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Perfect Strangers:
revaluing urban sociality
through street performance

By

Felice T. Ling

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Faculty Advisor: Hussein Agrama
Preceptor: Tracey Rosen

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INTRODUCTION

“IF MY ANKLE WASN’T BAD, I’D BOOGIE.”



Kaliq, sitting as he plays his clarinet

Kaliq is a musician. Among street performers (or buskers) in Chicago, musicians outnumber the rest, so I have decided to start here with some observations of this clarinetist. This particular street performer is highly respected by other performers because of his apparent success at eliciting money from passersby, as well as his ability and skill level as a musician. When asked what he does differently from the other street

musicians out there, his reply was curt: “Practice. Sound good.”

His straightforward reply was telling. Not only did it reveal his general thoughts on the abilities of other street musicians, but it also obfuscated everything else that he does, purposefully and otherwise, to utilize and craft the space around him into a place in which pedestrians seem to genuinely have a good time. How does he manage to do this? And, through his actions, what exactly does he do that differentiates him from, for instance, any old guitar player who decides to try out busking for the first time?

In mid-May of 2014, I arrived at Michigan and Ohio to find Kaliq playing the clarinet at his usual spot. The weather was sunny and, at 70°F, made for a pleasant day. Kaliq was nicely dressed in a checkered shirt and jeans. He stood behind a bucket that had been adorned with license plates saying “Chicago Home of the Blues Illinois,” “Chicago Jazz,” and “French

Quarter.” Behind Kaliq was an amplifier connected to an iPod. He had music playing through the amplifier, then played his part on the clarinet over the prerecorded music.

To his left, leaning up against the barrier (within which were some flowers and two trees) was an older white male in his 60s. The older man, a friend of Kaliq’s, was tapping his feet along with the music. Before that day, in my walks through the streets to observe and chat with other performers, I have always noticed at least two other people standing beside him, tapping their feet and bobbing their heads along with his music. When I asked about the man who was standing there today, Kaliq told me, “He has been following me around for six years.” After a pause and a glance at the other man, Kaliq corrected himself: “He’s been my friend for six years.” The man nodded, adding that he had gone with him last weekend on a trip to a New Orleans Jazz Fest. Kaliq does not pay these friends of his, and he claimed not to know if having his friends there helps his show or not – but they are there. Throughout the day, Kaliq made eye contact with the older man, joked, and chatted with him between songs.

While his friend tapped his feet and snapped his fingers to Kaliq’s music, I watched as one man approached them. He was dancing along. Kaliq met the other man’s gaze and continued playing his clarinet while the spectator danced in place for a few more minutes. With a slow flourish, the man dropped a bill into Kaliq’s bucket and (still dancing) moved south and away. He only stopped dancing once he fully merged back with the flow of foot traffic.

Soon after, three people, two men and one woman, walked south. They stopped suddenly when one of them said, “Hold on, I’m gonna give him a dollar.” He twisted around and doubled back to donate while his two friends awkwardly tried not to get too much in the way of foot traffic. After a moment of indecision, they stepped towards the side by the flowers. Their friend finally caught up to them, and the three of them continued south.

Why do these passersby, and many others like them, dance? What happens in these spaces that make so many pedestrians stop, watch, listen, and record Kaliq's performance with their phones? What does Kaliq do to make passersby leave the flow of traffic and convince them to engage with him? What happens in the spaces around him to create what one other busker has called a "speed bump" in the flow of traffic – both foot traffic and otherwise, as I soon saw when Kaliq noticed a tour bus and turned to face them, waved, and played music in their direction?

The visual effect of having his friends dance nearby while he played may be accidental, but Kaliq purposefully added to his visual performance through eye contact, waving, and dance. When he complained of how he had recently twisted his ankle, he noted that he would move around even more if he could: "If my ankle wasn't bad, I'd boogie." "Boogieing," by itself, does not change the way that his music sounds, but it is an intentional addition to his performance that shows a purposeful manipulation of his space to create a certain kind of sensorial experience for his audiences. This manipulation of visual experience embellishes the soundscape that he creates.

Through the ways in which he uses space as a medium and a technique in his performance, Kaliq manages to create audiences out of passersby and convince them that he has some kind of value. He even managed, at one point, to impact the experiences of the occupants of a car. During my observations that day, Kaliq gestured at me when I was standing just to his left. He pointed towards Ohio Street and asked me to go and get a dollar for him: "Go over to that car – they got a dollar for me. Right there!"

I ran up and grabbed a five dollar bill through an open window from a woman in the passenger seat. I returned the bill to Kaliq, who thanked me. The car had three people in it. The man in the back seat had an iPhone out recording Kaliq. The woman in the front was swaying to

the music. Kaliq danced while he played – moving his feet this time – as he turned to face them. They watched through open windows as the car turned at the intersection and drove off.

Afterwards, when I asked him how often cars stop to tip him, he explained that it happens often enough. Normally, he would run up to collect the donation himself: “I usually do [run up]. I just didn’t feel like running cuz of my ankle, you know.”

REVALUING URBAN SOCIALITY

The stopping of a car is simply a more extreme instance of what happens when a performer successfully turns a passerby into a spectator. Whether an individual is a pedestrian, a driver, or a passenger on a city bus, the work of the busker is to take that individual and transform her into a spectator.

The enormity of this task can only be comprehended if the context of such performances is taken into consideration. Cities are traditionally understood to be settings of sensory overload – where metropolitan life “stimulate the nerves to their utmost reactivity until they finally can no longer produce any reaction at all” (Simmel 1903: 14). The city of Chicago is no different. Buskers work on street corners beside stores with fancy window displays, canvassers, panhandlers, and others. They are, in a sense, just another attraction attempting to gain people’s attention.

When Georg Simmel describes the “blasé” (*Ibid* 14) attitude of the urban dweller, he is describing the alienation that comes when sensory overload becomes habituated to the degree that all stimuli lose its salience. This alienation is reinforced, for Simmel, by the “money economy which has thus filled the daily life of so many people with weighing, calculating, enumerating and the reduction of qualitative values to quantitative terms” (*Ibid* 13). Fran Tonkiss,

on the other hand, takes the alienation of urban life and argues that such alienation is not necessarily negative: Tonkiss finds social value and freedom in the urban relations of anonymity, through a “low-level trust in the tolerance or indifference of the people with whom one must share the city” (Tonkiss 2005: 22). I argue that the work of street performing actually revalues urban sociality even more, from the value of freedom in anonymity that Tonkiss places in urban “relations of indifference (*Ibid* 117), to one in which urbanites find not merely tolerance, but *pleasure*, in their relationship with one another as strangers during the course of observing a street show. Buskers thus take the relation of indifference that Tonkiss argues as inherent in city life and reformulate it to create a new, more positive relation that is premised, instead, on pleasure in stranger relations. Through ethnography, my project therefore explores urban sociality and the ways in which the work of street performers revalue that sociality.

As such, I will first investigate the heavily-theorized notion of alienation in the late capitalist American city, where urbanites are estranged from their labor and estranged from one another. I argue that urban alienation, far from being an obstacle that must be overcome by street performers in the city, actually creates the conditions of possibility for a distinctive kind of productive affective labor.

In my second section, I note that this affective labor has a transience that is, on the one hand, associated with the nature of performance itself, and on the other, a consequence of the city government’s regulation of street performers. The performer’s argument for her status as a professional is therefore an argument against such transience and, essentially, a declaration of the significant (and not simply ephemeral) value that her work brings to the city.

I then articulate the particular details of the busker’s productive labor and the ways in which she uses space to generate a distinctive affective dimension for her audiences; in this

process, passersby are transformed into spectators who subsequently begin to acknowledge one another as members of the same audience. I argue that this affective dimension actually revalues stranger sociality; through the spectacle of a street show, spectators begin to identify with one another as strangers.

Finally, as the street show continues and spectators acknowledge the value of their experiences, their acknowledgement of existing value actually creates additional value. The audience therefore plays a role in the affective labor of street performance. Here, value (as the product of nonalienated labor) is actually co-produced by the street performer and her audiences. In this way, the sense of stranger sociality that had already begun to develop through shared membership within an audience is now strengthened by their collective role as co-producers. Street performances thus revalue stranger relations by, ultimately, creating intimate strangers out of indifferent passersby.

“WELCOME TO THE STREETS.”

I began my fieldwork by wandering the subways and streets of downtown Chicago. I was able to find buskers on the subway platforms of Jackson Station, on State Street, and Michigan Avenue. I also observed a singer busking in Bryn Mawr (North Chicago) and several musicians at the throughway from the blue line to the Chicago O’Hare International Airport. However, given the scope of my study, I decided to focus my research primarily on the street performers on Michigan Avenue. Michigan Avenue has a higher concentration of street performers than any of the other sites and, unlike the subway platforms in which the majority of buskers are musicians, it has a wider range in terms of the different types of performances they do.

Armed with a personal history as a magician, and using my past as someone who had a

few months' worth of experience street performing in Memphis, Tennessee, I was able to go beyond my identity as "just another student researcher" and situate myself within the loose community of Chicago street performers. Two of the key participants in my study (the "Original" Chicago Tin Man¹ and Jeremy, the Magician from Britain) took me under their wing as a young performer interested in learning the craft of busking. A friend of Jeremy's, a performer who works as a silver statue and balloon artist, took this directive to heart: Every time I saw him, he would ask, "When are you going to start working? I want to see you making money!"

Another performer, a living statue who goes by the name of the Golden Lady, befriended me as one among the even smaller group of female street performers. The other performers with whom I observed, spoke, and interviewed viewed me more generally as another street performer – a shared identity that made many of them more interested in speaking with me than they otherwise would have been. There was a shift in my relationships with other street performers the weekend after my first time performing on the streets of Chicago. The Golden Lady ran into me performing the morning of the Saint Patrick's Day Parade; the next time I saw her, she walked up to give me a hug, proclaiming, "You're one of us now. Welcome to the streets."

In addition to a sense of shared identity, the time spent maintaining relationships mattered too. As one street performer explained after I observed a student from Northwestern quickly interviewing him with a voice recorder between shows, he gets interviewed like this "every now and again" but "no one has stuck around to research [street performers] in depth." Here then, time spent in the field, as well as a commitment to stopping by and speaking with performers – even after my main observations of them were finished – allowed me to come to them again and again with questions and ideas as my research progressed.

¹ In May of 2014, near the end of my fieldwork for this project, the "Original" *Chicago Tin Man* rebranded and trademarked himself as the *Chicago 10 Man*. Out of convenience and habit, I shall refer to him here simply as the Tin Man.

CITIES AND ALIENATION

“IT’S SAM WALTON’S HUSTLE.”

The “hustle” is a complicated term that carries with it different connotations. Depending on who you ask, you may hear someone talk about “hustling” as cheating a person out of their money. It can be a scam, illegal, or an art form. It can even be respectable and completely within the bounds of the law. One street performer demonstrated both his understanding of the term and its negative connotations with a shrug. “All of this is technically a hustle, I guess.” By “this,” he meant everything from street performing to panhandling to shining a pedestrian’s shoes for cash. He went on to explain, “I don’t think that’s fair. I regard what I do as work.”

