

WHY CIRCUS WORKS

How the values and structures of circus make it a significant developmental experience for young people.

Reginald Bolton, B.A. (hons.), Cert. Ed.

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains, as its main content, work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

.....
(Reginald Bolton)

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Abstract

Why Circus Works

How the values and structures of circus make it a significant developmental experience for young people

Circus is increasingly being used as a developmental and remedial activity for children. However, it is in the paradoxical nature of circus that it operates in a way both mysterious and easily accessible. This thesis proposes that circus as education is more effective when both teacher and student have a better understanding of circus as an art form.

To explain this I first introduce six 'elements' of childhood, whose absence often seems to result in an incomplete personal maturity. I then conduct a wide exploration of both the real and the imagined circus, showing how these elements occur or are evoked there, and I establish a correspondence or 'homology' between the two entities – childhood and circus. The discoveries shed light on the aesthetic code of circus itself, leading to the conclusion that circus works as an artform because its essential composition recalls profound experiences of childhood.

I argue that contemporary Western childhood presents unexpected hazards, mostly involving passivity and over-protection. In other parts of the world, and in some Western populations, childhood has other problems, linked to deprivation, exploitation and physical danger. In either case, a child involved in circus activities has a chance to make good some deficits, by experiencing constructive physical risk, aspiration, trust, fun, self-individuation and hard work. My hope is that this dissertation will contribute some strength to the case for well-designed programmes of circus activities for young people, in both formal and informal settings.

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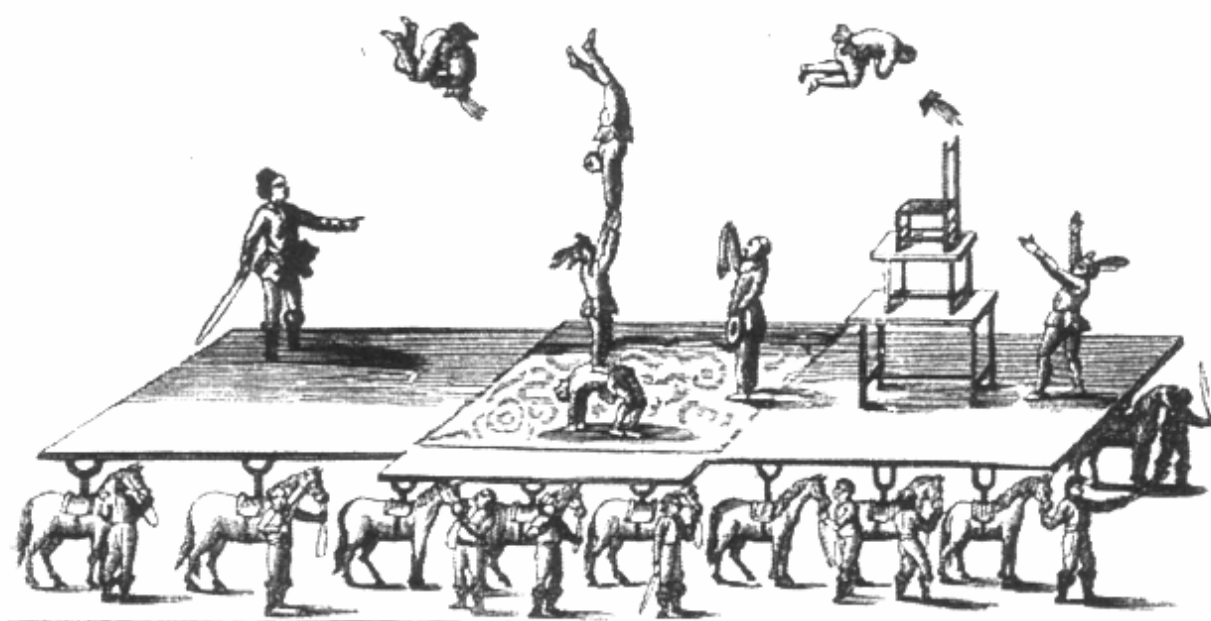
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Par Permission du ROI, & de Monseigneur le Lieutenant-Général de Police.

E X E R C I C E S
S U R P R E N A N S
DES SIEURS
A S T L E Y,
RUE ET FAUXBOURG DU TEMPLE,

Aujourd'hui MERCREDI 27 Décembre 1786.



[To face p. 44.]

3. Astley's handbill, Paris, 1786.

(Facsimile from *The Memoirs of J. Decastro, Comedian*, London, 1824, facing p. 44.
Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, shelfmark M. adds. 123 e.63.)

1 Introduction: A Wilderness

The values and structures of circus make it a significant developmental experience for young people.

This is a correlational study of two fields, one of which is largely neglected, while the other is exhaustively studied. The former, circus, is remarkable for being a worldwide and centuries-old phenomenon which, with a few exceptions, has escaped academic analysis. Although there is a significant body of historical and biographical material, there is very little associated aesthetic, critical, theoretical, sociological, scientific or psychological work. In such a vast wilderness of non-scholarship, relieved occasionally by small oases of research, I can attempt no more than a general map of the area, indicating some suggested paths for future explorers. However, I shall stop to dwell on some particular features of circus, landmarks on the map, which suggest an association with the other partner in the hypothesis.

Pursuing the wilderness metaphor, I should like to clarify my intent by explaining that I plan to guide the reader in and safely out again. Some of the paths have been trodden before, and I hope to acknowledge the pioneers who have preceded us. As an ecologically aware traveller, I hope to cause no damage; 'leaving nothing but footprints, taking nothing but pictures'. There is no intention to 'develop' this wilderness, opening it to tourism, mining or housing. Much of the value and appeal of circus is that it is relatively unexplored and unexplained. We shall stop frequently to look closely at phenomena, some possibly 'unknown to science'. I shall attempt some description and explanation, then move on. My hope is that the reader will not become frustrated when some of the stops prove to be relatively short, for we have a lot of ground to cover. Very often we shall find, as Burke and Wills in Central Australia sadly did not, a tree with the word 'Dig' carved on it. At the very least, a bit of spadework will expose a footnote or two, and in most instances a complicated root system, a spring or a mineral lode warranting further careful investigation, and probably inspiring another thesis.

