

Risky Enterprise: Stunts and value in public life of late nineteenth-century New York

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Abstract

This thesis analyses stunts in the public life of late nineteenth-century New York, where 'stunt' developed as a slang term. Addressing stunts as a performative and discursive practice, I investigate stunts in popular newspapers, sports, politics and protest and, to a lesser extent, theatre and film. Each chapter focuses on one form of stunt: bridge jumping, extreme walking contests, a new genre of reporting called 'stunt journalism', and cycling feats. Joseph Pulitzer's popular newspaper, the *World*, is the primary research archive, supported by analysis of other newspapers and periodicals, vaudeville scripts, films, manuals and works of fiction.

The driving question is: how did stunts in public life enact conceptions of value? I contextualise stunts in a 'crisis of value' concerning industrialisation, secularisation, recessions, the currency crisis, increased entry of women into remunerative work, immigration, and racialised anxieties about consumption and degeneration. I examine the ways in which 'stunt' connotes devaluation, suggesting a degraded form of politics, art or sport, and examine how such cultural hierarchies intersect with gender, race and class.

The critical framework draws on Theatre and Performance Studies theorisations of precarity and liveness. I argue that stunts aestheticised everyday precarity and made it visible, raising ethical questions about the value of human life and death, and the increasingly interdependent nature of urban society. Stunts took entrepreneurial idealisations of risk and autoproduction to extreme, constructing identity as commodity. By aestheticising precarity and endangering lives, stunts explored a symbolic and material connection between liveness and aliveness, which provokes questions about current conceptualisations of liveness and mediatisation.

I argue that while stunts were framed as exceptional, frivolous acts, they adopted the logic of increasingly major industries, such as the popular press, advertising and financial markets. Stunts became a focal point for anxiety regarding the abstract and unstable nature of value itself.

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Introduction

1. Risky enterprise

In the late nineteenth century, people began to frame risky and attention-grabbing acts in public life as stunts for the first time. This thesis explores what stunts were, and how and why they were deployed as a strategy. It focuses on New York, a hub of theatrical, media, sporting and political activity. In this thriving culture of spectacle, stunts experimented with emerging forms of self-actualisation and value creation. Stunts tested developing modes of identity, work and politics in extreme fashion. In doing so they exposed and aestheticised the precarity of life in New York's hyper-exploitative culture, as well as the conflicting drives that shaped that culture.

I examine four types of stunt that took place in the 1880s and 1890s: bridge jumping; pedestrianism; stunt journalism; and bicycle stunts. The four categories each involve distinct performance histories, but several interlocking themes speak across the case studies: precarity and its aestheticisation; liveness and aliveness; the affinities and differences between humans and machines; and surrogation.

The first chapter explores bridge jumping, a precarious feat that was a sport, entertainment and form of protest in the early nineteenth century, and by the century's end, exploited in New York's cultures of spectacle. I explore how bridge jumping aestheticised precarity for political and commercial aims, situating jumps in relation to contemporary protests and debates concerning value, work, race and the role of the state. Drawing on the work of Joseph Roach, the returning structure of bridge jumping is understood as a process of surrogation, which maintained a cultural memory or fantasy of antebellum white masculine autonomy. This nostalgic affect intersected with widespread concern about the potential and dangers of freedom by the turn of the century, and the precarity of everyday life under laissez-faire industrial capitalism. Analysing a macabre contract between a bridge jumper and a dime museum, I suggest that bridge jumpers played a sacrificial role in narratives of American history, underpinned by a prevalent discursive parallel between stunts performers and soldiers.

The following chapter on extreme pedestrianism extends this investigation to another sporting act which attained its popular interest by pushing bodies to the limit and staging precarious life. Both bridge jumping and pedestrianism demonstrate the modes of self-actualisation that certain types of stunts offered, particularly, though by no means exclusively, to men. These acts and surrounding contemporary debates express nineteenth-century entanglements of masculinity, racialised identities, immigration and labour. In the context of intensifying industrial capitalism, pedestrianism indicated both fascination with, and concern about, how humans and machines framed each other, whether as analogous entities, or as opposing forces in a conflict ultimately tending toward humanity's degradation. This troubled fascination found expression in walking contests in which contestants walked repeatedly round a track in a mechanistic motion to the point of exhaustion. Such contests depicted both the glory of human physical achievement and the spectacle of bodies in a state of breakdown, again understood by contemporary observers in sacrificial terms, and in relation to masculinity, whiteness and humanity in crisis.

The third chapter on 'stunt journalism' marks a shift in that it is concerned with women and writing. From the late 1880s, 'stunt journalists' undertook risky and controversial acts in order to write about them in popular newspapers. They constructed events with the sole purpose of reporting them in the media. I explore how this practice disrupts present-day theoretical conceptions of liveness and mediatisation. Mainly young, white, middle-class, unmarried women, stunt journalists created aliases for their undercover investigations, as well as more sustained celebrity reporter personas. Through acts of surrogation, they carried out embodied investigations of female labour and citizenship and highlighted the precarity of their readers' daily lives as well as their own. I will examine the problematics of stunt journalists' impersonations, arguing that their acts of cross-ethnic and cross-class embodiment and appropriation were constitutive of emerging professional female identities, and paralleled wider practices in cultures of reform, work and celebrity. While stunt journalism offered the journalists the apparent security and prosperity of fame, it instead increasingly created composite celebrity personalities, which could be embodied by a succession of anonymous reporters. I understand this as bodies and personhood being transformed into

image, arguing that the configuration of identity in stunt stories of the 1890s anticipated cinematic stunts in the early twentieth century.

Finally, I advance the investigation of humans, machines and circulation in an exploration of two promotional bicycle stunts: a high-wire ride on a charged electrical wire, and a round-the-world bicycle trip. I analyse the attraction to circulation that these acts express — in the form of wheels, electricity and capital — and the broader structures of value that this recognised. Emerging structures of value entwined risk and possibility, creating unexpected connections and dependencies which are here conceptualised as ‘derivative’, borrowing from the work of dance scholar Randy Martin. Accounts of financial derivatives in banking journals of the 1880s demonstrate the anxiety commentators felt about derivatives’ potential to increase and redistribute risk. I pose ‘derivative’ as an illuminating analogy for how stunts constructed value, and suggest stunts manifested the ‘fictitious’ constructions of high finance through performance. I examine the intersection between such capitalist fantasies and desires for self-actualisation surrounding the ‘New Woman’.

In conclusion, I sum up what stunts in public life tell us about precarity, liveness and value in the late nineteenth century, and how this research might contribute to these concepts as they operate within Performance Studies. This thesis aims to be both a piece of historical, archival research about attention-grabbing acts in New York’s public life, and a contribution to less historically-oriented fields of inquiry: precarity as affect; liveness and its relation to bodies; and performance and value.

This introduction analyses the meaning and etymologies of ‘stunt’, before viewing stunts through the lens of Performance Studies. It goes on to describe the historical context of New York and the ways in which economic, sociopolitical and cultural values were being challenged and re-evaluated. The critical framework — animated by theorisations of precarity, liveness and aliveness, and public life — is then developed and justified. Finally, I introduce the research archive, and place it in the context of New York’s cultures of spectacle and the scholarship addressing them.

2. Tracing stunts: definitions and etymologies

'Stunt' began to be used as a word for 'feat' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but during this period, its meaning remained fluid and it described a wide array of acts. In the American Dialect Society's *Dialect Notes*, 'stunt' appeared in a list of new words prepared by a branch at Cornell University in a volume that covered the period 1890 to 1896. The 'stunt' entry remarked that it was:

one of those convenient words which may be used in almost any connection and the exact meaning of which must be determined largely by context; in general it is synonymous with "thing" and may be used as variously. "It would be a great *stunt* to go to a dance with a girl" (i.e. an unpleasant thing to do). "He performed various *stunts* for the prof." (i.e. did things that would win him the professor's favor, give him a "pull"). "To do a *stunt*" (=to do something) is very common. The word properly belongs with student slang. Ithaca. [Doing *stunts* is used in N.Y. City by boys in the sense of performing some feat in rivalry, — a long jump for instance, — one boy "stumping" or challenging another.]¹

Three meanings spring from this passage, all variations on doing a 'thing' in public. The first is doing something out of duty or under duress. Though it is unclear why it would be unpleasant to go to a dance with a girl, in this example it is born unwillingly. The second meaning is doing something attention-grabbing to gain advantage with a person in authority (a professor), to position oneself strategically within a given system (school). The third furthers this hint of competition; it is open, physical contest, springing from one person challenging another to participate.

These denotations map loosely onto scholarly definitions of 'performance'. Marvin Carlson offers several meanings or categories of performance, starting with a 'display of skills', much like the rivalrous feats among New York boys.² At one of the first conferences on popular Western theatre, Jim Davis noted that entertaining displays of skill constituted a vital aspect of popular theatre, listing 'horsemanship, encounters between men and beasts that exhibit disproportionate strength and

¹ American Dialect Society, *Dialect Notes*, 6 vols (Norwood, MA: J.S. Cushing & Co., 1896), I, p.395 and 400

² Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edn (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2004) p.4

human intelligence [...], wire-walking, juggling, singing, magic, trick shooting.’³ Carlson goes on to say that performance also expresses the ‘general success of activity in light of some standard of achievement’ as judged by an observer. Note how this compares to the stunt designed to gain favour at school. The school stunt is geared towards successful performance, but not necessarily by official means; it aims to shift the perception of the professor. Finally, Carlson cites performance as a display not of skills but of a ‘recognized and culturally coded pattern of behaviour’. While skills and stunts have a particularly strong affinity, the stunts cited by the American Dialect Society are participations in social life, which sometimes involve feats of skill, but not always.⁴

That ‘stunt’ was used to express doing something in public is evidenced in contemporary newspaper accounts. Echoing the characterisation of socialising with women as fulfilling an unpleasant duty, in a satirical article about middle-class New Yorkers adopting the slang of ‘Bowery toughs’, the writer recalls attending a tea party, where the hostess complains that lots of guests have bowed out, and remarks that she’s pleased he is “doing his stunt like a man”.⁵ The *OED* states that one association with the word ‘stunt’ is ‘stint’: a limited period of time spent doing something, probably not by choice.⁶

Contemporary newspapers also demonstrate that the public activity might involve skill and challenge. One 1897 article held that ‘stunt’ was specifically a bicycle word, a ‘synonym for “trick”’ — as in a display of skill — frequently used in the ‘cycling columns of eastern papers.’⁷ Challenge features in a cartoon entitled ‘A Stunt’ published in the *New York Journal* in 1898, depicting a man doing a handstand, his hat lying upside-down on the ground in front of him, for donations perhaps. A middle-aged woman walks past, a little stooped, turning her kerchief-covered head to look at him with a bemused expression. In a cod Irish idiom, common to many New York cartoons of the 1890s, the caption reads: “Hey Mag, I betcher can’t do dis.”⁸ The practice of challenging, however, was not limited to

³ David Mayer, ‘Towards a Definition of Popular Theatre’, p.257-277, ed. by David Meyer and Kenneth Richards, *Western Popular Theatre: The Proceedings of a Symposium sponsored by the Manchester University Department of Drama* (London and New York: Methuen, 1977), p.265-266

⁴ Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, p.4

⁵ Joseph Russell, ‘Our New York Letter: Slang and Society’, *North Adams Evening Transcript* (North Adams, MA), 6 January 1899, p.12

⁶ ‘stunt, n.2.’ *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2016. Web. 9 May 2016. All subsequent references to the *OED* are to this edition.

⁷ Anon., ‘A New Bicycle Word’, *Oak Park Vindicator* (Oak Park, IL), 27 August 1897, p.6

⁸ J.S. Allen, ‘A Stunt’, *New York Journal*, 31 March 1898, p.12

displays in public. In 'Setting Himself A Great Stunt', an 1897 article originally published in the *New York Sun*, an anonymous writer stated that every morning he set himself the 'stunt' of remaining tranquil, and every day he failed.⁹ In this case, the writer is his own audience, observing his attempts at self-improvement.

Importantly, stunts bridged performance and discourse. Although the bulk of early instances of 'stunt' were in the United States, the first recorded use is in an initially private letter by writer Samuel Butler to Miss Savage, written in London in 1878. In the letter, Butler explains that another letter he submitted to the *Athenæum*, which apparently contributed to a scientific debate, was actually 'a stunt to sell [his] book'.¹⁰ Butler's admission points to stunt's connection, from the first, to advertising and promotion. It also indicates that a stunt could constitute a discursive as well as a performative practice; it took place on the pages of journals as well as in public and social life.

Intermingling of action and published words is evident in stunt journalism. Stunt stories were justified by the journalists' actions, but also emphasised publication as event, bolstered by a wave of popular newspapers which presented themselves as active players in public life. Though initiated in 1887, stunt journalism was not named until later; the label seems to have emerged in the 1890s and been retrospectively applied. In 1901, the *Brooklyn Eagle* described a 'young woman, who said she belonged to the staff of a yellow journal [a term for popular newspapers]' doing 'sensational stunts on the Brooklyn tower' escorted by an 'inevitable man with a camera', suggesting that by the turn of the century, female stunt journalists were a recognisable, even tired, trope.¹¹ In the 1910s, the novelist and journalist Djuna Barnes wrote a series of self-defined 'stunt stories'.¹²

As well as taking place on the published page, stunts could also be achieved in speech. This is echoed in Mayer's description of popular theatre, which included verbal as well as physical skills: 'telling jokes, monologues, mock debates, story-telling.'¹³ In the early 1900s, there are several examples of monologue or 'oratorical stunts', and in each case, they are not simply rhetorical displays but also

⁹ Anon., 'Setting Himself A Great Stunt', *Newark Daily Advocate* (Newark, NJ), 15 November 1897, p.6

¹⁰ Samuel Butler, 'Life and Habit', *The Athenæum* (London), 9 February 1878, p.189; Samuel Butler, *Letters Between Samuel Butler and Miss E.M.A Savage 1871-1885* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), 7 February 1878, p.174

¹¹ Anon., 'Lowered From the Tower', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 11 May 1901, p.1

¹² Anon., 'The Barnes Among Women', *Time* (New York), 18 January 1943, p.57

¹³ Mayer, 'Towards a Definition of Popular Theatre', p.266

performative speech acts in J. L. Austin's sense: illocutionary utterances which 'have a certain (conventional) force'.¹⁴ Two speeches cited as stunts in newspapers officially opened events: one a political convention and the other a theatrical season.¹⁵ I suggest that one reason these were termed stunts is because they intertwined speech and action, and just as in the example of Butler above, what was said was secondary to the effect of the act of saying it.

As in the example of New York schoolchildren 'stumping' each other to do a 'stunt', the *OED* states that 'stunt' and 'stump' are often thought to be etymologically linked, though there is no evidence to suggest so, other than a 'remarkable affinity of meaning'. As well as 'to challenge', 'stump' referred to the practice of making itinerant, political speeches, literally or metaphorically standing on a tree stump. Vaudeville performer Eddie Cantor's 1928 autobiography, *My Life Is In Your Hands*, exemplifies the similitude between stunts and spectacular speechifying in the rhetorical culture of the U.S. in the late nineteenth century. As a young teenager in the 1890s, Cantor 'took the stump', supporting and condemning political candidates with no regard for political position: 'My passion for talking was a labor of love [...]. I got nothing at all and spoke for and against everybody'.¹⁶ Cantor enjoyed stump speaking as pure form, experimenting with attracting and maintaining the attention of crowds. As with the stunt speakers, the communicative aspects of his speeches were secondary to the performative. In the words of cultural theorist Paolo Virno, Eddie's speech constituted 'in itself an *event* consisting of itself, which is justified solely by the fact that it happens'; a phenomenon which will be explored in chapter 4.¹⁷

Political stump speeches overlapped with blackface minstrel performance. Stump speeches were a stock element of blackface minstrel shows, part of the second act of a minstrel play. They were overinflated, satirical rhetorical displays, drawing on political, scientific and religious discourses. Stump speeches became particularly popular during the 1840s, performed by the Virginia Minstrels, among

¹⁴ J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, 2nd edn, ed. by J.O. Urmson and Marna Sbisà (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), p.109

¹⁵ Anon., 'Amusements', *Truth* (Salt Lake City, UT), 9 September 1905, p.3; Anon., 'Ham Lewis In A Stunt', *Spokane Press* (Spokane, WA), 11 January 1904, p.1

¹⁶ Eddie Cantor and David Freedman, *My Life Is In Your Hands & Take My Life* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), p.45 and 43

¹⁷ Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. by Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), p.90. Originally published as *La grammatica della moltitudine: Per un'analisi delle forme di vita contemporanee* (Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 2001).

others. Banjo player Billy Whitlock, for example, performed a 'Locomotive Lecture' in which he explained the workings of trains in pseudoscientific expressions, punctuated by the sounds of the railway. When the Virginia Minstrels performed in Britain, the *Manchester Guardian* described Whitlock imitating 'the phuzzing and panting of the engine, the shrill steam-whistle and all'.¹⁸ These speeches unravelled the sense of speech into sound, at once presenting a racist view of African Americans' potential for educated discourse and also satirising highfalutin discourse itself. Usually given by one of a series of stock characters, a free African-American dandy, often from New York, such as the postbellum caricature 'Zip Coon', stump speeches manifested, as Daphne Brooks argues, the 'white supremacist nightmare of African American class aspiration'.¹⁹ Such verbal displays continued in and out of blackface, which is indicative of the extent and popularity of blackface minstrelsy in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century popular culture.²⁰ In the late nineteenth century, major vaudeville performer Tony Pastor set up a fake tree stump in his auditorium and gave speeches on liberty and freedom, having previously done so in blackface minstrel shows.²¹ One of Cantor's trademarks was his frequent performance in blackface throughout his vaudeville and cinematic career. Strong affinities between verbal feats and blackface minstrelsy lie outside the scope of this study, as does a wider critical history of blackface and cinematic stunts (blackface was in practice among stunt performers at least until 2014 in the Hollywood film industry).²² One contention of this thesis, however, is that stunts have preserved performance practices and ideas that have become unacceptable in wider culture.

By the turn of the twentieth century, 'stunt' was used in newspapers across the United States to describe an array of actions: athletic, theatrical, military, journalistic, and technological. To give some examples of its application: in 1897,

¹⁸ Jessica H. Legnini, 'A "genuine display of Ethiopian life": the Virginia Minstrels at the Manchester Athnaeum', *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 2:2 (2011), 35-54 (p.47)

¹⁹ Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.49; Daphne A. Brooks, *Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), p.260

²⁰ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.5

²¹ Parker Zellers, *Tony Pastor: Dean of the Vaudeville Stage* (Ypsilanti: Eastern Michigan University Press, 1971), p.18

²² Matilda Battersby, 'Gotham: Warner 'sorry' for 'blacking up' white stunt woman to pass for black actress', *Independent* (London, UK), 10 October 2014, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/gotham-warner-sorry-for-blackening-up-white-stunt-woman-to-pass-for-black-actress-9786680.html>> [accessed 9 May 2016]

New York newspaper the *World* credited presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan with causing an athletic turn among public figures, spurred by his 'INCREDIBLE STUNTS IN SWIMMING, JUMPING AND RUNNING'.²³ In 1901, an African-American newspaper described theatrical variety acts as 'stunts', and the following year, pioneering African-American vaudeville performers Bert Williams and George Walker were described as performing a 'nightly stunt of 20 minutes'.²⁴ *Variety* magazine, first published in 1905, echoed this usage in reviews and advertisements for vaudeville acts.²⁵ While young women should exercise, the *Republic* advised in 1903, women in their sixties should not perform 'physical culture stunts', but rather preserve their energy.²⁶ In 1904, President Roosevelt was treated to "'stunts"' or deep-sea dives in a submarine in order to observe its 'Marvellous Performances'.²⁷ A clown's 'stunt', explained a Virginia newspaper in 1905, might be 'to chase a fellow clown about a ring, or [...] to imitate a rooster, or play a ball game all by himself'.²⁸ In 1913, a writer in the *University Missourian* reported that it was not practical to introduce a 'Stunt Week' at the end of the academic year containing all of the entertainment events, as many had to go home and work.²⁹ The same year, in Utah, two men died in a 'branding stunt', intended as an initiation ritual into the 'Loyal Order of Moose'.³⁰ In 1917 in Honolulu, a baseball player pulled off a 'stunt', an unexpected move that left his fans wondering what he would do next.³¹ Meanwhile, a Honolulu roof garden manager also staged a 'stunt' — a dance contest in which the winner would be decided by public vote.³² The First World War seems to have expanded the use of the 'stunt',

²³ Anon., 'PUBLIC FIGURES ARE TURNING TO ATHLETICS', *Sunday World* (New York), 18 July 1897, Cartoon Supplement. The cartoonist's signature is not visible. It could have been cartoonist George Luks, hired by Pulitzer in 1896, or one of two staff cartoonists, Walt McDougall and Valerian Gribayedoff.

²⁴ Anon., 'Afro-American Stage Notes', *Colored America* (Washington, DC), 26 January 1901, p.3; Anon., 'Theatrical News', *Topeka State Journal*, 11 January 1902, p.11

²⁵ "'Doe," a pup of apparent uncertain parentage [...] has some puzzling stunts of the "human intelligence" variety', Anon., 'Shows of the Week [...] Pastor's', *Variety* (New York), 5 May 1906, p.9; '[N]ever have we been witness to such as performance as that given by Hermann in the final stunt on this week's bill', Advertisement, 'The Last Word in Spectacular Acrobatics and Pantomime Comedy: Park Byers (Clown) and George Hermann (Skeleton)', *Variety*, 12 December 1908, p.103

²⁶ Anon., 'Eternal Youth of the Early-To-Bed and Early-To-Rise Women', *Republic* (Washington, DC), 22 November 1903, p.9

²⁷ Anon., 'President Roosevelt Under Water Three Hours In Plunger', *Evening World* (New York), 26 August 1905, p.4

²⁸ Anon., 'Clown's Work Hard, and Offers No Future', *Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), 7 May 1905, Magazine section, p.3

²⁹ Anon., 'Viewpoints', *University Missourian* (Columbia, MO), 21 February 1913, p.2

³⁰ Anon., 'Kill Two In Initiation', *Ogden Standard* (Ogden City, UT), 6 August 1913, p.1

³¹ Anon., 'Doings on the Dope Circuit', *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 10 August 1917, 2nd edn, p.8

³² Anon., 'Plans New Stunt For Roof Garden Patrons', *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, 9 Oct 1917, p.5

reflecting the *OED*'s view that in the United Kingdom, the word was seen as soldiers' slang. In 1918 in Tacoma, five new 'War Stunts' were included in an Amateur Athletics competition.³³ The following year in Philadelphia, a comedian was the first actor to buy and fly a plane for pleasure and perform stunts in it.³⁴ In Washington in 1918, tanks were performing stunts by enacting a sham battle on a local field, with a 'girl reporter' getting into one to tell the public how it felt.³⁵

These unstable and multiple definitions suggest that 'stunt' was not primarily a theatrical or cinematic term, which was then adopted to describe performances in everyday life. Rather 'stunt' referred to performances in a range of closely connected cultures of spectacle — theatre, vaudeville, circus, sport, newspaper culture, politics, advertising, cinema and war. There was no single originating form for stunts, but rather a range of applications in performance arenas which mutually influenced one other, in terms of content and style of performance, language in which performances were described and reported, and reception. For this reason, stunts in the nineteenth century are well served by Richard Schechner's capacious definition of performance, as 'actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music), and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race and class roles, to healing (from shamanism to surgery) and to the various representations and constructions of actions in the media and the internet'.³⁶

This is as much a reflection of the vibrancy and variety of nineteenth-century performance and visual culture as it is of stunts' peculiar nature, as I'll describe more fully below. There was a bustling circulation of acts between performance spaces and genres, particularly in New York. Pastor's vaudeville house, for example, often featured athletics, including boxers, pedestrians, cyclists and wrestlers.³⁷ The various incarnations of Madison Square Garden in the 1880s and 1890s, the site of several acts analysed in this thesis, hosted boxing, walking contests, William Jennings Bryan's major political speeches, religious oratory,

³³ Anon., 'War Stunts Enter In Big Athletic Classic', *Tacoma Times* (Tacoma, WA), 7 May 1918, p.6

³⁴ Anon., 'Laugh Doctor Is High Flyer', *Evening Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), 12 March 1919, Automobile Section, p.1

³⁵ Anon., 'Tanks Will Do Stunts In Drizzle' and Anon., 'The Times' Girl Reporter Take A Trip In The Tank', *Washington Times* (Washington, DC), 21 April 1918, p.1

³⁶ Richard Schechner, 'Foreword' to *Teaching Performance Studies* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2002), p.xi

³⁷ Zellers, *Tony Pastor: Dean of the Vaudeville Stage*, p.35

charity events for actors, war memorials, bicycle and electricity fairs, horse races and shows, spectacular theatrical performances including Wild West exhibitions, circus, wrestling, rollerskating, basketball and physical culture shows. Nearby, the Madison Square Presbyterian Church was the site of Reverend Charles Parkhurst's 'ringing jeremiads' against vice in the city, which helped to usher in a wave of social reform in 1890s New York.³⁸ A 'historical sketch' in 1894 claimed that there was 'no other place so completely identified with the growth of the city' than the Square, where '*fin de siècle* civilization in its fullest development can be seen'.³⁹ Through much of the 1890s, the Garden's entertainment programme was organized by Harry Pollok and Daniel McKetrick, who had together left their posts in the sports department of the New York *World* newspaper to do so.⁴⁰

The intertwining of theatrical, sporting and media performance cultures is evident in newspaper articles describing spectacular feats. In 1888, the *Sunday World* featured a first-hand account by successful female aeronaut, 'Carlotta', whose given name was Mary Myers. Carlotta demonstrated a strong awareness of how popular newspaper and theatrical conventions had shaped the reception of her acts. She complained of having been depicted, inaccurately, in a circus-style costume in an illustration in the *National Police Gazette* and denied one article's claim that she'd given a gymnastics display before taking off in her balloon. Demonstrating a strong understanding of cultures of spectacle, Carlotta gave a near definition of what would soon be termed a 'stunt': 'The landing was sensational — the requisite materials presenting a mixture of danger and daring, with a flavor of the ludicrous, which made it appetizing in a popular sense'.⁴¹ This description illustrates an emerging concept of 'stunt' not only as an act, but also as a framework for representation and reception.

The notion that stunts were created at the meeting point between feats and the surrounding performance of the media is backed up by later newspaper articles. In 1907, the *Tacoma Times* reported that even though President Roosevelt would not allow any press on his hunting trip, he was 'still a good news stunt' as a

³⁸ Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and the Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press), p.162

³⁹ Benjamin Marcus, *A historical sketch of Madison square* (New York: Meriden Britannia Company, 1894), p.5

⁴⁰ Zander Hollander, *Madison Square Garden: A Century of Sport and Spectacle on the World's Most Versatile Stage* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1973), p.8

⁴¹ 'Carlotta', 'Thrilling Mid-Air Tales', *World*, 12 August 1888, p.17

lion might 'do its duty' and eat him.⁴² Here a 'stunt' has become a source of media sensation rather than any particular act. In Britain in 1927, the *Saturday Review* blamed journalists for "'stunting'" cross-Channel swimmers and cross-Atlantic pilots, implying that making stunts was as much the work of a reporter as a performer. For the writer in the *Saturday Review*, the stunting phenomenon was by no means a good thing: the public, they complained, was 'being trained to enjoy the stupidest confusion and perversion of values'.⁴³ The perception that stunts devalued the performer, professional conduct, and public life in general was not unique to this journalist. In a 1905 *Tribune* article about circus press agents, entitled 'Lingual Acrobats', a journalist commented that while audience members who crowded the gallery hoped to see "stunts", for the press agent, 'They are not "stunts"' but instead, 'dangerous feats deftly and surely performed on the high wire'.⁴⁴ The term 'stunt' seems to have undervalued the skill of the performer in the press agent's view.

A certain scepticism surrounding stunts, and some justification for that scepticism, is marked in Cantor's autobiography. Cantor was the child of Russian Jewish immigrants, who both died in his infancy, leaving him to be brought up by his grandmother in a New York tenement in the 1890s in extreme poverty. To feed and amuse himself, Cantor devised various street performances, which straddled begging and showmanship, much to the disgust of Ida, the object of his affections, whom he eventually married. Thirteen-year-old Ida's reaction to Eddie's performing habits gives a taste of the status of stunts.

After Eddie has declared his love for Ida, who is from a middle-class family, Ida tells him that her mother expects her to marry someone 'with a good reliable position', explaining:

'People say the worst things about you. [...T]hey told me you started to cry and howl at a street corner, saying your stepmother would kill you because you lost a quarter she gave you to buy bread, and the people dropped in pennies and nickels and told you not to cry!'

When an embarrassed Eddie brushes the incident off as a 'little stunt', Ida replies:

⁴² 'Rath', 'Intimate Correspondence From Washington', *Tacoma Times* (Tacoma, WA), 15 February 1909, p.4

⁴³ Anon., "STUNT", *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* (London), 22 October 1927, p.537

⁴⁴ Anon., 'Lingual Acrobats', *New-York Daily Tribune*, 2 April 1905, p.2

'A stunt? Why even the cops laugh at you!' Ida was on the verge of tears. To think that the cops didn't take me seriously enough to arrest me at least.⁴⁵

To contrast this 'stunt' with Cantor's later cinematic performances (in which he was doubled by Bobby Rose among other stunt performers), Eddie's act involves doubling only in the sense that Eddie plays himself in public life, thinly dramatising the situation in which he finds himself: he's hungry.⁴⁶ Similarly, the stunt is not physically dangerous — the main thing that Eddie risks is his dignity. The performance does however fit into the much wider meaning of 'stunt' in circulation New York in 1896: an act that attracted and channelled attention for strategic gain.

Eddie's act also subtly unsettled conceptions of value in an economic sense, paralleling the fears about cultural values expressed in the *Saturday Review*. His performance might be begging, or it might be a performance of begging, and this uncertainty makes apparent the lack of difference between the two. It's not quite clear what kind of exchange is taking place: is the money a gift or charity or unwitting payment for a show?

Such unsettling of exchange is common to many of Cantor's early means of getting by at the fringes of the performing arts. A few years later, Eddie makes money by acting as a 'shilliber' or 'booster' for various sideshows in Coney Island.⁴⁷ Boosters were undeclared aspects of sideshow promotion: Eddie knocked over ducks or shot targets in order to make a show of winning a prize and boost interest. Eddie later returned the prize and earned a quarter for his work. In both cases — crying on the street and being a 'booster' — Eddie made a quarter by attracting and channelling attention, either for himself or for an intermediary. In both cases, there was something improper about the exchange, because Eddie did not acquire money for the reasons apparent to the spectators, and additionally in the case of the sideshow, he did not acquire what he apparently acquired. Indirect economic structures are common to many stunt performances in the late nineteenth century. Stunts tended to make use of transactional models such as wagers, speculation, patronage, charity and — perhaps most importantly — the highly indirect forms of wealth creation involved in advertising and promotion.

⁴⁵ Cantor and Freeman, p.57-8

⁴⁶ 'Bobby Rose', in Gene Scott Freese, *Hollywood Stunt Performers, 1910s to 1970s: A Biographical Dictionary* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2014), p.244

⁴⁷ Cantor and Freeman, p.102-3

Because of this, stunts had the capacity to destabilise ideologies surrounding value, exchange and work.

The organisation and industrialisation of promotional and advertising practices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century shaped stunts decisively. This is exemplified in John Peter Toohey's 1922 novella, *Fresh Every Hour*, featuring a fictional worker in the New York entertainment industry, Jimmy Martin. (Born in 1879, Toohey worked as a journalist for newspapers including the *New York Evening World*, before becoming a publicist and playwright.) Involved in the emerging profession of public relations for popular entertainments, Jimmy spends a summer working for a Coney Island amusement park called Jollyland:

‘Stunts’ were what he [Jimmy] specialized in, the creation of news that was so unusual, so bizarre, so full of human interest that the newspaper not only felt obliged to print it, but usually assigned their own reporters to write it up. He wasn't dignified, his conversation reeked with slang and his methods sometimes offended against all the established canons of good taste, but he sometimes landed with one foot and not infrequently with both.⁴⁸

Jimmy is closely identified with stunts themselves. He is an Italian New Yorker, from the tenement streets in which ‘stunt’ developed as slang, and like Eddie, he is not ‘dignified’ or tasteful. Jimmy was part of what Jackson Lears terms the ‘carnavalesque advertising tradition’ of patent medicine lecturers, itinerant peddlers, and sideshow entertainers. Lears comments that in the nineteenth century there was no ‘sharp distinction between salesmanship and other modes of performance’.⁴⁹ By the 1920s, Jimmy's line of work had been professionalised and structured into mainstream media practices. He created what historian Daniel Boorstin in the 1970s termed ‘pseudo-event[s]’, totally constructed happenings in public life which only exist for the purposes of publicity.⁵⁰ Performance scholar Marlis Schweitzer used this critical lens effectively to analyse publicity stunts designed for actresses in the early twentieth century.⁵¹

In the novel, Jimmy is constantly under pressure from the Jollyland boss to get another splash. The metaphor of ‘landing on one foot’ points to an affinity between the feats Jimmy promotes and his own labour, as he struggles to retain

⁴⁸ John Peter Toohey, *Fresh Every Hour* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), p.20

⁴⁹ Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: a cultural history of advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), p.42-3

⁵⁰ Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), p.9

⁵¹ Marlis Schweitzer, ‘Surviving the City: Press Agents, Publicity Stunts, and the Spectacle of the Urban Female Body’, in *Performance and the City*, ed. by D.J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr and Kim Solga (Houndsmill: New York, 2009), 133-151

the attention of the press. His most effective stunt at Jollyland demonstrates the way in which he intertwines popular entertainment and the surrounding performance of public engagement. It involves an outdoor spectacular, in which a film actor, June Delight, plays a secret service agent, who at the climax is rescued from the top of a building in an actual airship, buoyed by a gas balloon. Jimmy conspires with the pilot (who has just returned from fighting in the First World War and 'offer[s] himself for the sacrifice just as a lark') to pretend that the airship's engine has cut out and, apparently accidentally, drift out to sea with June.⁵²

Meanwhile, Jimmy has fallen in love with a young actor, Lolita, who has been hired as an understudy for the outdoor spectacular because of her physical resemblance to June. Playing a broad range of choral parts, Lolita isn't 'even mentioned on the program'.⁵³ When June falls ill and Lolita takes her place, Jimmy plans to execute the drifting out to sea stunt in order to attract publicity and turn Lolita into 'Miss Lolita Somebody'.⁵⁴ Yet Jimmy's plan goes awry when one of the audience members — a visiting aristocrat, invited to take part in a crowd scene as a publicity stunt — takes Lolita's place in the airship.

Like stunts in general, *Fresh Every Hour* is packed with such doubling, mistaken identities and substitutions. Identities are not merely constructed, but multiplied and proliferated in a process of self-doubling suggestive of Roach's 'effigies' — surrogates through which communities perpetuate themselves.⁵⁵ Roach's concept of surrogation will be explored across the upcoming case studies, in the form of dummies, reform-driven cross-class and cross-ethnic embodiment, corpses and scapegoats.

In the late nineteenth century, then, 'stunt' largely described acts in public life which strategically directed attention, through the deployment of risk and sensation. Yet the slang and sometimes derogatory nature of the word meant that 'stunt' expressed a variety of tensions concerning the nature of work and exchange, the morality or respectability of seeking attention, and professionalism, all of which were bound up with hierarchies of class, race and gender.

⁵² Toohey, p.17

⁵³ Toohey, p.18

⁵⁴ Toohey, p.22

⁵⁵ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p.36

3. Performance Studies: perspectives on stunts

Stunts have served as formative examples in seminal work in Performance Studies, as a means of posing questions regarding performance frames, skill and acting.

Social scientist Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis* uses stunts as an early example of how performances intersect with social frameworks. Goffman begins by defining 'primary frameworks', that is 'a group's framework of frameworks — its belief system, its "cosmology"'.⁵⁶ He proposes that such cosmologies support a 'humble entertainment' — the exhibition of stunts.⁵⁷ Goffman lists daredevil drives, a wide variety of circus performances including human-animals acts, and space missions as examples of stunt performances. The interest of stunts for Goffman lies in their capacity to display 'some willed agency under what are seen as nearly impossible conditions'. In doing so, they provide a social function, by clarifying for audiences the 'ordering and limits of their basic framework'.⁵⁸ In Goffman's conception, stunts test physical limits by attempting apparently impossible things. They destabilise and ultimately re-stabilise the 'cosmology' or perhaps *values* of a given culture. Hence my contention that stunts demonstrated, aestheticised and thereby made it possible to question the precarity of life in late nineteenth-century New York.

Goffman's concept of frames (which draws on the work of fellow social scientist Gregory Bateson) is a useful one in understanding the various layers of performance that will appear in my analysis of stunts. To frame is to 'discriminate a sector of sociocultural action from the general ongoing process of a community's life', thereby marking it out as a forum for performance.⁵⁹ The stunts described in this thesis range from forms of play, such as sporting contests, to what Goffman calls 'fabrication' in the name of 'correxive hoaxing', that is deliberate deception about what frame is in operation for the purpose of making a moral point.⁶⁰ I analyse acts that would be proper to a circus, theatrical or sporting frame, but which have been resituated in novel urban or rural environments, as well as acts

⁵⁶ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), p.27

⁵⁷ Goffman, p.30

⁵⁸ Goffman, p.31

⁵⁹ Victor Turner with Edie Turner, 'Performing Ethnography', *TDR: The Drama Review*, 26:2 (1983), 33-50 (p.34)

⁶⁰ Goffman, p.83 and 90

that take the world as their performance forum, functioning as part of an imperial imaginary. Generally, the stunts discussed tend to demonstrate an ambiguity in the way that they are framed, which has the effect of making frames visible and questionable. They bring the structures by which performances are ‘geared into the ongoing world but not in quite the close way’ of everyday activity into visibility, and by doing so, highlight that performative structures are also present in that everyday activity.⁶¹

Stunts trouble distinctions between acting and not acting and the identities embodied in each case. In a play, Carlson observes (drawing on Schechner’s *Between Theatre and Anthropology*), the performer is ‘not herself (because of the operations of illusion), but she is also not not herself (because of the operations of reality). Performer and audience alike operate in a world of double consciousness’.⁶² Frances Harding, employing Michael Kirby’s theorisations of acting, describes various modes of African performance, distinguishing between acting and presenting the self in skilled and unskilled activities. Harding argues that acting only takes place when the performer ‘replaces him- or herself with an illusion’.⁶³ Creating a typology of performers, she identifies a ‘non-acting lead performer’ who ‘presents the self in a specific skilled role’, including stunts such as tightrope walking in her examples.⁶⁴

Harding argues, however, that stunts’ status as illusion is complex, drawing on examples from the streets of Nairobi and Nigeria:

Everywhere men — and women, but less so — juggle and bend and spring and in so doing create the illusion of doing the impossible. But it *is* an illusion because it is possible: they do it. To this extent, the acrobat is also drawing attention to him- or herself — but doing it not only through the display of skill, like the singer or musician, but, like the storyteller, through the creation of an illusion. It is, however, a double illusion that is created by the acrobat. Whereas for the storyteller the element of fiction is primary in the content of the display, for the acrobat the element of fiction is absent, for such performers are the “subject of the performance”.⁶⁵

By this account, stunts engage in illusion even as they display their actuality. In chapter 1, I will argue that such double illusion often provoked questions of

⁶¹ Goffman, p.560

⁶² Carlson, p.49

⁶³ Frances Harding, ‘Presenting and Re-Presenting the Self: From not-acting to acting in African performance’ in *The Performance Studies Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by Henry Bial (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp.231-248, p.206

⁶⁴ Harding, p.232

⁶⁵ Harding, p.241. The final quote comes from John Harrop, *Acting* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.5

whether what appeared to happen had actually happened, but these questions missed the nature of the illusion in the stunt performances concerned. Rather than trickery, stunts engaged in states of heightened actuality, the ambiguous framing of which revealed paradoxical conditions in the 'primary framework' of the culture.

Presenting the self as the subject of a performance which involves illusion creates complex conditions of identity. In the late nineteenth century, stunts tended to be performed under a pseudonym. Like Eddie Cantor (first named Edward Israel Iskowitz), Carlotta and June Delight, almost every person discussed in this thesis used at least one alias. Stunt performances illuminated and spectacularised relations between identity and value, demonstrating in often extreme ways Martin's view that: 'What we call identity is certainly an attribute of self that gets bundled, valued, and circulated beyond an individual person'.⁶⁶

Stunts are also particularly demonstrative of two constellations in Performance Studies: one which emphasises resistance, play and the disruption of order, and another that instead puts weight on performance's role in discipline and normativity. These interlocking emphases parallel an important cultural condition in the late nineteenth century: the simultaneous and contradictory lauding of both discipline and play. As suggested above, stunts have a root in the practice and display of physical discipline, exemplified in military drills and self-improvement exercises. Yet discipline alone does not explain the impetus behind stunts. To take an example, can a man who achieved fame by leaping from bridges in the 1880s be seen as obeying imperatives of hard work, conditioning or conformity? Instead, the act involves entrepreneurial assumption of risk, and an attitude at once flippant and sacrificial.

Such acts were driven in part by an 'ethic of self-control and autonomous achievement', which historian T. J. Jackson Lears roots in racialised fear of over-civilisation in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁷ Urban life and modern comforts were thought to render people weak and nervous, a concern which in its most extreme form manifested as fear of Anglo-Saxon 'race suicide'.⁶⁸ Hence advocates of a 'strenuous life' such as Theodore Roosevelt argued for militaristic exercises, physical culture became a daily practice and spectacular performance form, and

⁶⁶ Randy Martin, 'A Precarious Dance, a Derivative Sociality', *TDR (The Drama Review)*, 56:4 (2012), 62-77 (p.64)

⁶⁷ T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), p.4

⁶⁸ Jackson Lears, p.28

athletics and drills were popularised in schools and colleges, contributing to what Lears describes as a ‘cult of experience with martial activism at its core’.⁶⁹

Self-discipline was also rooted in a belief in the primacy of character. Responsibility rested with individuals, who were perceived to be intrinsically at fault for any misfortune and yet also entreated to work on and build their characters. Literary historian James Salazar argues that the rhetoric of character ‘promoted a democratic vision of self-governance and upward mobility that legitimated and secured existing social hierarchies through the very gesture of overcoming them’.⁷⁰ The growth of success literature in this era is indicative of people’s belief in control over their personal destinies, as well as concomitant anxiety about the task of working on themselves. Of New York, media historian George Juergens writes: ‘the middle classes strained to prove they were up-standing, go-getting, on-the-toes competitors in a game which had no place for laggards. The terribly urgency to succeed, to be getting some place, to be ‘not just liked but well-liked’ made daily labor an ordeal’.⁷¹

I argue that the culture of late nineteenth-century New York was characterised by a ‘performance paradigm’, a term I have borrowed and adapted from Jon McKenzie’s *Perform or Else*. McKenzie invites us to see the performance of artists, activists, executives, and machines as aspects of a ‘general theory of performance’.⁷² These various sites of performance contribute to a wider culture that promotes an adaptable, reflexive, self-disciplined way of living, and instils this way of living at an individual, corporate, and national level. McKenzie focuses on the rise of workplace performance management, Performance Studies and high-performance technology, citing the 1950s and 1960s as the start of the paradigm’s intensification. The performance paradigm connects the performances of individual bodies to larger cultural and social systems, such as sporting organisations, stock markets, and nations, framing them as a ‘regime of normative forces’.⁷³

Though McKenzie is concerned with post-Fordist, neoliberal cultures of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, he offers this speculative insight:

⁶⁹ Jackson Lears, p.118

⁷⁰ James B. Salazar, *Bodies of Reform: The Rhetoric of Character in Gilded Age America* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), p.19

⁷¹ George Juergens, *Joseph Pulitzer and the New York World* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), p.176-177

⁷² Jon McKenzie, *Perform Or Else* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p.4

⁷³ McKenzie, p.15

'performance will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that is, the onto-historical formation of power and knowledge' (italics original).⁷⁴ I suggest that the end of the American nineteenth century saw both of these paradigms operating in a powerful way, and that stunts were vivid expressions of these contradictory, yet combined, ideologies. Discipline certainly prevailed, but it existed alongside a playful, risk-inclined approach to living. Indeed, the way that many people worked, conceived of themselves, and conceptualised risk in the period before Fordism and Taylorism anticipates a performance paradigm in full swing. The description that McKenzie offers of the subjectivity that the performance paradigm produces — 'fragmented rather than unified, decentred rather than centred, virtual as well as actual' — functions as a summary of the stunt subject.⁷⁵ A bridge-jumper's death defying action invoked his actual endangered body, but it also created a virtual one that denied or exceeded physical limitation, fragmenting his person into discrete, reproducible commercial products: his image, signature and name.

Stunts were carried out by journalists, politicians and people seeking work, as well as by actors, circus performers and press agents. Their widespread adoption indicates that stunts made sense as a contemporary strategy. Stunts were perhaps one way in which the conflicting imperatives of discipline and play could momentarily come into alignment. At the turn of the twentieth century, many New Yorkers were caught between the reality of an increasingly systematised urban existence, on the one hand, and entrenched belief in autonomous action and self-sufficiency on the other. Walter Benn Michaels holds that the 'capitalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries acted more to subvert the ideology of the autonomous self than to enforce it.'⁷⁶ Mark Seltzer argues that this conflict gave rise to a 'romance of the market in machine culture'; fantasies of self-sufficiency, which were in turn commodified in consumer life.⁷⁷ Rooted in individual risk, stunts performed compelling romances of the market, tapping into a nostalgic fantasy of self-sufficiency.

Finally, Performance Studies scholars have usefully considered the commodified and propagandist nature of some performance events, and how such

⁷⁴ McKenzie, p.18. Italics original.

⁷⁵ McKenzie, p.18

⁷⁶ Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.51

⁷⁷ Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p.49. Italics original.

commodification affects critical viewpoints. In a critique of Schechner's 'broad spectrum' approach, Paul Rae warned against the danger that Performance Studies scholars guilelessly devote themselves to reading 'images that give themselves to be seen' with such close attention that the scholars become 'professional dupe[s ...] never knowingly turning down an invitation to see — and subsequently state — the obvious'.⁷⁸ His reflections are particularly pertinent to a study of stunts:

Someone or something invites us to attend to it, and for all the ensuring reflexivity and hermeneutic gymnastics our discipline drills into us, what is consistently overlooked is the impulsive enthusiasm of our original RSVP: "I'd be delighted!" Does any other object of study flatter its interpreters as solicitously as performance, which is at once so generous in sharing its fairy dust, and so hungry for exegesis?

This thesis attempts to return consistently to the nature of the invitation extended by stunts, the surrounding structures and economies that govern this invitation, and hence the implications of attending itself.

4. Stunts and value in New York

The late nineteenth century was a period of rapid modernisation and political, economic and social unrest. A gilded age of industrial fortunes, increased mass consumption and extreme inequality, it was also a period in which many attempted to impose order through reform of politics, industry and individual bodies. Fundamental value systems — most notably Protestant Christianity, the norm of small-town, rural life, a liberal approach to industry, and racial, class and gender hierarchies — were felt to be under threat or ripe for radical change. I've termed this multifaceted condition a 'crisis of value'.

The emergence of a wealthy industrial and financial elite alongside sustained exploitation of industrial labourers led to strikes, violent conflict and the spread of anti-capitalist politics. From the 1870s onward, periodic major strikes were met with extreme force from militia, notably at Homestead in 1892 and Pullman in 1894. In the Haymarket Affair of 1886, a bomb thrown at a rally for an eight-hour working day in Chicago killed police officers, leading to seven men being sentenced to death. In 1901 President McKinley was assassinated by a self-

⁷⁸ Paul Rae, "Wyang Studies?", in *The Rise of Performance Studies: Rethinking Richard Schechner's Broad Spectrum*, ed. by James M. Harding and Cindy Rosenthal (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 67-84 (p.68)

titled anarchist at the Pan-American Exposition. Fears of anarchist violence and revolution coincided with a growing conviction that the relationship between labour and capital was unsustainable, exacerbated by a series of recessions, sometimes termed the 'long depression' from 1873 to the late 1890s.⁷⁹ Consumer and civic suspicion of monopolies and trusts was also widespread by the century's end.

Some were beginning to attribute recessions to over-production and under-consumption, arguing that workers should be conceived of as consumers as well as producers.⁸⁰ Michaels argues that fears of over-production and excessive competition gave production itself an 'equivocal status'.⁸¹ Mass production led to hitherto unseen cultures of consumption, not only among the conspicuously wealthy '400', as the social elite of New York were termed, but also among middle-class Americans. Scholar of nineteenth-century literature, Kyla Wazana Tompkins, writes that in these decades, an abstemious mid-century attitude towards consumption gave way to an 'an almost orgiastic flood of commodities', fuelled by an emerging advertising industry.⁸² Tompkins argues persuasively that images of black and Asian bodies in advertising trade cards demonstrate 'the white bourgeois consumer's disavowal *and* enjoyment of commodity pleasure', displaced onto images of hyper-embodied, racialised subjects.⁸³

In large cities, where immigration remained high and government was ineffective and often corrupt, middle-class concerns about poor housing, disease and 'immoral' behaviour among the working classes gave rise to the reform movement. Reformers disagreed as to whether character or environment was the primary cause of poverty and suffering. Social science reports recorded the extent of poor living and working conditions, and works such as Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Live* (1890) revealed squalid conditions in tenements (though stopped short of calling for governmental intervention).⁸⁴ Through the practices of 'friendly visits' and tenement settling, middle-class people attempted to aid and exert

⁷⁹ Jackson Lears, p.29

⁸⁰ Richard Schneirov, 'Thoughts on Periodizing the Gilded Age: Capital Accumulation, Society, and Politics, 1873-1898', *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (2006), 5:3, 189-224 (p.213); John J. Ingalls, 'J. J. Ingalls On Cheap Labor [...] The Labourers, He Points Out, Form the Chief Market of the Manufacturers', *Sunday World*, 25 June 1893, Colored Supplement, p.2

⁸¹ Michaels, p.71

⁸² Kyla Wazana Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century* (New York and London: NYU Press, 2014), p.145

⁸³ Wazana Tompkins, p.150

⁸⁴ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.1158

influence over urban working classes.⁸⁵ In the 1880s, Anthony Comstock led a campaign to end gambling and alcohol consumption in New York, shut down night spots and censor salacious publications.⁸⁶ In 1894, William Strong and Theodore Roosevelt came to municipal power in the city, supported by Reverend Charles Parkhurst, initiating a zealous crusade against vice, which deployed a rhetoric of pollution and purification.⁸⁷

One source of concern about moral degeneration was a diminution in the role of family. Family structures were altered by an increase in women entering the workplace, as well as the leisure cultures of saloons, dance halls, cheap theatres and amusement parks, where working-class and unmarried people enjoyed a degree of economic independence and social liberty.⁸⁸

Secularisation was cited as another reason for moral decline. Christian leaders, both Protestant and Catholic, feared that advances in science such as Darwinism, increased nationalism, and the intensification of the capitalist economy meant that people were living their lives without recourse to religious institutions and beliefs.⁸⁹ This led to efforts to serve and attract the public, through recreational facilities and spectacular oratory.⁹⁰ Revivalist movements also came from beyond established churches, notably the Salvation Army, which began in England and came to New York in 1880. On arrival, the missionaries immediately held a prayer meeting on the dock and shortly introduced themselves by performing a turn in a music hall.⁹¹ The Army combined brass bands, parades, military-style uniforms and a 'Barnumesque flair for publicity' with significant material support for those in need, and had spread extensively in the U.S. by 1890.⁹²

Reform culture was directed not only towards the poorest groups in society but also towards individual bodies as sites of improvement. Temperance,

⁸⁵ Burrows and Wallace, p.1181-3

⁸⁶ Burrows and Wallace, p.1163-4

⁸⁷ Burrows and Wallace, p.1169

⁸⁸ Bureau of the Census, *Statistics of women at work: Based on unpublished information derived from the schedules of the twelfth census* (Washington, D.C: United States Government Printing Office, 1900), p.20, <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/00779830ch1.pdf>, [accessed 8 March 2014]; Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-Of-The-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), p.57

⁸⁹ W. Clark Gilpin, 'Redeeming Modernity', in *American Christianities: A History of Dominance and Diversity*, ed. by Catherine A. Brekus and W. Clark Gilpin (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), pp. 155-182 (p.159)

⁹⁰ Boyer, p.138

⁹¹ Burrows and Wallace, p.1157

⁹² Burrows and Wallace, p.1158

disciplined eating, exercise and sexual self-control were all conceived of as ways to prevent or reverse moral and civic decline, just as sports and drills were deployed to counter over-civilisation. In *Racial Indigestion*, Tompkins demonstrates the intertwining of temperance movements and racial anxieties. Mid-century temperance advocates such as Sylvester Graham argued for a 'union of physiological and moral well-being with civic virtue', such that the 'intimate constitution of the private citizen' was sutured with domestic harmony, nation building and whiteness.⁹³

Acts of violence against black people were prevalent in these decades, and gains in civil rights were frustrated by law and intimidation. In 1883, the Supreme Court ruled against the 1875 Civil Rights Act which had mandated equal rights for all races in the public sphere, paving a path to segregation. A sub-Darwinian sense of competition affected popular conceptions of race, bolstered by proponents of scientific racism.⁹⁴ In the face of this prejudice and exclusion, enterprise among African Americans was making a mark on public life as lived by both black and non-black communities, particularly in the performing arts.⁹⁵

As Protestant Christianity adapted to more a secular framework, ideas of sacredness began to attach to other events. Levine writes of how by the end of the nineteenth century, middle-class Americans had begun to frame aspects of art and culture as sacred and civilising. A hierarchy of 'high' and 'low' culture developed, Levine argues, where previously there had been heterogeneous co-existence. Both the phrenology-inspired terms and their operation were racialised, and in practice, cultural hierarchies prevented African Americans and others from gaining recognition in the performing arts.⁹⁶

It is significant that 'stunt' came into use just as this hierarchy became entrenched. Levine demonstrates that in the early nineteenth century, Shakespeare plays were performed in extract, burlesqued, and put into bills alongside acrobatics, dances and music. By the end of the century, this had changed: Shakespeare was the pinnacle of 'legitimate' theatre, to be viewed decorously and isolated from other performances. In 1901, a theatre critic in Salt

⁹³ Wazana Tompkins, p.56-7

⁹⁴ Jackson Lears, p.30

⁹⁵ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, 'Working in the "Kingdom of Culture" in *Beyond Blackface: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890-1930*, ed. by Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 2011), pp.1-42

⁹⁶ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p.222; Fitzhugh Brundage, p.3

Lake City complained about the insertion of a patriotic advertisement in a play, comparing it to ‘an up-to-date skirt stunt between the fourth and fifth acts of “Hamlet”’.⁹⁷ Associated with commercialism, spectacle, and immigrant, black and ethnic cultures, as well as white mockery of these cultures, stunts were accorded a low status, which persists in the use of ‘stunt’ over a century later.

Today, naming an act in public life a stunt is often a rhetorical strategy, which works to devalue the act in question. Political acts, for example, are regularly termed stunts by opposing politicians, in order to suggest that the act was undertaken exclusively to attract attention and is thus void of political integrity.⁹⁸ In my case studies, similar accusations intersect with assumptions concerning class, gender, race and ethnicity, revealing the valorisation structures on which such judgments are based. In the late nineteenth century, stunts were perceived as both worthless, in terms of efficacy, taste, and wider social utility, and excessive, in terms of the attention and wealth they could attract, provoking anxiety about how value was determined.

Such fears of excess map onto literary movements of the late nineteenth century. Michaels argues that naturalism was utilised as a means of tempering a perceived excess of emotion in sentimental fiction, as well as its commercial nature. Naturalism partook of a ‘network of related contradictions and controversies (over the nature of money, art, professionalization, and persons)’.⁹⁹ Michaels explores naturalism’s connection to a variety of economic functions, including the gold standard and derivatives. Stunt performances expressed controversies that closely align with his reading. Paralleling Michaels’ literary research, this thesis explores how stunts absorbed the logic of economic functions such as futures, contracts and the circuit of capital, and by performing them, expressed their contradictions.

In addition to viewing value through the lenses of secularisation, cultural hierarchy and economic functions, I have drawn on Marxist and Marxist Feminist

⁹⁷ Anon., ‘The Players Column’, *Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, UT), Sunday 10 March 1901, p.16

⁹⁸ Theodore Schleifer, ‘Paul Ryan: House sit-in on guns is a ‘publicity stunt’, *CNN Politics*, <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/06/22/politics/paul-ryan-sit-in-guns-publicity-stunt/index.html> [accessed 14 July 2017]; Richard Watt, ‘Tory MSP says Alex Salmond ‘commandeered’ Arbroath Abbey for ‘party political stunt’, *Courier.co.uk* (Dundee), 1 September 2014, <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/news/local/angus-mearns/155788/tory-msp-says-alex-salmond-commandeered-arbroath-abbey-for-party-political-stunt/> [accessed 8 May 2016]; Patrick Wintour, ‘Labour dismisses pro-Tory letter from business leaders as party political stunt’, *Guardian* (Manchester), 1 April 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/apr/01/labour-dismisses-pro-tory-letter-from-business-leaders-as-party-political-stunt> [accessed 8 May 2015]

⁹⁹ Michaels, p.175

theorists to illuminate this era of industrial and finance capitalism and intensifying commodity culture. During Karl Marx's lifetime, his work was focused on Europe and there was debate about whether his ideas had any application in America. America's history diverged from Europe in important ways, notably in the exploitation of slaves and extent of available land. Marx argued that in spite of such differences, America was not an exception to his understanding of capitalist production, and later changes to the American economy lent weight to his view.¹⁰⁰ By the 1870s and 1880s, American capitalism had changed: an industrial class of capitalists had emerged, as well as a permanent class of wage labourers. The republican ideal of wage labour as a stepping stone to independent land ownership began to look unfeasible.¹⁰¹ In New York, Richard Schneirov argues, a 'relatively cohesive capitalist class had taken shape, fused together in cultural institutions such as museums, the social register, elite clubs, and marriage networks and united in fear of the working class'.¹⁰² This coincided with a surge of labour activism, partly inspired by the socialist influence of immigrants from Germany and elsewhere.¹⁰³ By the 1890s, corporate and finance capitalism were also entering the economic ecology in the form of investment banking and trusts. Although Marx's application to America and usefulness for the American labour movement is contested, his theoretical framework readily applies to the characteristics of America's political economy by the century's end.

I am particularly concerned with the often violent interplay of abstraction, labour, and bodies in stunt performances, which I pursue through Marxist theorist Alfred Sohn-Rethel's concept of the 'real abstraction'.¹⁰⁴ In my discussion of work and value, I turn to Leopoldina Fortunati's theorisation of the role of reproductive labour within capitalism systems and its designation as 'non-value'.¹⁰⁵ Like Michaels and Seltzer, I emphasise that financial and industrial systems were also experienced as embodied metaphors. A connection between person and capital was prevalent in the nineteenth century, particularly in the presentation of

¹⁰⁰ Robert Weiner, 'Karl Marx's Vision of America: A Biographical and Bibliographical Sketch', *The Review of Politics* (1980), 42:4, 465-503 (p.466)

¹⁰¹ Richard Schneirov, 'Thoughts on Periodizing the Gilded Age: Capital Accumulation, Society, and Politics, 1873-1898', *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (2006), 5:3, 189-224 (p.201)

¹⁰² Schneirov, p.206

¹⁰³ Burrows and Wallace, p.989

¹⁰⁴ Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978), p.6

¹⁰⁵ Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital*, ed. by Jim Fleming, trans. by Hilary Creek (New York: Autonomedia, 1995), p.8. Originally published as *L'arcano della riproduzione: Casalinghe, prostitute, operai e capital* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1981).

character as capital.¹⁰⁶ This intersects with twentieth-century theorisations of ‘human capital’ by the Chicago School of economists, as well as Michel Foucault’s critique of their thinking in his lectures of the 1970s, *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Both Seltzer and Tompkins note that anxiety about the distinction or similitude between person and thing — formed along hierarchies of race, class and gender — was prevalent in nineteenth-century commodity culture. Realist works of fiction, for example, described characters in terms of their ‘physical capital’.¹⁰⁷ Such metaphors marked, in Tompkins’s phrase, the ‘strangeness [...] the thingness, the quiddity even, of the body’, even as they abstracted the body.¹⁰⁸

As well as investigating specific stunt performances, the upcoming chapters investigate aspects of value: the first analyses money and exchange; the second work, attention and circulation; the third reproductive labour and identity; and the fourth circulation, work and speculation.

The next section outlines why precarity, liveness and public life form an illuminating conceptual framework for viewing stunts in the late nineteenth century.

5. Conceptual framework: precarity

Life in New York was precarious, particularly for those who were socially marginalised. This thesis argues that stunts aestheticised precarity and made it spectacularly visible. Stunts meet historian Eric Lott’s description of popular culture as a ‘place where cultures of the dispossessed are routinely commodified — and contested’.¹⁰⁹

Precarity is a useful term because it expresses a nexus of bodily states, material conditions, and affects, and enables them to be conceived of together. Precarity illuminates several facets of stunts, and provides a route to understanding the connections between, for example, isolated physical acts and working lives, or nostalgia and dangerous performances.

¹⁰⁶ Salazar, p.16

¹⁰⁷ Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p.49

¹⁰⁸ Wazana Tompkins, p.30

¹⁰⁹ Lott, p.8

The most immediate connection between stunts and precarity concerns precarity in a physical sense. In their introduction to a special issue of *The Drama Review* on precarity and performance in 2012, Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider invoke performance as an ‘embodied balancing act’, which teeters on an edge, a description that can be applied literally to the risky leaps and nimble balances involved in physical stunts.¹¹⁰

Precarity also describes the socioeconomic conditions in which many of the people I’ll go on to analyse created their performances. A considerable proportion of New York’s population in the late nineteenth century, particularly immigrants, lived by insecure, low paid and sometimes perilous labour, in overcrowded and unsanitary housing. The slums of New York were far more densely populated than London or other American cities, and the death toll per population comparatively high.¹¹¹ In describing these conditions as precarious, I’m using a term which has more recently been applied to the conditions experienced under neoliberal systems of governance since the 1970s, but which was also routinely used by contemporary commentators to describe working and living conditions in the late nineteenth century.¹¹²

The term ‘precarity’ rose to prominence in critical discussions of the financial crisis of 2007-2010, the conditions that it brought to light, and the protest movements that followed, particularly the Occupy Protests. (The EuroMayDay protests against the depletion of the welfare state that began in 2001 are credited with the emergence of precarity as a political idea.)¹¹³ Motivated by student protests at the University of California, the Arab Spring and resistance to austerity in some European nations, the Occupy protestors occupied Zucotti Park near Wall Street in New York on 17 September 2011 and protested under the banner, ‘We are the 99%’.¹¹⁴ The movement spread to many other cities in the world, with a strong presence in the United States. The protesters’ slogan invoked increasing disparity between a global, financial elite, symbolised in Wall Street, and a vast majority experiencing long-term difficulties in attaining or sustaining a decent

¹¹⁰ Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider, ‘Precarity and Performance: An Introduction’, *TDR (The Drama Review)*, 56:4 (2012), 5-9 (p.6)

¹¹¹ Juergens, p.265-66

¹¹² Anon., ‘How Poor People Manage to Live’, *World*, 17 December 1893, p.40; Anon., ‘Odd Ways to Earn Money: Women on the Street Corners and Their Little Wares’, *Sunday World*, 14 July 1889, p.18

¹¹³ Ridout and Schneider, p.6

¹¹⁴ Sanford F. Shram, ‘Occupy Precarity’, *Theory & Event*, 16:1 (2013), <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/501861> [accessed 30 June 2017]

quality of life in the face of debt, unstable labour, low wages and a stripped-back welfare state.

In *The Return of Ordinary Capitalism*, Sanford F. Shram describes this condition as a return to an unstable status quo, arguing that rather than being novel, the rise of precarity marks the extraordinary nature of the post-Second World War period. Concurring with political economist Thomas Piketty, Shram establishes that for around thirty years, socioeconomic disparity fell and economic growth benefited most, rather than merely those at the top.¹¹⁵ From a Marxist-Feminist perspective, Angela Mitropoulos agrees, stating '[c]apital is precarious, and normally so'.¹¹⁶ Shram describes the present as a 'new Gilded Age', drawing a parallel with late nineteenth-century America in terms of extreme disparity of income and the dominant role of inherited wealth. 'Gilded Age' is a loaded periodisation, which speaks of the disapproval of middle-class reformers and some later historians at the 'spectacular excess, brass-knuckled business and shady politics' of the late nineteenth century, to quote Glenn Porter. In a collected volume of essays reconsidering interpretations of the Gilded Age in 2007, Porter acknowledges the validity of this view, while also emphasising that the late nineteenth century yielded the 'origins of modern American economy and society'.¹¹⁷ While we should be wary of simplistic historical parallels, there is justification for considering the two historical moments conjointly not only because of their similarities, but also because the late nineteenth century formed a socioeconomic order which extends into the present.