This slightly negative understanding of the hustle comes from the word’s relationship with the way that it is used “in the black community.” The Tin Man, another street performer, attempted to clarify the concept:

In the black community, when we talk about hustling, or a lot of them, when they talk about hustling, a lot of them talk about doing their own job, maybe selling drugs. That’s why they call it hustling. They be like, naw, naw. I get off at the gig at like 8:30 and then I’mma start hustling. Ya know, a hustle is something that you do on your own. It’s not like a job. It’s your hustle. Something you do on your own, completely independent of anybody else. And it brings you profit.”

The negative connotations of the hustle are a result of its close association with “selling drugs” and other such illicit activities. However, the key here is in the distinction that the Tin Man makes between a conventional job and a hustle. “When you’re working a job,” he argued, “you’re working somebody else’s hustle.” He continued:

They [someone with a conventional job] might get \$9 or \$10 an hour but after insurance and Uncle Sam and everybody, they’re getting hustled, ya know? It’s Sam Walton’s hustle, not their hustle. If I wake up in the morning and it cost \$10 to get to work, as far as gas, and I might pay another \$15 for parking. And I pay another \$5 for food. That’s \$30 bucks I paid to get to work. But if I come home with a few hundred dollars, that’s *my* hustle. You know what I’m saying? I just hustled. It didn’t cost me nothing to make this money. That’s what a hustle is.

In this sense, Sam Walton, founder of Walmart, is a hustler. The boss of any company has a hustle. Freelancers of any kind are also hustlers. Indeed, Tin Man's explanation of the word ultimately signifies ownership: for him, to hustle is to have ownership over one's labor.

While there may be various interpretations of the word "hustle," the meaning that the Tin Man attempts to communicate through the term is ultimately one that most street performers (at least the ones with whom I have spoken) seem to identify with: street performing is "work," like the first busker argued, and – more importantly – street performing is one's own work. Ownership is particularly significant. The ability to labor, identify that labor as clearly one's own, and thereby "profit" from that labor is, at its heart, what street performing is all about.

The significance that street performers place on "ownership," especially in their comparisons of busking with other jobs makes salient just how rare such ownership is. The Tin Man's pride in his work comes, in a sense, from almost 'beating the system' and, through busking, escaping the need to work at a low-paying job. Thinking back to his decision to become a full-time street performer, Tin Man reflected, "My first day was so profitable, I quit my job, I quit college, I moved out of my parent's house. And that... that was in '03. 2003. So, uh, I've been performing, street performing about ten years now." For a young college student who was working for a life insurance company, busking was more profitable than his job at the time, seemingly had better prospects than what a bachelor's degree² could give him, and, in effect, granted him the financial independence that he had not yet found in the more conventional paths.

Another individual also spoke explicitly of how he actually left a low-paying job to become a street performer: "I got a job working at Macy's and it sucked. Working for \$8.25 an hour. I couldn't do it. I could, I enjoyed it, but I didn't enjoy it as much as performing. So I'm a performer. It's what I do. [...] I like my freedom, so that's basically it." This kind of pride,

² When the opportunity arose, the Tin Man did go back to school to get his bachelor's in fine arts.

however, exists because of a socioeconomic context in which regular employment means “\$9 or \$10 dollars an hour.”

Jeremy, a street performer who goes by the stage name “Magician from Britain” (his past jobs included one in which he taught at a high school, sold insurance, worked at a Catholic church, and baked), started to work as a street performer during a period of unemployment when alternatives were few. He thus summed up his work history in a conversation: “And here I am. That was in May. Like, May 6th, I think. 2011. And here we are, 2014, and now it’s my full time gig.” However, though unemployment may have led to his decision to start busking, something else contributed to his decision to remain a street performer. After all, he described street performing as “the best job” he’s ever had:

And I think too that they all [family and friends] realize that of all the jobs that I’ve had in the past, this is actually the one that fits me best, you know? And this certainly is the best job I’ve had. I’ve never enjoyed working as much as I have doing this. And I’ll, you know, as I said earlier, I’ll work long hours, but it’s not a burden to me. But if you stuck me in a law firm and asked me to work for twelve hours non-stop, that would be bad.

Even something as socially prestigious as working “in a law firm” does not compare to the satisfaction possible in having ownership over one’s labor and to, in essence, doing something that “fits” him best.

In a context where wage labor (doing “somebody else’s hustle” or doing “Sam Walton’s hustle”) is the norm, street performance is an example of a kind of work where the laborer is not alienated from the product of her labor. Street performance thus has a unique kind of value for the street performers who make a living out of busking and, as I shall argue, it generates value, too, for those in the city who engage with them and their work. In this section, I thereby investigate what alienation in the city means and argue that urban alienation is actually what generates the conditions of possibility for the work of street performers.

By alienation, I mean two things. The first is “estranged labor” in the Marxian sense, where “the worker is related to the *product of his labour* as to an *alien* object” (Marx 1844: 72) and where, essentially, “the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else’s, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another” (*Ibid* 74). As I have already illustrated, many of the individuals who street perform chose this profession as an alternative to other, more alienating kinds of work that is otherwise available to them in a de-industrialized capitalist city like Chicago.

The second meaning of alienation to which I refer, and one that I shall explore next, has to do with the culmination of a variety of historical factors that make cities specific places where large quantities of people gather, where stimuli proliferate, and where, as Georg Simmel (1903) asserts, in order to protect oneself from this overstimulation, people become alienated from one another – and in effect begin to deal “with persons as with numbers” (*Ibid* 12).

LOST IN URBAN SPACE

The historical factors that lead to this second kind of urban alienation go back to the very planning of the city itself. In “Cities, People, and Language,” James Scott argues that city planners and governments “simplified” and made urban spaces more “legible” in order to facilitate the movement of state actors and visitors (who lack local knowledge) to local sites; in this process, new urban structures (like the city grid) challenged the exercise of “political autonomy” (Scott 1998: 54) by facilitating state regulation, thereby threatening the distinctive local color of such spaces. I argue, however, that whatever the original intentions of this kind of city planning and whatever the consequences this restructuring dealt to the local inhabitants at

the time, these “simplified” and “legible” spaces are now utilized by independent local agents – the very same people who are the state’s target of regulation – to achieve their goals.

Chicago’s grid, the quintessential product of the state’s attempts to simplify and “neutralize” (Sennett 1992) city spaces, grants navigational knowledge to even first-time visitors to the city. Local actors can use these same spaces to predict the movements of visitors. Locals (retailers, vendors, canvassers, panhandlers, protestors, and street performers) can thus insert themselves into locations that would maximize opportunities for interactions with outsiders. Moreover, with knowledge of these flows comes the ability to use and shape them. Local knowledge, then, is not just knowledge of the spaces of a city but, rather, knowledge of its flows.

While city planning has resulted in a proliferation of potential contact between local agents and outsiders, travel guides and city boosters have produced a reputation for urban environments that subsequently attract people from all walks of life. These boosters specifically highlight Michigan Avenue as a major tourist destination. *Fodor’s*, for example, describes the Magnificent Mile in its section on shopping (“Shopping”). *Frommer’s*, another travel company, writes about Michigan Avenue: “In terms of density, the area’s first-rate shopping is, quite simply, unmatched. Even jaded shoppers from other worldly capitals are delighted at the ease and convenience of the stores concentrated here” (“Top Shopping Streets”). Both *Fodor’s* and *Frommer’s*, then, extol the Magnificent Mile as a place to “shop-till-you-drop” (*Ibid*). For non-shoppers, the Magnificent Mile is nonetheless “worth a stroll because this stretch is, in many ways, the heart of the city” (*Ibid*). The *Lonely Planet* agrees: “Probably what’s most magnificent is the millions of dollars they ring up annually” (Zimmerman 2011: 64). This area is thus a site of attraction, a place of leisure where people go to spend money.

Local knowledge of city flows is accordingly combined with guidebooks and representations of city spaces to grant locals access to large volumes of people. Increased quantities of people and increased attempts to attract their attention result, I argue, in a proliferation of strangerhood.

What do I mean by “strangerhood”? Simmel defines a stranger as someone who “is an element of the group itself” and yet “an element whose membership within the group involves both being outside it and confronting it” (Simmel 1908: 144). In an interaction where the street performer as an individual has to stop a group of people (a group that normally shares a common identity as family members, friends, or at the very least, as strangers walking down a city street), the performer must identify enough with this group to establish a relationship with its members and yet, clearly, the performer can never really belong. At the end of each show, their paths diverge, and their relationship is ostensibly severed.

Significantly, however, the audiences are the ones who depart, leaving the street performer behind. Indeed, these performers consider the places they work as their “home” or “office.” In this view, audience members are visitors to their domain and thus could be considered the strangers in this scenario. Instead of simply attempting to determine who better fits into the ideal type of Simmel’s stranger, however, I suggest that, as a consequence of the ways in which these specific sites in the city have been shaped and represented, the interaction of strangerhood has become universalized or, at the very least, normalized.

Strangerhood is thus not about a defining label, but, rather, “a specific form of interaction” (*Ibid* 143), one that involves the factors of “nearness and remoteness” (*Ibid* 145) working together to create a “form of union” (*Ibid*144). This kind of interaction characterizes “the potential wanderer” (*Ibid* 143), the individual who stays in a space but does not really belong.

Places like Michigan Avenue are particular kinds of spaces where nobody belongs. The structure of the city grid physically provides opportunities for maximal contact between those who walk the streets and those who attempt to draw them in. In addition to a historical sense of cities as spaces where people from all over congregate, guide books and advertisements further gather even city dwellers to the Magnificent Mile. As local agents attempt to use every method at their disposal to attract the attentions of passersby, passersby cut themselves off from this overstimulation, and subsequently disconnect from one another. As such, the relation of strangerhood is one in which people are alienated from one another as a reaction to the hyperstimuli of the city. Indeed, Simmel argues in “The Metropolis and Mental Life” that the overstimulation of the senses in urban life resulted in “the blasé metropolitan attitude” (Simmel 1903: 14). These spaces, then, have been shaped in a way that produces the interaction of strangers as the norm.

The normalization of the interactional relationship of strangerhood is reminiscent of Richard Sennett’s argument that city planning has neutralized urban spaces, which has resulted in a division between urbanites’ “inner, subjective experience and outer, physical life” – and ultimately created a “fear of exposure” in which they attempt to ignore each other (Sennett 1992: xii-xiii).

However, the distance generated by Sennett’s theory of neutralized city spaces and Simmel’s view of urban dwellers who hold a “blasé outlook” to the city ignores the second aspect of the interactional relations that Simmel himself uses to characterize the stranger: strangerhood involves a dynamism in which the experience of “nearness” is just as essential as that of “remoteness” (Simmel 1908: 145). Interactions between strangers rest, instead, on a foundation that is antithetical to what Sennett calls the “fear of exposure.” I suggest, perhaps, the

experience of the city dweller is one in which individuals have a desire *for* exposure in an environment where the blasé attitude is the norm. In other words, people in the city want affirmation through attention but do not (and cannot) give the same kind of attention that they want to others, if only because of the sheer number of people they encounter everyday in the city.

In a context of proliferating strangerhood, a certain kind of sociality becomes valuable – and that sociality is what Fran Tonkiss calls the “‘side-by-side’ relations of anonymity” (Tonkiss 2005: 10). “The alienation of strangers” (*Ibid* 10) in the city, as Tonkiss points out, is not necessarily negative, but positive: urban sociality requires a degree of “low-level trust” (*Ibid* 22) through which one can exist peacefully with anonymous others. In the “fragile trust [based] in the indifference of others” one thus finds “a precarious freedom” (*Ibid* 23); “freedom” and a maintained “low-level trust” are the prerequisites in “the everyday matter of sharing social space with familiar strangers” (*Ibid* 21).

