of community work with young people living in precarious conditions often point to the fact that circus has, in many places around the world including Quebec, emerged from a tradition of street performance and has historically provided livelihoods to those marginalized from

mainstream workforces (Avrillon, 2011; Bessone, 2013; Spiegel, 2016). As Hurtubise, Roy and Bellot (2003) note in their study on youth homelessness, circus 'is coherent with the world of the street: nomads, gypsies, and wanderers have played a preponderant role in the history of circus and the street arts occupations' (p. 405). They claim that this association allows social circus to help marginalized youth explore their own strengths and interests in a manner that is appealing and culturally appropriate to those who feel alienated by the strategies traditionally offered.

While cautioning against a 'classical [top-down] paradigm' being imposed on participants, scholars of Cirque du Monde view this programme as an alternative able to reconcile opposing ideas, such as marginal-normal, or particular-universal. Past research suggests that the vast majority of those involved in social circus do tend to share much the same discourse regarding overarching goals (Rivard, 2007). However, how these goals and hence the transformations sought are nuanced points to the same tension experienced in many community development projects worldwide – namely the dominant funder – perspective of providing embodied life skills for harmonious existence with (if not integration into) the current economic system is met with questioning by participants of the very terms of the system itself. While earlier theorist practitioners such as Guattari had firmly anchored their analysis and programmes of change in a critique of the capitalist system that shaped the possibilities and desires of participants, the official discourse of the largely corporately funded outreach programme tended to focus more on individual and group dynamics. We sought to understand how the specificity of the approach and its framing was experienced by participants.

Here we analyse four of the eight Cirque du Monde-affiliated social circus groups in the province of Quebec, Canada (in Drummondville, Quebec City, Sherbrooke, and Montreal), selected because they target primarily street-involved youth with marginalized lifestyles – the original and dominant target population of social circus programmes in Quebec – whereas others were more focused on children at risk.

A 'critical mixed methods' approach toward investigating the cultural stakes of community development

Stein and Faigin (2015), amongst others, note the problematic nature of trying to capture arts experiences with scientific inquiry. Goldenberg (2006) further argues that prioritizing quantitative data operationalizes 'the positivistic elimination of culture, contexts, and the subjects of knowledge production from consideration' (p. 2622). However, Miller (2010), cited in

Seebohm *et al.* (2012), argued that community development 'urgently needs impact and outcome measures that have credibility with clinically trained commissioners' (p. 484). This has been particularly applicable to arts-based community development projects (Matarasso, 2007; Newman *et al.*, 2003). Matarasso (2003) points to the varying epistemologies that can inform a research design, arguing against 'uncritical scientism' in assessing arts practices. We adopted a mixed methods approach including statistical analyses; however, we echo the caution of Stein and Faigin (2015) that: 'When art activities are framed in terms of their capacity to 'fix' the 'problems' of people identified by the dominant culture as 'deficient' or 'at risk', there is the danger that the arts simply become an instrument for perpetuating oppression and the status quo' (p. 72).

Our initial emphasis on understanding the goals, methodologies and scope of social circus in Quebec as the basis for designing our survey was intended to mitigate this bias, while our critical qualitative analysis contextualized the quantitative data within an understanding of the social implications. Lead author J.B.S. conducted a critical ethnographic study over a two-year period (2013–2015), working closely with social circus participants, instructors and community workers in the Montreal programme, as described in depth elsewhere (Spiegel, 2016). Based on this preliminary research, claims of social circus advocates and other research on social circus (Rivard, 2007; Schwan and Lightman, 2015; Spiegel *et al.*, 2015), a retrospective post-then-pre questionnaire (Rockwell and Kohn, 1989) was developed.

