The Passing Show

Kathryn Fanelli
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The Passing Show

A Thesis Presented

by

KATHRYN FANELLI

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

February 2021

Department of Art, Architecture and Art History
The Passing Show

A Thesis Presented

by

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis could not have been produced and written without the generous direction, engagement and criticism of my advisor, Professor Shona Macdonald. I am honored to have had the opportunity to work so closely alongside her to produce this work. I wish to thank the members of my committee: Professor Susan Jahoda and Professor Robin Mandel, for the time and attention they devoted to my work. I have benefitted from Professor Jenny Vogel and Professor Young Min Moon’s positive words to proceed with the initial project idea. I appreciate support from Professor Karen Kurczynski whose confidence and faith supported me along the way. Thank you to Professor Karen Schiff at RISD who placed “Rabelais” in my hands and heart. I wish to thank MASS MoCA’s Alexandra Foradas for curating On The Edge, her insight and camaraderie was clearly felt. Amanda Tiller's friendship and commitment to the gallery installations, filming and photography elevated the experience of exhibiting at NYPOP. A sincere thank you to the College of Humanities and Fine Arts for enabling me fantastic interns, Archie Gibbs and Angela Zhou who worked alongside me from the beginning and for all the insightful conversations. Thank you, Neil Wei, for splicing our brains together electrically and to Luis Martinez for your incredible strength. I would not have been able to assemble Vimoksha without the help of Rock Hopkins who tolerated my endless questions across the universe. I would like to thank the New England Carousel Museum in Bristol, CT and the Green-Wood Historic Society’s historian, Jeff Richman in Brooklyn, NY for your historic knowledge. A warm thank you to Hollis Henderson at University Services whose literal support and vibrant team of movers always came through. A special thank you to
structural engineer Robert Leet for his generous support and belief in the project’s vision.

I received kind help from UMass University Health Services Director, Jeanne Ryan, who escorted me to x-ray for a busted ankle at closing time on a scorching Friday in July. To Brian Baldi, Jennifer Cannon, Madeleine Charney and Professor Katja Hahn D’Errico’s from the UMass Contemplative Pedagogy Working Group whose meetings greatly impacted my need for equanimity in addition to being seen and heard among contemplatives.

A special acknowledgement and thank you to author and teacher Stephen Batchelor. I would also like to thank the following artists who visited my studio and offered their time and exceptional support of *Vimoksha*: Xylor Jane, Didier William, Craig Drennan, Tom Friedman, Seph Rodney and Roni Horn. I thank poet Sarah Sousa who collaborated with me in the Emily Dickinson Poetry Festival.

Thank you to Izzy Vega for wielding ancient forklifts and blasting equipment from my birthplace. I wish to thank good friends, Bonnie MacGillivray, Dan Wessman, Pam and Danielle Rueda-Watts. A special thanks to Bob Woo whose extraordinary help would not have made *Vimoksha* see the light of day.

A sincere thanks to my brothers James and Jack Fanelli, each contributing significantly to my work. I would like to thank my mother Gina Fanelli, whose eyes taught me to see from a healing perspective at an early age. I thank my dear children, Malcolm and Annabelle, you are my best teachers. Fur friends at home whose unconditional love and comfort aided me. Finally, this adventure would have never been possible without the patience and support of my beloved husband, Andrew Olendzki, gracious and ever wise.
ABSTRACT

The Passing Show

February 2021

KATHRYN FANELLI, B.F.A., MONTSEVERRAT COLLEGE OF ART
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Directed by: Shona Macdonald

_The Passing Show_, examines the interface between contemplative practices and
the destabilizing effect of the carnivalesque. A repurposed early 20th century merry-go-
round is reconfigured as a conceptual vehicle for renewing our attention to removing
hindrances. The site-specific installation, titled _Vimoksha_, is viewed through the lens of
the radical imaginary, investigating notions of karmic inheritance through a heuristic
approach to material processes, personal history, kinetics and sound.
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

The object is never the cause of bondage or liberation; by the way things are imagined, attachment comes up or does not. It’s by unreal imagining about an object that you’re caught; when you can see that same object as it really is—you are free.

—Handsome Nanda, by Ashvaghosha

Vimoksha is the Sanskrit word for liberation from suffering, or release from the bondage of ignorance. To attain Vimoksha is to achieve complete freedom from samsāra, the cyclicality of all life as sentient beings, without wisdom, wandering continuously through the rounds of rebirth. The Passing Show is the title of the exhibition. The structure of my project hinges on the frame of the beloved merry-go-round, “the short ride” one attends in the passing show of their life. By juxtaposing the carnivalesque with the contemplative, I have reimagined Vimoksha as a vehicle, (yāna) set upon an imagined pathway, that can carry one to liberation.

This work is the culmination of a three-year arc of graduate study using elements sourced from a traveling carnival. My research starts with the circular motif as a holistic form inspired by the kasina disc, a focusing device used in meditation. Cycles and circles repeat movement, and when displaced, new processes arise and things change. The merry-go-round is chosen as a multi-dimensional focusing device, destabilized by contemplative practices that clarify the build-up of culture and habit. To free accretions, a stripping down of outmoded systems takes place, deliberately cultivating its basic, unalloyed form of bare attention. One cannot describe the search for the ‘essence’ of freedom from ignorance within physical materiality alone. Vimoksha’s transformation explores the idea of
plasticity by reconfiguring new materialities, bringing unorthodox approaches to making, adopting new perceptions, and reframing our cultural past.