I argue that successful street performers take the interaction of “familiar” strangerhood and go one step further in crystallizing stranger relations as socially valuable. Street performers do not convince passersby to watch them in spite of people’s fear of exposure but, rather, because of the spectacle and risk of the exposure through which they subject themselves; street performers provide for their audiences the opportunity to experience a kind of pleasure in their relations as anonymous strangers who are, nonetheless, united as members of the same crowd. Previously strangers-to-be-ignored, they begin to recognize each other as strangers through the spectacle of a street show. Street performers thereby take Tonkiss’ “familiar strangers” provide for them a shared affective experience, and, as they begin to recognize each other, transform them into more intimate strangers.

This recognition comes in many forms: in relationships, however transient, built over the course of something deemed “fun”; in anticipation of the acknowledgement of a spatially prominent person who paradoxically ignores passersby; and even in something seemingly as non-disruptive as well-played music that may result in drivers rolling down their windows, just so that they can participate in a relation of strangerhood as another member of the performer’s listening audience. Street performances thus enable “recognition scenes,” where individuals have “a sudden awareness of the other” (Sennett 1992: 198), while still allowing them to maintain a degree of distance from one another. In urban conditions where alienated strangerhood proliferates, the street performer therefore revalues urban sociality: through the pleasure experienced as an anonymous member of a spectating crowd, one finds solidarity through “co-membership with indefinite persons” (Warner 2003: 57, on publics), and thus, through one’s relations as strangers.

REPRESENTATIONS OF STREET PERFORMING

“IT’S A LOT OF WEALTH. YOU HAVE TO KEEP THEM HAPPY.”

A street performance is worth watching as “affective labor” (Ngai 2010: 948), through which audiences can clearly see the link between the worker and the product of her labor. Buskers, however, must go through the difficult work of actually defining street performing *as labor*. The difficulty here is twofold: buskers must first actually create an affective space and, significantly, buskers must convince their audiences that what they do is, indeed, work. The challenges in defining street performing as work come in part through the ways in which they are regulated. What is at stake is the stability or transience in the value of the street performer’s work.

In this section, I examine and balance the value of generating stranger sociality in relation to enforcement in the city.

To legally busk in the city of Chicago, you must go in person to City Hall, Room 800. Room 800 houses the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection: Business Assistance Center. You go up to the person behind the counter who asks you why you are here. When you tell him that you are here to get a street performer's license, he gives you a form to fill out and points to a ticket machine. You take a ticket (your number is G620 – *G* is for *General*), sit down to wait your turn, and, even though you are just a street performer, you marvel at the fact that you are in a government office that caters to the needs of businesses. The government seems to view you and other street performers as a legitimate Chicago business.

The form that you fill out is an application for one of three licenses: "Peddler," "Food Peddler," or "Street Performer." As a street performer, you leave the second half of the form blank; no business tax numbers are required of you. The city wants to know who you are, where you live, when you were born, and how to contact you, but they have no interest (or at least no expectations) of getting tax money out of you. Here, in its attempts to create distinctive kinds of licenses – all under the domain of the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection – lies the government's attempts to tax businesses, regulate movement, and enforce the specific regulations that differentiate one category of person from another.

Licensing of individuals is just a descendent of the creation of surnames, what James Scott describes as a "key navigational aid" towards the state project of "simplifying" and making "legible" its denizens and the spaces within its domain (Scott 1998: 64). The second half of the application form for a peddler/performer license also makes clear that taxation is a key purpose for such licensing practices. "State naming practices," writes Scott, "were inevitably associated

with taxes” (*Ibid* 68). Licensing, through its association with taxation, is an attempt by the government to receive a portion of the earnings of a licensed individual.

Interestingly, however, an Illinois Business Tax number is not required of street performers. This seeming oversight may simply be a low estimation of a busker’s earning power, or, perhaps, an acknowledgement of the impossibility of keeping track of a street performer’s earnings, as evidenced by my informants’ refusals to talk about the amounts of money they earned and, when they did, their insistence on such information staying “off the record.” Street performers, then, are regulated by the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, but, unlike other individuals or groups, they are not formally taxed as businesses. In the case of street performers, the government’s emphasis is thus less on the extraction of their resources, but, rather, on the regulation and sanctioning of their behavior.

True, the City of Chicago can earn money through the licensing process itself, a process that needs to be renewed every two years for a \$100 fee each time. The significance of licensing, however, becomes apparent in the Municipal Code of Chicago. In chapter 4-244, a section on “Street Peddlers and Street Performers” formally defines the following three terms:

“**Perform**” means and includes, but is not limited to, the following activities: acting, singing, playing musical instruments, pantomime, juggling, magic, dancing or reciting.

“**Performer**” means any person holding or required to hold a street performer permit under this chapter.

“**Public area**” means any sidewalk, parkway, playground or other public way located within the corporate limits of the City. The term “public area” does not include transit platforms and stations operated by the Chicago Transit Authority or the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

(Municipal Code of Chicago 2013: 4-244-010)

These terms, in the context of the rest of the section on street performers legally define who performers are, what kinds of activity they do, and – in part, through the definition of a “public area” – *where* they can perform. Visibly labeling performers by requiring them to “carry and display a permit on his or person [*sic*] at all times while performing in a public area” (*Ibid* 4-244-

163) gives performers the right to perform while, at the same time, restricts them from performing at certain places and times. Such a label thus facilitates the government's regulation of their activities. A performance, for example, can only "take place in any public area [...] between the hours of 10:00am and 8:00pm on Sundays through Thursdays and 10:00am and 10:00pm on Fridays and Saturdays," and "street performers are prohibited from performing [...] on both sides of Michigan Avenue, bounded by East Delaware Place on the north and East Superior Street on the south" (*Ibid* 4-244-164).

One performer remembers this area on Michigan Avenue, before prohibitions were set in place:

When I first started, I used to perform at the Water Tower. The Water Tower's a really nice place, especially during Christmas time, and there's a lot of shoppers coming out. I mean, the sky's the limit on what you can earn as long as you stay out there. But, uh, a lot of the people who live downtown pay a lot of money for their condos or taxes. When they hear street performers or they hear Bucket Boys [a group of drummers], first thing they do is they call the police because they don't want to hear the noise. So the police, after going out there X number of times, they have to call the alderman. And the alderman says, ok. All these people are making complaints. I need to make a change here. So he bans street performing north of Superior. So, um, that took out my Water Tower spot. I had to go find another spot.

This performer's soon-to-be fiancée articulated the process of how such spaces become prohibited for performers:

People would complain, whether people are residents or the businesses. And the complaints will go back to the police of course because they go to the meetings. They have to please the Michigan Avenue Association. It's a lot of wealth. You have to keep them happy. They would make the complaints to the police, to the city, so on and so forth, and they would take action.

These restrictions, then, result from the decision of the alderman, the police, and the city to "keep ... happy" or even "embrace" (Torpey 2000) certain members of its citizenry. Those who complain are "residents or the businesses" – ultimately, tax-paying sedentary folks who have a larger stake in the kind of place they want Michigan Avenue to be. John Torpey claims that states, in order to embrace "their citizenries more successfully over time," needed "to identify

unambiguously who belongs and who does not,” which ultimately led to the state’s monopolization of the “legitimate means of movement” (*Ibid* 6).

Complainants who view street performers as nuisances (because they “don’t want to hear the noise”) thus charge the government with the work of keeping such performers out of certain places. As such, government regulation, I argue, is less about legitimizing buskers through the granting of licenses but, rather, as a means of controlling the street performer’s space.

Take the example of a pair of jazz musicians who were ordered by two police officers to leave their spot after an anonymous complaint. Consider, also, the example of a drummer asked to leave the corner where he was working. In both of these cases, someone had anonymously filed noise complaints. When asked to leave, they picked up their gear and, with an officer casually following behind them, walked a block or two to another location. Another busker, working in her usual spot, was approached by the police after a noise complaint; when she refused to move, she was arrested and charged with misdemeanor, resisting arrest, and interfering with a public officer. Even Kaliq, a clarinetist who is highly respected among his street performing peers, showed frustration with a certain police officer who regularly ordered him to move away from his preferred street corner.

There is, then, a level of precariousness to the space that a street performer has. Even a busker who works a certain spot regularly can be removed from that location or arrested according to the whims of a police officer or an anonymous caller. Regulations and enforcement thus make street performances appear inherently transient. This transience, a manifestation of the view of street performances as nuisance, is an argument against the work of street performers as socially valuable – and, in effect, against a perspective of street performance as real work.

“THEY’RE NOT TRYING TO BUILD ANYTHING.”

The struggle to define street performing as work is an assertion that the street performer has created for herself worthy, regular, and independent work. This assertion is an argument against her transience. While enforcement has consequences for the spots in which street performers can perform and thus the regularity with which they may appear in those spaces, certain street performers declare themselves as “professionals,” often to distinguish themselves from those who they claim do not fit this definition. By tapping into the idea that socially recognized work has a temporal aspect to it, they subsequently assert their professionalism by committing to a regular work schedule. What is at stake in the struggle to establish social worth for themselves is, in the end, the value of stranger sociality that they add to city spaces.

Interestingly, one performer, a young man in his twenties (a musician whom I had seen perform on the streets for a few weekends when the spring finally rolled around) quickly corrected me when I asked him what days he comes out to work: “I don’t really call this work. I call it play.” He works during the week and plays music during the weekends because he enjoys what he does. He is, interestingly, the only performer I met who calls it “play.” Such performers, perhaps, are more difficult to find because of the irregularity with which they go out to perform.

The only other busker I met who does not consider street performing “as work” is the Golden Lady – though she does not necessarily consider busking “as play” either. She goes downtown regularly to perform and described what she does as a “means to be the best dancer in the world.” This description, she placed in stark contrast to the goals of the Tin Man, one of the living statues whom she claimed helped train her: the Tin Man, she told me, treats his work as a statue “as a career, as a job.” She said that he, “in the Chicago scene, is the best at what he does.”

How does he see what he does? The Tin Man was one of the few performers that I found working in Chicago through the cold winter months. He used the saying, “Live by the sword, die by the sword” to explain what he does: “People who live with guns will die by a gun. I live³ and work out on the streets.” That conversation took place one Saturday afternoon when the weather was 30°F and snowing. “I have to treat my work as a career if I am going to make any good money out of it.” He didn’t say it, but the implication was there: He lives by the street and will die by the street. The Tin Man treats street performing as a career, one that he had done since 2003 – ten years when I first met him. His respect for street performing as a form of work manifests in his evident respect for Kaliq, the clarinet player who loves to “boogie” at work: “Kaliq has been out here for ... about eight or nine years. Long as I can think of. And if he’s out there jamming, he can get a nice little crowd. It’s just playing. He’ll just play and play and play and play. He won’t take a break like me. Just getting those hours in gets his money.”

Kaliq confirmed this perception of him when he complained that he was unable to come to work one Friday: “I don’t like missing days,” he said. And though there were many days when I did not see him working, stories of trips down to New Orleans expanded the scale of all the streets and cities where he could possibly work. He mentioned, too, that he ran into Jeremy, a Chicago street magician, on the train on his way back from New Orleans. When the weather had gotten warmer and Chicago had become a more hospitable place, these two performers picked up their gear from the streets of New Orleans and headed home to Chicago.