Social circus proponents have long claimed that this art form is a powerful stimulator of personal growth (Trotman, 2012; Kinnunen *et al.*, 2013), defined as the desire or capacity to change and develop one's self, including skill acquisition, the subjective feeling of being a 'better person', and self-esteem (Robitschek, 1998). Social circus is claimed to also promote participants' social inclusion (Kinnunen *et al.*, 2013), defined as having the means, material or otherwise, to participate in social, economic, political, and cultural life (Huxley *et al.*, 2012). We therefore focused on personal growth and social inclusion, as well as social engagement, defined as performing meaningful social roles for either leisure or productive activity (Glass *et al.* 2006). Following Guattari's theory of social change and transformations in discourse, affect, and sense of individual and collective potential as being intimately interconnected (Guattari 1995, 2000), our study was designed to assess the extent and conditions in which social inclusion is promoted, and its relationships to personal growth and social engagement, focusing especially on the experience of youth in social circus. We further sought to detail the *kinds* of personal growth, social inclusion, and social engagement experienced.

We selected questionnaires used by others to measure our constructs of interest (Robitschek, 1998 for personal growth; and Huxley *et al.*, 2012 for social inclusion and social engagement), adapting questions for social circus. We then tested whether the questions showed consistent responses, and ascertained that they did indeed, both for social inclusion and personal growth (Cronbach α 0.846 and 0.793, respectively), allowing analysis of these sets of questions as scales representing the constructs of social inclusion and personal growth respectively. Questions about social engagement did not show this attribute (Cronbach α of 0.616 for post-scale).

The questionnaire was administered initially at the gathering of social circus participants from across the province of Quebec (Spiegel *et al.*, 2014). After the in-depth ethnographic study of the Montreal site (Spiegel, 2016), both co-authors observed sessions, conducted semi-structured interviews with participants, instructors, community workers, and coordinators, held focus groups at the three other study sites, and distributed the questionnaire to those who had not completed it previously.

Living on the margins: profile of social circus participants

All the Quebec social circus programmes studied are conducted by, or partnered with, one or more community organizations that support street-involved youth (Spiegel and Parent, 2016). One of the coordinators described the population that social circus attracts: 'we see youth with mental or physical health issues, drug use, and even some who don't necessarily have family or drug use issues, but who feel they do not fit within society'.

Most survey respondents were aged eighteen to twenty-three years old (43.9 percent), ranging from thirteen to thirty-four; 57.1 percent were males. More than a third (36.7 percent) did not have their own place and did not live with their families before joining circus: 11.2 percent were living in government-provided care such as youth detainee centres or foster families; 10.2 percent were sleeping at a friend's place; and 5.1 percent were living in shelters or on the street.

Social circus and trajectories of transformation

Three overarching themes emerged.

Personal transformation

Participants across programmes shared experiences of personal transformation they attributed to the ways in which discipline, creative expression,

physicality, and playfulness work together as a collective cathartic experience, and how practising social circus requires working in teams in activities that require entrusting one's physical safety to others, such as in acro-balance routines. Many participants reported that social circus helped them to become less shy or taught them to trust. This young woman explained:

> I want to be actually able to trust someone fully…. I feel that by having more human contact, it just allows me to break down my own barriers…

The way in which circus leveraged 'play' to re-learn relational patterns was a strong motif. As one participant stated: 'Circus allows us to let out steam, to learn things and help us forget what happened in the past'; another explains: 'We discover who we are in relation to the group while playing and having fun.' Moreover, the playful human contact here is decidedly physical; it is this physicality that, participants explain, precipitates the transformation they experience. As one participant stated:

> Circus relates to the body. I think it helps in becoming aware of yourself in relation to others and to your physical fitness, and this helps you to make better decisions in life, because you are more aware of who you are, and you can then become a better person.

Through increased body awareness, some participants reported that they did not like the effects drugs had on them, and became motivated to control their consumption:

> Before coming to circus, I didn't like being in my own skin, and I was using a lot [of drugs] to forget who I was. Since I started coming to circus, I found a new way to feel good in my own skin, like… evacuate all the rage and the sadness I bear. It really helps to come here and I feel in my safe zone.

Another participant concurs:

> The first time I came to circus I was high as a kite because I didn't know what I came to do. But after that, I never again consumed hard drugs before coming here. You can't – you know! (…) [Hard drugs] were cutting me off from the group's energy! I was learning nothing! I wasn't opening up to people, I wasn't with the group!