The concept of precarity is not merely socioeconomic; it also describes an affect. In *Cruel Optimism* and elsewhere, Lauren Berlant views precarity as a structure of feeling, enmeshed with nostalgia.¹¹⁸ For Berlant, the term precarity enables connections to be drawn between various 'ongoing class/group antagonisms/nostalgias/demands' which surround a 'postwar good life fantasy'.

¹¹⁵ Sanford F. Shram, *The Return of Ordinary Capitalism: Neoliberalism, Precarity, Occupy* (Oxford, New York et al: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.7. See also: Thomas Piketty, *The Economics of Inequality*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (London and Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015), p.17-19.

¹¹⁶ Angela Mitropoulos, 'Precari-us?', *Mute*, 1:29 (2009)

<http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/precari-us> [accessed 30 June 2017]

¹¹⁷ Glenn Porter, 'Industrialization and the Rise of Big Business' in *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America*, ed. by Charles W. Calhoun, 2nd edn (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), pp.1-18, p.2

¹¹⁸ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011); 'Precarity Talk: A Virtual Roundtable with Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Bojana Cvejić, Isabell Lorey, Jasbir Puar, and Ana Vukanović', *TDR (The Drama Review)*, 56:4 (2010), 163-177

These tensions and demands take many forms, and Berlant includes both the Tea Party and Occupy as examples, arguing that both partake of a 'desperation about losing traction that is now becoming explicit and distorted politically'.¹¹⁹ Shram accords with Berlant in his characterisation of 'middle-class melancholia' in the present-day United States. He roots this melancholia in a perceived failure to live up to an 'ideal of the self-sufficient self', which has given rise to a continual state of anxiety and sense of loss.¹²⁰

In the affective realm, there is another aspect to precarity: the hope of fulfilment. Ridout and Scheider describe precarity as holding out a 'kind of promise', through which opportunity and danger are woven together (through debt mechanisms for example), such that self-actualisation seems to arise, perhaps exclusively, through encounters with risk.¹²¹ Martin depicts precarity as 'potentially depleting or sustaining', while Berlant has coined the phrase 'cruel optimism' to describe a particular kind of destructive attachment to states of life that are continually promised but never arise under late capitalism, whereby seeking these states actively hinders their attainment.¹²²

Finally, Judith Butler has brought a distinct emphasis to precarity in her book *Precarious Life* and series of lectures about the Occupy Movement in 2011. Butler frames precarity as the unavoidable interdependence of human existence. Precarity embraces our potential to be undone by our attachments to one another, in states of grief or desire.¹²³ It also includes everyday conditions of mutual care and reliance, and the politics of recognising that care.¹²⁴ In this, Butler and Martin share ground; Martin emphasises our mutual entanglements and indebtedness and calls upon us to reimagine these states in new forms.¹²⁵ Along with many other thinkers, Butler is interested in how precarity might be a potentially unifying political call, which recognises conditions of mutual vulnerability and operates across disparate states of economic instability.¹²⁶ The latter idea is posed most

¹¹⁹ Berlant, 'Precarity Talk', p.166

¹²⁰ Shram, p.32

¹²¹ Ridout and Schneider, p.5

¹²² Martin, p.62; Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, pp.23-50

¹²³ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (London and New York: Verso, 2010), p.23

¹²⁴ 'Precarity Talk', p.170

¹²⁵ Martin, p.75

¹²⁶ Precarity Talk', p.169-170

strongly, though not by Butler, in the conceptualisation of the precariat as a class.¹²⁷

Precarity is a useful conceptual framework here for several reasons. Most obviously, stunts involve risk, often physical risk. The adoption of stunts as a strategy demonstrated the interweaving of opportunity and risk in turn-of-the-century United States. I will go on to demonstrate that physically dangerous stunts were frequently a means of self-actualisation in hyper-exploitative entertainment industries, employing entrepreneurial personas, fantasies of self-reliance and the aestheticisation of precarity. I'll argue that dangerous stunts in New York's public life were paradigmatic acts of precarity, as described by Ridout and Schneider, in that they were embodied balancing acts, which expressed the conditions of their creation — a pervasive state of uncertainty — and at times, situated opportunity on a borderline between life and death.¹²⁸

Stunts also partook of a nostalgic structure of feeling, deeply concerned with a perceived loss of self-sufficiency among white Americans. In the late nineteenth century, nostalgic outlooks deployed a pre-industrial imaginary rather than a post-War good life fantasy. However, the two outlooks share a sense of lost self-reliance and quality of life, and a propulsion towards xenophobia, jingoistic nationalism and racism, as well as protests that staged new collectives and the difficulty of everyday survival. In dangerous displays of autonomy such as bridge jumping and high-wire performances, nostalgic ideals of pre-industrial self-sufficiency and freedom were manifested as precarity, and that nostalgia became part of the entertainment economies in which they functioned.

Such manifestations of precarity had the potential to bear political meaning, because they made precarity visible. In some cases, stunts in public life fulfilled this potential, and were deliberately deployed to highlight social issues. In others, the political implications of stunts — particularly those that went wrong — were drawn by contemporary commentators, who recognised that the acts posed questions about sociopolitical responsibilities. Through dangerous performances that experimented with bodies and social systems (financial, industrial, social), stunts questioned the nature of people's interdependence in late nineteenth-century New York.

¹²⁷ Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011)

¹²⁸ Ridout and Schneider, p.5-6 and 8

6. Conceptual framework: liveness and aliveness

Stunts were engaged in exploring liveness and mediatisation at a time when new forms of mediatisation were being invented or attaining popular reach. Stunts were termed 'stunts' before the advent of cinema, during a fertile period of visual invention. Stunt performers made use of associations between liveness, immediacy and authenticity, as well as the mediatising possibilities of popular newspapers, early cinema and other forms of visual culture. This should be viewed in the context of the distinct matrix of realism and illusion that characterised nineteenth-century spectacle (described in 'Cultures of spectacle' below).

In part, this thesis is a historically grounded consideration of Philip Auslander's theory of liveness through the lens of stunts. In *Liveness*, first published in 1999, Auslander critiques what he terms a romantic or traditional view of live performance. This view appeals to 'magic', the 'energy' between performer and spectator and the 'community' or communion created between them in live performance.¹²⁹ Auslander argues that community is equally created around events that don't involve live performance, and, drawing on Herbert Blau's *The Audience*, that seeing a performance is as much an experience of separation from the performer as it is of connection.¹³⁰ Auslander argues against a prevalent notion in Theatre and Performance Studies that liveness is inherently resistant to commercialisation, because it involves an ontology of disappearance and hence is harder to commodify, citing Peggy Phelan as an exponent of this view. He points out that most live performances are readily commodified and that disappearance is not unique to live performance, as many television or film scholars could testify.¹³¹ Phelan has argued, however, that as well as a potential for resistance to commodification, live performance is characterised by the capacity for performer, as well as audience, to be changed by and in the interaction of performance.¹³²

More broadly, Auslander disputes that there is any ontological difference between liveness and mediatisation. Liveness, historically, was a product of

¹²⁹ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a mediatized culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p.2

¹³⁰ Auslander, p.57

¹³¹ Auslander, p.41-43

¹³² Peggy Phelan, 'Marina Abramovic: Witnessing Shadows', *Theatre Journal*, 56:4 (2004), 569-577 (p.575)

mediatisation: 'Prior to the advent of these technologies (e.g. sound recording and motion pictures), there was no such thing as "live" performance.'¹³³ This claim is significant for this project, because it makes the period in question (the late nineteenth century) a key historical moment in the development of both mediatisation and liveness. Auslander argues that mediatised technologies such as film and television based themselves on live theatre to gain cultural recognition and were themselves strongly associated with liveness. Later, when film and television became the dominant media, theatre began to imitate them, further eroding distinctions between the media.¹³⁴

Borrowing from Steve Wurtzler, Auslander offers a less ideologically-loaded set of distinctions, which are concerned with performers and audiences being co-present in space and time. In live television, for example, performers and audiences share time but not space, while live performances involving sections of pre-recorded video footage interrupt the shared space and time of the auditorium.¹³⁵ He calls for a more historically-inflected view of liveness, which attends to distinct constructions of liveness and mediatisation in particular eras. This thesis undertakes this task and in doing so, makes two interventions into Auslander's conception of liveness.

Auslander sees reproduction in film as the key differential: the technology which brought liveness and mediatisation into being as categories of visual performance. He is aware that his claim that writing is not a form of reproduction is controversial, but argues that writing cannot create a complete reproduction of a live event.¹³⁶ This thesis, with its focus on popular newspapers, argues for an alternative perspective. Popular journalism, which arose before film, created a very similar effect to that described by Auslander as mediatisation. Stunt journalism disrupted liveness, even though only a partial visual reproduction of events were created, in writing and drawings (copied from photographs). This disruption was rooted in the nature of events in space and time: everything that happened live was in the service of its subsequent reproduction in media. Stunt stories created, in Boorstin's phrase 'pseudo-event[s]', totally constructed

¹³³ Auslander, p.51

¹³⁴ Auslander, p.10

¹³⁵ Auslander, p.3

¹³⁶ Auslander, p.52

happenings in public life which only exist for the purposes of publicity.¹³⁷ Hence, the performers and audiences shared space and time, and yet the performance was nonetheless mediated in important ways.

This suggests that we cannot rely on a clear technological marker as the initiator of liveness and mediation as distinct categories. Though technological reproduction is evidently involved and important, I argue for the equal importance of growing awareness of structures of value, which interrupted temporal and spatial cohesiveness. According to the emerging structure of value in commodity culture, the value of an event which happened before your eyes was not necessarily in seeing it then and there, but in its subsequent reproduction in whatever form, a reproduction that also made use of its liveness and the presence of an audience to bolster that mediated value. Certain forms of commodification disrupt the spatial and temporal structures on which liveness rests, even without a complete reproduction being made. Stunts displaced potential for an intimate encounter with a mediating imperative, which threatened not only liveness but also aliveness, through the extreme precarity that performers experienced. As I'll describe in chapters 1 and 4, advertising stunts in particular engaged in the abstraction of human life. Bodies became ambulant media space, and in some instances even death itself was turned into a form of media.

The second intervention in Auslander's concept relates back to precarity. Missing from Auslander's account is recognition of the way that liveness tends to substitute for *aliveness* in a romantic or traditional discourse of liveness. Discourses of energy, encounter and intimacy, I argue, are reaching for a way to express aliveness. Liveness often attains discursive weight, or romanticism depending on your view, through an appeal to aliveness.

By highlighting an experiential and cultural connection between liveness and aliveness, this thesis demonstrates that the ideological and ethical questions that Auslander attempts to separate from media were crucial to understanding stunts and their reception. The fact that bodily risk was undertaken for the purpose of creating mediated art cemented a connection between mediation and death, both conceptually and actually. In the most extreme example, in early twentieth-century Hollywood cinema, many anonymous stunt performers died in

¹³⁷ Boorstin, p.9

the creation of recorded images.¹³⁸ Even without such horror underpinning the production of films, recorded images were often experienced as ‘phantom-like’ by viewers.¹³⁹ This experience may have sprung from the excessive claims to realist reproduction which were made for recorded images, a claim echoed in Auslander’s invocative of complete reproduction; Phelan observes that, ‘representation produces ruptures and gaps; it fails to reproduce the real exactly’.¹⁴⁰ It may also demonstrate a nexus of mediatisation, liveness, aliveness and precarity, which was key to understanding the reception and impact of nineteenth-century stunt performances. Commodified images in New York’s hyper-exploitative culture were intimately engaged with life and death, explored through forms of mediatisation that were not limited to recorded reproduction, but rather related to a wider experiential plane of commodification, which rendered the distinction between live and mediated performance unstable.

7. Conceptual framework: public life

Stunts in the late nineteenth century fed into and staged widespread debates about what was, or ought to be, of public concern. Deliberately or unwittingly, because of the risks they involved, stunts provoked questions about what were individual private responsibilities and what were collective. Hence, stunts were part of a broad reconsideration of what constituted public life, which involved socio-political debate as well as sensational performative and discursive practices. In their introduction to *American Public life and the Historical Imagination*, Wendy Gamber, Michael Grossberg and Hendrik Hartog argue for the capacity of studies animated by the term ‘public life’ to resist ‘traditional separations of historical writing — of politics not law, of culture not politics, of economics not race, of women’s history not legal history, and similar exclusions’. Instead, they argue, such

¹³⁸ Freese, p.244

¹³⁹ Tom Gunning, ‘Animated Pictures’, in *The Nineteenth-century Visual Culture Reader*, ed. by Schwartz and Przyblyski (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.100-114, p.109

¹⁴⁰ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the politics of performance* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2003), p.2

work 'draws attention to the continuities and slippages between apparently distinct categories of historical experience'.¹⁴¹

Drawing on Berlant's analysis, this thesis conceives of 'public life' as multiple 'culture[s] of circulation' of people, texts and objects, which take place within highly asymmetrical power structures. Rather than Jürgen Habermas' 'public sphere', I refer to 'public life' to underline the fragility and material nature of the bodies and events described.¹⁴² Feminist critics have argued that Habermas' theorisation of Enlightenment-inspired civil society failed to recognise that the public sphere rested on a division of labour which relegated swathes of human life to invisibility and low status.¹⁴³ By using 'public life', I consciously underline the significance of precarity in my critical framework, highlighting the shifting location of responsibilities for sustaining life.

Situating this research in 'public life' invites theatrical considerations of spectatorship, witness and participation, which are complex when it comes to stunts which relocated theatrical activity to unexpected places and even deliberately concealed the terms of the performance. Performance Studies theorists have argued for the 'continuous formation of public space', which is created not only architecturally but through use and behaviour, influenced by the spatial and urban theorisations of Michel de Certeau.¹⁴⁴ Stanton B. Garner Jr coined the term 'urban real': 'less an ontological given than an intersubjective construct, "performed" at multiple sites, continually renegotiated'.¹⁴⁵ This thesis is concerned with both the performance of urban space in New York, and also the historical particularities of places such as Madison Square Garden and Brooklyn Bridge, and their impact on the meaning of the stunts performed there.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Wendy Gamber, Michael Grossberg and Hendrik Hartog, 'Particulars and Perspectives: Rethinking the History of American Public Life', in *American Public Life and the Historical Imagination* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), pp.1-6, p.2

¹⁴² Jürgen Habermas, 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopaedia Article (1964)' in *The Idea of the Public Sphere*, pp.114-120

¹⁴³ Dale M. Bauer and Philip Gould, 'Introduction' to *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing*, ed. by Bauer and Gould (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.1-18, p.7

¹⁴⁴ Sigrid Merx, 'Public Pie: Performing Public Space', *Performance Research* 16:2 (2011), 132-137, (p.137)

¹⁴⁵ Stanton B. Garner Jr, 'Urban Landscapes, Theatrical Encounters: Staging the City', in *Land/Scape/Theater*, ed. by Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), pp.94-118, p.109

¹⁴⁶ Joanne Tompkins, 'The 'Place' and Practice of Site-Specific Theatre and Performance', in *Performing Site-Specific Theatre: Politics, Place, Practice*, ed. by A. Birch and J. Tompkins (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2012), pp.1-17, p.1

As this thesis analyses newspapers as well as performing arts, it addresses reading publics as well as spectators. My consideration of stunt journalists draws on Berlant's concept of 'intimate public[s]'. Intimate publics constitute a group of consumers whose interests and desires are perceived to be expressed through the circulation of texts and objects, so that the group comes into being as an identifiable entity with the apparent capacity to feel in common. This was particularly prevalent in 'women's culture' of the late nineteenth century, which Berlant views as the first intimate public, and is evident in the self-actualisation of female journalists as well as their perceived representative functions.¹⁴⁷ Intimate publics constituted structures of feeling, which brought distinct meaning to individual, cultural acts, such as riding a bicycle.

Newspapers such as the *World* also framed themselves in boldly civic terms and as parallels to democratic representation, as I'll describe below. In this period of rapid social and industrial reform, government was seen to lag behind, failing to keep up with a need and appetite for change.¹⁴⁸ New or intensified publics were being posed: political, social, commercial and, in particular, national. Modernisation presented new opportunities to foster and experience a nationwide 'imagined political community'.¹⁴⁹ A massive expansion in newspaper circulation enabled many more people to participate in civic and entertainment culture in a shared timeframe.¹⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the proliferation of touring theatre and the development of the theatrical syndicate made it possible 'for thousands of theatergoers across the United States to consume a single commercial spectacle simultaneously'.¹⁵¹ Many Americans perceived their country to be coming of age, ascendant in a global imperial hierarchy. While national myth proposed a 'deep, horizontal comradeship' or 'fraternity' between Americans, actual inequality between races, genders and classes meant that there was no single, uncontested

¹⁴⁷ Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2008), p.5

¹⁴⁸ Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), p.294-5

¹⁴⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), p.6

¹⁵⁰ Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years, 1690 to 1940* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p.411; George Rowell, *American Newspaper Directory 1896* (New York: Geo. P. Rowell & Co., 1896), p.69.

¹⁵¹ Marlis Schweitzer, *When Broadway Was the Runway: Theater, Fashion, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p.14; Steve Travis, 'The Rise and Fall of the Theatrical Syndicate', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 10:1 (1958), 35-40; John Frick, 'A Changing Theatre: New York And Beyond' in *Cambridge History of American Theatre*, 3 vols, ed. by Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), II, 196-232 (p.212-4).

'public' that could be entered on equal terms.¹⁵² The term 'public' is a productive one in this project because it invites debate about what was and is public: what was shared in common, and what was of legitimately wide concern.

8. Cultures of spectacle: archive and research context

This thesis uses New York newspapers, predominantly the *World*, as its primary archive, but also draws on other newspapers, vaudeville scripts, sporting and technological periodicals, films, manuals and works of fiction. Seeking an inclusive reading of stunts' development in New York's public life, the upcoming chapters focus on sporting displays, circus acts, protests, skilful feats, work, media gimmicks and military drills. I haven't excluded acts to achieve a narrower definition of 'stunt', nor do I insist that every event I analyse was called a 'stunt' by contemporary observers, if attracting attention for strategic gain was its primary function. As well as providing analysis of attention-grabbing acts in New York's public life, I use stunts as a lens through which to explore broader questions concerning value, labour, and identity during this period.

This thesis therefore works across disciplinary lines and cultural contexts, drawing on studies of Media, Theatre and Performance, Film, America, and Literature, as well as political histories and theorisations of value. Such interdisciplinarity is necessary because stunts in New York's public life were framed by contemporary media and performance cultures, which were the forums for stunts and reference points for their interpretation. Many forms and genres contributed to New York's cultures of spectacle: sensational newspapers and popular literature; theatrical spectacle; circus, vaudeville, amusement parks, freak shows and other dime museum performances; advertising; early film, photographic experimentation and visual spectacle; sport of various kinds; political campaigns; and military display. This section introduces some of New York's major cultures of spectacle and the research concerning them.

The initiator of stunt journalism, the *World* newspaper was an important shaper of New York's sensation culture. The newspaper was part of a movement named 'New Journalism' by Matthew Arnold, or 'Yellow Journalism', after a cartoon

¹⁵² Anderson, p.16

character, the Yellow Kid, who appeared in the *World* and then the *Journal*.¹⁵³ Joseph Pulitzer, owner and editor of the *World* established many of the visual, rhetorical and professional tropes of journalism in the present day.¹⁵⁴ Established publications of the time criticised the new journalistic style for its sensationalism and scandal-driven content, which was thought to appeal to the worst instincts of its readership, culminating in unsavoury warmongering in 1898.¹⁵⁵ An editorial in the *Nation* derided the *World*'s 'pervading spirit of vulgarity, indecency and reckless sensationalism', while *Time* publisher Frank Munsey blamed Pulitzer for creating 'hysterical, sensational, untrue' journalism.¹⁵⁶

Pulitzer bought the ailing *World* from Jay Gould in 1883 and swiftly altered the newspaper's appearance, reporting style and politics. Pulitzer had already revitalised the *St Louis Dispatch* and he brought over key members of his staff.¹⁵⁷ The *World* began a two-pronged approach, combining a campaigning ethos with entertainment. Pulitzer's introduction of the newspaper expressed its particular slant:

There is room in this great and growing city for a journal that is not only cheap but bright, not only bright but large, not only large but truly democratic — dedicated to the cause of the people rather than to that of the purse potentates— devoted more to the news of the New rather than the Old World — that will expose all fraud and sham, fight all public evils and abuses — that will battle for the people with earnest sincerity.¹⁵⁸

Pulitzer pitted his newspaper against financial elites and governmental corruption, and proclaimed the *World* the people's champion, the one newspaper in New York 'not controlled nor in any way swayed or influenced by the side of capital'.¹⁵⁹ The newspaper frequently launched campaigns on behalf of its predominantly working-class readership. In 1884, for example, it campaigned for better pay and conditions for working women.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ Karen Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News; New Journalism and Literary Genre in Late Nineteenth-Century American Newspapers and Fiction* (Kent and London: Kent State University Press, 2005), p.xii; David R. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism: The Press and America's Emergence as a World Power* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p.214

¹⁵⁴ Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years: 1690 to 1940* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p.430

¹⁵⁵ Spencer, p.214

¹⁵⁶ John D. Stevens, *Sensationalism and the New York Press* (New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1991), p.99

¹⁵⁷ Jo Anne Smith, 'John A. Cockerill', *American Newspaper Journalists, 1873-1900*, ed. by Perry J. Ashley (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1983), *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, XXIII, 47-56 (p.47)

¹⁵⁸ Joseph Pulitzer, 'The New 'World'', *World*, 11 May 1883, p.4

¹⁵⁹ Pulitzer, Editorial, *World*, 9 September 1884, p.4

¹⁶⁰ Anon., 'Women Workers to Unite', *World*, 20 November 1887, p.5

On the entertainment side, Pulitzer gradually altered the appearance of the newspaper. Before the *World*, newspapers in the United States rarely used images unless they were specifically graphic publications, column structures were rigid, and front pages looked much like other pages. By the mid-1890s, the *World* was topped by headlines in large typeface and packed with illustrations and photographs. It contained magazine supplements with inventive layouts, sections targeted at men, women, and children, and cartoons, both comic and political. Images not only came to illustrate most of the news, they also became the justification and drive for stories, particularly in the *Sunday World*.¹⁶¹ As newspapers began to be purchased from newsboys on the street rather than by subscription, front pages, in Pulitzer's words, had to mimic the flashy layouts of department store windows.¹⁶² With the exception of the editorial page, stories emphasised crime, disaster and divorce, often told in a melodramatic tone. The approach proved popular. The newspaper's circulation increased four-fold, reaching a daily circulation of 400,000 by 1893 and 1,500,000 by 1898.¹⁶³

The *World* did not merely report on events, it produced them. As Karen Roggenkamp argues, New Journalism was concerned with 'narrating the news', with attention to dramatic or literary conventions of plot, character, setting and pace.¹⁶⁴ If there was no obvious event to relate, journalists constructed one; they became the protagonists of their stories and focused on their own reactions. Roggenkamp points out the intimate connections between fiction and journalism in this period, noting that the conveyance of stories, rather than information, was journalism's primary function.¹⁶⁵ Populated with such characters as 'the female adventurer, the accused murderer, the dashing hero, and the damsel in distress', New Journalism produced stories only distinguishable from fiction by their contested and sometimes playful claim to fact.¹⁶⁶ Research on popular New York journalism by Frank Luther Mott, David Spencer, John Stevens, George Juergens, Jean Marie Lutes, Brooke Kroeger and Alice Fahs have informed this thesis.

As well as being a proponent of literary-style sensation, the *World* is of interest because it had a close relationship with other performance forums. It

¹⁶¹ Juergens, p.97

¹⁶² Helen MacGill Hughes, *News and the Human Interest Story* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2014), p.31; Spencer, p.77

¹⁶³ Stevens, p.73; Roggenkamp, p.28

¹⁶⁴ Roggenkamp, p.xiii

¹⁶⁵ Roggenkamp, p.xii

¹⁶⁶ Roggenkamp, p.xvi

acted as a nodal point between visual innovation, theatrical spectatorship, politics and sports, and its representational framework was influenced by other forms. In particular, theatrical presentations of race and ethnicity are evident in the *World*, mirroring Tompkin's analysis of advertising trade cards.¹⁶⁷ Tompkin's theatrical lens is a highly productive way of viewing the *World's* representational mode, in terms of images and narrative. The *World's* cartoons drew on vaudevillian ethnic stereotypes, particularly of Irish people, and blackface minstrel depictions of African Americans and imagined Africans.¹⁶⁸ Images of freak performers enacted enfreakment on the page, and multiple illustrations of physical culture stars invited viewers to pore over eroticised muscles.¹⁶⁹ Stories similarly drew on vaudevillian and minstrel gags, with reported speech in broad dialect a dominant feature, as well as depictions of 'savages' and 'ape-like... specimen[s]', which combined sensational entertainment and scientific discourses in the manner of Phineas Taylor Barnum.¹⁷⁰ The newspaper's portrayal of women as romantic heroines, plucky adventurers or comic New Women was theatrical as well as literary: in one feature, the *World* presented a story about a waitress in bloomers as a five-act comedy.¹⁷¹

Theatre was a key shaper of sensation culture in this era and melodrama the transatlantic staple. Melodrama became increasingly spectacular, creating the paradox of more and more stage realism 'being used to present an essentially unrealistic form', as Michael Booth writes.¹⁷² Domestic, gothic and nautical melodramas were performed throughout the century, as well as melodramas concerning slavery and conflict with Native Americans. The main development was

¹⁶⁷ Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion*, p.153-55

¹⁶⁸ R.F. Outcault, 'Hogan's Alley Folk Sailing Boats in Central Park' and Anon., 'A Merry-Go-Round With Real Animals in Gazoozaland', *World*, 28 June 1896, Colored Supplement, p.6; Anon., 'Before the Blackwell Umpire Was Mobbed', *World*, 16 June 1895, Colored Supplement, page unnumbered; Anon., 'The Oyster Biter Gets Bitten', *World*, 16 February 1896, Colored Supplement, p.3

¹⁶⁹ Anon., 'Rendevous of Paris Freaks: The Strange Meeting Place of the Famous French Monstrosities', *World*, 28 April 1905, p.37; Anon., 'The First Live-Size Picture of an Adult Human Being Ever Printed in a Newspaper', *World*, 2 August 1896, p.24-25; Anon., 'Strangest, Lowest, Weirdest of All Americans', *World*, 11 October 1896, p.20; Anon., 'The Strongest Man in the World', *World*, 18 June 1893, p.16; Anon., 'The Strongest Man Measured: Dr Sargent, of Harvard University, Makes a Physical Examination of Sandow for The World', *World*, 25 June 1893, p.21

¹⁷⁰ Anon., 'Not Fond of Eating Rats', *Evening World*, 15 June 1889, p.3; Anon., 'Gorilla-Man Found By Garner in Africa: A Most Strange and Savage Specimen of the Human Race, Ape-Like in Looks and Actions', *World*, 23 February 1896, p.21; Anon., 'Race of Hairy Pigmyies Found in Darkest Africa: Woo'ly Headed, Flat-Nosed and Large-Lipped, They Roam the Forests Naked', *World*, 23 February 1896, p.21

¹⁷¹ Anon., 'New York Comedy in Bloomers', *World*, 24 November 1895, p.34

¹⁷² Michael Booth (ed.), *Hiss the Villain: Six English and American Melodramas* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), p.21

increased focus on a sensation scene: a pinnacle of stage spectacle or peak of emotion. While spectacle had always been key to melodrama, in large urban theatres it was realised with improved stage machinery, advanced lighting and hosts of extras by the late nineteenth century.¹⁷³ Jacob Smith argues that stunts in the theatrical and cinematic sense — the construction of exciting action sequences in which performers took physical risks — developed in the making of elaborate melodramatic spectacles and sensation scenes: cyclones, train crashes, horse races, balloon landings and shipwrecks. While advanced technology enabled these effects, they were also the result of ‘perilous stunt work’ on the part of performers.¹⁷⁴ As well as Michael Booth, this research is informed by the research of George Rowell, Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow.

As Booth emphasises, theatre was a formative part of a wider culture of spectacle, which included urban architecture, advertising, product display in department stores, painting and book illustration. A ‘doctrine of realism’ came to cut across these arts, emphasising accuracy and replication, enabled by developments in visual technology.¹⁷⁵ Vanessa Schwarz and Jeannene Przyblyski describe this as a ‘nineteenth century taste for consuming visual illusions as if they were real.’¹⁷⁶ Intimate technologies such as the stereoscope aimed to simulate the ‘actual presence’ of a scene or object,¹⁷⁷ while photography, Wolfgang Schivelbusch argues, seemed to overcome the alienating effects of the industrial revolution and resurrect ‘intensive experience of the sensuous world’.¹⁷⁸ The consumption of illusions as if they were reality was the flipside of the tendency of newspapers such as the *World* to construct ‘reality’ using the frameworks of fiction and theatre. In the theatre itself, the doctrine of realism led to a fashion for stage furniture and props that were the same as those used in domestic life. One 1884 article in the *Stage* remarked: ‘The progress made in stage furnishings has evidently reached its climax, that is to say, all articles of furniture being such precisely as are or have been used in ordinary, it is obviously impossible to proceed further in the direction

¹⁷³ Michael R. Booth, *Prefaces to English Nineteenth-Century Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), p.36

¹⁷⁴ Jacob Smith, ‘The adventures of the bridge jumper’, *Celebrity Studies*, 1:1 (2010), 12-34 (p.27)

¹⁷⁵ Michael R. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850–1910* (Boston, London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p.12

¹⁷⁶ Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski, ‘Introduction to Part Three’, in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, pp.71-71, p.71

¹⁷⁷ Jonathan Crary, ‘Techniques of the Observer’, in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, pp.82-91, p.84

¹⁷⁸ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, ‘Panoramic Travel’, in *The Nineteenth-century Visual Culture Reader*, pp.92-99, p.98

of realism in this particular.¹⁷⁹ Such observations invite questions as to the nature and affect of realism: was such replication unnerving as well as pleasing? Was the object on stage the same as the object in everyday life? Writing of cinema, Tom Gunning argues that film produced ‘affects of astonishment and uncanny wonder [...] a profound ambivalence and even a sense of disorientation’, and suggests that ever greater realism was rooted as much in a perceived loss of a shared reality as it was in uncomplicated expression of that reality.¹⁸⁰ Stunts undertaken outside a theatrical frame were often absorbed back onto the melodramatic stage, where they could be praised for their authenticity within a frame of illusion.

Beyond theatrical stages, stunts also took place in circus, variety, vaudeville, freak shows, amusement parks, Wild West entertainments and dime museum shows.

The late nineteenth century was the period of the colossal three-ring railroad circus. By 1903, ninety-eight circuses and menageries travelled the United States, with the largest comprising scores of carriages bearing performers and animals.¹⁸¹ Circus included not only performances in the ring by increasingly daring aerialists, clowns, equestrian performers, acrobats, animal trainers, and strong men and women, but also parades, sideshows and freak performers. This thesis draws on late nineteenth-century circus research by Helen Stoddart, Peta Tait, Matthew Wittman, Jane Goodall, Janet Davis and Anthony Hipplesey Coxe.

Also bolstered by the railroad network, vaudeville was becoming one of the most popular forms of entertainment by the turn of the century, jettisoning associations with more salacious burlesque and concretising into two major circuits on east coast and west. A typical vaudeville line-up included eight items: an animal act, a comic skit, a juggler, a magician, acrobats, a pantomimist, a pair of dancers, a singer and a one-act play.¹⁸² Hence vaudeville was an ideal forum for the short, energetic and attention-grabbing acts described as stunts. This thesis has drawn on research on vaudeville by Bill Smith, Parker Zellers, Robert Allen, Shirley Staples, Charles Stein, Robert Snyder and Arthur Frank Wertheim.

¹⁷⁹ Anon, ‘Stage Furnishings’, 25 January 1884, in *Victorian Theatrical Trades: Articles from The Stage 1883-1884*, ed. by Michael R. Booth (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1981), pp.47-50, p.47

¹⁸⁰ Gunning, ‘Animated Pictures’, p.109

¹⁸¹ Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society Under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p.7

¹⁸² Charles W. Stein, Preface to *American Vaudeville As Seen By Its Contemporaries* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), pp.xi-xv, p.xiii

Wild West entertainments were also at their height in the 1880s. William F. Cody, or Buffalo Bill, came to New York in the 1870s and in 1886 collaborated with Steele MacKaye and Nate Salsbury to produce *The Drama of Civilisation* at Madison Square Garden. As William Brasmer relates, such Wild West shows drew on all the conventions of the 'pictorial realistic stage', employing enormous panoramas and circus animals to create pictorial scenes on a massive scale.¹⁸³ Such realism was cemented by the Wild West exhibition's claims to authentic history told by the protagonists themselves, both white and Native American, who re-enacted events in a stylised form. Narrated scenes were interspersed with trick riding and shooting, drawing on circus equestrian drama.¹⁸⁴

Dime museums, having begun with Barnum's American Museum in 1841, reached a peak of popularity in New York in the late nineteenth century. For a flat fee, visitors to dime museums could also see vaudeville, ventriloquism, temperance plays, magicians, magic lanterns, waxworks and (by 1896) film. Dime museums also had a collection of freak acts, who according to a *World* article written in 1889, would 'sit on a platform and be stared at for eight hours a day'. Visiting the Peck, Fursman and Lloyd's Museum, Menagerie and Theatre, the journalist found freak acts including 'The Human Ostrich', who was able to eat anything including metal and live frogs; Adah Briggs 'The Fat Woman'; and Lucius N. Monroe, who was partially paralysed and billed as the 'Ossified African'.¹⁸⁵ These acts fit Rosemarie Garland Thomson's categories of enfreakment: eroticisation of racial and ethnic difference, and heightening of corporeal difference, often of the kind that might now be termed disability. Garland Thomson views this as part of a trend towards secularisation, arguing that during America's 'swift and chaotic modernisation', people once considered wondrous, portentous monsters instead became both curiosities and sites of potential rational progress.¹⁸⁶ With 'human freaks' at their centre, dime museums offered both these narratives simultaneously. A.S. Dennett writes that freak shows 'once thought to be simply a low form of itinerant amusement, gained a certain respectability and an

¹⁸³ William Brasmer, 'The Wild West Exhibition and the Drama of Civilization' in *Western Popular Theatre: The Proceedings of a Symposium sponsored by the Manchester University Department of Drama*, ed. by David Meyer and Kenneth Richards (London and New York: Methuen, 1977), p.133-156, p.134

¹⁸⁴ Brasmer, p.148

¹⁸⁵ Anon., 'Society in the Dime Museums', *World*, 19 May 1889, p.16

¹⁸⁶ Rosemarie Garland Thomson, 'Introduction: From Wonder to Error — A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity', in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. by Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996), 1-22 (p.3)

undoubted popularity in the museums.’¹⁸⁷

Cultures of spectacle were particularly prominent in World Exhibitions. Exhibitions had existed since the early nineteenth century, but the focus of these displays shifted from manufacturing to commodities after the Great Exhibition of 1851 at Crystal Palace in London.¹⁸⁸ Items came to be classified by nation, empire, state or race, and stratified according to ethnocentric ideologies of civilisation and progress.¹⁸⁹ In the United States, the Columbia Exposition in Chicago in 1893, and the Pan-American Exposition of 1901 experimented with architectural styles, spectacular technological displays and an imperial outlook. The planned space of the exhibition leant itself to cultural hierarchies. The Midway Plaisance was put aside for popular entertainment, and was often referred to as the ‘sideshow’.¹⁹⁰ In 1893, it hosted various national or ethnic ‘villages’, animal shows, fairground rides, panoramas, erotic dancers, theatrical performances, military displays and feats of technology and industry.¹⁹¹ The 1901 Exposition celebrated America’s imperial status following the Spanish-American War of 1898. Exhibits glorified the recent conflict, and a fireworks display included representations of the U.S., Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines and ended with a likeness of McKinley and the caption ‘Welcome—McKinley—Chief of Our Nation and our Empire.’ Even as conflict between the U.S. and the Philippines was ongoing, a ‘Filipino Village’ in the fair’s entertainment zone featured one hundred ‘natives’, so that visitors could imagine themselves in the ‘home of our rebellious subjects’.¹⁹²

By 1896, what Tom Gunning has named the ‘cinema of attractions’ was just beginning to exist, distinguished from the norms of later, narrative cinema by its exhibitionism, the way it ‘display[ed] its own visibility’.¹⁹³ The *World* was heavily involved in experimentation with image production, communications technology

¹⁸⁷ A.S. Dennett, *Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p.6

¹⁸⁸ Tony Bennett, ‘The Exhibitionary Complex’ in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, pp.117-129, p.125

¹⁸⁹ Bennett, p.126; Anon., ‘The Midway Plaisance [...] Civilization Found Cheek By Jowl With Savages and Semi-Savages’, *Sunday World*, 2 July 1893, p.24

¹⁹⁰ Trumbull White and William Igleheart, *The World’s Columbian Exposition* (Philadelphia and St Louis: P. W. Ziegler, 1893), p.561

¹⁹¹ Anon., *Conkey’s Complete Guide to the World’s Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1893), p.55

¹⁹² Anon., ‘The Filipino Village’, *Journal of American Industries Pan-American Exposition Souvenir Number* (Buffalo, New York), February 1901, p.19

¹⁹³ Tom Gunning, ‘The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde’, in *Early Film: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. by Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 56-62 (p.57)

and live performance — the intermedial exchanges from which cinema emerged. Cinema's diverse, early manifestations included acrobatic acts, actuality scenes, dances, violence and nationalist iconography, which drew on theatre, vaudeville and military displays and were shown in a variety of collective and individual contexts. The *World* screened films at its outdoor events and also took a producing role by requesting theatrical scenarios to be filmed by the Edison Manufacturing Company.¹⁹⁴ As well as Gunning's work, this thesis has drawn on research into cinema's early history in the United States by Kemp Niver, Charles Musser, Gordon Hendricks, Jonathan Auerbach and Paul Young.

Illustrating the various cultures of spectacle from which early cinema emerged, the first cinematic stunt performers had backgrounds in a broad range of sporting, theatrical and agricultural fields: Bob Rose as a jockey; Art Acord in Wild West shows; Gene Alsace as an athletic trainer; Dorothy Andre in vaudeville; Monte Blue as a football player, cowboy and manual labourer; and Helen Gibson in vaudeville and rodeo.¹⁹⁵ Many also fought in First World War. Though not focused on twentieth-century film, this thesis has benefited from by a recent flurry of literature on stunts in early cinema by Gene Scott Freese, Martha Crawford Cantarini, Yakima Canutt, Mollie Gregory and Kevin Conley.

Stunts also developed as advertisements, particularly in the performing arts, which spearheaded innovation in advertising and promotion. The American railroad circus industrialised advertising practices in the form of 'advance men' and innovative poster art.¹⁹⁶ The early career of Jimmy in *Fresh Every Hour* cites a potted history of itinerant promotion, combining sports journalism with Barnumesque circus advertisement: 'He had been kidnapped from an assistant sporting editor's desk on a middle western paper by a small circus while still young, and for seven years he had been touring these United States ahead of an infinite variety of attractions'.¹⁹⁷ The use of stunts as vaudeville advertisement in the early twentieth century is documented in a guide for vaudeville managers published in 1918, which explained that many acts were prepared to do 'special stunts' in addition to their stage skit:

¹⁹⁴ Anon., 'The Anatomy of a Kiss', *World*, 26 April 1896, p.21; 'May Irwin Kiss / Kiss Scene / Kiss', in Charles Musser, *Edison's Motion Pictures 1890-1900: An Annotated Filmography* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), p.197-200

¹⁹⁵ Freese, p.244, 7, 8, 10, 24, and 105

¹⁹⁶ Davis, p.43

¹⁹⁷ Toohey, p.18

PAULINE, driving team of horses, while blindfolded, through the principle streets, and finding key hidden by committee. DIVING NYMPHS, diving and swimming exhibitions from some bridge in the city [...] POTTER, of Potter and Hartwell, hand-balancing on cornice at top of building. WARD, of Ward and Useless, riding bicycle around top edges of building. [...] CHING LEE HEE, and other Chinese troupes, one member doing a 'slide for life,' suspended by a cue, from some high point outside the theatre to the ground.¹⁹⁸

The vaudeville stunts cited ranged from endangered bodies on display to a range of social appearances, suggesting that 'stunt' covered almost any kind of mechanism for boosting circulation. The word 'stunt' suggests a lack of distinction between vaudeville acts and the wider selling machine.

Stunts as 'live advertising' contributed to commercial advertisement more broadly, particularly in New York where a vibrant advertising culture had grown throughout the century, utilising space on buildings, clothing, vehicles and sandwich boards, as well as spectacular electrical lights.¹⁹⁹ A key proponent of this culture was Barnum, whose prolific advertising output utilised absurd performances among other techniques. As an advertisement for his museum, Barnum reportedly asked a homeless man to place bricks on various street corners and walk between them carrying another brick, building up a crowd of curious observers, before eventually wandering into the museum.²⁰⁰ As well as advertising industry journals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this thesis draws on research into advertising by Jackson Lears and Kyla Wazana Tompkins.

Cultures of spectacle sprang from and leant themselves to a culture of mass consumption. It's important to emphasise however that spectacle was also utilised to resist structures of oppression. In Brooks' *Bodies In Dissent*, she analyses the mid-century activism of Henry Box Brown, who freed himself from slavery by posting himself in a box in 1849. Brown later reprised this act in performance as an introduction to a radical, abolitionist moving panorama of Southern landscapes which depicted the violence and cruelty of slavery.²⁰¹ African-American activists and performers such as Brown found 'risky, innovative paths of resistance' to

¹⁹⁸ Edward Renton, *The Vaudeville Theater: Building Operation and Management* (New York: Gotham Press, 1918), p.256-8

¹⁹⁹ David Henkin, 'Word on the Streets', in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, pp.194-205, p.195

²⁰⁰ Helen Stoddart, *Rings of desire: Circus history and representation* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.54-5

²⁰¹ Brooks, p.66

disrupt and reconstitute audience's perceptions and 'enact their own "freedom dreams"'.²⁰²

The resistant capacity of stunts rests partly in testing physical limits and partly in ambiguity. Analysing the ambiguously and variously raced performer Adah Isaacs Menken, Brooks refers to Menken's 'identity performances', noting the equivocal, contingent and 'opportunistic' manner in which Menken constructed her personas.²⁰³ Brooks argues convincingly that such performances presented Menken as a 'transatlantic body of spectacularly real deception', destabilising the apparent legibility and stability of identities themselves, as well as the work of performance: 'was she an actress or merely a sensation act? An earnest and inspired artist or a hack talent and charlatan?'²⁰⁴ Elsewhere, in her discussion of Zoe in Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon*, Brooks argues that spectacular theatre revealed raced identity itself as a spectacular illusion. *The Octoroon*:

exposed the hoax of "race" itself, turning it once and for all into an optical, illusionistic, phantasmagoric stunt. Spectacular theatre's presumption that "realness" can only be expressed through majestic, spectacular, and indeed, highly artificial means would surely then complicate the "truth" of Zoe's body.²⁰⁵

As Brooks' research demonstrates, spectacle and ambiguity, resistance and commercialism, popular sensation and complex representational politics, are not mutually exclusive. The destabilising quality of stunts often rested in their uncertain classification, which posed questions about identity, skill, efficacy and ethics afresh. To begin to understand ambivalent status of stunts, the first chapter explores the vexed relationship between stunts and money.

²⁰² Brooks, p.4-6

²⁰³ Brooks, p.155-6

²⁰⁴ Brooks, p.164 and 167

²⁰⁵ Brooks, p.42

1.

Stunts and money: bridge jumping and the Industrial Army**1. Introduction**

This chapter explores bridge jumping and through it, the relationship between stunts and money. Commercial intent is an abiding part of what 'stunt' means; a stunt is an 'exploit' or 'enterprise'.²⁰⁶ Nonetheless, the connection between stunts and money is not as straightforward as this suggests. Stunts are often explicitly commercial, but indirect in their economic structure. Difficult to measure in terms of monetary value, stunts in the nineteenth century were conceived as at once worthless and excessive, in terms of the riches they could attract and the risks they involved. Because stunts put monetary, affective and bodily economies into close and challenging relation, they expressed conflicts regarding what money was and how it attained its value in an era in which these questions were fraught. Stunts embodied, and intervened in, a crisis of value, which in this chapter will be framed in terms of money and exchange.

Dangerous in the extreme, bridge jumping as performance was at times only distinct from suicide attempts because of staging: advance publicity, costumes, and the use of 'dummies' or doubles to draw the attention of police. I argue that bridge jumping attained a status at once sacred and profane, suggesting that as secularisation gradually spread, sacredness attached not only to 'high' culture as Lawrence Levine argues, but also, as Erving Goffman implies, to dangerous stunts that attempted the apparently impossible. Though they partook in a 'low' form of cultural expression, bridge jumpers' endangerment of their lives meant that they attained an ambivalent quality of sacredness.

This contested sacredness was rooted in the sacrificial logic of bridge jumping. Susan Mizruchi argues that at the turn of the century, social scientists (Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, Henri Hubert) began to theorise and explore sacrifice, its role in communities and its continued function in modern life.²⁰⁷ George Bataille and René Girard built on this sociological work in the mid-twentieth century. Drawing particularly on Bataille, this chapter illuminates the

²⁰⁶ 'stunt, n.2.' *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2015. Web. 27 August 2015.

²⁰⁷ Susan L. Mizruchi, *The Science of Sacrifice: American Literature and Modern Social Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), p.12

sacrificial logic played out in bridge jumping, and its meaning in the context of economic uncertainty and social conflict. It views this sacrifice as a form of surrogation in Joseph Roach's sense, the maintenance of cultural memory or fantasy — in this case, white antebellum autonomy — through a succession of substitutes.

This chapter is particularly concerned with the role of skill in stunt performances. Drawing on David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness*, as well as histories of bridge jumping and labour protests by Jacob Smith, Paul Johnson and Benjamin Alexander, it analyses the role that conceptions of skill and freedom played in the construction of a 'white worker' identity, and in related cultural hierarchies. As ambiguously skilled but highly impactful acts, I argue bridge jumps revealed the ideological framework that constituted skill.

Viewed as a paradigmatic act of precarity, bridge jumping is analysed in the context of a major protest of 1894 in which unemployed people walked to Washington to demand work. I draw parallels between this protest and the recent Occupy Movement, using the work of Sophie Nield to illuminate the protestors' modes of embodiment and use of public space. I argue that this protest was part of a broad reconsideration of the responsibility of government for keeping its citizens alive, and connect this to narratives of sacrifice, particularly relating to war. Analysing the protest and bridge jumping together, I argue that risk to bodies, sacrifice, substitution and monetary policy formed a biopolitical matrix, which was intimately concerned with liveness and aliveness, not only in terms of performing bodies, but also in terms of money itself.

Starting with the longer history of bridge jumping, I go on to focus on men who jumped from Brooklyn Bridge in New York in the 1880s and 1890s, explore their actions in their economic and political contexts, and analyse how bridge jumping destabilised conceptions of value. Bridge jumping demonstrated the absurd, irrational and excessive aspects of the industrial economy, and in doing so, exposed the socially constituted nature of value and money. The men's acts will be presented and contextualised in several ways: as a search for monetary value from bodies, which expressed resistance to waged labour and asserted a nostalgic conception of white masculine autonomy; as an embodiment of precarity in a hyper-exploitative culture, which parallels twenty-first century protest movements and questions surrounding value; and as a form of modern sacrifice, in

which the jumpers became ‘fall guys’, or scapegoats, for general anxieties regarding the relationship between government, work and staying alive under industrial capitalism.

2. The first bridge jumper: Sam Patch and skilled labour

The earliest famous bridge jumper was Sam Patch, a skilled mill labourer who performed his renowned jumps in the late 1820s. Patch’s biographer, Johnson, calls him the ‘first professional daredevil [...] a mill boy who became a celebrity’.²⁰⁸ An enduring figure of folklore, Patch was an important influence on late nineteenth-century bridge jumpers. Robert Odium, the first man to jump from Brooklyn Bridge in 1885, was referred to as an ‘imitator of Sam Patch’ and renowned 1880s jumper Steve Brodie recognised his forerunner by repeating some of Patch’s famous leaps.²⁰⁹

The successive or returning structure of bridge jumping is suggestive of what Roach has termed ‘surrogation’: the process of replacing those who are dead and gone.²¹⁰ Patch was mythologised as the original jumper, and various successors to him, or versions of him, arose throughout the nineteenth century. A key mechanism in the workings of cultural memory, surrogation is for Roach the means by which things are remembered and forgotten, and the way that the dead continue to speak through the bodies of the living. Bridge jumping performed memories not only of jumping itself, but also of ideologies surrounding masculinities, freedom and physical risk. Drawing on the work of Bataille, Roach calls surrogation a drama of ‘sacrificial substitution’ or the ‘doomed search for originals by continuously auditioning stand-ins’.²¹¹ Bridge jumping was an extraordinary example of surrogation, because it explicitly performed destruction, and thus the need for a replacement, who would in turn be destroyed. Its logic or economy, then, followed sacrifice very closely, and I will return to both Roach’s and Bataille’s thinking below.

Johnson argues that bridge jumping was a skill, learned by boys who

²⁰⁸ Paul E. Johnson, *Sam Patch, the famous jumper* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), p.2

²⁰⁹ Joseph Pulitzer, Editorial, *World* (New York), 20 May 1885, p.4

²¹⁰ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p.2

²¹¹ Roach, p.3

worked in factories by leaping from bridges and mills. He writes that Patch's jumps embodied a type of American masculinity rooted in working class, skilled labour. Patch's first widely reported jump in Paterson, New Jersey, for example, was an act of defiance, designed to interrupt the opening of a bridge constructed by local entrepreneur, Thomas Crane. Crane had recently taken over freely accessible land near a local waterfall, previously used by people for recreation, and set it up as a bourgeois pleasure park. Crane controlled access to the park and also planned to charge a toll on his new bridge. When the whole town gathered to watch the bridge being put into place, Patch stole their attention by jumping into the waterfall. Patch told a newspaper reporter that he was 'perfectly sober and in possession of my proper faculties': leaping waterfalls was 'nothing more than an art which I have knowledge of and courage to perform'.²¹²

Johnson emphasises a distinction between Crane's concept of art, based on nature gentrified, and Patch's art, arguing that in 'Patch's world a man's art [such as spinning or cobbling] was his identity-defining skill.' Johnson aligns Patch's approach with his position as a boss spinner, a 'fiercely independent' group of 'skilled, formidable artisans', who had created 'a craftsman's world within the factory walls'.²¹³ Accustomed to being a respected skilled labourer, Patch accorded the same significance to jumping. Patch's further jumps in Paterson also expressed class tensions within the community. The next took place at Independence Day celebrations in 1828, which had that year changed from being an open-access event to a ticketed one. His third jump was timed to rouse support for a strike among the mill workers whose working conditions had been changed. Patch's leaps were protests at industrial authority, the encroachment of middle-class ideals, and the exploitation of resources which had previously, in practice at least, been commonly held. They were direct objections to waged labour and bourgeois consumption under industrial capitalism.

Coverage of Patch's feats questioned both the skill and ethics of his jumps: 'What is there in a leap over a cataract of 90 feet?' one journalist asked. 'Danger and desperation.'²¹⁴ Reacting against such arguments, Johnson is concerned with re-establishing the role of skill in bridge jumping. This valid critical move involves a tendency to romanticise nineteenth-century 'Anglo-American manhood', echoing

²¹² Johnson, p.53

²¹³ Johnson, p.33

²¹⁴ *New York Enquirer*, 4 August 1828, quoted in Johnson, p.75

a wider cultural romanticisation of masculinity and skill.²¹⁵ Johnson makes frequent reference to ‘democracy’ with regard to the culture of skilled labourers such as spinners (as does, to a lesser extent, Jacob Smith in his writing on Brodie), framing the male Paterson community as a ‘democracy of respect’ or a ‘democracy of worth’.²¹⁶ Yet the ‘old male democracy’ of the working-class community was inevitably built in part on the exclusion of women and non-whites, promoting egalitarianism and common ownership only within the homosocial group.²¹⁷

Patch’s leaps might usefully be viewed as part of a formation of a masculine ‘white worker’ identity, which answered anxieties about waged labour. Revolutionary heritage promoted independence as the primary virtue of American men, near inseparable from masculinity. Yet the nineteenth century saw a massive expansion in waged labour, which undercut a sense of independence. Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness* outlines the antebellum construction of a white, working-class identity, which attempted to resolve the anxiety of being a ‘hireling’ by differentiating it sharply from slavery.²¹⁸ Such differentiation forced black people, enslaved or free, into the role of the white worker’s Other, ‘embodying the preindustrial, erotic, careless style of life the white worker hated and longed for.’²¹⁹ While race did not play an explicit role in Patch’s jumps, I suggest that his acts responded to a similar anxiety regarding waged labour, and served to assert a threatened, masculine autonomy, associated with whiteness and the nation-making epoch of the American Revolution. Patch’s project, then, was an effort to protect or revive an ideal masculinity, perceived to be dying out. In its romanticisation of a masculinity bound up with skill and freedom, Johnson unwittingly re-performs this yearning for masculinity lost, but possibly momentarily regained through risky acts such as jumping from a bridge.

As Patch began to attract more media attention, he made a shift from being a mill labourer who leaped for pleasure and protest to being a professional performer. He appeared in dime museums and jumped from ships’ masts and bridges for money (sometimes earning his fees by the bridge tolls). Johnson’s framework can only conceive of Patch the paid performer as a degraded version of

²¹⁵ Johnson, p.53

²¹⁶ Jacob Smith, ‘The adventures of the bridge jumper’, *Celebrity Studies*, 1:1 (2010), 12-34 (p.22); Johnson, p.55 and p.52

²¹⁷ Johnson, p.51

²¹⁸ David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, rev. edn (London and New York: Verso, 2007), p.44

²¹⁹ Roediger, p.14

Patch the protestor and labourer, indicating that the concept of skill is doing ideological work: 'Sam leaped for strangers who merely wanted to see a man jump from high places, and whose enjoyment of Sam's leaps had nothing to do with labor disputes, fights over local playgrounds, or the games of factory boys'.²²⁰ The showman's skill is not recognised as skill; in fact, it devalues Patch as a skilled labourer. The financial transactions involved in the later leaps demean Patch's jumps.

An alternative understanding of skill might help to unpick the work the concept does here, and the relation to authority for which it stands. Recall Johnson's comment that the boss spinners made a 'craftsman's world' in the factory. This leads us to view Patch's work in terms of craftsmanship, defined by Richard Sennett in *The Craftsman* as the 'skill of making things well'.²²¹ Sennett describes a skill as a 'trained practice' and he contrasts it with 'sudden inspiration'.²²² He situates craftsmanship in the workshop, putting forward a definition of workshop as a 'productive space in which people deal face-to-face with issues of authority' and authority is legitimated by skill.²²³ All of this is highly applicable to Patch's work. The boss spinners' authority was legitimated by skill, while the authority of their industrial bosses was not. The spinners frequently engaged in protest and disruption in order to demonstrate that in the logic of the workshop, their bosses were illegitimate. Karl Marx associates this with a phase of industrial capitalism in which handicraft is still the basis of production, and 'capital' is compelled to wrestle with the insubordination of workers.²²⁴

Patch described his own jumping as his 'art'. Sennett puts forward a useful distinction between art and craft. Craft, he argues, was historically a collective effort, more concerned with the exercise of authority than autonomy. This, for Sennett, is what differentiates craft from art, because art involves people working 'in an expressive way, by ourselves'.²²⁵ This is not to say that artists always or generally work alone, but that the concept of individual creativity and credit usually matters in art in a way that it does not in craft.

²²⁰ Johnson, p.76

²²¹ Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Allen Lane, 2008), p.23

²²² Sennett, p.66

²²³ Sennett, p.94

²²⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Ben Fowkes, 3 vols (London: Penguin Books, 1990), I, p.489-90. Originally published as *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Oekonomie* (Hamburg: Otto Meisner, 1867), I, *Der Produktionsprozess des Kapitals*.

²²⁵ Sennett, p.113

Patch's jumps sit interestingly between the categories of art and craft. As a jumper, he had an opaque motto, 'Some things can be done as well as others', which suggests a pride in doing things well, as well as being free to choose what should be done.²²⁶ His early jumps expressed autonomy; on the other hand, they were also designed to provoke communal resistance, responding to problems within the factory and community. As Patch moved towards being a professional performer, in Sennett's terms, he became less of a craftsman and more of an artist. The skill he executed was largely the same, but his relations to authority and autonomy were subtly different.

In terms of labour, we can also see Patch's transition as a shift from a producerist ideology to an entrepreneurial one. The producerist ideology was a popular nineteenth-century viewpoint, which bridged divides between independent artisans, farmers and industrial labourers by framing them all as the producers of tangible wealth. (Contrastingly, financial mechanisms such as interest and speculation were demonised as unproductive and parasitic.)²²⁷ Producerism was rooted in collective production; it was not merely concerned with a single productive body, but with communities of productive bodies working in synch, in relation to apparently or actually non-productive bodies. (This relates back to the formation of the white worker identity: in labour movements in New York in the 1830s, for example, slaves were figured as both a symbol of the ultimate degradation threatened by industrial capitalism, and also, paradoxically, as unproductive and underworked in comparison to white workers.)²²⁸ By contrast, an entrepreneurial ideology reifies a single person, even if the labour carried out is, in fact, collective. An entrepreneur accepts the majority of the risk for their efforts. In a bridge jump, for example, a jumper risked life and limb; a helper risked arrest or nothing at all. The entrepreneurial ideology is also less strict in its conception of making: to make money is to make. As I will go on to explore, entrepreneurialism dramatically expands that which can be exploited, including the person of the entrepreneur. As well as shifting from craft to art, then, Patch changed from a producerist to an entrepreneurial mode of operation.

This is important to note, because when men began to jump from Brooklyn

²²⁶ Johnson, p.55; Anon., 'The Story of Sam Patch', *Indianapolis Journal* (Indianapolis, IN), 25 May 1890, section 2, p.13

²²⁷ Benjamin F. Alexander, *Coxey's Army: Popular Protest in the Gilded Age* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2015), p.21

²²⁸ Roediger, p.76

Bridge nearly seventy years later, the crucial issues in contention were not the recognition of skill and its legitimisation of authority. Rather than defiantly declaring, 'Some things can be done as well as others,' bridge jumpers seemed to ask more disturbing questions: 'What is my body worth?' or 'Can I get any value from this body at all?' The sudden shift in valorisation that Johnson adopts with regard to Patch's unpaid and paid jumps indicates an unease with the way that bridge jumping put money and extreme risk into a dependent relation. Always explicitly commercial, jumps in the 1880s and 1890s were both feats of skill *and* aestheticisations of physical precarity, which sprang from the intense precarity of working life, particularly during financial recessions. Whereas Patch's acts can be seen as celebrations of autonomy, later jumps both recalled this exhilarating affect and invoked a troubling side of freedom, lauded in entrepreneurial, liberal and neoliberal discourses. In bridge jumping, both autonomy and a person's potential value could only be realised at enormous risk to life. Physical stunts like bridge jumping were paradigmatic acts of precarity: 'embodied balancing act[s]', which situated opportunity on a borderline between life and death.²²⁹

The concept of precarity helps us to see that to base a theory of stunts on skill alone might be to resist their more destabilising impact. A distinct characteristic of the 'precariat' is that it can overstep traditional divisions of skill and class, because instability, insecurity and frequent mobility have come to characterise dispersed occupations. By shifting the focus away from skill, my intention is not to devalue skill or the need to resist deskilling of work, but to recognise that acting as units of specifically skilled labourers excludes large numbers of people from the equation (and that this exclusion is intrinsic to the construction of a 'skilled worker' and 'white worker' identity). Skill *is* a potentially important aspect of stunt performance, but not a vital one, and recognising this might illuminate stunts' political potential, as well as provide a more accurate depiction of spectators' ambivalent responses to stunts. Writing on circus, Antony Hippleley Coxe offers 'Daredevil' alongside his other categories (aerialist, strong man, clown), but expresses dissatisfaction at it because the 'term is a little too general. It could apply equally well to a racing motorist or the driver of a car which somersaults over the sawdust. Yet while the former must possess great skill, the

²²⁹ Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider, 'Precarity and Performance: An Introduction', *TDR (The Drama Review)*, 56:4 (2012), 5-9 (p.5-6)

latter needs no more than calm nerves.²³⁰ Perhaps the more important quality of bridge jumping was that it entwined skill and precarity: the skill of bridge jumping was in one sense to be able to endure extreme precarity, to have the ‘courage’ to perform.

In Patch’s case, this intertwining related to the way freedom and skill were bound together in the developing white worker identity. Skill was perceived as the basis of freedom; to be a skilled labourer was to be a ‘free man’. In order to assert this freedom, Patch put himself into extreme danger, manifesting freedom as aestheticised precarity. When he jumped, the free, skilled man was embodied as victorious and, at the same time, fundamentally under threat. Patch’s jumps staged a myth (based in a material reality) of waning white masculine autonomy, momentarily regained through an encounter with death. Free men are dying, the jumps seemed to say, but I’ll be free and/or die trying. Patch functioned, in Roach’s terms, as an effigy made of flesh, a ‘medium’, who performed a set of actions that held open a ‘place in memory’ into which others might step, or jump.²³¹ The memory Patch held was of a complex and conflicting mixture of ideas about pre-industrial capitalism, Revolutionary masculinity, whiteness, skilled labour and anti-work imaginaries.

Having come through encounters with death, Patch became famous, and to some extent gained the ‘preindustrial, erotic, careless style of life’ that Roediger argues was projected onto black Americans. In Rochester, New York, Patch’s last place of residence, Patch drank, hung around with a local band and enjoyed himself.²³² Patch’s work became enacting a mode of life and type of freedom that was threatened by industrial capitalism, achieved and financially supported via intermittent confrontations with death.

Several contemporary commentators argued that rather than lacking skill, the problem with Patch’s jumps was that they were ‘unnecessarily sporting with human existence’.²³³ These observers attempted to grapple with an ethical problem: a question of the value of a human life. Patch died in November 1829 in Rochester, undertaking a jump of 125 feet. Several accounts of the performance state that Patch seemed drunk: he gave a haranguing speech before leaping and

²³⁰ Antony Hippenley Coxe, *A Seat at the Circus*, 2nd edn (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980), p.105

²³¹ Roach, p.36

²³² Johnson, p.134

²³³ *New York Enquirer*, 4 August 1828, quoted in Johnson, p.75

lost control of his position mid-air.²³⁴ Rumours circulated that Patch was still alive and his death had been a hoax, until his frozen body was found in the river several months later. Like an effigy, Patch troubled distinctions between life and death, even in his own death.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Patch lived on as a hero of skilled labour, defiance, and white, working class masculinity, appearing on stage, in novels and folk tales. In the 1830s and '40s, for example, Dan Marble acted in several popular melodramas about Patch, which featured a perilous stage stunt: 'jumping Sam Patch, leaping from the *flies* of the house down beneath the stage'.²³⁵ The plays reportedly caused a jumping 'mania', and formed part of a series of plays featuring 'Yankee' characters performed by Marble, stock comic representations of north-eastern Puritans, who were depicted as greedy, interfering bumpkins, as well as hard working, resourceful citizens.²³⁶ Patch's leaps entered into emerging sectional and national identities, which themselves negotiated social relations regarding work and trade. A Louisiana newspaper reported that the phrase 'as crazy as Sam Patch' was common in the early nineteenth century, as a 'synonym of recklessness or daredeviltry'.²³⁷ In one story which Johnson discovered in a schoolboy's creative writing book, it turned out that 'Pach' had in fact been a hero of the American Revolution, and he claimed the medals he was rightfully owed, supporting the view that Patch performed an enduring notion of Revolutionary masculinity.²³⁸

Bridge jumping continued to pose the questions Patch had raised regarding freedom, ownership, risk and the value of life. By the time bridge jumping became a frequent occurrence in the hyper-exploitative culture of late nineteenth-century New York, it was conceived and undertaken within a highly developed entertainment and media economy. As a result, the question of life's value was sometimes viewed from a different and more disturbing perspective: what was the value of a human death? As well as fantasies of freedom from industrial capitalism, bridge jumping came to stage violent confrontations between bodies and money.