In the first semester of the program I abandoned all former traditional artistic approaches as a painter, choosing the attitude of “beginner's mind.” Instead of gathering knowledge, a beginner's mind is the state of a clear mind from which you can hear what you already know. I blended this curiosity with the cultivating aspects of contemplation, along with my personal history growing up in a traveling carnival, and structured it as a problem-solving opportunity, a wellspring that draws out new meanings and narratives from the inside out.

There are many steps and layered actions to uncover embedded bodily memories, whether human or machine, and they are intertwined. The initial movements started with locating the center points of self, place, objects and practices and then verticalizing the forms that emerged. Circle centers rose into pillar stacks that disappear; faceted mirror puzzles that trace the fracturing of illusion into a luminous matrix of reconfigured electric lights; polishing aluminum horses, not to make them jewel-like but rather, as a continuation of awareness practice in the sense of cultivating the mind. Finally, landing as a fully formed collection of elements unified by the circle motif balanced by a center pole, mirrors, lights and horses all set in perpetual motion, Vimoksha invites us to encounter the redirection and refashioning force of a combined life/work/spiritual practice through the repurposing of a kiddie-sized merry-go-round manufactured in 1924.
Chapter 2: CONTEMPLATIVE

To begin always anew, to make, to reconstruct, and to not spoil, to refuse to bureaucratize the mind, to understand and to live life as a process—live to become.

—Paulo Freire

As a meditator and yoga practitioner, contemplative practices and metacognition help balance mind, body and spirit. They are also folded into my work as a means of creative problem solving. Contemplative practices that are utilized creatively also act as “a technique for recuperating the ritual sources of art.” Meditation (samādhi) is the inner processing tool that serves to sculpt and shape human experience. By slowing down our awareness, the sensate, perceptual world becomes magnified, allowing us to see differently. The neologism, imagnification, clarifies these combined elements.

Imagnification joins the deep attention of mind and body while in active relationship with subtle forms of otherness. In considering the work of social philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, imagination is not the power to represent, as conceptualized by Kant, but the power to present, to bring into being. Castoriadis dissolves the conceptual break between imagination and reality. A key concept tying Castoriadis to contemplative practice is the ‘radical imaginary’. It is precisely this generative function of the imagination that makes

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2 “Imagnification” is a term first used by Kathryn Fanelli, curriculum for Drawing Composition at UMass-Amherst Fall 2018, MFA Thesis, *The Passing Show*.
it ‘radical’—it is a crucial yet often overlooked role in the development of new structures, institutions and innovations. It is the flux of the social-historical that brings the ‘social imaginary’, or the institutional society into being. An example of this is Helena Mandlová, a 12-year-old girl imprisoned at Theresienstadt, a concentration camp near Prague, who made a landscape collage using office stationery. The cut white paper collage shows upside down text, an enumeration of transports to Auschwitz. The filing papers turn into a starry night, pointed mountains and vegetal mounds glued on red paper. For a moment, “Helena had cleansed the sheet of its moral dirt. She had made art.”

The following research projects in this chapter describe the evolution of contemplative practices and artistic processes, how they overlap and culminate into the final thesis project, titled *Vimoksha*.

**IMAGINE WISDOM**

My first project set the stage for the emergent theme of the circle. Works for the NYPOP exhibition, titled, “To From” were made in transit. This was the beginning of a series of ‘operatives’—I chose a prompt from my car radio en route to New York involving seeking solutions to gun violence. In the same moment I was driving near the Dakota building where John Lennon was shot and killed in 1980 and I made my way to the Imagine Peace memorial that Yoko Ono installed in 1985 at Central Park. Due to high visitations during daylight hours, I took a few midnight trips to Strawberry Fields—minus

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5 Simon Schama (2018) *From the Darkness: Simon Schama on human adversity and the origins of great art*, myFT, [https://www.ft.com/content/00031e3c-ff87-11e7-9650-9c0ad2d7c5b5](https://www.ft.com/content/00031e3c-ff87-11e7-9650-9c0ad2d7c5b5)
the crowds—and made several rubbings of the 10-foot diameter mosaic circle using a variety of papers and muslin cloth. The sections of rubbings were brought to the studio, layered, and shot through with a bb gun, opening up a 1.5” diameter hole in the center revealing the word *wisdom* printed underneath in pale letters. The mosaic pattern is code-like, barely revealing the visibility of the word IMAGINE. The impossibility of actually resolving gun violence is implied. However, the simultaneous events between the gun violence prompt I was thinking about at that moment, my physical proximity to the Dakota, and my memory of the December 8, 1980 announcement of Lennon’s attack, combined all at once, acted as threaded cues to reflect upon. I continued the sequence of directives by visiting the aftermath and made multiple rubbings of the mosaic, a permanent transfer of that record. The altered rubbing, now a frottage, becomes an original image, thus reframing it’s meaning. Acting reflectively vs. reactively is a tool to train the reflective response to impulse and not just to the impulse itself.

An interesting circuitous link to Ono’s memorial as a reflexive act links to the Zen Buddhist teachings on the concept of non-self, in which we are ceaselessly in the process of becoming. Ono invites us to picture positive change for all for a brief moment. This concept connects to D.T. Suzuki’s lectures on Zen which John Cage and Yoko Ono attended at Columbia University; both were heavily influenced by Zen and the mix of spiritual practice and art making. Ono and Cage were separately involved and aware of one another in a group of artists during the Chambers Street loft happenings, a vibrant collection of performers, participants, and friends during the late 1950’s. The Cageian principle of indeterminacy also appears throughout Ono’s conceptual works, still visible
in the public memorial mosaic at Strawberry Fields. *Imagine Wisdom* is an out-cropping formed from the concatenation of artists merging spiritual philosophy with art making.