Jeremy also consistently spoke of street performing as work: “I’ll work for twelve hours,” he said. “Some guys will only work for three or four hours.... If you ask anyone who knows me, who is the hardest working busker they know, it will be me.” He, like the Tin Man, treats his

³ The Tin Man works on the streets and may spend a lot of time there, but he does live in a house.

work as a career. “I work like a dog doing this,” Jeremy explained. “When I first started, I didn’t take much of a break either because I was just an animal.”

Interestingly, Jeremy’s description of himself as a “dog” and “an animal” is strikingly similar to a metaphor that the Tin Man used to describe how he views the social network of buskers: as a “food chain.” “In order to be at the top of the food chain,” he said, “you have to hunt *for a living*.” The Tin Man described two variables that play a part in this food chain: a performer’s relative success in making money and the regularity with which that performer works. These two variables remove street performers who do not actually need the money – those who treat busking as play – from the social picture all together and, instead, distinguishes three social types of labor: buskers who regularly work, and do so successfully; buskers who only come out when they need the money (opportunists?); and buskers who come out regularly but only manage to scrape by on their earnings (starving artists?).

While most street performers did not really speak about the last type, I did meet several. These would be the buskers who were recently laid off and thus trying to make do with their music – who, really, had no choice but to perform while they searched for other work. They are also those who would partially treat performance as play and partially as a desired supplement to their income.

The second type, the ones who only come out when they need money, are the ones from which the more regular performers attempt to distinguish themselves. C-Dot, one among a group of five acrobats known as the Kings of Michigan Ave (the KOMA Krew), complained about the mindset of the other members of his group after they decided to stop performing early one day:

They just want to make a quick buck, like, you know what I mean? And that’s fine and dandy, like, in the same token bro, what about tomorrow? You know what I’m saying? Like, what if it rains tomorrow? Or, you know, God forbid, a tragedy or something and you can’t make it! Then what? You’re gonna wish that you stayed out those extra couple hours no matter what you do when you go home. Like, I don’t care what you do when you get home but in the same token when you’re here, *you’re supposed to be*

professionals. And they don't treat it like that. They treat it like a *two-bit hustle*, you know, and I don't see it like that. [...] They don't have an appreciation for what we do.

C-Dot's desire to treat his performance as a job bolsters his view of himself as a "professional," one that also translates into distinguishing himself from those that he does not consider to be professionals, as exemplified by his use of pronouns that discern "*they*" from "what *we* do." Unprofessional street performers, in contrast, are those who "treat it like a two-bit hustle,"⁴ which translates to more breaks between shows, shorter and less regular working hours, and (in the case of a group of street musicians who have been similarly derided as unprofessional by at least three other buskers) performing without street performer licenses.

Indeed, the Tin Man contrasted himself with this particular group of musicians the same way that C-Dot contrasted himself with the other members of his group:

But you gotta understand, street performing for a lot of people is like, um, what's the word. It's *kinda like shaking the cup*, okay? And I'm gonna use this metaphor because they'll only go out to get money *when they need it*. You know? They need some money, they'll go out and make it. That's quite different from somebody who's going out steady like it's a job. Regardless of whether they need it or not, they're just going out, you know. That's a different mentality than just those people. Those people, they're trying to get in and get out, you know. I just don't – *they're not trying to build anything*. They're just trying to get in, get the money, get out.

Where C-Dot spoke of "two-bit hustlers," the Tin Man compared these kinds of performers with panhandlers – "shaking the cup." Whereas, for the Tin Man, street performing is steady work – one that he can take pride in because he, in contrast, *is* "trying to build" something, buskers who only work "when they need it" are, he claims, practically begging. While I did not sense any kind of desperation from this group of musicians (perhaps, because, they are confident in their ability to make money), lack of a work ethic, for C-Dot and Tin Man, translates to lack of pride in what they do. Within this argument of steady, regular work is the "internalization" of a "work-discipline" that connects "time-sense" to labor that first manifested in the early stages of industrial capitalism (E.P. Thompson 1967). Despite the freedom that being one's own boss

⁴ A "two-bit hustle," C-Dot later notes, is distinct from a "hustle."

would supposedly entail, the discipline involved in working regularly is, for these buskers, an index of their status as professionals and, ultimately, of street performing as valuable.

Their pride in their profession (both pride and a perspective of street performing *as* a profession), then, is what distinguishes them from nonprofessional street performers and, in effect, panhandlers. This distinction is particularly significant because it reveals an argument based, not on money, but on the very kinds of people that they are. After all, a panhandler who makes a lot of money is, nonetheless, still a panhandler.

The distinction made here between “two-bit hustlers” and “professionals” is a positioning of oneself at the top of a “food chain” of street performers and, with this positioning, a declaration of oneself as a social equal among the larger community (or non-community?) of strangers who populate Michigan Avenue. In this act of separation, the significance for them, then, is the social standing of street performers within the larger community.

This larger community, for example, includes panhandlers. Not only are panhandlers “not trying to build anything,” as Tin Man noted, but the practically vehement response that some performers have to panhandlers reveal a fear of being associated with them. One performer noted that some people will call street performers “beggars with a gimmick,” a label that he didn’t think was “fair.” Several buskers have warned me never to give any money to panhandlers: “It’s crack money,” said one. Panhandlers, he claimed, use their money to “get high.” On the other hand, street performers speak of using their money in more mundane ways: one spoke in his show of needing to “pay the rent,” another told me that he had “bills and kids,” and another spoke of feeding his family. Regular work, regular income, and regular payments distinguish the professionals from the denizens of the streets who work irregularly and seek out money only

when they need it. There is a temporal aspect to street performing that distinguishes the professionals – those who push through the daily grind day after day.

Moreover, in Tin Man's claims that panhandlers and performers who do not work regularly are "not trying to build anything," he searches for something more than status through the recognition of a professional job; he is searching for recognition that he has added something of value to the city. The kind of work that professional street performers do, unlike the work of the unprofessional ones, is ultimately productive. Jeremy the Magician from Britain, too, reflected, "I like to think I bring a bit of character to the city."

Here, then, something more is at stake than the social status of the street performer. The street performer's assertion of the value that she brings to the city is reminiscent of what Pitt-Rivers calls the "rites of incorporation" through which, for visitors entering a new community, "the status of stranger ... is lost and that of community member ... is gained" (*Ibid* 503). If the overstimulation of city spaces result in a "blasé" attitude in the face of such stimuli (Simmel 1903) and consequently in a transference of this "blasé" attitude to people's relations with one another, and if "indifference," as such, becomes "the key social relation between urban subjects," (Tonkiss 2005: 10), then, as I have asserted, cities are spaces where the relation of strangerhood is the norm. In this context, Julian Pitt-Rivers' investigations into the law of hospitality or, more precisely, "the problem of how to deal with strangers" (Pitt-Rivers 2012 [1977]: 501) becomes relevant. In the process of an incorporation rite for the stranger, the new quasi-community member gains a social status that is determined by their success or failure.

The street performer, I suggest, is therefore the exemplary stranger. The social status gained through a successful performance of self translates into a pleasurable experience by

passersby; buskers are thus an index of city “vibe,” or the valued “atmosphere” of what one tourist called the “heart of the city.”

Indeed, on *Yelp*’s page for the Magnificent Mile, a platform with content generated by tourists and visitors, someone uploaded a photo of a living statue covered in white make-up. The first reviewer on the page, on June 10, 2014, wrote of the Magnificent Mile’s “interesting and memorable vibe,” one populated by “horses,” “carriages,” and “street performers” (“Magnificent”). One reviewer wrote, “There are tons of street performers out there to entertain you while you walk from shop to shop,” and another agreed with a simple line: “Street performers galore” (*Ibid*). Buskers exist on the Magnificent Mile for these visitors because they saw them, watched them, remembered them, and thought of their activities as essential to the “vibe” of this street. They are part of the atmospherics of the tourist-commercial area; in that sense, this “vibe” is the value that they add to the spaces of Michigan Avenue.

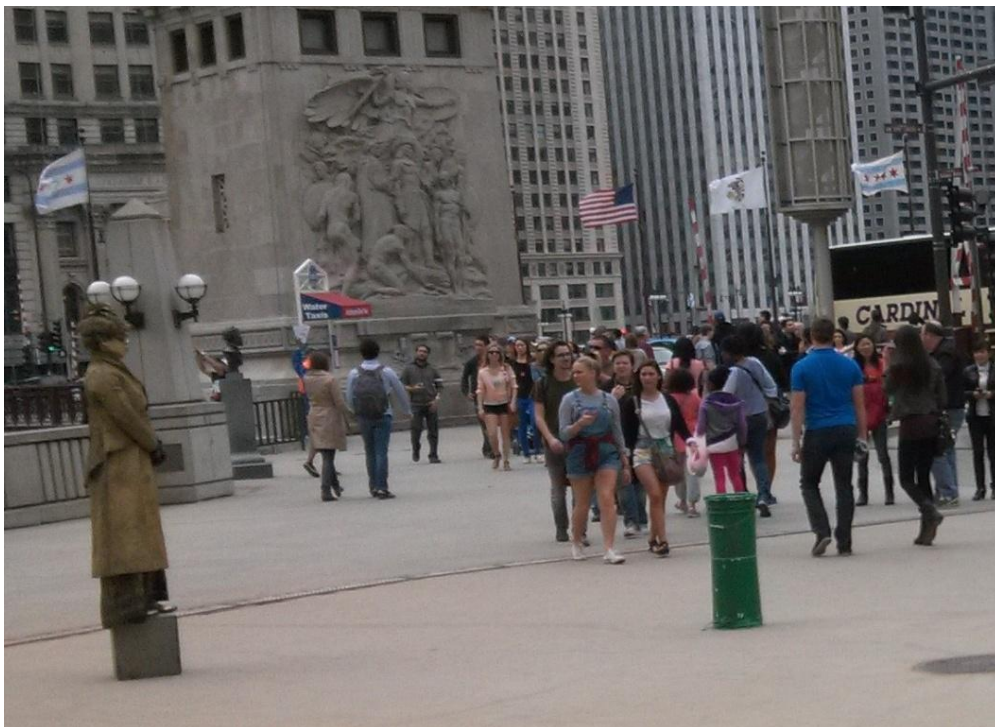
As the exemplary stranger, the street performer thus takes the alienation of life in a city among strangers and revalues it, thereby creating this “vibe.” Instead of strangers as another stimulus to be ignored, they become incorporated into a transient community of acknowledging strangers, all of whom are involved in a rite of incorporation through which they observe the exemplary stranger working to be incorporated into their quasi-community. In this sense, stranger relations become pleasurable, and not just alienating.

Street shows, however, inevitably end. With their ends, these quasi-communities disperse and revalued stranger sociality vanishes as well. The value of the show, its “vibe,” is bound up with the performance itself, and performances are ephemeral in nature. However, for this “vibe” to be created and acknowledged again and again as a part of the city – through *Yelp*, through what one performer called “people’s memories, and through other platforms – buskers must

work to declare the regularity of their work and, thus, a stability to their presence. As such, Pitt-Rivers' incorporation rites need to be performed again and again; these rites of incorporation are rites of positive strangerhood that, though ephemeral, are valuable because of the professional street performer's determination to continually repeat them. They are thus an example of both the transient nature of performance and the busker's declaration of her more stable presence, as exemplified by her insistence in maintaining the "vibe" that such rites create.