²³⁴ Johnson, p.159; Anon., 'Sam Patch, His Remarkable Leap', *Camden Journal* (Camden, SC), 6 March 1873, p.4

²³⁵ Falconbridge, *Dan Marble: a biographical sketch of that famous and diverting humourist, with reminiscences, comicalities, anecdotes, etc.* (New York: Dewitt & Davenport, 1851), p.91

²³⁶ Falconbridge, p.93 and 48

²³⁷ Anon., 'Sam Patch's Fatal Leap', *St. Landry Clarion* (Opelousas, LA), 25 October 1919, p.9

²³⁸ Johnson, p.178

3. Jumping from Brooklyn Bridge

The opening of the Brooklyn Bridge in May 1883 was a grand spectacle. Fifteen years in construction, the bridge was hailed as the ‘Eighth Wonder of the World’, ‘the grandest engineering work of the age’ and ‘one of the greatest implements of civilization devised by man’.²³⁹ The President attended, a holiday was announced, and there were open-air concerts and a military parade. Part of the excitement was that at this time Brooklyn and New York were separate cities ‘wed’ by this new structure (they would officially join in 1898).²⁴⁰ The response was also a mark of the sheer scale and difficulty of the project: a ‘Score of Lives’ were lost in the bridge’s construction, and of two chief engineers, one died and one was left permanently ill as a result of the work (decompression sickness also affected many of the other bridge labourers).²⁴¹ The celebrations were thus marked by a sense of sacrifice: this modern narrative of progress included a human toll paid, reminiscent of discourses of war.

Two years later, a man named Robert Odlum was the first to jump from Brooklyn Bridge in an unofficial and illegal performance. In advance, Odlum circulated an announcement to several newspapers, in which he explained:

‘From the time that the East River Bridge [the official name for Brooklyn Bridge] was opened I have been possessed with a desire to jump from it. I have been over it time and time again and studied it in all its bearings. [...] I am convinced I can jump from the bridge with as perfect safety as you can jump from the chair on which you are sitting.’²⁴²

Odlum was a long-distance swimmer and well-known swimming instructor, and had made similar jumps before. He was supported by a group of ‘sporting and theatrical people’ (including actors, a wrestler and a man who had apparently shot a boxer), who gathered in a saloon to prepare, along with journalists.²⁴³ Notable among them was experienced water-based entertainer Captain Paul Boyton, who owned the saloon. Boyton had achieved fame in the 1870s for inventing and exhibiting a diving suit (he once jumped from a transatlantic steamer and swam the last part of a journey to Ireland, and on another occasion, swam up the River

²³⁹ Anon., ‘Glorification!’, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 24 May 1883, 4 o’clock edition, p.12

²⁴⁰ Anon., ‘Building the Bridge’, *World*, 24 May 1883, p.1

²⁴¹ Anon., ‘United!’, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 24 May 1883, p.1; Joseph Pulitzer, ‘The Bridge Opening’, *World*, 24 May 1883, p.4

²⁴² Anon., ‘Odlum’s Leap’, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 20 May 1885, p.6

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

Thames) and would go on to appear in P.T. Barnum's circus and to open amusement parks in Chicago and Coney Island.²⁴⁴ The *World* reported that Boyton helped Odlum prepare (they inspected the bridge together) and also offered to wager \$1000 on his success.²⁴⁵

Odlum's friends and reporters arranged themselves in a tugboat beneath the bridge. Meanwhile, in order to evade the bridge police, Odlum executed a quick substitution: a friend, James Haggert, climbed the suspension of the bridge and claimed he was the man who planned to jump. While the police struggled with Haggert, Odlum burst out of a nearby wagon, threw off his loose suit to reveal red shirt and swimming trunks and climbed down to the edge. Haggert was described in newspaper reports as the 'dummy', prefiguring the doubling and shared identities of later stunt performances.²⁴⁶ The role of the bridge jumper was shared between the two men as a means of diverting attention and reducing the risk of being caught before the jump was performed. Such doubling did not serve the same purpose as later stunt doubling under the Hollywood star system: to protect a star from harm, while creating a macho character through performances of physical peril.²⁴⁷ The person who would become the star of a bridge jump was the same person who took the physical risk. Instead, the momentary, diversionary doubling of Odlum and Haggert seemed to heighten and prolong a moment of 'sacrificial substitution', structuring the question 'who will be the jumper?' (or 'who will jump Sam Patch?') into the performance.

Rather than the cinematic star system of the 1930s, this late nineteenth-century doubling was more akin to the increased visibility of stunt performance which took place in the 1970s, when stunt men became the focus of several Hollywood films and Evel Knievel attained international celebrity for his motorcycle jumps. Smith associates this trend with a 'crisis in masculinity' bound up with the trauma of the Vietnam War, pointing out the affinity between soldier and stunt man in films such as Richard Rush's *The Stunt Man* (1980).²⁴⁸ In this film, a tyrannical director stands in for the state, forcing a Vietnam veteran and novice

²⁴⁴ Jacob Smith, *The Thrill Makers: Celebrity, Masculinity and Stunt Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p.20-24; Lauren Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p.3

²⁴⁵ Anon., 'Sam Patch's Successor', *World*, 20 May 1885, p.1

²⁴⁶ Joseph Pulitzer, Editorial, *World*, 12 June 1885, p.4

²⁴⁷ Jacob Smith, 'Seeing Double: Stunt Performance and Masculinity', *Journal of Film and Video*, 56:3 (2004), 3-53 (p.38)

²⁴⁸ Smith, 'Seeing Double', p.41

stunt performer into ever more dangerous acts. (Incidentally, both the stunt man's first encounter with the director, and the spectacular death the director plans for him, take place on a bridge.) Smith's reading of Rush's film supports the idea that stunts such as bridge jumping worked through conflicts and contradictions of masculinity in relation to national identity and labour, and points to the way in which stunts have been used as a performative means of exploring the value of human life in the overlapping contexts of war and the entertainment industry. As I'll discuss below, this was also a feature of 1890s stunts.

Odlum's technique, he explained to a *World* journalist in the saloon, was to straighten one arm to the sky and the other down by his side, and jump feet first. Yet perhaps because of the height of 140 feet (higher than Odlum's previous leaps), the jump went wrong. Odlum's body turned in the air and he hit the water 'almost horizontally'.²⁴⁹ Boyton jumped from the tugboat to pull Odlum from the river. Though Odlum briefly revived and spoke, he soon began to bleed from eyes and nose and died shortly afterwards of internal injuries. An autopsy was carried out and the coroner reported that the injuries were like those found 'in a man crushed to death by caving in of a sand bank. Odlum was simply mangled to death.'²⁵⁰

Haggert was arrested for aiding and abetting Odlum in 'an act imminently dangerous to human life'. Haggert initially could not believe that Odlum had died, insisting that he had rigged a ladder on a mast 110 feet and Odlum had jumped from it successfully. As Haggert's trial began, he told a reporter he had only wanted to give Odlum "a chance for his leap" and would never have been involved if he thought Odlum would die.²⁵¹ Odlum's mother apparently blamed Boyton, who published a letter in the *New York Times* in his own defence. Boyton claimed that in spite of his 'entreaties' to abandon the plan, Odlum had insisted on jumping for 'fame and a reputation' and 'plenty of engagements.' According to Boyton, Odlum believed a successful jump would have enabled him to make 'a name and a fortune' (Boyton's own career supported this view).²⁵²

Responses to Odlum's jump suggested it was a deluded, suicidal search for fame and money. One official commented: "I trust that the example of that unfortunate man will satisfy all cranks as to the feasibility and desirability of

²⁴⁹ Anon., 'Odlum's Leap', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 20 May 1885, p.6

²⁵⁰ Anon., 'Just Why Odlum Died', *World*, 21 May 1885, p.1

²⁵¹ Anon., 'Odlum's Leap', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 20 May 1885, p.6

²⁵² Paul Boyton, open letter to Mrs Odlum, 27 May 1885, in 'Odlum's Fatal Leap', *New York Times*, 7 June 1885, p.9

jumping from the bridge.”²⁵³ A *World* editorial stated that Odlum’s epitaph should be ‘brief and pointed: ‘Died as the fool dieth.’”²⁵⁴ A sermon against ‘Self-Aggrandisement’ printed in the *World* criticised the jump on rationalist grounds. It would not contribute to science or the furtherance of knowledge; there was simply no ‘good’ to come of it, successful or unsuccessful: ‘his death was the price of an attempt of a man to purchase vainglory.’²⁵⁵

Smith situates such comments in a nineteenth-century discourse of classical fame, which pitted heroism based on achievement against celebrity, an excessively speedy and fleeting form of notoriety.²⁵⁶ This illustrates Levine’s argument that by the turn of the century, a cultural hierarchy had been established, distinguishing between edifying ‘high’ culture and ‘low’ entertainments.²⁵⁷ Smith critiques the classical fame discourse for its elitism, emphasising that cheap newspapers which enabled celebrity were vital to forming an increasingly democratic society. For this discussion, it’s interesting to note that, as in the sermon, such claims were often made via biblical metaphors of immoral transaction and false coin: bridge jumpers were ‘looking for cheap glory’.²⁵⁸ Celebrity of this kind enabled people to circulate too freely, thereby devaluing the system of valorisation as well as themselves.

In spite of such criticism, however, other young men were quick to imitate Odlum. Two weeks later, the judge sentencing Haggert to eight months in prison stated:

‘[N]ewspapers every day give accounts of ‘cranks,’ if I may so designate them, who either want to or attempt the suicidal effort of the unfortunate Odlum. It has got to be a craze and it must be stopped.’²⁵⁹

Joseph Pulitzer viewed such imitations as inevitable, underlining the sense that bridge jumping enacted surrogation and simultaneously staged a need for further substitution. The following year, Pulitzer commented that from the moment Odlum jumped, ‘it was morally certain that some fool would in time demonstrate that the leap could be made in safety.’²⁶⁰

The person who did so was Steve Brodie. In July 1886, he leaped unharmed,

²⁵³ Anon., ‘Odlum’s Leap’, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 20 May 1885, p.6

²⁵⁴ Joseph Pulitzer, Editorial, *World*, 20 May 1885, p.4

²⁵⁵ Rev. N. B. Thompson, quoted in Anon., “Odlum’s Jump to Death”, *World*, 25 May 1885, p.5

²⁵⁶ Smith, ‘The adventures of a bridge jumper’, p.24

²⁵⁷ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p.30

²⁵⁸ Anon., ‘Beat Steve Brodie’, *Pullman Herald* (Pullman, WA), 13 Jul 1895, p.1

²⁵⁹ Anon., ‘Odlum’s Decoy’, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 11 June 1885, p.4

²⁶⁰ Joseph Pulitzer, Editorial, *World*, 24 July 1886, p.4

having snuck onto Brooklyn Bridge in a wagon. Brodie, a twenty-three-year-old New Yorker from the Fourth Ward, had been a newspaper seller as a boy and was at that time described as a 'printer' and also a 'bootblack'.²⁶¹ He had previously walked competitively in Madison Square Garden in a contest similar to that discussed in chapter 2, and coverage of Brodie's jump echoed that of the walking contest in its disturbance of a division between work and play: "It's my business!" Brodie shouted from the river, as he resisted arrest after his leap. "I do it for fun."²⁶² Such statements played on the perception of bridge jumping as both excessive and frivolous, a money-making enterprise and a lark. They invoked some of Patch's defiance against industrial capitalism, but from the position of precarious worker rather than skilled boss spinner.

Brodie and two friends, also printers, were arrested. This bridge jumping survivor presented a legal problem, because there was no distinction in law between bridge jumping as performance and bridge jumping for the purpose of killing oneself. Brodie could only be charged with attempted suicide, yet the penal code specified that the act must be done with the intention of taking one's own life, and Brodie was present and able to explain that he had no intention of dying (he was charged nonetheless, a situation Joseph Pulitzer called 'preposterous').²⁶³ The law also stipulated that the act must be equivalent to homicide if committed upon another person; when it came to death, a person had no more right to take risks with their own body than with somebody else's. Bridge jumping expressed a bodily autonomy beyond that condoned in law. Like Patch, Brodie staked a claim on freedom, challenging the boundaries of autonomy: he would be free and/or die. Unlike Patch's leap, however, Brodie's stunt took place in an industrialised and hyper-exploitative entertainment culture.

4. Dime museums, enfreakment and the entertainment context

Immediately, Brodie attracted extensive press coverage and public attention. When he left the police cell where he'd spent the night after his jump, Brodie was

²⁶¹ Anon., 'Dropped From the Bridge', *World*, 24 July 1886, p.1

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ Joseph Pulitzer, Editorial, *World*, 26 July 1886, p.4

met by a waiting crowd, including journalists.²⁶⁴ “I’ll be a great card for a dime museum now,” he reportedly said. “I wonder if Barnum will take me?”²⁶⁵ Smith charts Brodie’s career following his jump: Brodie set off on a nationwide dime museum tour (and was arrested for attempting to leap from a museum as an advertisement); turned a Bowery Street saloon which he owned and operated into a profitable tourist attraction; undertook stunt work in melodramatic theatre (most notably in well-known playwright Steele MacKaye’s *Money Mad*, in which Brodie leaped from a bridge); and appeared on stage as ‘Steve Brodie’ in a reconstruction of his own saloon in *On The Bowery* (1896).²⁶⁶ Brodie’s performances were geared towards the proliferation of public persona. By jumping, it seemed that he earned a right to play ‘Steve Brodie’ in public life. In Roach’s terms, he became an effigy, a medium for cultural memory, filling the vacancy left by Patch and Odlum. Like Patch, Brodie kept the space for cultural memory open: he entered into popular mythology and slang, appearing as a character in several films throughout the twentieth century, and in the phrase to ‘do a Brody [sic]’, meaning to take a suicidal leap.²⁶⁷

Accusations of tarnished fame were thrown at Brodie as they had been at Patch and Odlum. The *World* wrote that he was ‘famishing for notoriety’ and jumped for ‘an idle life’.²⁶⁸ The *Brooklyn Eagle* agreed that Brodie ‘thirsted for celebrity’ and his jump had ‘spoiled him for proper employment’.²⁶⁹ Such statements half recalled the history of anti-work imaginaries and resisting industrial labour which bridge jumping embodied. The *World* also triangulated Brodie’s jump, fame and war, suggesting an uncomfortable affinity between this dangerous act and loss of life in battle: ‘Men have perished on the field of battle without getting one thousandth part of the celebrity which came to Brodie.’²⁷⁰

However, nobody could claim that Brodie’s act had not worked and later accounts tended towards admiration rather than condemnation or snobbery. Brodie continued to proliferate his activities and a review of *On the Bowery*

²⁶⁴ Smith, *The Thrill Makers*, p.30

²⁶⁵ Anon., ‘Steve Will Be Exhibited’, *World*, 25 July 1886, p.5

²⁶⁶ Smith, *The Thrill Makers*, p.35

²⁶⁷ *The Bowery*, dir. by Raoul Walsh (United Artists, 1933); *Park Row*, dir. by Samuel Fuller (United Artists, 1952); David Foster Wallace, ‘A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again’, in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1997), pp.256-353 (p.261)

²⁶⁸ Anon., ‘Dropped From the Bridge’, *World*, 24 July 1886, p.1

²⁶⁹ Anon., ‘Spoiled By Celebrity’, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 26 July 1887, p.2

²⁷⁰ Anon., ‘Dropped From the Bridge’, *World*, 24 July 1886, p.1

described him as an ‘innkeeper, king of the Bowery, high bridge jumper and one of the most interesting and unique figures on the American stage’.²⁷¹ The reviewer also noted that it was a ‘profitable thought’ to stage a play touching on Bowery life, as it was well attended by Bowery residents, drawn by a strong, ongoing intimacy between Brodie and his community. His wide-ranging career is indicative of close connections between various performance platforms, particularly those of sport and theatre. Brodie was emblematic of an emerging cross-media celebrity, based in popular newspapers, saloons, theatres, politics, sports arenas and, importantly, dime museums.

Brodie apparently saw dime museums as the key industry in which he could profit from his jump and build a career as a novelty or freak performer. A *World* article claimed that while theatrical performers in dime museums worked hard for ‘a bare living’, freak performers ‘commanded fancy salaries’. Adah Briggs, the ‘Fat Woman’ owned a ‘magnificent collection of diamonds’ and a country house, where she rested for a third of the year. The ‘Ossified African’ Lucius Monroe earned around \$200 a week and was engaged in writing his autobiography.²⁷² Such wealth would be impossible, the reporter insisted, without the museum’s publicist, who constructed the acts’ images: ‘But for the press agent, the freak would be relegated to oblivion. He it is who whips the foam of flattering language and paints their portraits in vivid word pictures, handing them down full-fledged to posterity.’ There is some tension between the exalted person of the act themselves, and the professional, or even artistic, power of the publicist. Rosemary Garland Thomson points out that enfreakment involved four distinct forms, which combined rhetoric, text and performance: the spiel or ‘lecture’ before the act, delivered by a showman; the often fantastic accounts of the freak acts’ lives in advertisements and pamphlets; staging, such as costume and choreography; and finally, the distribution of freak acts’ images in the form of photographs and illustrations.²⁷³ Performers, publicists and journalists were engaged in co-creation of celebrity.

Bridge jumpers were anomalous freak acts, because although they undertook extraordinary performances, they did not do so in the context of the dime museum, before their audiences. Moreover, by current understandings of

²⁷¹ Anon., ‘On the Bowery’, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), 11 October 1896, p.11

²⁷² Anon., ‘Society in the Dime Museums’, *World*, 19 May 1889, p.16

²⁷³ Rosemarie Garland Thomson, ‘Introduction: From Wonder to Error — A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity’, in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. by Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996), 1-22 (p.7)

bodily difference and Thomson's schema, they were not physically different. This suggests that the freak category was a somewhat loose one. Thomson notes a paradox of enfreakment: it reified specific difference but at the same time created 'a single amorphous category of corporeal otherness'.²⁷⁴ It seems that unusual physical acts were enough to transform the bodily status of the performer and enable them to enter into a distinct, legible and marketable identity. Bridge jumpers might be viewed in the tradition of what Edward L. Schwarzchild calls the 'spectacle of death'. The risk the jumpers had assumed, and continued to assume through sporadic jumps, made them akin to objects 'poised precariously between life and death, placed in something of a hybrid, unnatural, 'other' world'.²⁷⁵ In an era of secularisation, bridge jumpers might have attained a sense of sacredness as well as profanity, suggesting that though they were classified as a 'low' form of culture, they nonetheless accessed some affective states more characteristically associated with 'high' art in emerging cultural hierarchies.

In the heavily managed and co-produced culture of dime museums, Brodie seems to have been extraordinary. Smith describes him as 'a pioneer of a new kind of nineteenth-century 'DIY' celebrity; one forged by an individual operator rather than an established 'showman-publicist' such as Barnum.²⁷⁶ Brodie's saloon purchase made him a relatively stable enterprise — the owner of his own museum — and enabled him to exert a peculiar amount of control over his self-presentation.²⁷⁷ Fellow bridge jumper W.C. Keeble's relationship to dime museums was less auspicious, and the economics of his jump demonstrate a grimmer side of bridge jumping.

5. 'He was no fool. He was a bridge jumper'

In July 1897, Keeble, a man from England in his twenties or early thirties, died jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge.²⁷⁸ By the time of Keeble's jump, the *Tribune* recorded, police had prevented many leaps from the bridge, and recorded twenty-

²⁷⁴ Garland Thomson, p.10

²⁷⁵ Edward L. Schwarzchild, 'Death Defying/Defining Spectacles: Charles Willson Peale as Early American Freak Showman', in *Freakery*, ed. by Garland Thomson, 82-96 (p.84)

²⁷⁶ Smith, 'The adventures of a bridge jumper', p.23

²⁷⁷ Anon., 'Social Gossip', *Courier* (Lincoln, NE), 12 October 1895, p.1

²⁷⁸ Anon., 'Did He Jump The Bridge?', *Sun*, 5 Jul 1897, p.1; Anon., 'Jumped To His Death', *New York Daily Tribune*, 5 July 1897, p.4

three, seven of which had been fatal.²⁷⁹ Unlike Brodie, Keeble was not an independent operator, and before he jumped, he had entered into an agreement with a dime museum owner. Keeble's reported aim was to become 'of value as a dime museum freak'.²⁸⁰ The involvement of two parties, and the jump's failure, meant that the financial mechanics of the jump were closely scrutinised.

Keeble had come to America about seven years previously and had most recently been employed as a waiter, a job he'd given up a month before in order to prepare. Keeble had some experience in diving, and had won several medals for his feats in leaping from ships' masts, and from Blackfriars Bridge in London.²⁸¹ He had several tattoos, some of which were images of the ships from which he had jumped, and the *Tribune* reported that he planned to have the bridge tattooed upon his chest if he succeeded. Keeble had turned his feats into an aspect of his identity, and his tattoos were one way in which his actions were transferred onto his body in a manner conducive to inhabiting a freak persona. Thomson notes that white men with tattoos were sometimes given exotic biographies, in which they were 'captured and tortured by cannibals'.²⁸² While that particular story seems unlikely, Keeble's tattoos could certainly contribute to the construction of his celebrity identity.

The pattern of Keeble's jump closely resembled those of Odlum and Brodie, suggesting that bridge jumping and its reportage were by now a performative and discursive genre. Before jumping, the *World* reported, Keeble told fellow residents: "All I want is to find someone who is willing to make it worth my while. I can do the jump as easy and as safe as you can eat that bread and butter."²⁸³ The striking similarity between this and Odlum's boast about jumping from a chair implies that jumpers, reporters, or both, were versed in an established rhetoric. The key difference is that Keeble's reported words were an expression of interest: he was actively looking to secure a reward before taking the leap.

Keeble found his sponsor in dime museum owner, William E. Holmes, who contracted him to perform the jump. In the contract, Keeble stated that he was not jumping 'for the purposes of suicide, but for fame and fortune'. Holmes agreed that if the jump succeeded, he would give Keeble 'a good engagement'. Compare this to

²⁷⁹ Anon., 'Jumped To His Death', *New York Daily Tribune*, 5 July 1897, p.4

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ Anon., 'Did He Jump The Bridge?', *Sun*, 5 Jul 1897, p.1

²⁸² Thomson, p.7

²⁸³ Anon., 'Bridge Jumper Killed', *World*, 5 July 1897, p.1 and 2

the current of resistance to industrial labour seen in previous bridge jumps. Keeble jumped in order to attain a position working for Holmes, with the promise, potentially, of building a career in the way that Brodie had done before him. Opportunity and risk were bound together in a process of finding a job that was basically quotidian, but for the fact that one of the likely outcomes was death. If Keeble failed, Holmes would provide a 'decent burial', and in return, receive Keeble's medals and other belongings and 'full and only right use of [Keeble's] name.'²⁸⁴ Whatever the outcome, Holmes stood to profit from Keeble's person through exhibition at his dime museum.

Late nineteenth-century bridge jumping continued to challenge authority, but the representatives of authority became the bridge police rather than industrial bosses. Part of the pre-jump preparation was to goad police by informing them in advance, ensuring a confrontation. The night before the jump, the bridge police office received a handwritten card reading: 'Champion Vessel Jumper. CAP. W. C. KEEBLE. Clipper Office.'²⁸⁵ The 'Clipper' was the *New York Clipper*, a sporting and theatrical newspaper, implying that newspapers may have had a role in producing as well as reporting this event (as in the walking contest discussed in chapter 2). Having been informed, the bridge police stationed guards on the bridge and near Keeble's boarding house in an attempt to prevent the jump. Nonetheless, Keeble and three friends successfully paid the toll to drive across the bridge in a wagon, and dashed out at an opportune moment.

Three hundred people had waited for two hours on the riverbanks to watch Keeble's promised jump. At eleven o'clock, Holmes announced the event would take place, and shortly afterwards, Keeble was seen to run from the carriage, evade a bridge policeman and throw himself over, feet first. The *World* claimed that Keeble wore a costume of 'blue tights and a blue jumper, with letters of god [or gold, text illegible] across his chest' (the same article noted that Keeble had worked in a 'Scripture-placard restaurant').²⁸⁶ The *Tribune*, however, had him more prosaically dressed, in a sweater with the arms cut off, and trousers tied beneath the knees.²⁸⁷

Keeble did not resurface. The *World* reported with distaste that Holmes

²⁸⁴ Anon., 'Bridge Jumper Killed', *World*, 5 July 1897, p.1 and 2

²⁸⁵ Anon., 'Jumped To His Death', *New York Daily Tribune*, 5 July 1897, p.4

²⁸⁶ Anon., 'Bridge Jumper Killed', *World*, 5 July 1897, p.1 and 2

²⁸⁷ Anon., 'Jumped To His Death', *New York Daily Tribune*, 5 July 1897, p.4

'took the death of his promised freak with stolid indifference. He still had the relics of the man to put on exhibition, and if the body was not found there would be no funeral expenses to pay.' Holmes did not deny his lack of interest in Keeble's survival: "I wanted Captain Keeble as an advertisement dead or alive." He did, however, defend the contract, presenting it as a fair exchange between businessmen:

' [...] Capt. Keeble was in search of fame and fortune, and had he escaped with his life I would have helped him to get it. I want you to thoroughly understand that he was no fool. He was a bridge jumper.'

Keeble had requested a 'floral piece' in the shape of the Brooklyn Bridge on his coffin, carefully directing his posthumous public image.²⁸⁸

6. An 'advertisement dead or alive': economy of excess and human/capital

Holmes described Keeble's bridge jump as advertising. As described in the introduction, there was a significant expansion in the advertising industry in this era. Advertising became part of the fabric of urban daily life, appearing as trolley cars posters, street signs, and live performances, among other forms.

Associations with the spurious claims of patent medicine tycoons had given advertising a bad reputation, and in 1880, many considered a copywriter or advertising agent to be 'no more than a respectable crook'.²⁸⁹ Over the next twenty years, false claims in advertising became less frequent and the creation of advertising more widely acknowledged as a profession. Yet the professionalism of advertising remained highly ambivalent. Advertisements were designed to draw attention to themselves, which was often viewed as distasteful. Advertising journal *Fame* explained that 'the first point in advertising is to attract attention' and bemoaned the type of 'professionalism' that assumed 'a cloak of superiority' and shunned its use, arguing that for such professionals enterprise was a crime.²⁹⁰ Even if attracting attention was accepted as necessary, the uncertain relationship between advertising and sales exacerbated people's suspicions. Advertising cost money and did not in itself produce anything, and its relation to selling goods or

²⁸⁸ Anon., 'Bridge Jumper Killed', *World*, 5 July 1897, p.1 and 2

²⁸⁹ *How It Was in Advertising: 1776-1976* (Chicago: Crane Books, 1976), compiled by the editors of *Advertising Age*, p.12

²⁹⁰ Anon., 'About Eye Catchers', *Fame*, May 1894, p.124-125

services was not fixed, predictable or easily measurable. For those in the advertising industry, this meant that encouraging businesses to adopt advertising as a practice was a major persuasion project. *Fame* editor, Artemis Ward, expressed the new logic that advertising required in terms of productivity, taking the example of Pennsylvania Railroad's luxurious services:

Money is lost on every fare, on every trip, on every meal. A train of box cars of the plainest build, running at slow speed, would earn twice the total fares by carrying grain to the seaboard. Why, then, is it that every switch is fixed to facilitate the speed of this special train? [...] Because it is an advertisement of the road. Because by the outlay of that loss the Penna. R. R. is known all over the world.²⁹¹

In advertising, *Fame* explained, loss was (eventual) gain. The publication berated novices to advertising for expecting too much by way of profit: 'They seem to regard it as a game of poker in which they can, or ought to, scoop in a big pot now and again'.²⁹² While *Fame* maintained that advertising was always eventually profitable, it also emphasised that tact, judgement and delicacy were required to appreciate and manage the tool. Advertising could not be approached as a crude, money making venture, *Fame* suggested: 'It is serious business, this dispensing of great sums on faith.'²⁹³ Paradoxically, advertisers idealised as being beyond money, and at the same time claimed to sell, relational, affective states: faith, confidence, and good will.

Fame's broad conception of advertising, which included any kind of self-presentation, further muddled the relation between advertising and money: 'Men's acts are their advertisements. There are more things in the world that are *intended* as advertisements than the world realizes.'²⁹⁴ According to *Fame*, the logic of advertising extended way beyond billboards and newspapers. Advertising was presented as an indirect, hard-to-measure form of value creation by association, which blurred remunerative and non-remunerative, commercial and non-commercial, strains of activity.

That a man dying as a result of a bridge jump might be good advertisement for a dime museum is ghoulish but plausible. Keeble's jump took to extreme *Fame's* contention that advertising was, in essence, a display of waste. Given the terms of the contract, Keeble's act was effectively suicide as advertising, an idea explored in

²⁹¹ Artemas Ward, 'Stray Shots', *Fame*, September 1892, p.196

²⁹² A.H. Beardsley, 'Advertising Profits', *Fame*, May 1894, pp.121-122, p.121

²⁹³ Artemas Ward, 'Stray Shots', *Fame*, May 1892, p.67

²⁹⁴ Artemas Ward, 'Stray Shots', *Fame*, September 1892, p.196

the reflections of Jean Baudrillard on the New York marathon in the 1980s. Baudrillard observed that the marathon (which returned to sport with the modern Olympics in 1896 and became a popular pursuit in the early twentieth century) functioned as a free-floating, evacuated form of advertising:²⁹⁵

I DID IT!

The slogan of a new form of advertising activity [...] a pure and empty form [...] a form of demonstrative suicide, suicide as advertising: it is running to show you are capable of getting every last drop of energy out of yourself, to prove it ... to prove what? [...] I'm so-and-so and I exist! They [the runners] are free publicity for existence.²⁹⁶

Baudrillard was struck by the excessive and pointless expenditure of energy on display, an expenditure which invoked both life and death, destruction and renewal, all with a sense of frivolity and purposelessness. Advertising dictated the logic of the activity, even when advertising was not its actual or primary purpose, and the runners did not attract attention towards anything but themselves.

To illuminate these reflections, I'll return to Bataille's conceptions of sacrifice and an economy of excess, which he outlined in *La Part maudite* or *The Accursed Share*, first published in 1967. Taking economy in its widest possible sense, Bataille argues that the general condition of the world is one of excess energy and resources, which must be squandered through destruction and excess consumption. For Bataille, waste is not a choice but a necessity, and if the drive to waste is not channelled in some way, it will manifest uncontrollably. Waste serves the function of allowing people to enter into a state of intimacy and connecting them to the sacred, removed from the 'real world' of utility and calculation.²⁹⁷ Sacrifice is one means by which societies have wasted through sanctioned violence, structuring their relation to the sacred. Sacrifice functions by determining a victim for 'violent consumption', a 'surplus taken from the mass of useful wealth'. The victim becomes the 'accursed share', who is removed from the 'order of things'. Having been removed from the realm of utility, the victim 'radiates intimacy, anguish, the profundity of living beings'.²⁹⁸ They become a sacred being by virtue of their impending destruction. A sacrifice therefore has the power to

²⁹⁵ Anon., 'First Marathon Race: Thirty Long-Distance Runners Enter the Initial Run in America', *World*, 20 September 1896, p.13

²⁹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. by Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 1999), p.21-22. Originally published as *Amérique* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1986).

²⁹⁷ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, 3 vols (New York: Zone Books, 1988), I, p.58. Originally published as *La Part maudite* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967). All italics original.

²⁹⁸ Bataille, p.59

restore or maintain social equilibrium, appeasing a general condition that has little or nothing to do with the victim specifically.

Though modern, secularised cultures tend to idealise production rather than ‘unproductive glory’, Bataille argued that the ‘archaic sensibility’ of sacred, violent excess was ‘still alive’.²⁹⁹ The newness and rationality promised by modernity and industrial capitalism discouraged certain manifestations of sacredness, as in the shift, through enfreakment, from portentous monsters to curiosities and sites of progress. Yet the material cultures of modernity were constructed through massive expenditures of energy (beyond that required for growth) and loss of life. Such waste could barely be contained by narratives of progress and productivity, including that of the construction of Brooklyn Bridge itself, which inspired awe partly because the process had been so destructive. To apply Bataille’s theory: bridge jumping combined an uncontrollable drive towards excess and waste with the commercial drives of the entertainment industry. In the modern economy, bridge jumping found its place in the most exploitative aspects of advertising, a practice that encouraged — perhaps expressed its essence — in elaborate and ostentatious waste.

Bridge jumping undermined the modern myth of perpetual productivity and shook the norms of valorisation. It did so by forcing into exchange that which was supposedly beyond money — sacred or idealised concepts and entities — thereby making apparent the fact that they were not beyond exchange at all (even if they disturbed ideas about exchange). For Holmes, Keeble’s bridge jump realised a great deal of value. It attributed additional value to the dime museum, Keeble’s artefacts and his name. Underlining the sacred quality of Keeble’s jump, items of little worth became ‘relics’ after his death, accruing a metaphysical significance more akin to an artwork or religious icon than an everyday commodity. Relics are nodal points between that which is valued in monetary terms and that which is supposed to be valued apart from or beyond money. Notably, some of Keeble’s belongings were medals: objects that are materially similar to money — the same shape, often the same metal, and given as a way of rewarding effort or acknowledging debt — and yet are supposed to be valued according to totally different and higher principles. The dime museum profited by this vexed meeting between the economy and the ‘general economy’ (a meeting also invoked in its

²⁹⁹ Bataille, p.29

name: a 'dime' is a fractional coin, and 'museum' analogous with mausoleum, an often sacred place for burying or remembering the dead).

Clearly, the greatest taboo of Keeble's jump was that it put into exchange his body and life. A rejection of such body- or life-for-money exchanges was evident in a roughly contemporary philosophy of money, outlined by the German philosopher Georg Simmel in a series of lectures delivered in the 1890s in Berlin. The lectures were subsequently published in 1900 as *Philosophies des Geldes* or *The Philosophy of Money*. Simmel noted a general shift from valuing human life in monetary terms, for example trading slaves or paying money to a family to atone for a murder, to attributing absolute value to human life. Simmel described such money-for-life exchanges as 'quite alien to our thought today', even if the shift was really 'only a gradual and quantitative difference'.³⁰⁰ If in practice the change Simmel identifies was incomplete, uneven and marked by race, class, and gender, it is true to say that such trades had become increasingly taboo in Europe and the United States. Simmel argued that this stemmed from an intensified differentiation of people and, conversely, non-differentiation of money. Money could get you anything; it therefore became more important that it couldn't get you the things people claimed to value most highly.

Importantly, though, Keeble did not risk his life for a cash payment, but for opportunity. Opportunity — precarity's promise — implies money, but while money is 'pure quantity', opportunity approaches immeasurability.³⁰¹ An opportunity might give rise to more opportunity, becoming an ongoing condition which perpetually renews itself. In that sense, both Keeble and Holmes offered something that approached immeasurability in the contract, hence Holmes' presentation of the deal as a fair exchange. As Walter Dean Michaels argues, the 'institution of the contract assumes that any voluntary exchange is equitable' and hence 'legitimate[s] every desire' as well as providing a 'mechanism for determining the value of the goods and services offered in exchange'.³⁰² This illusion of equivalence was of course belied by the one-sided distribution of risk. The contract resembled a gamble: Keeble's life was his stake, while Holmes staked

³⁰⁰ Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, ed. by David Frisby, trans. by Tom Bottomore, David Frisby and Kaethe Mengelberg, 3rd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p.361. Originally published as *Philosophies des Geldes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1900).

³⁰¹ Simmel, p.148

³⁰² Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.128

\$25 in expenses. Unlike a stake, though, Keeble's body and person (much like his belongings and identity) would change status in the light of a win. Like Brodie, he would become an enterprise, a means of making money beyond the ordinary constraints of labour. His capacity for earning would no longer be consistently tied to time, presence or a specific activity. Keeble's personhood would take on some of the qualities of an investment, money that grows and reproduces itself, and continues to work in the owner's absence. Keeble was *that which was risked* and *that which had the potential for growth*: Keeble became capital. Rather than labour for a wage, he exchanged himself for the prospect of long-term return.

If we try to comprehend this interaction in terms of Marx's schema, its unusual nature becomes apparent. The most obvious way to view it might be to see Holmes as a capitalist and Keeble as a labourer. Holmes put forward \$25 in money-capital. In a system of industrial production, money-capital (M) is spent on two things: the means of production (*mp*) and labour-power (L).³⁰³ In this case no money was spent on labour power: there was no wage for the work of jumping. Instead, the jump was a preliminary stage that might open up the possibility of earning a wage in the future. This makes it impossible for the jump to create any surplus value, for it is surplus labour that produces such value. Yet the jump *did* realize value. Why?

The only way that the jump seems to make some sense within Marx's framework is if we view Keeble as commodity capital, and the newspaper and entertainment industry as a form of productive capital, working in synch within a process of industrial production. To adapt Marx's formula M (money capital) — C (L + *mp*)... P (productive capital) C' (commodity capital + surplus value) — M' (money + additional money):³⁰⁴

M (money capital: Holmes's \$25) — C (Keeble's labour appropriated for nothing + Keeble as commodity) ... P (productive capital: Holmes's dime museum + popular newspapers + Keeble's labour power) ... C' (Keeble + surplus value; dime museum + surplus value) — M' (indirect increase in profit to dime museum)

Holmes's interest was in the dime museum increasing its value; Keeble's interest was in his own potential increase. Of course, Keeble acting as capital does not mean that he was a capitalist. He didn't own the means of production and his

³⁰³ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by David Fernbach, 3 vols (London: Penguin Books, 1992), II, p.110. Originally published as *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Oekonomie* (Hamburg: Meissner, 1885), II, *Der Cirkulationsprozess des Kapitals*

³⁰⁴ Marx, *Capital*, II, p.109

labour produced surplus value. Rather than being a capitalist, Keeble seemed to strive to embody a mystified circuit of capital whereby capital rather than labour appears to create surplus value. Keeble's attempt made apparent the contradictory nature of this mystification by inserting his own living and labouring body into the process, but making its function akin to capital as well as labour-power. Importantly, the jump was all in the service of attaining a job: its overall structure recognised surplus labour as the source of surplus value. Even if he succeeded in getting the job, however, Keeble hoped to continue to increase his own value as if he were capital.

James Salazar argues that this logic of self-actualisation was inherent in the nineteenth-century conception of character as capital: character became that 'unique form of value that seemed magically endowed with the power of self-creation — the power of capital itself'.³⁰⁵ In common with many performing artists, stunt performers hoped that their act would establish them as entrepreneurs who could continue to exploit their persons. The presentation of character as capital parallels the twentieth-century conception of 'human capital', a term developed by the 'Chicago School' of neoliberal economists, particularly Gary Becker, in the 1950s and '60s. In Michel Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics*, a series of lectures given at the College de France in 1978 and 1979, Foucault framed 'human capital' as a progression of biopolitical governance and an example of the 'grid' of economic thinking expanding to cover all aspects of human life.³⁰⁶ Foucault held that human capital is made up of two components: intrinsic aspects of the labourer's personhood, and the total accumulation of 'investments' in that person.³⁰⁷ The second category includes skills, experience and other types of nurture, physical and emotional. In this model, the wage labourer was no longer dependent on a company to facilitate their work. Instead, they were the entrepreneurs of themselves, with full responsibility for the investment of their own capital (in spite of not owning the means of production).

There's a broad historical parallel between the developments Foucault describes — the neo-liberal, late capitalist structures that increasingly took hold in the second half of the twentieth century — and the liberal political and economic

³⁰⁵ James B. Salazar, *Bodies of Reform: The Rhetoric of Character in Gilded Age America* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), p.16

³⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979*, ed. by Michel Senellart, trans. by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.246

³⁰⁷ Foucault, p.219

ideology of the late nineteenth century. In both cultures, the entrepreneur becomes an ideal model of self-sufficient growth. In the hyper-exploitative conditions of the late nineteenth century, the idealisation of the entrepreneur found a logical endpoint in acts such as Keeble's jump. Dangerous stunts of this kind parallel some of the more absurd phraseology later employed by Becker regarding the awkward tie-in between non-transferable human capital and humans themselves: 'human capital is a very illiquid asset.'³⁰⁸ To liquidate this capital was potentially to destroy the body that contained it. The economics of Keeble's jump demonstrate that exploitation of the whole person came into mainstream consciousness long before the theorisation of biopolitics.

Stunt performers aimed to establish human capital via a specific mechanism: they sought attention, which would bring fame, which would turn the stunt performer into an independent commercial enterprise. As an enterprise, they could make money in a wide variety of ways: appearances, merchandise, advertisement sponsorship and further performances. To undertake a stunt was thus to recognise that attention could dramatically increase one's capacity for accumulating wealth. (The unwieldy state of play regarding who could obtain attention in an age of proliferating media was a key driver of anxiety regarding the insubstantial nature of modern celebrity.) This too is an idea that found its fullest expression in the late twentieth century, when in 1997, Michael Goldhaber put forward the idea of the 'attention economy'. In this system, each person can increase their human capital by drawing attention to themselves, much like a commodity. Goldhaber predicted that in the future the attention economy would succeed the monetary economy as the dominant mode of understanding assets, arguing, 'obtaining attention is obtaining a kind of enduring wealth'.³⁰⁹ Attention-grabbing by definition, stunts operated according to this logic within the existing monetary economy, thereby unsettling received views on what was and should be valuable.

Keeble's investment of self aimed to increase his human capital, but in the final reckoning, the capital functioned just as well without the human life. Though Keeble died, his name, image, belongings and body worked as capital all the same.

³⁰⁸ Gary S. Becker, 'Investment in Human Capital: A Theoretical Analysis', *Journal of Political Economy*, 70:5 Part 2 (1962), 4-49 (p.41)

³⁰⁹ Michael H. Goldhaber, 'The Attention Economy and the Net', *First Monday* 2:4 (1997), <<http://firstmonday.org/article/view/519/440>> [accessed 27 August 2015]

Chillingly, the contract entitled Holmes to ‘temporary use of [Keeble’s] body’ in the event of his death, presumably as a short-term, grisly introduction to Holmes’ Captain Keeble display. Though his body was not recovered, Keeble’s jump provided a concentration of affect that transferred to his belongings and, subsequently, to an unknown number of related commodities. He underwent a process of abstraction, to the point that it no longer mattered whether he was living or dead. He was separated into constituent parts, which did not require the whole except in the form of a concept. Rather than becoming an entrepreneur, Keeble became a victim in a sacrifice, a person expended in the workings of industrialised entertainment, while attempting to embody its entrepreneurial logic. Keeble became a kind of scapegoat, who could be dismissed as deluded, suicidal and work shy, a crank who jumped for an idle life. In a term that came into use in slang in the first few years of the twentieth century in the United States to mean ‘easy victim’ or ‘one who ‘takes the rap’ for others’, Keeble became a ‘fall guy’.³¹⁰

The phrase ‘fall guy’ would shortly be used to describe a stunt performer in the film industry, and it appeared in a comic vaudeville sketch about cinema production by Aaron Hoffman, written in New York in 1914. In ‘Falling For Her’, a young movie actress, Vita, approaches a man on the street, Wuz, who’s out of work, and asks him to appear in her feature film, explaining, ‘There’s one scene in which we can’t use the leading man [...] we must get someone to substitute for him [...] we need a dummy to take his place.’³¹¹ When Wuz understands the job is to fly up in a plane over the Atlantic to a height of 17,000 feet and drop into the sea, he replies: ‘You want me to be the ‘fall’ guy?’³¹² The sketch’s extended joke hinges on a double meaning of dummy as effigy/idiot, and a notion of opportunity (precarity’s promise) in which risk and reward have collapsed into one another:

Vita
Think man, it’s the one opportunity of your life.
Wuz
After that I’ll never have another.
Vita
Think of it, it’s a chance for a monument–
Wuz
On my grave.

³¹⁰ "fall, n.1." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2015. Web. 2 December 2015.

³¹¹ Aaron Hoffman, ‘Falling For Her: A Dialogue by Aaron Hoffman’, New York, copyright 23 June 1914, p.22

³¹² Hoffman, p.23

Vita
No, in the Hall of Fame.³¹³

Vita (life) offers Wuz (has been/done for) an opportunity according to which, 'You don't win. Nobody expects you to win. I don't want you to win. Don't even try to win.'³¹⁴ Conflating the two possible outcomes of a bridge jump, public renown and death, Wuz is presented with 'a great chance to show the people what [he] is [...] A dummy!'³¹⁵ An imperative, causal relationship is constructed between Wuz's death and the creation and marketing of the film: 'you must get killed so the picture will sell,' Vita tells him, 'we've advertised it — you must get killed'.³¹⁶ The language and logic of sacrifice are thus interlaced with the entertainment economy through the mechanism of image production, which abstracts and commodifies Wuz's life and death — a process he encounters with a wary familiarity a person might bring to an old joke (a joke on them). Like Keeble, 'fall guy' Wuz must endure a thoroughgoing exploitation of any and all aspects of his person, including his body, dead or alive.

7. The real abstraction

Keeble's jump has important implications for my question, how do stunts enact value? The *World's* outraged tone in its coverage of Keeble springs from two ideas about exchange: that monetary value is a reflection of *intrinsic* value, and that exchange should entail equivalence. By these standards, Keeble's contract was an obscene anomaly. Such views, however, attribute to exchange value a necessary moral, utilitarian or logical aspect.

This view was of course challenged by Marx, who drew distinctions between use value (utility) and exchange value (exchange ratio with other commodities).³¹⁷ Subsequent Marxist theorists have developed Marx's thinking on value, including mid-twentieth-century economist and philosopher, Alfred Sohn-Rethel. In the 1920s and '30s, Sohn-Rethel was loosely associated with the

³¹³ Hoffman, p.11-12

³¹⁴ Hoffman, p.26

³¹⁵ Hoffman, p.31

³¹⁶ Hoffman, p.26-7

³¹⁷ Suzanne de Brunhoff, *Marx on Money*, trans. by Maurice J. Goldbloom, rev edn (London and New York: Verso, 2015), p.27. Originally published as *La Monnaie Chez Marx* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1967).

Frankfurt School, and connected with various socialist and communist movements. Near the end of his life, Sohn-Rethel amassed his theories in *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*. In this, his major work, Sohn-Rethel argues that value has ‘no thought content of its own, no definable logical substance’.³¹⁸ He recalls that Marx posited no inherent relation between value and labour. While Simmel argued that value was a ‘primary phenomenon’, even if the question of what it was was ‘unanswerable’, Sohn-Rethel defines value as a concept of equivalence that allows for exchange to take place.³¹⁹ For Sohn-Rethel, it is best understood as a ‘value abstraction’, a mode of social action that facilitates exchange.³²⁰ Part of what happened when Keeble jumped, then, was that he entered into an exchange, as both subject and object. The contract and the jump were twin events in Keeble’s becoming capital and commodity.

While it is abstract, Sohn-Rethel argues, value is not all in the mind. Keeble’s experience makes abundantly clear that the abstraction — value — and real actions, such as jumping off a bridge, do not exist in separate, distant realms, but are rather bound together in social life. Sohn-Rethel writes:

[T]he economic concept of value is a real one. It exists nowhere other than in the human mind but it does not spring from it. Rather it is purely social in character, arising in the spatio-temporal sphere of human interrelations. It is not people who originate these abstractions but their actions.³²¹

Keeble’s jump made the social production of abstraction peculiarly visible, because it was carried out through an intensely physical and dangerous action, one that seems anything but abstract.

Sohn-Rethel pursues this contradiction in a concept he calls the ‘real abstraction’. Guided by Marx’s analysis of commodities, Sohn-Rethel interrogates what he calls ‘the exchange abstraction’, and its structural role in social relations and epistemology.³²² Here I’ll focus on Sohn-Rethel’s discussion of money, and through this, his definition of the ‘real abstraction’.

Sohn-Rethel argues that there is an unimpeachable divide between use and exchange in commodity societies. When objects are put forward for exchange, use of them is prohibited or taboo, because while it is on the market, the object must

³¹⁸ Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978), p.49

³¹⁹ Simmel, p.59

³²⁰ Sohn-Rethel, p.8

³²¹ Sohn-Rethel, p.20

³²² Sohn-Rethel, p.6

remain unchanged. Exchange abstracts the object, removing it from its spatio-temporal existence. Sohn-Rethel describes: ‘Time and space assume thereby that character of absolute historical timelessness and universality which must mark the exchange abstraction as a whole’.³²³ Sohn-Rethel argues that exchange itself gives rise to abstraction, just as labour becomes ‘abstract human labour’ when it is bought and sold. Money is the ultimate example of such an abstracted commodity. As the universal exchange, money ‘consists of nothing but form – pure abstract form arising from the disregard of the use-value of the commodities operated by the act of exchange equating the commodities as values’.³²⁴

Importantly, however, both use and exchange happen in a ‘sensual, spatio-temporal reality’; this is precisely why they are ‘mutually exclusive’.³²⁵ Despite the vacuum of exchange, commodities are transported across the world and received in a particular time and place. Money is carried around and passed from hand to hand. Yet there is a radical disjuncture between the material qualities of metal coins, paper notes and digital numbers, and their symbolic role. Money as object is ‘a metaphor of the value abstraction’, an abstraction which only finds full expression in the exchange of one object for another.³²⁶ In summary, exchange creates a totally abstract but, at the same time, completely real mode of social life, and this ‘real abstraction’ assumes representation in money.³²⁷ This oxymoronic condition is also received as a liminal state between life and death. In James Buchan’s words, money has a ‘wandering or frontier reality [...] not wholly living or dead’.³²⁸ Journalist Kate Masterton recognised this when she visited the New York Treasury in 1896: she was initially excited to be in the presence of so much money, which felt like a ‘living thing’, but her wonder soon gave way to anxious desire to escape the ‘tomb-like vault’.³²⁹

Why might the ‘real abstraction’ be a useful way of considering Keeble’s jump, and stunts in general? The ‘real abstraction’ captures a central contradiction in stunt performances: stunts are habitually discussed in terms of a trick, illusion or con, when, in fact, one of their most common characteristics is that they involve

³²³ Sohn-Rethel, p.49

³²⁴ Sohn-Rethel, p.6

³²⁵ Sohn-Rethel, p.28

³²⁶ Sohn-Rethel, p.34

³²⁷ Sohn-Rethel, p.45

³²⁸ James Buchan, *Frozen Desire: The Meaning of Money* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), p.269

³²⁹ Kate Masterton, ‘\$300,000,000 Gold All Under One Roof’, *Sunday Journal*, 23 February 1896, p.18

people *really* undertaking often *really* dangerous feats. Spectators seem to experience stunts as abstract from the physical feat before them. In bridge jumping, this often took the form of suspicion about whether or not a jump or death had really happened, as in the assumption that Patch's death was a hoax and the *Sun's* coverage of Keeble — 'Did He Really Jump the Bridge?' Steve Brodie's jumps were put into question after a weighted effigy was sent down in Brodie's place in a promised jump over Niagara Falls, causing a rumour that all of his jumps had been performed by a 'dummy'.³³⁰ Part of what was produced by the stunt was an enduring sense of multiple possibilities, of reality concealed or disrupted. The disruption relates to Frances Harding's conceptualisation of a stunt as a 'double illusion' in which the apparently impossible is invoked and then performed.³³¹ This combination of illusion and actuality made stunts an apt expression of the contradictions of the 'real abstraction'. Stunt performances revealed in a troubling way the abstract and contingent nature of exchange value, and this was partly experienced as a disruption of reality. Simmel recognised an affinity between value and reality when he described both as endlessly deferred:

As a rule, we are able to state why we assume the reality of a particular phenomenon; namely, because we have already assumed another phenomenon with which this one is connected by its specific characteristics. The reality of the first one, however, can be shown only by tracing it in similar fashion to a more fundamental one. This regression requires a final member whose existence depends only upon a sense of conviction, affirmation and acceptance, a sense that is directly given. Valuation has exactly the same relation to objects. [...] what we consider a proof of value is only the transference of an existing value to a new object.³³²

Stunts disrupted ideas about value by engaging in apparently pointless forms of labour, absurd equivalences and appallingly unequal exchanges, and yet, in terms of the economy, functioning as soundly as rational, equal exchanges of useful products. In Marx's terms, they demonstrated the 'irrational' and 'absurd form' intrinsic to capitalism, whereby social relations are construed as relations between material objects, hence people are objectified and objects reified.³³³ They are

³³⁰ Smith, 'The adventures of a bridge jumper', p.30

³³¹ Frances Harding, 'Presenting and Re-Presenting the Self: From not-acting to acting in African performance' in *The Performance Studies Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by Henry Bial (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp.231-248, p.206

³³² Simmel, p.58

³³³ Marx, *Capital*, I, p.169; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by David Fernbach, 3 vols (London: Penguin Books, 1992), III, p.516. Originally published as *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Oekonomie* (Hamburg: Meissner, 1894), III, *Der Gesamtprozess der kapitalistischen Produktion*.

examples of an economy of excess and an industrial economy operating within one another. Stunts performed the ‘real abstraction’ by staging a confrontation between money and bodies, which appeared anomalous, but actually demonstrated the total lack of differentiation that value involves — a radical commensurability in which you can exchange money for life after all.

To understand the political and economic contexts of Keeble’s self exchange, I’ll now turn to the complex contemporary events regarding money and labour, and a popular protest movement in which Keeble participated.

8. The currency problem

Keeble had attained his title, Captain, not from military service, but from a major protest march that took place in 1894.³³⁴ Like his tattoos, Keeble had adopted this experience as an aspect of his identity, a persona he prepared for public consumption. One of Keeble’s medals also came from this march, *The Sun* reported, and read: ‘Cap. W. C. Keeble, Kelly’s [sic] Indust’l Army. Cal. To Washington 1893 [sic].’³³⁵ The protest march was a response to a deep recession of 1893, prompted by the collapse of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad company, which led to stock market falls, banks calling in loans and the collapse of other railway firms. Such recessions occurred roughly every decade in the late nineteenth century. Each time, large numbers of workers were laid off and others had to work for reduced wages. People had very little capacity to absorb such instability of income; even when the economy flourished, many earned a subsistence wage for working ten or twelve-hour days, six days a week.³³⁶ The 1893 Panic (as it was termed) was particularly severe: by the end of 1893, 20 per cent of the working population were unemployed, and despite relief efforts by trade unions, religious and social organisations and newspapers, many were in dire need. The *World* ran a campaign to buy bread for New York’s poorest citizens during the winter and sent its star journalist Nellie Bly (the subject of chapter 3) into the city to report on their

³³⁴ Anon., ‘Bridge Jumper Killed’, *The World*, Monday 5 July 1897, p.1 and 2

³³⁵ Anon., ‘Did He Really Jump the Bridge?’, *Sun*, 5 July 1897, p.1

³³⁶ Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 10 vols, 2nd edn (New York: International Publishers, 1975), II, p.19

suffering.³³⁷ Steve Brodie also engaged in generous and conspicuous acts of charity, distributing handbills throughout the Bowery advertising a free dinner to all comers.³³⁸

The 'Industrial Army', as it became known, was a collection of unemployed men. Under the leadership of Frank Coxey, they joined together to march to the Capitol in Washington D.C. to demand that the government provide work. Their organisation took on many of the conventions and structures of the military. 'Coxey's Army' wanted the government to introduce infrastructure projects to improve roads and bridges, and — crucially — to pay people for the work in fiat paper currency. They maintained that the government had a duty to uphold workers' ability to make a living from their labour, even when the economy could not. Their act was particularly politically potent because one of the terrible aspects of unemployment was the threat of being prosecuted for vagrancy if you travelled to seek work (a form of sanctioned scapegoating). Vagrancy laws were vague, enabling law enforcers to harass and arrest people who had not committed crimes.³³⁹ One protestor recorded that his main motivation was to band together with others to protect himself from such persecution.³⁴⁰

Before I explain more about this political action, it's important to clarify the currency debate, and its implications for thinking about value during this period. This apparently technical issue was the burning political problem of the era, a vital question in determining the future of the nation. The key questions were: what should constitute currency and, relatedly, how should currency attain its value?

During the Civil War the Unionists created a National Banking System, which released unbacked paper currency, or greenbacks. Immediately before the Civil War, America had operated on an unofficial gold standard, whereby state banks would exchange circulating bank notes for gold. When war costs made this unfeasible and reserves ran low, the federal government abandoned the specie-based system, on the assumption that it would be adopted again when the war was over. By the 1870s, as Gretchen Ritter writes, there were several kinds of currency

³³⁷ Anon., '14,017 Loaves!', *World*, 14 January 1894, p.1; Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Bly Among the Starving', *World*, 14 January 1894, p.29).

³³⁸ Anon., 'Evolution of a Genius', *Washington Standard* (Olympia, WA) 9 October 1896, p.1

³³⁹ Anon., 'A Tramp's Travels', *The World*, Sunday 23 June 1889, p.21; Charmian London, *Jack London* (London: Mills & Boon, 1921), p.183

³⁴⁰ 'Diary of the March,' *Chicago Record*, 20 April 1894, *Coxey's Army: Scrapbook*, 1:77, quoted in Benjamin F. Alexander, *Coxey's Army: Popular Protest in the Gilded Age* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2015), p.95

in operation: 'gold and silver coins, currency notes from both national and state banks, gold and silver certificates, and various interest and noninterest-bearing Treasury notes, including greenbacks.'³⁴¹ Moves were made to return to a gold-based currency, and reintroduce a dependant relationship between paper money and gold bullion (rather than bonds). Silver was demonetized in the 1873 Coinage Act, and the gold standard officially reinstated in 1879. (Silver was still used as fractional coin, but the silver dollar would no longer be minted.) The demonetization of silver was controversial, partly because Article One of the Constitution stipulated that both metals were valid currency.

Under the gold standard, a US dollar was consistently worth 25.8 grams of gold, tying America into an international system of exchange. James Buchan explains:

If a country bought more goods from abroad than it sold, [...] it was obliged to ship gold abroad to extinguish the debt that had arisen. Its money would contract with its gold, bringing about a depression in trade, causing imports to fall and consumption to be deferred or stifled. As that happened, it shipped less gold abroad.

The main effect of the gold standard was 'a slight but continuous depression in the price of goods in money [...], entrenching the lending class.'³⁴² Because it imported more than it exported, America was persistently plagued by lack of money, particularly in the West and South, where banks were few and interest rates high. The resumption of a gold standard exacerbated the money shortage, creating a strong political call for 'soft' money.³⁴³

The money debate was a longstanding one, and many people were highly engaged in its terms, not least because of its painful impact on their lives. 'Hundreds of books and pamphlets were released in the argument over the nature of money and its role in regulating relations between classes and sections,' Ritter writes.³⁴⁴ Before the 1890s, the money question had given rise to a Greenback Party — a small, third party in a system dominated by Democrats and Republicans. In the late 1880s and 1890s, another new party arose out of farming organisations and labour unions, the People's, or Populist, Party. The Populists gathered such momentum that the Democrat Party unexpectedly elected a Populist to run as its

³⁴¹ Gretchen Ritter, *Goldbugs And Greenbacks: The Anti-Monopoly Tradition and the Politics of Finance in America, 1865 to 1896* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1997), p.88

³⁴² Buchan, p.163-4

³⁴³ C.M. Stevens, *Silver vs. Gold: Free Silver and the People: A Campaign Handbook for the Struggling Millions Against the Gold-Hoarding Millionaires* (New York: F. Tennyson Neely, 1896), p.69

³⁴⁴ Ritter, p.1

presidential candidate in 1896. Having previously maintained a bipartisan support for the gold standard, the two major national parties organised themselves along currency lines in the 1896 election. The race between Democrat/Populist candidate, William Jennings Bryan, and Republican nominee, William McKinley, was a battle between bimetallism, also known as ‘free silver’ — the idea that gold and silver should *both* function as a standard — and ‘sound money’ — the gold standard.

The currency debate meant that those who supported gold, silver and greenbacks were forced to draw and communicate fine but crucial distinctions between substance and representation, or between materiality and abstraction. Sound money campaigners referred to gold bullion’s intrinsic value:

Gold does not derive its value solely by the fiat of the Government that use it as currency. If by common consent [...] every piece was withdrawn from circulation, it would still be wanted and would have a high market value as a beautiful, malleable, incorrodable metal useful for a thousand purposes outside of the currency.³⁴⁵

Ritter situates this view in a nineteenth century tradition, which distinguished between a ‘real’ or ‘natural’ economy, and an ‘unnatural’ or ‘speculative’ economy.³⁴⁶ Gold was useful, beautiful, good; it encapsulated intrinsic value in a tangible form. Supporters of this position derided the dangerous idea that an object might have value merely by its designation.

Supporters of greenbacks occupied the most radical position, which Ritter calls ‘a dramatic innovation in beliefs about how money obtained its value’ that prefigured mid-twentieth-century conceptions of money.³⁴⁷ They argued that the value of metals as commodities disrupted their monetary function. Labour reformer William Greene wrote, ‘money, so far forth as it is mere money, ought to have NO VALUE’ and its function should be purely representative.³⁴⁸ Despite, or perhaps because of, this sophisticated position, they met with little political success. It was a silver proponent, rather than a greenback one, who made it to the political centre stage when the 1893 recession caused the currency debate to return with new momentum.

Silver had the advantage of appeasing those on both sides of the argument.

³⁴⁵ John Jay Knox, ‘Three Pecks to a Bushel’, *The Chamber of Commerce of New York, Upon Free Silver Coinage*, from *The Journal of Commerce*, 16 January 1891, p.7

³⁴⁶ Ritter, p.76

³⁴⁷ Ritter, p.76

³⁴⁸ William Greene, *Mutual Banking*, quoted in Ritter, p.17 and 46

Ritter calls it a 'monetary half-breed'; it had the soothing tangibility of bullion, but also acknowledged the arbitrary nature of value.³⁴⁹ At times, this led to confusing rhetoric, which attempted to appeal to money as representation and money as intrinsic value simultaneously. In a campaign handbook, Silverite Professor James Ridpath argued that all American currency was based upon the silver denomination. Thus the 'eagle of the original statute' was not 'made to be ten dollars, but to be *of the value* of ten dollars [...]. Even the gold dollar of 1849, mirabile dictu! was *not* a dollar, but was made to be of *the value* of the dollar!' The dollar, Ridpath concluded, 'was of silver only.'³⁵⁰ Attacking the notion that a gold dollar was an 'honest dollar', Ridpath depicted gold as the 'treacherous metal'; its role as standard enabled it to 'conceal its fallacy', 'the lie that was in it', even 'its value'.³⁵¹ The discourse of surface and depth, concealment and revelation, assumed the 'real value' that it aimed to discredit. The same publication, however, quotes Bryan's speeches in which he explained that neither monometallism nor bimetalism could offer an 'absolutely just standard of value.'³⁵² And W.K. Carr argued, 'value is a mental conception, a ratio, and is *extrinsic* instead of *intrinsic* [...] 'intrinsic value' is an absurdity.'³⁵³

Bryan argued that the solution to the gold shortage was to reintroduce silver as a joint standard. Campaigners called for the free coinage of silver at a ratio of 16 to 1, fixing the value of silver at 1/16 that of gold. Free Silverites argued that the readoption of silver as currency would restore its former market position, depleted by the Coinage Act. More money in circulation would prevent the long-term deflation caused by currency shortage. It would increase prices and enable farmers, who were persistently forced into debt by the agricultural cycle and the expense of distributing goods by train, to pay back what they owed. Those of the opposing view argued that the value of the dollar would deplete and debts would be repaid in inferior currency.