Survey results corroborated that social circus participants widely reported becoming more physically fit and reducing drug use. Additionally, there was a marked and statistically significant increase in all the personal growth indicators (Table 1 in Spiegel and Parent, 2016), albeit to varying degrees.

These personal transformations in affect and personal habits often translated into and/or complemented self-reported increase in self-discipline

and taking responsibility – lessons that could be, at least potentially, leveraged as transferrable job skills – of importance to funders that support such activities as 'pre-employability' programmes. For example, the survey showed a 21.2 percent increase in *seeing projects through to the end*. One participant reflected on how the skills learned through social circus equipped him for life outside circus:

> [The instructors] gave us small responsibilities. I realize that taking on this small responsibility showed me how to push and challenge myself. I wanted to be disciplined, because if I wasn't disciplined, how could I tell [others to be]? Like you learn how to adapt and accept other people really. I find that interesting because I apply that type of stuff at work and at home, with my family. And it's stuff I never realized before but it's incredible because you finish by applying it in other spots and other circles in your life and like you don't expect that.

An instructor explained further:

> Working today to obtain a result later is not a skill that is necessarily acquired. So this is something we transmit via circus activities: '…You won't be juggling tomorrow, but in six months you'll be able to show your juggling technique in front of an audience'.

The life skills, habits, and relational dynamics generated through social circus are thus intended to have a lasting transformation on the ways in which individuals navigate the world.

Creating community

Importantly, self-discipline and personal growth tended to accompany development of particular modes of sociality, translating into formation of social networks or 'social capital' that could be leveraged for community building beyond the social circus sessions. As this instructor explains: 'Social circus' main success is that many people who were extremely introverted, extremely isolated, succeeded in developing bonds and a network in the community.' In our survey, 85.1 percent reported higher scores on the social inclusion scale after participation in social circus (Table 2 and Figure 1 in Spiegel and Parent, 2016). Linear regression models coincided, supporting the instructor's explanation that change in personal growth was indeed associated with change in social inclusion (Figure 2 in Spiegel and Parent, 2016; $R^2 = 0.5$, $P < 0.01$). The reverse was also true, with no significant difference between the slopes of the two lines, indicating that personal growth promotes social inclusion and vice versa.

The qualitative data corroborated the quantitative results. A young woman who had been incarcerated spoke of the newly found sense of belonging that social circus provided her, underscoring the relationship

between community building and the creation of an alternative 'family': 'At the beginning, I was scared that people would judge me and think I am weird, but I came anyways and, well, oddly, everyone accepted me and no one thought I was weird.' The sense of belonging was so strong that many narratives referred to circus as a family, or to instructors as parents, who became responsible for passing on sociocultural values:

> [Circus] was a family where I could be myself, where I felt like a fish in the water. My instructors were like my second parents [since my real parents] were not there. My instructors taught me important values in life… they encouraged me to be respectful towards others and helped those with less abilities.

If personal transformation through circus is interconnected with strengthening social and community bonds, as our data indicated, what kinds of sociality and collectivity are being generated?

Interestingly, change in reported openness to difference (*Feel judgmental [negative] towards people who think differently from you?*), while having improved by 7.6 percent (Table 1 in Spiegel and Parent, 2016), was relatively less marked than change associated with other indicators. This appears to be due to the fact that participants generally perceived themselves to be open to different kinds of people from the outset, as they themselves often felt ostracized. One participant explained: 'Most people who come here are rejects, either at school, or somewhere in their family. There is an aspect of reject somewhere, but circus aims to change this'. Some participants insisted that: 'a bond is formed amongst everyone, even though we hold different values and ideals'; 'circus unites people from different backgrounds'; and that 'It's kind of cool to see people from completely different backgrounds who will work together in teams. It gives interesting duos, like a punk and a student'. However, others observed that the groups in which they were involved tended to assemble participants with similar sociopolitical sensibilities, albeit typically progressive.