SPACE AS A MEDIUM AND TECHNIQUE FOR THE CREATION OF SUBJECTS

THE "TIME BUBBLE"



The Golden Lady at work: note the space between her and her two buckets.

The Golden Lady, who has only been performing as a living statue for about a year, has something different set up for her act almost every time I have run into her; she quite actively experiments with her performance, tweaking one thing, adding another, and completely

rethinking something else. Though I first met her in February of 2014, mid-May was the first time that I saw her standing still with music playing in the background. When I asked her about her new speakers, she explained, “I’m trying to set up all these speed bumps.” Ever since she added music to her routine, she has started to “see them [pedestrians] slowing down when they get to me and speed up afterwards.” She noted that, before she added music, people also slowed down when they approached her, but now “there’s a whole flood of people” – it’s almost like, she said, a “time bubble.” As such, the addition of music to the Golden Lady’s act impacted more pedestrians than the visual cues alone would have by essentially widening the diameter of her “bubble.”

Golden Lady’s visual cues are, by themselves, not insignificant. She is, for example, covered in gold from head to toe. She stands on a small box, thereby increasing her height and making herself more visible. She uses two buckets, one stacked on top of the other, to collect money. This bucket was originally painted red because, she said, “red is more effective” – it more easily catches people’s eyes. Later, she repainted both buckets so that they would be green, she said, to signify money. Indeed, she later complained about – and I observed – spectators who did not seem to see the buckets: They either walked up and handed her money or wondered where they should put it.

When I saw the Golden Lady in mid-May, the addition of music to her act was complemented by a “make-over” of her bucket. She taped two one-dollar bills onto the side of the green bucket and, on top of it, attached a stuffed Mickey Mouse that she had spray-painted gold. The bucket, which had previously been regularly ignored, suddenly became an object of attention in its own right. Children stopped to pet the Mickey Mouse and pose beside the bucket. The bucket, which despite its placement at some distance away from the Golden Lady, had been

an ineffective attempt at widening the place that she occupied. The addition of the Mickey Mouse and the dollar bills made that bucket visually salient and therefore successfully widened what the Golden Lady called her “time bubble.” Music and the decoration of the bucket, combined with her costume and the added height provided by a small platform, worked together to alter the (visual and auditory) senses of passersby.

Through her experiments with space, the Golden Lady gradually managed to increase the size of her “time bubble” and consequently draw in more passersby. What exactly is the connection between the manipulation of space and the creation of an audience? For strangers to begin to recognize another through the spectacle of a street show, for a “vibe” to be generated, people in some way must be ensnared by the busker’s net. Passersby – pedestrians, bystanders, and spectators – are the addressees of an interactional journey from interpellation to recognition and, finally, to commitment. The success of this journey, which can vary drastically from one performance to another, relies on the ability of the busker to create subjects. Herein lies the stakes of the performer’s work, the value-added as a result of the affective “vibe” that she produces, and, moreover, the social value and pleasure experienced by audience members who participate in an urban sociality of strangerhood – one that had been made possible by the busker’s labor.

While I have already argued that street performers revalue urban sociality, in this section, I investigate how they specifically accomplish this task. I therefore describe the ways in which street performers use city spaces as a medium and a technique through which they mold certain kinds of places. These places, or what I like to imagine as the busker’s bubble, are produced in the process of ‘sense work’: the work of the street performer is to create a zone within which passersby’s sensorial experiences are altered. Manipulation of space, then, results in the co-

production of place and affect. The initial goal of such manipulations is, for the street performer, the transformation of pedestrians into an audience: from indifferent strangers, as we shall see, into acknowledging subjects.

ON THE SUBJECT OF SUBJECT CREATION

A crowd of strangers gathers and shares in a kind of pleasurable anonymity in the process of watching the exemplary stranger expose herself. For the exemplary stranger who creates this scene of mutual recognition, the value of street performing as work comes in its ability to generate an affective dimension that results in distinctive form of urban sociality, a “vibe.” The connection that the street performer has with the affective dimension she creates sharply contrasts with the seeming unproductiveness of postindustrial wage labor, where the worker is alienated from the product of that labor. In a modern setting where consumers are used to purchasing objects that have long been alienated from the labor involved in its production, the opportunity to observe an object as it is produced has value. In this section, we investigate the productive labor involved in the generation of the busker’s affective bubble and the ways in which the transparency of this process attracts audiences and thus adds value to their relationships with one another as strangers.

Street-performer-produced stimulation to the visual and auditory nerves is not simply raw information to be absorbed. Some pedestrians stop to watch, some move around the Golden Lady as though she were invisible, and some are more interested in the stuffed Mickey Mouse than they are in the Golden Lady herself. Instead of raw information to be absorbed, the senses are mediated even as they are perceived; otherwise, Golden Lady’s performance would be a disparate collection of stimuli instead of the “air of mystery” for which she is aiming. Moreover,

if not for the (cultural?) mediation of senses, people's reactions to such performances would everywhere be the same. Indeed, "sense experience," notes William Mazzarella, is often misrecognized "as the fundamental stuff of social life" (Mazzarella 2009: 293); rather, as Mazzarella writes while channeling Massumi, "The affective body is by no means a *tabula rasa*; it preserves the traces of past actions and encounters and brings them into the present as potentials" (*Ibid* 292). More succinctly stated, "The senses, like the self, have their histories" (*Ibid* 293).

This notion accounts for the reason why some pedestrians stop and acknowledge performers, thereby becoming subjects, and why other pedestrians move on and ignore them. As I argued above, through the example of the Golden Lady's "time bubble," the production of place and affect in and through space creates subjects, but what exactly does that mean?

Historicized sense experience is, after all, a reason why one singer sings "recognizable songs" – pop and Broadway hits – when she works; passersby are more likely to stop and donate if her music strikes an affective chord. Similarly, one person with whom I was speaking explained that she would give a dollar to a busker every time she hears them playing jazz in the subway station; one particular performer whom she sometimes runs into on her way to work now switches to playing jazz each time he sees her. Another performer who uses music as one element of his show explained, "It's my way of communicating to them without, you know, verbally saying something. Through music. If it has a really really strong base, that gets the young people, and it gets a nice big crowd. If it has more of a melodic flow to it, it gets the older people." The affective nature of such performances therefore reveals, and possibly exploits, a degree of intimacy in the relation between busker and spectator.

Through music, then, performers can interpellate individuals from among the crowds of pedestrians; subsequently, through people's historicized sense experiences, and the affect intertwined with such sense experiences, members in the crowd are thereby hailed into recognizing themselves. The spectator thus exists as a member of a public, which "exists" and is called into being "*by virtue of being addressed*" (Warner 2003: 50, original emphasis). There is thus a gap between the performer's *interpellation* of its potential spectators – addressed to and directed at a general public, in the search for its discrete public – and the individual's *recognition* of that interpellation and, therefore, of her place as a member of that performance's public. This recognition, in the case of a pedestrian's response to a street musician, can come in obvious forms; a spectator can stop and dance to the music, buy a CD, or give money. Less obvious instances of self-recognition, but no less significant, include the many times that I have observed passersby remove an ear bud as they walk past a band of musicians, car windows rolled down in spite of Chicago's winter chill as a singer lets loose with her favorite song, or even just the slight tapping of a pedestrian's foot as she waits to cross the street.

In the affective resonance of such performances, one finds a degree of intimacy that is strongly contrasted with the fact that the performer is not really just addressing *you*; rather, *you* are just one out of the many other members of a public that is being addressed – a public that is simultaneously being called into being. Accordingly, *you* are being addressed just as strangers are being addressed; this observation is taken in stride by Michael Warner in his declaration, "Public speech must be taken in two ways: as addressed to us and as addressed to strangers" (*Ibid* 58), which brings us to two of his main points – "*The address of public speech is both personal and impersonal*" (*Ibid* 57, original emphasis) and "*A public is a relation among strangers*" (*Ibid* 55, original emphasis).

Warner's argument is significant here in that he both speaks about the personal yet impersonal experience of being addressed, the solidarity of a relation of strangerhood that can form among a performer's public, and, on a much larger scale, he writes of "the way they [publics] make stranger-relationality normative" (*Ibid* 57). In the urban context of the Magnificent Mile, as I argued earlier, strangerhood proliferates anyway. Stranger-relationality, however, develops only as these strangers are being addressed – in this case, through the work of buskers. As such, Warner's "public" is similar to a street performer's audience in that both are transient in nature, both depend on stranger-relationality, and both find value in the solidarity that can be found in this relation of strangerhood.

The "self-organizing" nature of Warner's publics (*Ibid* 54) takes into account the individual's ability to choose which publics to belong to, who they want to watch, or, even, who they would prefer to ignore. Indeed, as Warner argues, "The act of attention involved in showing up is enough to create an addressable public. But some kind of active uptake – however somnolent – is indispensable" (*Ibid* 61). "Active uptake," or simply "showing up," is enough, for Warner, to create a public. In a theater, for example, or even in the reading of a text, this uptake involves planning (however minimal) and a self-selecting public. Moreover, in a theater, the audience is, to a degree, held captive for the duration of a show.

At this point, the comparison with Warner's "publics" falls apart. The audiences that form for a performer who works the streets require, instead, *assisted* self-selection in open space; the busker, in the act of performing, must first consciously work to convince indefinite persons to leave the flow of traffic and become the object of her address. Then she subsequently must convince these people to commit to staying even though the open space of the city streets allows

them to leave at any point. The primary difference between Warner's "publics" and the addressees of a street performer is thus spatial.

This distinction in the kind of work that an actor on a stage does in addressing a public and the kind of work done by a street performer is an observation that Jeremy made by comparing the contexts of a festival and a street show: "In the old days they used to say you could do what's called *ballying*. You make a big noise – 'Show time, show time! Magic show about to start!'" Ballying, he went on to say, "doesn't work. You just look like a crazy guy, you know? And people told me ten, fifteen years ago you could stop a crowd that way. But that doesn't seem to work on the street. You go to a festival and do that, people will stop cuz they're there to have fun. *But on the street, not so much.*"

The key here is in the distinction between "a festival" and "the street." The formation of a public in reaction to the work of a street performer differs sharply with the work that a politician has to do at a political rally or the work that an actor does on a stage. I therefore assert that spatial technique, unlike public formation in the closed spaces of a theater, is a key variable in the formation of publics in the open spaces of the city streets.

For a musician, the work of creating an addressable public – and, significantly, transforming this public into a committed audience – could mean the right song choice. This work, for Jeremy, involves directly interpellating individuals as they walk past:

Happy shopping. Hi guys, how you doin'?

Good afternoon, how you doin' guys? Awesome? Have a lovely day.

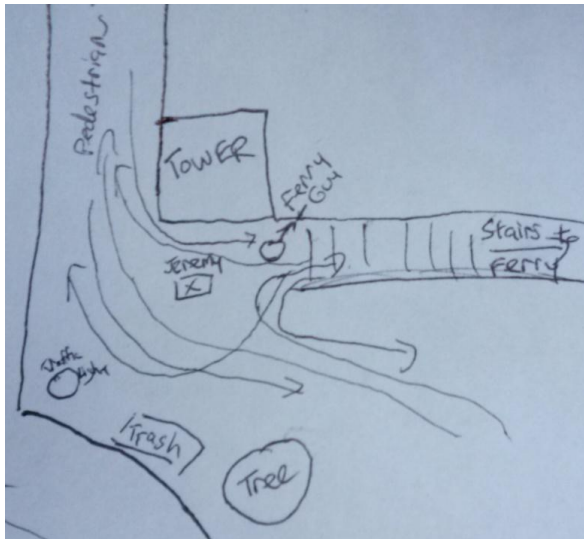
I like that hat. I'm a hat kind of guy, can you tell? [He] Doesn't care.