Free Silverites positioned themselves as nationalists, invoking a Revolutionary tradition. They declared, 'monometallism is a British policy and its adoption has brought other nations into financial servitude to London.' The gold

³⁴⁹ Ritter, p.76

³⁵⁰ *Silver vs. Gold*, p.95

³⁵¹ *Silver vs. Gold*, p.97-8

³⁵² *Silver vs. Gold*, p.223

³⁵³ *Silver vs. Gold*, p.130-131

standard was ‘not only un-American but anti-American’.³⁵⁴ Silver served as shorthand for several connected political positions. As James A. Barnes argues, silver was ‘but a symbol’ for reform, taxation, anti-trust and anti-monopoly legislation and governance for the mass of people.³⁵⁵ The Democrat campaign of 1896 pitted itself against the financial elite of Wall Street and London: ‘Will the toiling masses of this Republic continue forever like dumb unreasoning brutes in the harness of the usurers whose grasp on gold is the grasp of enslavement on the throat of humanity?’ Bryan asked.³⁵⁶

The currency debate educated people about the fluctuating status of money according to its availability, spawning new understandings of money’s properties and function. For America to prosper, people realised, money had to *perform*. Systems of money were not neutral, but rather tools for social organisation and change. In Marx’s phrase, money was a ‘social relation’.³⁵⁷ The ceaseless discussion of value drew attention to the role of the public in creating and stabilising the economy. During the 1893 recession, financier E.C. Benedict gave his opinion on the causes of the depression to the *Evening World*. The problem was ‘distrust’ and ‘lack of confidence’, Benedict maintained, caused in part by the press: ‘newspapers have much responsibility resting upon them for their part in developing the bad frame of the public mind.’³⁵⁸ Benedict’s remarks emphasised that value was designated not only through law and the actions of government, but also by the actions and beliefs of people, guided by the media. It was not enough that banks or Wall Street played their part — everyone had to participate in the economy in a manner that expressed their faith in its operation. That is to say, everyone performed the economy. Amid bank runs and currency hoarding, this seemed a worryingly unstable base.

Benedict described his amazement at the counterintuitive attribution of value in the currency market. In what he called ‘the greatest object lesson of these strange times’, Benedict had that day witnessed traders valuing paper money above gold. He remarked:

Would any one believe such an extraordinary condition could prevail? Paper money, greenbacks, shin-plasters, the ridiculed money of a few years ago, with

³⁵⁴ *Silver vs. Gold*, p.44

³⁵⁵ James A. Barnes, ‘Myths of the Bryan Campaign’, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 34:3 (1947), 367-404 (p.369)

³⁵⁶ *Silver vs. Gold*, p.13

³⁵⁷ Marx, *Capital*, I, p.168

³⁵⁸ Anon., ‘Money Madness’, *Evening World: Extra 2 o’clock*, 8 August 1893, page number illegible.

nothing behind them but the credit of the Government, are actually more highly valued to-day in New York than gold coin! Will not this strange fact, this startling condition awaken many thoughts, give birth to important reflections?'³⁵⁹

I contend that the naming and recognition of stunts were a reflection of precisely this condition: awareness of abstraction's manifestation in material reality, the socially determined nature of value, and a resultant destabilisation of value principles. Such destabilisation was not limited to money — as I'll explore in the upcoming chapters, the late nineteenth-century crisis of value also related to women's increased participation in productive labour, immigration, and awareness of, and anxiety about, mediation in political life.

In the 1896 election, two sources of anxiety combined: the vexed relationship between currency and value, and the increasingly mediated role that franchised citizens could play in representative democracy. Bryan's campaigning tactics sought to invoke physical immediacy between citizens and representatives. Many were concerned that such direct connection was a thing of the past. An editorial by Pulitzer a few years later described 'Presidential hand-shakings free to all comers' as a sentimental old custom (responding to security fears following the assassinations of two presidents in 20 years).³⁶⁰ Bryan's campaign sought to reinvigorate such customs of face-to-face contact, foregrounding his bodily presence through a series of physical feats.

Bryan's campaigning style was consistently theatrical, relying on spectacular displays of oratory which earned him the nickname 'the Boy Orator'.³⁶¹ He embarked on an exhausting tour across the nation. David Anderson writes that Bryan travelled 'more than 18,000 miles by train, thus inventing the whistlestop while giving almost three thousand speeches during the course of dozens of days of eighteen hours of campaigning.'³⁶² Even the *World*, which did not support Bryan's campaign, recognised that Bryan had 'broken all records for speechmaking and all round hard work in a Presidential canvas.'³⁶³ Part of Bryan's public persona, then, was expressed in feats of seemingly inexhaustible energy and virtuosity. These feats emphasised Bryan's bodily presence, repeatedly performing

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁰ Joseph Pulitzer, 'The Prevention of Assassination', *World*, 8 September 1901, p.4

³⁶¹ David D. Anderson, *William Jennings Bryan* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), p.80; Anon., 'Bryan One Day Nearer: The Boy Orator Reaches Pittsburgh on His Trip', *Sun*, 11 August 1896, p.1

³⁶² Anderson, p.89

³⁶³ Anon., 'Bryan As Lawyer', *World*, 11 April 1897, p.31

an unmediated connection between himself and his audiences — apt for a candidate who sought a new era of governance in the interests of a mass of people.

This tactic was marked in relation to his opponent, William McKinley, who adopted a new technology to spread his message: cinema. McKinley was the first President to appear on film, and the first to make use of film as a campaigning tool. *McKinley At Home*, a re-enactment of him hearing of his Republican nomination, premiered on 12 October 1896 as part of a programme of vaudeville and actuality views in Hammerstein's Olympia, New York.³⁶⁴ It was among the earliest films to be viewed collectively rather than through individual viewing machines, and it successfully associated McKinley with the excitement of this developing technology. While Bryan's performance of democracy privileged shared vibrations and personal presence, McKinley's, in Jonathan's Auerbach's words, 'paved the way for a new style of modern presidential campaigning' that depended on the 'power of abstracted images disseminated by film technology.' Relying on collective, intimate engagement with moving images, McKinley's campaign team replaced face-to-face contact with an affective, cinematic experience: 'Only by being absent from the campaign trail could McKinley could be at once at home and before the nation.'³⁶⁵

It is tempting, then, to view the 1896 campaign as a battle between McKinley's virtual presence in the image, and the actual presence of Bryan's speaking body: between mediatisation and liveness. Yet this is perhaps too simple, because Bryan's live feats also constructed a public persona that required and inspired media coverage and the distribution of his image. It is in this nexus between actual bodily presence and media construction that stunts emerged, and they involved a complex intersection of modernity and nostalgia, spawned by anxiety about aspects of modernity. Bryan's acts seemed to assuage concerns about mediation and the abstracted and arbitrary nature of value by rooting value in his own present, working body, yet his acts also demonstrated that a live body could be mediated, in a manner that belied Bryan's appeals to authentic co-presence.

The first use of the word 'stunt' in the *World* in fact relates to Bryan's campaign. 'Stunt' appeared in an 1897 cartoon entitled 'PUBLIC FIGURES ARE

³⁶⁴ Kemp R. Niver, *Biography Bulletins 1896-1908* (Los Angeles: Locare Research Group, 1971), p.12

³⁶⁵ Jonathan Auerbach, *Body Shots: Early Cinema's Incarnations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p.21

TURNING TO ATHLETICS' and featuring well-known politicians and officials in the throes of sport.³⁶⁶ The caption reads: 'BRYAN STARTED THE FAD BY DOING INCREDIBLE STUNTS IN SWIMMING, JUMPING AND RUNNING,' and explains that many have imitated him. The cartoon suggests that such stunts had been recognised as a political technique, and adopted into political life. It also transfers those live, working bodies into mass-produced, circulating images, almost as efficiently as film.

9. The Industrial Army

The Industrial Army, which gave Keeble his title, shared some of Bryan's tactics. Its members traversed the nation, undertook a challenging physical task, and demanded direct, unmediated contact with their representatives. The leaders also shared some of Bryan's political positions. Frank Coxey had been a member of the Greenback Party and more recently, a prominent member of the Ohio Populist Party. In 1892, the Populist convention supported government ownership of utilities, the expansion of silver currency and an end to land speculation.³⁶⁷ More broadly, the Populists expressed growing dissatisfaction with laissez-faire capitalism, which had entrenched the exploitation of a majority of farmers and labourers, while creating a rich industrial and financial elite.

As a Populist, Coxey was against what was termed 'money power', and in favour of government intervention to ensure a fairer situation for labourers. On this basis, he suggested a specific financial mechanism. Coxey reasoned that it was customary for the federal government to sell interest-bearing bonds to finance its operations. Ultimately these bonds benefited the national banks, which stood to regain their investment with interest. Instead, Coxey suggested, state and local governments should have the ability to issue *non-interest bearing bonds*, which the federal government would buy with printed fiat money. Effectively, the federal government would loan local governing bodies fiat money, which they would pay off, interest free, over 25 years, with fiat money. With those loans, state and local

³⁶⁶ Anon., 'PUBLIC FIGURES ARE TURNING TO ATHLETICS', *World*, 18 July 1897, Cartoon Supplement. The cartoonist's signature is not visible. It could have been cartoonist George Luks, hired by Pulitzer in 1896, or one of two longstanding staff cartoonists, Walt McDougall and Valerian Gribayedoff.

³⁶⁷ Alexander, p.42

governments would employ some of the many people without work to improve roads and infrastructure.³⁶⁸ \$500 million of paper money would be put into circulation in this way, creating work and alleviating the currency shortage. The American Federation of Labor (which overtook the Knights of Labor as the dominant labour union in the 1890s) pledged their support for Coxe's policy in 1893.

Coxe's idea was extremely radical. The received view was that the federal government should take no role in supporting people. In 1887, President Grover Cleveland had rejected a call to offer minimal financial support to Texan farmers, who had suffered an extreme drought. Cleveland maintained the widely supported view that: 'though the people support the Government, the Government should not support the people.'³⁶⁹ A similarly hard-line approach was adopted towards striking workers. 1894 saw major strikes by the Pullman Railroad workers and coal miners. As outlined in the introduction, strikes were commonly tackled by hiring private militias (known as the Pinkerton National Detective Agency or the Pinkerton) or bringing in the National Guard, in order to protect strike breakers (who were often recent immigrants, African Americans and/or women, excluded from employment, skilled work and union membership). Such tense situations led to serious violence. In July 1892, for example, at Henry Clay Frick's steel works in Homestead, Pennsylvania, there was an armed battle between strikers and militia, killing several on both sides and injuring many (anarchists Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman attempted to assassinate Frick later that month).³⁷⁰ Channelling a widespread sense of injustice at acts of war being employed to maintain industrial exploitation, Populist policies put forward a new understanding of government's role, which anticipated popular views in the Progressive Era.

Coxe decided to draw attention to his policy by organising a march, leaving Ohio on Easter Sunday of 1894 and arriving in Washington on May Day. He partnered with a fellow Populist, Carl Browne, who was involved in a type of spiritualism called Theosophy (Browne believed that both he and Coxe were aspects of Christ reincarnated). The group was therefore called the 'Commonwealth of Christ'. Historian Benjamin F. Alexander has traced their movements and

³⁶⁸ Alexander, p.3

³⁶⁹ Anon., 'The Texas Seed Bill Vetoed', *Los Angeles Times* (CA), 17 February 1887, p.1

³⁷⁰ Foner, p.209-13

politics in his 2015 study *Coxey's Army: Popular Protest in the Gilded Age*. As the marchers left the town, they carried with them banners decorated with their slogan: 'Peace on earth; good will towards men, but death to interest on bonds'.³⁷¹ Despite this, and Coxey's protestations, newspapers began referring to them as 'Coxey's Army' and to Coxey as 'General Coxey' because of their military-style organisation.³⁷² This embodied metaphor resonated with strikers' battles with employers as well as unemployed workers' position as the standing army of the nation's industries. Marx described the creation of an 'Industrial Reserve Army' as an intrinsic part of capitalist production, and argued that because of this, co-operation between employed and unemployed working class people was particularly politically potent.³⁷³

The Commonweal was inclusive in its conception. Members were led out by one of a small number of African-American marchers, Jasper Johnson, who bore the flag.³⁷⁴ In addition, Coxey's group was not concerned with divisions between skilled and unskilled labourers, setting them apart from the union, the American Federation of Labor.³⁷⁵ This perhaps marked the dwindling importance of these categories if both types of people found themselves unemployed. Women also joined the group, although this was sometimes contentious. Another major supporter was the cycling body, the League of American Wheelmen, which advocated Coxey's plan to improve roads.

Around a hundred protestors made the complete march. Coxey's action inspired others to organise, and more groups began marching from different areas of the country. The largest, at perhaps as many as 1,500 participants — including the bridge jumper, Keeble — was Charles Kelley's, which started out from San Francisco. Kelley was a labour organiser from New England. Alexander writes that Kelley's group were strictly organised, with a working camp hospital and court-martials for anybody found drunk.³⁷⁶ Rather than following Theosophy, they held Protestant services. Groups from the west coast stood no chance of covering such a long distance by foot, and so some stole trains in order to reach Washington. Kelley

³⁷¹ Alexander, p.2

³⁷² Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, II, p.242

³⁷³ Marx, *Capital*, I, p.781 and 793

³⁷⁴ Alexander, p.49

³⁷⁵ A sociologist from Johns Hopkins University who visited 'Coxey's Army' reported that the men were mainly unskilled workers. Kelley's army was visited by students of Drake University while camped for a week in Des Moines, Iowa. Their survey found 763 men, of whom 425 claimed to be skilled labourers, with the majority working in mining (Alexander, p.94).

³⁷⁶ Alexander, p.83

refused to do so, and amazingly, his group reached the city because they built 140 boats and sailed there along the Iowa River.³⁷⁷ Such extensive effort and ingenuity in the interests of protest was perceived as a threat, as I'll describe below.

As well as resembling an army, Coxe's protestors bore comparison with a circus: they were a travelling band including horses, wagons, banners and tents, with an interest in attracting attention. Initially, Coxe rejected any association with entertainment, and threw out three members of his group, including Johnson, who accepted an invitation to appear in a dime museum.³⁷⁸ By the end of the journey, however, the protestors were charging an entry fee to their tent to raise money for the Commonweal. In a biography of popular writer and traveller Jack London, Charmian London records that en route, Kelley's army entertained locals and 'gave them better vaudeville than they'd often had, for there was good talent left in some of the decayed artists of the army.'³⁷⁹ The campsites continued to be framed as an attraction in Washington, with one journalist commenting, 'Visitors are not numerous and gate receipts continue light. Even as a dim freak attraction the Coxe army appears to have lost its interest and drawing power'.³⁸⁰ Their circus-style economy was used against them in a later trial, when a District Attorney accused Browne of being a 'fakir' who displayed himself 'to the curious multitude at 10 cents a head.'³⁸¹ Such views repeat the schism of valorisation that Johnson expressed in his variant attitudes towards Patch's protests and commercial leaps, but in this case, both were happening at the same time.

Attitudes towards the protestors varied widely. Some newspapers derided them as 'tramps, cranks, scoundrels and a few honest but misguided persons' engaged in a 'wild and impracticable exploit', which represented a 'menacing tendency to disorder and anarchy'.³⁸² Other observers expressed a belief in the non-interference of government despite the strictures of the economic depression, invoking a lost masculinity bound up with financial independence and nationhood: 'There was a time when every American citizen was proud to achieve success by his own exertion, and neither asked nor expected assistance from the

³⁷⁷ Alexander, p.87

³⁷⁸ Anon., 'Coxey's Freaks', *Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 4 April 1894, Evening edition, p.1

³⁷⁹ London, p.159

³⁸⁰ Anon., 'To-Day's Telegraphic News', *Alexandria Gazette and Virginia Advertiser* (Alexandria, D.C.) 15 May 1894, p.1

³⁸¹ Alexander, p.102

³⁸² Anon., 'The Observatory', *Courier* (Lincoln, NE), 21 April 1894, p.1

government'.³⁸³ Others sympathised with the unemployed protestors, describing them as 'honest, sober, industrious, LOYAL men, whose only crime is that they are poor and without work'.³⁸⁴ The army was 'going to the nation's capital to ask of their SERVANTS, the law-makers, simple JUSTICE'.³⁸⁵ They were, supporters emphasised, 'unarmed', a 'peace army', and though 'vagabonds and tramps', they were 'nonetheless representative in character'.³⁸⁶ The protestors received a particularly warm welcome when passing through the sites of past labour disputes, where tens of thousands of people gathered to watch them process: 'Never in this history of Pittsburgh was such an ovation given to a human being as to Coxe and Carl Browne and their followers'.³⁸⁷

Tension mounted as the protestors approached their destination: 'What shall be done with Coxe's army when it eventually reaches Washington?'³⁸⁸ There were fears of enormous numbers of people amassing on the town, with further 'reinforcements [...] on the march'.³⁸⁹ The response from the House of Representatives and Senate was twofold: dismissal and containment. A Senate Committee met on 20 April and decided that the 'whole matter should be left to the Sergeant-at-Arms, who is the custodian of the building'.³⁹⁰ In this way, they framed the protest as a spatial problem, rather than a political or social one, echoing the tendency of vagrancy prosecutions.

The marchers' final leg was a grand parade through the city, led by Coxe's daughter Mamie, dressed as a Goddess of Peace and riding what the *Evening World* described as 'a prancing circus steed'.³⁹¹ Coxe followed in a carriage with his wife, Henrietta and infant son, whom the Coxes had named Legal Tender. Six hundred marchers followed, and spectators lined the route. Coxe was poised to deliver a speech on the steps of the Capitol.

³⁸³ 'K.', 'Coxe's Army and Paternalism', *Alexandria Gazette* (Alexandria, D.C.), 21 April 1894, p.1

³⁸⁴ Anon., 'The Industrial Army', *Kansas Agitator* (Garnett, KS), 26 April, 1894, p.1

³⁸⁵ Anon., 'The Industrial Army', *Kansas Agitator* (Garnett, KS), 26 April, 1894, p.1

³⁸⁶ Anon., 'Coxe's Peace Army', *Kansas Agitator* (Garnett, KS), 22 March 1894, p.1

³⁸⁷ Anon., 'Growing Strong', *Advocate* (Topeka, KS), 11 April 1894, p.1

³⁸⁸ Anon., 'The Observatory', *Courier* (Lincoln, NE), 21 April 1894, p.1

³⁸⁹ Anon., 'Coxe and Congress', *People's Voice* (Wellington, KS), 4 May 1894, p.1

³⁹⁰ Anon., 'Coxe's Commonwealers', *Alexandria Gazette* (Alexandria, D.C.), 21 April 1894, p.1

³⁹¹ Anon., 'Gen.' Coxe Suppressed', *Evening World*, 1 May 1894, Evening edition, p.7

10. Occupy Washington

The Commonweal protests sprang from the intense precarity of people's working lives. Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that they came to resemble the far more recent Occupy protests. Both movements were spurred by economic recession and unemployment, protested the disparity between the majority and an elite, and focussed on the power of high finance. The Commonweal's anti-Wall Street sentiment found its strongest expression in a small contingent led by Carl Browne, who walked to Wall Street to protest there (and was arrested).³⁹² The protests also shared some of the same rhetoric. Coxe later appeared before a House Labor Committee, which was discussing a resolution to appoint a committee to investigate the causes of the financial crisis. Coxe explained that the national bankers, '1 per cent of the people', had the power to issue money, and he wanted the remaining '99 per cent' to have the same privilege. A Democrat Representative questioned Coxe about what authority enabled him to 'represent 99 per cent of the people', to which Coxe replied that he did not exactly claim to represent them, but he did know that they were misrepresented in Congress.³⁹³

The Commonweal protestors also faced the same problem that Sophie Nield describes as an impetus for the Occupy protests: they were engaged in a 'politics of legibility' in which claim-makers must express their demands through 'symbolic or spectacular means'. As a result, it was possible for authorities to 'regulate protest by simply reducing access to public space and impeding the capacity of anyone to stage any claim in the accepted format'.³⁹⁴ As the marchers approached their destination, the metropolitan police prepared to use an 1882 law to prevent them from protesting in the Capitol grounds. This law forbade oratory, parading, assembling or displaying banners designed to 'bring into public notice any party, organization or movement' in the area (it was declared unconstitutional in 1972, although as Nield points out, spatial limitation of protest has recently resurged).³⁹⁵ Browne advised his followers that in order to avoid falling foul of the law, they had

³⁹² Anon., 'Carl Browne Arrested', *World*, 20 October 1894, p.1

³⁹³ Alexander, p.102-3

³⁹⁴ Sophie Nield, 'Tahrir Square, EC4M: the Occupy movement and the dramaturgy of public order' in *The Grammar of Politics and Performance*, ed. by Shirin M. Rai and Janelle Reinelt (Abingdon and New York, 2015), pp.121-133, p.122

³⁹⁵ Alexander, p.68

to ‘disband’ and enter Capitol grounds as ‘individual citizens’.³⁹⁶ To enter the space, then, they had to — apparently, at least — set aside their claim, like protestors made to put down ‘all outward signs of their dissent’ in order to exit a kettle (a police containment area, adopted in the U.K. since the 1990s).³⁹⁷ They also had to — apparently, at least — leave the group, and thereby lose the protective collective of the protest.

As planned, the police stopped Coxe from ascending the Capitol steps. In keeping with the emphasis on spatial control, they did not arrest him, but ‘merely moved him away from the centre of conflict [...] satisfied in having prevented the use of the steps’.³⁹⁸ Browne then rushed towards the steps, and was chased and beaten by police along with a number of other protestors. The police then, according to the *Evening World* reporter, ‘seemed to lose their head’ and fell upon the ‘luckless colored men and women nearest them’ with clubs. It’s not clear whether these people were participants, spectators or passers-by; whatever the case, they became scapegoats for this confrontation between majority white, unemployed labourers and governmental authority (echoing Roediger’s argument that African Americans were at times treated as ‘anticitizens’, not merely extrinsic to, but enemies of, productive labour).³⁹⁹ Two people were arrested, including Browne, and the remaining members retreated to set up a camp nearby. The leaders were charged with carrying banners and trampling the grass, and released on bail. Over the next few weeks, further protestors arrived, joining the camp or creating their own camps elsewhere in the city. It was 1 May. The camps would last until the end of July.

Coxe’s protest differed from Occupy in that it did not resist claim-making — it had a coherent message. However, the duration of the camps did put ‘being there’ before the public in a way that parallels the later movement.⁴⁰⁰ The now stationary marchers’ presence spoke symbolically in a way illuminated by Nield’s conception of theatrical doubling. Nield’s idea hinges on a tension between representation and presence, in a culture in which representation has been curtailed and appears to be taking part in a hegemonic dramaturgy, rather than resisting it. The sense of doubling is produced by the state of being oneself, and at

³⁹⁶ Anon., ‘Gen.’ Coxe Suppressed’, *Evening World*, 1 May 1894, Evening edition, p.7

³⁹⁷ Nield, p.127

³⁹⁸ Anon., ‘Gen.’ Coxe Suppressed’, *Evening World*, 1 May 1894, Evening edition, p.7

³⁹⁹ Roediger, p.57

⁴⁰⁰ Nield, p.133

the same time, representing oneself in public space, and it closely resembles the theatrical presence of actor and character, material body and fictional being. Like the Occupy movement, the Commonweal protestors 'translate[d] themselves into representations of what they actually [were]'. Each member was 'present as a material body which lives, sleeps, and eats in the temporary space of the occupied camp; representing itself simultaneously as political subject and claim-maker'.⁴⁰¹

Such self-doubling was the Commonweal's primary strength. As Coxe admitted, there was no official sense in which they represented ninety-nine per cent of the population, but that was not the point. They only needed to represent themselves, their own existence and needs, to have a political impact. Their need to eat, wash and sleep was in itself their primary message. Labour historian Philip Foner expresses this through a corporeal metaphor: the protestors, he writes, 'thrust before the eyes of the nation the stark and naked fact that there was something basically wrong in the nation'.⁴⁰² Bodies that would rather be working instead put their labour into performing their (in)ability to work: first by marching, and then by living in public space. They took on the task of being seen, and attracting attention to their being. Part of the power of this action was that it was simultaneously productive and wasteful. As in the case of Kelley's army's boat building, it was a tremendous outpouring of energy, which expressed 'I'm so-and-so and I exist!' and invested the statement with political meaning and force.

This form of doubling, in which the protestors doubled themselves to appear in public life, paralleled the celebrity identity adopted by bridge jumpers, in life or in death: Steve Brodie played 'Steve Brodie' in public life, W.C. Keeble became 'Captain Keeble', freak display. This affinity is in keeping with the broad range of roles and bodies that Roach identifies as designated to enact surrogation: 'actors, dancers, priests, street maskers, statesmen, celebrities, freaks, children, and especially, by virtue of an intense but unsurprising paradox, corpses'.⁴⁰³ Both protestors and bridge jumpers put themselves forward as candidates for surrogation, driven by their material needs. In doing so, they put themselves in danger. For the ordinary marchers, the ability to enact theatrical doubling was by no means secure. They were relatively safe in the collective, but highly vulnerable as individuals. The protestors had come together to make the risk they endured

⁴⁰¹ Nield, p.131-2

⁴⁰² Foner, p.243

⁴⁰³ Roach, p.36

visible, but the danger was that such visibility would result in them being burdened or marked with that risk. Whoever stepped into the role of surrogate risked becoming the sacrificial victim.

The summer saw a slow strangulation of the protest, which was gradually reduced from groups representing themselves as unemployed workers to dispersed individuals and small collections of unemployed people, vulnerable to prosecution and persecution. Eventually the Washington authorities got rid of the protestors through a combination of persuading them to travel home, arresting them for vagrancy and destroying their camps. Officials used a rhetoric of health and hygiene, as well as vagrancy, an intertwining of security and contagion discourses which is prevalent today.⁴⁰⁴

The protestors had asked the federal government to take account of their existence in a novel and biopolitical way. They demanded that government intervene in the market and respect as imperative the principle that working bodies were the source of wealth and must be able to produce it for their own welfare. This was expressed as the belief that people must literally, and metaphorically, be able to *make money* in order to live. By contrast, money should not be able to reproduce itself. The protest responded to what Marx calls the ‘most superficial and fetishized form’ of the capital relation, interest-bearing capital.⁴⁰⁵ In their slogan, ‘death to interest on bonds’, the Commonweal protestors attempted to assert a difference between living bodies and dead money. Through their live performances of living, they also staked a claim on *aliveness* as a quality that did not pertain to abstractions.

Keeble’s jump carried his protest identity over into an entertainment marketplace. His leap echoed the Commonweal’s demands that he should be able to extract value from his body, but it made good on the promise of the producerist ideology via an immediate and extreme release of value. In a twist on Patch’s claims to autonomy, Keeble demonstrated Simmel’s statement: ‘modern man is free — free because he can sell everything.’⁴⁰⁶ In a society in which it was no longer legally or morally acceptable to buy and sell another person entire, Keeble could nonetheless be an entrepreneur of himself in the most extreme way imaginable, and Holmes could profit in turn. This brought to the fore the contradictions that

⁴⁰⁴ Alexander, p.103

⁴⁰⁵ Marx, *Capital*, III, p.515

⁴⁰⁶ Simmel, p.407

Michaels situates in the contract: 'The right of the individual to own himself must not be infringed, and so the right of the individual to sell himself and to be owned by someone else must not be denied. Insisting on these rights — loving property, loving freedom — the capitalist and the masochist are one and the same.'⁴⁰⁷ Many members of the Commonweal seemed unable to avoid being, in Bataille's phrase, a part of wealth 'doomed to destruction or at least to unproductive use'; they were the standing army of industrial capitalism, collateral damage in a systemic effort to maintain money as a general equivalent by constricting credit.⁴⁰⁸ What is more troubling about Keeble's act is that this waste was immediately turned to profit, feeding back into an economy productive of wealth if not life.

11. Stunts and soldiers: substitutes, greenbacks and war

Before concluding this chapter, I'll elaborate on the significance of war in relation to substitution, and its connection to the matrix of money, bodies and life outlined above. I suggest that after the 1890s, stunts continued a practice of substitution that had become socially taboo in the military, hence preserved the mode of valorisation and embodiment that substitution entailed.

Between the Civil War and the First World War, there was a change in conscription in North America. Conscription by federal government was introduced for the first time during the Civil War, by both Unionists and Confederates. Conscription systems established physical combat as a potential price of national citizenship, often linking it with democracy.⁴⁰⁹

The crucial change in conscription post-Civil War related to money and substitution. For conscripts fighting for either side in the Civil War, it was possible, and in some areas common, to pay substitutes to take their place. This practice was controversial in the 1860s and contributed to the 1863 Draft Riots in New York and violent scapegoating of African-American New Yorkers.⁴¹⁰ By the First World War, substitution was outlawed, in keeping with the increasingly taboo nature of money-for-life exchanges identified by Simmel. The Selective Service Act of 1917

⁴⁰⁷ Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism*, p.133

⁴⁰⁸ Bataille, p.25

⁴⁰⁹ George Q. Flynn, *The Draft, 1940-1973* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), p.2

⁴¹⁰ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.888

prohibited substitution, and the payment of money or anything of value for the avoidance of military service. It was no longer enough that a toll of some kind be paid and a body turn up; instead the body must be the conscript themselves, and the contribution must be their own labour and risk to life. Instead of allowing wealthy people to pay to avoid military service, the government intended to organise conscription on the basis of skills. The designation of who could live and who might have to die now, apparently at least, lay beyond money and was subject to rational calculation.

By the late nineteenth century, the North-South divide of the Civil War had given way to efforts at cross-sectional healing and nation building. Nina Silber calls this a 'conciliatory culture', in which 'forgetfulness, not memory, appears to be the dominant theme'.⁴¹¹ The Commonwealth protestors included Civil War veterans, and they commemorated the war by the names of their camps, in a manner designed to be inclusive to both Unionists and Confederates. Jon Pahl argues that memorialising wartime 'sacrifice' was one of the key grounds on which North and South reunited.⁴¹² Such markings of the Civil War often came 'at the expense of any northern white commitment to civil rights', Alexander notes.⁴¹³ Walter Benn Michaels agrees, arguing that class and sectional differences were replaced by 'racial differences between whites and blacks'. Citizenship came to be imagined as something that could be 'achieved' for white people, a matter of 'ideology rather than birthplace', whereas black Americans were increasingly exempt from the status of citizen.⁴¹⁴

The legacy of the Civil War filtered into broader conceptualisations of labour and industry, notably in the framing of industrial labourers as 'slaves' and the Northern victors as oppressive capitalists.⁴¹⁵ In Andrew Rennick's analysis of William Dean Howells' literature, Rennick claims that Howells 'uncovers a logic of substitution in 1880s capitalism analogous to the controversial Civil War method

⁴¹¹ Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), p.2 and 4

⁴¹² Jon Pahl, 'Shifting Sacrifices: Christians, War, and Peace in America', in *American Christianities: A History of Dominance and Diversity*, ed. by Catherine A. Brekus and W. Clark Gilpin (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), pp.445-465 (p.450)

⁴¹³ Alexander, p.94 and p.67

⁴¹⁴ Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism and Pluralism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), p.33

⁴¹⁵ Andrew Rennick, "'A Good War Story': The Civil War, Substitution, and the Labor Crisis in Howells' *A Hazard of Good Fortune*", *American Literary Realism*, 35:3 (2003), 247-261 (p.249)

of escaping military service'.⁴¹⁶ The character Dryfoos in Howells' *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, who paid a substitute to fight when conscripted, is depicted as continuing this practice through speculation and providing capital for business enterprises, rather than labouring himself. This producerist-inflected view of Dryfoos' activity valorises direct action and labour, and rejects financial input as insubstantial and unethical. For Howells, the metaphor of substitution was a means of expressing disquiet about mediated, indirect forms of wealth production in the late nineteenth century.

The Commonwealth's invocation of an 'army' invoked a tight relationship between war and monetary policy. In 1894, the 'peace army' and their financial mission were a potent reminder, or an embodied memory, of the use of greenbacks during the Civil War. The peace army perhaps evoked the knowledge that in times of war, governments had instituted, and would institute, fiat paper money — almost as if such money were an exchange for the death and physical harm sustained by their citizens. Conflicts between Pinkerton's National Guard and striking workers, meanwhile, demonstrated that states of peace and war were not as distinct as they might seem.

The emerging biopolitical exchange taking place between governments and citizens might be clarified by Foucault's understanding of the 'pacts of war' developed during the Second World War. Foucault argued British and American governments made tacit agreements with their citizens: 'Now we are asking you to get yourselves killed, but we promise you that when you have done this, you will keep your jobs until the end of your lives.'⁴¹⁷ I am not suggesting that the federal government made such an agreement, but rather that these pacts were expressions of a long running nexus interlocking war, corporeal risk, and Populist (latterly Keynesian) economics. The financial mechanism that governments could use for general welfare was the same mechanism which was called upon in war. This nexus is at the core of governmental rights and responsibilities regarding life and death, and its shifting terms can be seen as part of a broad progression of biopolitical governance.⁴¹⁸ More specifically, this nexus is necropolitical, in that it constitutes, in Achille Mbembe's words, the 'ultimate expression of sovereignty [...]

⁴¹⁶ Rennick, p.248

⁴¹⁷ Foucault, p.216

⁴¹⁸ Foucault, p.317

the power to decide who may live and who must die.⁴¹⁹ A wartime economy was the negative image of biopolitical governance for general welfare. Hence the Commonweal staged their citizenship through a ritual enactment of warfare in order to demand that the government account for their existence and enable them to live.

Given the increasingly taboo nature of substitution in war, it's remarkable that stunts preserved the previous mode of operation and resituated it in the entertainment industry. Stunts retained as an embodied memory the practice of substitution and the possibility of paying somebody else to take the risk that you might otherwise have to bear, or vice versa. As mentioned above, the 1880s and 1890s are notable for their difference from the forthcoming cinematic stunt structure — the bridge jumper himself could and did become famous. Like the 1970s, around the time that conscription was abandoned in the United States and most European nations, the 1880s and '90s were a period in which stunt performers attained a peculiar degree of visibility. By 1914, when Hoffman wrote 'Falling For Her', stunt substitutions, with their explicit commercialism and designation of expendable bodies, were established. In Roach's phrase stunt performers were 'forgotten but not gone', becoming the unrecognised other to a star.⁴²⁰

When stunt performers returned to heightened cultural visibility, they were explicitly associated with soldiers. In Rush's 1980 film, when the eponymous stunt man realises that the director plans to film his death, he tells the lead actress: 'If he had his way, there wouldn't be a soldier left alive by morning. But I'm the only soldier he's got on hand.' Stunts became a metaphorical means of expressing all that was taboo about who actually went to war, what purpose it served, and what it meant in terms of governmental power and economic privilege.

In the 1890s, this doubling of stunt man and soldier was already underway. Bridge jumping was one way in which the destruction of war was (mis)remembered as comparatively worthy and at the same time, troublingly unrewarding: 'Men have perished on the field of battle without getting one thousandth part of the celebrity which came to Brodie.' The sacrificial logic that Keeble's jump expressed through advertising and entertainment was the frivolous double of a wartime economy, an economy of excess, in which people often died to

⁴¹⁹ Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', trans. by Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture*, 15:1, 11-40 (p.11)

⁴²⁰ Roach, p.2

no greater purpose than Keeble. Yet Keeble's jump, and the Commonweal protest, also invoked the other side of wartime economy: biopolitical governance that aimed to sustain life. The mechanism by which the state could demand that you and you alone must go to war (because life couldn't be valued in monetary terms) was the same mechanism by which the state would attempt to keep you alive and working (because life couldn't be valued in monetary terms). Stunts revealed this mechanism in all its inconsistencies.

12. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that bridge jumping in late nineteenth-century New York negotiated sacredness as well as profanity, demonstrating the potential of dangerous stunts to enact rituals of surrogation which maintained cultural memory. Bridge jumps recalled a nostalgic conception of antebellum white masculine autonomy, which, by the late nineteenth century, had been subsumed into commercial, entertainment culture. Through acts of hyper-self-exploitation, bridge jumps enacted violent confrontation between exchange abstractions and physical life, demonstrating stunt's potential to reveal the paradox of the 'real abstraction'. Bridge jumps also performed modern sacrifice, by which jumpers either altered their lives or destroyed themselves in attempts to embody a mystified circuit of capital, exemplifying the constitution of personhood as capital in stunt performances. Viewing bridge jumps as paradigmatic acts of precarity, this chapter has questioned the role of skill in stunts, and demonstrated its connection to a white worker identity. Reading bridge jumps in tandem with the Industrial Army protest of 1894, it has demonstrated that stunts engaged with a matrix of monetary policy, bodily risk, substitutions and war. Hence, bridge jumping exemplifies stunts' capacity to reveal and question value abstractions and primary frameworks.

The next chapter extends the investigation of precarity, sacrifice and circulation in stunts by analysing a six-day pedestrianism contest, in which competitors walked repeatedly round a track.

2.

Stunts, work and walking in circles in the 'Go-as-you-please' race**1. Introduction**

This chapter focuses on a flourishing area of nineteenth-century sports: walking or 'pedestrianism'. In the mid-nineteenth century, this everyday activity was turned into a spectacle, paralleling the Commonwealth Army's protest, as well as P.T. Barnum's walking advertisement for his dime museum.

I focus on a six-day walking contest in Madison Square Garden in 1884, which pushed participants to the limits of endurance. Part of the appeal of the gruelling competition was its presentation of bodies in extreme and precarious states. Like bridge jumping, durational walking contests were understood in terms of sacrifice: as negotiations with sacredness, as well as frivolous entertainments.

Pedestrianism is particularly demonstrative of emerging cultural hierarchies in the nineteenth century. While professional pedestrians were developing walking as a sport, writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson and Lesley Stephen were forging an opposing vision of walking: as a meditative, recreational, amateur activity. This chapter investigates how hierarchical conceptions of professionalism and amateurism mapped onto concerns regarding the nature of work and skilled labour. In the context of large-scale immigration to New York and campaigns for an eight-hour working day, it explores how the value of walking expressed concerns about the value of work, reading the walking contest as a durational performance of industrial time in the city. It examines how the diversion-based structure of the contest functioned both to produce and undermine cultural hierarchies.

One of the troubling aspects of professional walking for contemporary observers was that it didn't fit established ideas about what constituted work. Instead of producing something, famous walkers converted attention into monetary gain. Contestants viewed the contest as way of establishing a celebrity persona, paralleling bridge jumping (Steve Brodie once competed in a walking contest). The race was thus a forum in which identities were constructed and displayed. As competitors circled the track, personas were — in a very literal sense — put into circulation in public life, in anticipation of circulating beyond the competitors' bodies. Such commodification of personhood spectacularised

racialised identities, and competitors were read as representatives of their race or nation. This chapter analyses how walking intersected with racial exoticisation, as well as fears of over-civilisation and white, masculine degeneration.

I argue that while stunts were framed as frivolous sideshows in the go-as-you-please race and beyond, they in fact demonstrated not only the economy of the whole race, but also a much wider economic condition in industries such as newspapers, advertising and other forms of entertainment. In these industries, attention could be converted to value, hence stunts, including apparently pointless circulation, attained a new significance and productive capacities.

2. Their long jaunt begun

'At 12 o'clock this morning the go-as-you-please-race in Madison Square Garden was started,' the *World* reported on 28 April 1884. A crowd of 'fully five thousand persons' watched fourteen male competitors begin their journey 'on a dead run, as though they had but one hour to race instead of 143.' For the next six days, the contestants would walk, jog, sprint, or shuffle round and round a sawdust-covered track. Unlike in some other walking races, the walkers were not required to keep part of a foot on the ground at all times —hence the name, the 'go-as-you-please' race. The 'pedestrians,' or 'peds' for short, could also eat and rest when they liked, adding to the suggestion of free choice. Their aim, however, was to travel as far as possible in the available time. The incentive for completing this grueling task was a cash prize of potentially thousands of dollars.⁴²¹

While the go-as-you-please race was just beginning, professional pedestrianism in general was in its dying days. At its height, from the mid-1830s to the 1860s, pedestrianism in North America had been 'second only to horse racing in popular appeal'.⁴²² In a revival of interest in the 1870s, hundreds of 'advertisements, news stories, and challenges' relating to the sport appeared in the press. James Gordon Bennett, who ran the *New York Herald*, walked a race for \$6000, and British walker 'Madame Anderson' walked 'a quarter-mile every

⁴²¹ Anon., 'Their Long Jaunt Begun', *World*, 28 April 1884, p.1

⁴²² George Moss, 'The Long Distance Runners of Ante-Bellum America', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 8:2 (1974), 370–82 (p.382)

quarter-hour for four straight weeks' in Mozart Gardens in Brooklyn.⁴²³ A great range of walking and running performances by men and women included: races against the clock, one-on-one matches, individual journeys across vast distances, saloon performances in which pedestrians 'walked the plank' for thirty hours straight, and — an 1870s innovation — six-day track races.⁴²⁴ Six-day contests also took other forms, including cycling and roller-skating competitions (two men died in a roller-skating contest in Madison Square Garden in 1885).⁴²⁵ Such endurance competitions also anticipated endurance dance marathons, often called 'walkathons,' which developed in the United States in the 1920s and became elaborate entertainment events during the Great Depression.⁴²⁶

The flourish of six-day contests in the 1870s was perhaps a last gasp for pedestrianism, anticipating its subsequent decline. The enterprise was at a new low according to one of the most famous nineteenth-century walkers, Edward Weston. He told a New York reporter in 1883 that he was 'disgusted with pedestrianism, which had descended to hippodroming'.⁴²⁷ 'Hippodroming' was a slang term for fixing races: the reference to a hippodrome arena suggested that the sport was being distorted by gambling, closely associated with horse-racing, and also with modes of theatricality usually found in circus. (Barnum had initially called Madison Square Garden the 'Great Roman Hippodrome' when he converted it from a railway depot in 1874.) By the early 1880s, the increasing popularity of amateur and college sports had compounded a view that walking for money degraded pedestrianism. Specifically, gambling — a morally suspect activity to begin with — destroyed competition, because contestants could frequently earn more by throwing a race than they could by winning it. By replacing competition with concealed forms of organization and cooperation, hippodroming reduced the event to what it arguably was all along: walking in circles, with no meaning or purpose beyond (potentially not very interesting) entertainment, and the circulation of money (largely in favor of bookmakers).

⁴²³ Walter Bernstein and Milton Meltzer, 'A Walking Fever Has Set In', *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 56:4 (1980), 698–711 (p.701)

⁴²⁴ John Cumming, *Runners and Walkers: A Nineteenth Century Sports Chronicle* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1981), p.48

⁴²⁵ Anon., 'Killed By Roller Skating', *New York Times*, 18 March 1885, p.5; Anon., 'Victim of Roller Skates', *New York Times*, 11 April 1885, p.5

⁴²⁶ Carol Martin, *Dance Marathons: Performing American Culture of the 1920s and 1930s* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), p.xviii

⁴²⁷ Cumming, p.94

It was, in part, repeatedly walking in circles that Weston found degrading. On the first few occasions that Weston raced round a track, rather than through countryside, towns, and cities, he had to bow out, stating: “I am convinced that walking upon a circular track is not only against my nature, but unnatural to either man or horse”.⁴²⁸ The ‘continued walk round the circle’ caused him to feel nauseous and dizzy. Walking a repetitious circuit was, in Weston’s view, unfit for living beings; it was a live performance of a mechanical and punishing action which threatened aliveness.

The walking contest of 1884, then, enacted and troubled circulation in two senses. It consisted in the act of repeatedly walking in circles to a point of exhaustion and degradation, and it involved money circulating in a manner seen as unproductive, and even threatening to productivity. The race partook of modes of circulation that some perceived as morally corrosive, degrading, or pointless: circulation that seemed to detract rather than add value. What was at stake in the walking contest, in a highly visible and complex way, was the *value* of walking. A consideration of this vexed subject points to distinctions between modes of valorization that were fiercely protected but difficult to uphold: distinctions between work and life; work and leisure; and sporting and theatrical modes of performance.

3. The value of walking

Professional pedestrians like those racing in Madison Square Garden were figures of particular concern in essays that shaped a new discourse of walking in the nineteenth century, by writers such as Henry David Thoreau, John Burroughs, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Lesley Stephen. Stevenson insisted that the ideal walker was ‘none of your athletic men in purple stockings, who walk their fifty miles a day’.⁴²⁹ Stephen felt that such walkers practised only out of ‘vanity’ or ‘the

⁴²⁸ Quoted in P.S. Marshall, *Weston, Weston, Rah-Rah-Rah!': The Original Sporting Superstar?: A Career Biography* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2012), p.48

⁴²⁹ Robert Louis Stevenson, *Virginibus Puerisque and Other Papers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904), p.252

spirit of competition,' motives that might lead to walking's 'degeneration'.⁴³⁰ These writers held up the professional pedestrian as a prime example of how *not* to walk.

Instead, the essayists called upon readers to "cultivate the art' of pedestrianism',⁴³¹ and understand the 'genius' for 'sauntering'.⁴³² Walking was to be valued for fostering reflection, a sense of freedom, continuity with the past, and communion with nature. In *Walking, Literature, and English Culture*, Anne Wallace named this discourse 'the peripatetic,' and traced its development in Britain and North America from the early nineteenth century, attributing it largely to the influence of Wordsworth's poetry.⁴³³ The peripatetic discourse depicted the continuous movement of walking as a means to experience a moral order inherent in the natural landscape. Through thoughtful walking, these essays suggest, one could find or rediscover one's rightful place in a natural order, which transcended economy and society. In this way, walking became a rather sophisticated form of recreation which, Wallace notes, 'carries connotations of both labour and leisure, both the remaking of self and world and the sense of relaxation and respite from labour'.⁴³⁴

In order for walking to serve as a 'cultivating labour' that facilitated the 'recreation of the self,' walking had to be detached from commerce and figured as intrinsically valuable.⁴³⁵ Stevenson called walking 'a reward in itself',⁴³⁶ and Stephen concurred that the 'true walker is one to whom the pursuit is in itself delightful'.⁴³⁷ English essayist William Hazlitt was loath to talk to people during his walking ventures, because he feared the conversation might 'hint' at his 'profession and pursuits'.⁴³⁸ Even the mention of professional work would disrupt Hazlitt's effort to lose his 'personal identity in the elements of nature'.⁴³⁹ In contrast to the pedestrians' aim of establishing and circulating identities, Hazlitt sought to dissolve his public persona and enter into a state of communion with his environment.

⁴³⁰ Leslie Stephen, *Studies of a Biographer*, 4 vols (London: Duckworth & Co., 1910), III, p.261 and 255

⁴³¹ John Burroughs, *The Art of Seeing Things* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001), p.47

⁴³² Henry D. Thoreau, *Walking* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1914), p.4

⁴³³ Anne D. Wallace, *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.13

⁴³⁴ Wallace, p.170

⁴³⁵ Wallace, p.14 and 17

⁴³⁶ Stevenson, p.246

⁴³⁷ Stephen, p.256

⁴³⁸ William Hazlitt, *On Going a Journey* (New York: The Marchbanks Press, 1951), p.15

⁴³⁹ Hazlitt, p.16

Clearly, walking as fast as possible, with as little rest as possible, round and round a circular route, for a cash prize, was not what these writers had in mind for walking. The romantic, amateur ideal, which stipulates that the participant be at leisure to reap the benefits of the practice, was constructed in opposition to professional walkers. As Nicholas Ridout writes in his study of the 'passionate amateur' in theatre, the categories of professional and amateur are mutually dependent: 'The amateur does for pleasure (or some other personal or collective purpose) something that others do for wages. One cannot practice, as an amateur, something for which there is no corresponding professional or 'work' version'.⁴⁴⁰ The 'go-as-you-please' race and peripatetic discourse present two distinct and conflicting conceptions of leisure. While the race's name, 'go-as-you-please,' suggested free choice, the reality was that the competitors could choose whether to walk or run around a prescribed route, with a fixed goal, taking occasional breaks. In this sense, the race was a crude summation of choice in capitalist economies. The essayists, by contrast, saw their walking as external to this closed circuit. They sought to preserve walking as an activity beyond necessity.

Yet on closer inspection, the essayists' walks were not as far from labour as they believed. Through walking, these writers not only undertook the reproductive labour of remaking the self, they also engaged in immaterial labour, the stuff of their intellectual trades. Stevenson's ideal walker was 'composing articles, delivering orations, and conducting the most impassioned interviews' on the road.⁴⁴¹ In keeping with Ridout's analysis, the 'passionate amateur' of the peripatetic discourse turns out to be another kind of professional, who may manage their own time and choose their own route, but who is nonetheless at work.⁴⁴² Rather than escaping the logic of capitalism, the essayists converted walking from a physical activity to a form of intellectual labour. As I'll go on to explore, the go-as-you-please race also engaged in its own disruptions of work/leisure binaries.

The peripatetic discourse continues to play an important role in current histories and philosophies of walking, which often insist that walking has intrinsic value and base this statement, in part, on a dismissal of sport and commerce.

⁴⁴⁰ Nicholas Ridout, *Passionate Amateurs: Theatre, Communism, and Love* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), p.106

⁴⁴¹ Stevenson, p.250

⁴⁴² Ridout, p.45

Frédéric Gros entitled the first chapter of his 2013 *Philosophy of Walking*, 'Walking Is Not a Sport,' distinguishing walking from sport on the grounds that walking is not labour, performance, or spectacle.⁴⁴³ In a similar vein, writer and novelist Geoff Nicholson's history of pedestrianism, *The Lost Art of Walking*, espouses the intrinsic value of walking with the claim that walking is 'definitely not a stunt. It's something entirely worth doing for its own sake'.⁴⁴⁴

Given that in the peripatetic discourse, professional pedestrians exemplified how *not* to walk, Nicholson's insistence that walking is *not* a stunt suggests that, as a performance form and concept, the 'stunt' might be an illuminating lens for viewing the go-as-you-please race. The first meaning of 'stunt' in the *Oxford English Dictionary* serves as a summary for the contest overall: 'a prescribed item in an athletic competition [...] an act which is striking for the skill, strength, or the like, required to do it; a feat.' As noted in the introduction, in 1895, when 'stunt' first appeared in *Dialect Notes*, the editor wrote: 'stunts is used in N.Y. City by boys in the sense of performing some feat in rivalry,—a long jump for instance,—one boy 'stumping' or challenging another'.⁴⁴⁵ 'Stumping' was also a contemporary colloquial term for walking, suggested the sporting history of challenges and gambles contained in the practice.

Just as 'hippodroming' implied theatrical as well as sporting modes of performance, the first meaning of 'stunt' also spans these two contexts: a stunt is 'an item in an entertainment, a (theatrical, etc.) 'turn.'"⁴⁴⁶ Stunt's second meaning is also of direct relevance to the contest: 'an enterprise set on foot with the object of gaining reputation or signal advantage,' hence, in advertising or journalism, 'a 'gimmick' or device for attracting attention.' A stunt is 'a piece of business, an act, enterprise, or exploit,' unavoidably tarred by a commercial brush. This is one reason why 'stunt' is often — as in Nicholson's history — to some extent derogatory, hinting at degradation or devaluation.

Yet Nicholson goes on to discuss instances when walking *has* functioned as a stunt, describing with some affection Captain Robert Barclay Allardice, a Scottish soldier and landowner and one of the first pedestrians. In 1809, Barclay walked a

⁴⁴³ Frédéric Gros, *A Philosophy of Walking* (London: Verso, 2014), p.1

⁴⁴⁴ Geoff Nicholson, *The Lost Arts of Walking: The History, Science, Philosophy, Literature, Theory and Practice of Pedestrianism* (Chelmsford, UK: Harbour, 2010), p.16

⁴⁴⁵ American Dialect Society, *Dialect Notes*, 6 vols (Norwood, MA: J.S. Cushing & Co., 1896), I, p.400

⁴⁴⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. 'stunt, n.2,' <<http://0-www.oed.com/view/Entry/192178?rskey=wiVslug&result=2#eid>> [accessed 18 December 2014]

thousand miles in a thousand consecutive hours, up and down a field, a 'huge public event' that attracted 'vast crowds'.⁴⁴⁷ In Nicholson's account, Barclay's eccentric amateur status seems to rescue him from his suspect connection to sport and money. Though 'he had no practical need to make money', Barclay gambled large amounts on his own feats, literally raising the stakes.⁴⁴⁸ Like many competitors in the early 'gloriously eccentric pedestrian contests', Barclay seemed to walk 'for the sheer hell of it'.⁴⁴⁹ Nicholson regrets that a recent rerun of the thousand-mile walk by ex-jockey Richard Dunwoody 'lacked all the colour, all the singularity, all the *eccentricity* that makes Barclay's so compelling'.⁴⁵⁰ Barclay's class status enabled him to inhabit the role of charming amateur; because he did not need the money, he gained entry into a 'proper' walking fold. In Nicholson's account, a pro/am dichotomy is thus layered onto the sport/art dichotomy: Barclay doesn't have to be a professional sportsman, he can be an amateur artist instead. In analysing an instance of stunt walking at a time when stunts were first coming to public consciousness, I aim to unpick these dichotomies, and reveal a manifestation of the 'other' on which romantic walking depends.

4. Producing the contest and the city

Paralleling the usage of 'stunt' among New York boys, the customary impetus for walking contests was a challenge. Pedestrians or their backers would publish a letter in a newspaper, issuing a challenge to prospective contestants, and determining the stake necessary to compete. In 1884, the sporting newspaper *Turf, Field and Farm* published a challenge from Peter Duryea, on behalf of the champion English walker, Charles Rowell. Duryea was a sports manager, who had produced several six-day races and was reportedly very wealthy.⁴⁵¹ As well as backing Rowell, Duryea managed the whole contest. *Turf, Field and Farm* also played an active role in producing the event. Early in 1884, Rowell and his prospective competitors signed contracts at the newspaper's office, and put 'in the hands of the

⁴⁴⁷ Nicholson, p.103

⁴⁴⁸ Nicholson, p.99

⁴⁴⁹ Nicholson, p.100 and 102

⁴⁵⁰ Nicholson, p.109. Italics original.

⁴⁵¹ Anon, 'Peter Duryea', *National Police Gazette* (New York), 23 May 1885, p.14

editor of the TURF, FIELD AND FARM a stake of \$500'.⁴⁵² A series of subsequent articles sought to drum up interest in the competition. The newspaper announced that the venue had been booked, introduced other contestants who had come forward, and advised anyone interested in securing 'privileges' (presumably the right to sell goods or services, including taking bets) to contact the office and place their bids.⁴⁵³ At the behest of other prominent pedestrians, the stake was eventually reduced to \$100, perhaps belying the *National Police Gazette's* claim that 'walking matches have the same fascination as they had of old, notwithstanding that many believed that such entertainments were played out'.⁴⁵⁴ The admission fee was set at fifty cents, lower than it had been in previous years.⁴⁵⁵

The influence of *Turf, Field and Farm* and other newspapers was evident in the list of officials. The referee, one of the judges, and the superintendent of scoring were all from the staff of the newspaper.⁴⁵⁶ The two remaining officials came from the *New York Herald* and the *Sun* respectively. Ties between competitive walking and newspapers went further: one pedestrian, John Hughes, was backed directly by the *National Police Gazette* and advertised its title on his jersey.⁴⁵⁷ Several other walkers, including Weston, are recorded as having worked as journalists for short periods.

Interest was not limited to specialist sporting newspapers. Reportage of walking contests was just as intense in the popular press. The *World* provided detailed, day-by-day coverage of the go-as-you-please race on its front pages, indicating Joseph Pulitzer's policy for his recently launched newspaper. Pulitzer recognized the importance of a specialized sports section in his efforts to drive circulation.⁴⁵⁸ The walking contest was a particularly effective circulation-booster because like the newspaper's readers, pedestrians were commonly recent or second-generation migrants and served as unofficial representatives of their own communities. This contributed to a popular following for pedestrianism in New York, where so many immigrants resided.

⁴⁵² Anon., 'Rowell and His Rivals,' *Turf, Field and Farm* (New York), 8 February 1884, p.96

⁴⁵³ Anon., Untitled, *Turf, Field and Farm*, 4 April 1884, p.255; Anon., Untitled, *Turf, Field and Farm*, 11 April 1884, p.275

⁴⁵⁴ Anon., 'The Six-Day Walking Match,' *National Police Gazette*, 10 May 1884, p.7

⁴⁵⁵ Anon., Untitled, *Turf, Field and Farm*, 4 April 1884, p.255

⁴⁵⁶ Anon., 'The Six-Day Race,' *Turf, Field and Farm*, 2 May 1884, p.336

⁴⁵⁷ Cumming, p.103

⁴⁵⁸ George Juergens, *Joseph Pulitzer and the New York World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p.119

On the first day of the go-as-you-please race, the *World* gave a short introduction to each pedestrian, illustrated with a caricatured portrait. Contestants came from far and wide, and most were depicted as representing a community, nation, race, or ethnicity. The group is a snapshot of people's movements within the United States and Canada, and across the Atlantic. As it is unclear whether or not many of the competitors were in New York to stay, this 'snapshot' is productively blurred, suggesting people in motion rather than anonymous (and sometimes misleading) numbers crossing borders. Some traveled specifically to compete: one 'came on purpose from England,' and after withdrawing early, was left 'penniless,' without means to return.⁴⁵⁹

A significant contingent came from Great Britain and Ireland, as migrants and/or visitors (pedestrianism was a trans-Atlantic sport). Rowell and Samuel Day were from England, George Noremas from Scotland, and Bobby Vint and Patrick Fitzgerald from Ireland.⁴⁶⁰ Rowell was a noted pedestrian, who had saved \$50,000 and bought a house in England from his winnings.⁴⁶¹ He was the current holder of the Astley Belt, 'a large silver and gold international championship belt' donated by English aristocrat Lord Astley in 1878.⁴⁶² There was a strong sporting rivalry between the United States and England: Weston declared he was 'ready to prove that no man in England, so long as I stand on my own two feet, can beat any man in America at pedestrianism'.⁴⁶³

Other competitors traveled within the United States, from east coast and west. Winston H. Burrill was an African American from Philadelphia who had decided to compete when another black pedestrian, the very successful Frank Hitchcock (protégé of champion Irishman Dan O'Leary), pulled out. Burrill was a 'carpet-cleaner' by trade; on hearing there would be no black competitors, he 'decided to try his luck'.⁴⁶⁴ This gives an impression of the range of experience, training, and motivations among the entrants. Rowell, Vint, and Noremas had trained in Williamsburg in advance. By contrast, William Wallace Lounsbury joked

⁴⁵⁹ Anon., 'Fitzgerald's Great Feat', *World*, 1 May 1884, p.1-2

⁴⁶⁰ Anon., 'Their Long Jaunt Begun', *World*, 28 April 1884, p.1

⁴⁶¹ Anon., 'Rowell Well in the Lead', *World*, 30 April 1884, p.1-2

⁴⁶² Cumming, p.90

⁴⁶³ Marshall, p.38

⁴⁶⁴ 'Their Long Jaunt Begun'

that he made the attempt 'because the admission fee is low and insures him free entrance to the Garden'.⁴⁶⁵

The youngest competitor, Nitaw-eg-Ebow, was a Native American, described as 'a Chippewa Indian from Dakota,' 'very intelligent,' and 'the only good-looking man in the race'.⁴⁶⁶ While there is no record of Nitaw-eg-Ebow's personal history, two months before the race, the Turtle Mountain reservation in North Dakota was dramatically reduced in size; it is possible that he had recently been displaced.⁴⁶⁷ Native Americans had figured prominently in writing about walking, depicted as possessing a natural and well-practised talent for the activity. In his early history of pedestrianism, English writer Walter Thom saw cause for national celebration in the assertion that walkers such as pedestrian Captain Robert Barclay had performed 'feats more astonishing' than those of 'American Indians,' who 'go journies of a thousand leagues in six weeks' and 'pursue the elk with such rapidity, that they are able to fatigue and secure him'.⁴⁶⁸ In his history *Runners and Walkers*, John Cumming writes that in the mid-nineteenth century the impression of the 'Indian's native ability' as a runner was so great that sponsors of races in towns near reservations often set up separate races for Native Americans, excluding them from mainstream competitions, presumably to prevent them from winning.⁴⁶⁹ Even so, several runners overcame this restriction to achieve widespread acclaim. In the 1870s, Native Americans were mentioned in accounts of walking feats as both participants and spectators, and the *World* reporter remarked that a 'squad of Kickapoo Indians' attended the first night of the walking race.⁴⁷⁰ The prominence of national and racial identities, and the perception that specific peoples were naturally gifted at walking, meant that walking contests became a way in which racial and national identities were imagined, produced and proliferated, as I'll go on to explore.

Because the majority of pedestrians were migrants and peripatetic athletes, the competition in Madison Square Garden performed mobility in specific ways. Pedestrianism reflected and was part of patterns of continental and global

⁴⁶⁵ 'Their Long Jaunt Begun'

⁴⁶⁶ 'Their Long Jaunt Begun'

⁴⁶⁷ David E. Wilkins, *Documents of Native American Political Development: 1500s to 1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.496

⁴⁶⁸ Walter Thom, *Pedestrianism; or, An Account of The Performances of celebrated Pedestrians During The Last and Present Century* (Aberdeen: D. Chalmers & Co., 1813), p.255

⁴⁶⁹ Cumming, p.12

⁴⁷⁰ Marshall, p.43; Anon., 'Their Long Jaunt Begun', *World*, 28 April 1884, p.1

migration largely dictated by urban industrial capitalism. As competitions took place throughout the United States and in Britain, the sport was boosted by the transport revolution, for the practical reason that prominent walkers could afford the time and money to travel to competitions. In New York in 1884, the six-day race functioned as a highly visible metonym for the industrial city, as a place to which people moved, and where people moved about, almost ceaselessly. By spatially limiting urban movement and divorcing it from ordinary motivations, the race presented the city as, in Imanuel Schipper's words, a 'living construction' based in people rather than buildings. Writing on artistic productions in present-day urban environments, Schipper describes the city as a process — 'how people live together' — as well as a 'huge production machine' creating representations of the realities it shapes.⁴⁷¹ As the contest was an occasion for expressing national, racial, and ethnic identities, the displacements and absences involved in creating the industrial city were particularly evident. The arena became a site in which other places were remembered and celebrated. For the contestants, the race also offered the promise of *social* mobility, achieved in an unusually literal manner: as much movement as their bodies could bear.

Though walkers in cities have received a lot of critical attention, there is a mismatch between competitive pedestrians and privileged theories of urban walking, summarized by Carl Lavery and Nicholas Whybrow as, 'Walter Benjamin on the *flâneur*, the Situationist International's notion of drifting (*la dérive*) and Michel de Certeau's tactical reappropriation of what he terms 'the long poem of walking''.⁴⁷² Both the *flâneur* and a participant in a *dérive* are conceived as meandering along paths that are to a large extent chosen by the walker (though the *flâneur*'s path might be said to be dictated by the planned, modern city, and the Situationists saw their route as revealing the city's psychogeography). Competitive pedestrians in six-day races did not pick their routes or privilege a slow pace. Most crucially, perhaps, these pedestrians did not endow walking with political significance or frame it as 'an act of subversion and resistance in a globalized society obsessed with speed and mobility'.⁴⁷³ On the contrary, the race seemed to celebrate a globalised society obsessed with speed and mobility.

⁴⁷¹ Imanuel Schipper, 'City as Performance,' *TDR (The Drama Review)*, 58:3 (2014), 18–26 (p.26 and 21–22)

⁴⁷² Carl Lavery and Nicholas Whybrow, 'Editorial Pas de Deux,' *Performance Research*, 17:2 (2012), 1–10 (p.4)

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*

Nonetheless, de Certeau's description of walkers as the 'ordinary practitioners of the city' illuminates mobility in the go-as-you-please race.⁴⁷⁴ Through the act of walking, de Certeau writes, ordinary practitioners create the city: 'Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together'.⁴⁷⁵ The difference between this claim and associations between walking and narration in the peripatetic discourse is that, for de Certeau, these walkers are unable to read the urban text that their movements write. The everyday practice of the city exists 'below the threshold at which visibility begins.' De Certeau envisions a 'migrational, or metaphorical city,' which 'slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city,' but maintains its own, invisible life beneath.⁴⁷⁶

The go-as-you-please race distilled and spectacularised the practice of walking, an activity normally so ordinary that 'pedestrian' has long been a byword for 'dull' and 'commonplace.'⁴⁷⁷ By spectacularising walking, the contest sent it over the threshold of visibility: the walkers momentarily exposed the migrational, metaphorical city that usually went unseen. To claim such an act as resistant, however, would be to misunderstand what that visibility entailed. The pedestrians did not merely become visible, they became a spectacle. If the walking contest staged resistance at all, it was not by refusing to follow the dominant pace and routes of the industrial city. Instead, through repetitive and sustained action, the contest pushed the abstraction of urban space to a point of absurdity. The common ground between Situationist thinking and the go-as-you-please race was not resistance, but rather a tendency towards parody.

5. Walking round the clock

The pedestrians in the New York race in 1884 walked almost continuously for six days (or as long as they could manage). Most took a few hours of rest in the early morning, before their trainers woke them up and sent them back to the track. The

⁴⁷⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p.93. Originally published as *L'invention du quotidien*, 3 vols (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1980), I, *Arts de faire*.