Author Kay Larson reiterates Cage’s words, “*Suffering builds character and impels you to penetrate life’s secrets.*” Seeking insight may lead to the aspiration of truth, but at the same time it has to spring from practical and intellectual engagement within formal study. Artistic practice, where multiple distant overlapping actions occur as *Imagine Wisdom* does, stimulates visuospatial problem solving. I was uncomfortable and a little scared doing this (midnights in Central Park). Contending with the challenges I set up, analyzing the history, considering the space I was in, visually producing a rubbing in wind, the detail structure failing sometimes (wrong tools) and various unplanned conditions springing forth (addicts, hustlers, the homeless), all juxtaposed with keeping the mind relaxed and contemplative. All of which is good fertilizer for mindful adventurers reincorporating an image. In Maurice Blanchot’s *Two Versions of the Imaginary*, he echoes a premise which describes the formidable resource of “the image becoming the object’s aftermath.” *Imagine Wisdom*’s imprint not only describes the displaced mark of Strawberry Fields, it is in the distance (physical or temporal) that is at the heart of the piece. It becomes a thing appearing as disappeared, presence in absence, appearing as disappeared. “It is the return of what does not come back.” *Vimoksha* considers the remoteness of distance in its own “aftermath” in terms of its long physical history.

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CIRCLE PAINTINGS

Determining the location of an object's true center became an obsessive pursuit I practiced for weeks using a plumb bob. During this time, I was in a live video dialog exchange with Stephen Batchelor, author, teacher, artist and secular Buddhist scholar. I wanted his perspective on where contemplative art takes place in his personal practices. Early in the conversation, he noticed the stack of wooden circle painting supports I made in the background and asked if they were kasinas. Kasinas are meditation discs which focus the mind in order to keep it from drifting, and it was my first time hearing about them. In a way, I had been meditating on the center points of the wooden circle panels I produced at the time. The circle paintings involved color relationships that were chosen by noticing optical phenomena and not by aesthetically made choices. In the middle of a disc, a color would appear long enough for me to study and remember it. I duplicated the color by mixing paints and directly applying to where I saw it while spinning on a potter’s wheel. After some moments another color seen by the eye would appear next to the first and that was matched and applied. This process was repeated until a totality of concentric bands formed on the panel like a target. These “chroma study” practices dealt with optical phenomena called after-image or simultaneous contrast. “The fact that the after-image is a psycho-physiological phenomenon should prove that no normal eye, not even the most trained one, is foolproof against color deception.”9 These focusing kasinas suggest an illusory perceptual experience through color interaction but are actually produced without any deception to self or other. Retinal fatigue causes complementary colors to be seen in afterimages. The analysis and application of these color bands is induced by the hypnotic

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motion of the turning wheel, increasing the brain’s perceptive capacity while turning down the conceptual function.

I chose a potter's wheel because of its anti-prescriptive use as a painting tool, to exercise independent thinking and welcome a new approach. Carnivalesque behavior is about upending norms, rules and dominant forms. I was not aware of this subconscious carnival attitude at the time and found it unexpectedly aided me with the insight that when one part of the brain is inactive another part becomes switched on. One observation in working this way was that it helped me get ’my ego self” out of the way. In other words, we can participate in phenomena without intentionally dictating where it’s going. Things happen on their own while we are engaged and not because of our engagement—follow its lead but pay attention to every step of the way. This is an important aspect of material based contemplative practices, and it encourages objective awareness. This kind of awareness practice is not dissimilar to moment to moment vipassanā (insight) meditation.

5. K. Fanelli, kasinas, 2018, acrylic on wood.
SWEET IMPERMANENCE

Once I established a relationship to “center” in the circle paintings, I continued to embrace the struggles and challenges of new material territories as a form of practice in itself. I began to welcome other unorthodox tool applications and uses which became a direction in my research. The three-year program itself resembled a circle and I thought of work in terms of growth cycles, time progressions, and death. Following these creative leads was instinctive.

In another project, I borrowed a cotton candy machine (also a circle form with a center that whips out sugar fibers) and treated the edible coloring in a painterly manner. I began with the familiar movements of laboring at the carnival, repeating them as prostrations for mantra, filling the room with hanks of cotton candy and casting piece after piece into multiple cylindrical segments. The segments were stacked, compressed and paddled into pillars six and ten feet high, thereby verticalizing the center into seemingly giant core samples of human scale. These were then mounted on a metal pole (spine) and screwed into white kasinas as a supportive base. Made from spun sugar, the pillars were unstable constructions indicating the labor of carefully built impermanent structures. Furthermore, the materiality suggests the ‘sugar-coated’ figure-of-speech of our inherited consumer society, with all of its quick fixes and attendant diminishing returns. The colors began in fat, cottonty, baby soft hues, becoming increasingly vibrant the longer they stood, and ended in a gravelly, crumbly pile, somehow beautiful. Two vertical constructions were exhibited at six and nine feet. The largest sugar pillar was laid down and turned into a skin-sloughing ouroboros. Visionary Sugar, is a 30’ long, 15’
diameter circle balanced above the floor by a trail of bricks with an open center in which to sit or stand. Both impermanent sculptures were installed in the LEG Gallery, Studio Arts Building in 2018 for my first-year review.