Hello! Good afternoon, how are you doing? Thanks for smiling at me. Some people don't. They just pretend I'm not here.

Well, hello folks. How are you? Hey, watch this. Hey guys. Have a lovely day. I love the hair. It's cool. Yeah, I like that. I might do mine that way. Hello. It's a magic show! How are you doing, guys? Have a nice day

now. Watch this, yeah, it's a magic show. Would you like to see something cool? Make you smile now! For a long time.

Interpellation and recognition, here, are taken in a much more literal sense than the afore-described interpellation-through-music. This primarily one-sided running dialogue continues until someone finally recognizes herself as the addressee and responds by stopping to watch Jeremy's show. "Recognizing oneself as the person addressed," in response to a "Hey, you!" is significant in "showing the importance of imaginary identification ... and locating it ... in the subjective practice of understanding" (*Ibid* 58) – in, ultimately, creating subjects out of passersby.

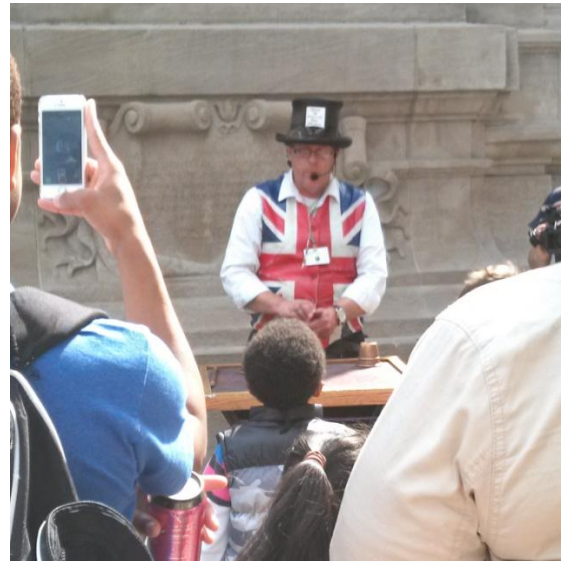


Jeremy works in the very center of pedestrian flows.

One reason that Jeremy's running dialogue works so well is because of the way he has positioned himself in front of pedestrians as they walk through his space. Another magician has described Jeremy's *pitch*, or a specific spot where a busker works, as "prime real estate." Jeremy stands with his back to a wall in a location of high foot traffic – somewhere between the tourist attraction of Chicago's Millennium Park to

the south and the shopping haven of the Magnificent Mile to the north. Since he is situated at the mouth of a bridge, all foot traffic on the west side of the road is funneled through his pitch. Whether or not they want to watch him, pedestrians must nevertheless face him as they walk around the narrow space beside him. The addition of a microphone and an amp magnifies his voice, thereby adding auditory stimulus to the already visual one of his Union Jack vest (and thus expanding his "bubble").

In contrast with the work done by actors in an organized play or by a politician giving a scheduled speech at a political rally, the street performer thus must do extra work in order to build her audiences: she must play down the much-theorized significance of nonidentity or impersonality in urban affective relations and play up, instead, the (even if, imaginary) intimacy and



Jeremy, in his Union Jack vest

personality of the performer-spectator's interactional relation. Indeed, whatever the reason for that intimacy, some kind of affective connection is, for the street performer, what is important. As Jeremy pointed out, "On any given day, the crowd will be started either with people who [think], 'Oh, I love magic. Show me a trick!' and those who had absolutely no desire to stop or expectation but somehow you made a connection with them. You said something, you made them smile, you made them laugh, you caught their attention long enough to say, 'Hey, watch this.' You do a trick and you bring them in." A "connection," then, is what "bring[s] them in."

This initial connection is possible because of the way that the performer has used space to maximize opportunities for such encounters. One way that Jeremy gets his initial spectator is by wading out into the flow of pedestrians, performing one effect for a passerby, and then taking her hand and leading her back to his table, thereby manipulating her friends to either commit and watch his show with her – or decide to abandon her completely. Once that initial group gathers, other passersby will stop to observe because the interaction between the performer and his volunteer has become an essential part of Jeremy's "bubble."

Yet, getting someone to stop is not the same as getting someone to commit. Herein lies the difference between a bystander and a spectator. The difficulty is in turning mere observers, or bystanders, into audience members. Upon noticing bystanders, Jeremy often looks up at them and directly encourages them to come closer. The result is varied. At times, they leave the space entirely, and at times they approach and become committed spectators. When there are enough bystanders for a full show, Jeremy starts his official show by doing two things: he tells everyone to “step up to the table,” and he physically lifts up his table and shifts it back towards himself. Though he sometimes tells his audience that moving in is a means to satisfy police regulations and avoid obstructing traffic, he explained to me that his main goal here is to convince his audience “to commit,” which makes them more likely to stay, watch the entire show, and tip him.

A group of acrobats known at the Kings of Michigan Avenue (KOMA Krew) uses similar methods to build a committed audience. While they are not quite located in the center of pedestrian flows, they stand right beside an intersection where, until the traffic light turns green, they have a captive audience. In that time, they, like Jeremy, instigate a running dialogue which draws individual passerby into stopping. Music and the pure spectacle of five dancers also create an affective bubble that piques people’s curiosities. And, like Jeremy, they ask the crowd to move in closer:

Call⁵: “But first, the city of Chicago!”
 Response: “They love us and they love our show!”
 Call: “But! They tell us that we must have-”
 Response: “Crowd control!”
 Call: “Simply meaning we can’t block the sidewalk,”
 Response: “Or the stairwell!”
 Call: “Everyone! Do me a favor: move all the way up to this line.”

⁵ “Calls” are made by one member of the group, while the “Response” is vocalized by the entirety of the group.

Street performers thus differentiate between bystanders and committed audience members. As such, the term “publics,” which as Warner writes, “*is constituted through mere attention*” (*Ibid* 60), is too all-encompassing of a notion for my purposes. While publics are interesting and important, especially in examining modern relationalities, street performers actively work to get people “to commit.” After all, only committed members of the



Pedestrians are held captive by the traffic light as the KOMA Krew works to build a crowd.

public will pay. While self-selected publics take part in the case of other kinds of “texts” or public addresses, *assisted* self-selection is essential to the street performer’s trade. Buskers work, then, to either actively and directly turn pedestrians into spectators (by creating affective bubbles through the manipulation of space and thereby addressing them directly), or to turn pedestrians into bystanders who ultimately must (the busker hopes) also become spectators.

In the examination of Jeremy and the KOMA Krew, space can be seen to be central, though not the only factor, in the creation, effectiveness, and maintenance of the “busker’s bubble.” As exemplified by Jeremy’s use of space as a funnel and the KOMA Krew’s use of the traffic lights for the temporarily captive audiences they create, these bubbles are significant because of the amount of people that they catch. Space, as a medium through which place and affect are produced, as a technique through which the largest numbers of people can get ensnared within this produced place, thus becomes the means through which passersby acknowledge the performer and, through this acknowledgement, become subjects themselves.

THE "CONNECTION" THAT BRINGS THEM IN

While interpellation and space may help build a crowd, what maintains a performer's audience and keeps the crowd present is ultimately the affective bubble that the busker creates. The manipulation of space, in Jeremy's case, and the pulling in of his table to convince people "to commit" could only work if his audiences were already ensnared in his affective bubble – in this case, one of comedy, enjoyment, and astonishment. While a variety of factors may go into a busker's performance, the affective dimension that they create is the actual product of their labor. As such, this product merits exploration.

Take the example of the KOMA Krew. These street performers are a group of black men in their mid- to late- twenties who, through a *hat line*, or a street performer's request for money, directly address and challenge stereotypes of young black men as gang members and drug dealers:

Call: "We're not out here gang banging."
 Response: "No!"
 Call: "We don't sell drugs!"
 Response: "No!"
 Call: "We're promoting real hip hop!"
 Response: "Healthy independent people helping other people!"
 Call: "Give us a hand, y'all!"
 [...]
 Call: "We are street entertainers, but we do not live on the street!"
 [...]
 Call: "... your money helps us keep out of two places."
 Response: "Number one!"
 Call: "The poor house!"
 Response: "We wouldn't want to be there!"
 Call: "And number two!"
 Response: "It keeps us out of your house and your house and your house." [Acrobats make a gesture like a gun with their hands and use it to point at members of the audience]
 Call: "Choice is yours!"
 Response: "Give a donation today, save a TV tomorrow."

This hat line begins by directly addressing stereotypes of young black men as "gang bangers," drug dealers, and homeless. They thus deny these stereotypes for themselves and assert their identities through the use of "hip hop" as an acronym. Immediately after this declaration,

however, they ask for applause; applause from the audiences here is thus acknowledgement that the street performers in question could easily have become the very stereotypes that they are denying. Applause in this instance is congratulatory; by becoming “street entertainers,” the acrobats have somehow escaped the trappings of their socioeconomic situations and discovered a means through which they could legally assert their economic and social independence as “healthy independent people.” Hand-in-hand with the acknowledgement that such stereotypes exist and the congratulations that these performers have escaped such precarious lifestyles is, significantly, reinforcement that they could easily become those stereotypes: “Choice is yours! Give a donation today, save a TV tomorrow.” In these words is the underlying message, ‘We aren’t *those guys*, but we could be.’

Through their hat line, the KOMA Krew thus draws on their audiences’ knowledge of the wider world; the wider world, as brought into being through their performances, is one in which American cities like Chicago, due to the shifting political economy, are known for the pains of de-industrialization. Busking is thus performed as a viable legal and licit option when alternatives for financial independence are few and far in between. In this racially and socioeconomically-charged context, the KOMA Krew thus plays off the guilt of privileged, mostly white tourists (by reference of “the poor house”) and, even, plays off inner city tensions by what seems to be a threat-disguised-as-comedy (“it keeps us out of your house and your house and your house”). While the resulting laughter – sometimes exuberant, sometimes nervous, and always affectively-tinged with a degree of shock – does a good job of concealing or assuaging the tensions, the tensions manifest most obviously when the acrobats are in the process of collecting money. Immediately after collecting money from the audience, they turn their

attention to the line of volunteers who have been standing in front of everyone, waiting for one of the acrobats to jump over all of them:

Call: "Yo, fellas!"
 Response: "What's up?"
 Call: "I think we're forgetting somebody."
 Response: "Who?"
 Call: "White guys!"

While the line is composed of more than "white guys," the acrobats specifically seek out, in their words, "a tall white guy!" as a volunteer. When the performers address these volunteers at last and ask them for money, the volunteers' decision to pay or not pay will be seen by everyone in the audience. The tactics used are thus palpably aggressive.

Call: "Hurry, give us something good-"
 Response: "And you will live-"
 Response: "We promise. Give us something good, give us something good!" [They sing these words, while clapping]
 Spectator: "I got nothing."
 Call: "You ain't got nothing? Come to the front!"
 Response: "VIP!"
 Call: "Something goes wrong,"
 Response: "You die first!"