⁴⁷⁵ de Certeau, p.97

⁴⁷⁶ de Certeau, p.93

⁴⁷⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. 'pedestrian, adj. and n.,'

<www.oed.com/view/Entry/139574?redirectedFrom=pedestrian#eid> [accessed 19 December 2014]

repetitiousness and duration of the go-as-you-please race, which pitted a six-day timeframe against the pedestrians' need for sleep and rest, prefigured durational aesthetics of the mid-twentieth century. Durational artworks, Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh write, tend to 'establish a temporal measure against which the work can be interpreted, and deploy an alteration of its [the temporal measure's] (culturally) ascribed terms.' Heathfield and Hsieh go on to suggest what such an alteration might involve, citing disruptions to rhythm and pace, and a 'proliferation, contraction or extension of the 'proper' time of work'.⁴⁷⁸ Both of these dynamics were inherent to the walking contest.

After a fast, exciting start, the contest developed into a 'monotonous tramp,' occasionally interrupted by one of the pedestrians accelerating to a 'dog-trot'.⁴⁷⁹ Rowell took and maintained an early lead, with Day and Fitzgerald close behind. With no change in these positions for the next three days, there can be little doubt that large stretches of the spectacular contest felt slow and mundane ('pedestrian') to spectators and competitors alike:

Great crowds hung all day about the fences encircling the sawdust ring, watching with a strange fascination the monotonous twinkle of flying feet. The most enthusiastic of the spectators admitted that they could not explain in what the fascination existed. They only knew that the longer they remained, the more difficult it was to tear themselves away.

Day said he watched the audience to distract himself from the long journey to come, and he threatened to bring a mouth harp and 'beguile the tedious tramp with music'.⁴⁸⁰

The walking contest, then, had the capacity to extend the experience of time in a manner claimed for durational performance. This feature is often pitted against an sense of modern life as bewilderingly fast: as Lara Shalson writes in 'On Duration and Multiplicity,' one of the enduring appeals of durational performance is its capacity to '*slow down* in the face of an ever-accelerating pace of life'.⁴⁸¹ Slowness is also, Fiona Wilkie notes in *Performance, Transport and Mobility*, commonly held as a peculiar and beneficial characteristic of walking.⁴⁸² Wilkie

⁴⁷⁸ Adrian Heathfield and Hsieh Tehching, *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh* (London: The Live Art Development Agency; Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), p.22

⁴⁷⁹ Anon., 'Rowell to the Front', *World*, 29 April 1884, p.1

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸¹ Lara Shalson, 'On Duration and Multiplicity.' *Performance Research*, 17:2 (2012), 98–106 (p.99–100)

⁴⁸² Fiona Wilkie, *Performance, Transport and Mobility* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.35

points out that statements about the slowness of walking contain an implicit comparison with other, faster, forms of transport. She cautions, however, that 'walking is not uncomplicatedly slow, any more than technologically driven transport is always experienced as speed'.⁴⁸³

Walking contests were definitely not 'uncomplicatedly slow,' and there is little evidence that pedestrians like those in Madison Square Garden walked in resistance to the inhuman speed of transport technologies, as is sometimes claimed for present-day walking. (Novelist Will Self called walking 'the only possible response to a civilisation crazed with its own sense of mobility'.)⁴⁸⁴ In 1877, the *New York Clipper Almanac* featured a double-page spread that listed record times for traveling from one to 1000 miles by foot, immediately followed by the best times for steamships, sailing vessels, and railroads.⁴⁸⁵ This suggests that pedestrianism placed walking in the context of rapid transport technologies, prizing speed rather than the particular pleasures of slow walking. A manual for young pedestrians called on the present generation to prove that in a time with 'abounding facilities in every city for reaching any given point,' they could still perform feats of speed and endurance on their own two feet.⁴⁸⁶ Extreme walking was a means of demonstrating that autonomous movement could still cut it in the machine age, curbing fears of physical deterioration and over-civilisation.

Pedestrianism invoked, in Mark Seltzer's phrase, a 'body-machine complex'.⁴⁸⁷ It framed bodies as machines by demanding unattainably mechanistic, repetitious labour, and at the same time, pitted bodies against machines, as if by victory in the contest, the walkers could forestall humanity's replacement or supersedence. Walter Bernstein and Milton Meltzer's history alludes to this complex: 'the muscles of the nation were making one final, vast, collective effort before being replaced by the internal combustion engine [... Rowell] was travelling like a machine.'⁴⁸⁸ While such mechanistic labour was closely associated with industrial production, in the context of the contest, it produced nothing but affects, patterns of movement and identities, invoking Schipper's description of the city as a 'huge production machine' producing representations. Though it made nothing

⁴⁸³ Wilkie, p.37

⁴⁸⁴ Will Self, 'PsychoGeography. Motorway Madness,' *Independent Magazine*, 25 February 2006, p.2

⁴⁸⁵ *New York Clipper Almanac* (New York: Frank Queen, 1877), p.54–55

⁴⁸⁶ Champion Publishing Co., *The Young Pedestrian* (New York: Champion Publishing Co., 1882), p.3

⁴⁸⁷ Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p.103

⁴⁸⁸ Bernstein and Meltzer, p.701 and 708

material, the race as a whole staged the rhythms and routines of production in the city. Over six days, the comings and goings of the crowd turned the arena into an organic clock, which marked the shifts of industrial time: ‘The day grew older, and by degrees men who must sit behind counters all to-day in business offices left the Garden and another class of sight-seers arrived. They were workmen with their shovels and picks on their shoulders’ who remained ‘until nearly 7 o’clock’ in the morning.⁴⁸⁹ Then, women came ‘with gentleman friends,’ alone, or in groups, some of whom ‘spent the entire afternoon alternately reading and watching the men’.⁴⁹⁰ At four o’clock an ‘accession of downtown business men’ caused the contestants to ‘put on an extra spurt in recognition of their new arrivals.’ As the evening began, the workmen who had left ‘clean-handed and bright returned with grimy faces’.⁴⁹¹ Shortly before seven o’clock, some of the walkers ducked into their huts and emerged ‘radiant in the natty costumes worn during the remainder of the night,’ satin knee trunks and silk shirts (provided by the pedestrians or their backers). The contestants raced in earnest until the crowd dispersed around eleven o’clock, when they slowed to a walk. Despite the duration of the performance, the crowd’s movements, the walkers’ quickening pace, and their natty evening costumes demonstrate that ‘show time’ was still programmed to coincide with the majority of the spectators’ hours of leisure. The effect was that the arena became — to repurpose Leopoldina Fortunati’s description of reproductive labour — ‘almost [...] the mirror image, a back-to-front photograph’ of urban production.⁴⁹²

Shalson notes that durational art has often been viewed as a critical intervention into industrial time-discipline.⁴⁹³ The industrial revolution, when the time period rather than the task became the key measure of production, instituted a strict division between work and leisure, as well as a sense of ‘time-thrift’. As E.P. Thompson wrote in what is widely regarded (and contested) as the key essay on the topic: ‘Time is now currency: it is no longer passed but spent’.⁴⁹⁴ Though the walking contest was not conceived as an intervention into time-discipline, in practice, it unsettled conceptions of the “proper’ time of work’. For when the

⁴⁸⁹ Anon., ‘Fitzgerald Still Ahead’, *World*, 3 May 1884, p.1–2

⁴⁹⁰ Anon., ‘Rowell to the Front’, *World*, 29 April 1884, p.1

⁴⁹¹ Anon., ‘Hurrah for Fitzgerald!’, *World*, 4 May 1884, p.1–2

⁴⁹² Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital*, ed. by Jim Fleming, trans. by Hilary Creek (New York: Autonomedia, 1995), p.8. Originally published as *L'arcano della riproduzione: Casalinghe, prostitute, operai e capital* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1981).

⁴⁹³ Shalson, p.100

⁴⁹⁴ E.P. Thompson, ‘Time, Work, and Industrial Capitalism’, *Past and Present*, 38:4 (1967), 56–97 (p.61)

workday and conventional 'show time' were both over, the walkers kept walking. The *World* journalist compared the pedestrians' sustained action to the movement of the large clock that hung in the arena: 'Ceaselessly and as tirelessly, unlike the walkers, the two hands of the clock kept on their course and no wrinkles on the white face told the story of labor as did the black lines on the features of the men on the track'.⁴⁹⁵ By walking around the clock, the pedestrians seem to have posed the vexed contemporary question of what a working day should be. At a time of national campaigns for an eight-hour day, rather than the ten or twelve hours commonly demanded, the walkers set to work for as many of the twenty-four hours as could possibly be worked. In Karl Marx's terms, the contest asked, 'How far may the working day be extended beyond the amount of labour-time necessary for the reproduction of labour-power itself?'⁴⁹⁶

The expectation of impossibly repetitious and exhausting work had the effect of throwing sustained focus on bodily functions and their limits. Rather than spectacular racing, the major draw of the event seemed to be an opportunity to watch the men at close quarters, performing their everyday practices of eating, resting, and walking, day and night, under conditions of privation and the scrutiny of judges, reporters, and thousands of spectators. There was a hut for each walker at one end of the track, in a line the *World* dubbed 'Pedestrian Row' or 'rue de tramp'.⁴⁹⁷ 'One of the greatest points of interest is the trainers' end of the garden, where the huts are,' the journalist explained, and he visited regularly for news on competitors' torn muscles, stiffness, and appetites, closely attending to the race's effects on their bodies.⁴⁹⁸ In addition to distances traveled, the *World* reported daily on how long the men had slept. The race provoked prolonged focus on the everyday state of being alive. Bearing in mind the extreme toll this work took on bodies — Weston thought it unfit for human or beast — the race could also be said to intensify and aestheticise precarity.

The walkers' efforts to be on their feet for as long as they could manage was particularly charged in relation to concerns about overproduction and immigration. Newspapers expressed the widespread fear that recent immigrants

⁴⁹⁵ Anon., 'Hurrah for Fitzgerald!', *World*, 4 May 1884, p.1–2

⁴⁹⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Ben Fowkes, 3 vols (London: Penguin Books, 1990), I, p.378. Originally published as *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Oekonomie* (Hamburg: Otto Meisner, 1867), I, *Der Produktionsprozess des Kapitals*.

⁴⁹⁷ Anon., 'Their Long Jaunt Begun', *World*, 28 April 1884, p.1; Anon., 'Rowell Well in the Lead', *World*, 30 April 1884, p.1–2

⁴⁹⁸ Anon., 'Rowell Well in the Lead', *World*, 30 April 1884, p.1–2

would work excessively and undo the value of work through too much work. Even Pulitzer's *World*, which generally expressed a pro-immigration position, showed little support for Chinese, Slavic, and Southern European arrivals in America. Two weeks prior to the race, Pulitzer's editorial read: 'these foreigners, who it is said, 'work for fifty cents a day and live like hogs', are not Hungarians. They are Slavs [sic]'.⁴⁹⁹ Distinctions were being drawn between those who came to live and those who came to work excessively and leave, figured as specific national, racial, or ethnic groups. In 1882, nativist protectionism and prejudice had given rise to the first piece of legislation designed to prevent industrial migration, the Chinese Exclusion Act. Alan Kraut argues that concern was shifting from 'protecting the immigrant against the hardships of America' to 'protecting America from potentially dangerous elements in the immigrant population'.⁵⁰⁰

Pulitzer's editorials on immigration expressed conflicting sentiments. An immigrant himself, he was generally against restrictions to citizenship, such as language tests, and espoused a vision of an American melting pot which walked a line between social Darwinism and utopic visions of unity: 'Our greatest merit as it should be our greatest boast, is that we have assimilated all that is vital from every available stock, and, utterly disregarding the class distinctions of the past, have given Nature a new freedom to work out a new race'.⁵⁰¹ Pulitzer's support of immigrants was usually expressed in terms of physical strength: they brought 'strong blood and unlimited possibilities'.⁵⁰² Mirroring these conflicting sentiments, the walking contest simultaneously performed an ideal of industrial immigrant labour (a never-ending supply of labour power and potential) and also a nightmare of industrial immigrant labour (labour that devalued itself in the doing). As I'll go on to explore, it also utilised novel ways in which bodies and personhood could be exploited.

In expanding the working day to its absolute limit, the contest disrupted urban, capitalist narratives of ceaseless productivity by taking them too literally. It sent 'time-thrift' into overdrive, and broke down industrial time and work discipline into their constituent actions: endless, absurd, repetitious circuits, without meaning or purpose. Everyone involved seemed to be confronted by the

⁴⁹⁹ Joseph Pulitzer, Editorial, *World*, 18 April 1884, p.4

⁵⁰⁰ Alan M. Kraut, *The Huddled Masses: The Immigrant in American Society, 1880-1921* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlin Davidson, 1986), p.52

⁵⁰¹ Joseph Pulitzer, Editorial, *World*, 27 January 1884, p.4

⁵⁰² Joseph Pulitzer, Editorial, *World*, 27 January 1884, p.4

pointlessness of the walkers' 'self-imposed tasks'.⁵⁰³ By the second day, 'All of the men seemed tired of walking and willing to stop if the man in front would do the same,' but as long as one pedestrian was making circuits, the others were falling behind unless they too walked. Each looked 'at his competitors as though they were responsible for his hard task'.⁵⁰⁴ Summing up the race, the *New York Herald* declared, 'between eight and ten thousand men and women shouted and breathed tobacco smoke in Madison Square Garden last night. What for? To see a set of emaciated, woe-begone fellows limp about a queer shaped ring'.⁵⁰⁵

6. Economies of walking

Although the pedestrians' 'works of labor' unwittingly parodied industrial time-discipline, professional pedestrianism had an ambivalent status when it came to work.⁵⁰⁶ The *Genesee Valley Herald* wrote of Weston, 'Most men find it necessary to work for a living, but Weston walks and has his name kept before the public'.⁵⁰⁷ For the *Herald* journalist, walking functioned as a device for attracting attention; walking didn't count as work.

The journalist's view parallels claims made in the peripatetic discourse, in which walking was to be understood as non-work or respite from work. As described above, Wallace troubled this view by demonstrating that walking functioned to reproduce the self and as an element of intellectual labour. In Marxist Feminist terms, walking was part of the 'reproduction work': all of the care, support and effort that made it possible for a worker to live and do their job.⁵⁰⁸ The walking contest pushed an everyday, unproductive activity into a highly public realm, in which it could contribute to the making of a public persona. Like bridge jumping, the walking contest was hyper-exploitative in its valorisation: it shaped novel ways in which people could be exploited. By spectacularising reproductive labour, the contest made it valuable. It also altered its purpose,

⁵⁰³ Anon., 'Far Beyond the Record', *World*, 2 May 1884, p.1

⁵⁰⁴ Anon., 'Rowell Well in the Lead', *World*, 30 April 1884, p.1-2

⁵⁰⁵ Anon., 'Victory in the Balance', *New York Herald*, 3 May 1884, p.4

⁵⁰⁶ Anon., 'Hurrah for Fitzgerald!' *World*, 4 May 1884, p.1-2

⁵⁰⁷ In Marshall, p.44

⁵⁰⁸ Fortunati, p.8

because while reproductive labour was work that sustained life, the walkers threatened to destroy life through excessive labour.

Professional walking was an entrepreneurial business for which the pedestrians risked their bodies as well as their own or somebody else's money. Having put down a stake, the walkers usually had to go for a minimum number of miles (sometimes as many as five hundred) in order to qualify for a portion of the gate money and other earnings. It was quite possible, therefore, for a contestant to walk for several days and not only see no return, but actually lose money in the process. The alternative scenario was that a walker could become rich. In a major race in 1879, Rowell won \$19,500 in prize and gate money, and a further \$6000 in sweepstakes (the other pedestrians' stakes), all of which was split with his backer.⁵⁰⁹ Perhaps reflecting the decline of interest in pedestrianism, the final prizes in 1884 ranged from \$9468 for the winner, to around \$500 for the man who placed seventh.⁵¹⁰

Additional forms of gambling were another vital part of the walking economy. Bets hugely expanded opportunities for money to change hands, because they were not restricted to sporting questions of who would win or how far they would walk. Almost any aspect of the event could and did become an occasion for a bet among audience members; for example, Cumming writes that in the 1879 race, odds were offered on whether or not Weston would show up.⁵¹¹ Pedestrians also sometimes bet on themselves in order to supplement their earnings.⁵¹²

As the *Herald's* criticism of Weston's efforts to have 'his name kept before the public' suggests, walking and gambling were not the only ways to boost one's earning potential in the contest. A well-known sportsman in the audience at the 1884 race explained, "There is an intense desire among a number of gentlemen to become famous, respected and wealthy through the walking match".⁵¹³ Weston's first walk from Boston to Capitol Hill is a good example of how this could work: it began as a wager with a friend on the outcome of the presidential election, and Weston funded it by acting as an advertising medium, delivering leaflets for companies selling sewing machines, photography services, waterproof clothing,

⁵⁰⁹ Cumming, p.103

⁵¹⁰ Anon., 'The Great Six-Day Race,' *Turf, Field and Farm*, 9 May 1884, p.356

⁵¹¹ Cumming, p.92

⁵¹² Cumming, p.22

⁵¹³ Anon., 'Far Beyond the Record', *World*, 2 May 1884, p.1

and drugs.⁵¹⁴ Later, Weston made money by lecturing on walking and temperance, giving demonstrations of his gait at three, four, and five miles an hour, and walking backwards.⁵¹⁵ Thus Weston acted as a medium for circulation, and he also put *himself* into circulation, closely paralleling bridge jumpers by becoming an entrepreneur of himself and taking on some of the functions of money. He invested himself in an effort to boost his 'human capital,' and cash in on that capital in the form of endorsements, appearances, and advertisements. The *Sun* reported that in the 1879 race, Weston was more concerned with amusing the crowd than breaking records: 'he kicked up his heels, cantered stiff legged, went sideways, balanced his cane on his nose, and played other childish antics'.⁵¹⁶

Weston's contemporaries did not altogether approve of his exploits. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* wrote: 'the necessity or desirability of him is becoming less and less apparent. We have no hard feeling toward him, but we challenge his right to occupy so much attention'.⁵¹⁷ This commentator recognised that rather than competing earnestly for prizes, Weston operated according to an 'attention economy', as did several of the walkers in the 1884 contest. During the race, a capacity for making attention productive even applied to the audience, who 'attracted almost as much attention as did the men on the track'.⁵¹⁸ Prominent New Yorkers only had to turn up at the arena in a smart suit to be sure of publicity from the *World*.

Some contestants were depicted as primarily entertainment, with little or no consideration as competitors. Peter Napoleon Campana, nicknamed 'Old Sport', was 'induced to join the army of trampers at the Garden to make sport, cut up capers, and keep the crowd in good humor'.⁵¹⁹ The journalist described him as the 'clown of the ring,' who 'trot[ted] around with contortions that threaten[ed] to dismember him'.⁵²⁰ Indeed, the *National Police Gazette* reported that Campana had been 'engaged as the clown of the exhibition' and was 'to remain on the track until the close'.⁵²¹ There is, however, no record of if, or how, this work was remunerated.

⁵¹⁴ Marshall, p.2

⁵¹⁵ Marshall, p.42

⁵¹⁶ Quoted in Marshall, p.241

⁵¹⁷ Anon., Untitled, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 10 October 1874, p.4

⁵¹⁸ Anon., 'Fitzgerald's Great Feat', *World*, 1 May 1884, p.1-2

⁵¹⁹ Anon., 'Their Long Jaunt Begun', *World*, 28 April 1884, p.1

⁵²⁰ Anon., 'Rowell to the Front', *World*, 29 April 1884, p.1

⁵²¹ Anon., 'The Great Walk', *National Police Gazette*, 17 May 1884, p.7

Similarly, the *World* commented of Nitaw-eg-Ebow: 'As for the Indian, he was regarded like 'Old Sport,' as simply engaged to wear good clothes and please the ladies.' Nitaw-eg-Ebow 'changed his costume more frequently than any other man on the track,' slept more, and thus looked 'fresher' than the others and 'ran with more ease and grace'.⁵²² *Turf, Field and Farm* explained that by the third day, Nitaw-eg-Ebow was ready to give up, but as 'his admirers and the management realized that his occasional presence on the track would prove interesting to the spectators, he was requested to remain and occasionally run a fast five or ten miles as he saw fit'.⁵²³ This reframing of Nitaw-eg-Ebow as a vaudeville-style spectacle — 'a sideshow to please the ladies' — demonstrates how racial hierarchies and cultural hierarchies intersected.⁵²⁴ It formed part of a more general exoticisation: in his *World* portrait, Nitaw-eg-Ebow appeared in a feather headdress and tunic, holding a tomahawk and drinking from a flask of 'Fire Water'.⁵²⁵ His actual racing costume was similar to the other contestants: 'blue tights, white belt and blue shirt, with a white cap'. He was described as running 'as light of foot as if on the trail of his native woods', suggesting he was innocent of the race in which he participated and merely expressing his natural instincts.⁵²⁶ On the second day, the journalist noted that the 'novel spectacle' of a race between Nitaw-eg-Ebow and Winston H. Burrill, the African-American pedestrian, caused great excitement in the crowd.⁵²⁷ Their performances in the walking contest were shadowed by other performances commonly hosted in the arena (and others around the country), including exhibitions of 'Indian life,' and — as a sideshow during the race — a stand at which people could 'peg the negro's head with a baseball'.⁵²⁸

Nitaw-eg-Ebow's actions took their place in a history of walking that performed Native-American identities for consumption, drawing on exhibition-style imperial narratives of progress and civilisation. While on tour around Britain in the 1860s, for example, famous Native-American walker Deerfoot (also called Louis or Luke Bennet and Hagasadoni) performed war cries and publically refused to sleep in a bed as part of his public persona, responding to the demands of

⁵²² Anon, 'Fitzgerald's Great Feat', *World*, 1 May 1884, p.1–2

⁵²³ Anon., 'The Great Six-Day Race', *Turf, Field and Farm*, 9 May 1884, p.356

⁵²⁴ 'Fitzgerald's Great Feat'

⁵²⁵ 'Their Long Jaunt Begun'

⁵²⁶ 'Rowell Well in the Lead'

⁵²⁷ 'Rowell Well in the Lead'

⁵²⁸ Anon., 'P.T.Barnum's Great Hippodrome and World-Renowned Menagerie,' advertisement, *New York Tribune*, 8 December 1874, p.11; 'Fitzgerald's Great Feat'

crowds he met.⁵²⁹ Historian Peter Lovesey writes that Deerfoot's first race, which he narrowly lost to a well-established English pedestrian, was a 'springboard to unparalleled success. If this novice to English pedestrianism could almost match a first-class runner in his debut [...], what might he achieve after acclimatization, with training and advice from professional trainers?'⁵³⁰ Such reflections demonstrate that Native-American identities were bound up with conceptions of amateurism. To be the 'Indian' in the six-day race, it was vital that Nitaw-eg-Ebow not be professional in the manner of Rowell or Fitzgerald. At the end of the contest, Nitaw-eg-Ebow argued that the problem was that he had not trained properly, but next time he would understand the competition and be prepared.⁵³¹ His amateurish manner perfectly set up his persona as an attractive innocent with incredible, natural potential: an outsider who was at once 'other' and also in the process of becoming modern.

Having agreed to stay on as an incorporated 'sideshow,' Nitaw-eg-Ebow's attention-grabbing antics drifted further from the competition's goal: at one point he gave up walking and took a spin around Central Park in a carriage.⁵³² As this suggests, maintaining the attention of the crowd across six days was a challenge that spurred new combinations of sporting and theatrical performance. Such efforts reached a height in dance marathons of the 1920s and 1930s. Producing dance marathons 'as theater', Carol Martin writes, was a 'solution to the problem of audience interest in what was otherwise a long and repetitious contest'.⁵³³ Ultimately, the audience's attention was as scarce a resource as the dancers' energy, hence there were 'all manner of stunts worked into the contest itself, a variety of extra divertissements thrown in' to keep audiences engaged.⁵³⁴ Such entertainments included 'comedy sketches, weddings, mock weddings, elimination contests, and mud wrestling'.⁵³⁵ These additional entertainments were sometimes participatory: there were prize draws offering bags of groceries, and audience members could request performances from particular dancers.⁵³⁶ Martin quotes an

⁵²⁹ Peter Lovesey, *The Kings of Distance: A Study of Five Great Runners* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1968), p.27 and 31

⁵³⁰ Lovesey, p.21

⁵³¹ "If I had been in the hands of a good trainer, I would have had a good place at the finish." Nitaw-eg-Ebow quoted in Anon., 'Resting As They Please', *World*, 5 May 1884, p.1

⁵³² 'Far Beyond the Record'

⁵³³ Martin, p.23

⁵³⁴ Arnold Gingrich, 'Poor Man's Night Club', *Esquire* (Chicago), 1:1 (1933), 61

⁵³⁵ Martin, p.42

⁵³⁶ Martin, p.56

interview with a female contestant in a 1934 dance marathon, 'Jessie', who recalled, 'one night they gave me a singing lesson for my solo stunt'.⁵³⁷ In dance marathons, stunts were the extra entertainments and tasks performed by the dancers, just as they were seen as the extra feats vaudeville artists could provide to advertise their acts. The go-as-you-please race, like the dance marathon, required diversions in order to function: it was in this sense, a diversion that came with its own diversions. As well as competitors who functioned as 'sideshows' within the sporting competition itself, there were peripheral entertainments at which spectators could engage in 'pulse-driving exercises with a huge mallet,' test 'their skill with a rifle,' or weigh themselves.⁵³⁸

This characteristic — the double or two-fold diversion — made the walking contest a particularly compelling exploration of the relationship between work and leisure. The 'stunts' undertaken by Weston, Campana, and Nitaw-eg-ebow — balancing a cane on the nose, doing funny walks, taking a trip in a carriage — gave their performances the appearance of play. A *Gazette* reporter wrote of Weston: "To judge from his playfulness, one would think that a six-day walk was a holiday with him, and the tan bark [the sawdust-covered track] a delightful playground".⁵³⁹ This dynamic parallels theatrical performance. Ridout comments that theatre is an 'experience that is not normally experienced as work, but as some kind of nonwork or 'play.'"⁵⁴⁰ Like theatre, the walking contest put the division of labour on display, and the separation between work and leisure under pressure.

In the walking contest, the experience of work as nonwork was twofold. The competition as a whole was a form of entertainment, in which the walkers engaged in the 'nonwork' of walking. Within this forum for nonwork, a *further*, unstable division of labor took place, in which some walkers appeared to engage in nonwork or play, and other walkers in work. The result was a thorough destabilisation of a work/leisure binary. One spectator at the race, an ex-boxer, expressed pedestrianism's combination of labour and leisure thus: "I thought they [illegible] trained me pretty hard for a prize fight, but this kind of work for fun beats me all to pieces".⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁷ Martin, p.82

⁵³⁸ 'Fitzgerald's Great Feat'

⁵³⁹ Quoted in Cumming, p.93

⁵⁴⁰ Ridout, p.9

⁵⁴¹ 'Fitzgerald Still Ahead'

The 'stunts' performed by Weston, Campana, and Nitaw-eg-Ebow had the appearance of exceptional instances in the race, moments in which the contestants were not applying themselves to the task at hand. However, stunts were not confined to Weston's comic walks or Nitaw-eg-ebow's carriage ride: on the contrary, the entire contest was a stunt. Those acts seemed to be doubly removed from the ordinary rules of economy, production, and labour, but in fact, these twice-diverted-diversions reflected the structure not only of the contest as a whole, but also of major industries in which an attention economy operated, such as newspapers, advertising, and various forms of entertainment. In these industries, there was no sound or unsound circulation: circulation was productive in itself, because the crucial thing was to be seen by as many people as possible. Hence, stunts were a strategically sound mode of operation which recognised how attention could be converted to value and in doing so, disturbed prevailing notions of value and productivity.

Experimentation with what should or could be valuable was concomitant with urban migration on a vast scale. As new arrivals in New York, nineteenth-century immigrants may not have known what aspects of their bodies or personalities, their skills or abilities, might prove economically advantageous. Precisely where value was situated was difficult to specify. As Kraut put it: "The new immigrants in the United States faced the difficult task of carving for themselves a niche in a society to which they were strangers. What could they do here? What did they have that America needed?"⁵⁴² In 1887, a *World* reporter stationed at the port described the disembarkation of two tall German men who didn't speak much English, remarking on their impressive height. Following the newspaper's publication the next morning, the owner of a clothes shop on Broadway sent his clerk to find and employ the 'German giants.' The new arrivals were immediately engaged to walk up and down the busy street, dressed in the shop's finery, its name emblazoned upon their backs.⁵⁴³ Though walking was not universally accepted as work, many pedestrians developed their propensity for walking long distances while working precarious jobs, such as Dan O'Leary's stint as a book seller: "Trying to eke out an existence, he bravely continued his rounds of the city every day, and thus he acquired the strength of muscle and the long-

⁵⁴² Kraut, p.74

⁵⁴³ Anon., 'It Pays To Be a Tall Man', *World*, 27 November 1887, p.26

windedness, — necessary qualities of the pedestrian'.⁵⁴⁴ The lean body of the walker was also that of the precarious labourer, and walking contests were a situation in which an extreme version of the same, mundane activity could result in extraordinary wealth creation.

The stunts, then — those apparently extraordinary double diversions — demonstrated not only the economy of the walking contest, but also a much wider economic condition.

7. Reaching the limits

The points at which pedestrians gave up were as vital to the contest's dramaturgy as the race for the finish. The 'first wrecked' was William Wallace Lounsbury, who dropped out on the first day, complaining that the tobacco smoke in the Garden was nauseating.⁵⁴⁵ The second day saw two more defectors: John Sullivan, who also felt sick, and Campana, who told the *World*, "I've been so disheartened and disgusted by the jibing of the people in the Garden that I can't go any further."⁵⁴⁶ The third day 'settled three more of the ambitious plodders,' including Burrill, who 'thought it was no use continuing the race, as he could not cover enough miles to regain his entrance fee'.⁵⁴⁷ Burrill 'did not look out of form,' and according to the *World* journalist, simply declared, "I've had all de walking dis chile wants."⁵⁴⁸ Despite Day's strong start, he too abandoned the race that evening. Day had 'pushed along all day in spite of disordered stomach and swollen limbs,' but finally admitted that 'nature could stand no more'.⁵⁴⁹ The coverage conveys a strong interest in each competitor's breaking point, in the context of a wider attempt to explore humanity's limits. *Turf, Field and Farm* reported that a special box had been reserved for 'distinguished physicians who desire[d] to study the effects of diet and physical exertion upon the pedestrian'.⁵⁵⁰ The conspicuous presence of the doctors suggests the race drew on an exhibitionary mode of performance that

⁵⁴⁴ Marshall, p.103

⁵⁴⁵ Anon., 'The Great Walk,' *National Police Gazette*, 17 May 1884, p.7; 'Rowell to the Front'

⁵⁴⁶ 'The Great Walk'; 'Rowell to the Front'

⁵⁴⁷ 'The Great Walk'

⁵⁴⁸ 'The Great Walk'; 'Fitzgerald's Great Feat'

⁵⁴⁹ 'The Great Walk'

⁵⁵⁰ Untitled, *Turf, Field and Farm*, 4 April 1884, p.255

combined science and spectacular entertainment, inviting scrutiny of the participants as samples.⁵⁵¹

As successive contestants retired, the competition intensified. On the fourth day, 'Rowell, who had all along been at the head, lost his lead [...] At 1.45 A.M. Fitzgerald and Rowell came on the track and raced around at a faster pace than at any time since Monday. Between 2 and 3 o'clock each made 7 miles.' The pace proved 'too hot for Rowell,' and Fitzgerald took the lead.⁵⁵²

On the fifth day, eight walkers remained, and most were in 'a state of the most abject misery'.⁵⁵³ The *World* described the appearance of an exhausted pedestrian: 'His eyes are either sunken with blackened ridges beneath them or else protrude from their sockets and have almost the stare of death.' Portrayals of the pedestrians' decline suggest that the breakdown of their bodies became a troubling indicator of the degeneration of their respective peoples. On the final day, famous athlete Harry Vaughn took a few turns around the track with his child. The *World* compared Vaughn — 'his shoulders square, chest out and his legs as strong beneath him as iron shafts' — to Rowell and Fitzgerald, who 'seemed like descendants of a degenerated race. They were limp and weak; he was all strength and vitality'.⁵⁵⁴

Vaughn's upright walk is an example of what Tim Ingold describes as the 'so-called 'striding gait' with which the walkers of Western civilisation (especially men) have been enjoined since Antiquity to sally forth in the world, asserting as they go their superiority over subject people and animals'.⁵⁵⁵ Such ethnocentrism is evident in the description of the exhausted walkers: 'his cheek bones stand out more prominently than those of the wildest aborigine of the far West.' It is as though by losing their disciplined, military stride, the pedestrians had loosened their grip on whiteness, masculinity, and humanity. The walking contest itself constructed such racialised, gendered and classed identities through its competitive structure, and also demonstrated the wider role of the act of walking in this process by putting it under sustained observation. This gave rise to a curious situation in which identities were created, spectacularised and also

⁵⁵¹ Jane R. Goodall, *Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin: Out of the Natural Order* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p.21

⁵⁵² 'The Great Walk'

⁵⁵³ 'Far Beyond The Record'

⁵⁵⁴ 'Far Beyond The Record'

⁵⁵⁵ Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essay on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p.48

deconstructed in the competition. The pedestrians were both rigid expressions of specific identities and also undifferentiated beings reduced to nothing more than sustained output. The contest involved ‘the reduction of a man to the simple capacity to get on’ and the journalist remarked: ‘Probably two more uninteresting specimens of mankind than the two competitors on the track could not be found in the fifteen thousand’.⁵⁵⁶ In spite of participants’ hopes of forging celebrity identities, the race turned out to be a grim realisation of Hazlitt’s desire to lose his identity in the act of walking.

Structural similarities between pedestrianism and horseracing — shared locations, format, economies, and often participants — gave rise to frequent parallels between knackered horses and broken down pedestrians (comparisons also prevalent in dance marathons, as in the 1969 film *They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?*).⁵⁵⁷ In a speech following a race in 1867, Weston likened the ‘complete exhaustion’ that ‘every man must experience’ to ‘an animal’.⁵⁵⁸ During the final stages of the walking contest, the journalist noted that Fitzgerald’s ‘mouth was open and his tongue hung out. He looked like a jaded car horse’.⁵⁵⁹ The contest — an effort to record human achievement — thus involved the prolonged spectacle of people in a reduced, bestial, and ‘abject’ condition. The journalist’s description of the walkers as ‘descendants of a degenerated race’ portrays the spectacle as evolution in reverse.

Pedestrianism tapped into anxieties about over-civilisation, which mapped onto ideas about bipedalism and civilisation, and a related codification of hands and feet. As feet took on functions of weight bearing and motion, Ingold argues, hands ‘became answerable to the call of reason’.⁵⁶⁰ With ‘the onward march of civilisation’, hands grew ever more dexterous, but feet were progressively constricted. Because of advances in footwear such as restrictive boots, the foot ‘regressed to the status of a merely mechanical apparatus.’ Ingold notes that in 1881, Edward Tylor’s *Anthropology* stated that the Western foot had become ‘nothing more than a ‘stepping-machine’’.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁶ ‘Fitzgerald Still Ahead’

⁵⁵⁷ Martin, p.30; *They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?*, dir. by Sydney Pollack (ABC-Cinemara, 1969)

⁵⁵⁸ Quoted in Marshall, p.37

⁵⁵⁹ ‘Hurrah For Fitzgerald!’

⁵⁶⁰ Ingold, p.35

⁵⁶¹ Ingold, p.36

Pedestrianism, however, centered on the foot rather than privileging the hand. Depictions of the pedestrians as abject or bestial accord with the common connotations of the foot: it is 'the most humble and despised of all body parts' which 'provides us with a disturbing and profane(d) aesthetics'.⁵⁶² Instead of hiding feet away, pedestrianism made them the subject of intense scrutiny. In 1874, the *New York Herald* reported: 'To the men—and there are many of them—who frequent the Hippodrome during Weston's walk, the condition of the pedestrian's feet becomes a matter of absorbing importance; the general color of his corns, and, the brilliancy of his blisters, and the temperature of his toes, are subjects of the gravest discussion and the wildest speculations'.⁵⁶³

Burroughs proposed pedestrianism as a solution to the restriction of feet, and thereby the excessively constricting nature of civilisation. Enjoying the sense of profanity, he began his essay with an ode to the 'naked, human foot, [...] a thing sensuous and alive'.⁵⁶⁴ Next to the 'high-heeled boot,' he noted, it looked 'primitive and uncivil,' 'a real barbarian in the parlor!' Burroughs feared that the American man was falling behind in the 'manly art of walking' because his feet were becoming dainty through constriction and lack of use.⁵⁶⁵ His essay set forth 'to brag as lustily as [he could] on behalf of the pedestrian,' and propose walking as a means of checking the effeminizing, weakening effects of civilisation.⁵⁶⁶

Burroughs was not the only writer to make this claim. Quoting Christopher Christian Sturm, British writer Walter Thom argued that in 'a state of civilisation,' man 'does not know how much strength he possesses; how much he loses by effeminacy, nor how much he can acquire by frequent exercise'.⁵⁶⁷ Thom, writing when Britain was at war with both the United States and France, advocated pedestrianism as a means to rediscover and test this strength, with the aim of being in a state of preparedness for battle: 'Our regiments are gradually wasted by sickness and disease, for they are not fitted by a course of preparatory training'.⁵⁶⁸ Ordinary citizens, Thom argued, should imitate the soldier through practices of bodily discipline; they should march.

⁵⁶² Lavery and Whybrow, p.3 and 6

⁵⁶³ Quoted in Marshall, p.91

⁵⁶⁴ Burroughs, p.39

⁵⁶⁵ Burroughs, p.42

⁵⁶⁶ Burroughs, p.39

⁵⁶⁷ Walter Thom, *Pedestrianism; or, An Account of The Performances of celebrated Pedestrians During The Last and Present Century* (Aberdeen: D. Chalmers & Co., 1813), p.256

⁵⁶⁸ Thom, p.35

From this perspective, the walking contest had a peculiar double role. On the one hand, it celebrated an activity seen as the catalyst for human evolution and civilisation; on the other, it checked the undesirable effects of civilisation. This double role brings together both common meanings of the word ‘stunt’: civilisation in the form of boots and shoes checked the growth and development of feet, and spectacular feats of walking were the proposed solution. It also enacts Georges Bataille’s sacrificial logic, whereby non-productive drives must be unleashed — potentially violently — to restore a state of social equilibrium. This view is supported by the *World* journalist’s opinion that the 1884 walking contest structured and channeled the violent impulses of the crowd, which felt increasingly chaotic and uncivilised as the race progressed.

During the first two days, relations between pedestrians and audience, and within the audience, were largely convivial. Some walkers chatted with spectators, and audience members awarded their favourite contestants bouquets. However, as Rowell and Fitzgerald became the two frontrunners, tensions grew between English and Irish spectators, respectively. There were ‘hisses heard’ when Rowell was given flowers, as partisanship built among audience members. The *World* described one man’s shouts of support: “Give it to the tarrier!” cried a burly red-headed man, evidently a recent arrival from England. ‘Don’t let the Mick beat you’.⁵⁶⁹

By the following day, a police inspector was, to the reporter’s amusement, ‘solemnly impressed with the entirely original idea that there would be a war of races and a terrible riot’.⁵⁷⁰ That evening, the bar at the Garden did a strong trade and fights broke out between audience members: ‘A snarl of voices, a gleam of clubs, a leap of stalwart policemen.’ By this time, the crowd struck the reporter as ‘without exception the most ruthless assemblage that was ever gathered under a roof in New York,’ ‘a rude, bluff, insensible kind of humanity.’ In the journalist’s imagination, the scene gave an impression of ‘what the Roman amphitheatre must have been’; the walking match invoked ‘Nero’s Circus, and the mixed mob of plebeians and parasites who poured through the vomitories glutted with blood when it was all over.’ Rowell and Fitzgerald, were described in terms that recall the impersonal role of the ‘accursed share’ in a tragic sacrifice: ‘Some kind of inexplicable fascination keeps [spectators’] eyes fixed on that narrow strip of track

⁵⁶⁹ ‘Far Beyond the Record’

⁵⁷⁰ ‘Fitzgerald Still Ahead’

and upon the two uninteresting and gaunt men upon whom the strife has settled'.⁵⁷¹ And yet, the writer repeated, 'this is only a walking match': the journalist's heightened register, the pedestrians' 'awful agony,' and the 'mad crowd' were all out of kilter with the event's entertainment status.⁵⁷² Sacrificial logic was finding uncomfortable expression in the mechanisms of popular entertainment, where it could be exploited for economic gain.

In his analysis of endurance marathons, Gregg Whelan begins by asking 'why run?' and, in answer, offers a vision of the transformative capacity of the end of a long race: 'the opportunity to stop running at the end of a marathon — to halt the considerable difficulty that running has generated — is the most humane of offerings, the opportunity to re-enter the non-running world, to begin the world again'.⁵⁷³ An endurance marathon feels like 'a catastrophe of sorts,' Whelan writes, but it is, crucially, a 'freely-entered-into suffering; suffering undertaken so that suffering can end'.⁵⁷⁴ Such potential is, of course, complicated by money. With more than experience at stake in the go-as-you-please race, pedestrians, backers, and trainers were incentivized to push as far as possible. A *World* illustration entitled *Almost Gone* shows an exhausted man being pushed from behind, hinting at the trainers' role in keeping the contestants going: 'There are men who are not, to use a sporting phrase "dead game" and in such situations, trainers "must oftentimes use brute force to get him out of bed.'" There was speculation that some trainers drugged the athletes to sustain them. At one point, Fitzgerald disappeared into his tent with his trainer for five minutes. When he emerged, 'his face was clearer, his gait stronger, his eyes flashed and sparkled' and the 'general impression was that he had been given injections of morphine'.⁵⁷⁵ As the *World's* descriptions suggest, for periods of the race, some contestants gave up their freedom to choose, or temporarily agreed to be forced, complicating the degree to which the action was 'freely-entered-into'.

As in bridge jumping, however, the hope or promise of economic reward did not entirely justify the excessive suffering and risk of death that many endured.

⁵⁷¹ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, 3 vols (New York: Zone Books, 1988), I, p.59. Originally published as *La Part maudite* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967); 'Fitzgerald Still Ahead'

⁵⁷² 'Hurrah For Fitzgerald!'

⁵⁷³ Gregg Whelan, 'Running Through a Field', *Performance Research: A Journal of Performing Arts*, 17:2 (2012), 110–120 (p.111 and 117)

⁵⁷⁴ Whelan, p.118

⁵⁷⁵ 'Hurrah For Fitzgerald!'

The *World* journalist wrote that immediately after having stopped, the pedestrians ‘seemed to have forgotten all their pains and aches, or was it as many supposed — that they had suffered so much that they could feel no longer and if they fell now on this last lap it would not be to faint, but to die’?⁵⁷⁶ The reporter seemed unable to decide whether the event was glorious or shameful; whether it presented a possible relation to the ‘sacred’ or rather put human life and death into quotidian exchange.⁵⁷⁷

At the end of the race, having covered sixty hundred and ten miles and rested for less than twenty-nine hours in total, Fitzgerald took the prize.

Nationalist tensions stirred by the contest were brought to a symbolic conclusion:

The band played ‘See the Conquering Hero Comes,’ and the hero, Fitz., walked with Rowell by his side. Fitz. carried two flags, one Irish and the other American. Rowell snatched the green one from him, and forgetting everyone and everything dashed down the stretch waving the colors. The victor followed fluttering the Stars and Stripes.⁵⁷⁸

According to the *World*, Rowell was initially unwilling to carry the Irish flag, but had done so at the behest of Duryea as a ‘little ruse to pacify any national spite’.⁵⁷⁹ Regardless of Rowell’s inclination, then, the organizers thought it necessary to demonstrate that the pedestrians had to some extent transcended narrow national identities. The strategy was successful: the crowd ‘cheered and howled [...] as though they had won a lost world.’ The *World* journalist’s impression seems in accord with Whelan’s sense that the end of an endurance marathon offers a chance, for both runners and spectators, ‘to begin the world again.’ For the reporter, the end invoked circularity as well as completion, a sense of being back where they began: ‘Rowell and Fitzgerald stood again before the big clock where they had started almost six days before [...] Fitzgerald extended his hand and the Englishman grasped it. The fifteen thousand people cheered and the race was done.’ Fitzgerald took a prize of over \$9000, which his wife hoped they would use to return to the ‘old country’.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁶ ‘Hurrah For Fitzgerald!’

⁵⁷⁷ Bataille, p.58

⁵⁷⁸ ‘Hurrah For Fitzgerald!’

⁵⁷⁹ ‘Hurrah For Fitzgerald!’

⁵⁸⁰ ‘Hurrah For Fitzgerald!’

8. Conclusion

The 'go-as-you-please' race pushed competitors to their limits, and in doing so, staged and aestheticised precarity. This grim feat of endurance responded to ethnocentric fears of over-civilisation by rehearsing conflict in a ritual form, which was experienced as akin to sacrifice.

Pedestrianism exemplifies stunts' tendency to expose interlocking cultural hierarchies: distinctions between amateurism and professionalism; skilled and unskilled; sideshow and serious competitor. The six-day race proliferated hierarchies within the competition, yet at times it also undercut them, problematising distinctions between work and leisure, work and life, and sporting and theatrical modes of performance. While frivolous acts within the competition were framed as exceptional, the contest demonstrated that stunts were not merely *divertissement* within the event, but characterised its economy as a whole. Like bridge jumping, pedestrianism demonstrated that attention directed towards a public persona could be converted to wealth, destabilising a connection between work and productivity. The self-exploitation involved in creating a public persona often incurred spectacular racialisation, as contestants became the vehicles for exoticisation or fears of racial degeneration.

The triviality of the competition — 'only a walking match' — was a vital factor in enabling such rehearsals of conflict and explorations of value. By being performed as a stunt, walking was brought to a devalued state, distanced from its ideal connection with meditation and communion with nature. The 1884 race demonstrates how stunts could become an unwieldy but powerful tool for revealing the economic, temporal, and cultural structures of living and working in the industrial city.

3.

Stunt Journalism**1. Introduction**

In the previous two chapters, I've investigated precarity, sacrifice and surrogation through analysis of feats undertaken by men, and explored how they intersected with conceptions of masculinity, labour and race. Such dangerous feats were of course also performed by women, as exemplified in circus scholarship by Janet Davis, Peta Tait and Helen Stoddard. There were professional female pedestrians, such as Madame Anderson, and the first person to jump from Niagara Falls in a barrel was a woman of middle-age, Anna Edson Taylor, who sought to 'attract the attention of museum and theatrical managers in order to secure money to provide a home for herself' in later life.⁵⁸¹ The pairing of women and writing in this chapter, then, should not be read as an indication that women didn't take part in extremely risky physical stunts.

Stunt journalism, however, was a practice dominated by women, which investigated and enacted female labour and identity in novel and revealing ways. It involved journalists putting themselves into dangerous and controversial situations, often uncover, in order to write about their experiences. Stunt journalism was part of the *World's* reform programme and it brought social issues to public attention. It was also a sensational, entertaining form, in which journalists spectacularised and exploited themselves and others in the service of boosting the *World's* circulation figures.

Writing in the late nineteenth century, stunt journalists could draw on a lineage of writing by American women, and take part in a vibrant contemporary culture of women's writing. Many of the major female writers of the nineteenth century switched between fiction, essays, poetry and journalism, which enabled them to explore women's roles and rights in a range of genres and tones. The 1850s saw a flourishing of women's fiction, which coincided with the development of a mass market in which women were the primary readers.⁵⁸² African-American writers such as Frances Harper and Harriet Jacobs (published under the

⁵⁸¹ Anon., 'Over the Falls', *Cameron County Press* (PA), 31 October 1901, p.3

⁵⁸² Elaine Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers: American Woman Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2009), p.72 and 82

pseudonym Linda Brent) began to make a mark on public life, as did white writers exploring slavery and abolition, most notably Harriet Beecher Stowe. Women were closely associated with domestic, sentimental and gothic fiction, and critics often accused their writing of being commercial and lacking in literary merit.⁵⁸³ After the Civil War, when the Women's Suffrage movement gathered force, women's literature was dominated by visions of 'the emancipated woman of the future', who appeared in novels by Alice Cary and Lillie Devereux Blake among others.⁵⁸⁴ In the 1890s, the concept of the 'New Woman' caught many imaginations. In her groundbreaking study of American women writers, Elaine Showalter describes how the New Woman 'rejected conventional female roles, redefined female sexuality, and asserted their rights to higher education and the professions'. Rather than accepting domestic roles, new women were 'daring modern heroines in search of 'feminine self-realization.'"⁵⁸⁵ Single women were constructed as a 'new political and sexual group, not just as an absence' and some public figures such as suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton called for recognition of women's sexual desires.⁵⁸⁶ The rapidly organising suffrage movement abandoned campaigns for racial equality for the promise of female suffrage (a *World* article records Susan B. Anthony describing the success of a blackface minstrel performance as a suffrage fundraiser).⁵⁸⁷ Hence African-American women formed their own collectives, buoyed by the work of black intellectuals and campaigners such as Ida B. Wells. Radical writers of this era including Pauline Hopkins and Charlotte Perkins Gilman reimaged women's identities and roles in society. As well as scholarship by Showalter and Judith Fetterley, this chapter builds on literary research on stunt journalism by Jean Marie Lutes, Alice Fahs, Brooke Kroeger, Phyllis Abrams, Rebecca Loncraine and Karen Roggenkamp. In addition to stunt stories in the *World*, I briefly analyse Dorothy Richardson's novel *The Long Day*, published in 1905 and based on articles written for the *New York Herald*.

Stunt journalism drew on a legacy of sentimental, popular fiction, the type that realist and naturalist writers perceived as excessively emotional, commercial and feminine. Yet they also created contrasting aesthetics of femininity, presenting

⁵⁸³ Showalter, p.71

⁵⁸⁴ Showalter, p.164

⁵⁸⁵ Showalter, p.210

⁵⁸⁶ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 2010), p.21 and 46

⁵⁸⁷ Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Bly with the female suffragists', *World*, 26 January 1896, p.4

daring and adventurous female leads who anticipated the heroines of cinematic melodrama of the 1910s.⁵⁸⁸ Stunt stories appeared next to sections explicitly aimed at women, sometimes called ‘Woman’s World’, which was one of Joseph Pulitzer’s editorial innovations.⁵⁸⁹ A major part of the *World*’s human interest journalism, stunt stories, in Alice Fahs’ words, ‘created an important new social space within the pages of the newspaper’, encouraging interaction and representations that ‘imagined a variety of new social worlds’.⁵⁹⁰ They were a lively part of “women’s culture”, which Lauren Berlant frames as a ‘mass-market intimate public’. This intimate public, Berlant writes, has long been the site of white bourgeois women’s fantasies of non-white and working class women’s interiority. She states that ‘the intimate sphere of femininity’ in sentimental fiction contains ‘a kind of soft supremacy rooted in compassion and coercive identification’ which at once negates and instils race and class hierarchies.⁵⁹¹ Stunt stories are a prime example of such ambivalent identification and embodiment.

The cultural hierarchies explored in the previous two chapters — professionalism and amateurism, skilled and unskilled, sideshow and main event, sacred and profane — are explored in this chapter through the lenses of gender, work and identity.

After an introduction to stunt stories in the context of the *World*, this chapter analyses Elizabeth Cochrane’s first stunt story, ‘Behind Asylum Bars’. I argue that Cochrane became an ‘entrepreneur of [her]self’, in Michel Foucault’s terms, creating both a sustained public persona, Nellie Bly, and a series of surrogates with various levels of significance and realism. Questioning the role of ‘complete’ technological reproduction in mediatization, I contend that Cochrane’s stunt stories disrupted liveness. I then examine how her techniques intersected with cultures of reform, work and celebrity, suggesting that cross-ethnic and cross-class embodiment were constitutive of emerging, middle-class, professional female identities, but also had parallels in working-class women’s cultures.

Stunt journalism responded to a triangulation of women, work and sex, which had its root in female labour under industrial capitalism. I examine stunt

⁵⁸⁸ Alice Fahs, *Out On Assignment: Newspaper Women and the Making of Modern Public Space* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p.164

⁵⁸⁹ Anon., ‘Woman’s World’, *World*, 28 October 1895, p.22

⁵⁹⁰ Fahs, p.94

⁵⁹¹ Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2008), p.5-6

stories' explorations of women's work in their sociohistorical context, and argue that stunt journalists adopted a novel technique of spectacularising reproductive labour and making it peculiarly productive. I frame this technique as stunt journalists producing themselves as image, and investigate the problematics of this approach by the mid-1890s. Many stunt stories came to be written by anonymous female writers under composite pseudonyms. Often undertaking dangerous tasks, stunt journalists became widely available surrogates who spectacularised the dangers of life in New York and described their work in sacrificial terms. While some journalists became famous personalities, others were rendered a series of replaceable surrogates. I argue that the configuration of identity in these later stunt stories anticipated cinematic stunts in the early twentieth century.

2. Stunt journalism: an overview

Stunt journalism in New York was initiated by Elizabeth Cochrane, known as Nellie Bly, in 1887, two years after W.T. Stead forged similar strategies for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in London. In the late 1880s, stunt stories appeared in the *World* by Nell Nelson (whose given name was Nell Cusak), Fannie Merrill and Viola Roseboro, as well as male journalists. In the 1890s, Cochrane/Bly continued to have a prominent position, and the *World* was also joined by Kate Swan (mainly Kate Swan McGuirk) and Dolores Marlburg.⁵⁹² Further articles were written by Becky Sharp, Caroline Wetherell, Dorothy Dare, Meg Merrilies — a pseudonym adopted by various reporters — and another shared *nomme de plume*, 'The New Woman'. At one stage, 'The New Woman' was Annie Kopchovsky, who is discussed in chapter 4.

Stunt stories were almost always published in Sunday newspapers, which were a burgeoning and competitive market, reflecting the long hours and six-day weeks worked by many of the city's residents. Under the editorship of Morrill Goddard, who was later poached by William Randolph Hearst for the *Journal*, the large, playful and picture-packed *Sunday World* reached a mass audience, including

⁵⁹² Fahs, p.6

semi-literate and illiterate people.⁵⁹³ In 1887, it featured small illustrations, and by the mid-1890s, photographs, lithographs, cartoons, magazines and coloured supplements with whole-page images. Stunt stories usually appeared towards the back of the Sunday edition, among content that was geared more towards entertainment than news.

As argued in the introduction, the *World's* representational framework was shaped by popular literature and theatre, and nowhere was this more the case than in stunt stories. Writing under pen names, the journalists created characters for themselves, drawing on tropes of damsels in distress and plucky young heroines. Cochrane took the name 'Nellie Bly' from a folk song, while 'Meg Merrilies' is a character in Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering*. For female fiction writers, this had been the established practice for over a century. Only in the twentieth century did women tend to publish under their own name.⁵⁹⁴

The theatricality of stunt stories was most obviously expressed in a returning practice of journalists becoming an actor for a day: Cochrane/Bly and Meg Merrilies both undertook this task, Merrilies twice.⁵⁹⁵ Stunt journalists also explored circus performance: Cochrane/Bly rode one of the elephants who had just joined P.T. Barnum's 'Greatest Show on Earth', and met William Cody's cowgirls (though refused an invitation to ride a bucking horse).⁵⁹⁶ Swan learned how to balance on the back of trotting circus horse.⁵⁹⁷

Theatricality extended beyond investigations of the performing arts. As well as the reporters' aliases, stunt stories usually involved another character, an undercover persona. Writers drew on stage conventions in shaping these, with some dwelling extensively on costume and make-up. When Roseboro disguised herself as a beggar, for example, she wrote: 'One would hardly believe how hard it is to get beggar's rags. [...] The jersey was too good, but then it would be covered up with a shawl, and as I am too thin for a jersey it looked woebegone on me. The shoes were great.' Roseboro took pleasure in the theatrical aesthetics of her task:

⁵⁹³ George Juergens, *Joseph Pulitzer and the New York World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), p.94

⁵⁹⁴ Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers*, p.xvi

⁵⁹⁵ Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Bly On the Stage', *World*, 4 March 1888, p.15; Meg Merrilies, 'How Easy It Is To Be An Actor', *World*, 28 January 1894, p.14; Meg Merrilies, 'Meg Merrilies as a "Barn-Stormer"', *World*, 21 October 1894, p.33

⁵⁹⁶ Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Bly As An Elephant Trainer', *World*, 23 February 1896, p.17; Nellie Bly, 'Girls of The Wild West', *World*, 8 July 1888, p.9

⁵⁹⁷ Kate Swan, 'Kate Swan A Fairy Bareback Rider: Thrilling Experiences in the Tan-Bark Ring, Poised On a Trained Galloping Steed', *World*, 8 March 1896, p.25

'It was becoming, too, in a downcast way, when I got my hair parted in the middle and combed down plain [...] I much desired to add to my effect by trying a little make-up, but a sick make-up, as the actors would call it.'⁵⁹⁸ Similarly, when Cochrane/Bly went undercover in a box factory, she expressed delight at her carefully-chosen props: 'In a nice little bundle covered with brown paper [...] was my lunch [...] I considered the lunch a telling stroke of thoughtfulness in my new role'.⁵⁹⁹ Roseboro was both drawn to a realist portrayal and frightened by it: the notion that it was relatively easy to pretend to be in need disturbed her — the 'worst thing about it all is that everybody was mightily influenced by a little acting' — as did the possibility of losing her middle-class status: 'I was on the street, in the pitiless glare of light, my identity gone'. Even back in her own clothes, Roseboro wrote that she found herself 'looking at everybody with beggar's eyes', as if she had been internally altered by the costume: 'it was some twenty-four hours before the paint entirely wore off.' Yet her experience had not given her more empathy for beggars, and at the end she continued to believe that people ought not to give them money.⁶⁰⁰

In the most extreme example of the theatrical representation of race that Kyla Wazana Tompkins identifies in wider visual culture, a male journalist, W. J. Curtis adopted a blackface minstrel costume in order to investigate whether black New Yorkers were being refused service in bars and restaurants. This application of stage tropes to wider public life enabled the racist pleasures of blackface minstrelsy to be enjoyed within a framework of social investigation. Though it purported to expose racial prejudice, the article's interest rested as much on the success of his impersonation as it did on whether African-American New Yorkers were being excluded. The story concluded with the journalist 'scraping the black from [his] face' and expressing sympathy for restaurant managers, who could not serve black customers because they had to 'protect their own interests' but made their refusals 'as kindly as possible so as not to hurt their feelings and to avoid lawsuits'.⁶⁰¹ Hence cross-class and cross-race embodiments in stunt stories allowed for conflicting impulses of identification, appropriation and rejection — or love and theft in Eric Lott's terms.

⁵⁹⁸ Roseboro, 'Begging As An Avocation', *World*, 11 Dec 1887, p.11

⁵⁹⁹ Nellie Bly, 'The Girls Who Make Boxes', *World*, 27 November 1878, p.10

⁶⁰⁰ Roseboro, 'Begging As An Avocation', *World*, 11 Dec 1887, p.11

⁶⁰¹ W.J. Curtis, 'Disguised As A Negro', *The World*, 10 June 1888, p.3

Stunt journalism expressed a reforming impulse in several ways. Merrilies observed votes being counted in New York to check for any foul play.⁶⁰² Bly investigated and exposed corruption among lobbyists and politicians.⁶⁰³ In the 1890s, Bly visited Tammany Hall and interviewed several political figures, including the Reverend Charles Parkhurst.⁶⁰⁴ She travelled to Pullman to meet striking workers and residents, and interviewed New Yorkers starving as a result of the 1893 recession.⁶⁰⁵ Bly also interviewed anarchist Emma Goldman, as well as some key figures in women's movements, including Susan B. Anthony and Belva Ann Lockwood.⁶⁰⁶ If Bly expressed support for these figures, it was usually the culmination of a skittish dramaturgical arc involving a reversal. After meeting the Pullman residents, for example, Bly declared she had completely changed her opinion of them and was finally persuaded to give a rousing speech to the strikers.⁶⁰⁷

As well as engaging with political leaders, stunt journalists explored political issues on the ground, again in a dramatic fashion. Several spent nights on the streets to report on the conditions they experienced, and one man spent a month in a workhouse.⁶⁰⁸ Another male journalist named 'J.Z.R.' spent three days in prison, as well as investigating a major strike by becoming a trolley car driver for a day.⁶⁰⁹ Bly reported on her experiences as a Salvation Army member.⁶¹⁰ The *New Woman*, meanwhile, patrolled with police officers attempting to tackle vice in Tenderloin District.⁶¹¹ Like nineteenth-century reformers more broadly, stunt

⁶⁰² Meg Merrilies, 'Meg Merrilies On Watch At the Polls: The World's Courageous Young Woman Officially Watches the Voting in the Worst Election District: Saves the Inspectors From Making Mistakes', *World*, 11 November 1896, p.18

⁶⁰³ Nellie Bly, 'The King of the Lobby', *World*, 1 April 1888, p.19; Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Bly and Mr. Lexow', *World*, 1 July 1894, p.13

⁶⁰⁴ Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Bly and the Tiger', *Sunday World*, 8 October 1893, p.17-18; Nellie Bly, 'Dr Parkhurst to Nelly Bly', *World*, 10 December 1893, p.33

⁶⁰⁵ Nellie Bly, 'Cheers for Nellie Bly', *World*, 15 July 1894, p.20; Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Bly Among the Starving', *World*, 14 January 1894, p.29

⁶⁰⁶ Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Bly Again', *World*, 17 September 1893, p.1 and 3; Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Bly with the female suffragists', *World*, 26 January 1896, p.4; Nellie Bly, 'Champion of Her Sex', *World*, 2 February 1896, p.10

⁶⁰⁷ Nellie Bly, 'Cheers for Nellie Bly', 15 July 1894, p.20

⁶⁰⁸ Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Bly Roughing It', *World*, 3 February 1895, p.11; The *New Woman*, 'The New Woman's Night in Greenwood', *World*, 11 August 1895, p.26; Becky Sharp, 'All Night In New York's Streets', *Sunday World*, 9 April 1893, p.19 and 20; W.P.R., 'One Month in a Workhouse', *World*, 10 June 1888, p.22

⁶⁰⁹ J.Z.R., 'Three Days in Tombs Prison', *World*, 17 February 1895, p.20; J.Z.R., 'Running A Car In The Big Strike', *World*, 20 January 1895, p.25

⁶¹⁰ Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Bly As a Salvation Army Girl', *World*, 1 October 1893, p.17-18

⁶¹¹ The *New Woman*, 'A Night in a Patrol Wagon', *World*, 6 October 1895, p.38

journalists veered between blaming social conditions and blaming individuals for their plight, as I'll go on to describe.

Female stunt journalists were particularly involved with investigating sex work: Bly exposed a man who was drawing women into sex work in Central Park, and Dolores Marlburg investigated flower selling as a cover for selling sex, as discussed below.⁶¹² Bly also visited homes for the religious reform of 'fallen' women, as well as reporting on the trade in babies.⁶¹³ Such investigations combined contradictory positions: a drive to expose the sexual exploitation of women and its wider effects, melodramatic depictions of 'fallen' women, and titillating identification of the journalists with sex workers.

Connected to a reform agenda were stunt stories' frequent investigations of spiritualist, occult or superstitious practices. These stories were usually triumphalist exposures of fraudulence by mesmerists, hypnotists and other purveyors of faith-based practices, expressing a secularising drive.⁶¹⁴ At times, such stories dramatised encounters with an exoticised 'other', as in Bly's meeting with an African-American 'voodoo' practitioner. In her woozy account of their conversation, Bly felt her 'will weakening' and her mind becoming susceptible to 'superstition' which she thought 'foreign' to her, framing the encounter as a melodramatic seduction.⁶¹⁵ Bly's stories often tried out services that had been advertised in the *World*, which added an intertextual element to these investigations, and cemented Bly's emerging role as representative of the *World's* readership.