The other partner in the correlational study is the challenge of childhood – a child's developmental needs. Here we find a forest of research in sharp contrast to the desert of circus scholarship. Indeed we find ourselves among endless library shelves filled with theories, theses, case studies, statistics and policies.

My choice has been to make a subjective selection from this enormous field. I shall begin by introducing just six 'elements' I consider integral to a child's growth, and briefly examine some of the theory and research associated with each one. My choice is based primarily on my own thirty years' experience of circus-in-education. As a trained primary school teacher, I am well aware of the expected growth stages of the child, and I can often sense if there is a gap or a lack in his/her development. Chapter two will introduce these specific deficiencies so that, as we then explore the tracks and tracts in the circus landscape, we shall bear these elements in mind, aware always of possible associations and comparisons.

Emerging with a greatly improved knowledge of what circus is, what its values and structures are, we shall again look closely at those six chosen elements in the development of children and young people. Testing the hypothesis that there is a fruitful correspondence between the two paradigms, we shall draw on examples from my own and others' experience. One by one, we shall examine each element, and see how the young person's developmental needs may be met by exposure to circus activities.

1.1 Epigraphs, Quotations, Citations and Translations

I quote others only the better to express myself.
Michel de Montaigne

Most of the forty-nine sections of this work are headed by an epigraph, and most contain quotations. I have made every effort to attribute correctly all quoted passages in bibliography 1, although some classical references, like Montaigne (above), stand alone. The epigraphs serve as overtures to each new section, sometimes to introduce a new thought, sometimes to provoke, sometimes to suggest concepts that the section cannot contain. Quotations within the text are usually accompanied by comment, but not always. If another writer's words appear in isolation, it is because I have chosen to quote a passage which I cannot improve, and which needs no explanation.

The citation system is in a modified MLA style, allowing the reader to source each reference in the separate bibliographies of books and articles, juvenile sources, films, songs and miscellaneous items. For works quoted within the text, original page numbers are cited. Elsewhere, authors and/or works are referred to if they are of interest or influence. Footnotes occur in places where I have things to say which would otherwise interrupt the flow of the text. They may contain examples, comparisons and references, or observations that I feel impelled to include.

I have taken the liberty to translate passages of several authors from French into English. Where this occurs, I will indicate 'trans. Bolton' at the first occurrence of each work. I apologise now if I have not done justice to the authors' intentions. If an interview is cited in the text, it is with me, and details will be found in bibliography three.

1.2 The Shape of the Thesis

'and what is the use of a book,' thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversations?'
Lewis Carroll

Much as I enjoy reading literature uninterrupted by bullet points, I have decided to divide these hundred thousand words into digestible sections within chapters. The argument of the thesis will be pursued throughout the work, but the lands to be surveyed and the roads to be travelled are so many, that I feel we may get lost in a continuity of seamless prose. Like Alice, I am conscious of the demands made on the reader, and while resisting the temptation to fill the work with pictures and

conversations, I have at least broken it up with sections, epigraphs and quotations chosen to be as ornamental as they are appropriate.

Throughout the dissertation I shall be looking for examples of homology between the two fields, circus and childhood. Occasionally I shall spend time looking through a representation or manifestation of circus and find few associations to report. However, in the interest of mapping the whole landscape, I have included even the less fruitful areas, for comparison.

1.3 Voice

I think that I think, therefore, I think that I am.
Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

For a writer to explain his voice is a bit like a painter exhibiting his brushes. However, throughout my thirty years in the field I have had to choose the appropriate voice from a range including performer, clown, teacher, researcher, administrator, broadcaster and writer for both adults and children. Given these circumstances I have had to think carefully about how to present this thesis. Clearly, the first person plays a part. It would be crass and clumsy to avoid it. The 'I' in these pages will necessarily vary from raconteur to analyst, from protagonist to sceptic, hoping never to become the evangelist.

Because so much of the support material in my argument has been collected first hand, I cannot avoid 'being there'. The credibility of the thesis does not depend on the length, depth and range of my experience in the field. Obviously the work must stand alone. If I occasionally cite my own experiences to illustrate a point, it is done as just another instance, to add to the totality of the argument in each case.

Regarding the thorny question of gender-specific pronouns, may I quote from the preface of one of my own books on circus?

I would like to point out that this is an equal opportunity book. However, I find it inelegant to write 'him/her' or 'she/he' in the text, when of course I fully believe that both girls and boys can and should do everything. So sometimes I write 'him' and sometimes 'her'. If I tend, occasionally, to paint moustaches on boys, and rosy cheeks on girls, it is in the spirit of evoking Circus as it has been. Everything else in this book is in the spirit of Circus as it can be.
(Bolton 1988 p.1)

1.4 Theory

I reckon thinking stuffs it.
Circus Oz clown

In moving towards an answer to the question 'How does Circus work?' I have considered various frameworks upon which to arrange assumptions, test hypotheses and reach a theory. None of the available literary/cultural theoretical frameworks seemed to satisfy the multi-disciplinary nature of my enquiry, although some results of my endeavours remain, and will be found in the section 'A Circus Of Theory', at the end of 3.3.

I am aware of circus studies being undertaken in the fields of Anthropology, Sociology, Education and Social Work, all of which have their own established and developing investigative methods.

