

A Question Concerning the Visible

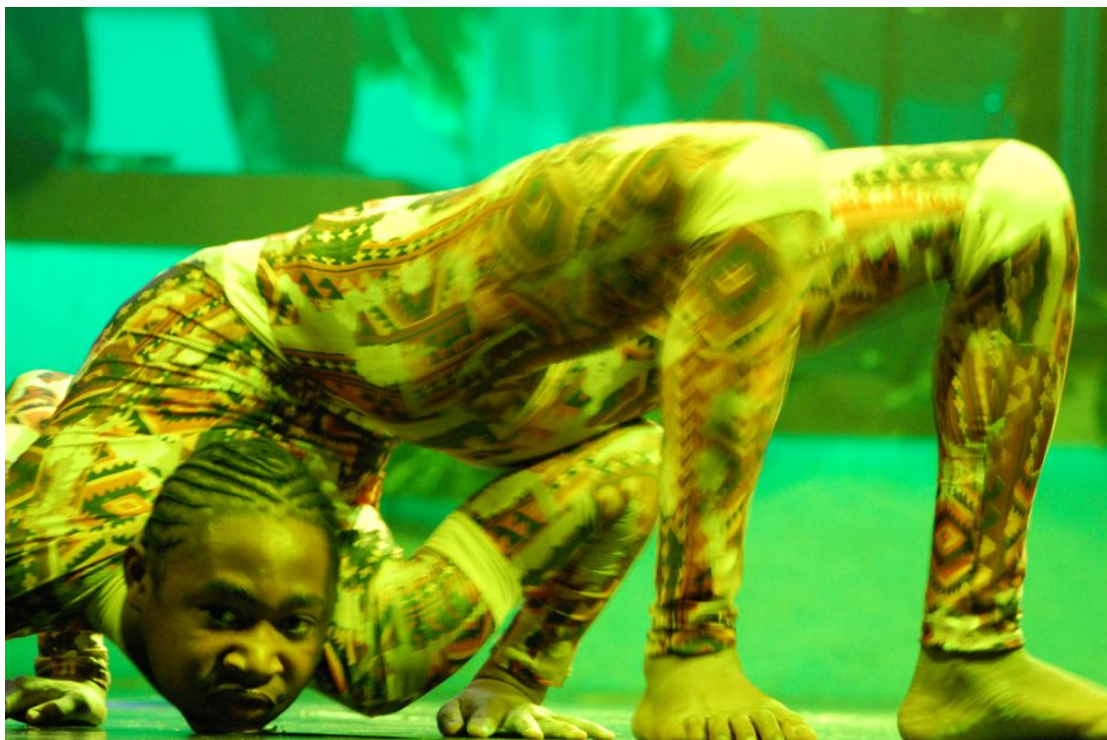
By Jessica Kendall (SOAS, University of London)

ABSTRACT: How do we know about the Other?

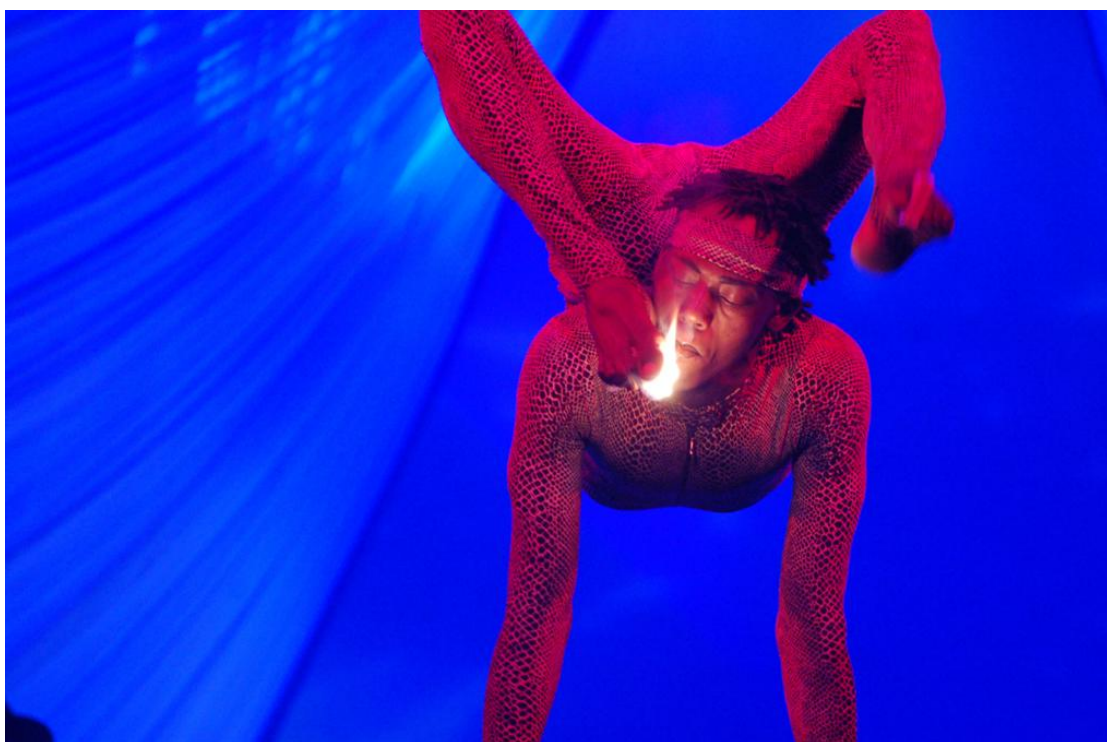
Photographs



Jendaya had seen L'Ultimo Bacio at least five times.



Whenever he could find an excuse, Amri wore a tuxedo.



Zawadi only had three fingers on his left hand.



Nassir wondered what things would have been like if he had been a country musician instead.



Kobla never cried in front of anyone.

Words

The above images were taken at an ‘African’-themed circus that was touring through Europe in 2008. I spent three months with the tour travelling through Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Italy. I began as a PhD researcher, and moved on to become an employee of the circus itself. As I captured thousands of photos of the performers (who came from six different countries), I became intrigued by the differences between the aesthetics of the show and the life of the performers offstage.

Upon returning to London, I received funding to produce a photographic exhibition of my work at a gallery. For the exhibition, I placed photographs of performers ‘on stage’ side by side with those taken of performers outside the context of the circus performance. Moreover, each image was accompanied by a simple piece of text that gave a different perspective into the world of the performers. In this submission, I have echoed this concept by juxtaposing photographs of performers on stage with text. In this way, I hope to invite the reader of this article, just as I did with people who attended the exhibition, to ponder how we, as spectators, evaluate visual information.

About the author

Jessica Kendall is currently a PhD candidate in the Anthropology and Sociology department at SOAS, University of London. Her research explores how circus performers develop their movements at various levels – corporeal, geographic and cultural – in order to increase their mobility within the international circus world. Behind the lens, Ms Kendall is most fascinated by the moment-to-moment interplay of movement, emotion and surprise.