WHITEX HORSE

When I was 11 years old, I learned to paint merry-go-round horses in the wintertime at my father's workshop. I never had the experience of removing decades-old paint on a carnival ride until I endeavored on the next project, which was an impossibility due to the time limitations and harsh treatments needed for such an undertaking. The image below shows the second of two horses that I attempted to remove the skins of history from. The first horse was wood carved, and I don’t believe ever stripped of paint. After consulting with a restorer, it would take a minimum of six months of treatments to release its former paint layers (too many to count). The second attempt was more successful, due to the newer body of a cast polyethylene shell which responded to a lighter treatment. I erased its former identity as a war horse with a high-pressure wash after lifting the paint. I then painted it white using a child's fist-held paint brush and a chalky, pudding-like tempera. It is balanced between the floor and ceiling by a steel pole as the axis and is titled From the Kingdom of Childhood. The holographic paper beams lift the specter from below, releasing it in a galloping gesture from the confines of its collective circle. It is an end-of-world symbol signifying the transition from the exhilaration of the lay world, in a static pose grounded above and below, suggesting the soul leaving the phantasmic world. The title suggests the transient nature of youth, however, the dynamic air-borne legs are frozen in discontinuity, contradicting its phantom nature as well as the ultimately distorting function of memory. This sculpture was included in the November 2018, “Alter/Altar” exhibit, at Herter Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
NET OF GEMS

Indra’s Net describes the Buddhist concept of interdependence, (*pratītyasamutpāda*). The *pratītyasamutpāda* ontological principle in Buddhism is applied not only to explain the nature and existence of matter and empirically observed phenomenon, but also to the nature and existence of life itself. The vision is described as a vast net of multi-faceted gems, each reflecting and illuminating every other, ad infinitum. The circuit design I produced for my work *Net of Gems* pushes the idea further. I translated line drawing studies of bioluminescent mycelium, the largest known terrestrial network of organisms. Several spools of electrical wiring were cut and stripped into various lengths and interconnected in a framework to match the drawing. Identifying where the cross wiring intersected was not only confusing to keep track of, it was dangerous work. A practice of focused attention to safety, memory and coding was required to problem-solve this artwork. Every connection is dependent upon the other to receive power in a safe manner, analogous to meandering streets mapped out or the human nervous system. Dozens of odd and obsolete carnival light bulbs were repurposed from a carnival ride graveyard, and some were purchased locally. Instead of repeating illusions through the camouflage of reflectivity, it discharges the ‘light of radiant truth’ evidenced through the mutual support by an electrical source.
**MIRRORLAND**

*Mirrorland* is a 36” x 39” wall relief. It is a laser-cut mirrored plexiglass tracing of an imagined landscape situated in archaeologist Robert Johnston’s phrase, “*landscape is holistic, temporally complex, and bound up in material culture, architecture, ecology, memories, narratives and cosmologies.*”\(^{10}\) Johnston goes on to posit that in theory, ‘the paradox of landscape’ aspires to a totality of human experience, but in practice it suppresses its complexity.

*Mirrorland* proposes a multidisciplinary approach by considering the karmic notion of epigenetics as an inherited landscape. The term epigenetics is used to describe any modification of cellular alterations in the DNA sequence that affects gene expression. The causes of change may result from external or environmental factors that become heritable. Landscape archaeology evidences a similar genesis. We see the relationship between the earth’s body altered from the ancient past to the devastating consequences resulting in the current global climate crisis. It is a kind of environmental karma we are all paying for, due to the abusive treatment to which our ancestors and ourselves collectively contributed.

New archeological technologies that analyze excavations can now reveal even more complex scarifications of early settlements. This offers us a modern way of seeing more clearly into our past relationships to land, culture, humanity, etc. A multi-dimensional view allows for an ‘environmental understanding’ we can fully take in.

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How closely might we examine what our personal inherited memories are, as *Mirrorland* invites us to do in a clear, reflective, although refracted, way. *Mirrorland* attempts to awaken the viewer into deeper self-reflection, an internal pathfinding made visible in our shifting image.

Chapter 3: CARNIVALESQUE

The carnival world met me at birth, and it is the medium from which I am rooted. Rhode Island School of Design Professor Karen Schiff, with whom I studied independently for a semester, recommended the book *Rabelais and His World*. I discovered I had an affinity with Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin and his writings on the “carnivalesque.” This text has been an influential conduit for my final work. Bakhtin expands the breadth of the carnival worldview with the metaphysical understanding of carnival disorder as a “moment of transfer.”

“Moment of transfer” contains dialogic energy—Vimoksha’s mirrors gaze back at us. The collective riders actively watch themselves witnessing each other's experience. Proper orientation of the body at carnivals requires that we dislocate ourselves from a single-point perspective. I must be liberated from the thought that the comfortable perspective on things from *my* body is the only perspective that is real.

The carnivalesque is rooted in both the individual and collective levels of the psyche and is complex in its spectrum of meaning. In medieval carnival traditions there was an ethos regarding the barriers of hierarchy, such as assumed truths, class, profession, age and economic background, which was subverted in favor of ‘joyful relativity’ from participation in the festival. It created a situation in which diverse voices are heard and interact, breaking down conventions and enabling genuine dialogue. A technique for ‘social weaving’, it offers new perspectives and a new order of things by

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showing the commonalities in nature. Its invitation as a living festival, among others, creates feelings of immanence and unity by way of bodily participation in the potentiality of another world. Carnival bridges the gap between holism and the imperative to refuse authority: “it absorbs its authoritarian other in a way which destroys the threat it poses.”