Once again, the tension built up by any aggression (the situation itself as well as the words, "Give us something, and you will live") is relieved through the use of humor and the subsequent audience laughter; the volunteer who does not pay gets moved to the front of the line (where, supposedly, he would be the most likely to get hurt if the acrobat were unable to make the jump).

By performing into being an economic and racialized context and using this context as a means to elicit donations, partially through guilt and partially through threats, the acrobats of the KOMA Krew bring into play knowledge and experiences from the wider world outside of the show itself. These performers thus use, manipulate, and control racial and class tensions (in the same way that they manipulate space and flows) in order to create a certain affective experience – one in which the guilt of the socioeconomically advantaged is combined with subtle threats, all

of which are alleviated through humor and the steady rhythm of the KOMA Krew's call-and-response dialogue. In their racial comedy, there is something to laugh at and, at the same time, a question over the ethics of laughing at this kind of humor; this disorientation, what Sianne Ngai called "a meta-feeling" where "one feels confused about *what* one is feeling," results in a "very *specific* state of affective indeterminacy as the negative feeling of 'disconcertedness'" (Ngai 2005: 14). "Disconcertedness," alongside the experiences of humor and enjoyment, is the affective experience that the KOMA Krew seems to generate.

In this process, the discomfort that the KOMA Krew creates through a comedic performance can potentially impact their spectators' perspectives of street performers and of young black men and, even, make a socioeconomic critique of life in American cities. The KOMA Krew performs into being an acknowledgement of the socioeconomic context in which they work, a challenge against its restraints, and, ultimately, a declaration of their freedom in defiance of it. In a time of economic urban downturn, where a given busker's performance of self can be so explicitly explicated, their work demonstrates that there are alternatives to alienating wage labor. The street performer's pride, then, is a manifestation of the social value they find in their productive powers.

Furthermore, the affective experience of "disconcertedness" that manifests in response to the complicated socioeconomic issues that the acrobats allude to (and yet joke about) is cast out over the entirety of the KOMA Krew's audience. One moment of aggression, for example, directed at a particular volunteer resulted in that volunteer's partner yelling out, "I already donated for him!" In another instance, a volunteer's boyfriend ran out to pay on her behalf. Each of these moments of aggression is followed by a joke that relieves tension. Laughter, enjoyment, guilt, and discomfort are thus a part of the affective dimension of the KOMA Krew's labor.

In the moment of sharing the affective space produced by the performance, strangers begin to identify with one other through their shared experiences as members of the same audience. Moreover, where the disconnect between labor and its product is the norm, street performance also provides, for urbanites, the opportunity to clearly witness an object-as-it-is-produced. Unlike consumers who purchase commodities with no knowledge of the labor needed to create it (Marx 1844), audiences who observe street performances have the opportunity to witness the labor that produces the product that they are enjoying. In a context of a city where urbanites are as alienated from each other as they are from the labor of the objects that they use, a street performer's act is significant because of its ability to provide for audiences something worth watching. This *something* is a specific affective experience that is unique to each performance. By creating something worth watching, street performers provide for their specific audiences a unique affective experience which, in turn, create subjects out of them, and thereby transform them, however temporarily, into acknowledging strangers.

VALUE

"WE DON'T NEED ANY MONEY. GIVE WHAT YOU LIKE."

A woman with a child beside her approached a balloon artist on the street. It was late afternoon at the Festival of Lights, Chicago's annual Thanksgiving parade, and the sidewalks were quickly filling up with families. After taking a look at the balloon creations that adorned a sign that the man had set up, she asked the performer how much she should "pay" him for a balloon. He responded that there is no price, that he only takes "donations." The woman suggested, then, that what the artist wants is like "a tip," only to have the artist repeat that any money given is "a donation."

He explained, “We don’t need any money. Give what you like.” Though the “we” here is ambiguous and seems to refer to himself (or it could be social commentary about street performers in general). Yet, despite this claim, a couple minutes later and in response to a man who only handed him a dollar in exchange for a gun-shaped balloon, the balloon artist directly met the man’s gaze: “I more than earned that, my friend. I more than earned what you gave me.” This man later returned to give the balloon artist an additional five dollars.

Here, then, is a “donation” – neither a “tip” nor a “payment” – that the performer does not “need” and yet “earned.” The work of balloon artists would appear to be the most straightforward out of the different forms of performances buskers do; yet, in something as ostensibly direct as a balloon in exchange for money, this particular performer refused to a payment. A payment implies a “direct exchange” (Zelizer 1997: 42) and is as close as we can get to socially neutral, which, interestingly, the performer denies with a “We don’t need any money. Give what you like.” For this balloon artist, being paid in exchange for an object created and given implies “need.” In this view, he is not performing for money

The “tip,” which Viviana Zelizer has carefully analyzed, originally “established the inferiority of the recipient” because of its gift-like nature (*Ibid* 97) but, through time, has come to be expected and even earned as “recipients ... pressed to define the bonus or tip as an entitlement or payment” (*Ibid* 99). The ambiguous social implications of the “tip” explains this balloon artist’s choice to eschew the term, but why the choice of “donation”? “Donation” implies charity and would therefore infer, even more than the “tip,” an unequal status relationship between the giver and the recipient. The balloon artist’s paradoxical statement that the donation is “earned,” and the giver’s subsequent acknowledgement of the performer’s self-proclaimed entitlement by returning with a five dollar bill, complicates this word choice and reveals a social struggle over

the very meaning of the term “donation.” Different street performers choose to label their money in different ways. This particular exchange between a balloon artist and a pedestrian reveals a socially-loaded tension in something as apparently negligible as word choice. What, then, is at stake in the choice to define the social meaning of money?

“DONATION HELPS A CAUSE.”

Chapter 4-244, Article III of the Municipal Code of Chicago – on the regulation of street performers – has a section titled, “Acceptance of contributions” (Municipal Code of Chicago 2013: 4-244-165). “Contributions,” a word that legally defines the ‘things’ given to street performers, has particular significance when placed in association with and opposition to the different terms that performers have used (Saussure 1959) in their requests for money – “donations,” “tips,” and “payment.” In this context, the word “contributions” is politically loaded as a legal means to neutralize the social meaning of money. The use of this word is connected to the US government’s attempts to standardize and homogenize money (Zelizer 1997: 13-18).

If we are to agree with the socially neutral sense that the word “contributions” attempts to communicate, then we are to accept that the exchange of money neutralizes any relationships that are formed in a street show. As Simmel argues, “exchange value reduces all quality and individuality to a purely quantitative level” (Simmel 1903: 12). Following Simmel’s line of thought, street performers would thus generate recognition scenes that produce meaning through affect, which consequently loses this meaning as soon as money has been exchanged. Unless some other value existed that cannot be captured in purely monetary terms, there would be no purpose in watching and paying a street performer.

Continuing along this framework, I can point out that Simmel contrasts “domestic production and direct barter of goods” (*Ibid* 13) with the kind of exchange that now dominates transactions in cities. Because the performer produces scenes of mutual recognition and affect right in front of her audiences – because she is not alienated from her labor and her audiences are able to witness the mode of production – the “product” of her labor maintains a use value (one of the memory of urban sociality through the relation of intimate strangerhood) that remains even after money has changed hands. In this scenario, value and meaning exist because of the performer’s physical nearness to her audiences.

I think, however, this argument reduces the specific content of the performer’s work into one in which her mere presence is enough to generate value. Some performers, after all, are more successful than others. On top of the success of their performances, performers also go through the nonvisible work of getting a license, finding a pitch, and creating a show. Money, moreover, is not simply neutral pieces of paper to be exchanged. This is Viviana Zelizer’s point in *The Social Meaning of Money*: “money is neither culturally neutral nor socially anonymous” but instead invested “with meaning and social patterns” (Zelizer 1997: 18).

In this section, I argue that the very acknowledgement of the value of the performer’s show actually creates additional value. Value is therefore the product of the street performer’s *and her audience’s collective labor*. In this argument, I am only partially channeling David Graeber: Graeber (drawing on Victor Turner) conceptualizes value as “the way in which an individual actor’s actions take on meaning, for the actor herself, by being incorporated into a larger social whole” (Graeber 2001 [Turner 1979: 20-21]). For Graeber, even as something takes on value through its incorporation into “a larger social whole,” he makes a distinction between value’s “production” and its “realization” (Graeber 2001: 70). Indeed, he goes on to say, “value

is not *created* in the public recognition. Rather, what is being recognized is something that was, in a sense, already there” (*Ibid* 77, original emphasis). As such, in the gap between value’s “production” and its “realization” is a politics to “establish what value is” (*Ibid* 88).

While I do not deny that some kind of negotiation is involved in the value of a street performance, I argue that (due to the fact that street performances take place in open space, due to proximity between busker and spectator, and due to a dearth of institutional norms that could inform a passerby’s behavior as she encounters a street performer) a spectator’s recognition of the performer’s value is a part of the performance itself that ultimately generates more value. Granted, audiences applaud in the closed setting of a theater, and spectators yell out in response to calls for participation in the context of improvisational comedy. However, the sheer amount of audience participation possible in street theater makes it distinct from other kinds of performances. Moreover, not only is audience participation possible – it is inherent to street performance itself.

The decision over how to label one’s money, for instance, is a reflection of the audience’s role in a street performance. Like the balloon artist who labeled his income as “donations,” the Tin Man also primarily describes his revenue to his audiences as a “donation.” One woman, for example, replied to Tin Man’s assertion that a picture requires a donation with confusion: “It’s a required donation?! [That] doesn’t make it a donation!” Her reply only drew a smile from the Tin Man and laughter on the woman’s part as she fished out some cash and the two of them posed for a photograph.

The KOMA Krew also uses the word “donation” in their hat line when they ask their audiences to “Show your appreciation with a donation!” While collecting money, one acrobat also often adds in the line, “Yes! Collection just like church!” Along with a reference to how the

audience's money keeps them out of "the poor house" and a joke on how one acrobat "had a pretty messed-up life" because his "mom's a construction worker, and his dad's a ballerina," the use of the term "donation" plays once again on the guilt of the privileged tourist – which, the social implications of status aside, may perhaps be more effective at eliciting money.

Indeed, explained Tin Man, "Nobody likes to feel like they're being sold on something. They wanna sell themselves on the idea first. "Donation helps a cause," which, he said implies that a giver's "money means something. People like the power of giving. It's from the heart. All those other words ['tips' and 'payment'] mean 'You owe me.' Would you rather shop at the mall with set prices or give a donation?"

Money invested with social meaning here has less to do with the performer's social status and more to do with the spectator's affective experience within the busker's bubble. The word "donations" is a facsimile of granting agency to spectators, allowing them to decide whether and how much they should give, and thereby creating a situation where the giver feels good about herself because the money given was "from the heart" and not required. Through the act of donating, as opposed to participating in the script of an ostensibly socially neutral exchange, the audience member actually participates in creating the busker's "vibe" by, in a sense, acting like a patron of the arts. "Donation" thus interpellates the audience member as a fellow producer of social life in the city – thereby not only allowing a performance to maintain its value even as money is exchanged, but also adding value to the performance itself.

The goal in using the word "donations" is less about how the performer actually views the money but, rather, how money is performed to contribute to the overall "vibe" around the street performer. As such, while "tips" or "payment" may invoke the alienating abstract sense of money, "donations" involve the donator in the performance itself, creating a shared ownership

over the affective bubble they create. As a result, in addition to the experience of pleasure and shared subjecthood among the strangers of a busker's audience, street performing also involves its audiences in the labor of the street performer. Not only is street performing productive labor for the street performer, street performing is productive labor *for the spectators*. Through shared ownership of this labor, as well as through the shared affective experience of co-membership in the busker's audience, indifferent strangers become, instead, intimate strangers.