Different readerships would expect different tools of enquiry – from the rigours of empirical science to the random creativity of post-modernism. Wondering if it is possible to satisfy all readers, I came to realize that many frameworks are self-referential. A scientific experiment generally pre-supposes the application of scientific principals. A feminist enquiry would have no credibility if it depended on a 'liberal humanist' framework, with its pantheon of dead white males, or psychoanalytical theory, with the alleged misogynist Freud lurking in the shadows. No, feminist enquiry demands feminist theory; post-colonialism uses post-colonialism and so on.

One of the twin themes of my research into 'Why Circus Works' relates to that significant moment when an outsider becomes an insider. It is tempting to use the image of a mirror, of stepping through a looking glass. Anton C. Zijderveld's 'Analysis of Traditional Folly' is entitled *Reality in a Looking Glass*. (Zjiderveld, 1982, p. 11) He quotes Langland's *Piers Plowman* where the goddess Fortune bids him look through The Mirror of the World, and of course he quotes Lewis Carroll's *Alice*. I would add George MacDonald's *Lilith* where again the hero steps through the uncrossable barrier into a world of enchantment. Yet there is no looking glass to be seen in the circus ring (except the empty one in the classic clown gag).

When I feel the need of a visible analogy, with which to argue my points, instead of the mirror, I shall look at what is really there in the circus, and refer to the *ring*, and the *ring door*. Outside the ring sits the audience; those who pay, visit and then leave; those who talk about the circus as they saw it from the benches. Within the ring are the circus people, the performers, those with the knowledge. Behind the performers is the ring door (usually velvet curtains). This, like the ring perimeter, is a very significant border. I am always fascinated to watch that moment, at the end of an act, when the spangled performer, with her cloak and high heels, finally turns her back on us, and exits through that curtain. We catch glimpses of the next act, the ponies, or the juggler, oddly static, waiting. We observe that behind the curtain the light is dimmer, the space crowded, the mood is functional, the angels have become human again as they pass back through that ring door. In reverse, in a tableau so attractive to painters

such as Toulouse-Lautrec, Robert Riggs and Laura Knight, we see past the dark backs of the waiting artists to the glowing excitement of that other domain where the magic happens, the ring itself.

Realizing that theoretical systems can be self-referential, the strength and universality of the physical structure of circus now becomes very attractive as a framework for its own analysis. Many of the more serious books on circus history and theory seem to be trivialised by the catchy and pithy nature of their titles. Mark St Leon's excellent *The Circus in Australia* is actually entitled *Spangles and Sawdust* (1983). Toole-Scott's *Circus and Allied Arts : a World Bibliography* (1958-1971) actually cites four other books with that same title. Helen Stoddart's *Circus History and Representation* has as its main title, the pun *Rings of Desire* (2000). *A Seat at The Circus* (1980), *Under the Big Top* (Feiler, 1995), *Here Comes The Circus* (Verney, 1978), *Hold Yer Hosses!* (Sherwood, 1932) and *I Love You Honey, but the Season's Over* (Clausen, 1961) are all very respected books in the field, but like circus itself, these titles do not demand respect, and belie the integrity of what lies within. Hans Brick's autobiography has possibly the worst title of the lot. It is a book packed with the experience and wisdom of a very gifted animal trainer, and is inexplicably entitled *Jungle Be Gentle* (1960). The American edition is a great improvement – *The Nature of the Beast*.

These aberrations may be explained by the enthusiasm and blinkered vision of the publishers' marketing directors. However, a mystery which is only now becoming clear to me is why so many excellent books on circus have adopted the predictable and corny structure of a circus programme in order to cover the history, development, variations, controversies and future of Circus. Hippisley-Coxe, in his book *A Seat at the Circus* (1980), has the following chapters (my comments in brackets):

'Overture' (introduction), 'A Grand Parade' (history), 'Voltige' (including equestrian origins of circus), 'The Strong Man', 'Performing Animals', 'Liberty Horses', 'Daredevils', 'The Interval' (reminiscences of circuses he has known), 'The Big Cage', 'Aerial Acts', 'La Haute Ecole', 'Jugglers', 'Ground Acrobats', 'Clowns' Entrée', 'Finale' (thoughts on the dynamics of circus presentation, and on its future).

This break-down of book sections to correspond to the acts in a circus programme is cute, it is memorable, and this is why I have resisted it. However, as I shall suggest in the section on circus as metaphor (3.2) and in circus of theory (3.3), my chosen subject has itself the potential to provide the theoretical framework not only for its own investigation, but also for other, seemingly unrelated studies. I rely on the imagination of the reader to see how circus theory could be used to analyse some of the following possible scenarios:

'Politician as Clown'
 'Getting it Right: the intangible correctness of skate-boarding, hip-hop and juggling'
 'Over the Ringmaster's Shoulder – an Analysis of Confidence in Management'
 'The Circo-anthropology of a Classroom'
 'The Goal-Umpire, the Traffic Cop and the Mime- the Anthro-semiotics of Gesture'

'Look at me, Mum! – Appropriate Showing Off in Childhood'

So, with the confidence of this discovery, I intend to allow myself what I initially tried to avoid: occasionally to use as a theoretical framework, the circus itself.

1.5 Literature Review

If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.

Isaac Newton, 1643 - 1727. (An early circus metaphor?)¹

In chapter three I shall review representations of circus seen through many lenses, including those worn by academic researchers and analysts (3.3). This body of writers would normally be expected to appear comprehensively cited in this literature review, so perhaps an explanation is needed. Here in this section, I am specifically looking at the literature on youth circus. So among my eight categories of theorists, the only ones to feature here are some educationalists, being the only ones with direct relevance to the practice of youth circus. The others, concerned with semiotics, aesthetics, anthropology and so on, will be reviewed later, as just another external representation of circus. This literature review, then, will not confine itself to academic literature.²

This thesis is proudly eclectic. It has to be, given the lack of scholarship in the field of circus in education. There have been many publications by circus companies, including *Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey* in the USA, *Circus Royale* in Australia, and the U.K. *Circus Friends Association*, designed to be teacher-friendly, offering facts of circus life and jolly classroom projects, but ultimately designed to put little bums on seats.