The recuperative power of the carnivalesque has been in decline since the eighteenth century and has turned into the music festivals and state holidays of today. However, Bakhtin believed the carnival principle is indestructible. The carnivalesque is one part of the inspiration for Vimoksha which also includes the investigation of life in a traveling carnival and the transgression of the abstracted carnival body as a repurposed merry-go-round. The materiality of the merry-go-round body is seen as transgressing and outgrowing its own limits by shedding itself. This is contrasted with the counterposing of the contemplative. There is also a vision of time involved with treatments of resurfacing towards new and future sites of regeneration and abundance.

French literary theorist Julia Kristeva argues that carnival is a transgression, that it “establishes its own law.” In the case of Vimoksha, for nine months I endeavored through all the proper channels to site the project without success. The way I found a proper exhibition site was to go beyond the limits prescribed to me by creating an exchange of voices in collaboration with a mix of insiders and outsiders. In the spirit of

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carnival as transgressive, there is a second voice, an unofficial one that up-ends, “it asserts and denies, it buries and revives.”  

*Vimoksha’s* first transgressive move to free the action step was an extraordinarily difficult undertaking. I removed the merry-go-round from its rational, fixed position in the family amusement business and carnival midway and placed it within the structure of an institutionalized setting for higher learning.

The second-floor atrium in the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Studio Arts Building turned out to be the perfect carnivalesque, Dostoevskian threshold site for *Vimoksha* to transgress. Located at the familial heart of the Art and Humanities department, it is also a transition space for speculation in which we literally “pass through.” The union between the contemplative and carnivalesque mirrors Dostoevsky’s use of ‘carnivalization’ here. It encompasses both poles of becoming, end/beginning, old/new, create/destroy and so forth. All decisive encounters between people, consciousness with consciousness, always take place in Dostoevsky’s novels “for the last time” (current transitions of the Covid crisis), they take place in carnival-mystery play…

“we are two beings and have come together in infinity...for the last time in the world. Drop your tone and speak like a human being! Speak, if only for once in your life, with the voice of a man.”

*Vimoksha* is no longer a mechanical carnival ride but a kinetic installation imbued with new meaning.

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Bakhtin’s carnival is not contemplated, strictly speaking, and not even performed; its participants live in it by its laws, that is, they live a carnivalistic life. To some extent “life turned inside out” is “the reverse side of the world” (monde à l’envers). Dostoevsky’s literary usage weds and combines the sacred with the profane, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid. Carnivalistic categories are not abstract thoughts about equality and freedom or the interrelatedness of all things, they are played out in concrete sensuous ritual-pageant experiences in the form of life itself. It may seem strange to juxtapose the contemplative with the carnivalesque. But in fact, the association is profoundly appropriate. Both the life of monastic contemplatives and of carnival people, for all their differences in content, are equally “life taken out of life,” contextually removed from common, ordinary affairs.
Chapter 4: ON WITH THE SHOW

I was born into a traveling carnival as the youngest in a family of nine. It began when my father cobbled together a little popcorn wagon in 1956 at age 18 to supplement the family income on weekends. The ancestry on both sides of my family originate from the Mezzogiorno region, in the Southern half of Italy. My maternal grandparents came from a 9,000 year old Neolithic settlement: a haunting district known as the Sassi (Italian for the “stones”), where some 1,500 cave dwellings honeycomb the flanks of a steep ravine.16 Southern Italy’s long history of poverty, economic neglect, isolation from the industrial north, foreign domination and government corruption left a detrimental mark on subsequent generations. Although I have spent time in Italy, neither of my parents had an interest in connecting with their roots due to that stated above. Both of them grew up with serious hardships and were extremely grateful to be Americans with opportunity. My father, John, was a self-taught, ambitious workaholic, and he ultimately grew the Fanelli Amusement Company from a collection of used kiddie rides he refurbished, accumulating enough larger rides to complete an entire midway furnished with custom built games and concession stands. Due to their large, mobile structures and dynamic kinetic functions in which we are collectively strapped in, mechanical amusement rides are powerful interrupters of physical and somatic space. The hierarchical fields are leveled in our encounters and engagements with the varieties of sharp, wild tumbles and unpredictable thrills, along with games of skill and chance, all consciously

conjured illusions—not unlike the game of life in a single dose, where a minute is equal to years.

While working in the carnival business as children, we were unpaid until the age of 18 or so. Its season ran from April to October. We ‘played’ shows all over the Northeastern United States, up to the border of Canada, in liminal landscapes, urban environments, fields, the oceanside, islands, churchyards, schools and century-old state fairgrounds. Carnivals coming to town primarily served as a folk-scene for townspeople from all economic backgrounds. Over the decades our show included occasional travels and bookings with other carnivals, small circuses, artisans, animals, burlesque performers, and independent game and concession owners. I often wandered through these seductive environments during work breaks unsupervised. It wasn’t just the arresting features of spectacle one noticed, it was the destabilized public that presented itself as a kind of unscripted living theater.