Notably, stunt stories carried out a prolonged exploration of women and work. Journalists including Cochrane/Bly and Merrill went undercover in factories and exposed the conditions they found there.⁶¹⁶ In 1887, Cusak/Nelson wrote a series of articles called the 'White Slave' stories, originally published in the *Chicago Times* and reprinted in the *Sunday World*. Cusak subsequently settled in New York and worked for the *World*. In the 'White Slave' series, Cusak/Nelson found short-

⁶¹² Nellie Bly, 'The Infamy of the Park', *World*, 5 August 1888, p.9; Dolores Marlburg, 'One Day As A New York Flower Girl', *World*, 1 October 1893, p.25

⁶¹³ Nellie Bly, 'In The Magdalen's Home', *World*, 12 February 1888, p.29; Nellie Bly, 'What Becomes of Babies', *World*, Sunday 6 November 1887, p.10

⁶¹⁴ Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Bly As A Mesmerist', *World*, 25 March 1888, p.19; Nellie Bly, 'How To Be Cured By Faith', *World*, 1 July 1888, p.1; Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Bly And A Spiritualist', *World*, 11 November 1894, p.25

⁶¹⁵ Nellie Bly, 'A New York Voodoo Knave', *World*, 19 August 1888, p.11

⁶¹⁶ Fannie B. Merrill, 'Cigarette Girls', *World*, 20 November 1887, p.25 and 'A Make Believe Shop Girl', *The World*, 6 November 1887, p.11; Nellie Bly, 'The Girls Who Make Boxes', *World*, 27 November 1887, p.10

term employment in companies including a feather factory, clothes manufacturer, bookbindery and office.⁶¹⁷ The title of these series expressed a racialised fear of the degradation of white workers under industrial capitalism, which both elided the history of slavery and presented white suffering as particularly deserving of sympathy, relating to the conflation of freedom, skill and whiteness discussed in chapter 1. Cusak/Nelson was appalled at the harsh conditions and meagre pay that she discovered. She described at length the depleted state of her colleagues: 'stoop shouldered, thin, with dark rings about their eyes [...] pale and wan, emaciated in figure and bodily harassed', a 'tireless army of young martyrs', 'pale-faced and stunted in growth'.⁶¹⁸ Nelson figured the operating factory as nightmarish: its 'feverish heat', 'ceaseless whiz and deafening rumble of machinery' continued 'with an industry that [was] appalling'.⁶¹⁹ She described in detail her own experiences of labour: 'I sewed until my fingers had needle cramps, my head swam and my back ached; until my joints were sore, my feet blistered and my body perspired with heat; until every garment clung to my flesh and every vein swelled with pain'.⁶²⁰

Cusak/Nelson's focus on physical labour and sensation should be read in the context of tensions within working women's movements regarding the role of middle-class women. In 1887, the *World* commented on moves to unionise working women: 'Organisation and Exertion, Not Sympathy, Is What They Need'.⁶²¹ Descriptions of a meeting to discuss unionisation suggested a gulf between those 'well-dressed lad[ies]' who came to 'sympathize with their poorer sisters' and 'wage-earners', who risked their livelihoods by attending.⁶²² Philip Foner argues that middle-class women's focus on suffrage as the route to an improvement in women's conditions distanced them from the majority of unskilled, wage-earning women for whom economic improvement was the most urgent demand. The New York Working Women's Association turned away from unionism and towards 'fact-finding investigations of conditions in various industries,' which provided useful information, but generally concluded with

⁶¹⁷ Nell Nelson, 'White Slave Girls', *World*, 23 September 1888, p.17; 'Poor White Slave Girls', *World*, 30 September 1888, p.17; 'Ammidown's White Slaves', *World*, 31 October 1888, p.17; 'Fingers Worn to the Bone', *World*, 18 November 1888, p.9

⁶¹⁸ Nelson, 'Poor White Slave Girls'; Nelson, 'White Slave Girls'

⁶¹⁹ Nelson, 'White Slave Girls'

⁶²⁰ Nelson, 'White Slave Girls'

⁶²¹ Anon, 'Women Workers to Unite', *World*, 24 November 1887, p.5

⁶²² Anon. 'Slavery In All But Name', *World*, 17 November 1887, p.6

'rhetorical appeals.' Such investigations involved 'professional, middle-class women: working women were the object of their efforts but had no voice in their activities.'⁶²³ Cochrane/Bly put the efficacy of middle-class rhetoric into question when she called upon campaigners to assist in procuring women positions: 'Here would be a good field for believers in women's rights. Let them forego their lecturing and writing and go to work: more work and less talk.'⁶²⁴

Stunt stories demonstrate conflicting views of the nature of action and efficacy of sympathy. As Cusak/Nelson's articles imply, stunt stories were often performances of effusive sympathy, combined with sensationalist descriptions of bodily and emotional responses. As the blackface minstrelsy article and Roseboro's story on begging demonstrate, however, at times stunt stories exposed the limits of the journalists' sympathy. The apparent embodiment of a role was taken as justification for the withdrawal of sympathetic feeling and any action to which it might lead. In other cases, the way that stunt stories performed empathy in a physical sense — the journalists embodied the object of empathy — lent them a claim to impact that clouded a distinction between action and emotional rhetoric. As outlined in the introduction, this was characteristic of the *World*, which sought to present itself as a political actor. Stunt stories' publication in the *World* was an event with considerable potential impact, and some did inspire political change, including Cochrane/Bly's first stunt story. However, a desire to conflate empathy and action connected to broader class problematics, and a tendency, as Berlant argues for a writer's sense of 'compassion' to allow them to experience themselves as overcoming hierarchies, 'while busily exoticising and diminishing the inconvenient and the noncompliant'.⁶²⁵

As well as exposures of industrial labour conditions, stunt stories involved women trying out various occupations for a day, thereby demonstrating their ability to carry out the work.⁶²⁶ These stories exposed the theatricality of everyday labour, and of shaping oneself to suit a market. They are developed examples of female writers creating themselves as writers in order to 'insist on the possibility of women transforming themselves from consumers to producers', as Walter Benn

⁶²³ Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement* (New York: Free Press, 1979), p.154

⁶²⁴ Nellie Bly, 'The Girl Puzzle', *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, 25 January 1885, reprinted in Brooke Kroeger, *Nellie Bly* (New York: Times Books, 1994), p.47

⁶²⁵ Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, p.6

⁶²⁶ The New Woman, 'The New Woman in a Life-Saver's Boat', *World*, 23 June 1895, p.29; The New Woman, 'Sunday With A Woman Excise Inspector', *World*, 8 September 1895, p.29; The New Woman, 'A New Woman Mail Clerk', *World*, 10 November 1895, p.36

Michaels writes.⁶²⁷ Stunt stories also fed into the *World's* depiction of the 'New Woman' as a spectacular curiosity: a figure of fun as well as progress. Stunt stories appeared in the same newspapers as a series entitled 'The "New Woman" In Everyday Life' detailing her 'Exploits', 'Foibles and Freaks'.⁶²⁸ Merrilies, for example, spent not one but two weeks in 'trouserettes' to report on her experience.⁶²⁹ Just as journalists were presented in a literary or theatrical representational frame, so too were the 'plucky' women featured in the *World's* news stories, who were breaking into new professions.⁶³⁰ The next sections analyses the demanding role that stunt journalists played in the *World's* production of sensation.

3. Stunt stories and the *World's* circulation

Cochrane/Bly's most famous stunt was her enactment of Jules Verne's 1873 novel, *Le Tour du Monde en Quatre-vingts Jours*, or *Around the World in 80 Days*, in 1889-90. Billed as turning fiction into fact, as well as a scientific experiment, the trip saw Cochrane/Bly travel through Southampton, Calais (where she met Verne), Brindisi, Colombo, Hong Kong, Yokohama and San Francisco, and finally return to New York in seventy-two days.⁶³¹ Realising that there would be little in the way of communication from Bly to publish, the *World* maintained interest by offering a trip to Europe for the reader who guessed the exact time of Bly's journey, while the *Journal* sent their own journalist to race Bly.⁶³² The *World* announced the venture with the words: 'Can Jules Verne's Great Dream be reduced to Actual Fact! A Veritable Feminine Phileas Fogg'.⁶³³ On return, Cochrane/Bly was greeted by enormous crowds and the *World's* hyperbolic praise: 'Is someone dead? Only an old era. [...] The stage coach days are ended, and the new age of lightning travel has begun.'⁶³⁴ After the trip, she went on to perform a lucrative lecture tour,

⁶²⁷ Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.28

⁶²⁸ Anon, 'The "New Woman" in Everyday Life', *World*, 11 August 1895, p.33; 1 September 1895, p.37; 8 September 1895, p.32; 29 September 1895, p.38; 6 October 1895, p.36; 13 October 1895, p.21; 10 November 1895, p.33

⁶²⁹ Meg Merrilies, 'A Week in Trouserettes', *World*, 4 March 1894, p.25; Meg Merrilies, 'Another Week in Trouserettes', *World*, 11 March 1894, p.25

⁶³⁰ Anon., 'Three Plucky Girl Editors', *World*, 1 August 1897, p.26

⁶³¹ Anon. and Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Meets Verne', *World*, 21 November 1889, p.1

⁶³² Anon, 'Make Your Guess!', *World*, 1 December 1889, p.13

⁶³³ Anon., 'Around the World', *World*, 11 November 1889, p.1

⁶³⁴ Anon., 'Father Time Outdone!', *World*, 26 January 1890, p.1

appear in numerous advertisements and be the subject of a song by comedians Hallen and Hart, 'Globe-trotting Nellie Bly'. One magazine critic took a more suspicious view of Bly's trip: "A young woman sent round the world for no practical purpose [...] It has been a great advertisement for the *New York World*".⁶³⁵

This statement is suggestive of stunt journalists' role as purveyors of sensation and drivers of circulation. In February 1890, shortly after Cochrane/Bly's return, a Sunday edition's front page declared in the masthead, 'Circulation Greater Than That Of Any Two Other American Newspapers Combined'. Immediately below was the statement: 'With Every Copy of To-Day's World Will Be Furnished Free A Photo-Likeness of Nellie Bly'.⁶³⁶ Attracting attention was a requirement for stunt journalists, built into the opportunities afforded them. Lutes argues that stunt reporting became 'synonymous with women's journalism in some circles', citing Ada Patterson's memory of taking up a 'woman's job' for the *New York American*. The job was to go and experience the dangerous air pressure faced by labourers working in a caisson under the East River, which was reportedly causing deafness and the bends.⁶³⁷ In order to actualise themselves as female journalists in New York's public life, these women had to accept their role within an attention economy, and produce themselves as sensational image.

As I'll go on to demonstrate, stunt journalists often embodied the newspaper's readership in their stories, enacting a representative function similar to that which the *World* claimed to serve in its reform campaigns. The *World* reported on conditions in New York's slums and factories, bringing them to public attention in an effort George Juergens calls 'discovering the poor'.⁶³⁸ The *World* backed up its claims to public service with a programme of welfare provisions, such as keeping thirty-five doctors on staff to attend to citizens who could not afford fees.⁶³⁹ Hearst's *Journal* followed in the *World's* footsteps, announcing in 1897 that the *Journal's* reporters would form a 'Murder Squad', with the aim of

⁶³⁵ Alan Forman, *The Metropolis*, quoted in Kroeger, p.176

⁶³⁶ Masthead, *World*, 2 February 1890, p.1

⁶³⁷ Jean Marie Lutes, *Front Page Girls: Women Journalists in American Culture and Fiction, 1880-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), p.33

⁶³⁸ Juergens, p.263

⁶³⁹ Anon., 'Achievements', 'Justice', and 'Public Service', *World*, 12 May 1896, p.36; Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years: 1690 to 1940* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p.438

solving the city's crimes before the police.⁶⁴⁰ Both newspapers pledged to assist actively, and to make visible, New York's poorest citizens. As in a democratic system, Pulitzer argued that the *World's* power derived from its readers, expressing this claim in terms of an economic structure: "The people are the capital of an honest newspaper."⁶⁴¹ Pulitzer was in fact elected a member of Congress in 1884, but resigned when he found it took too much time from his newspaper work.⁶⁴²

While a fruitful political exchange, the *World's* relationship with readers was underpinned by the newspaper's distinct connection to advertisers. The *World's* production of sensation both empowered and disciplined its readers, according with Nicholas Daly's study of sensation and modernity in Britain. Daly argues that sensation culture, defined as 'cultural artefacts that deployed a variety of shock and suspense effects' rooted in 'a physiologically based theory of reader/viewer response' was part of a democratic imaginary, which explored the potential of a mass. On the other hand, Daly writes that sensation culture constituted a "training" in modernity': it was a type of 'disciplinary apparatus' which provided manageable doses of shock and suspense as preparation for the pace and demands of industrial, urban life.⁶⁴³ Sensation culture was an exploration of mass political mobility, and at the same time, a distinct form of discipline for industrial society. Under Pulitzer, the *World* expressed just such a contradictory combination.

The *World* contained an enormous number of advertisements, both classified and corporate. Pulitzer's relationship with advertisers was a major element of his innovative approach. Pulitzer believed that to be socially effective in the way that he desired, his newspapers required a mass circulation and low price. A mass circulation would attract advertisers, making the newspaper commercially viable. Such a calculation sounds obvious today, when many publications have replaced purchase price with advertising revenue. However, Pulitzer's approach consolidated a new way of understanding newspaper value, which was driven by changes in the advertising industry.

⁶⁴⁰ David R. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism: The Press and America's Emergence as a World Power* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p.111

⁶⁴¹ Anon., 'Achievements', 'Justice', and 'Public Service', *World*, 12 May 1895, p.36

⁶⁴² Mott, p.439

⁶⁴³ Nicholas Daly, *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.4-5

In the second half of the nineteenth century, advertising agents awoke to the fact that accurate information about readers of publications would enable them to target their advertisements more effectively, and began to gather and publish this data.⁶⁴⁴ Their publication gave rise to conflict between advertisers and newspaper editors, many of whom believed that circulation figures were private.⁶⁴⁵ The move for accurate circulation figures was the subject of a wager between the *New York Herald* and the *Sun*, both challenging the other to reveal and prove the accuracy of their numbers.⁶⁴⁶ By contrast, Pulitzer embraced this new statistical requirement. In an 1890 list of circulation figures, an advert from the *World* proclaimed Pulitzer's view:

Circulation Establishes the Value of Advertising
No Two Other Newspapers Combined Can Approach The World's Record
The World and Judicious Advertisers are Progressive⁶⁴⁷

While Pulitzer advocated a balance between readers' and advertisers' interests, the views of *Sunday World* editor, Goddard, suggest a more exploitative position. Lecturing in the 1930s, the veteran editor described the public not as citizens but as a 'mass of bewildered children', 'human sheep' who could be predictably controlled using 'sixteen fundamental elements of human interest'.⁶⁴⁸ The repetitive, sensational material of the *Sunday World* in the 1890s correlates with this mechanistic approach.

The effect of intense focus on circulation figures was that newspaper circulation became a spectacle. In September 1884, when the *World's* circulation reached 100,000, Pulitzer had one hundred canons fired in City Hall Park and gave every member of staff a silk hat.⁶⁴⁹ The *World* voluntarily staged accuracy checks and displayed facsimiles of signed testimonials on the front page of the Sunday edition.⁶⁵⁰ It was not enough that circulation should happen; instead newspapers ceaselessly had to draw attention to it happening. Cochrane/Bly's journey around the world can be read as one of many idiosyncratic performances of circulation produced by the *World*. In chapter 4, I'll analyse another round-the-world journey

⁶⁴⁴ Geo. P. Rowell & Co., *American Newspaper Directory* (New York: Geo. P. Rowell & Co., 1880), p.7

⁶⁴⁵ *N. Y. Graphic*, Aug. 15, 1878, quoted in Rowell, 1880, p.8

⁶⁴⁶ Rowell, 1880, p.9

⁶⁴⁷ Rowell, 1890, p.1145

⁶⁴⁸ Morrill Goddard, *What Interests People and Why* (New York: The American Weekly, 1932), p.72 and 79

⁶⁴⁹ Mott, p.435

⁶⁵⁰ Anon., 'The Testimonial', *World*, 23 April 1893, p.1; Anon., 'Over 433,000 Circulation Per Day', *World*, 4 May 1894, p.1

which Cochrane/Bly's trip inspired to illuminate what it tells us about how circulation was conceived and performed in the late nineteenth century.

For female journalists, the *World's* circulation-driven approach necessitated self-spectacularisation. Yet it also enabled them to question moralistic views of women and value, which held that women were necessarily devalued by circulating in public life, as Cochrane's career demonstrates.

4. Becoming Nellie Bly

Cochrane came from Pittsburgh, where she had coined her alias and gained several years' experience writing for the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*. When Cochrane arrived in New York in 1887, however, she found it impossible to find a job or secure meetings with editors. The same year, a *World* article bemoaned the effects of hundreds of educated women seeking work in the newspaper industry:

The editors of every newspaper in the city will tell you that they have from five to twenty-five applications a day from young women. [...] Now, what is the result of all this crowding? The salaries accepted are really pitiable, the positions are insecure.⁶⁵¹

In 1888 the *Journalist* estimated that two hundred women worked for New York newspapers.⁶⁵² Fahs argues that in this era a new generation of newspaper women replaced a small number of established female journalists. These new journalists were largely middle class, but for a few exceptions, and most led a 'precarious financial existence'. African-American women also entered journalism in larger numbers in this era, though they were not given opportunities to write for white newspapers.⁶⁵³

When Cochrane heard that the *World* was to send a hot air balloon from St Louis to New York (the two homes of Pulitzer's newspapers), she volunteered for the expedition, but was refused on the grounds that the task was unsuitable for a woman. After three months without work, Cochrane hit upon the idea of making her search for work the stuff of her journalism. Cochrane/Bly wrote a piece for her former paper about being a young woman looking for a position as a reporter in New York and in the process met and interviewed several prominent editors.

⁶⁵¹ Anon., 'The Doings of Womenfolk', *World*, 25 December 1887, p.7

⁶⁵² Mott, p.489-490

⁶⁵³ Fahs, p.22, 35 and 26

Cochrane's innovative technique set the tone for much of her own journalism, that of other female reporters, and increasingly that of the *World* as a whole. Cochrane/Bly created and embodied news, rather than reporting it. Part of Cochrane's work was to construct her alias Bly as a 'personality'. This synonym for character came to denote a notable, exceptional or famous person in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁶⁵⁴ One of the innovative aspects of New Journalism was that journalists began to be credited for their work in by-lines.⁶⁵⁵ The use of pen names complicated such credit, however. Rather than drawing a clear connection between text and writer's person, the by-line was a means of constructing a separate personality. If female journalists in New York achieved fame, they did so under their assumed name. Fahs notes that some journalists wrote under several names, to meet the differing tastes and demands of readers.⁶⁵⁶

Cochrane interacted in public as Nellie Bly, inhabiting her persona through narrativisation and performance. Bly was based upon Cochrane, but distinct from Cochrane; to put it another way, Cochrane was 'not-herself' but 'not-not-herself'.⁶⁵⁷ The reporter, Nellie Bly, constructed and enacted scenarios, which derived from, and took place in, the milieu of New York life. Bly's scenarios involved the generation of further personas, which existed for the purposes and duration of the scenario. Almost like a superhero alias, the persona ended up having capacities that Cochrane did not have. Cochrane couldn't get a meeting with an editor, nor could Bly, but Bly being a young-woman-looking-for-work-as-a-journalist-in-New-York-and-writing-about-it could. Such scenarios took place within a register of 'the real' that was tantalisingly close to 'reality': they were drawn from 'real life' experiences and problems, and they led to conclusions about, and changes to, 'real life'. Yet they created a register of the spectacularly real, in which journalists' performances were realist enough to blend into everyday life, but everyday life had become spectacle by virtue of their presence. The performances were demarcated by a frame, within which Bly's personas performed. A further frame around it marked Bly's performance arena, created by Cochrane. Awareness of those frames was part of the particular pleasure of stunt journalism.

⁶⁵⁴ "personality, n. and adj." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2016. Web. 24 May 2016.

⁶⁵⁵ Mott, p.488

⁶⁵⁶ Fahs, p.39

⁶⁵⁷ Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edn (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2004) p.49

The *World's* reporting strategies had precedents in New York journalism. In the 1830s, the 'penny press' had developed a sensational and scandalous reporting style under James Gordon Bennett, Sr. More recently, in the 1860s and '70s, James Gordon Bennett, Jr, who had inherited proprietorship of the *New York Herald*, had instituted a policy of flamboyant, self-reflexive reporting — “I make news” — and created a series of events often termed 'stunts' by media historians.⁶⁵⁸ Bennett competed in walking contests like that described in chapter 2. He also initiated and funded colonial-style expeditions, producing situations in which representatives of the United States ventured out to conquer a global frontier.

Bennett also engaged in hoaxes, as in 1874 when the *Herald* reported that the animals had escaped from New York Zoo and caused chaos in the city.⁶⁵⁹ Such hoaxes, which are also sometimes referred to as stunts, exploited the gap between actual events and the compelling reality-effect of the media. They played with the temporal conventions of newspaper publication and consumption, and made a collective event of multiple individual moments of realisation. The pleasure of realisation was two-fold: relief that the terrible events brought into actuality by the newspaper had not in fact taken place, and the sudden reveal of the media's capacity to create spectacularly realist illusion.

Stunt stories were, in Erving Goffman's terms, often a form of 'correxive hoaxing' within a frame of 'fabrication'.⁶⁶⁰ This involved creating a frame, stepping out of it and then drawing attention to it as an example of an everyday social issue. Stunt journalists achieved this by creating and jettisoning a series of surrogate personas. Yet as I'll demonstrate, the journalists deployed frames within frames, producing themselves as personalities alongside and through the production of expendable surrogates.

While a hoax is closely related to a stunt, it is a slightly different form, because it always involves the revelation of an illusion or trick. Stunts do not require this revelation, although they might sometimes involve it. Awareness of a gap — between purported purpose and actual purpose, between a reality effect and reality, a name and a person — could linger throughout and after a stunt performance, rarely dissipated by an unambiguous return to an accepted truth or

⁶⁵⁸ Mott, p.416

⁶⁵⁹ Anon., 'A Shocking Sabbath Carnival of Death', *New York Herald*, 9 November 1874, p.1

⁶⁶⁰ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), p.83 and 90

reality. Stunts were often invested in an idea of the actual, and in the production of an actuality effect, but did not tend to offer a clear delineation between the two.

As noted in the introduction, such constructed events in public life destabilised a delineation between a live event and a mediated one. Cochrane played a role and created a scenario entirely for the purpose of reproducing them in the media, and the performance was largely consumed in its mediated form. Though there was no reproduction in the form of film, the event was framed in such a way that reproduction was written into the logic of production. As the remark about Bly's trip round the world being an advertisement implies, this related to the commodification of the event as much as it did to technologies of reproduction.

5. Behind Asylum Bars

Bly's first article for the *World* in 1887 created a blueprint for stunt stories. Along with John A. Cockerill, editor of the *World*, Cochrane devised a plan that Bly would attempt to be declared insane and committed to an asylum on Blackwell's Island. In conjunction with Cockerill, Bly created another persona that she would inhabit, Nellie Brown. For this story, then, a persona, Bly, would perform a second persona, Brown. Bly duly booked herself into a boarding house where she performed insanity until a matron called the police. She appeared before policemen, a judge and several doctors for examination, and was finally admitted into a charity-run asylum on Blackwell's Island, where she stayed for ten days. The resultant articles exposed brutal conditions in the asylum in a sensational style.

In the first instalment of her two-part story 'Behind Asylum Bars', Bly described her 'mission': to find out the asylum's 'inner workings', and chronicle them 'faithfully [in a] plain and unvarnished narrative'.⁶⁶¹ Bly depicted herself as an ingénue (almost as if she only existed within frames like this, for the purpose of undertaking such tasks): 'I had never been near insane persons before in my life and had not the faintest idea what their actions were like.' In a characteristic trope, an initially trepidatious Bly then attacked her mission with gusto: 'I began to think my task a hopeless one. But it had to be done. So I flew to the mirror and examined

⁶⁶¹ Nellie Bly, 'Behind Asylum Bars', *World*, 9 October 1887, p.25-6

my face.' Using ideas she had gleaned from novels, Bly rehearsed the 'staring eyes' she attributed to insane people, and read extracts from ghost stories to incite her own anxiety.

Bly's article set up her challenge as a theatrical one, emphasising her stint as first-time actress:

Could I assume the characteristics of insanity to such a degree that I could pass the doctors, live for a week among the insane without the authorities finding me out? [...] I began to practise the rôle in which I was to make my début on the morrow. What a difficult task, I thought, to appear before a crowd of people and convince them that I was insane.

The actress as concept was a metaphorical means of structuring and legitimising Bly's task. Her application of theatrical logic was widely accepted, and Bly was apparently offered theatrical roles after the story was published.⁶⁶² With its suggestion of social and sexual fluidity, the actress circumvented some of the requirements of respectable femininity. Acting and the stage also served to structure a complex division between private and public. The article offered backstage insights: illustrations showed Bly preparing in her apartment, as though giving the reader an intimate view of the actress at home. On/off stage structured a skittish, illusory division between the private life of Nellie Bly and the public appearance of Nellie Bly/Brown. This dynamic of concealment and revelation was a game within a game: Bly, after all, had no private life.

A tone of naive candour ran through all of Bly's articles, giving the impression that they consisted of unfiltered observations. Lutes argues that the persona has spawned a 'persistent fantasy' amongst commentators, which holds that Bly's prose presented artless, authentic selfhood.⁶⁶³ One reason for this simplification may be the actuality-effect that Cochrane/Bly's combined performance and prose created. The articles continually emphasised her material presence in the scenario through sensationalist descriptions of physiological states such as fear, nervousness and relief, common to many stunt stories. Yet stunt stories pressurised the actuality-effect even as they produced it. Bly's body was both Cochrane's actual body and a performative and textual creation, a conduit for reader identification.

World editors also worked to construct Bly as personality, with a distinct

⁶⁶² Brooke Kroeger, *Nellie Bly* (New York: Times Books, 1994), p.100

⁶⁶³ Jean Marie Lutes, 'Into the Madhouse With Nellie Bly': Girl Stunt Reporting in Late Nineteenth-Century America', *American Quarterly*, 54:2 (2002), 217-253 (p.228)

status in terms of professional journalism. In the last of a series of by-lines, she was introduced as a ‘feminine “amateur casual”’, a label that took in Bly as an amateur actress, amateur insane person and amateur journalist. Bly’s naive, hyper-feminine narrative tone further belied Cochrane/Bly’s experience as a professional journalist, folding her gender and amateurism into one another. While the *World*’s description of Bly withheld professional status, it also enabled Cochrane/Bly to elude some of the barriers faced by female journalists by allowing her to occupy a novel, spectacularised position. For example, Bly’s story appeared on the front page, near unprecedented prominence for a female writer in the *World* and many other newspapers (though not African-American newspapers, which offered women more equal status).⁶⁶⁴ By playing at being an amateur — or playing at being an amateur, playing at being a professional — Cochrane/Bly established a successful professional career as a journalist.

To adapt Foucault’s phrase, Cochrane was an entrepreneur of herself. In her hunt for employment and in the asylum story, Cochrane/Bly converted her life into material for her work, making aspects of her person — femininity, youth, whiteness, middle-class respectability — productive. Born out of Cochrane/Bly’s search for work, her performances magnified the everyday practice of shaping and stratifying oneself and others to suit the market. When Bly visited an employment agency in a later article, for example, she recounted being looked at ‘as if I was an article for sale’.⁶⁶⁵ (Timothy Gilfoyle notes that some employment agencies served as screens for recruiting women into sex work, and Bly/Cochrane may have intended an allusion to this.)⁶⁶⁶ Bly was amused to find that the agent’s description of her in an advertisement as a ‘very neat English girl’ rivalled her own personas in its fiction, commenting, ‘I wondered what my rôle would be the next time.’

Cochrane’s experiences can also help to nuance Foucault’s theory in terms of gender. The ‘entrepreneur of himself’ was male by default, and his gender played little or no part in his (self) exploitation. Gender, though, has dictated and continues to dictate the terms by which exploitation of self can take place. Like race, class and sexuality, gender is not merely a given property, which facilitates or blocks entry into the workplace. As Kathi Weeks has argued, work has been and

⁶⁶⁴ Lutes, *Front Page Girls*, p.17 and 50

⁶⁶⁵ Nellie Bly, ‘Trying To Be A Servant’, *World*, 30 October 1887, p.9

⁶⁶⁶ Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), p.260

continues to be a key site of *becoming* gendered, classed and raced.⁶⁶⁷ Moreover, in a culture of hyper-exploitation, gender can itself become material for exploitation: as human capital, gender fulfils its potential to become productive.

Amid Cochrane's prolific persona production, the entrepreneur of herself takes on a different nuance again. Cochrane's productivity stemmed in part from her generation of selves, or surrogates, with different levels of attributed 'reality', import and meaning; surrogates that could be discarded, fetishized and ridiculed, even by her other surrogates. As much as her articles, these surrogates were the products that Bly/Cochrane produced. Cochrane's work accords with Michaels' reading of Gilman's protagonist in 'The Yellow Wallpaper', who demonstrates a 'commitment to production so complete that it requires her to begin by producing herself'.⁶⁶⁸

Having checked herself into the temporary boarding house, Bly/Brown stayed awake all night. Passing as insane depended upon abandoning legitimate roles such as worker or consumer. Bly/Brown deliberately brought too little money to pay for her board and repeated the refrain, "I have never worked. I don't know how." This curious statement hinted at a formative aspect of the emerging stunt story genre. Stunt journalists' personas were invariably doing something for the first time. They enacted a particular kind of surrogation in the form of '[n]ewness'; their perky, curious characters arrived at everything fresh.⁶⁶⁹ In doing so, these surrogates fulfilled an apparent desire for work to be utterly novel to women (or at least to white, young, pretty women), and for working women to be a novelty. Both the *World* and Bly obliterated Cochrane/Bly's journalistic experience, first by her presentation as an amateur, then through her eternally fresh personas. In Joseph Roach's terms, stunt journalists enacted a cultural memory of modern female labour which also forgot female labour.

These maneuvers had an additional racial or ethnic dimension. The boarding house matron eventually fetched a policeman, who took Bly/Brown to court, where a judge admitted her to Bellevue Hospital. On learning that the policeman and matron believed she was a 'foreigner' or 'emigrant', Bly/Brown

⁶⁶⁷ Kathi Weeks, *The Problem With Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), p.9

⁶⁶⁸ Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.5

⁶⁶⁹ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p.4

assumed a new persona, adopting the judge's suggestion that she was from Cuba. From this point, Bly/Brown intermittently spoke Spanish and called herself Nellie Marino, claiming that she did not know where she was or how she had arrived there. Marino seems to have been an exoticised persona, at least in the eyes of reporters. Even before the story was published, Bly/Brown/Marino's appearance in court and committal to the asylum was a minor press phenomenon. Her refined appearance meant her story was reported in at least four New York papers, many of which spectacularised her supposed Cuban heritage, implying that Bly/Brown/Marino performed a heightened class status: 'Who Is This Insane Girl? She is Pretty, Well Dressed and Speaks Spanish [...] She was a Cuban [...] and had been waited upon by slaves'.⁶⁷⁰ The *World* reprinted these stories alongside 'Behind Asylum Bars', crowing over its duped rivals.

After a cursory examination, Bly/Brown/Marino was diagnosed as insane and sent on to an asylum on Blackwell's Island. Once admitted, Bly/Brown ceased to pretend to be mad, dropping the Marino persona. In spite of Marino's apparently high status, then, Bly/Brown had created an ethnic persona that was designed to be discarded, and was in fact born of the assumption that only an immigrant would be in Bly/Brown/Marino's marginalised situation. This was paralleled in the broader construction of stunt journalist personalities, as writers such as Nell Cusak and Annie Kopchovsky erased traces of immigrant identities from their public names.

Instead of continuing her performance of insanity, Bly emphasised the ease with which a sane person could be effectively imprisoned. Increasingly embodying her role as reporter, Bly interviewed several sane women who were without the means to prove their sanity and contest their status. The conditions in the asylum were horrific, ranging from systematic neglect in the form of poor food and hygiene, to malicious bullying and violence. One inmate told Bly that she had seen a woman beaten to death by nurses, and Bly witnessed assaults and was physically threatened. Playing out the assumptions of judge, matron and police officer, many of the asylum's inmates were immigrants, unable to speak English and provided with no translator, and large numbers had ended up there through poverty rather than mental ill health.

⁶⁷⁰ Anon., 'Who Is This Insane Girl?', *Sun*, Sunday 25 September 1887, quoted in the *World*, Sunday 9 October 1887, p.26

Bly lobbied for better treatment on behalf of her fellow inmates, converting her story into a moral mission: 'I determined then and there that I would try by every means to make my mission of benefit to my suffering sisters'.⁶⁷¹ Subsequently, Bly's story was a factor in an increase in funding to asylums.⁶⁷² As her narrative adopted the tone of sympathetic saviour and Bly shed her ethnicised, working-class and 'insane' personas, she cemented a middle-class, professional identity, even in her statements of solidarity.

6. Imitation, identification and the construction of character

As Eric Schocket has pointed out, such cross-class and cross-ethnic embodiment is rarely unproblematic.⁶⁷³ Tonally, the stunt stories that followed Bly's asylum piece ranged from earnest, investigative efforts towards social justice to delight in slumming. In this way, stunt stories marked the exploitation of working-class and marginalized lives for middle-class advancement, an advancement based upon constructing others as objects of knowledge and sites of progress.⁶⁷⁴

However, the class divide between female journalists and women working in factories was not as clear cut as this might suggest, given the precarious and low paid nature of journalism. A further comparison between journalists and actresses might be helpful. In an article in which Bly auditioned for a chorus line, a woman waiting to audition noted that another woman cleaning the theatre earned more than the 'Amazons' would.⁶⁷⁵ This unstable distinction in terms of status made the negotiation between the women represented and the women representing more complex (echoing the discussions of the precariat in chapter 1). To say that these women were already different as a result of existing social structures might be to simplify what was at stake. Rather, through processes of surrogation — theatrical manoeuvres — versions of a middle-class professional woman were being formed. As they did so, they brought working-class women into visibility on middle-class

⁶⁷¹ Nellie Bly, 'Inside The Madhouse', *World*, 16 October 1887, p.25

⁶⁷² Kroeger, p.96-98

⁶⁷³ Eric Schocket, 'Undercover Explorations of the "Other Half," Or the Writer as Class Transvestite', *Representations*, 64 (1998), 109-133

⁶⁷⁴ Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work 1980-1945* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p.3

⁶⁷⁵ Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Bly On the Stage', *World*, 4 March 1888, p.15

terms, identifying strongly with them and at the same time, differentiating themselves.

Richardson's *The Long Day*, the novel based on her experiences of industrial labour, exemplifies how spectacularly realist illusion intersected with such class problematics. Richardson formed the novel by writing a series of newspaper articles, for which she went undercover in workplaces. When she reshaped these articles into fiction, her role as journalist was removed, and her claim to truth-telling was amplified. Fahs notes that Richardson had reordered her experience to better suit a melodramatic story structure, offering middle-class readers what they 'wanted to believe' about working-class women.⁶⁷⁶ Richardson was then called upon to comment upon working women's lives as an informed expert, cementing her middle-class status. Fahs remarks upon the irony of this, but also suggests that what Richardson had channelled into her fiction was her own precarious experience as a journalist.⁶⁷⁷

Surrogation in stunt stories should be viewed alongside a reform agenda, particularly the practice of friendly visiting. Paul Boyer argues that the idea was based on a middle-class visitor's capacity to transfer her qualities to those she visited: 'Almost by osmosis, the charity organization literature sometimes seems to suggest, the faithful friendly visitors would slowly "impart their own virtues" to the poor.'⁶⁷⁸ They distributed the 'coin of character', building up working-class people's 'capital' in the form of virtue.⁶⁷⁹ These ideas were based upon a one-way model of influence along hierarchical lines, yet as a mass-media phenomena, stunt stories point to more complex modes of self-actualisation, which were asymmetrical in their power structure but not entirely one sided.

The imitative self-actualisation of stunt journalism is indicative of wider cultures that were also practised among working-class women. Richardson described how working women at one factory chose a 'story book name' when they arrived, often springing from dime novels, mirroring the journalists' practice.⁶⁸⁰ Kathy Peiss points to the role of such working cultures in immigrants creating 'American' identities for themselves. She emphasises the importance of

⁶⁷⁶ Fahs, p.225

⁶⁷⁷ Fahs, p.226

⁶⁷⁸ Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and the Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press), p.153

⁶⁷⁹ James B. Salazar, *Bodies of Reform: The Rhetoric of Character in Gilded Age America* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), p.16

⁶⁸⁰ Dorothy Richardson, *The Long Day* (New York: The Century Co., 1905), p.92

personal style for working women, and of workplaces as forums for sharing fashions and behaviours.⁶⁸¹ Workplace communities gave women an increased sense of participation in public life. When an interviewer asked one young woman what they talked about at work, she replied: “We have such a good time. We talk about books that we read, [...] the theatres, and newspapers, and the things that go on about town”.⁶⁸² Workplace cultures intersected with the emerging ‘social space’ that newspapers such as the *World* created.

Imitative self-actualisation was also thought to be a peculiar quality of the New Woman. When the *Journal* published a satirical description of the New Woman in 1895, the writer mocked her propensity towards faddishness and imitation. She distinguished herself ‘by embracing foolish fads and talking foolishly about them; by multiplying poor literature, poor art and worse music in the passion of imitation’.⁶⁸³ An important part of the New Woman’s perceived character was her ability to mimic and adapt to cultural shifts.

While intended as a slight, the *Journal*’s ‘passion of imitation’ is an apt term for the overlapping dynamics of mimicry and desire in relations between working women and stunt journalists. Stunt stories provided forums for forging experimental identities not limited to the journalists themselves. Bly recorded in the *World* her amusement at the fact that several women had pretended to be her, in order to give newspaper interviews or purchase goods on credit.⁶⁸⁴

As celebrities, stunt journalists became available as objects of fantasy. Readers began to write letters to the *World*, curious as to who Bly was and what she was like. In 1888, *Town Topics* published a letter from a ‘fair reader who confesses to an honourable admiration for the intrepid and energetic Nellie Bly’ asking if the ‘real name of that enterprising young woman’ was Elizabeth Cochrane.⁶⁸⁵ When Cochrane/Bly returned from her round-the-world excursion, the *World* ‘G[ave] to the Public’ the ‘Well-Kept Secret’ of her identity and ‘authentic biography’.⁶⁸⁶ This curiosity about Bly’s life prefigured the letters that early cinema audiences wrote to fan magazine publishers, asking of the unnamed

⁶⁸¹ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-Of-The-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), p.65

⁶⁸² Peiss, p.46

⁶⁸³ Anon, ‘Is she really new?’, *The Morning Journal*, 13 October 1895, p.9

⁶⁸⁴ Kroeger, p.136

⁶⁸⁵ *Town Topics*, 16 August 1888, p.1, quoted in Kroeger, p.116

⁶⁸⁶ Anon., ‘The Story of Nellie Bly’, *World*, 2 February 1890, p.1

players, 'what are their names? Are they married?'⁶⁸⁷ Karen Sternheimer's analysis of fan magazines in the first two decades of the twentieth century offers an insight into some of the desires that may have played in to the relationship between Cochrane/Bly and her curious readers. Sternheimer characterises the fantasy of upward mobility in this era as one of becoming 'self-sufficient' and 'enjoying a life beyond subsistence and mindless labor'. The film industry offered employment opportunities for women, which held the promise of a middle-class lifestyle, in turn connected to de-ethnicised identities and whiteness. Fan magazines gave etiquette advice designed to help immigrant populations look and act 'more like native-born, middle-class Americans'.⁶⁸⁸

Celebrity female journalists offered a similar forum for fantasies of upward social mobility, entrepreneurship and improved work opportunities. Sternheimer notes the ubiquity of typewriter adverts in fan magazines, and the underlying suggestion that all one needed to become a scenario writer was a typewriter and a bit of imagination.⁶⁸⁹ On return from her round-the-world trip, Cochrane/Bly too advertised typewriters, proffering a similar fantasy of do-it-yourself career creation.⁶⁹⁰ Richardson's novel presented an optimistic career path from factory floor to clerk to journalist, yet as Cindy Sondik Aron points out, this was not a 'meaningful possibility for most laboring women'.⁶⁹¹

While the fantasies of *The Long Day* and fan-magazine advertisements did not translate to reality, they did feed into working women's popular cultures and in Showalter's words, forums for 'feminine self-actualization'. Stunt stories should be viewed, then, as at once a site for the production of middle-class identities, and an indication of the precarity of these identities, which was in part rooted in cross-class and cross-ethnic embodiments and appropriations. While stunt journalism primarily created a forum for middle-class, white women, it also paralleled practices by which working women created personas and imagined new working lives for themselves.

⁶⁸⁷ Karen Sternheimer, *Celebrity culture and the American dream: stardom and social mobility* (London: Routledge, 2011), p.36

⁶⁸⁸ Sternheimer, p.19

⁶⁸⁹ Sternheimer, p.61

⁶⁹⁰ Mignon Rittenhouse, *The Amazing Nellie Bly*, 2nd edn (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), p.215

⁶⁹¹ Cindy Sondik Aron, Introduction to Dorothy Richardson, *The Long Day: The Story of a New York Working Girl* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1990), pp.ix-xxxvii, p.xxxi

7. Women, sex and work

A frisson of identification and difference was most apparent in stunt stories' treatment of sex work. Bly's asylum article presented a continual inferred connection between insanity/hysteria and sexual abandonment/fall. Subsequent accounts by the ambulance driver who took her to hospital and a young doctor from the asylum indicated this connection more explicitly than Bly did herself. The ambulance driver claimed that he knew Bly was faking, because "insane girls always make violent love to the ambulance surgeon".⁶⁹² He went on to describe how only Bly/Brown/Marino's inferred class status saved her from some kind of sexual abuse: "I came very near subjecting her to an infallible test as to insanity in a woman, but her good bearing and general appearance were so much in her favor that I desisted." Similarly, a doctor who had put his arm around Bly as he was examining her explained, "if the girl had been insane, she would have liked it. All insane girls like to be treated that way."⁶⁹³ Lutes proposes that the largely unspoken dramatic tension powering Bly's story stemmed from an underlying question: could a middle class woman enter a place of sexual fluidity and exploitation, and maintain her respectability?

Later stunt stories returned to scenarios involving sex work and sexual exploitation, as if to a touchstone for conceptions of women's work, to be repeatedly embodied and/or rejected. Sometimes this took the form of conventional melodramatic narratives. In 1888, Bly visited an 'Institution for Unfortunate Women', where she noted the residents' laziness and crudeness, before concluding that once women started on the 'toboggan ride of sin', there was no stopping their descent.⁶⁹⁴ Bly maintained a tone of distaste at embodying a potential resident, and avoided providing any credible story as to why she was there. In other stunt articles, however, the journalist's attitude was more ambiguous. In 1893, Dolores Marlburg spent a day selling flowers on the street, an occupation which was believed to act as a cover for selling sex or recruiting people to the sex trade.⁶⁹⁵ As evening came, Marlburg stood outside a gentleman's club,

⁶⁹² Anon., "'Nellie Brown's' Story', *World*, Monday 10 October, 1887, p.1

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁴ Nellie Bly, 'In The Magdalen's Home', *World*, 12 February 1888, p.29

⁶⁹⁵ Gilfoyle, p.285

recording and in some cases naming men who harassed or tried to buy sex from her.⁶⁹⁶ Marlburg's article combined a reforming, moral zeal with the novelty and controversy driven of a journalist embodying a sex worker. Like sensational reporting as a whole, these stories thrilled as they disciplined.

Perhaps in response to the embarrassment caused by Marlburg's article, *Town Topics* condemned the *World* for 'employing women to degrade and humiliate themselves in order that they might write their experiences for its diseased paper'.⁶⁹⁷ This commentator drew on conventional notions of middle class respectability, implying that women's work to be separated from any hint of sex. Yet sex was a constitutive element of female labour in this era, and vital in the roles that stunt journalists performed.

Bly's first *Dispatch* article, published in 1885, was called 'The Girl Puzzle', and it addressed the problem of women and unemployment:

The schools are overrun with teachers, the stores with clerks, the factories with employees. There are more cooks, chambermaids and washerwomen than can find employment. In fact, all places that are filled by women are overrun, and still there are idle girls, some that have aged parents depending on them.⁶⁹⁸

Bly argued that it was inevitable young women would 'fall' unless they were given access to employment as men were. In this way, Bly's first piece triangulated women, work and sex.

Bly's article is indicative of the way that the concept of the 'fallen woman' was employed to police women's work and lives. In her analysis of the rhetoric of fallenness in Victorian culture, Amanda Anderson points out the 'fluidity' of the term 'fallen woman': it was applied to almost any illicit sexual relation and sometimes to unsanctioned conduct in general: 'prostitutes, unmarried women who engage[d] in sexual relations with men, victims of seduction, adulteresses, as well as various delinquent lower-class women'. Anderson argues that the fallen woman was not so much a 'predictable character' as a 'figure who displace[d] multiple anxieties about the predictability of character': the fallen women typically 'loses her character'.⁶⁹⁹ Writing on mid-nineteenth century melodrama in Britain, Sos Eltis describes its Christianity-inspired rhetoric of fallenness, whereby the

⁶⁹⁶ Dolores Marlburg, 'One Day As A New York Flower Girl', *World*, 1 October 1893, p.25

⁶⁹⁷ Anon., *Town Topics*, 5 October 1893, quoted in Kroeger, p.206

⁶⁹⁸ Nellie Bly, 'The Girl Puzzle', *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, 25 January 1885, reprinted in Kroeger, p.47

⁶⁹⁹ Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p.1-2

fallen woman was 'seduced, abandoned, and [died] horribly, while her aged parents grieve[d]'. The attraction of this discourse of inevitable descent, Eltis continues, was that it attributed blame to the individual and their failure to show 'strength of character' in the face of temptation, a narrative taken up by social studies of sex work in the 1870s.⁷⁰⁰

The fallen woman, then, functioned as a female version of a fall guy; she routinely took the blame for everybody's sexual desires and transgressions. Bly depicted employment as a means of avoiding becoming this scapegoat. In stunt journalism, Bly/Cochrane achieved this state — found a job — by creating multiple characters or personas, which she inhabited for short periods and then dropped. In her performances, Bly repeatedly created and then 'lost' her 'character', and risked the reputation or social capital denoted by that phrase, without entering into a stereotypical melodramatic descent. Instead of continuing down, Bly sprang back, ready for the next fall.

The idea of the fallen woman played an important role in conceptions of value, as exemplified in Georg Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*. Simmel presented female virtue, unwittingly perhaps, as undergirding the whole system of value. For Simmel, it was vital that a woman not exchange sex for money, explicitly or tacitly, if she were to protect her own value. Hence, prostitution 'so degrades a woman's most personal possession, one that is dependent upon the greatest reserve, that the most neutral value devoid of all personal qualities [money] is considered to be an appropriate equivalent.'⁷⁰¹ Simmel's analysis of women and sex accords with the increasingly taboo nature of body- or life-for-money exchanges. The 'decency' of marriage for Simmel relied on the concealment of any economic motive.⁷⁰² Simmel seemed appalled by women in his era exchanging sex or themselves for material gain in any way, despite him noting that society's approbation depended upon a woman's social status ('the actress whom everybody knows is kept by a millionaire is considered presentable in the salons').⁷⁰³ It was vital to Simmel that women held up that which was beyond monetary valuation, in keeping with his sense that if everything could be got for money, the things that were considered

⁷⁰⁰ Sos Eltis, *Acts of Desire: Women and Sex on Stage, 1800-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.19-22

⁷⁰¹ Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, ed. by David Frisby, trans. by Tom Bottomore, David Frisby and Kaethe Mengelberg, 3rd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p.379. Originally published as *Philosophies des Geldes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1900).

⁷⁰² Simmel, p.383

⁷⁰³ Simmel, p.386

most personally (or intrinsically) valuable must not be attainable in this way.

Exchanging sex was inevitably degrading for women, because in sex, Simmel argued, a 'woman gives her total self, with all its worth, whereas the man gives only a part of his personality in the exchange'.⁷⁰⁴ Women were stuck in a metonymic conception of personhood, whereby a part was all and exchange therefore became untenable, while men were able to take part in exchange while preserving their personhood.

Simmel held that prostitution made women interchangeable: 'men of crude sensuality are interested in a quality of women that is identical for the seamstress and the princess'. Yet he also claimed that sex was more important for women than men because men were more differentiated in character than women, who had a fundamental sameness, rooted in 'those natural, universal functions that guarantee the uniformity of the genus'.⁷⁰⁵ To summarise Simmel's position: women must not be interchangeable, it was crude to find them so, but at base, they were all the same. Women should not be objects of exchange and yet their social function made them very like an interchangeable commodity. The trick, it seemed, was that women must be commodities that never appeared to be commodities. This paradoxical condition was the basis of 'character', which demanded a woman have trans-monetary value in exchange by denying that she was an object of exchange. A woman's trans-monetary value, according to Simmel, was also the basis of her doubtful differentiation: by keeping her 'character' a woman in Simmel's schema kept (the illusion of) her differentiation, but it was only ever an illusion, because bluntly, cunts were all the same.

Labour rarely cropped up in Simmel's philosophy, but its introduction might serve to clarify the roles of women under industrial capitalism and their relation to value and sex. In her 1981 work, *L'arcano della riproduzione* or *The Arcane of Reproduction*, Leopoldina Fortunati defined reproductive labour as the work of producing and reproducing the labourer, broadly categorised as house work and sex work. She argued: 'Marxian analysis describes only one half of the process of production', which was dependent on the other half, reproductive work.⁷⁰⁶ Under industrial capitalism, Fortunati held, 'reproduction is separated off

⁷⁰⁴ Simmel, p.381

⁷⁰⁵ Simmel, p.380

⁷⁰⁶ Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital* ed. by Jim Fleming, trans. by Hilary Creek (New York: Autonomedia, 1995), p.9-10. All italics original.

from production' so that it 'appears as the creation of non-value.' She illustrated this using the metaphor of a photographic negative: reproductive labour appears 'almost as the mirror image, a back-to-front photograph of production'.⁷⁰⁷ By creating non-value, reproductive labour made it possible to create value, both materially and conceptually (and continues to do so).

In the late nineteenth century, many women in the United States sought to make a necessary, difficult, and often piecemeal, transition from unwaged, reproductive work into the waged workforce.⁷⁰⁸ By 1900, approximately one in five American women over sixteen were classified as 'gainfully employed', though there was wide variation in this figure depending on class, race and when the women or their families had immigrated. For the first time, breadwinners included married women in significant numbers. Many unmarried women, including an increasing proportion of educated women, also had to work as a matter of course. In her study of work and sexual relations in New York, Elizabeth Alice Clement cites the proportion of white, single women in employment as forty-five to fifty-five per cent in the final decade of the century.⁷⁰⁹ Employment did not necessarily remove women from domestic life, however. Peiss notes that in 1880, forty per cent of all women in New York were employed as domestic servants and many others in trades 'seemingly marginal to the industrial economy'.⁷¹⁰ Three quarters of female labourers also reported that they handed all of their earnings to their families.⁷¹¹ In this way, women's relation to wages was still mediated by family. Nonetheless, employed women were a frequent enough occurrence to be considered an important and perhaps troubling social shift. A tribute to a contemporary livestock reporter, Maria Morgan, who died in 1892, argued that given 'in these days a woman must live', it was better it should be 'by honest industry — brain-work or hand-work'.⁷¹² The work of the mind or the craft of the

Originally published as *L'arcano della riproduzione: Casalinghe, prostitute, operai e capital* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1981).

⁷⁰⁷ Fortunati, p.8

⁷⁰⁸ Bureau of the Census, *Statistics of women at work: Based on unpublished information derived from the schedules of the twelfth census* (Washington, D.C: United States Government Printing Office, 1900), p.20, <<http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/00779830ch1.pdf>> [accessed 8 March 2014]; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.109

⁷⁰⁹ Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love For Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 2006), p.50

⁷¹⁰ Peiss, p.36

⁷¹¹ Peiss, p.68

⁷¹² Anon., *Journalist*, 15 June 1892, p.5, quoted in Kroeger, p.195

hand were compatible with respectable femininity, this implied; the remainder of the body ought to be kept for other, non-monetary purposes. There was considerable anxiety about the sites and valorisation of female labour, and how this would impact on marriage, men's wages and social and moral well-being, for which women were held peculiarly responsible.

Sex work shadowed discussions of female labour because women's wages were often barely enough to support a living. Besides lack of work, low wages meant that many women in New York exchanged sex, physical affection or flirtation for money to supplement their incomes.⁷¹³ Such work was not confined to industrial labourers, but also carried out by clerks, teachers and office workers.⁷¹⁴ By the 1880s, sex was increasingly sold in tenement buildings, small shops and restaurants, as well as in the sex districts which had established themselves after the Civil War.⁷¹⁵ Not only was it difficult to delineate types of women in relation to sex and exchange, then, it was also hard to draw spatial boundaries that would assert the exceptional state of prostitution. In 1886, Police Captain Thomas Byrnes commented: "Startling as is the assertion, it is nevertheless true, that the traffic in female virtue is as much a regular business, systematically carried on for gain, in the city of New York, as is the trade in boots and shoes, dry goods and groceries."⁷¹⁶

Prostitution was a social reality but it was also routinely employed as part of discourses that shaped what it meant to be a woman, a working woman, and a woman in public. After 1870, sex work became a major object of reform, as anti-vice campaigns sought to 'redefine the public limits of sexual behavior'.⁷¹⁷ Stunt stories in the *World* can were part of this puritan movement, which would extend into the Progressive Era. Nonetheless, the *World's* sensational style reinvigorated a tradition of scandalous New York journalism, in which the sex trade had a spectacular status. One of the formative events in the development of the early penny press in the 1830s was the *New York Herald's* three-month long coverage of the murder of Helen Jewett, a celebrated prostitute in the city's most popular

⁷¹³ Peiss, p.108-110; Clement, p.2

⁷¹⁴ Gilfoyle, p.290

⁷¹⁵ Gilfoyle, p.245; Clement, p.98-99

⁷¹⁶ Gilfoyle, p.248

⁷¹⁷ Gilfoyle, p.181

brothel.⁷¹⁸ Sex, representation and circulation were thus interwoven, blurring distinctions between sexual and violent acts, symbolic registers and the distribution of words and images. Such interweaving was vital to the construction of women's 'characters': as with any kind of value, what was communicated and publicly known mattered far more than what was done. The ruin associated with 'falling' was connected to, but not one with, sex; rather, it happened in the circulation of information. Hence too much public circulation already smacked of something dangerous for women. When the *World* published woodcut portraits of girls from Brooklyn deemed attractive by the journalists, the *Herald* and the *Journalist* condemned Pulitzer's newspaper for invading the women's privacy, the latter remarking: 'There is no legitimate excuse for holding these women up to ridicule and ribald comments of the bar-room and the street... [...As] a sensation it was a success. It has, however, lowered the standard of the paper'.⁷¹⁹ Pictures of women boosted circulation but threatened to devalue both the women and the publication. (By contrast, 'fallen' women could be circulated freely.) Stunt journalists, however, experimented with the extent to which their 'characters' could *gain* rather than lose value in circulation by slipping between registers of material and symbolic 'reality'. They had hit upon a method of looking, sounding and acting like 'fallen women', but shifting the terms of valorisation. They undertook reproductive labour, but did so under special conditions of spectacularisation, which introduced an unwieldy potential for extraordinary value production. For stunt journalists, circulation often served to increase the value of their public personas. These stories exploited ambiguities in the construction of women's characters.

As well as cross-class and cross-ethnic impersonations, then, Bly's professional persona was based upon a simultaneous spectacularisation and rejection of sexual exploitation. To build on Lutes' analysis, the question of whether a middle-class woman could enter the asylum without losing her respectability played out in Bly creating and performing 'character(s)' in a near parody of the practice necessary to maintaining female respectability in everyday life. The key difference between Bly's exploit and ordinary female respectability

⁷¹⁸ 'James Gordon Bennett, Jr., 1841-1918', *American Newspaper Journalists, 1873-1900*, ed. by Perry J. Ashley (Detroit, Michigan: Brucoli Clark/Gale Research Company, 1983), *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, XXIII, 7-16 (p.9)

⁷¹⁹ *Journalist*, June 7, 1884, p.3, quoted in Juergens, p.110

lay in the fact that she had multiple characters in play, enabling her various personas to explore a range of fates. Once inside the asylum, Cochrane/Bly did not want to maintain her Marino and Brown personas — she wanted to shed them in order to get on with the business of being the increasingly professional reporter, Nellie Bly. In a playful inversion of a woman losing her character, Bly kept creating characters for the very purpose of getting lost and going up in smoke. *Bly* however, lived on. With each persona discarded, Bly became more of a ‘personality’: a plucky, adventurous, controversial ‘girl reporter’.⁷²⁰ Stunt journalism created fragmented and multiple subjectivities, which anticipated cinematic stunt configurations, as the next section will demonstrate.

8. Labouring in the image: Meg Merrilies, the *World's* courageous young woman for all occasions

Female journalists found themselves in a double-edged situation with regard to gender and work. Stunt stories’ prolonged focus on women at work amounted to a political effort, paralleling the *World's* campaign for working women in 1884. These articles challenged preconceptions about what women could do by repeating Cochrane/Bly’s technique of pretending to be an amateur, pretending to be a professional. In ‘A Woman Usher At Herrmann’s’ in 1893, for example, Meg Merrilies persuaded a theatre manager to allow her to work as an usher for three nights, opening her article with the question: ‘Women ushers in theatres. Why not?’⁷²¹ Merrilies intended her performance to expand women’s working opportunities: ‘The object was to ascertain just what is required of an usher and to shed the light of my experience before the public, to the end that it might be demonstrated that a woman could do an usher’s work just as well as a man.’ Like a legal precedent, the act materially taking place (even under conditions of spectacularisation) posited the possibility of it taking place again.

Merrilies went into detail about how she found the position. An exchange of labour for a wage in a conventional way would not suffice, she explained. Merrilies needed to turn the transaction into a game:

It clearly would not do to go to a manager and beg for a week’s employment

⁷²⁰ Lutes, *Front Page Girls*, p.4

⁷²¹ Meg Merrilies, ‘A Woman Usher At Herrmann’s’, *World*, Sunday 17 December 1893, p.32

at regular market rates. He already had skilled male help for all his needs. Neither would the audience be particularly impressed by an ordinary young woman, actuated apparently by no other motive than the desire to earn a few dollars. The manager must be interested on his romantic side, and the audience must have an opportunity of being gently tickled in the same way. They must have a little comedy in front of the curtain in addition to the usual performance on the stage.

Competing against the status quo and a plentiful labour supply, Merrilies drew on romantic and comic theatrical conventions. She created a fictional wager, which paralleled the mechanistic coincidences and devices of melodrama. The wager was a bet as to whether or not she could attain a job as an usher and keep it for three nights. She approached a theatre manager with a request to help her to win this fictional bet, and he agreed. Hence Merrilies turned her labour into an entertaining scenario, which took place within a frame, as well as in front of a theatrical frame. To expand women's working opportunities, stunt journalists produced their work as spectacle.

As Cochrane's experience demonstrates, one possible outcome of becoming a stunt journalist was to become a personality: a commodified name with a range of money-making avenues, much like Steve Brodie. In stunt journalism, however, this outcome was by no means assured. Although Cochrane successfully created Bly and kept her persona attached to her own person, other writers became replaceable labourers writing under umbrella pen names. In the 1890s, 'Meg Merrilies' was detached from a specific person and applied to several female reporters (one of which was Lottie Germaine, Fahs writes).⁷²² Kroeger argues that the use of such 'composite[s]' demonstrates that the 'Sunday female stunt slot had taken on aspects of the production line'.⁷²³ The journalists became interchangeable and, like Bly's personas, to some extent expendable. Composite pen names withheld the establishment of professional identities and ownership of work, just as stunt subjectivities would come to obscure the labour of individuals under the Hollywood star system. In this way, the tendency of stunt stories both to spectacularise and to obliterate female labour was taken to extreme. Even with her picture at the centre of a page, a female journalist did not necessarily come into visibility.

As the potential for recognition and ownership depleted, however, the

⁷²² Fahs, p.173

⁷²³ Kroeger, p.223

riskiness of the journalists' acts increased. The reason that Fahs connects Merrilies to Germaine is that Germaine was hospitalised attempting a balloon ascent for the *World* in 1894 and was thus identified by other journalists.⁷²⁴ Stunt journalists also became more explicit surrogates for New York citizens, or *World* readers, invoking a sacrificial logic. Reporters staged situations in which they took on risks on behalf of readers. The scenarios they created were sometimes direct stagings of the questions regarding citizenship and social responsibility indirectly raised by W.C. Keeble's bridge jump.

In 1894, for example, Merrilies was struck by a trolley car in order to draw attention to the frequent and sometimes fatal accidents on the lines, often involving children.⁷²⁵ With this stunts, Merrilies aimed to demonstrate that accidents would be less likely to be fatal if safety nets were placed on the fenders of the cars, challenging the trolley line companies, which claimed that nets made no difference. Merrilies was hit by a car with a net fitted, and fell into the net, bruised but otherwise uninjured. She concluded that the safety nets were a worthwhile safety measure, and responsibility for accidents and deaths lay with the trolley companies. Her risky act was thus concerned with establishing safety as well as performing danger.

Merrilies' terms situated the problem in a wider struggle between citizens and corporations: "The sway of the trolley magnates is fast placing Brooklyn under a "reign of terror." Within this struggle, Merrilies acted as surrogate victim. Her descriptions developed the notion of sacrifice in melodramatic terms, referring both to the 'luckless pedestrian' hit by a car and her own potential sacrifice for collective safety: 'I wondered in a dim sort of way if what I was doing for the public good, for the good of the dear little innocents who were continually being sacrificed to the merciless greed of the street railway corporations would make a martyr of me if I should be killed.' Merrilies doubled for children in potential danger, and for *World* readers/citizens in general. Her wide-ranging availability as a surrogate paralleled the conditions of her production: Merrilies was a persona into which others might step, the *World's* 'Courageous' and 'Versatile Young Woman' for all occasions.⁷²⁶

The same year, Merrilies — who may or may not have been the same

⁷²⁴ Fahs, p.174

⁷²⁵ Meg Merrilies, 'Faced Death Before A Trolley Car', *World*, 7 October 1894, p.25

⁷²⁶ Meg Merrilies, 'Meg Merrilies At Sea On A Pilot-Boat', *World*, 25 November 1894, p.33

woman — was shot while wearing a bulletproof vest, invented by Brooklyn resident W.J.F. Lennard for military use.⁷²⁷ Again emphasising a sacrificial dynamic, Merrilies described donning the vest: ‘What a heavy weight it is around my neck! I wonder whether the prisoner about to be electrocuted, when having the different straps fastened about him, does not feel somewhat in the same way.’ (Two years later, another stunt journalist Kate Swan informed readers what it felt like for a woman to go through the motions of being electrified.)⁷²⁸ Merrilies doubled both for a condemned criminal and an imagined soldier, for whom the vest was intended. As argued in chapter 1, soldiers were often paired with stunt men, because the soldier functioned as a touchstone in discussions of democratic citizenship. This was particularly significant in debates about women’s suffrage. In 1894, Pulitzer’s editorial praised the ‘more thoughtful men,’ who believed in the ‘higher right of women not to vote,’ associating voting rights with the duty to fight, ‘the basis of force upon which all government ultimately and necessarily rests.’⁷²⁹ One spectator praised Merrilies’ ‘plucky’ ability to stand being shot with the words: “you have shown you are not afraid of the bullet, and I believe you deserve the privilege of the ballot. I am a believer in woman’s rights after this.” Through her identification with soldiers, Merrilies was testing the boundaries of female citizenship.

In both performances, the stunt was initially carried out by a man: the inventor’s son in the case of the vest, and a ‘professional acrobat’ in the case of the trolley car. These minor players in the stories — the stunt journalists’ stunt doubles — indicated that the journalists’ role was not to conduct the experiment, but to be a-woman-being-seen-conducting-the-experiment, as part of the sensational requirements of stunt journalism. In ‘How It Feels To Be Shot’, Merrilies dramatised the imperatives of her position, particularly the authority of the editor. The article began with Merrilies receiving her instructions:

When I walked into the editor’s office last week to ask for my assignment I found him reading very closely something in the morning World. He paid no attention to my inquiry for a minute and I was about to repeat it when he looked up suddenly and said:

“Go out and get shot!” And then returned to his paper and seemed to have forgotten me.

This tyrannical editor is reminiscent of the sadistic director in Richard Rush’s *The*

⁷²⁷ Meg Merrilies, ‘How It Feels To Be Shot’, *World*, 22 July 1894, p.25

⁷²⁸ Kate Swan, ‘A Woman in the Death Chair’, *World*, 16 February 1896, p.17

⁷²⁹ Joseph Pulitzer, ‘When Women Will Vote’, *World*, 22 July 1894, p.4

Stunt Man, discussed in chapter 1. He is a figure of authority who stands in for the imperatives of state and market.