Moreover, while participants in the urban centres of Quebec appreciated interaction with participants from northern First Nations communities during the yearly gathering of the sites, on a daily basis, staff, particularly in Montreal, noted that other than occasional visits from advanced participants from northern First Nations programmes, their groups were predominantly White. One community worker attributed this to word-of-mouth recruitment strategies and the profile of their partner organizations (Spiegel and Parent, 2016). The two largest cities, Montreal and Quebec City, are, however, now explicitly trying to foster community outreach through connecting with other organizations. The Montreal programme, for instance, is combining intensives with another local social circus

programme serving youth with physical disabilities, offering two very different communities the opportunity to create together, and perform at social housing conferences, facilitating convergence amongst those experiencing different life challenges.

The status of social circus as an ultimately performative arts-based practice, however, adds another dimension for community development – stretching beyond the confines of the group itself, and grounded in how it reaches potentially diverse audiences however broadly defined:

> I was walking by an old folks' home the other day, and everyone was just sitting there […]. So I started juggling for them for about ten minutes, and that really put a smile on their face.

Participants spoke of being viewed positively by the community, where they felt previously frowned upon because of their marginalized lifestyle. An instructor noted:

> Through circus, we try to show the different side of youth who are sometimes… marginalized. When they perform public shows, the eyes of the community change also; it brings a different perspective on these youth who are doing something really interesting, really positive.

This emphasis on public performance as a site for mitigating stigma and offering a goal, has, however, met with much controversy, as some fear it overemphasizes product over process, pushing some youth toward professionalization at the risk of diluting the social accessibility and open nurturing environment of the programme. To mitigate this, when they reach the point of proficiency, participants are often encouraged toward other programmes for further developing their artistic skill. However, programme staff note that artistic proficiency does not always mean they will thrive in an environment not designed to be accessible and sensitive to their challenges.

Horizons for future development

> I was always a problematic child. Like at school they were always telling me, oh you are never going to accomplish anything in life. You're always going to be like a sorry guy, a sorry guy. You're never going to do this. You're never going to do that. But then when I figured out that like I can concentrate and I can actually focus on something I actually love. …Maybe I'm not doing well in school because I'm not interested in school. I don't know how to write, I don't have the right love for it. Because if I had the same love I had for school that I had for Circus, shit I would have had like 90s everywhere.

Circus giving *motivation to accomplish something* and *meaning to their life* was recurrent in participants' discourse. Many participants reported feeling a

void in their lives before joining circus, loitering, or doing other activities they identified as harmful to personal or collective well-being:

> We come to circus to get something… we need a sense of belonging, we have an unmet need that we filled with drug use, theft, all kinds of stupid shit we did to boost us, but at the end of the day, it was always negative.

In giving participants a goal, they were effectively being encouraged to develop skills and aptitudes to become 'productive' members of society. Our survey provided some evidence of effectiveness in this regard. For example, 14.3 percent of respondents had previously dropped out of school with *no desire to go back* at the time they started social circus; this decreased to only 6.1 percent after social circus participation. Similarly, 21.4 percent of participants indicated *neither having nor wanting a job* before social circus, decreasing to only 7.1 percent afterwards.

Participants from Drummondville experienced greater personal growth and social inclusion than participants from both Montreal and Sherbrooke; Quebec City participants as well as those from Drummondville indicated greater social engagement. Drummondville and Quebec City are both sites that include youth who have had trouble with the law – populations potentially with fewer similar opportunities, such that circus made more of a difference in their lives. In Drummondville, significantly more participants had dropped out of school prior to beginning social circus; afterwards, most participants, including those from Drummondville, were taking courses of some kind (Table 3 in Spiegel and Parent, 2016).

These results beg the question: what kind of society were they being entrained to 'produce'? According to our survey (Table 4 in Spiegel and Parent, 2016), participants as a group were 42.8 percent more likely to *consider further involvement in social circus* and 36.5 percent more likely to *participate in organizing or offering social or community circus projects* after attending social circus. There was also a substantial, albeit smaller, increase in intent towards non-circus related social engagement after social circus participation, with a 24.2 percent increase for the question*Iparticipate in organizations, community projects, or social activism*, and a 25 percent increase for*Iparticipate in artistic projects (other than circus)*. A community worker explains:

> The majority of participants do not like the dominant system in which they find themselves. Many have the ambition to change it, to improve it. They all have skills, beautiful dreams, but sometimes they don't know how to realize these dreams, to push their projects to fruition, and also how to manage their personal development.