There is also a body of books for children on 'How to do Your Own Circus' which I review in section 3.7. Their significance lies in the changing techniques and attitudes towards the young readers. Techniques gradually change from impractical dressing up and pretending, towards the rigour and discipline actually needed in circus life. The attitude to the reader changes perceptibly from the 1923 *How to Put on an Amateur Circus* which suggests it should be "a burlesque circus [...] entirely a home made affair" (Hacker and Eames, p. 9), to the 2000 publication *Le Cirque* which features mature advice from professional performers to young aspirants. (Laurendon and Laurendon, 2000).

A third source is occasional journals, leaflets, and newsletters published by youth circuses, circus schools and organizations. Some significant items are listed in the

¹ Hal Abelson's version – 'If I have not seen as far as others, it is because giants were standing on my shoulders' - fits the many youth circus practitioners whose busy lives have not given them enough time for reflection. This review highlights some who have taken the time.

² More writings will be reviewed in sections 3.3 and 3.4 as I trawl the depths of circus theory and criticism, looking for traces of our six syntenic elements.

bibliography but many others are lost among global ephemera apparently made redundant, as such material moves from print to the digital media. Around the world there are several important collections, such as the private archives of Dietmar and Gisela Winkler in Berlin, Hovey Burgess in New York, and Jean-Paul Jenack in Florida.

Other collections pile up, fragmented in filing cupboards of government departments, schools and youth clubs. Many youth circuses have survived three generations, e.g. *Elleboog* (Amsterdam) and *Sailor Circus*, Sarasota (Florida), coincidentally both established in 1949. *Elleboog's* archives are extensive, and tell a story of a steady increase in size and scope, a name change from 'Circus' to 'Theatre', and later to 'Circus Theatre', and Amsterdam's changing demographic distribution. Successive policy documents tell of a change in attitude towards the participating children, and, most recently, in 2002, *Elleboog* contracted me to review their entire operation, and subsequent discussion of my report has resulted in another policy change, the appointment of an artistic director, and an intention to redress the balance which had been increasingly tilted towards pedagogy, and neglecting the 'magic' of creativity and circus heritage.

Robert Sugarman's *Circus for Everyone: Circus Learning Around the World* (2001) eclipses my *New Circus* (1986) and itself shines more light on the spread of circus as a developmental curricular and extra-curricular activity for children. Sugarman's attitude to 'circus learning' is that of an explorer who has discovered a new land. The tone of his book is overwhelmingly positive. He declares that "writing this book has been such an adventure for the author, a retired academic whose area of specialization has, heretofore, been theater" (p. 12). In 1995 he met Alla Youdina, then Creative Director of new acts for *Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus*. He watched her creating a new act, and "intrigued by this process he had seen, the author set out to discover how circus performers came to be that" (p. 12).

Circus for Everyone provides a considerable networking and inspirational resource for those in the field, and a revelation to those who are not. Twenty-four professional circus schools are listed and dozens of circus clubs, camps, programmes and networks. Interviews with Rob Mermin of *Circus Smirkus*, Paul K Pugh of *Wenatchee Youth Circus* and many others, give insight into the way these trainers combine a feel for circus acts with often instinctive understanding of child development. Sugarman lists as many as he could find, in 2001, of professional training schools, community- and youth-circuses, circus camps and school curriculum and extra-curricula units. Apart from a considerable job of research and cataloguing, Sugarman also analyses what he sees as the benefits of youth circus. He sees circus as:

- ✍ a team sport that is not competitive
- ✍ structuring each step as a plateau for further achievement
- ✍ providing self-esteem for those struggling academically
- ✍ bringing outsiders in
- ✍ difficult, therefore teaching good work habits
- ✍ authentic in a world becoming ever more 'virtual'

His main observations have been in the USA, and my many visits there confirm the multiform development of youth circus there as elsewhere. AYCO, the American Youth Circus Organization, founded in 2001, and its very successful biennial festival, reveal a spectrum from high achieving professional training, often European or Asian inspired, to community youth groups happy just to 'get the kids off the streets'.

In *New Circus*, I wrote, "A common factor I have discovered in many children's circuses around the world is the presence of one charismatic figure who loves children and circus in equal measure" (p. 33). This is still true in many instances, whilst there are also numerous excellent youth circuses run by collectives or elected boards. However, this thesis will indicate that the balance of these two passions, of these two areas of understanding, is what is necessary for the best successes in this field.

An inspiration for the present author was the book I discovered in the late seventies, *The Children's Republic: The Country behind the Circus Muchachos* (Mobius, 1976). It is the story of Los Muchachos (the youngsters, the lads) whose circus was formed by Cesar Silva Mendez (Padre Silva) in Bemposta, Spain, with boys in a residential home. Circus became the creative focus of the 'Nation of Boys', and:

[t]his year [2001] the youngsters will celebrate the 36th anniversary of their debut in Plaza Cataluna in Barcelona. We have visited 85 countries over the five continents, gone to hundreds of cities, done thousands of presentations and two million people have enjoyed our shows. (Silva, quoted in Simpson, 2002, p. 35)

Padre Silva is still active and busy and was an honoured guest at the 2002 'International Round Table on Circus and Social Work' in La Seyne-sur-Mer, France. His credo/homily, printed in the 'Rencontres' programme reads:

Circus blood is in my veins. I could have been a clown or a trapezist. I am a Priest in order to send people a message of happiness, peace and love. I love children. And I have dedicated the best of my childhood dreams to them. Caring about children pushed me to create, in 1965, "La Nacion de los Muchachos".