These signs in front of the Tin Man describe, for his audiences, what he gives in exchange for “donations”: “photos” and movement.

More than the role of word choice in inducing audience participation, the Tin Man's street show actually most clearly demonstrates how a spectator's recognition of value – the exchange itself – generates even more value. In his show, the Tin Man acts like a statue by staying still. A sign beside him has the words, “Donations make me move!!!” Movement, however, is by itself not easily definable as valuable. Yet one man practically yelled his excitement to me when I asked him about his decision to pay the Tin Man. He explained, “I want to see him move!”

Another person spoke to the man with whom she was walking: “Baby, do you have any cash? I wanna see him move!” At one point, one of the women in a group of three explained to her friends, “He's done moving until he gets more money, I think.”

The Tin Man's movement was interpreted as a commodity by his audience. That last woman's understanding of movement-as-commodity was particularly interesting because she framed movement as a service that the Tin Man stopped providing as soon as he was no longer

paid. This conceptualization of what Tin Man “sells” was based off of an understanding of a normative transaction; as such, when the Tin Man did not follow the script for this kind of transaction, people became frustrated:

When a woman walked by with two of her friends, she spotted the Tin Man and commented, “They gonna move or what?” After posing this question out loud, she immediately went up and donated. When the Tin Man did not immediately respond with movement, she complained, “I give you two bucks, you not moving!”

A version of this scene was repeated throughout the course of Tin Man’s performances: he does not move until only after the majority of the audience has paid; even then, he moves only to elicit payment with the words, “Photos are for donations!” Only after this person pays him (or departs the scene, as often happens) does Tin Man dance. Afterwards, when the audience is satisfied that Tin Man has completed his end of the transaction, they depart.

The usual script for a transaction here is disrupted by the Tin Man: he manipulates an audience member’s experience of time by ignoring the spectator-as-individual and, instead, addressing the audience-as-collective. The frustration expressed by members of the audience is interesting. Unlike in cases of charity, where someone donates money to a homeless person and does not expect anything in return, the audience expects to be rewarded (in measurable ways) for their payment. Unlike transactions with merchants or businesses, where consumers pay for a product and immediately receive the item that they have bought, the Tin Man has more agency in deciding when and whether to complete the transaction. He knows the script that his audiences expect – an expectation that they have gained from experience with other transactions and, moreover, an expectation that they have picked up from the transactions that they have enacted over the course of walking through the stores on Michigan Avenue – and he uses these

expectations to garner donations for a transaction that he may or may not decide to complete.

“To reintroduce uncertainty is to reintroduce time, with its rhythm, its orientation and its irreversibility,” which, Pierre Bourdieu has argued, is essential to the ontological status of the gift (Bourdieu 1992: 99). Indeed, he goes on to note that the distinction between the exchange of a gift and one of “swapping” as, significantly, merely the manipulation of time: “the counter-gift must be deferred and different, because the immediate return of an exactly identical object clearly amounts to a refusal. Thus gift exchange is opposed to swapping, which, like the theoretical model of the cycle of reciprocity, telescopes gift and counter-gift into the same instant” (*Ibid* 105).

Tin Man’s manipulation of time, then, redefines the nature of their exchange – from an economical transaction to a gift exchange. Combined with the use of the word “donations,” Tin Man further communicates to his audiences that the initial contribution is, in a certain way, a gift. The ensuing interaction is therefore a typical example of the Tin Man’s performance: a spectator pays him. When the Tin Man does not immediately respond with movement, the spectator is forced to wait for the completion of the transaction. In the ensuing time lag, other spectators pay, and other spectators are also trapped in place by the uncompleted transaction. Through the shared affective experience of anticipation, they begin to acknowledge one another as subjects. This experience of anticipation is further magnified by the uncertainty of whether or not the Tin Man will follow through with his end of the exchange. Failure to respond with a “counter-gift” is a social communication of what Bourdieu articulates as “disdainful refusal” (*Ibid* 106), which results in a spectator’s frustration and, if the street performer does not respond in time, her departure.

By redefining the nature of their interactions as that of a gift exchange, the Tin Man

inserts social meaning into his performance. He is, in a sense, stuck in a temporary debt relationship with the spectators who have just paid him; on the other hand, he has the power to reject that relationship. The “counter-gift,” his movement, is an “instrument of power based on the capacity to take the initiative in reopening or suspending hostilities” (*Ibid* 106). When invested with this kind of social meaning, his decision to move is much more socially valuable (as an acknowledgement of a social relationship with the spectator), and his decision *not* to move is a social insult that results in evident frustration.

Indeed, the Tin Man articulated this kind of interaction through what he calls the “rubber band effect.” He said, “When you tease somebody, you make them want it more.” He waits until their patience runs out and, he declared with a snap of his fingers, he moves right before they decide to leave. In the meantime, he said, “potential energy builds and builds and builds,” and he only releases that energy when he finally moves.

The Tin Man creates value by holding out the promise of that value: movement is what his audiences want to see, and, in order to get that movement, they have to first pay him.

If I'm performing and I'm standing still, I can't just start dancing for free because they haven't placed any value in me. Because they don't appreciate me. [...] So I have to stand my ground and be completely still until everybody donates. Now they've placed value in me. Now when I give them something, they're going to appreciate it. And the more they give, the more they're gonna appreciate, you know? And they don't know that walking up. They have no clue about that and that's the beauty of it. They did a selfless gesture and they got a reward from it. So they leave happy. That's beautiful.

In the process of giving money, he argued, value is built through anticipation. As soon as he moves, he said, they would leave. “It used to hurt my feelings when I was younger. I would do my best [dancing] moves, [and] they just keep moving. They don't want to see a show. They just want to see me move, is all.” Movement, then, is not really what is valuable to his audiences but, rather, the anticipation of movement as it builds through the accumulation of donations.

The accumulation of donations requires audience participation. Significantly, there is a

performative aspect to the very act of giving money to a street performer. Especially in the singling out of the last non-paying spectator, the Tin Man turns the attention of the rest of the audience at this last spectator. Regardless of whether or not this last spectator decides to donate, this action forces the audience to participate collectively in the shared affective experience of anticipation. They are, in a sense, working together – in acknowledging Tin Man’s movement as valuable – to make him move. By manipulating time, by redefining his relationship with his audiences as one that is connected by a gift exchanged, and by forcing them to work collectively before he moves, the Tin Man is establishing his movement as valuable – because it is the product of his *and his spectators’* nonalienated labor.

“YOU’RE ONLY AS GOOD AS YOUR AUDIENCE.”

The street show as the product of a street performer’s and her audience’s collective labor is made even more salient when the audience fails to acknowledge the show’s value – and thus fails to help create the additional value that I have argued comes with this acknowledgement. The KOMA Krew, for example, will stop performing mid-show if they sense that their audiences are not appreciating their performance.

One particular show was cut short in just such a way. When the acrobats asked their audience to “make as much noise as [they] possibly can!” and the response was lackluster, the acrobats immediately turned off the music and turned their backs to the audience. When I asked one of the acrobats about this later, he explained their decision:

I mean, it’s not easy what we do. Like, we can get hurt. Like right now, my knee is hurting. But I will do a show if the energy’s there. For me it’s not about the money all the time.... I was taught, you’re only as good as your audience. And if the audience is great, you’re gonna have a great show, you know? But, I mean, we did all of that building up this energy to grab the crowd and we were like, you wanna see the show? And they blahaaaaah. If we don’t get a good response in the beginning, it doesn’t make sense to do the show because that lets us know how the end will go. If they don’t give us enough energy, we’re not

gonna do it because we could hurt ourselves and we're exerting energy and they're not giving it back to us. It doesn't make sense to do the show.

The exchange of energy and the failure to exchange energy is, for C-Dot and his fellow acrobats what makes or breaks a show. An audience that refuses to acknowledge the value that the KOMA Krew can give will, in effect, not be given a performance. By not acknowledging the value of a show, the audience lets the acrobats "know how the end will go." Lackluster audience participation signifies the production of an eventual product that may just not be worth the labor.

While the KOMA Krew's decision to stop their performance mid-show has a jarring effect on their audience, they are not the only performers who manipulate the length of their show based on how likely they think their audiences will pay them. Jeremy, for example, does not start a full show unless a sizable audience has already gathered. If he manages to stop someone but is unable to build a good audience, he will do one trick, ask them for a tip, and move them along. Otherwise, he would waste his time and energy working for an audience that would not participate as much in the co-generation of an affective experience when, instead, he could be working to build another, better audience.

Tin Man also turns off his music and declares to his audiences, "I'm on break!" if his audiences have stopped paying him. He explained:

That's why I don't dance all the time when people donate. I might get one or two donations, but if I don't feel that appreciation from the crowd, there's no reason to give my all into it because they're not going to appreciate it. Not gonna appreciate it. I've been rejected so many times. [...] Those people are expecting you to do something for nothing. So he [another performer] dictates how long his show is – hell yeah. He says, 'I'm cutting this one short.' Ah, yeah. I hop off and say I'm on break. Yeah. Right in the middle of the song. I'm on break!

These examples are all instances when street performers gauge how much "appreciation" their audiences will have for their show, prior to the moment when they have expended time and energy performing, and prior to the moment when they have actually requested money. In these instances, the street performer attempts to maintain control by manipulating who they want as

members of their audiences.

An audience's acknowledgement of the value of a show is thus indicative of the subsequent role they may play in generating additional value for the street performance. Their failures, as well as their triumphs, reveal just how closely linked they are to the affective labor of a street show. In the end, this link is what connects them with their fellow audience members. In addition to the shared affective experience as members of the same audience, they also share in the work of nonalienated labor. By being co-laborers in the generation of an affective product that they, in turn, enjoy together, indifferent strangers develop the 'intimacy' of intimate strangerhood. Street performers, in effect, take indifferent passersby and turn them into intimate strangers.

CONCLUSION

"YOU CAN ONLY DO IT IN THE CITY."

In the process of watching a street show, strangers begin to form a common identity with one another as strangers. This experience of intimate strangerhood, the source of what I have argued to be an urban "vibe," is essentially the product of the interactions between busker and spectators. Since this product is effectively co-produced by street performer and audience, I suggest that the street show and the bubble it creates is the product of the audience members' labor, just as much as it is the product of the street performer's work. As Golden Lady explained, "You can only do it [busk] in the city, I think, because you need an audience of some sort. Otherwise you're just standing still."

The implication here is that "an audience of some sort" can only be found "in the city." While audiences can obviously form in any location, the "audience" that Golden Lady speaks of

is a uniquely urban audience. This urban audience is composed of people who are, for the most part, strangers to one another, as well as strangers to the street performer. They form in open space through the work of the street performer and, as they form and stranger relations are generated, they actually take part in further crystallizing those relations through their participation on the productive labor of the street show.

In the specific context of the city, in which stranger interactions proliferate, the busker-audience relation therefore revalues stranger relations. At the same time, street performers can only work where strangers proliferate. Cities, then, are important as places where strangers can be easily found, are alienated from one another, and yet, are places where they can potentially connect (while remaining strangers) through the affective work of the street performer.

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