Stunt stories anticipated configurations of identity and risk in cinematic stunt performances. Uncredited journalists (and their stunt doubles) laboured and took risks in order to create separate public personalities. Although the stunts involved in stunt journalism were often less physically dangerous than those mentioned in the opening of this chapter, they played out a hierarchy of expendability that found fuller expression in early twentieth-century cinema. In Eddie Cantor's autobiography, he recalls shooting his first silent film, *Kid Boots*, released in 1926:

There were many daredevil stunts in "Kid Boots," and I was soon initiated into the mystery of doubles. Whenever there is an element of danger the star is exempt. Some stunt man doubles for him, often risking his life for a few dollars. After all, why should a star take a chance when he has a wife or two, three automobiles, and a swimming pool dependent on him.⁷³⁰

Cantor's sardonic joke sums up the stratification of bodies and identities under the early Hollywood studio system. The star's body, of greater value to the studio than those of other performers, had to be protected from risk. Yet the risk was necessary to creating spectacle, particularly before stunt performers and camera operators worked together to forge filming techniques which went some way to limiting punishment to bodies. Hence the star was doubled by a person whose life and body were deemed to be less valuable, and whose performing identity was to varying extents subsumed into that of the star. While the person of the star was exalted within the studio structure, Cantor's description nonetheless undercuts the star's status. Rather than the star being preserved, it is property that is secured, suggesting an analogy between stars and capital.

Stunt performers did not attain credit for their labour until 1975, after forming associations for male and female performers in the 1960s.⁷³¹ Gene Scott Freese notes that Cantor's double, Bob Rose 'survived an era' in which many of his colleagues died attempting 'death-defying feats'. Rose was a stuntman on *The Trial of '98* (1928), in which four stunt performers drowned.⁷³² Director David Butler recalled shooting a dream sequence in *Ali Baba Goes To Town* (1937) in which

⁷³⁰ Eddie Cantor and David Freedman, *My Life Is In Your Hands & Take My Life* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), p.265

⁷³¹ Gene Scott Freese, *Hollywood Stunt Performers, 1910s to 1970s: A Biographical Dictionary* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2014), p.5

⁷³² 'Bobby Rose', in Freese, p.244

Cantor starred and Rose doubled: “The greatest thing I ever saw was the way this guy Rose got amongst about twenty horses, all galloping at full speed.” Butler’s concluding remark — “That was a great shot” — underlines the fact that it was not the star for which the stunt performer might die, but rather the image: the production of a ‘great shot’.⁷³³

Media theorist Jonathan Beller sees this potential destructiveness not as an exceptional state but rather as expressive of cinema itself, in which bodies ‘mark their disappearance from materiality with their reappearance as images’. Bodies exist ‘at the margins of images, as that which can be utterly appropriated and/or discarded’.⁷³⁴ Beller argues that in the attention economy, the primary mode of production is cinematic, by which he means that ‘images, working in concert, form the organizational principles for the production of reality’.⁷³⁵ Beller’s conception is related to, but not synonymous with, technology. The cinematic mode of production describes a shift in consciousness and structures of commodification. Beller’s comments about the appropriation and discarding of bodies demonstrates an affinity in his theory between liveness and aliveness, or mediatization and death, which is linked to technology but also extends beyond it, to modes of production. The destructiveness of mediatization in Beller’s theory is symbolic, but histories of stunt performance demonstrate that it was also a material reality.

Like cinema, the *World* used new image-producing technologies which structured reality in novel ways, creating journalists as image or personality. Stunt stories were among the first wave of *World* stories to be illustrated, pre-empting the newspaper’s prolific image experimentation in the 1890s. ‘Behind Asylum Bars’ and ‘Ten Days In A Madhouse’ were both accompanied by small captioned scenes from the story, based on Bly/Cochrane’s descriptions: ‘Nellie Practises Insanity at Home’, ‘In The Hands of the Police’, ‘Nellie’s First Meal At the Home’. These images were drawn by the *World*’s pioneering cartoonists and are reminiscent of comics in their framing and progression of action.

Tucked beside the first paragraph of ‘Behind Asylum Bars’ was another picture of Bly writing at a desk: the journalist at work. These signature portraits appeared frequently in her work. ‘Trying To Be A Servant’, for example, showed

⁷³³ David Butler: *Interviewed by Irene Kahn Atkins* (The Directors Guild of America & The Scarecrow Press: Metuchen, NJ and London, 1993), p.154

⁷³⁴ Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production* (Lebanon, NH and London: University Press of New England, 2006), p.65

⁷³⁵ Beller, p.1

Bly in an apron and headscarf, holding a steaming kettle (despite her not having succeeded in finding a post).⁷³⁶ ‘Nellie Bly On The Stage’ had her in ‘Amazonian’ costume — a leotard, short robe and helmet, holding a rod and shield.⁷³⁷ Rather than illustrating the story directly, these images worked to construct Bly the personality, circulating her as image, just as the *World* went on to distribute her portrait after her round-the-world journey.

By the 1890s, the text of articles by stunt journalists surrounded large illustrations in the centre of the page, depicting the riskiest part of their adventures, much like a cinematic still. Yet as described above, the creation of this image did not construct the journalist as personality or bring her labour into visibility. Instead, the journalist was, to some extent, discarded in the making of image. The multifaceted identities created in stunt journalism are illuminated by Michaels’ analysis of Gilman, when he argues that the act of writing in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ is the ‘work of at once producing and consuming the self, or what comes to the same thing, work in the market’. Stunt stories demonstrated a sometimes self-defeating ‘determination to see the self through on its own terms, as a commodity, a subject in the market’ and thereby to reimagine women’s productive roles in novel but highly exploitative terms.⁷³⁸

Stunt journalists were often faced with the imperative laid out in Bly’s first article: work or fall. Their solution, however, was to work *and* fall — radically, instead of being fallen women, they’d be fall guys. Stunt stories dramatised a widespread requirement that women in the media spectacularise their own labour. These journalists hoped that such spectacularisation would produce them as personalities and bring them into visibility in public life. For some, however, this mode of production obliterated their labour and instead produced a proliferation of exploitable surrogates.

9. Conclusion

This chapter has furthered the investigation of surrogation, sacrifice and liveness by analysing stunt stories in the 1880s and 1890s. It has claimed that stunt

⁷³⁶ Nellie Bly, ‘Trying To Be A Servant’, *World*, 30 October 1887, p.9

⁷³⁷ Nellie Bly, ‘Nellie Bly On the Stage’, *World*, 4 March 1888, p.15

⁷³⁸ Michaels, p.28

journalism is a rich example of middle-class women's self-actualization in this era, which related to reform movements, professionalisation and celebrity cultures. This self-actualisation was achieved through cross-class and cross-ethnic embodiments and appropriations. Through simultaneous spectacularisations and rejections of reproductive labour, stunt journalists also subverted triangulations of women, work and sex, experimenting with circulation that increased women's value. Though stunt stories were a forum for middle-class women, the modes of self-actualisation they involved were also paralleled in working women's cultures.

Successful stunt journalists constructed themselves as personalities through the proliferation of surrogates. Other journalists' identities and labour, however, were subsumed into composite pen names, as they took up increasingly sacrificial roles. This practice anticipated configurations of identity in cinematic stunt performances. This chapter has explored the ways in which both cinematic practices and theorisations of cinema intertwine liveness and aliveness, suggesting that producing oneself as image involved a threat to aliveness that was at once symbolic and material. The next chapter progresses the analysis of liveness, advertising and value through readings of two bicycles stunts.

4.

Turning the wheel: bicycle stunts, circulation and derivatives**1. Introduction**

This chapter investigates bicycle performances of the 1890s. It analyses two live promotional performances — a high-wire act and a round-the-world cycling feat — as well as cycling displays in two films by the Edison Manufacturing Company, a novel by Herbert Brown and a manual for female cyclists by Maria Ward. I read these performances and texts in three ways: as contradictory displays of human self-sufficiency and technological achievement; as expressions of a derivative logic; and as performances of circulation, which experimented with work, gender and value.

As contradictory displays of self-sufficiency and intimate connection with machines, these cycling performances raise questions that further complicate conceptions of liveness and aliveness. Bicycles were described as living beings, and their popularisation presented opportunities for creating novel inter-subjectivities between humans and machines, particularly for bicycling women. As acts of advertising, the cycling performances deployed bodies as media of circulation, further problematising a clear distinction between live and mediated events.

I argue that these advertising performances expressed a derivative logic and develop the analogy of the derivative as a way of theorising stunt performances and value more broadly. Randy Martin's concept of a 'derivative' encompasses a mode of sociality as well as a type of financial investment that gained prominence in late nineteenth-century stock markets. Martin expounded upon his idea in relation to dance and present-day precarity in 'A Precarious Dance, A Derivative Sociality', arguing that the 'dynamics of the derivative can be seen across all manner of human activity in ways that engender mutual indebtedness'.⁷³⁹ He argued for conjoint critiques of performance and value abstractions, holding that dance is 'a key site in which bodies in movement make value'.⁷⁴⁰ Pursuing this parallel between bodily movement and value abstraction, I

⁷³⁹ Randy Martin, 'A Precarious Dance, a Derivative Sociality', *TDR (The Drama Review)*, 56:4 (2012), 62-77, 65.

⁷⁴⁰ Martin, 'A Precarious Dance, a Derivative Sociality', p. 66.

put both Martin's derivative and Karl Marx's concept of 'fictitious capital' into critical dialogue with bicycle stunts.⁷⁴¹ I argue that the stunts analysed throughout this thesis employed derivative logic and created forms of fictitious capital to further circulation.

In conjunction with this theorisation of stunts as derivatives, I read cycling as a means of embodying circulation, viewed in the context of burgeoning rapid transport, electricity networks and high finance. Performances of circulation became a way of expressing the awe-inspiring and worrying proliferation of circuits in urban modernity, both material and abstract, and the interconnections that they facilitated. The performances under analysis present unexpected connections between people and machines, which enabled self-actualisation, particularly for women.

Conceptions of machines should be viewed in the context of nineteenth-century understandings of industrialisation and its effects. In Leo Marx's study of the pastoral ideal and its transformation in industrialised America, *The Machine in the Garden*, Marx outlines the emergence of the machine as a symbol from the late eighteenth century onwards. Around this time, manufacturing interests became bound up with national interests, prompting admiration for, and naturalisation of, manufacturing machines. Loosely drawing on Newtonian science, the machine came to be understood as a means by which to seize the power and the 'underlying principles of nature', because the universe itself was a 'mechanism'.⁷⁴²

By the early nineteenth century, what would soon be named industrialisation was beginning to alter understandings of machines. In a commentary widely debated in the United States, Thomas Carlyle's 1829 essay 'Signs of the Times' described his era as the 'the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word'.⁷⁴³ Carlyle used 'machine' to describe both technology and the controlled society to which industrialisation had given rise. He argued that in the face of machines, human (and animal) labour had been discredited and abandoned. A concomitant, mechanistic turn had taken place in government, society and individuals' thoughts and feelings. Leo Marx points out that Carlyle's descriptions are similar to Karl Marx's thoughts on alienation,

⁷⁴¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by David Fernbach, 3 vols (London: Penguin Books, 1992), III, p.596

⁷⁴² Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.165

⁷⁴³ Thomas Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times' in *The Modern British Essayists: Thomas Carlyle* (Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1852), V, 187-195 (p.188)

written in 1844. The increased value of the world of things correlated with a devaluation of the human world.⁷⁴⁴

Against these ideas stood a belief in the unfaltering progress that machines afforded the republic. Machines saved labour, and so were seen as constitutive to the egalitarian society Americans perceived themselves to be constructing.⁷⁴⁵ The machines of the industrial revolution symbolised abundance separated from the exertion of physical labour.⁷⁴⁶ Leo Marx refers to this as the ‘mechanized’ or ‘technological sublime’, a discourse by which the spirit of the republic, the progressive force of history and machines were brought together in a state of ‘cosmic harmony’.⁷⁴⁷ Praise of machines did not efface a pastoral ideal. Indeed, industrialisation was often understood as a route back to a rural idyll, typified by young people working in factories for limited periods in order to emigrate West and set up a farm.⁷⁴⁸ Leo Marx characterises this as a crucial national contradiction, which enabled ‘America’ to ‘continue defining its purpose as the pursuit of rural happiness while devoting itself to productivity, wealth, and power’.⁷⁴⁹

Stunts around the turn of the twentieth century expressed conflicted views about industrialisation. They invited analogies between bodies and machines and also pitted them against one another. As discussed in chapter 2, the walking contest enacted circulation, a mechanistic motion by which bodies emulated machines, potentially even beating them at their own game. Yet at the same time, the race undermined a sense of linear progress, threatening to deconstruct whiteness, masculinity and humanity.

Bicycles stunts sometimes expressed a state akin to Leo Marx’s mechanised sublime, in that they configured bodies and machines and celebrated the feats of which they were capable in consort. Their reception demonstrates counterintuitive interpretations, which channelled nostalgia for a rural ideal even as they celebrated machines. Such contradictory frameworks extended beyond the nineteenth century. Writing on Charles Lindberg’s solo flight across the Atlantic in 1927, Lawrence Levine observes the odd way in which a long-distance airplane

⁷⁴⁴ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, p.177

⁷⁴⁵ Marx, p.187

⁷⁴⁶ Marx, p.199

⁷⁴⁷ Marx, p.214

⁷⁴⁸ Marx, p.225

⁷⁴⁹ Marx, p.226

flight became the ‘occasion for hymns of praise to the solitary unaided man’.⁷⁵⁰ Lindberg’s flight was understood within a frontier paradigm, whereby a feat of industrialised technology could be read as a rejection of the ordered, industrialised world: a heroic tale of an individual overcoming and taming wild nature.⁷⁵¹ Such tension between nostalgia and progress, and between ‘machine society and the individual’, was a dominant vein in the conception and interpretation of late nineteenth-century stunts.⁷⁵²

This chapter first offers an overview of cycling performance cultures in the 1890s, emphasising their huge impact on conceptions of industry and gender, their close association with bodily discipline and military practices, and their important role in the proliferation of advertising. I then analyse a high-wire, electrical bicycle performance of 1897, contextualising it in relation to circus. Viewing the act alongside Edison’s trick cycling films, I argue that the high-wire performance presented a simultaneous and contradictory display of autonomy and systemisation. Building on my previous analysis of bridge jumping and the walking contest, I contend that this promotional act deployed a derivative logic involving the production of personas, and created a forum for sacrificial narratives.

The second half of the chapter focuses on how cycling enabled some women to reimagine their gendered identities and working lives. I read Ward’s cycling manual and Brown’s novel alongside Michel Foucault’s *The Birth of Biopolitics*, proposing that cycling was experienced as a form of embodied liberalism, and a means to actualise new gendered subjectivities through relations with machines. I then analyse Annie Kopchovsky’s round-the-world cycling journey of 1894-5, comparing her proliferation of stories and performances of work to stunt journalism. I argue that Kopchovsky too deployed a derivative logic, making use of the unwieldy connection that advertising created between action and the production of value. I view Kopchovsky’s creations through the critical theories of Paulo Virno and Guy Debord, proposing that the commodification of human communication that they describe also disrupts liveness. Finally I analyse Kopchovsky’s use of war narratives, arguing that she became emblematic of an

⁷⁵⁰ Lawrence Levine, ‘Nostalgia and Progress in Popular Thought: The Meaning of Lindberg’s Flight’, in *The Shaping of Twentieth-Century America: Interpretive Articles*, ed. by Richard M. Abrams and Lawrence W. Levine (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), pp.404-417, p.411

⁷⁵¹ Levine, ‘Nostalgia and Progress’, p.412-3

⁷⁵² Levine, ‘Nostalgia and Progress’, p.417

military-industrial-entertainment complex already at work in the cycling industry and popular newspapers.

2. Bicycle performance cultures: an overview

'The latest word in bicycle lore is 'stunt',' explained Illinois newspaper the *Oak Park Vindicator* in 1897:

Webster defines 'stunt' as 'to hinder from growing to the natural size [...].'
Bicyclists use the word as a synonym for 'trick.' Thus, to ride on one wheel is a
difficult 'stunt.' The new meaning for the word is of very recent birth. It is
extensively used in cycling columns of eastern papers.⁷⁵³

For this writer, the emerging definition of 'stunt' was bound up with cycling, a newly pervasive technology, sport, leisure pursuit, and mode of transport. A stunt was a specific type of cycling performance: a skilled 'trick,' which took place in everyday life — on streets and in parks — as well as on stage and in films. With 'trick' as a synonym, the meaning of 'stunt' pulls towards illusion, but the journalist's example steers away from this suggestion: standing on one wheel is exactly what it looks like. Such bicycle stunts engage in Frances Harding's 'double illusion', in that they present the impossible, which is in fact possible. The article depicts cyclists as a distinct, dynamic, urban group, who have produced the new meaning of stunt through a combination of slang, sport and journalism. Interaction between people and bicycles was giving rise to new performances, cultures and words, partaking in the abundantly generative novelty of modernity.

The popularisation of the 'safety' bicycle and pneumatic tyres in the late 1880s hugely expanded the practice of cycling, particularly among women. In 1889, *World* journalist Elizabeth Cochrane/Nellie Bly wrote a story on learning to cycle. Her trainer told of his growing trade, explaining: "We have taught 173 women since April, and I can safely say by Fall we will teach 500".⁷⁵⁴ By the mid 1890s, both the *Journal* and the *World* published content related to cycling almost every day. In 1895, the *World* ran full-page features entitled 'Odds and Ends About the All-Pervading Bicycle,' with articles such as 'A Three-Wheeled Tandem', 'The Bicycle Press', and 'A Bicycle On Ice'.⁷⁵⁵ Champion cyclist A. A. Zimmerman

⁷⁵³ Anon., 'A New Bicycle Word', *Oak Park Vindicator* (Oak Park, IL), 27 Aug 1897, p.6

⁷⁵⁴ Nellie Bly, 'Nellie Bly on a Bicycle', *World*, 23 June 1889, p.13

⁷⁵⁵ Anon., 'Odds and Ends About the All Pervading Bicycle Craze', *World*, 6 October 1895, p.37

authored *Sunday World* features.⁷⁵⁶ Describing a meeting of the League of American Wheelmen in 1895, the *World* claimed that it ‘marked the crowning event of the most remarkable popular craze of a country given to doing remarkable things. As a spectacle it was impressive of the rise of a new kind of locomotion for men and women.’⁷⁵⁷

Excitement about cycling was compounded by extensive media coverage (boosted by industry publications and advertising), professional and amateur competitions, widespread fascination with technological invention, and the opportunities the bicycle enabled for enacting and challenging gendered identities and behaviours. The proliferation of cycling performances included circus and vaudeville acts, trick riding, long-distance solo journeys, centuries (hundred mile races), mass gatherings, relay and six-day races, parades, protests, industry fairs, and drills. As I’ll go on to discuss, risky and attention-grabbing performances — stunts — were not limited to brief, isolated displays of skill. They also took sustained form, capitalising on tightly-knit relationships between journalism, advertising and the cycling industry.

The impact of increased cycling was such that in 1897 *Scientific American* stated: ‘the American bicycle industry has grown up to dimensions which fairly entitle it to be considered representative of the country and of the day.’⁷⁵⁸ As this statement suggests, the rapidly growing industry was readily adopted as a metaphor for wider economic and cultural change. The turning of the bicycle wheel came to represent and embody a dynamic mode of modernity. ‘Wheels, wheels, everywhere, turn and whirr,’ a *World* journalist wrote of a cycling meet in Philadelphia, in an article entitled ‘Quaker City Wheel Mad: Eyes Tired Out By the Motion’.⁷⁵⁹ Across the Atlantic, in a British magazine *Wheelwoman and Society Cycling News*, a New Year’s editorial celebrated the fact that 1896 had ‘done so much for the emancipation of women, not by granting them what the greater number are indifferent to be possessed of — Woman’s Suffrage — but by allowing them *to turn their own wheel*’ (italics original).⁷⁶⁰ The writer goes on to express pleasure at the growing importance of the ‘wheelwoman’s wheel’ in the ‘making and marring of men’s fortunes,’ emphasising the connection between propelling

⁷⁵⁶ A. A. Zimmerman, ‘Zimmerman Tells How To Ride Fast’, *World*, 16 March 1896, p.34

⁷⁵⁷ Anon., ‘The Great Bicycle Meet at Asbury Park’, *World*, 14 July 1895, p.29

⁷⁵⁸ Anon., ‘The Tribune Bicycle’, *Scientific American*, 4 January 1896, p.4

⁷⁵⁹ Anon., ‘Quaker City Wheel Mad’, *World*, Friday 6 August 1897, p.12

⁷⁶⁰ Anon., *Wheelwoman and Society Cycling News: A Journal for Lady Cyclists*, 2 January 1897, p.1

the wheel and powering a booming industry. This metonym was strengthened by its material and sensory reality: it was a metonym one could embody in action, which was then sustained in an apparently autonomous movement. Perhaps it's not surprising that cycling was thought to spur a kind of giddiness, that male and female cyclists were described as having 'wheels in their heads'.⁷⁶¹

An article in one New York periodical declared: 'The bicycle has become one of the most important factors in our every-day existence.'⁷⁶² Another predicted a point in the near future when cycling would be universal, describing bicycles as 'a necessary part of the machinery of existence'.⁷⁶³ Bicycle plants — vast machines producing machines — enabled people to conceive of machines in new ways. In Herbert Brown's novel *Betsey Jane*, for example, this proliferation of machines takes unexpected turns: doctors must produce machines to counter the spine-bending effects of poor cycling (a relief, as initially it seemed that they would be out of business due to cycling's health benefits).⁷⁶⁴ The bicycle industry pioneered many of production and distribution methods which in the automobile industry came to be described as Fordism. In this sense, bicycle manufacturing has played a generally unremarked but nonetheless formative role in ongoing conceptions of labour and society.

Lorenz Finison's study of cycling in Boston gives a compelling account of the ways in which racial, class, and gender prejudice were enacted and challenged through cycling societies and performances.⁷⁶⁵ Finison focuses on Boston resident and cyclist Kittie Knox, who was mixed race, and her fight against her exclusion from the League of American Wheelmen. In 1894, after a series of debates, the national committee for the League voted to ban all non-white members, indicative of a widespread increase in nativist racism in the 1890s. Many professional competitions were also closed to African Americans. In spite of this, in the late 1890s, Indiana born African American, Marshall Taylor, became an international cycling champion. Such racist exclusions connected to the popularisation of bodily

⁷⁶¹ D.M. [name illegible] 'The Mania for Up To Date Weddings — The Strange Things That The Wheels in Their Heads Make the Love-Sick Do', *World*, 25 July 1897, Colored Supplement, p.1

⁷⁶² Anon., 'The Bicycle Show', *Independent: Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, of History, Literature and Arts*, 11 February 1897, p.2

⁷⁶³ 'Martyn', 'The Universal Bicycle', *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 25 June 1896, p.26

⁷⁶⁴ Brown, pp.186-190

⁷⁶⁵ Lorenz J. Finison, *Boston's Cycling Craze 1880-1900: A Story of Race, Sport and Society* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014)

discipline, and its association with the protection and proliferation of whiteness. Bicycling was part of a 'cult of experience with martial activism at its core'.⁷⁶⁶

Many of the hundreds of bicycle-related patents filed during this period were concerned with the potential of the bicycle in war. This bustling inventiveness was not undertaken by the regular army or federal government, but by a dispersed range of bicycle enthusiasts and local guards. They undertook long-distance tests to demonstrate the speed and efficiency of bicycles as a means of military travel. William Randolph Hearst, editor of the *Journal* and *San Francisco Examiner*, organised a relay race between New York and San Francisco in 1896, naming it the 'Journal-Examiner Yellow Fever Transcontinental Bicycle Relay,' after the cartoon character, the Yellow Kid.⁷⁶⁷ Cyclists carried a message from east coast to west, beating the existing record by four days. The *New York Times* commented that relay races had done more than anything else to 'prove that the bicycle is a practical carrier', referring to two Generals who had recommended use of bicycles in the army.⁷⁶⁸ In the relations between popular newspapers, sports, armies, the cycling industry and government, a military-industrial-entertainment complex was very much in evidence.

Cyclists looked back to past wars and ahead to future conflicts for inspiration. In the 1880s, following instructions in Thomas Pratt's manual *American Bicyclist*, cycling clubs (usually for men) wore cavalry-style uniforms and assumed such roles as captain, guide and bugler.⁷⁶⁹ In 1892, Albert Pope, the initiator of the U.S. cycling industry and head of Pope Manufacturing, published Civil War veteran Brigadier General Albert Ordway's *Cycle-Infantry Drill Regulations*, containing scripts of verbal instructions, diagrams and trumpet calls. The manual quotes from a speech by General Miles, in which he argued that the army should take "fifteen or twenty thousand intelligent men and mount them on wheels [...]. It would be one of the most effective corps ever organized."⁷⁷⁰ In the back cover, this manual featured an advert for Pope Manufacturing's Columbia Light model, making the spurious claim that it was 'the only cycle used in regular

⁷⁶⁶ T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), p.118

⁷⁶⁷ Robert A. Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle: Its Early Life and Times in America* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1972), p.131

⁷⁶⁸ Anon., 'Bicycle Relay Journeys', *New York Times*, 20 September 1896, p.13

⁷⁶⁹ Smith, p.113

⁷⁷⁰ Brig. Gen. Albert Ordway, *Cycle-Infantry Drill Regulations* (Boston, 1892: Pope Manufacturers Company), p.ix

military service in the Army’.

Potential military applications persistently fuelled general enthusiasm about this developing technology. The *World* published illustrations of bicycles with cannons attached to them, articles such as ‘The Bicycle in War’, and cartoons including ‘The Sunday World’s Bicycle Suggestion to the Army’.⁷⁷¹ Through such articles, military ideas and preparations involving bicycles fed into entertainment culture. Newspapers, the bicycle industry, amateur cyclists, and other members of the public could partake in widespread fantasies about bicycles on the battlefield. In 1896 *American Cyclist* commented that, though nobody wished for war, ‘the modern war, if it ever comes, will be intensely exciting, and the part which the bicycle is destined to play therein will be of exceptional interest.’⁷⁷²

The bicycle industry was also at the forefront of experimentation and expenditure in advertising. In his social history of the bicycle, Robert Smith describes the industry’s massive uptake in newspaper, magazine, and trade journal advertising, as well as spectacular annual bicycle shows (held in Madison Square Garden from 1894), and ambulant promotions, such as brightly-dressed cyclists riding around towns to advertise bicycle schools.⁷⁷³ Pope underwrote sports publications including *Outing* magazine, and constructed a national network of selling agents, anticipating the methods of the automobile industry.⁷⁷⁴

The cycling industry took on the expansive vision of advertising outlined in journals such as *Fame*, whereby waste and production were intertwined, and the boundaries of value-productive activity hard to draw. The bicycle industry’s enthusiastic use of advertising created a proliferation of cycling and journalistic activities with uncertain aims, status and efficacy. In doing so, I contend, they created a forum for sacrificial acts similar to the bridge jumps analysed in chapter 1. They also provided space for reimagining gendered identities and modes of production, particularly among women. The two live bicycle acts analysed below are indicative of these contrasting modes of expression. The high-wire bicycle act exposed and aestheticised precarity, while Kopchovsky’s trip round the world spectacularised her labour and tested new forms of work and value creation.

⁷⁷¹ ‘The Sunday World’s Bicycle Suggestion to the Army’, *World*, Colored Supplement, 14 July 1895, p.4; Anon., ‘The Bicycle Ambulance’, *World*, 21 July 1895, p.36; Anon., ‘Uncle Sam’s War Balloon’ [powered by pedalling], *World*, 28 July 1895, p.36; Anon., ‘Roller Skates and Bicycle’, *World*, 29 September 1895, p.36

⁷⁷² ‘Item’, *American Cyclist* (Hartford, CT), 25 September 1896, 9:20, p.683

⁷⁷³ Smith, p.28-30

⁷⁷⁴ Smith, p.9 and 34

3. Live wire

In Ridgwood Park, Queens County, in 1897, a high-wire performer took advantage of a new amenity: the electrification of the Brooklyn train lines.⁷⁷⁵ Performing under the alias 'Professor Arion', Frank McDonald or Frank Donahue or D. H. McDonnell (sources disagree as to his name) cycled across a wire between 60 and 75 feet from the ground, before an audience of two or three thousand.⁷⁷⁶ The name 'Arion' is taken from a winged horse in Greek mythology, paralleling the hybridity of the man and bicycle in the air, and echoing an affinity between flight and aerial acts common in circus practice and discourses.⁷⁷⁷ Drawing electricity from the nearby train lines, 'Arion' connected to the live wire via his bicycle wheels, which were made of grooved metal. The *New York Tribune* described:

When 'Arion' mounted the wire from a small platform built around the top of the pole, all eyes were upon him. Small incandescent lights were so arranged about his clothing and the wheel that they illuminated as soon as the electrical current was touched. 'Arion' was to ride 100 yards.⁷⁷⁸

McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell was apparently an experienced aerial performer, who had attracted some attention by walking a narrow plank over Niagara Falls a few years before. Twenty-eight years old, he lived in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and had a wife and small child.⁷⁷⁹ He'd recently performed his bicycle act near a railway line in San Francisco.⁷⁸⁰ McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell had been engaged by the Brooklyn Heights Railroad Company for a seven-night run, and had completed the act successfully the night before this performance.

Exactly who was responsible for the show was a matter of intense debate in the aftermath, because it went badly wrong. The *Tribune* details:

⁷⁷⁵ Brian J. Cudahy, *How We Got To Coney Island: On the Development of Mass Transportation in Brooklyn and King's County* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), p. 144; Anon., 'Equipment of the Brooklyn Elevated Railway, Brooklyn', *Street Railway Journal*, 1 March 1898, 14:3, American Periodicals, p.168

⁷⁷⁶ The *World* named him as Frank McDonald (Anon., 'From Blazing Wheel to Death', *World*, 2 August 1897, p.1); the *Tribune* as Frank Donahue (Anon., 'Hundreds Saw Him Killed', *New York Tribune*, 2 August 1897, p.1); and the *Brooklyn Eagle* as D.H. McDonnell (Anon., 'Died From Electric Shock', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 2 August 1897, p.12)

⁷⁷⁷ Peta Tait, *Circus Bodies: Cultural identity in aerial performances* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.9

⁷⁷⁸ Anon., 'Died From Electric Shock', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 2 August 1897, p.12

⁷⁷⁹ Anon., 'Cycling On A Live Wire', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 30 July 1897, p.4

⁷⁸⁰ Anon., 'At the Chutes', *San Francisco Call*, 24 November 1896, p.11

He had gone about a quarter of the distance when he was seen to topple off the wheel, and both man and bicycle fell to the ground. [...] A call was sent to St. Catherine's Hospital, Brooklyn, but he was dead before it was responded to.

An autopsy concluded that McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell had died of electric shock, suggesting that the voltage was higher than intended.⁷⁸¹ The Brooklyn Heights Company argued, however, that it was mechanically impossible for the charge to be higher than 550 Volts. Nonetheless, both the Company and the manager of the park were accused of negligence, because there had been no net under the wire. Under the New York Penal Code, which was quoted in newspaper coverage, proprietors were obliged to provide a net for acrobatic exhibitions (an example of increasing performance legislation on both sides of the Atlantic).⁷⁸² The Company blamed the manager of the park, claiming that he had employed McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell; meanwhile, the manager of the park blamed the Company, claiming that the only existing contract was between it and the performer. The Company responded with a statement that in the contract, McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell had:

'formally released the company from any damage or injury arising out of the performance. All the railroad company agreed to do was to put up the wires and furnish a current of 500 volts. Prof. Arion was to do all the rest and to take upon himself the sole responsibility. ... [T]he railroad company had nothing to do with last night's fatal performance.'

The spokesman went on to say that the performer had come 'highly recommended' by managers of railroad companies in the West. McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell was effectively blamed in this account for his failure to overcome the risk as promised, while the Company was presented as the provider of opportunity.⁷⁸³ The statement referred to McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell by his pseudonym 'Prof. Arion' throughout, even though the general passenger agent knew him outside his act and had eaten dinner with him a couple of nights before. This textual slip suggests that the Company had taken at face value — or wished to imply that it had — the 'fictional' aspect of what Thomas Postlewait terms the 'double identity of a performance event', including the artist's apparent capacity to overcome the risk of his precarious act entirely.⁷⁸⁴ The Company seemed to take

⁷⁸¹ Anon., 'Died From Electric Shock', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 2 August 1897, p.12

⁷⁸² Helen Stoddart, *Rings of Desire: Circus history and representation* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.74; Brenda Assael, *Circus and Victorian Society* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2005), p.133-34

⁷⁸³ Anon., 'Died From Electric Shock', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 2 August 1897, p.12

⁷⁸⁴ Thomas Postlewait, 'The Theatrical Event', in *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.117-154, p.121 and 119

seriously precarity's promise: that danger could be invited, yet at the same time entirely negated, through the skill of an individual body.

High wire bicycle or velocipede acts had been a popular feature of circuses and carnivals in the United States for the previous two decades. Tait cautions against stories of 'aerial firsts'; in the 1890s, however, *St Paul Daily Globe* believed that aeronauts Harry Gilbert and 'Prof. Donaldson', who had run Buffalo Bill's advertising hot air balloons, were responsible for the first high wire cycling exhibition in the country.⁷⁸⁵ In the early 1880s, French aerialist Ella Zuilla (sometimes called Zuila or Zola), the 'female Blondin', toured a high-wire velocipede act with Adam Forepaugh's circus.⁷⁸⁶ For the next two decades, female and male high wire bicycle acts performed widely, including Alferetta Adair, 'Davenport', 'Herbo', duo George Zurella and Emma Dubois, and troupes such as the Melrosas, the Charest Family, Geo. Scott and Family, Professor Baum and his troupe, the Forepaugh family, and several companies from Tokyo.⁷⁸⁷

McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's addition of electricity was highly novel, and indicative of nineteenth-century circus's function, in Matthew Wittman's words, as a 'forum for new technologies'.⁷⁸⁸ Stoddart describes circus's relationship with electricity as constitutive of its historical alignment with the 'spirit of modernity' and technological innovation, pointing out that the first public display of arc electric lighting took place in a light parade and the illuminated ring of Howe's London Circus, Sanger's Royal Menagerie and Cooper, Bailey and Company's International Allied Shows on 15 April 1879.⁷⁸⁹ Subsequently, electric lighting was widely adopted and puffed in circus advertisements: in 1883, John Robinson's Big Show was 'Made as bright as the noon-day sun by the \$30,000

⁷⁸⁵ Tait, *Circus Bodies*, p. 16; Anon., 'Hero of 200 Ascensions', *St Paul Daily Globe*, 17 April 1892, p.14

⁷⁸⁶ Anon., 'John Robinson's Big Shows Combined', *Eaton Democrat*, 12 April 1883, p.2; Anon., 'Forepaugh & Samwell's Show', *Memphis Appeal*, 19 October 1886, p.5; S. L. Kotar and J. E. Gessler, *The Rise of the American Circus, 1716-1899* (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland, 2011), p.200

⁷⁸⁷ Anon., 'Alferetta Adair in her High Wire Bicycle Act', *Holt County Sentinel*, 2 September 1898, p.4; Anon., 'The Great Street Carnival', *Audubon County Journal*, 4 October 1890, p.3; Anon., 'Big Civic Parade', *Wichita Daily Eagle*, 24 September 1899, p.3; Anon., 'Barrett's Great Circus and Menagerie', *Salt Lake Evening Herald*, 11 June 1885, p.4; Anon., 'A Colossal Combination', *Opelousas Courier*, 7 November 1899, p.3; Kotar and Gessler, *The Rise of the American Circus*, p.10; Anon., 'Old John Robinson's Gigantic Union of Shows', *Salt Lake Herald*, 13 July 1882, p.1; Anon., 'Wonders of the World!', *Guthrie Daily Leader*, 4 October 1898, p.3; Anon., 'John Robinson's Big Shows Combined', *Semi-weekly Miner*, 14 July 1883, p.4; Anon., 'Chutes and Zoo', *San Francisco Call*, 25 September 1898, p.29

⁷⁸⁸ Matthew Wittman, *Circus and the City: New York, 1793 - 2010* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), p.73

⁷⁸⁹ Stoddart, p.35-6.

Brush Electric Light!’⁷⁹⁰ In a dynamic intrinsic to circus performance, McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell’s bicycle act brought fascination with electrical spectacle to bear on a single body. It staged the incorporation of the performer into an electrical circuit, exemplifying Stoddart’s view of circus’s tendency to ‘dramatise the frenetic, dangerous, spectacular and shocking energies of a modern secular world’ in a manner which (when successful) enacted the potential of human bodies to be ‘enriched by such encounters’.⁷⁹¹ A similar electrified act appeared in 1900 in Atlantic, Iowa, where ‘Davenport’ provided a ‘magnificent illuminated display at night, riding a bicycle on a high wire’.⁷⁹²

Electrical novelty is one of several ways in which McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell’s act can be read as a one-man embodiment of turn-of-the-century American circus. The performance took place at the height of large-scale railroad circus; that year, Janet Davis writes, each major circus was transported by scores of railcars carrying as many as a thousand labourers and performers, human and animal.⁷⁹³ Such colossal scale was enabled by the development of the railway network itself, which had standardised and rationalised, becoming a ‘powerful cultural icon of a new modern nation-state’.⁷⁹⁴ McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell’s act was an offshoot of the railway network, siphoning its power and using its architectural structures for a stage. His stunt assembled the parts of a railway in a stripped back or metonymic form: it put wheels on a rail and electrified them.

In circus scholarship, stunts are frequently referred to as both dangerous, skilful acts and attention-grabbing promotional mechanisms.⁷⁹⁵ Efforts to define ‘circus’ intertwine with those aimed at defining ‘stunts’ to the extent that it might seem that stunts are simply a subset or specific instance of circus. Both are concerned with bodies in danger, and feature virtuosic physical skill. Both have traditionally been considered ‘low’, commercial art forms (if they are termed art at all) and tend to share a sense of absurdity and frivolity. Both bring simultaneous

⁷⁹⁰ Anon., ‘John Robinson’s Big Shows Combined’, *Semi-weekly Miner*, 14 July 1883, p.4

⁷⁹¹ Stoddart, p.96

⁷⁹² Anon., ‘The Great Street Carnival’, *Audubon Country Journal*, 4 October 1900, p.3

⁷⁹³ Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society Under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p.21

⁷⁹⁴ Davis, p.10; Walter Werner and Steven T. Smith, *Wall Street* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p.134; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 26

⁷⁹⁵ Davis, p.12, 16, 21, 103 and 188 (physical stunts), p.120 (publicity stunt).; Stoddart, p.51 and 54 (advertising stunts), p.60 (clowning stunt)

and conflicting connotations of authentic danger *and* illusion or trickery.⁷⁹⁶ Stunts and circus also have a common and intimate affinity with advertisement. Stoddart argues that advertising is part of circus's 'art as well as its machinery'.⁷⁹⁷ Most obviously, Stoddart means that circus posters had substantive aesthetic qualities. More broadly, she emphasises the mutually reliant development of circus and advertising practices, citing 'stunts' and 'public relations exercises' as circus's key advertising forms, along with print.⁷⁹⁸

McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's bicycle act was 'circus' in that it embodied absurdity and sensation and was 'a vehicle for the demonstration and taunting of danger'.⁷⁹⁹ It was also a 'stunt' as distinct from circus, because these qualities were put into service not only for the sake of excitement and entertainment, but also for the promotion of another, unconnected entity. The significance and function of McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's endangered body was altered, because it was put at risk to increase the value of an unrelated organisation, Brooklyn Heights Railroad Company. To employ Martin's terms, the act entangled performer and Company in a contested state of mutual indebtedness.

The Company had organised 'Arion's' performance as part of its Hessian Volkfest celebrations, a public access event which served as a form of promotion for the Company. Such events were part of a new drive among railroad companies to entertain and attract potential customers: the *Street Railway Journal* reported that managers who were 'awake to the interests of their roads' were 'anxious to keep novelties before the riding public'.⁸⁰⁰ It was common for railroad operators to manage or lease adjoining parks, and their individually-owned electrical power plants presented new opportunities for engaging the public: the *Railway Journal* weighed up the pros and cons of installing an electric fountain for entertainment. McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's aerial performance highlighted the Company's new technological feature. Both performer and Company traded on the novelty of their electrical connections, spectacularised by McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's body at risk.

⁷⁹⁶ Stoddart, p.1

⁷⁹⁷ Stoddart, p.50.

⁷⁹⁸ Stoddart, p.51

⁷⁹⁹ Stoddart, p. 4

⁸⁰⁰ Frederic W. Darlington, 'Brooklyn's Electric Fountain', *Street Railway Journal*, 1 March 1898, 14:3, American Periodicals, p.128

Such leveraging made use of, and also altered, the invocation of responsibility in circus acts. Stoddart describes this as the 'expansion and contraction' of circus's performance frame through endangerment of performers, whereby audience members recognise and feel some responsibility for the artists' 'proximity to human extinction, rather than merely untruth' (as might be the case in realist theatre). The experience of watching circus, Stoddart suggests, makes a distinct claim on a spectator's sense of responsibility.⁸⁰¹ Removed from the ring and instrumentalised as advertisement in the late nineteenth century, circus stunts retained their capacity to invoke responsibility, and by the extremity of the exploitation frequently on display, pushed to the fore conflicts concerning freedom and safety. Hence dangerous promotional acts took on a particular social resonance, a capacity to reveal a general state of precarity and mutual indebtedness, and ask widely applicable questions about whether and how lives ought to be protected.

Because of stunts' association with several performing arts and other cultural performance forms (advertisement, political campaigns, sport), the risks attendant on them were more conceptually unwieldy than those associated with a circus act undertaken within a circus frame. Indeed, it was not always clear what framework should be brought to bear. This ambiguity complicated how risk signified and what social function it served. Writing on female stunt pilots of the early twentieth century, Mary Russo praised stunts' potential to celebrate autonomy and empower marginalised actors, and at the same time warned of stunts' capacity to mark those who undertook them as inherently risky. Russo described a stunt as 'a tactic for groups or individuals in a certain risky situation in which a strategy is not possible' (drawing on Michel de Certeau's theorisation of everyday life). As in definitions of precarity, risk here becomes a condition of production as well as a quality of the act produced. While embracing stunts' capacity to celebrate freedom, Russo also warned that through stunts, performers could come to embody riskiness, exacerbating the sense that they were in themselves always and already risky. Russo framed this as stunts' tendency to 'perpetuate the blaming, stigmatization, and marginalizing of groups and

⁸⁰¹ Stoddart, p.80

persons'.⁸⁰² Springing from a condition of precarity, stunts could justify and further that condition.

4. Contracts: a romance of the market

The contract between 'Prof. Arion' and the Brooklyn Heights Railroad Company parallels that between W.C. Keeble and dime museum owner, William Holmes, discussed in chapter 1. It differs however in that it involved two types of exchange, which accorded McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell two different roles.

The contract offered McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell an 'opportunity' to increase his own value as a performing artist. In this capacity, McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell performed the function of 'commodity capital' in Marx's schema; he was one of the commodities which came out with increased value at the end of the production process. Yet there is an important difference between McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's agreement and Keeble's. McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell earned a wage for his work. He was directly employed by the Company, in spite of the spokesman's efforts to depict the act, effectively, as benefiting nobody but the performer. If we read this in terms of Marx's conception of industrial production, McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's abstract labour was bought by the Company for a wage, and his surplus labour was the source of the surplus value the act created. The aim of the Company was to increase its value through the act.

The Company's reaction to McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's death demonstrated its interest in emphasising its role as provider of opportunity (or means of production), and restricting both responsibility and impact to McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell as an individual. Clearly, this avoided the social questions in play, such as, what responsibilities did a company have towards its employees? What role did government and the law have in this relationship? Like Keeble's contract, McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's agreement with the Company made the performer the sole bearer of risk. Instead of instating a condition of mutual reliance, the contract created an ideal, self-reliant subject, an entrepreneur

⁸⁰² Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 22; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p.xix

of himself.

Writing on turn-of-the-century consumer culture, Mark Seltzer argues that the 'self-made character of the commercial person' in liberal culture is an embodiment of the 'contract, and the forms of possession and self-possession, it entails'.⁸⁰³ For McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell, his 'self-possession' seems to have been enacted under the name of his persona, Professor Arion. He 'possessed' himself *as someone else*, as a character. This is an absurd extension of the condition of having a 'character' in market culture — being a person who is able to make good on promises — as well as the nineteenth-century conceptualisation of character as capital. It demonstrates the compatibility of identity and persona creation, and contractual structures, tapping into, in Walter Benn Michaels' phrase, a more general 'capitalist exploitation of fictionality'.⁸⁰⁴ Seltzer argues that neither the contract nor the notion of the market register the emerging conditions of identity at the turn of the century, which Seltzer frames as involving intimate couplings of bodies and machines and the simultaneous reduction of individuals to sheer materiality and total abstraction.⁸⁰⁵ Seltzer holds that the anachronistic subjectivity that contracts promised may be precisely why they exerted a particular fascination at this historical moment, paralleling Levine's argument about the paradoxical suturing of modern progress and nostalgic ideals.⁸⁰⁶

As well as the risk to his life, a key source of drama in 'Arion's' act was the tension between a spectacle of human self-reliance, and a spectacle of incorporation into disciplined systems. As a risky solo, the feat spoke to a glorious autonomy, beautified by precarity, but it was also embedded in and enabled by the infrastructure of the city, with its attendant ties to society, government and business. Because its novelty lay in connections, the act threw into relief the systems that brought it into being, and 'Arion's' place within them:

[H]e started over the wire, making connections, so that his clothing and bicycle, which were decorated with incandescent lamps of various colors, blazed with great brilliancy. As McDonnell glided out on the wire his body was thrown into strong relief by the blaze from the wheel⁸⁰⁷

Pulled between ideal individualism, on the one hand, and on the other, fascination with the increasingly interconnected material cultures of urban modernity, the act

⁸⁰³ Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p.73

⁸⁰⁴ Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.56

⁸⁰⁵ Seltzer, p.14

⁸⁰⁶ Seltzer, p.73

⁸⁰⁷ Anon., 'Hundreds Saw Him Killed', *New York Tribune*, 2 August 1897, p.1

invoked a form of metropolitan incandescence, a literal and figurative radiance, which derived from the system, but was transferred to the person poised within it. Drawing of Leo Marx's work, such incandescence might be described as a technological sublime, viewed through the lens of a frontier paradigm.

Tension between subsumption into a machine and mastery over it were constitutive of bicycle performances in this era. Cycling performances often presented bicycles as living beings engaged in power struggles with riders, constructing the bicycle as an ambivalent animal/machine/person.

This dynamic is evident in two extant Thomas Edison films, shot at the turn of the century. *Bicycle Trick Riding no. 2* (1899) features a male performer with a thick moustache dressed in a black suit.⁸⁰⁸ Edison's catalogue informs us that this is "Neidert, of national fame, who 'does stunts on his wheel that are simply wonderful'."⁸⁰⁹ Neidert cycles in tight circles against a painted backdrop of an urban street on a small stage. As the film opens, he is cycling backwards. After a few turns, he jumps off and lifts his front wheel as if the bicycle recognises an (unseen) audience's applause. Neidert jumps back on and rides in a few circles around the cramped stage and limits of the frame, before rearing up and spinning his front wheel. Then he stands on his pedals, lifts his body over the handlebar and sits on it, the tops of his feet resting on the pedals, so that he looks like a ship's mast. Finally, Neidert balances both feet on one pedal, and crouches down, stroking his wheel as though he were patting an animal. As well as Neidert's athleticism and skill, the act rests on the attribution of a degree of agency to the bicycle. At the time, bicycles were commonly depicted through the metaphor of a horse or other living being. Thomas Pratt's 1879 manual *The American Bicyclist* described the bicycle as 'in infinite restless motion, like a bundle of sensitive nerves'.⁸¹⁰ For brief moments in the show, the rider performs this animate, equine understanding of the bicycle.

Edison's later film, *The Trick Cyclist* (1901) presents a more anxious view of mastering the bicycle.⁸¹¹ It does not take place on stage, but rather in an outdoor

⁸⁰⁸ Thomas A. Edison, Inc., *Bicycle Trick Riding, no. 2* (United States: Edison Manufacturing Co., 1899), Paper Print Collection, Library of Congress, FEC 2205 (ref print) [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/varstg:@field\(NUMBER+@band\(varsm+0836\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/varstg:@field(NUMBER+@band(varsm+0836))) [accessed 14 April 2016]

⁸⁰⁹ Charles Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures, 1890-1900: An Annotated Filmography* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), p.493

⁸¹⁰ Thomas Pratt, *The American Bicyclist: a manual for the observer, the learner and the expert* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1879), p.30

⁸¹¹ Kemp R. Niver, *Early Motion Pictures: the paper print collection in the Library of Congress*, ed. by Bebe Bergsten (Washington, DC: Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress, 1985), p.335. Record reads: 'Edison ©H8693 Sept. 16, 1901 44 ft. FLA3829

yard, perhaps a playground. The performers — two young men wearing smart black trousers and white shirts — adopt a familiar vaudeville trope: one is a highly skilled cyclist, while the other performs a series of (highly skilled) near misses and pratfalls. The latter, ungainly man enters the frame first, wearing a top hat.

Unnecessarily using a chair, he levers himself onto his bike and weaves clumsily in a circle, before falling off. Next, his confident companion wheels a bike into frame and leans it against a pole in the centre. After brushing the bicycle with his fingers, the proficient rider wanders off nonchalantly. This bike — the master-rider's bike — remains at the centre of the frame as the klutzy character drops his hat, falls off his bike and smashes into the chair.

Smack in the middle of the image, the bicycle seems to exude scorn for the clumsy rider, as if it has absorbed the affect of the rider's swaggering friend. If a bicycle can have an attitude, this bicycle does. Its role, however, is slightly contradictory. The skilled rider has achieved what the clumsy rider cannot: he has mastered his machine. Yet, standing alone, the bicycle does not appear to be mastered. It is, at least, an equal partner; at most, autonomous. The power shifts slightly in a second and final shot, which cuts into the skilled rider performing a stunt. Cycling in a circle, the rider drops to the side of his saddle, raising and lowering his outstretched legs in a show of strength and balance. The rhythm of his movements seems to match the speed of the turning wheel, so that rider and bicycle appear as one mechanism. His piston-like motion might be powering the wheel; the wheel might equally be powering him.

5. Circulation and stunts as derivatives

As well as tension between autonomous achievement and absorption into a machine, the thrill of McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's performance drew on his audience's understanding of electrical high wires. High wires were a wonder and a public danger, and as such they invoked both liveness and deadliness. Disputes about responsibility for safety were manifold in the developing electrical network. Live overhead wires had caused accidents and deaths in Brooklyn and New York since the early 1880s. Though legislation prescribed the burial of electrical wires,

disagreements about who should pay meant that in 1897 many wires still hung overhead.⁸¹² Electricity's deadliness had been underlined when, after a series of experimental electrifications of animals (sometimes before a live audience), alternating current was adopted as New York's means of instituting the death penalty in 1889.⁸¹³ Thomas Edison and other direct current advocates had been a major influence on this decision, causing some commentators to decry the fact that the deadly workings of the state had been hijacked for the purpose of 'business advertisement'.⁸¹⁴

In spite of the danger they posed, high wires also provoked wonderment at connectivity. Seltzer describes turn-of-the-century amazement at the sense of the 'pure present conveyed by the electric technology's 'magical' and lightning transgression of the barriers of time and distance'.⁸¹⁵ In an official history of the New York Stock Exchange published in 1905, for example, Edmund Stedman recorded an impression of an English visitor eighteen years previously (in 1882):

[H]e saw a sight that instantly gave him a realization of the extent of our peopled territory, and of the meaning of the Stock Exchange as the focus to which all currents of American purpose and energy converge. It was shortly before the time when the wires of New York's electric system were buried, by enactment, out of sight. Through the air, over New Street, hundreds, seemingly thousands, of these wires stretched toward the Exchange. No bird could fly through their network, a man could almost walk upon them⁸¹⁶

Not yet concealed underground, the electric wires made the vast connectivity of the Stock Exchange explicit and awe-inspiring; Stedman held it up as evidence of the arrival of 'modern high finance'.⁸¹⁷ The Exchange's electric wires were a vision of unceasing circulation of information, money and commodities. Stedman's description invites a conflation of the 'currents' of human energy, electrical currents and the circulation of currency, or capital. Paradoxically, the mass of entangled wires presented in sensual, tangible form the ethereal quality of both electricity and capital. Electricity was a commodity that seemed to transcend its status as commodity, akin to money. Like paper currency or credit in Marx's *Capital*, electrical currents invoked a *dematerialized* medium of circulation, a

⁸¹² Anon., 'Danger in the Wires', *World*, 10 May 1890, p.1; Anon., 'Electric Conductors in Brooklyn', *Railroad Gazette*, 18 January 1895, p.36

⁸¹³ Thomas P. Hughes, 'Harold P. Brown and the Executioner's Current: An Incident in the AC-DC Controversy', *Business History Review*, 32:2 (1958), 143-165, 151

⁸¹⁴ *Electrical Engineer*, quoted in Hughes, 'Harold P. Brown', p.162; Letter by F.W. Jones in Anon., 'Killing by Electricity', *World*, 4 January 1889, p.2

⁸¹⁵ Seltzer, p.11

⁸¹⁶ Edmund Clarence Stedman, *The New York Stock Exchange* (New York: New York Stock Exchange Historical Company, 1905), p.v-vi

⁸¹⁷ Stedman, p.394

movement both instantaneous and constant.⁸¹⁸ Rather than displaying itself, electricity had the effect of illuminating commodities around it and facilitating their interconnections and exchange.

McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's performance spectacularised the bicycle's turning wheels, and its most thrilling element was the completion of an electric circuit, such that the performer's body mingled with, and was subsumed into, that circuit. It was an enactment and celebration of circulation, shadowed by the fatal circulation of electricity through human bodies in the form of execution.

The act was also concerned with putting McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell *into circulation* and abstracting him into a commodity, suggestive of Seltzer's conditions of identity in machine culture. Recall Martin's statement about such abstraction of self and its relation to circulation: 'What we call identity is certainly an attribute of self that gets bundled, valued, and circulated beyond an individual person'.⁸¹⁹ Martin situates this tendency to stratify and value identity in the dynamics of the *derivative*. The term derivative has multiple applications in McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's performance and its context. More broadly, the derivative is a revealing analogy for conceptualising stunts and value.

In its broadest sense, derivative refers 'to the transmission of some characteristic from an originating source to a consequent site, expression, or manifestation', as in the verb, to derive.⁸²⁰ A derivative is also a specific financial mechanism, one which developed intensely in the final decades of the nineteenth century. In the 1880s (as in the present) derivatives were called 'futures' and they were the subject of debate and legislation. Purchasing a 'future' meant buying an option to buy a product or stock at a fixed price, at a fixed date in the future. Effectively this was a gamble on the price rising or falling, and it massively expanded trade in stock exchanges: 'The number of those who devote their whole time and energies to transactions, which are nothing but bets on the future prices of commodities, has become enormous,' a financial journalist reported in 1883.⁸²¹ By the mid-1880s, futures were the 'main business transacted at the exchanges'.⁸²²

⁸¹⁸ Suzanne de Brunhoff, *Marx on Money*, trans. by Maurice J. Goldbloom, rev edn (London and New York: Verso, 2015), p.35

⁸¹⁹ Martin, 'A Precarious Dance, a Derivative Sociality', p.64

⁸²⁰ Martin, 'A Precarious Dance, a Derivative Sociality', p.64

⁸²¹ Anon., 'Gambling in Crops, Petroleum, Etc.', *Bankers' Magazine and Statistical Register*, August 1883, 38:2, American Periodicals, p.87

⁸²² Anon., 'Should the Exchanges Be Abolished?', *Bankers' Magazine and Statistical Register*, August 1884, 39:2, American Periodicals, p.88

Derivative investments are generally framed as means of offsetting a risk involved in a specific investment, which many argue has an overall, societal effect of increasing risk. Martin writes that a derivative ‘both particularizes certain risks and generalizes a condition of risk’, both ‘anticipate[s] and encourage[s] volatility’.⁸²³ Derivatives are concerned with expanding the possibilities of circulation — creating an entirely new, related and dependent orbit in which circulation can take place.

Derivatives also consist of yoking together two unrelated functions, and making one dependent on the other, enabling unexpected leveraging and extraction of value. In banking journals, the development of futures was greeted with suspicion and strong efforts to distinguish between gambling contracts, which were legally void, and contracts made for the ‘actual delivery of merchandise’.⁸²⁴ Writers in banking magazines called futures transactions ‘fictitious’ and ‘unproductive’.⁸²⁵ They served only to ‘make uncertainty still more uncertain’, to cause ‘defalcation, breach of trust, or unexpected insolvency’.⁸²⁶ One 1882 columnist reflected: ‘it is evident that by thus increasing the hazard of business, life is made less joyful, the strain is increased, the life-threads are sooner snapped.’⁸²⁷ It was widely understood that derivatives stood to make living more precarious; this commentator argued against them on the grounds of protecting life and happiness. Yet proponents of these ‘quicker and less unelastic trade systems’ argued that a pragmatic trader could hardly afford to ignore them.⁸²⁸

Marx situated derivative investments in the realm of *fictitious* capital, in which he placed all stocks and bonds. Stocks derived their value from actual capital, but became free-floating, circulating commodities with prices calculated according to anticipated income.⁸²⁹ Derivatives are like other securities, but further distanced from production. By creating and circulating such commodities,

⁸²³ Martin, ‘A Precarious Dance, a Derivative Sociality’, p. 64; Randy Martin, *An Empire of Indifference: American War and the Financial Logic of Risk Management* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), p.11

⁸²⁴ Anon., ‘Banking and Financial Items: Publisher’s Notice’, *Bankers’ Magazine and Statistical Register*, September 1882, 37:3, American Periodicals, p.230

⁸²⁵ ‘Gambling in Crops, Petroleum, Etc.’; Anon., ‘Options In Produce’, *Bankers’ Magazine and Statistical Register*, October 1883, 38:4, American Periodicals, p.252

⁸²⁶ Anon., ‘Speculation and Business’, *Bankers’ Magazine and Statistical Register*, August 1882, 37:2, American Periodicals, p.85; ‘Gambling in Crops, Petroleum, Etc.’

⁸²⁷ Anon., ‘Speculation and Business’, *Bankers’ Magazine and Statistical Register*, August 1882, 37:2, American Periodicals, p.85

⁸²⁸ Anon., ‘Options in Produce’, *Bankers’ Magazine and Statistical Register*, October 1883, 38:4, American Periodicals, p.252

⁸²⁹ Marx, *Capital*, III, p.570, 590 and 596

Suzanne de Brunhoff writes, the ‘financial system feeds on its circulation’:

‘Although the circuits of financing remain in the last analysis dependent on the needs of the productive capitalists, they can endlessly revolve confusedly about themselves, independent of the circulation of capital’.⁸³⁰ This extra layer of abstraction caused anxiety about the growth of derivatives trading in the 1880s. If we accept Marx’s understanding of stock exchange commodities, derivatives were not intrinsically distinct from any other stock or bond. Their heightened abstraction simply brought to the fore the abstraction already taking place in the trading of fictitious capital. Derivatives did however weave together unrelated entities, spreading risk in unexpected ways.

I suggest there is an analogy between the type of abstraction that took place in McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell’s stunt and that which took place in stock exchange trading, particularly derivatives. This accords with Martin’s argument that the ‘intricate acrobatics of high finance have all manner of parallel expression in dances on the ground’.⁸³¹ First, in a material sense, McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell’s stunt derived from the already active circuit of the railroad lines, siphoning power from its wires to create further, dependent circuits.

Second, ‘Prof. Arion’ was a commodified identity derived from McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell’s actual one. In a twist on Marx’s term for stocks and securities, McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell could be described as embodying a kind of *fictitious* capital: Professor Arion. He was, of course, a real person with a real life to lose, yet he invested himself as his persona, and the Company held his persona to account. The ‘real capital’ and real person of McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell were doubled by an identity that derived from him, but was held apart — a persona that facilitated circulation. This phenomena parallels the practice of stunt journalists, as well as that of W.C. or ‘Captain’ Keeble. Marx writes that with the development of the credit system, ‘all capital seems to be duplicated, and at some points triplicated, by the various way in which the same capital, or even the same claim, appears in various hands in different guises’.⁸³² McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell seems to have imitated this process through his construction of self and enactment of circulation. Michaels accords with this,

⁸³⁰ de Brunhoff, p.96 and 98

⁸³¹ Martin, *An Empire of Indifference*, p.3

⁸³² Marx, *Capital*, III, p.601

arguing that in using derivatives, the financier ‘recognizes in money a quick of identity that makes it possible to transcend the limitations of any “actual fact.”’⁸³³

Third, the performer’s body and life were yoked to the value of the Brooklyn Heights Railroad Company, in spite of a lack of material connection between the two. This enabled the Company to benefit from the risk the performer bore, paralleling Martin’s characterisation of derivatives as ‘quick shifts in deployment of capital to leverage money-making effects’.⁸³⁴ Such yoking together of unrelated entities was designed to capitalise on the affective economy of physical risk.

Finally, the overt riskiness of McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell’s performance made it seem as if it was an *exceptional* instance, set apart from everyday production and exchange. Like a derivative, the stunt seemed to be nothing more than circulation for circulation’s sake, a form of excess, which ought to be removed from the system. Yet, if we accept Marx’s proposition, it actually enacted the abstraction already taking place in financial systems, tapping into a much wider condition of risk inherent in the structure of commercial enterprises, including the Brooklyn Heights Railroad Company itself.

The Company was undergoing a typical trajectory in terms of financial development, indicative of emerging monopoly capitalism. It was incorporated by the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company (apparently before the date of the performance, though this is not clear from available sources), which took over all but one of the Brooklyn trolley lines by 1900.⁸³⁵ J. P. Morgan himself financed this consolidation as part of his drive to organise the nation’s railroads.⁸³⁶ The Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company was also typical of increased public participation in the stock exchange, a characteristic of modern high finance. Historian of the New York Stock Exchange, Stedman, reported that the Brooklyn railway was a ‘chief public fancy’ in the final years of the century, culminating in colossal growth during which the ‘glowing future of this trolley road’ could not be overstated.⁸³⁷ This gave the Company an interest in promoting itself to two overlapping publics

⁸³³ Michaels, p.67

⁸³⁴ Martin, *An Empire of Indifference*, p.10

⁸³⁵ Roger P. Roess and Gene Sansone, *The Wheels That Drove New York: A History of the New York City Transit System* (Springer: Springer-Verlag, 2013), p.77

⁸³⁶ Jean Strouse, *Morgan: American Financier* (London: The Harvill Press, 1999), p. 312-322

⁸³⁷ Stedman, p.381

— commuters and potential investors — connecting increasing numbers of people to its success or failure.

Immediately afterwards, Stedman explained, came the ‘inevitable descent toward the level of intrinsic worth, ruining many of its too zealous friends as it fell’.⁸³⁸ Note Stedman’s discourse of heights and falls; resistance to, and inevitability of, gravity; and the alignment of gravity with a natural order of value. The market’s veridiction was pitted against the public’s credulity, Stedman suggested, and those who took on too much risk were ruined as a result. In Stedman’s logic, such falls were not only inevitable but also necessary in the eternal pursuit of real or ‘intrinsic’ value. This intertwining of reality, nature and tempered emotion parallels Michaels’ characterisation of literary realism as opposed to the excess of both sentimentality and financial speculation.⁸³⁹

While necessary, however, Stedman also saw the falls as the fault of reckless individuals. Conflicted opinions about the role of risk in high finance are evident in Stedman’s contradictory descriptions of speculation. Having introduced one speculator as disruptive and undesirable, Stedman went on to say that he was ‘the most brilliant bear operator ever known in Wall Street’ and showed ‘shrewd judgement, daring initiative, and pluck, as the elect alone possess’.⁸⁴⁰ Stedman could not decide if such speculators were a disease in the system, an unfortunate necessity, or simply skilful operators to be celebrated for their achievements. Recessions, or ‘panics’, would ‘always hold a place in the normal order of things,’ he explained, yet they were invariably caused by ‘rank’ and ‘excessive’ speculation. Such investments were not ‘the real types, as some men assert, of modern finance’ but ‘the bastards of prosperity, too likely to pass at first in the public eye as true children of the house.’⁸⁴¹ For the market to function, it seemed, some credulous individuals had to be the ‘fall guys’, who at once demonstrated the precarious interconnections of the Stock Exchange *and* took the blame upon themselves, momentarily releasing everybody else from interconnection by demonstrating their individual lack of skill and judgment. The fall guy’s fall instilled a sense of equilibrium, momentarily masking systemic precarity.