That same year, shortly after becoming a priest, I joined the multicoloured circus caravans in Spain. Since then, most Spanish circuses have been blessed by the presence of Christ, from above blessing and applause, risk and magic. It became one of the most beautiful prayers to come from the heart of these nomads, messengers of a dream for the paths of the world.

These two were my favourite missions: Circus and children. Why not put them together? (ibid, p. 36).

In searching for a 'literature' on the subject of circus and young people, we find many frustrating examples like this - where the words and ideals are simply and passionately expressed, not couched in any methodology beyond enthusiasm and aspiration. The practical work itself, like the work of poets, painters and musicians is the essential literature. Unlike the work of these artists, so much of circus is ephemeral and

forgotten, carried only by a collective cultural memory, and the inadequate archives of programmes, posters and reviews.

In chapter three I shall review representations of circus seen from many angles, including the attentions of academic researchers and writers. One category is the educationalists. There will be crossovers between the study of youth circus and circus in education. Here in this section, I am specifically looking at the literature on youth circus outside the school curriculum, although my findings will involve a merging of these streams.

Now, we move on to some accredited academic writers who have given attention to the general subject of youth circus, and here follows a brief summary of work from four countries.

In France, Hughes Hotier has done most to enlighten the field of circus in education. His *Cirque Educatif* has operated an annual big top season since 1975. He is an advocate of 'Le Cirque Traditional' and himself appears sometimes as M. Loyal (Ringmaster) or an Auguste clown. His *Fichier [Dossier] du Cirque Educatif* describes his organisation as:

a popular cultural movement which tries, at the same time, to promote the values of traditional circus, and make of them this basis for an attractive pedagogy, and finally to reconstitute a future public to put the circus arts back into our cultural heritage. (Hotier, 1999, p. 1, trans. Bolton)

As the French government recently spent \$16,600,000 on a Year of Circus Arts, (2001,2002) benefiting both traditional and new circuses, clearly, it has never strayed far from that country's cultural heritage. (Baillet, 2001, p. 72). Hotier, however, although at the forefront of the revolutionary promotion of circus as education, is less than enamoured of the radical, confronting manifestations of new circus, so much of which is created by his compatriots. He seems to have *Archaos* in his sights in this passage from *Cirque Communication and Culture*:

New forms of spectacle have claimed the name "circus" on the pretext that they are presented in a ring under a big top. Others, despite themselves are seen as circus even though they refute the name. All this is confusing to the potential public. The horses don't whinny anymore, they throb. And solvent has replaced the shovel for tidying up after them. They want us to believe that grease has replaced dung in this modern age. In our polluted streets, possibly, but in the ring, we know what we want to see [...]" (Hotier, 1995, p. 11, trans. Bolton)

This jibe does not fully represent Professor Hotier's wide knowledge of circus, old and new, and his well-based belief in the essentially integral qualities of what he calls traditional circus. He sees circus as an organic product of society:

but it seems that, for several years, it has not been able to follow its natural evolution. It is true that this is not simple for an art form inscribed in a

tradition. Sometimes it stagnates, and sometimes, in reaction, it abandons itself to highbrow aberrations and loses all credibility (p. 69).

Hotier actually uses the word 'intello', which I have represented here with 'high-brow'. It is interesting that in English, the word 'intellectual' is often derogatory in itself. Not so in France, so 'intello' represents the pseudo-intellectuals, rather than "true philosophers who help us to think and to understand and to progress our knowledge" (p. 69, footnote 42).

Hotier's semiological and cultural works certainly "progress our knowledge", although his candour and personal aesthetic may challenge some current ideologies. His more recent work on circus as education, has also stirred up critics. A reviewer in *Arts de la Piste*, reviewing Hotier's *Un Cirque Pour Education* (2001) resents the fact that Hotier's 1992 production parodied *Archaos* – an ultra modern 'chain-saw' circus. What is so refreshing for a non-French researcher is to see that this debate exists at all. Not only 'intellos' but also intellectuals (*Arts de la Piste* is full of impressive critics) can publicly debate the role of circus as education. The reviewer, Marc Moreigne, seems to have a fundamental opposition to using circus as a pedagogical tool, or instrument of social intervention, claiming that Hotier ignores circus as an "artistic project with multiple aesthetics" (Moreigne, 2001, p.47).

The 2002 colloquium *La Fonction Educations du Cirque*, organized by *Cirque Educatif* resulted in the book of the same name, edited by Hotier (2003). Papers, including mine about circus in the Australian Central Desert³, came from researchers, teachers, circus school trainers, and social workers. Nothing like this collection has been published in English yet.

The keynote speaker, with the most substantial contribution to this collection, is Hubert Montagner, professor of psychophysiology and psychopathology. His paper is entitled "In What Way Can Circus Help the Child/Student Construct and Reform Himself?" and is a deep analysis of the psychological effects of watching circus, and the physical/social effects of learning circus. He is particularly keen to show how circus can activate the mind and body of the solitary or 'dormant' child.

Many of the other writers in this book are educationalists, whose studies show how a circus programme reduces absenteeism and develop students' commitment to school. Unfortunately none of the contributors answers the question, 'If it is so good, then why is it not more widespread?' In my research, I have recorded over one hundred thoughtful answers to this question. Most interviewees assume that it is everywhere. Others cite insurance concern and lack of teacher training. The most perceptive answer came from a 12-year-old girl at an Australian Circus Festival. "We don't want our school teachers to teach us circus – they would spoil it!" (Interview, 2000). This is very close to Hotier's conclusion to *La Fonction Educative du Cirque* in which he cautions that the institutionalisation of circus in education must not alter "la vraie nature du cirque". (2003, p. 236).