It was not considered unusual for the oldest child at age eleven to be left in charge of an entire show by themselves. Education and leisure were frowned upon because they were viewed as luxuries afforded by the rich. Hard work earned a badge of honor and money awarded social status. My three brothers were groomed to take over the family business while we four sisters were cast in the roles of providing supportive labor. The popcorn trailer, as it was then called, was my primary workstation. As a small child my bed was a simple shelf near the floor used to store bags of sugar. Above was a countertop where people paid for cotton candy, popcorn, snow cones and candy apples. I started
counter service at age eight, when I could do mental math for customers. By age eleven I worked game “joints” such as the gun gallery, water-race game, cat rack, ring-a-bottle, skee-ball, balloon-dart, arcades, horse race and basketball games. Ticket booth jobs were coveted because sitting in an enclosed space, quieter and separated by a glass window, was far more tolerable than being constantly exposed to the crowds.

The first third of my life was devoted to this world of wonder. Forever etched into my memory are the smells of vanilla pink cotton candy, popcorn, and cigarette smoke, mixed with the sounds of shrieking voices, merry-go-round music, ringing bells, popping balloons, rumbling generators, striped canvas cloth and multitudes of faces and hands. A common weekly scene: crouching on the ground outside my trailer the last night of a show, sticky and aching, scrubbing sugar off an aluminum cotton candy bowl with hot water at 2am. I would stare at the week’s accumulated litter, hammers wailing, lights throbbing, tinnitus resulting from the noisy crowds, and feel my body astral project from exhaustion. A few stragglers would shuffle by, usually young mothers with dirty faced kids, grateful that I gave away what was unsold.

In North Central Massachusetts it was expected for children to work while in high school, and many received academic credit for working half of each school day. We were not a family who vacationed, our enjoyment came by way of Catholic religious observations and the traditions of seasonal foods associated with them. We always grew food, even when we travelled. My neighborhood was called “The Patch.” All Italian
immigrants kept gardens and a patchwork design formed over the landscape into a rolling blanket of vegetable and flower gardens, a few farm animals, garages, sheds, cars and carnival rides.\textsuperscript{17} This strong work ethic instilled a belief that if you wanted something you would have to figure a way to make it yourself. Due to the unrelenting work/lifestyle, constant disruptions and restrictions prevented me from enjoying the freedoms most children have. The moments alone I did have were packed with desperate imaginings. I found joy in the immediate accessibility of the mind's ability to imagine and the hands ability to draw and record. This proved to be a powerful source of creativity: portable, free and self-generated. This practice of inventiveness developed into a method for problem solving that is lifelong. Disruption puts an artist in unpromising territory, yet when forced to start somewhere new the clichés can be replaced with moments of magic.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{quote}
There is a need for socially sanctioned activities which are the social, outward equivalents of dreaming.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

There was an unspoken understanding within our family that because we all worked in the amusement business, providing enjoyment for the public, our personal joy should derive entirely from this exchange. For many years the logo \textit{We Take Pride in Your Pleasure} was printed on trucks, letterheads, doors and business cards as a constant reminder, along with \textit{Fanelli Funtime Shows}. The hallucinatory power needed to draw the public into the setting of a ‘surrealist funhouse’ is suggested by \textit{Vimoksha’s} invitation to discover the yet unseen and to feel the yet not experienced.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[18] Tim Harford, \textit{Messy}, Riverhead, 2016
\item[19] Christopher Alexander et. al (1977) \textit{A Pattern Language}, Oxford University Press, p. 299
\end{footnotes}
Chapter 5: MIRROR GO ROUND

The golden age of carousels lasted fifty years, from 1880-1930. During this period there were two or three thousand in the world. Today, there are 150. The distinction between a carousel and a merry-go-round is its portability and level of opulence. Carousels are made as permanent installations, are often housed, and are much larger in size and more complex in adornment.

Merry-go-rounds went into greater production around the time of the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, which propelled the birth of the traveling carnival in the United States. Merry-go-rounds are built more compactly and are designed for collapsibility and rigorous use. You see this in Vimoksha’s horses, whose legs are compressed in a galloping posture not touching the ground, vs. a standing pose found with the statuesque lead horses on a carousel. On a merry-go-round the treatment of the horse’s mane is contained, wrapped around the neck, not wildly flowing outward as you would find in carved carousel wooden horses. The ears are smaller and pressed forward in an expression of anticipation. There are no deep reliefs in the aluminum casting, no fanciful trappings or elaborate embellishments that can break off. They are designed for durability and portability, and were cheaper to manufacture during their time of demand. Carousels became increasingly opulent constructions when, with industrialization and increased economic solvency, the public developed a greater taste for spectacle. A wave of immigrants from 1870-1910 brought skilled craftsmen from all over Europe to America’s shores. Unable to find employment in their fields of furniture carving and architectural woodworking, many
found employment in New York’s booming amusement industry that flourished in the Coney Island neighborhoods where *Vimoksha* was manufactured.

The master carvers were often trained sculptors with an infatuation with cavalry. There was a dedication to realism in the development of the early carousel. "*Carosello*" was a 17th century Italian word meaning “little war.” Early accounts describe contests between Arabian horsemen, eventually adopted by Spanish crusaders and then carried throughout Europe. The French royalty changed the game into a jousting fest using a lance to “spear the brass ring,” which was seen later on in “catch the brass ring” carousels.

The 1924 merry-go-round procured for *Vimoksha* was built by the former W.F. Mangels Co. of Coney Island, Brooklyn, N.Y. William Fredrick Mangels was a German immigrant who came to the United States in 1883 and founded his company in 1890. In 1907 he introduced an improved galloping mechanism for carousels, which is said to have led to the later development of “jumping” horses. His company began carousel production in 1910.