⁸³⁸ Stedman, p.382-383

⁸³⁹ Michaels, p.41

⁸⁴⁰ Stedman, p.306

⁸⁴¹ Stedman, p.261 and 406

The Brooklyn Heights Railroad Company's distribution of blame following the failed aerial cycling act was a literalisation of Stedman's market logic. In spite of the Company hiring the performer, putting up the wire, supplying the electricity, arranging the act without a safety net, and standing to benefit from its successful completion, in the event of an accident, McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell merely demonstrated his own excessive tendencies and failure to live up to 'Prof. Arion's' contracted promise. In a less direct sense, McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's accident may also have released spectators from the intense connectivity the act demonstrated, restoring a sense of individual responsibility and autonomy in increasingly systematised cultures. In Seltzer's terms, it presented a macabre romance of the market in machine culture, expressing a sacrificial logic that was inherent to high finance.

By literalising circulation and taking on extreme risk, McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell performed circulation as a social relation, embedded in class hierarchy. From what little can be gathered about McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell, we can ascertain that he was probably a first- or second-generation Irish immigrant, who occupied a precarious enough social and financial position for the job to be worth it. Russo's account of stigmatisation evokes Martin's description of the way in which financialized cultures divide populations into 'those able to avail themselves of wealth opportunities through risk taking and those who are considered 'at risk.'⁸⁴² Risk in the present, Martin argued, has come to serve a 'moral function' by distinguishing between those with the capacity to embrace risk from 'those relegated to being bad risks.'⁸⁴³ In late nineteenth-century New York, a moral, individually situated conception of risk was frequently employed, but the commentary surrounding McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's performance indicates that this view was becoming increasingly inadequate in the new era of corporate industrial capitalism. In spite of the Company holding McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell solely responsible for his actions, discussions concerning electricity and futures demonstrate that many were aware of the fact that more and faster circulation with increased connectivity and attendant risk was the direction of travel — was in fact necessary to the running of that pillar of urban modernity, the Stock Exchange. Such conditions required new conceptions of how risk could be

⁸⁴² Martin, *An Empire of Indifference*, p.8

⁸⁴³ Martin, *An Empire of Indifference*, p.21

understood and managed as a collective. They also spawned fantasies of autonomous, individual risk-takers, who could relieve everybody of collective precarity.

6. Bicycling for ladies

McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's cycling stunt expressed a sacrificial logic, supporting the view that in a secularizing culture, sacrificial dynamics were performed through the emerging advertising industry. However, cycling advertisement stunts were also used to experiment with gendered identities and work opportunities, deploying similar tactics to those used by stunt journalists. Cycling presented women with a route to subvert and alter their gendered identities and practices in social life and work. Before analysing Kopchovsky's round-the-world stunt, I'll discuss Ward's manual for female cyclists and Brown's comic novel about the cycling craze to illuminate how women were actualising themselves in conjunction with their machines.

'The needs of the bicyclist,' Maria E. Ward instructed her readers in her 1896 guide, *Bicycling for Ladies: The Common Sense of Bicycling*, 'are an intelligent comprehension of the bicycle as machine, an appreciative knowledge of the human machine that propels it, and a realization of the fact that rider and bicycle should form one combined mechanism'.⁸⁴⁴ Ward's manual describes a new and distinct subjectivity, or inter-subjectivity, which emerges when learning to cycle, as the cyclist views her body afresh in relation to the vehicle that she powers. Ward's conception of machine closely mirrors that described by Gerald Raunig in his philosophy of the machine as a social movement, *A Thousand Machines*: 'It is not a question of the essence, but of the event, not about *is*, but about *and*, about concatenations and connections [...] the bicycle *and* the person riding it'.⁸⁴⁵ Based on that in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, Raunig's machine is fluid, contingent and mutable. In the 1890s, I believe, the combination of women and bicycles, and the fluid state in which they operated, offered a means to

⁸⁴⁴ Maria E. Ward, *Bicycling for Ladies: The Common Sense of Bicycling* (New York: Brentano's, 1896), p.x

⁸⁴⁵ Gerald Raunig, *A Thousand Machines: A Concise Philosophy of the Machine as Social Movement* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010), p.19

reconfigure gendered bodies, practices, and modes of production, and to reveal them in their contingent and mutable state.

Curiously, in spite of her book's title, Ward refers to the cyclist as 'he' throughout: she initiates female readers into a subjectivity in which their gender/sex is absent, split or somehow recognized by being ignored. Drawing on Judith Butler's theorisations of gender and performativity, this interpellation of the female cyclist, the means by which she becomes subject, is awkward; her subjectivity falls between pronouns.⁸⁴⁶ In a rare nod to her audience, Ward's book opens with the admission that in sports 'women and girls bring upon themselves censure from many sources,' which, 'though almost invariably deserved, is called forth not so much by what they do as the way they do it'.⁸⁴⁷ This broad apology or scolding for all conduct up to this point suggests that Ward's project was not without anxiety, perhaps exacerbated by the fact that in a time of rapid change and revision of protocol, the how — 'the way they do it' — was all that anybody had to go on.

Bicycling For Ladies is as concerned with honing 'proper', and potentially productive, modern female subjects as it is with cycling. Ward's reluctance to refer to a female cyclist is part of her effort to guide readers towards a different kind of gendered subjectivity. She argues that cycling produces traditionally masculine qualities: self-sufficiency, technical knowledge, and independence. Cycling affords riders a 'new pleasure — the pleasure of going where one wills, because one wills'.⁸⁴⁸ Learning to cycle is implicitly offered as a strategy for de-feminising, and de-feminising as a means of becoming a modern woman. While this transformation might involve developing masculine traits, this is a secondary stage, an effect rather than a cause. First and foremost, becoming a modern woman means entering into a relationship with a machine, which will co-create your new subjectivity. This opens up possibilities for sexed bodies and gendered subjectivities that are not quite reduced to a s/he binary, even if there is little by way of language with which to express them.

The 1895 novel, *Betsey Jane On Wheels: A Tale of the Cycling Craze* by Herbert E. Brown, tackles the question of sex/gender in more directly political

⁸⁴⁶ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1993), p.121-2; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2006), p.34, 43, and 46

⁸⁴⁷ Ward, p.ix

⁸⁴⁸ Ward, p.11

terms. Dedicated to the 'New Woman', the story concerns Betsey Jane, a middle-aged wife and mother of two grown-up children, who lives on a farm in the West. Initially appalled by the 'infernal machine', Betsey is gradually won over by her progressive son Walter and a general shift in opinion that enfolds everybody in their small community.⁸⁴⁹ Betsey teaches herself to ride in secret, trains intensively, and eventually reveals her new skills by winning against professional racers at the town fair. Betsey's elderly Uncle Ezra visits from the South and (helpfully) voices the anti-progressive side of the debate, including the straightforward, body-focussed misogyny that often fuelled criticism of female cyclists and their clothing: 'Yeous, ther mother of a family, ridin around ther country in the short pants, why yer looked ridicklus, a great big fat woman like yeou, wearin close like a little boy.'⁸⁵⁰ Although Betsey's 'work on the machine' hardens her body and reduces her weight, she remains a large, middle-aged mother riding a bicycle — a challenge to general prejudice against female cyclists, *and* the de-feminised cyclist that Ward describes, *and* the fashionable images of youthful cyclists in newspapers, whether hyper-feminine or more androgynous in appearance.⁸⁵¹ Peter Stearns notes that between 1890 and 1910 there was a significant shift in attitudes towards fat/thinness, driven by trends for bodily discipline and athleticism (articles in the *World* support Stearns' reading).⁸⁵² After Betsey defends herself, informing Ezra she is 'not to blame for being large', he leaves in disgust.⁸⁵³ In the conclusion, Brown steps out of the narrative to advocate for female cyclists, metaphorically endowing the bicycle with life-saving properties: 'woman has so long been debarred from any active amusement [... Cycling] affords an asylum, a refuge, a sort of fire escape.'⁸⁵⁴

Yet Brown's novel also presents a concept of machines that sits alongside and perhaps overcodes this story of challenging social stigma. Characters

⁸⁴⁹ Herbert E. Brown, *Betsey-Jane On Wheels: A Tale of the Cycling Craze* (Chicago: W.B. Conkey Company, 1895), p.23

⁸⁵⁰ Brown, p.272

⁸⁵¹ Brown, p.204. M. Alder, 'The Prettiest Bicycle Riders At the Summer Resort', *World*, 18 August 1895, p.27; Anon., 'The Sunday World's Bicycle Beauties: Champion Zimmerman Decides That Miss Madeline Lack, of New York City, Is the Handsomest Wheelwoman in America and She Wins the Prize', *World*, 27 September 1896, p.29

⁸⁵² Peter N. Stearns, *Fat History: Bodies and Beauty in the Modern West* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2002), p.4-5; Anon., 'Fair Athletes at the Berkeley', *World*, 24 November 1895, p.20; Anon., 'Calisthenics in Boudoirs', *World*, 12 May 1895, p.42; 'To Reduce Flesh', *Evening World*, 14 December 1893, p.4; 'If You're Fat It Is Your Own Fault', *World*, 23 February 1896, p.11

⁸⁵³ Brown, p.272

⁸⁵⁴ Brown, p.284

repeatedly state that it is an ‘age of progress,’ and Walter explains to Ezra that ‘a man must either go forward or backward, he cannot stand still, as the moment he stops, the balance of the world moves forward and leaves him standing in the rear’.⁸⁵⁵ Here, Earth’s rotation, an ideological view of societal progress, individual locomotion, and the turning wheel are layered on top of one another in a dizzying technological sublime. Just as riding a bicycle requires continuous motion to balance, an individual must keep moving to remain in synch with the world. Such macrocosmic views of cycling are taken further in a parodic speech given by a senator at an Independence Day fair, which develops into an almost mystical reflection on the wheel:

It is the natural tendency of man to run either to, or on, wheels; the whole planetary system is nothing more nor less than a grand cycle arrangement. [...] Everything runs to, and in, circles. [...] Even our money is in the form of wheels, probably to facilitate its circulation.⁸⁵⁶

The senator’s speech presents a value-productive and spectacular form of circulation which is closely comparable to that performed in the walking contest — except the senator not only attributes it to economies, but also to the universe at large. Drawing a link between bicycles and planetary systems, the senator verges on invoking the older meaning of machine that Raunig identifies: ‘a complex composition [...] an assemblage that specifically could not be defined and grasped through its utilization’.⁸⁵⁷ This meaning, Raunig writes, was gradually eclipsed by another denotation: a technical, mechanistic and clearly defined object, which increasingly took on productive functions. Raunig posits that diverse aspects of life — bodies, society, the universe — were then viewed through the limiting lens of a productive, technical machine. The senator’s expansive, ontological vision of productivity is unwieldy (like Georges Bataille’s notion of general economy), but at the same time, utilisable. Its surplus value creation depends upon continuous and rapid circulation. In this sense, it is a proto-Fordist vision of consumption and leisure, whereby all activity serves the running of the machine.

Through their discussions of cycling, then, Ward and Brown explore *social* machines — systems of living and producing in relation to one another — and the position of various women within them. Ward’s descriptions of the cyclist as subject suggest a social machine in which each person strives not to depend on the

⁸⁵⁵ Brown, p.262

⁸⁵⁶ Brown, p.156-157

⁸⁵⁷ Raunig, p.19

other. The bicyclist is completely independent at all times, she explains, 'unless a break-down occurs'.⁸⁵⁸ In fact, Ward's descriptions of cycling often sound like a summation of embodied liberalism.

Compare Ward's emerging cyclist's consideration of society to Michel Foucault's description of the art of liberal governance in his 1978-9 lectures *The Birth of Biopolitics*. The liberal government, Foucault argued, is concerned with 'a complex interplay between individual and collective interests [...] between basic rights and the independence of the governed'.⁸⁵⁹ *Bicycling For Ladies* explains:

Mounted on a wheel, you feel at once the keenest sense of responsibility. You are there to do as you will within reasonable limits; you are continually being called upon to judge [...] and consequently you become alert, active, quick-sighted, and keenly alive. [...] Individual duty, recognition of the rights of others, consideration of means for the proper enforcing of laws, all are suggested to the awakening mind of the bicyclist.⁸⁶⁰

In keeping with Foucault's claim that under liberal governance, individuals are conditioned to understand their lives as perpetually 'containing danger,' Ward warns her readers against the 'great danger' that the 'human machine' faces when learning to cycle: overexertion. Note that this danger comes from within, and its avoidance rests on individual judgement and watchfulness, requiring 'cultivated perception and special knowledge'. Liberal governmental practice, Foucault said, aims to create and manage conditions under which freedom can be produced: 'Liberalism is not acceptance of freedom; it proposes to manufacture it constantly, to arouse it and produce it'.⁸⁶¹ Ward's manual describes the 'absolute freedom of the cyclist', which 'can be known only to the initiated'.⁸⁶² As a machine that produces freedom, particularly for female riders, the bicycle in Ward's text becomes a cog in the wheel of a liberal social machine, which creates an appreciation for industry and market, a spirit of adventure, and awareness of 'the interplay of freedom and security' as it plays out in the construction of roads, traffic legislation and laws concerning bicycle theft.⁸⁶³ Ward's woman-bicycle machine arouses and manufactures both freedom and danger.

Ward's machine also desires its own productive capacity, though it is never

⁸⁵⁸ Ward, p.4

⁸⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics : Lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979*, ed. by Michel Senellart, trans. by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.44

⁸⁶⁰ Ward, p.12-13

⁸⁶¹ Foucault, p.66; Ward, p.6

⁸⁶² Ward, p.4

⁸⁶³ Foucault, p.65

quite clear what this capacity is to be utilised for. At times in Ward's manual, it is hard to distinguish between the rider, vehicle and wider social machine, or to keep track of which is powering which for what purpose (recalling the trick cyclist in Edison's film). Ward starts one sentence by explaining how cycling can contribute to social life, but subtly switches to detailing the ways in which almost any personal attribute can be utilised in cycling, citing 'cheerfulness' as an important factor. Through such quiet slippages, Ward begins to present both individuals and the social machine as primarily geared towards enabling cycling. The autonomous individual of market culture is subtly undermined by the automation implicit in the woman-bicycle-machine she has created. One could wait for pleasant cycling weather, Ward reflects, but after all, 'the machine is always ready.'⁸⁶⁴

Annie Kopchovsky capitalised on this productive ambiguity to reimagine herself and her work through a durational cycling performance.

7. Girdling the globe on a wheel

On a Monday in June 1894, Annie Cohen Kopchovsky publicly announced her intention to set out on a cycling trip around the world. Kopchovsky planned to be the first woman to circumvent the earth on a bicycle (and the occasional boat). The *Boston Post* recorded her send-off outside the Massachusetts State House, comprising friends, suffragists, temperance advocates, 'advertising men' and representatives of the League of American Wheelmen.⁸⁶⁵

The groups who attended the farewell event are indicative of the cultural politics of Kopchovsky's act, and its relation to reform movements. Living in Boston, Kopchovsky was part of one of the most active and politically engaged cycling cultures in America (in the same city as Kittie Knox). From the start, Kopchovsky's trip was presented as political. Her friend, Mrs Ober-Towne, opened proceedings with a short speech, in which she 'declared that she had always believed that woman should have the same chances as men'.⁸⁶⁶ Mrs J.O. Tubbs, of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, gave the next speech: she hoped that

⁸⁶⁴ Ward, p.5

⁸⁶⁵ Anon., 'Going Woman: Annie Kapchowsky Is a Poor Bicycle Rider, But Intends To Do the Earth', *Boston Post*, 26 June 1894, p.2

⁸⁶⁶ Anon., 'Going Woman: Annie Kapchowsky Is a Poor Bicycle Rider, But Intends To Do the Earth', *Boston Post*, 26 June 1894, p.2

Kopchovsky would prove a “noble example” wherever she went, and pinned a white ribbon to her jacket.

Advertising professionals were in attendance because Kopchovsky worked as an advertising solicitor for several Boston daily newspapers, selling space in their pages. Kopchovsky had been involved in the newspaper and advertising industry for several years and her brother was also a journalist. At the send-off, an agent from a mineral water company gave Kopchovsky \$100 and attached a sign to the mudguard of her back wheel. As part of this agreement, Kopchovsky would change her surname to ‘Londonderry’ for the duration of the trip. Another agent, Captain A.D. Peck of the Pope Manufacturing Company, was there to present Kopchovsky with a Pope Columbia bicycle for use on her journey. As well as being akin to a political campaign, Kopchovsky’s trip around the world was also a commercial venture. The ways in which politics, commercialism and media intertwined in this bicycling feat make it a rich and provocative one in terms of thinking through the way that stunts disrupt received understanding of value, particularly in relation to women.

In her farewell speech, Kopchovsky informed the crowd that the motivation for her journey was a wager. She explained: “I am to go around the earth in fifteen months, returning with five thousand dollars, and starting only with the clothes on my back. I cannot accept anything gratuitously from anyone.” Kopchovsky turned her pockets inside out to demonstrate that they were empty, and refused to take a penny from Tubbs, explaining that she “must earn it.” She then accepted the penny as a fee for wearing the white temperance ribbon, indicating the ways in which advertising and promotion expanded the scope of remunerative activity. If successful, Kopchovsky stood to win \$5000 in addition to the money she earned.

The conditions of the wager were two-fold: Kopchovsky had to cycle around the world (wherever possible) and she had to earn money as she went. These two stipulations were strangely disconnected. There was no suggestion that riding her bicycle would earn Kopchovsky money in any direct sense. The two unrelated phenomena were yoked together in the form of a wager that put them into a dependent, abstract yet material relation. Like the creators of Prof. Arion’s stunt, Kopchovsky deployed a derivative logic, creating levers and gears where none existed. In a manner similar to Meg Merrilies producing ushering as spectacle via the construction of a fictional wager (discussed in chapter 3), Kopchovsky

created artificial, causal connections that were aimed at increasing her own circulation and potential for work.

Instead of earning money via cycling, Kopchovsky undertook various other forms of work. Immediately after the farewell, Kopchovsky went to work in Ober-Towne's photographic studio, where Ober-Towne 'kept her busy for several hours' in return for a studio portrait that Kopchovsky intended to sell. Note that Ober-Towne's creation of work in order to keep Kopchovsky busy reverses a logic of labour whereby work exists because it needs to be done, and people then do it. Rather, as in Coxey's Commonweal Army, the person's need to work to survive is the primary, driving factor (and as in the walking protest, this need is reframed as spectacle). The *Boston Post* also reported that Kopchovsky bought creams and lotions which she planned to sell at her 'lectures on beauty, physical culture, etc.' Kopchovsky would be a peddler in two senses, recalling an older American practice of itinerant salesmanship and the declining 'carnavalesque' tradition of advertising described by Jackson Lears.⁸⁶⁷ (Kopchovsky's husband, Max, was in fact a peddler by trade.) Later newspaper articles offered various stories of how Kopchovsky made money as her trip unfolded. The *Sandusky Register* explained that wherever she stopped she sold silk handkerchiefs and 'if she gets hard up she will do almost anything that is honourable—sometimes selling papers'.⁸⁶⁸ The *Plain Dealer* claimed that she would earn money by 'advertising goods on her trip, corresponding for newspapers, selling souvenirs and lecturing'.⁸⁶⁹ The *Shenango Valley News* held that her earnings were 'largely from her newspaper articles'.⁸⁷⁰

Peter Zheutlin, Kopchovsky's biographer and nephew, writes that there is little evidence that Kopchovsky had done much journalism in the past, and so the chances of her making money from newspaper articles were slim.⁸⁷¹ The recurrence of this idea in newspapers might be due to the various occupations summed up in 'newspaper woman'. It might also be a clever ploy on Kopchovsky's part to convey journalism as her profession in the hope that it would become so. At several points, Kopchovsky told reporters that *not* writing newspaper articles was a condition of her wager, subtly establishing a professional status by means of a

⁸⁶⁷ Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: a cultural history of advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), p.43 and 97

⁸⁶⁸ Anon., 'Annie Londonderry in Norwalk', *Sandusky Register* (Sandusky, OH), 24 October 1894, p.1

⁸⁶⁹ Anon., 'A Story of Wheels', *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), 3 September 1894, p.10

⁸⁷⁰ Anon., 'A Woman Rider Circling the World', *Shenango Valley News* (Shenango Valley, PA), 7 September 1894, p.8

⁸⁷¹ Peter Zheutlin, *Around the World on Two Wheels* (New York: Citadel Press, 2007), p.59

false prohibition.⁸⁷²

By reframing earning money as a challenge or game, Kopchovsky's act revealed making a living in its political state, closely paralleling the work of stunt journalists, who made attaining employment a major subject of their articles. Every time Kopchovsky distributed a flyer or sold a newspaper, the 'New Woman' demonstrated her 'business ingenuity'.⁸⁷³ Yet such opportunity only arose because of the wager: the work was taking place under special circumstances of spectacularisation, and its relation to everyday work was unstable. And yet — the performance folded in on itself once more — Kopchovsky was really working and making money, and furthering her own ability to work and make money in the future. Her trip was both a spectacular exception (which supporters hoped would change the status quo), and also, extending over two years, an unspectacular getting by that paralleled the everyday experience of an itinerant worker.

Originally from Latvia, Kopchovsky was Jewish and spoke Yiddish as well as English. She was in her mid-twenties, with three young children, and lived in a tenement on Spring Street in Boston. Clearly, Kopchovsky's new soubriquet, Annie Londonderry, altered her family affiliation and the ethnic connotation of her name, implying that she was of Irish descent. Kopchovsky also suggested, or allowed it to be understood, that she was unmarried and had no children. The persona Annie Londonderry, then, was usefully freed from both the threat of anti-Semitic or anti-Eastern European prejudice, and also censure at not fulfilling maternal duties. Like Elizabeth's Cochrane's persona, Nellie Bly, Annie Londonderry was able to do things that Annie Kopchovsky could not. One such capacity was that, in defiance of middle-class conventions concerning women and value, she might gain rather than lose value in circulation.

Despite pragmatic and commercial drives for creating the persona, Kopchovsky nonetheless wore it lightly. In Boston, where she was known, all of the newspapers referred to the fact that Londonderry was an alias. Even far from home, however, where it was possible to adopt the pseudonym entirely, her married name occasionally appeared in print. This was partly due to articles being reprinted, but it also exemplifies the way in which Kopchovsky proliferated versions of her story rather than guarding an authoritative one. Differences

⁸⁷² Nellie Bly, Jr., 'Around the World on a Bicycle', *World*, Sunday 20 October 1895, p.29; Anon., 'A Girl Globe Trotter', *Washington Post*, 14 April 1895, p.20

⁸⁷³ Anon., 'Around the World on a Wheel', *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, 25 September 1894, p.4

between versions became at times a productive frisson. As the lines between Annie Kopchovsky and Annie Londonderry are difficult to draw, I will refer to her as Annie from now on.

Annie's wager was reportedly struck between men in Boston, variously described as 'stock exchange men,' 'prominent sugar men' or 'rich merchants'.⁸⁷⁴ The men had been discussing Thomas Stevens, the first person to cycle around the world, on a high-wheeler or 'ordinary' bike from 1884-86. His experiences were recorded in *Outing* magazine and later a book called *Around the World on a Bicycle*. One of the rich Boston gentlemen had apparently argued that a woman could never complete such a task. Another said she could, and also earn money by the way, proving that the 'New Woman' was as capable as men. As well as Jules Verne's novel, Annie's trip took inspiration from Cochrane/Bly's trip around the world four years earlier. When Annie eventually returned from her excursion, the *Sunday World* ran her story, attributing it to 'Nellie Bly, Junior,' a persona layered onto a persona.⁸⁷⁵ Annie later wrote articles for the *World* under the alias 'The New Woman'.⁸⁷⁶ As well as layered identities, Annie and Cochrane/Bly shared a presentation style that emphasised their lack of experience. As discussed in chapter 3, in Cochrane/Bly's case, the 'feminine "amateur casual"' label was erroneous, yet enabled her to mine a productive zone between amateurism and professionalism, in which she appeared to be playing at both. Annie took this further: her entire skit was based on the fact that she had only just learned how to ride a bicycle. The *Boston Post's* subheading read: 'Annie Kapchowsky [sic] Is a Poor Bicycle Rider, But Intends To Do the Earth'. Based on Annie's accounts, newspapers reported that she was a novice, having had between one and three lessons.⁸⁷⁷ In a typically audacious style, Annie told the *El Paso Herald* in June 1895 that if she had 'known really how to ride a wheel at the time of starting out, she never would have undertaken the tour.'⁸⁷⁸

Edison's *The Trick Cyclist*, *Bicycling for Ladies*, and *Betsey-Jane*, along with articles by journalists about learning to ride a bicycle, all point to a discursive

⁸⁷⁴ Anon., 'Around the World on a Wheel', *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, 25 September 1894, p.4; Anon., 'Female Paul Jones on a Wheel', *Boston Globe* 26 June 1894, p.2; Anon., 'Going Woman: Annie Kapchowsky Is a Poor Bicycle Rider, But Intends To Do the Earth', *Boston Post*, 26 June 1894, p.2

⁸⁷⁵ Nellie Bly, Jr., 'Around the World on a Bicycle', *World*, Sunday 20 October 1895, p.29

⁸⁷⁶ 'The New Woman', 'Capture of a Very Novel "Wild Man"', *World*, 3 November 1895, p.36

⁸⁷⁷ Anon., 'Wheeling Around the World', *Washington Post*, 15 July 1894, p.7; Anon., 'New Woman on a Tour: Circling the Globe, She Meets With Many Adventures', *Princeton Union*, 23 May 1895, p.6

⁸⁷⁸ Quoted in Zheutlin, p.105

affinity between bicycle riding and attaining skills. On a basic level, people were learning to ride in large numbers. This phenomenon meant that cycling became particularly bound up with thinking about developing skills (an intertwining largely absent from present day discourses around bicycles). Ward's manual claims that bicycles are 'an educational factor, subtle and far-reaching, creating the desire for progress' and 'broadening the intelligence'.⁸⁷⁹ Annie's performed learning to cycle was therefore a performance *about* developing skills, which drew a connection between cycling and attaining other physical, mental and economic capabilities.

The self-actualisation that women were undertaking through cycling compares closely to theorisations of post-Fordist labour. Paula Virno argues that post-Fordist work, requires 'generically social talents'. The desired 'professionalism' is acquired 'during a prolonged sojourn in a pre-work, or precarious, stage'.⁸⁸⁰ Recall Ward's curiously general claims about cycling and sociability: cycling groups both drew on and developed desirably productive qualities, such as cheerfulness, apparently for no purpose other than more cycling. Such social skills were particularly important for female workers: for journalists, expressing emotion was often an implied requirement of the role.⁸⁸¹ As we've seen, Cochrane/Bly's efforts to get a job turned into a performance about getting a job, which turned into a job, but her pre-work and work also collapsed into one another. Cochrane's and other stunt journalists' fully-fledged professional labour continued to involve the performance of precarity, as well as actual physical and economic precarity.

Virno terms such work 'virtuosity', arguing that in the post-Fordist era, the substance of political life — talking and being together — has been transferred into the workplace, where it produces surplus value. Annie's act was virtuosic in Virno's sense, because it was both labour and politics. However the performance did not merely combine these categories, it destabilised them too. Annie's performance raised the same questions as the walking contest: was this work or

⁸⁷⁹ Ward, p.13

⁸⁸⁰ Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. by Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), p.53. Italics original. Originally published as *La grammatica della moltitudine: Per un'analisi delle forme di vita contemporanee* (Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 2001), p.85

⁸⁸¹ Phyllis Leslie Abramson, *Sob Sister Journalism* (New York and London: Greenwood, 1990); Jean Marie Lutes, *Front Page Girls: Women Journalists in American Culture and Fiction, 1880-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), p.65-9

play, amateur or professional, valuable or pointless activity? If she made money, it was work, but if she were only able to make money because of the performance, was it politics instead? If she made no money, what was it?

8. An advertising scheme from start to finish?

Much of the instability of Annie's act came from its actual and assumed functions as a form of advertising. The *Boston Journal* reported that the crowd attending the send-off at Massachusetts State House were 'incredulous about [Annie] receiving any such sum as \$10,000' and indeed, the wager's very existence. Several spectators believed the trip was 'simply an advertising scheme from start to finish.'⁸⁸² Such scepticism might be seen as a consistent dynamic of stunt spectatorship, even one of the pleasures that stunts afford.

Advertising certainly played an important role in Annie's act. Pope of Pope Manufacturing had gifted Annie her Columbia bicycle, continuing his record of supporting such excursions. As the underwriter of the magazine *Outing*, Pope had indirectly funded Thomas Stevens to cycle around the world in a manner that would not disrupt Stevens' amateur status. This gives a sense of the interlocking relationships between industry, media and sporting performances, both amateur and professional. It also demonstrates that amateurism (as in stunt journalism) had productive capacities, which were easily exploited by the advertising industry.

In 1894, however, advertising journal *Fame* expressed doubts that anything novel remained in feats such as Annie's: 'Such sensations seem to be practically exhausted: [...] Stevens and others have bicycled the world, a pedestrian walked to Albany [...] there seems to be little that would tempt the large advertising houses to undertake their schemes.'⁸⁸³ Entitled 'Advertising As A Patronage,' the article highlights the ways in which — on the cusp of increasingly mass waged labour — stunts drew on other forms of remuneration: wagers and patronage. Perhaps these economic forms were being reframed as spectacle in the newly expanding culture industries, or in Seltzer's phrase, as romances of the market in machine culture.

The qualms of *Fame* writers also suggest other reasons that Pope might not

⁸⁸² Anon., 'Will Journey on a Wheel', *Boston Journal*, 25 June 1894, quoted in Zheutlin, p.25

⁸⁸³ Anon., 'Advertisements As A Patronage', *Fame*, August 1894, p.241

associate himself too closely with Annie's venture. In spite of the necessity of attracting attention, a *Fame* commentator distanced himself from some kinds of promotional activity, exemplified by a Meg Merrilies of the *World*, who wore bloomers in order to write stories about it.⁸⁸⁴ *Fame* quotes a remark made by a passer-by about 'what she could possibly be': "She must be an advertisement for a cigarette," the man said (demonstrating the extent to which advertising had been absorbed into expectations of everyday life). The *Fame* writer jibed: 'Alas. Poor advertisement. Has it sunk so low?'⁸⁸⁵ Even advertisers, then, saw in such stunts — especially those performed by women — a degrading example of unprofessional conduct and tasteless display.

Although Pope gave Annie a bicycle, there is no evidence of any further agreement between them. *Outing* magazine did not publish articles by Annie or write about her trip, and Annie later swapped her bicycle for a Sterling model and struck a new deal with that company. Rather than Pope Manufacturing having devised the performance, it seems more likely that Annie did. The *Boston Post* claimed that Annie's friend Ober-Towne had persuaded her to undertake the tour. Whether it her own idea or her friend's, the trip relied on acquiring a range of small advertising and sponsorship deals, many of which Annie picked up as she travelled. Advertising enabled the trip, and sometimes seemed to be the point of the trip, but it was of the general kind identified by Jean Baudrillard, in which Annie proclaimed: "I'm so-and-so and I exist!" The lack of overall design or clear motivation meant that Annie's venture demonstrated advertising at its most unwieldy and experimental.

By the late stages of her journey, the extent of Annie's advertising verged on a parody of bodily hyper-exploitation. The *Buffalo Express* reported that she was 'a sort of riding advertising agency. She wears ribbons advertising various goods and will receive \$400 for one firm's ad that graces her left breast. On her right bloomer leg, she carries \$100 worth of advertisements and she had just closed a contract to cover her left arm.'⁸⁸⁶ The combination of business discourse and delicate references to Annie's body suggests amusement at the way in which Annie's performance offered her body as a value-productive and spectacular site. As a

⁸⁸⁴ Meg Merrilies, 'A Week in Trouserettes', *World*, 4 March 1894, p.25

⁸⁸⁵ Anon., 'Item', *Fame* (New York), April 1894, p.52

⁸⁸⁶ Anon., 'Round the World — A Riding Advertising Agency', *Buffalo Express*, 1 November 1894, quoted in Zheutlin, p.49

medium, Annie sold the surface of her clothing and skin just as she had sold columns of newspapers, following experimental thinking in the advertising industry.

In New York advertising industry journal *Fame*, a series of articles set in an imagined future foretold a widespread commercialisation of space. All newspapers would be sold at a nominal sum of one cent, one columnist predicted, and would be listed on an 'Advertising Exchange, an institution founded on the same principle as the New York Stock Exchange, with the exception that it deals in space'.⁸⁸⁷ Such commercialisation of urban space was already common in the form of posters, trolley car advertisements, electric signs and in the case of the *World*, words projected onto clouds in the sky.⁸⁸⁸ Similar predictions appeared regularly in *Fame* as those working in advertising reflected on the ways in which their industry might alter valorisation, reflecting the shift in newspaper economics in their own era as well as anticipating the present-day business models of many newspapers.

During the advertising industry's rapid development in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, experimentation in live advertising and the use of bodies as media of circulation was widespread. In 1894, *Fame* criticised the 'worn out faces' of two 'live' advertisers in Boston, illustrating the complaint with glum-looking figures in top hats and jackets, the surfaces of which were covered in railroad ticket prices.⁸⁸⁹ Fuelled by cheap labour and a flourishing new commodity in the form of media space, the advertising industry exploited bodies with experimental ebullience, troubling distinctions between people and commodities.

In a retrospective printed in 1938, *Printers' Ink* described advertising at this time as dominated by the 'attention concept,' that is the belief that grabbing a viewer's attention was its primary function. In one extreme example, *Printer's Ink* claimed that the 'use of bald-headed men, each with a letter of a product name or message painted on his pate and sitting in line with his likewise labelled colleagues at a theater or public gathering, became common.'⁸⁹⁰ This was most likely an exaggeration designed to demonstrate the tasteful qualities of advertising in the 1930s. However, the practice was certainly raised as an idea. *Fame* printed a story in which an advertising copywriter dreamed of meeting a man who suggested a

⁸⁸⁷ Percie W. Hart, 'The Advertising Cut of the Future', *Fame* (New York), April 1894, p.75-76

⁸⁸⁸ Anon., 'Signs in the Sky', *World*, 7 January 1894, p.3

⁸⁸⁹ Anon., 'Untitled', *Fame*, April 1894, p.63-4

⁸⁹⁰ *Printers' Ink*, p.122-123

new canvas for advertising: 'human skin!' "I notice you are extremely bald," the oneiric man remarked, "Now, if you would carry an ad. of the 'Hot House Hair Renewer,' and agree to sit in the front row".⁸⁹¹ The *Courier* in Nebraska printed a similar story in which an advertiser suggested a well-known, bald official use a brand of hair oil and, when his hair regrew, tell his acquaintances about the product. The official was reported to reply by offering the space on his head by the square inch, guaranteeing circulation figures and suggesting he recruit his bald-headed friends.⁸⁹²

Advertisements like these actual and imagined ones involved a continual displacement of body and thing, shuttling valorisation between that applied to a person and that applied to a commodity, demonstrating what Seltzer identifies as the 'permeability of boundaries between persons and things' in commodity culture.⁸⁹³ As a new commodity in the form of media space emerged, the surfaces of bodies were reframed as ambulant space, like that in a trolley car. In a manner not identical to money, but nonetheless akin, bodies became media of circulation. Live advertising drew attention to bodies, but immediately diverted that attention towards another commodity. In a movement that both revealed and concealed the labour involved in production, bodies were spectacularised in close proximity to the point of exchange, but in a manner that reframed bodily labour as a kind of joke. In Marx's view, this was indicative of the wider condition of industrial capitalism, which creates 'material [*dinglich*] relations between persons and social relations between things'.⁸⁹⁴

The *Fame* writer who suggested temporary tattoos on a skin continued: 'I wonder if anyone would ever have the *face* to do such a thing as this? And if they did, would the public countenance it!'⁸⁹⁵ Annie's performance tested this question: she did have the 'face' to commodify the surface of her body, attempt to profit by the attention she attracted, and through this spectacularisation, expand her opportunities for work and range of gendered expression.

⁸⁹¹ Anon., 'Something New At Last!', *Fame*, March 1894, p.19-20

⁸⁹² Anon., 'Proud of His Bald Head', *Courier* (Lincoln, NE), 31 July 1897, p.5

⁸⁹³ Seltzer, p.59

⁸⁹⁴ Marx, *Capital*, I, p.166

⁸⁹⁵ Anon., 'Something New At Last!', *Fame*, March 1894, p.19-20

9. Costume, virtuosity and idle talk

Annie set out from Boston on her heavy Columbia bicycle, aiming for New York and then Chicago. Relatively smooth roads to New York made the first part of her trip comparatively straightforward. On arrival Annie was publicised by both the *World* and the *New York Herald*, and despite her time limit, she remained in the city for most of July.⁸⁹⁶ Some subsequent newspaper stories increased her allotted time to sixteen rather than fifteen months.

In New York, Annie devised a more practical riding outfit. She had set off in typical late Victorian clothing: the souvenir photograph of Annie in Boston shows her standing in profile with her bicycle wearing a full-length dark blue skirt, puff-sleeved jacket, shirt and necktie, and a straw boater with a flat rim and dark ribbon. It must have been extremely challenging for any rider to cycle in these clothes for long distances on rough roads. Annie explained to the *Washington Post* that she could not quite bring herself to wear bloomers, commenting, "Although I've cheek enough to go around the world, I've not cheek enough for that." So Annie devised a "compromise": bloomers with a "short skirt coming to my shoe tops."⁸⁹⁷ The *Boston Post* described her later that month in 'a loose blouse, knickerbockers and leggings, with a cloth cap'.⁸⁹⁸ Annie's hesitancy to adopt bloomers makes more sense in a context of intense scrutiny of women's cycling outfits. As the *World* stunt story featuring a reporter in bloomers suggests, it was newsworthy when the first woman in a community was seen wearing bloomers, and caustic remarks about them were commonplace in newspaper articles ('Should Bloomers Be Suppressed?' one *World* story asked).⁸⁹⁹

By the time she reached Chicago in September 1894, Annie had lost a lot of weight and seemed highly unlikely to reach the west coast before winter. She had to make further changes to her clothing, bicycle and route if she were to stand any chance of completing the task. It was here that she met with the Sterling Company, and swapped for a lighter vehicle. Instead of continuing west, Annie cycled the shorter distance back east to New York and sailed from there.

Annie's costume was a central part of her performance. An article published

⁸⁹⁶ Zheutlin, p.17

⁸⁹⁷ Anon., 'Wheeling Around the World', *Washington Post*, 15 July 1894, p.7

⁸⁹⁸ Anon., 'Miss Londonderry Heard From Again!' *Boston Globe*, 29 July 1894, p.7

⁸⁹⁹ Anon., 'Should Bloomers Be Suppressed?', *World*, 8 September 1895, p.26

a few months before her journey announced the proposed feat of a 'Boston newspaper woman,' explaining that 'part of the plan is to travel through cities on a bicycle and in bicycle costume'.⁹⁰⁰ 'Bicycle costume' might have referred to Annie's original skirt suit, or the more specialist outfits that she went on to wear. If the latter, Annie's gradual adoption of bicycle costume was perhaps more intentional than it appeared. Annie's bloomers may have been a costume in the theatrical sense — clothing worn as part of Annie's persona. As Michelle Liu Carriger writes in her analysis of the trial of Boulton and Park, it is very difficult to distinguish between these categories (particularly when the apparent stability of professionalism is removed) because the meaning of clothing is determined by performance.⁹⁰¹ This is further complicated by the fact that Annie sometimes claimed that she had to buy her clothes with money she earned before leaving Boston — that she literally began with nothing. This would make obtaining the costume part of the performance as well. What we can be sure of is that Annie's clothes were a response to the twin demands of cycling and attracting newspaper coverage. Following these imperatives, Annie sometimes bought and adapted boy's trousers by gathering them in with elastic, confiding to a Utica reporter that her shorts were an excellent "drawing card".⁹⁰² Annie's outfit was not drag; she did not impersonate a man or boy, but it was enough to complicate and theatricalise her gendered representation. In November 1894, the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* described 'an object closely resembling Billy Grimes doing his cellar-door act' riding up the street. The journalist refers to Annie as 'the object' for the article's first paragraph, exaggerating the difficulty of making her a subject, then ends with an account from a local police officer: 'The officer was at a loss to make out what it was at first but finally discovered it to be a woman.'⁹⁰³

Although the policeman eventually saw past Annie's clothing to discern the woman beneath, the changes in Annie's body as a result of cycling prevented it from acting as a constant, fixed point, in opposition to her variable costume. Annie commented on her developing muscles, capitalising on the trend for physical

⁹⁰⁰ Anon., 'New Feature in Globe Trotting', *Washington Post*, 25 February 1894, p.1

⁹⁰¹ Michelle Liu Carriger, "'The Unnatural History and Petticoat Mystery of Boulton and Park': A Victorian Sex Scandal and the Theatre Defense", *TDR: The Drama Review*, 57:4 (2013), 135-156 (p.147)

⁹⁰² Zheutlin, p.53

⁹⁰³ Anon., 'Another Dead Broke Rider', *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, 2 November 1894, p.7

culture.⁹⁰⁴ ‘Wonderful are the possibilities of womanhood’, declared an 1896 *World* article about women building their muscles.⁹⁰⁵ Like Cochrane/Bly, Annie made gender productive, but rather than adopting more conventionally feminine practices, Annie created a persona that drew on masculinity, femininity, and their juxtaposition.

From New York, Annie sailed to Havre in France. Before disembarking, she asked a fellow passenger to write her a sign in French, stating that she was cycling around the world and asking for the opportunity to earn money. Annie claimed she was not allowed to speak French as a condition of her wager, indicating the increasingly elastic and contingent nature of Annie’s wager as her trip went on. In fact, she could not speak French, information that she subsequently shared with the *Washington Post*.⁹⁰⁶ In spite of this, Annie was well received in France, receiving newspaper coverage, offers of work and even a public reception.

Annie was often praised for being an entertaining speaker, and she relied on her abilities as a raconteur to spark the interest of reporters and other people she met on her way.⁹⁰⁷ She developed several stories, which ranged from the embellished to the fictional. In France, she variously described herself as a law student, medical student, wealthy heiress, accountant, and founder of a newspaper.⁹⁰⁸ Riding into Marseilles with her foot in bandages, Annie claimed her injury was sustained when she was robbed by highwaymen. She went on to recount the dramatic story numerous times, but Zheutlin points out that the details of this incident were never reported in any French newspapers.⁹⁰⁹ The various versions of such stories published during the trip serve as traces of Annie’s continuous improvisation as she travelled.

Annie’s improvised locution is a great example of what Virno calls ‘idle talk’ (in a revisionist reading of Martin Heidegger’s concept). Idle talk is social communication uncoupled from any requirement to communicate on an

⁹⁰⁴ Zheutlin, p.91; Anon., ‘The Best Developed Woman and Man in the World’, *World*, 3 March 1896, p.32

⁹⁰⁵ Anon., ‘Women Can Be As Strong As Men If they Wish: They Must Give Attention to the Proper Development of Their Muscles: Sciences Indorses It and Examples Shown’, *World*, 3 March 1896, p.32

⁹⁰⁶ Nellie Bly, Jr, ‘Around the World on a Bicycle’, *World*, Sunday 20 October 1895, p.29; Anon., ‘A Girl Globe Trotter’, *Washington Post*, 14 April 1895, p.20

⁹⁰⁷ She was an ‘interesting talker’ (*Tucson Citizen*, 18 June 1895), ‘extremely bright and animate in conversation’ (‘Around the World’, *Rochester Post-Express*, 2 November 1894), quoted in Zheutlin, p.102 and 51.

⁹⁰⁸ Zheutlin, p.59

⁹⁰⁹ Zheutlin, p.67

informational level, and freed from ‘the obligation of giving a faithful reproduction of the truth’. Virno calls idle talk a crisis in the ‘referential paradigm,’ situating this crisis ‘at the origin of the *mass media*’.⁹¹⁰ Such uncoupling of signifier from signified is both destabilising and generative, enabling terms to give rise to other terms, comparable to the proliferation of Annie’s stories and Cochrane’s personas. In an account of her journey in the *Sunday World*, Annie described herself lecturing in France: ‘I have to laugh when I think of myself standing before a big hall full of people jabbering away in English which not one in a hundred could understand. Every few minutes I would shout ‘Vive la France!’ Then how they did cheer! It was positively inspiring.’⁹¹¹ In this case, Annie’s speech communicates little or nothing, but nonetheless ‘constitutes in itself an *event* consisting of itself, which is justified solely by the fact that it happens’.⁹¹² The phenomena extended to Annie’s act as a whole. Accidents and contingencies became conditions of the wager, which was in the first place an invention, set into motion by a performative utterance which may never have happened: ‘I bet’.

Annie’s lectures and speeches to journalists could also be termed spectacle as defined by Guy Debord, a concept that Virno closely aligns with idle talk: ‘human communication which has become a commodity’.⁹¹³ This was particularly the case in Annie’s lectures, which, along with advertising, were her major source of income. Comparing spectacle to the ‘real abstraction’ of money, Virno argues that the difference between them lies in the fact that while money ‘refers back to finished labor’, the spectacle ‘portrays labor in itself, the present tense of labor’.⁹¹⁴ As a woman working in the culture industry, Annie was at the forefront of experimentation in what could constitute remunerative work and who could do it. Her entire performance was geared towards actualising her as a labourer. ‘I am a journalist,’ she began her article in the *World* — most likely bending the truth and bringing this state into being through her words — ‘and a New Woman,’ she went on, becoming ‘The New Woman’ as she wrote. Annie’s work and identity were bound up with one another in a single, entwined claim: the New Woman was a woman who could cut it in the productive economy, if necessary creating the

⁹¹⁰ Virno, p.89-90

⁹¹¹ Bly, Jr, p.29

⁹¹² Virno, p.90

⁹¹³ Virno, p.60; Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle: 221 Situationist theses*, trans. by Fredy Perlman, Tony Verlaan, Paul Sieveking, Michel Prigent, Colin Carsten and John Fullerton (Publisher not identified, 1971). Originally published as *La société du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1967).

⁹¹⁴ Virno, p.61

means by which to do so, beginning, as Michaels writes, with herself.⁹¹⁵ As with stunt journalism, I contend that such spectacularised communication that served no communicative function disrupted liveness with commodification, because it existed solely for the purpose of mediatization.

Annie gave various accounts of her subsequent journey from France. The wager, she later explained, stipulated that she stop at major ports rather than cycle the whole way: 'According to my contract, I was to report at Colombo, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Nagasaki, Kobe, and Yokohama.'⁹¹⁶ Zheutlin has traced Annie's route and concluded that from Marseilles, the vast majority of Annie's trip was undertaken by boat. Unlike in France, Annie struggled to interest journalists and embassy staff in her venture. Cycling receded from the foreground, limited to brief rides around port cities, and Annie reported that she made very little money during this period.

On return to San Francisco in March 1895, Annie was again able to attract the attention of journalists and ride her bicycle more frequently. She experienced the most gruelling part of her journey when she rode across Southern California and the Arizona desert. By this time, Annie was an accomplished cyclist, frequently performing exhibition races and tricks in order to make money.⁹¹⁷ Yet her primary income came from lectures, the chief content of her which were her embellished tales of the war that she had reportedly witnessed between China and Japan. Her *World* article featured lurid, orientalist descriptions of cruelty and violence ('I saw the bodies of women nailed to the houses, the bodies of little children torn limb from limb'), as well as fantastic tales of being shot in the shoulder, imprisoned and starved. Annie explained that she realised the 'opportunity' that the war presented for her to make money.⁹¹⁸ By the time she was back in New York, Annie had become a kind of a one-woman military-industrial-entertainment complex, channelling the strong martial tendencies in bicycle performance cultures.

In 1897 and '98, this connection between performances of circulation and war was repeated when the *World* and the *Journal* engaged in a circulation battle in the run up to the Spanish-American War of 1898, which several media historians have described as being to a significant extent caused by the two

⁹¹⁵ Michaels, p.5

⁹¹⁶ Anon., 'A Girl Globe Trotter', *Washington Post*, 14 April 1895, p.20

⁹¹⁷ Anon., 'Riverside County', *Los Angeles Times*, 3 June 1895, p.9

⁹¹⁸ Nellie Bly, Jr, 'Around the World on a Bicycle', *World*, Sunday 20 October 1895, p.29

editors, Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst.⁹¹⁹ Having adopted the *World's* sensational reporting style, Hearst spent money exorbitantly with the view that he would eventually turn a profit when the *Journal's* circulation was large enough. To compete, Pulitzer dropped the price of the *World* to a penny, and attempted to match Hearst's vast spend on advertising and spectacle. The logic of advertising, whereby waste was (eventual or possible) gain, became the modus operandi of both newspapers, and once again, an avenue for expressing sacrificial dynamics.

Both Pulitzer and Hearst published many stories of Cubans' suffering under Spanish brutality, positioning the United States as the natural protector of Cuba.⁹²⁰ Hearst identified his newspaper with 'extremely nationalistic—at times rabidly xenophobic' attitudes, and coined the masthead 'An American paper for the American people' above his editorial.⁹²¹ Hearst's support for Cuban independence from Spanish colonial rule was calculated to chime with readers' sense of the United States as a nation of underdogs which had thrown off British rule and also an industrial powerhouse set to assume its role as global leader. The *World* even suggested that Nellie Bly, a 'Fin de Siecle Joan of Arc', should lead an all-female regiment to fight for Cuban independence: 'Nellie Bly is arranging to add a new terror of war! Could anything be more delightful?'⁹²² A drive to increase newspaper circulation became entangled in a military-industrial-entertainment complex that pushed population, government and industry towards conflict as if it were an inevitable outcome.

Annie returned to Boston on 24 September 1895, without fanfare, and claimed to have received \$10,000 for winning the wager and made \$5000 en route. Within six weeks, she was working for the *World*. Via the creation of a wager and the completion of an exhausting fifteen-month journey, Annie had successfully altered her career. Nonetheless, like the journalists who wrote under the name Meg Merrilies, Annie's professional situation was by no means secure. Her first article was published under the name 'Nellie Bly, Jr', her next was credited to 'The

⁹¹⁹ Ben Procter, *William Randolph Hearst: The Early Years, 1863-1910* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.88; Donald Barr Chidsey, *The Spanish-American War: A Behind-the-Scenes Account of the War in Cuba* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971), p.37 and 84

⁹²⁰ Anon., 'Should the United States Annex Cuba?', *World*, 5 May 1895, p.33; Anon., 'Cuba Is Facing Ruin', *World*, 6 October 1895, p.1; Walt McDougall, 'Tormenting Poor Little Cuba: Isn't it about time for Uncle Sam to step in a spank the Boy King of Spain?', *World*, 27 October 1895, Colored Supplement, p.1

⁹²¹ Procter, p.88 and 101

⁹²² Anon., 'Nellie Bly Proposes To Fight For Cuba', *World*, 8 March 1896, p.24

New Woman'. This pen name was already in use before Annie's return to Boston, suggesting that she stepped into a persona previously or simultaneously inhabited by other female journalists.⁹²³ Annie's performance had earned her the opportunity to take up the role of surrogate. Just as idle talk uncoupled signifier and signified, stunt stories dissolved a connection between person and persona.

Cycling around the world was the attention-grabbing activity that enabled Annie to secure advertising deals, make money and change her working life. Nonetheless, it is difficult to pinpoint the motor of Annie's performance, and the aspects that were dependent or extraneous. In combination, Annie, her bicycle, newspapers, and the advertising industry, became an assemblage, loosely held together by the concept of the wager, which converted attention into money (or human capital, hence into money). The assemblage set up a relationship between making money and turning the wheel that appeared to be causal, but actually only existed in the specific conditions of Annie's performance (and yet was also suggestive of the economic development of the cycling industry at large). In terms of value production, Annie's machine worked as a derivative. It yoked functions together — Annie cycling, Annie getting odd jobs, the value of a water company — putting them into dependent relation. It also relied on already operating systems by which attention created value (such as the *World*) and, like a derivative, gambled on their operation. Annie's performance tested new forms of valorisation in extreme conditions.

10. Conclusion

Bicycle stunts of the 1890s expressed experimental connections between humans and machines, by which humans were framed as machines, bicycles as living beings, and human-bicycle composites as metonyms for systematised cultures at large. They performed contradictory drives for autonomous human achievement and a technological sublime, which could momentarily be brought together through spectacular stunts. Turning bicycle wheels intersected with, and became

⁹²³ 'The New Woman', 'The New Woman's Night in Greenwood', *World*, 11 August 1895, p.26, 'The New Woman', 'Sunday With A Woman Excise Inspector', *World*, 8 September 1895, p.29; 'The New Woman', 'A Day With Bellevue's Insane', *World*, 29 September 1895, p.35; 'The New Woman', 'Night Scenes In A Patrol Wagon', *World*, 6 October 1895, p.38

symbolic of, other forms of circulation, in the form of electricity, capital, rapid transport and media.

Promotional stunts deployed a derivative logic, which yoked together unrelated entities and enabled the affective economies of spectacularised bodies at risk to benefit emerging corporations. When they went wrong, as in McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's performance, they brought the precarity of working life into visibility and raised questions about where responsibility lay in increasingly interconnected urban cultures. As with bridge jumping, dangerous advertising stunts became a channel for sacrificial narratives, which were framed as exceptional but nonetheless also present in the wider operation of the electricity industry and stock market.

Bicycle performances and the fantasised human-machine intersubjectivities that they enabled presented opportunities for women to reconstruct their gendered identities and work opportunities. While Ward presented bicycling as creating an ideal liberal subject, Kopchovsky drew on reform cultures, women's movements, advertising practices and the martial performances prevalent in cycling to enact sensational, bellicose fantasies of the New Woman's productive capacities. Kopchovsky's contingent wager spectacularised and politicised her labour, paralleling the work of stunt journalists. Like McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell and Cochrane, Kopchovsky created a persona that facilitated her circulation, a persona which I suggest was a form of 'fictitious capital'. She proliferated versions of her identity and story, creating a spectacle in Debord's sense of commodified communication released from its communicative function. While Kopchovsky's performances were live in the sense that they happened in shared space and time, they also existed for the purpose of their reproduction in the media. Kopchovsky became a medium of circulation, and in doing so, I argue, disturbed a notion of liveness as a connection to authentic experience, as well as liveness as rooted in the absence of a complete audio or visual reproduction.

5.

Conclusion**1. Aestheticised precarity**

The four types of stunts discussed in this thesis each aestheticised precarity in closely comparable ways. Bridge jumpers of the late nineteenth century were precarious workers who attempted to change their working capacities by staging intermittent confrontations with death. Often harbouring similar hopes of entrepreneurial transformation, pedestrians pushed themselves to physical extremes in punishing durational feats. Stunt journalists entered into dangerous situations which dramatised hazards experienced in daily life, as well as their own uncertain status as labourers. McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's high-wire bicycle show was an embodied balancing act that invoked a liminal state between living and dead, through live currents, electrified bodies, and a machine that was figured as a living being. Finally, Annie Kopchovsky made developing skills the subject of a physically exhausting durational performance, which depended on continual, quick-witted improvisation, and was ultimately geared towards her imagining and forging new working opportunities by producing herself as persona. These acts speak to the attraction of precarity as a fantasy of self-reliance and autoproduction.

By aestheticising and spectacularising precarity, stunts sometimes operated politically. Stunt performers drew attention to precarity in everyday life, and deployed the fragility of individual bodies to demand that others consider where responsibility for sustaining life lay. In the cases of the Commonweal protest and Meg Merrilies' trolley car stunt, this was a deliberate strategy, in which protesters performed themselves and their needs in public life. For McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell, this effect was accidental, because the terrible outcome was always possible but never expected. Peggy Phelan writes that unscripted happenings in live performances, which transform artist and audience alike, are 'extraordinarily important, because this is the point where the aesthetic joins the ethical', brought together by the 'unpredictable force of social event'.⁹²⁴ The highly risky nature of stunts raised ethical questions that brought to the fore

⁹²⁴ Peggy Phelan, 'Marina Abramovic: Witnessing Shadows', *Theatre Journal*, 56:4 (2004), 569-577 (p.575)

not only political concerns about workers' rights and corporate exploitation, but also unavoidable states of interdependence and mutual vulnerability, and challenged audiences and commentators to consider how they could be reimagined in a rapidly changing social context.

These case studies situate the nostalgia associated with precarity under late capitalism in a longer history of American nostalgia, which affectively bound together dreams of freedom, whiteness, skilled status, property ownership, anti-work imaginaries and rural ideals. This view accords with Eric Lott's contention that identities — in Lott's argument, working-class whiteness — were precariously inhabited, and that this precarity found expression in a proliferation of identity-based performances, including the appropriation of other racial, class and ethnic identities, as well as thoroughgoing spectacularisation of a performer's own identity traits.⁹²⁵

Stunts revealed identity as a contingent form of capital, as something related to one's self but not one with it. This is an expression of a fundamental problematic, as Walter Benn Michaels writes, the problem of the 'relation of bodies to souls, the problem of persons.'⁹²⁶ Stunts enabled the multiplying logic of circulating capital to be applied to identities, thereby revealing their precarious and contingent nature, but at the same, stunts threatened that multiplying logic with an underlying limit, by which body, life and person were unavoidably connected.

2. Liveness and aliveness

Stunts of the late nineteenth century troubled liveness in a manner that both accords with Philip Auslander's theorisation of liveness, and suggests some interventions in how liveness can be determined and understood in this historical context.

Dangerous stunts gained dramatic and affective impact in their conjoint spectacularisation of liveness and aliveness. A strong, perceived connection

⁹²⁵ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.4

⁹²⁶ Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.21

between these two states enabled stunts to bring precarity into visibility in public life. Phelans argues: 'The connection between the social body and the mortal body is defiantly metaphorical. The metaphorical link, however, is fused by the literal physical body'.⁹²⁷ Endangered bodies and bodies in need posed the question of wider responsibility for sustaining life, and their means of doing so was live performance, shared in space and time. I argue that in this historical context, the association between liveness and energy, encounter and connection were not merely romantic or nostalgic wish fulfilment, but rather constitutive of the ethical work that stunts had the potential to do under certain circumstances. The Commonweal protest, for example, set out to assert a difference between living bodies and dead money, and ask government to instate that difference at the level of policy.

However, stunts also raise questions that demand a reconsideration of how liveness is determined. As noted in the introduction, Auslander proposed that reproduction was the vital event in bringing liveness and mediatisation into being, and limited this reproduction to audio recordings or film. This research suggests that popular newspapers were creating performances which, I argue, were mediatised, because they existed in order to be reproduced in the media, and were largely consumed in their mediatised form. At the same time, these performances invoked liveness by dramatising face-to-face encounters that had taken place in shared space and time, and putting living bodies into endangered states. Stunt stories, Kopchovsky's round-the-world trip and William Jennings Bryan's athletic feats can all be viewed in this way: as performances that were live, and deployed discourses of actuality and authenticity, but were also in important ways, mediatised. There is therefore, I argue, no clear, single technological development that initiated liveness and mediatisation.

A key feature of these acts is that they prised human communication away from meaning, and turned it into a commodity, largely to be sold in newspapers. Rather than commodification being irrelevant to liveness, as Auslander suggests, I believe that mediatisation in these cases constituted a mode of commodification. Commodification interrupted liveness, in these instances, by turning liveness into a mark of authenticity designed to facilitate mediatised circulation.

⁹²⁷ Phelan, p.577

Hence, instead of eschewing a connection between liveness and aliveness, and the notion that liveness can resist commodification, it is worth considering both liveness and mediatisation in the context of commodification. Mediatisation tends towards converting people into images which are in turn commodifiable. Liveness can also enact commodification, but the presence of a living, labouring body poses the possibility of this being disturbed, a possibility which is sometimes, though by no means always, fulfilled. I have cited numerous bodies which acted as media of circulation in the nineteenth century by bearing, distributing or becoming advertisements, as well as moving round and round in literal, physical ways. In the case of Keeble's bridge jump, not only Keeble's body but his life became an advertising medium. This event, however, posed serious ethical questions, because it had been a live event and more fundamentally, because Keeble had been alive. Interplay between liveness and mediatisation ended up being a performative language through which aliveness was explored, and the ultimate commodification of human life was enacted in a deeply troubling way that invited a range of emotional responses. This extreme example demonstrates liveness and aliveness have a connection that is not merely naïve but at the very least culturally inscribed, and that in this era, this connection was starkly highlighted in acts of that could be termed 'live mediatisation' — that is, live acts in which bodies were transformed into media and hence commodified. Indeed, live performance in the late nineteenth century might be conceived of as a vital means of critiquing value abstraction, not because it was removed from value abstraction, but because it enacted value abstraction in a shared space and time. Performances of circulation, for example, attempted to embody a circuit of capital, but by trying to become a mystified, constant flow, they demonstrated the incompatibility of this with human existence.

This supports Auslander's view that liveness and mediatisation are historically contingent, but also questions the technologically determined nature of these states, and suggests that a relation to commodification was an important aspect of constituting liveness and mediatisation. As with the commodification of identity, stunt performances demonstrated a connection between body, life and person that could be stretched but not ultimately eliminated.

3. Performance and value

I have argued that stunts in the late nineteenth century were peculiarly invested in performing circulation. This was rooted in a contemporary realisation that under certain conditions of industrial capitalism, circulation itself was value productive. Hence performers attempted to embody and exploit this value-productive potential.

Performances of circulation also related to anxieties concerning over-civilisation, industrialisation, white degeneration and the nature of production. In these instances, physically daring feats came to enact ethnocentric displays of strength, as well as attempts to assert superiority over machines. In both cases however, the performance tended to present those anxieties to audiences, by displaying bodies in states of breakdown and in the act of mechanistic motion.

Again paralleling economic developments, stunts performed a derivative logic, whereby unconnected entities were brought into dependent relation, leveraging the value created by risky performances. In this sense, stunts performed derivatives, supporting Michaels' reading of naturalist literature, as well as Randy Martin's theorisation of dances as parallel expressions of the 'intricate acrobatics of high finance'.⁹²⁸ Stunts multiplied and stratified identities, with a view to increasing circulation, and testing out emerging forms of valorisation and work.

Derivative logic is also at work in the dynamics of sacrifice. The act of sacrifice situates responsibility for a collective risk in an individual and attempts to appease that risk through ritual action, which has only symbolic connection to the risk itself. I have argued that sacrificial dynamics were evident in Keeble's bridge jump, McDonald/Donahue/McDonnell's high-wire act and stunt journalism, as well as advertising practices, commentary on the stock market, and performances relating to the electrical industry. Stunt performers either presented spectacularised versions of themselves in risky situations, or created and performed personas which were designed to bear risk. In doing so, they offered themselves as surrogates, who maintained cultural memories symbolised in such figures as the bridge jumper or the New Woman. Stunt performers also entered

⁹²⁸ Randy Martin, *An Empire of Indifference: American War and the Financial Logic of Risk Management* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), p.3

into ambivalent states in which they might become celebrated examples of entrepreneurial success, or scapegoated as idle, reckless and vulgar.

Particularly in the twentieth century, calling an act a stunt became a way of indicating its cultural status, as an illegitimate form of theatre, sport, politics or art. In this way, a scapegoating impulse continued to inflect stunts, which were associated with excess, commerce and lack of talent or skill (much like sentimental fiction). This study of stunts has demonstrated the intersection between such judgements and anxieties about secularisation; race, class and gender; work, skill and professionalisation; and more broadly, the abstract and contingent nature of value. One reason that stunts reward analysis is that they have sometimes preserved modes of embodiment and valorisation that have become taboo in a dominant cultural framework, such as substitution and the explicit designation of people as expendable. By enacting these modes, stunts demonstrate that in Joseph Roach's phrase, they are 'forgotten but not gone'.⁹²⁹ Stunts highlight the contradictory, illogical and often destructive aspects of a wider social framework which has deemed them frivolous and excessive.

⁹²⁹ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p.2

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