³ "Un Cirque Dans Une Valise", a translation of "Suitcase Circus".

Sharon McCutcheon, a high school theatre arts teacher in New South Wales, presented, for her M.A., a considerable paper, *Negotiating Identity Through Risk: A Community Circus Model for Evoking Change and Empowering Youth* (2003). Her methodology involves post-hoc longitudinal data gathered in many forms, from five case studies – school circus programmes in New South Wales and Western Australia. Her literature review is extensive and covers linked disciplines of community arts, youth culture, risk, and scholastic, physical, sociological and mental effects of circus in schools. Interestingly, she dwells on the question posed in the previous paragraph – the obstacles and prejudices facing circus programmes, and laments “a gap in the literature on circus in education as to how circus actually attracts young people and how it works”. (p. 106). Her thesis, and the present work, will go towards filling that gap.

McCutcheon's conclusions underpin many of the theories I have developed in this research. Among her 'principles' are the necessity of safe risk, of magic and of performance. Echoing the points made earlier, she also concludes, “Circus tutors need [...] most importantly passion, enthusiasm and respect for circus and the innate abilities of young people.” (p. 127).

Olivia Ricken's honours thesis at Bielefeld University, Germany, is entitled *Circus Teaching in Child and Youth Work* (2001). She reports on three case studies from Bemposta, Amsterdam and Berlin, and draws on her contacts with some of the hundreds of youth circuses in Germany. Listing specific skills like equilibristics, acrobalance, juggling and clowning, she examines their particular challenges and values. The thesis has special emphasis on the development of the child's motor and social skills, and also deals with the success of circus activities with marginalized groups. In this section she asks the provocative questions, “social integration through circus – is it a contradiction in terms?” Her examples of work with immigrant groups, 'unsporting' children and children of different ages show that circus, although itself seen as a marginalized world, can be an agent of integration.

At the Sorbonne, Paris, Brigitte Bailly is working on a PhD thesis in socio-anthropology, on circus as an intervention tool for helping young people in difficulty. For years she has been associated with *Cirque Pour Tous*, a French based organization which founded *Circo Para Todos* now a full-time circus school in Cali, Colombia. Like the *Belfast Community Circus*, *Cirque Pour Tous* puts evaluation as a high priority, and Brigitte Bailly has conducted a thorough examination of the project in Cali, which will no doubt inform her PhD thesis. As an interim measure, she presented a paper *Circus: an Interventional Tool Suitable for Young People in Difficulty*, at the international gathering on circus and social work, in La Seyne-sur-Mer, France 2002. In common with many of the South American delegates at that gathering, she demonstrates little sympathy for the indulgent make-believe youth circuses of the affluent north. She emphasizes aspects of 'social circus' which become starkly clear in the context of one of the world's most dangerous cities – Cali:

Circus is a tool of emancipation for girls and for equality of the sexes [...] Circus breaks the 'aid' paradigm which prevails in work with “youth at risk” (Bailly, 2002, p. 3).

The problem, according to researchers who have examined this theme, is that the perception of the child as victim leads to a denial of competencies and potential, and so he is considered first and foremost as an object, in an assistance equation. The logic underlying the [circus] project in Cali is different. The participant is not considered a victim or a potential malefactor, but as a student. The young people live up to these expectations. (ibid. p. 4)

Bailly is no blind idealist, and her observations of newly acquired solidarity, co-operation and esprit-de-corps take her looking beyond the circus school to the children's lodging houses, where all is not instantly transformed to peace and joy. Violence still exists there,

and this point should make us think about the limits of social circus programmes; it seems to me that circus can help develop the harmony of the individual, but to change social conditions – that is a political issue, and the best intentions and the best strategies of social circus are no substitute. It is important to remember this when setting one's objectives (ibid. p. 5).

I have begun to use the term 'Social Circus'. This is one used in Montreal by *Cirque de Monde* – the humanitarian arm of internationally successful *Cirque du Soleil*. Their promotional brochure explains:

Despite [Soleil's] success, Cirque's first performers have not forgotten their origins [as street performers]. Now they would like to share the challenges and magic of circus arts with young people in difficult circumstances, especially those who live on the streets (Cirque du Monde, 2001).

Cirque de Monde runs three assistance programmes.⁴ In 1996, Paul Laporte, Director of Social Affairs and International Cooperation for Cirque de Soleil, instituted a research programme, which he explained to me in Montreal:

We hope to demonstrate through academic research that joint action involving the public, community and private sectors, and using the circus arts as a teaching method, is an investment that holds great promise for the new millennium. (Interview, Laporte, 2001)

The millennium is upon us, and we may expect a cascade of research work from Canada, as researchers in sociology, physiology and psychology are co-funded by Cirque de Soleil to evaluate the work. An early report, by Nicole Ollivier, entitled *The Social Artist and Cirque de Monde* starts badly. "It has been nearly a decade already since circus artists began taking part in 'actions and intervention' projects aimed at youth in difficulty". (2000, p. 3). Having worked in community circus projects in Craigmillar and Pilton, Edinburgh's most deprived suburbs, three decades ago, I prepared myself for a

⁴ 1. Substantial funding of some established groups, e.g. Circo Para Todos and Circus Ethiopia.
2. The placement of social circus trainers (always with local partnerships).
3. Free tickets for Cirque du Soleil shows (which may be traded).

Information from interviews with Paul Laporte, Montreal and Susan van Esch, Amsterdam.

blinker vision of our history. As will happen in all research of this kind (and my work is no exception) the bias, the background, the culture of the writer will show through in the work. Ollivier, in her search for the essence of the social artist, draws on the Latin-American 'agit-prop' tradition of Boal and Freire, rather than a direct historic antecedent of community circus in Europe which germinated in Paris and Amsterdam in the late 1960's with *Le Grand Magic Circus*, and the *Festival of Fools*.