Amongst the goals of social circus is thus to offer the skills and support for participants to pursue their dreams. Our study provided some evidence to

support the conclusion that enhancement in such skills does indeed occur, notably through building discipline and networks anchored in dissident artistic expression. For instance, many social circus performances challenge gender identities, and/or highlight human rights abuses and marginalization participants experienced (Spiegel, 2016), and were often accompanied by discussions within the social circus workshops themselves, which in turn encourage social values and alternative ways of living. Nevertheless, the extent to which this is being channelled to transform the dominant social system that participants see as having marginalized them, rather than serving primarily to create 'productive citizens' within the cultural sector and related industries, remains to be seen.

Libidinal economies, community, and the orientation of social transformation

Leveraging the collective highly physical performative art form of circus with its distinct appeal to 'marginal' members of society, combined with recruitment strategies relying heavily on street outreach workers from partner community organizations, contributed to catalysing the creation of communities of those who primarily identified as alienated 'outsiders'. Duncombe (2007) argued that 'subcultures open up spaces where dominant ideology is contested and counter-hegemonic culture is created', but cautioned that 'cultural resistance, unless translated into political action, can become 'imaginary' solutions to real world problems and create 'magical' communities in the place of real ones' (p. 497–498).

Theorists of circus pedagogy (Bolton, 2004; Davis, 2014) have flagged the playful quality of circus as crucial to both the process and nature of transformation that takes place. The physical creativity is important in shaping subjectivity, as such activities not only provide models of 'correct behaviour', but also zones of innovation and expression, grounded in the very ways in which bodily energy is deployed, establishing 'a subtle economy of particular forms of power and collective signs' (Gil, 1998, p. 153). Through creative play, skills and habits are learned, channelling individual agency and dissent into a collective contained activity that allows for societal recognition. Overcoming personal or family traumas and experiences of marginalization were the primary gains reported by social circus participants. However, these gains drew primarily on attempting to harness the sense of alienation into a force that could be publicly celebrated and even 'put to work' for the dominant culture, directing energy into socially acceptable activities, such as contributing to the cultural life of the community.

The turn toward community (and to intervention workers within the programme, whether community worker, instructor or therapist) as an antidote to a troubled family life has been a staple of many psychoanalytic theories of healing. Nonetheless, broader social conditions must be considered in understanding and redressing individual well-being and community development challenges, particularly in response to threats posed by neoliberalism, commodification and individualism (Meade and Shaw, 2011). Social theorists have pointed to the pressures of atomizing structures that individualize struggles, and often place the burden of change on the shoulders of those with little access to support networks (Lazzarato, 2012). Gallagher's study on theatre in the schools showed that while many low-income youth have internalized the values of neoliberal society and have judged themselves harshly against these standards, the theatre programme served to open a conversation on the nature of values and how to support one another in the face of dominant discourses that disadvantage many from the start (Gallagher, 2014). Our study saw social circus playing a similar role, albeit with greater emphasis on the embodied relation rather than discursive sociopolitical critique (though this occasionally also occurs). The presentation of social circus as a site of resocialization in the face of social disgruntlement, tapping into 'play' and desire, becomes a double-edged approach, funnelling unrest into circus, transforming 'anti-social' tendencies into social capital. In the case of Quebec's social circus programmes, the bonding connection appeared to be precisely the sense of being (or, in some cases, desire to develop affinity with) identity as social outcasts. The reason for being an 'outcast' was, at least on the surface, secondary.

Processes unique to circus contributed to its impacts. Through paying attention to their bodies, participants gained sensory experience of the value of remaining alert and altering their everyday habits, both in order to be proficient performers and to facilitate certain kinds of social interactions. In many cases the physicality required for circus activities triggered a change in lifestyle, whereby participants felt compelled to alter their consumption patterns (including substance use) and the ways in which they approached social life. Through the collective interaction of various activities, such as building pyramids or partner acrobatics, habits of both trusting and becoming 'trust-worthy', as well as controlled risk-taking with others, are all designed specifically to foster different kinds of social subjectivities and collectivities, encouraging individuals and communities able to support one another and be employable in the current market.