In 2012, at my father’s request, my brother retrieved the Mangels from the New England Carousel Museum in Bristol, CT, donated by Unilever in New York, where it was stored in wooden crates needing removal. Junky and unwanted, it was left outside in the rain, rotting the wood, until it was eventually stored inside. A few years later, I came across the nine strange, large crates and saw the small horses inside. They were caked with very old, greasy and rusted filth, and had white paint glopped over them.
Old merry-go-rounds have long and mysterious histories that are difficult to trace. Five years later, in the week after applying to graduate school, I had a dream, a harbinger perhaps, where I walked toward a large wooden crate in the back of a room. I looked inside and found a family of white animals living quietly inside and they startled me. A woman was there, and she told me the ghost horses were coming in and I should obtain one.
Chapter 6: RESURFACING

During the era the Mangels was in production, there was an increasing public demand for extravaganzas of fantasy created by vivid scenic painting, exuberant scrollwork, carved Baroque dream images, plush upholstery, engraved mirrors, barley-sugar brass work, gaudy hues and gilt, all reflecting celebration of the carnivalesque. At Clacton Pier in England, showman Frederick Savage engineered carousels into citadels of popular fantasy. An account from the 1884 World Exposition in New Orleans describes this seemingly insatiable demand for spectacle during the golden age of carousels:

It took a cowboy to ride it and it beats all that people were so crazy to ride that we had a devil of a time to keep them from overloading the machine which had 24 prancing horses and four chariots. Electric lights were undreamed of so we lighted the machine with gasoline torches which smoked, filling the canvas top with gasoline fumes. Then too, there was a steam engine and the boiler that burned soft coal generating about as much smoke as it did steam. When the wind blew the smoke toward the machine, some of the people who had paid a perfectly good nickel to ride, were a sweet looking sight. Believe me the public wouldn’t stand for that now-a-days. Everything’s got to be gingerbread or you don’t get their money.

—Bert Stickney recalled in 1924.

Vimoksha’s skin was entirely sand and soda blasted down to the metal and wood structure. It was stripped of decades old built-up paint film, like layers of forgetting and unknowing holding it captive. It was never a lavishly ornate ride; my belief is that its first uses were on streets of New York boroughs enjoyed by children under age 6. The large paint chips I collected resembled thick bandaged scabs wanting to be freed from the sleep of the human condition. The pronounced artificiality of the badly peeling maquillage

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debunks practices of the ‘all the world’s a stage’ interior monologue. As I sought solutions for the non-stop stream of challenges I encountered, such as funding for its reconstruction, safety measures, engineering and design strategies, I realized they were all extensions of the same problem: my ignorance and the desire to be freed from it by meeting face to face with the spirit of Vimoksha itself. Each facet of transforming this merry-go-round required a new lesson every step of the way, from hauling it myself on a flatbed trailer across counties, to learning about metallurgy, translating outdated schematics, crushing my ankle, rejection from committees, cross country phone calls, pre-WW2 electrical design, and the list goes on. Fear was a formidable ally, as was the collaboration between the mutually supportive efforts of others who believed in the project and helped make it possible. In line with Foucault’s stripping nude of existence, 
\textit{mise à nu de l’existence},\textsuperscript{22} it calls attention to the anti-mimetic direction Vimoksha takes by shedding its trappings. The cast aluminum horses show their factory seams, identifying roman numeral engravings in the flooring and iron work as a bare construct.

The two wooden chariots were not completely removed of paint, declaring their former lives in red and white paint with the addition of plexiglass mirrors. Foucault suggests that instead of viewing knowledge solely as the result of a subject’s activity, in this case a traveling merry-go-round, one could document the process which invested the body and determine the forms of knowledge to which it was subject. The decades of public handling and riding warrant a collective authorship to its revealed marks. This textural concern reflects processes apparent in *vipassanā* meditation where the focus of attention is placed on internal conditions and external phenomena. The overlapping of direct experience, whether through insight meditation or evincing materiality, can also be a source of wonder as well as labor.

The interior mechanisms that turn the merry-go-round are traditionally enclosed by stationary mirrors and the presence of a musical fairground band organ. *Vimoksha* is without these florid facades and instead places emphasis on the stability, strength and power of the unmoving center pole around which everything spins, plainly demystifying its workings. The slow, counterclockwise, kinetic movement that I manually spin with bodily force audibly jangles from the metallic clinking of gears turning cogs, horses rising and falling, all working in interdependent unison. The umbrella-like skeleton above is a collection of sweep rods, cross braces and bushings that were rust-proofed to protect them from decomposing further. There is no protective canopy or skirting. The platform reveals lifted wood grain, echoing its scars from the feet of thousands of children once clamoring aboard.
The three abreast, 24 horse gallopers in *Vimoksha* are hand polished to a pale, silvery luster. Traditional carousel horses are laden with various historic accoutrements for military pageantry and it can take up to 30 coats of paint to fill the fine details. Removal of these surfaces were the most time-consuming part of the project. I liken this act of labor, to cleansing and clearing the clouds of hindrances which is part of my meditative practice. The feeling of monochrome simplicity resides in the sculpture to describe its cryptic complexity. Time and grime are benign collaborators. I chose to keep visible remnants of its past to serve as a reminder for the striving of a wounded, unhealed burden, liberated from former meanings.


Chapter 7: THE SPECTACLE OF THE PASSAGE

We’re simply thrown into a condition of awe or wonder. My sense is that Buddhism is not concerned at all with trying to say what that overwhelming sense of awe or wonder is about. What it’s interested in doing is cultivating certain forms of practice that actually make us more receptive to that kind of experience.