She quotes Fellini, "I know nothing/everything about circus". This brilliant observation epitomizes the arrogance that so many of us bring to the study of circus - where an apparent absence of scholarship presents a sort of academic virgin territory in which anyone may plant a flag. We look forward to the new papers as they come from Montreal. In such a new field, none of us can claim the high ground, and it is always interesting to see the subject analysed through different theories, different disciplines.

Orla Muldoon of the Queen's University, Belfast, produced a research paper of interest (1996): "St Patrick's Training School is a residential establishment for boys between the ages of ten and seventeen years who have been awarded a Training School Order (TSO) for either Care and Control or Detention due to criminal activities." This study evaluates the responses and the developments of the boys who took part in weekly circus workshops with tutors from Belfast Community Circus. The study had two streams - quantitative data in each boy's portfolio, generated by the circus tutors' assessment of the boy's progress, and a qualitative study based on ongoing interviews with the boys (for which they were paid \$10). The researcher's conclusions indicate clear improvement in the boys' behaviour, physical skills and feelings of self-worth, though she cautions that this is all taking place in a closed environment and may not translate to their life and behaviour in the outside world. Her stress on the circus students' control over their environment has echoes of the work of Sharon McCutcheon at Bateman's Bay Senior High School, New South Wales, as expounded in her thesis (2003).

As I said earlier, this is a rapidly growing field, and we may expect many new relevant publications in the near future. Kaskade, the European juggling journal, has a regular column, 'Bibliographic Notes', frequently citing scholarly papers on aspects of circus and circus in education. I have not been able to review much of what is available in German, and none of what I imagine must be available in Russian and Finnish, judging by the wide networks of youth circus in those countries.

2 The Challenges of Childhood

Too often a lacklove childhood combined with a minimum of tactile stimulation, compounded by the experience of a Public School, produced a rather emotionally arid human being who was quite incapable of warm human relationships. Such individuals made efficient governors of the British Empire, since they were seldom capable of understanding genuine human need.

Ashley Montagu, *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*, 1971, (p. 262)

There are many conflicting theories of childhood development, but many agree on one point: that there are stages that an individual must go through to achieve a wholesome maturity.⁵ This thesis suggests that, in many cases, this maturity is not being reached. Brazelton, in *The Irreducible Needs of Children*, includes "the need for developmentally appropriate experiences" as one of his seven needs. (Brazelton, 2000). His list has much in common with the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child, (United Nations Organisation, 1959) and other such charters. In this thesis, I am not concerned with re-iterating these rights and needs, but rather in identifying deficits in contemporary Western childhood experiences.

Today, perhaps more than ever before, a lot of adults in Western societies spend a lot of time having fun, taking risks, and exhibiting other childish behaviour. However, a stable society is predicated on the assumption that adults will behave like adults.⁶ When they do not, either they are punished (for inappropriate sexual, physical or proprietary behaviour) or the code of acceptable behaviour is stretched to fit the particular cultural modality. Thus in Australia, the widespread inclination towards sport, partying, waste and greed – which can be seen as very infantile attributes – is incorporated into what is acceptable, even laudable, behaviour. The Australian Prime Minister, at a moment of national grief, in Bali, October 2002, proudly and defiantly defended the Australian's right to party:

Our nation has been changed by this event. Perhaps we may not be so carefree as we have been in the past, but we will never lose our openness, our sense of adventure. The young of Australia will always travel. They will always seek fun in distant parts. They will always reach out to the young of other nations. They will always be open, fun-loving, decent men and women.

(Howard, 2002)

Our society seems to have paused at this adolescent phase of childhood, with no apparent desire to progress to a greater maturity. A glorification of youthful qualities among adults (and adult qualities among children) is a characteristic of our times, and

⁵Freud's (1958) and Erikson's (1950) psychoanalytic theories and Piaget's (1952) and Vygotsky's (1962) cognitive theories are all based on a progression of stages to be achieved by a growing person.

⁶ A study of inappropriate behaviour by adults, and its consequences, might start with *Childlike Achilles: Ontogeny and Phylogony in the Iliad*. MacCary, W. Thomas (1982)

the industries based on fashion, fitness, body care and recreation have such momentum and such inertia that it is hard to see a return to a time when adults could grow old gracefully. John Betjeman's poem *Late Flowering Lust* evokes the grotesque potential of human actions out of joint with time. He imagines a scene of geriatric carnality:

My head is bald, my breath is bad,
Unshaven is my chin,
I have not now the joys I had
When I was young in sin

I run my fingers down your dress
With brandy-certain aim
And you respond to my caress
And maybe feel the same

But I've a picture of my own
On this reunion night
Wherein two skeletons are shown
To hold each other tight;
[...]
Too long we let our bodies cling,
We cannot hide disgust
At all the thoughts that in us spring
From this late-flowering lust.

(Betjeman, 1990, p. 171)

I shall recall this final phrase at various points through this chapter.

There is general agreement that behavioural abnormalities or psychoses are linked to developmental stages having been missed, uncompleted, repressed or associated with trauma.⁷ For this argument I shall focus on the importance of not missing these stages. A child should have had a rich and varied experience of life by adolescence, and it is during these high school years that a child's deficits become really apparent, manifested in self-esteem problems and social misbehaviour.

My contention is that caring adults, who may not necessarily be trained counsellors or psychologists, by offering the circus experience to children and teenagers, can provide them an opportunity to make good those deficits, giving them more chance to advance to adulthood without gaping holes in their psycho-social personae.