This schema presents a quasi-integration that retains a brand of marginal identity while suggesting trajectories for becoming productive, economically viable subjects – albeit subjects whose economic viability as aspiring artists and/or community workers remains precarious in the present

economy. Guattari explained this, highlighting the value of ethico-aesthetic approaches to building collectivity as a mode of creating a shared habitable world (Guattari, 2000, p. 54). It is on this basis that social circus appears most fundamentally to orient sociocultural transformation. Broader transformation in labour conditions in the cultural industry into which social circus participants often are attracted is typically beyond the purview of social circus programmes. Nevertheless, creating individuals able to self-motivate and create their own work in an entrepreneurial manner is, as sociologist Maurizzio Lazzarato has pointed out, a mark of the 'success' of increasing numbers of government and non-governmental organization programmes, entraining, intentionally or otherwise, a form of neoliberal subjectivity (Lazzarato, 2012).

Our results showed not only that personal growth promoted by social circus leveraged a sense of social inclusion and community building, but that the reverse was also true. This is consistent with findings of Seebohm and colleagues (2012), who showed how a community development approach could be useful in promoting mental health, and resonates with the dialectical relationship between community development and personal growth through the arts discussed by Meade and Shaw (2011). The goal of 'reviving the democratic imagination', to quote Meade and Shaw (2007, 2011), lies very much at the heart of approaches that begin with personal growth, reinforcing confidence, calculated risk-taking, and ability to work in groups. Our findings suggest that these do indeed correlate with a sense of 'inclusion' – of belonging to and being accepted by a community. The question of what kind of community is being created, oriented to what goals, however, is both invoked and deferred by a physical art-making process, where one comes to take chosen role-models as parental figures who help shape the very bodily movements and interactions through which one learns to interface with community. To the extent that this correlates with the creation of particular forms of counter-hegemonic social or community engagement, our results show, perhaps not surprisingly, that it is the creation and expansion of social circus that it perpetuates. In other words, desire is funnelled toward the repetition of the movements learned in the environment in which community was 'created', and the embodied skills and principles developed therein. Behaviour deemed anti-social and socially destructive is replaced by behaviour more easily embraced by a broader public who come to see dissidents and marginalized youth as sources of joy and entertainment. As in all programmes, choices are at once amplified and shaped via the subjectivities of those solicited through the creation of alternative (circus) 'families'.

Whether social circus can serve to bring about the broader change of institutions and social dynamics identified by participants and community

workers as a root of discontent, or rather redirects energy toward softer endeavours and cultural animation, distracting from the more transformative goals of community development, however, remains to be seen. Purcell (2009), in studying how community development objectives can be achieved through critical photography, concluded that 'community development needs to build a critical vision of a better community' (p. 119). Our study on social circus suggests that such social arts programmes contribute to community development by carving out a space in society that offers alternative ways of seeing and engaging. Those whose own individual and collective perspectives have been marginalized are able to creatively work together, affecting horizons of individual and collective futures. It is through such collective creative embodiment of alternative ways of engaging that such programmes may contribute to 'micropolitical revolutions', providing tools for redressing the social inequities that dominate in contemporary urban centres.

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Dr Jennifer Beth Spiegel is a Montreal-based scholar with a PhD in Cultural Studies, currently teaching at Concordia University. She is also a Research Associate at Simon Fraser University's International Centre of Art for Social Change. Since 2013, she has been researching impacts and critical tensions in social circus and critical theories of art for social change

more broadly. Her work has been published as book chapters and articles in journals such as Antipode, Critical Inquiry, Theatre Topics, TDR and International Journal of Art and Health, among others.

Stephanie N. Parent is a Vancouver-based community health researcher trained in epidemiological and quantitative methods, with degrees in psychology and public health. She has pursued her longstanding interest in community development within the Global Health Research Programme in the School of Population and Public Health at the University of British Columbia where she investigated arts-based projects across Canada, in Ecuador and South Africa.

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