—Stephen Batchelor *After Buddhism*

I redesigned the electrical wiring to illuminate 180 LED carousel bulbs for the ‘crestings’—the upper decorative outside parts of a merry-go-round. Fabricated mirrored plexiglass remnants were used inside the rounding boards and on the shields designed through Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop. Traditionally, these crestings are painted with absurdist and sublime themes, which have been replaced with two new interpretations. Ten rounding boards hint at a linear eye shape derived from an ornate hand carving off an E.J. Morris carousel built in 1900. The remodeled baroque styling was greatly reduced, dematerializing into the mirror. The circular shields sit between the rounding boards encircled by light bulbs. On each shield there is a mirrored decagonal aperture opening at increasing diameters. When *Vimoksha* turns, it’s upper crestings resemble a praxinoscope animation. This movement tracks the expansion and contraction of apertures mimicking the act of opening and closing lenses of light. Mirrors are an integral part of carousel design, giving them a kaleidoscopic dimensionality that reflects and fractures anyone who comes into its proximity. Partaking in the experience of *Vimoksha* as a shimmering installation invites contemplation of an otherworldly state of the sublime which is not just transcendent but conjures the wonder of the world.


Charles Ray’s 1990 Revolution, Counter Revolution, a merry-go-round removed from its original context, assumes new meaning as a sculpture. The platform turns in one direction while the horses turn in the opposite direction, thus subverting this childhood symbol from one of dreaming into one of futility. As the title suggests, revolution is ultimately contradicted by the counter revolution with unsettling results; despite the hallucinatory space where time seems to be standing still, it calls the idea of “self-cancellation” into question. It “evinces the double game of ‘critical art’ while still capitalizing on it.” 23 Vimoksha, on the other hand, looks beyond the removed surface embellishments associated with traditional enchantments and replaces them with a new model of contemplation that entails a specific mediation—the production of awareness.

Vimoksha and its horses move in a counterclockwise direction, as do all carousels in the United States. In England they move clockwise, allowing the horses to be mounted from the left side. Years ago, health officers ensured that all carnival merry-go-rounds were run only in the counterclockwise direction for its health benefits. The superior vena-cava collects deoxygenated blood to the heart aided by heart suction, and the blood therefore moves through the heart from left to right. Centrifugal force due to counterclockwise movement helps this suction, while if we run clockwise the centrifugal force impedes suction and we tire more easily. Racing tracks, animal shows in circuses, and bullock-drawn pelt on wheels, all have mostly only left turns. Merry-go-rounds invite the community into its multiplicities and are not ‘solitary’ experiences. A joined spectacle, we are all equal and become temporarily expanded by the spontaneous

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23 Jacques Rancière, (2009), The Emancipated Spectator, Verso, p. 76.
collaboration of strangers; it is ultimately an empowering interactive experience between the ‘being apart’ from the work and the ‘being together’ of a new community by fashioning new social bonds.

Chapter 8: VIMOKSHA

This is peace, this is exquisite—the resolution of all fabrications; the relinquishment of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; Unbinding.

—Anguttara Nikāya

The investigative component in developing Vimoksha took me down unlikely parallel roads. The marriage between the carnivalesque and the contemplative is multifarious. Life is as much about entropy and the centrifugal as it is about order and the centripetal: Imperviousness to order provides the room for new creative directions and the possibility that defines us as human “becomings.” I found contemplative and intellectual kinship in feminist theorist Karen Barad’s concept of “agential realism” which proposes new materials theories through transdisciplinary inquiry. Vimoksha considers Barad’s concept of “intra-action,” i.e., “the mutual constitution of entangled agencies,” a holistic, transdisciplinary participatory event within emerging contemplative art and art educational practices.

Vimoksha’s transformation is initially viewed as an archive of time, witnessed through an “epigenetic layer” of inherited materiality subjected to the resetting of designated programs. The ‘reset’ was made through a series of recoveries, removals, reconfigurations, redesigns, additions and subtractions. Its evolution is akin to the process of “adaptive radiation,” a biological term used to describe the process of diversification.

from an ancestor into new forms through the advent of changes in environment, resources, or opportunities. “Adaptive radiation” is the result of the destabilizing effect of the carnivalesque. Provocations in cultural adaptations redirect the mainstream, disrupting the same repetitive pattern, lighting it up, and expressing it, not with an answer or replacement, but with a stimulus to reflect, see, and take notice on multiple levels. To quote poet Kenneth Rexroth, “The function of the artist is the revelation of reality in process, permanence in change, the place of value in this world of facts. His duty is to keep open the channels of contemplation and to discover new ones. His role is purely revelatory.”

In this realm of no ends, *Vimoksha*’s intention is to instruct, to act upon the world. It is a rotating beacon, a signpost occupying a liminal position between the order of knowing and the catastrophe of becoming. *Vimoksha* speaks as an artistic language transposed through the lens of the carnivalesque and extrapolated from contemplative criticality. Contemplative seeing requires no journey to exotic places, only to the matters directly in our hands and at our fingertips. *Vimoksha* authenticates seemingly endless cycles of birth, death, joy, fear, growth and stasis. Its full existence, including its present manifestation, forms a kaleidoscopic, omniscient perspective. It carries within its material body almost ten decades of history as a traveling apparatus for children to congregate. It is now a vehicle reconnecting us to a lost collective memory as the incarnation of a new collective intentionality, a new dawn of decision.

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IMAGE OF THE ARTIST AT WORK