At this stage I must admit that this claim is not scientifically verifiable. This dissertation is not offered through a school of education or psychology but, by choice, through the English department of a progressive university. The work does not claim to prove a truth, but to offer a suggestion. It may be criticised as too wide-ranging and too disconnected from accepted theoretical frameworks. My response is that I fully intend to range widely. Circus itself cannot be confined to one style, one culture or one period. I have to be open and inclusive to all interpretations of circus. Similarly,

⁷ Again, the works of Freud, Erikson, Piaget and Vygotsky suggest these consequences.

I will not confine myself to one specific behaviour or one developmental element in childhood. To the other possible criticism, that the work is not closely tied to the framework of an accepted cultural theory, may I explain, "in all humility" to quote the immodest showman Astley (Wykes, 1977, p. 71), that this is a co-relational study. I am comparing two paradigms, which are at one time both full of theoretical possibilities, but also undeniably physical. I take each one, childhood and circus, as a framework for the other. As an example, without presuming to offer my work as a comparison, I refer to Bakhtin's work on carnival. He produced a work of totally original theory, by juxtaposing two cosmologies – the grotesque epic novel of Rabelais, and the hidden history of mediaeval street life, with all its debauches and reversals. Kwint suggests that Bakhtin uses "such an avowedly anti-historical doctrine as structuralism as a tool of historical analysis" (Kwint, 2002) 47. But just as Kwint uses Bakhtin to justify his own approach to an historical study, so I see the originality of Bakhtin's syntenic juxtaposition as inspiration for my own methodology. Introducing his study of Rabelais, Bakhtin argues that "when viewed against the background of folk tradition [,] Rabelais' images are completely at home within the thousand-year-old development of popular culture." (Bakhtin, 1984) 3. In this way, he uses the patchwork blanket of "folk tradition", interpreted from the very personal perspective of a provincial lecturer in nineteen thirties Russia, laid across a reading of Rabelais' novels, and develops a theory of carnival, which some see as a satire aimed at criticising the authoritarian soviet system of the time. I can aspire to no such grand scheme. However, inspired by Bakhtin's 'double patchwork' method, I hope to make discoveries in a way similar to the methodology of geneticists comparing complicated structures, looking for significantly homologous elements.

In this chapter I shall attempt, using references from Western literary and popular culture, to establish a degree of common recognition of some shared childhood experiences. Clearly, every childhood is unique, and experience across cultures will have vast differences. This thesis is written after thirty years of working mostly with British, American and Australian children. Even within these societies there are clearly huge differences across the socio/economic spectrum, sometimes even more marked than the differences I have found working throughout Europe, in China, Japan, Papua and with remote Australian Aboriginal communities.

It is easy for a travelling entertainer to say, "Children are the same everywhere". At a certain embryonic stage, even a medical doctor could say that, but genes and environment guarantee that complex differences will develop. However, my experience as a teacher and entertainer has shown me that there are enough significant similarities in children everywhere to make some elements of a show, or a game, universally acceptable to children.

What is a child? In this study I make no attempt to classify a child by age. I shall not grade them, assuming that a certain age corresponds with a certain literary, numerical or social ability. In teaching adults, I often observe that the moment they learn to juggle three balls, or to stay balanced on a tightrope, they produce behaviour more associated with early childhood. "Look at me! I can do it!" Achievement of circus skills

can happen at any age, and I hope to show that the circus experience can have great significance whether you are six, sixteen or sixty.

In this chapter I shall explain in detail the six elements currently being restricted to children. They are, in my view, elements essential to development, which can also be seen as six rights or six values, which a growing child needs to experience and absorb. Then, in chapters three and four we shall thoroughly examine the nature of the real or imagined circus. We shall be looking out for the presence of the six elements in circus representations and activity. Then, reviewing the elements in detail, including what we have learned about the nature of circus, I hope the thesis will be accepted that circus activity contains much of what is currently needed by the growing child.

In the remarkable book *Golden City*, J. T. R. Ritchie lists and celebrates dozens of Scottish skipping rhymes, hop-scotch patterns, playground jokes and songs, and concludes with this evocative paragraph:

and, after all, it's in the old industrial maze, it's in this tin-can city that many of us playing as children enjoyed the most glorious visions. When the summer days dragged by like dynasties of Egypt, when the sun and shadow sides of the street eyed each other for a millennium! When beyond such an immense present lay the unbelievable future.
(Ritchie, 1965, p. 171)

As I recall my own childhood, I remember my own parents and grandparents talking about their own golden age of childhood. I am inclined to say the same to my children, which suggests an illusion common to every generation, that "fings ain't what they used to be". (Bart, 1959). However, in this twenty-first century, in Western society, there has never been such a concerted campaign to appropriate the child's dreams, money, palate, affiliative enthusiasm, gathering instinct, image and body.

Like Marilyn Ferguson, in her book *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (1980), I use the word 'conspiracy' aware of its etymology, suggesting breathing or blowing together. Here I see it as a destructive hurricane resulting from the convergence of separate currents. Among the conspirators are manufacturers of sports shoes, computer games and toys, fast food and drink multi-nationals, and the advertisers of the above; insurance companies who would rather children take no risk, albeit they become fat, clumsy and scared (which would seem to bode ill for accident claims in the future); paedophiles and the media industry built on the misdeeds of these few immature and devious men; the so-called 'economic rationalist' system which sees both parents working harder and harder for less and less time with their children; television, which revels in its influential role of baby-sitter and former of young minds; and education authorities who have allowed the job of teacher to become an underpaid, low-status, over-regulated, bureaucratic, clinically hands-off, travesty of what is the probably most important profession in the world.⁸

⁸ Among the tomes of political and economic studies which convincingly argue both sides of the market forces debate, one which shines out for its wit and originality is Bob Ellis, *First Abolish the Customer: 202 Arguments Against Economic Rationalism* (1998).

From the listed suspects, whose misdemeanours are mostly self-evident, I shall examine one, the insurance industry, an apparently benign institution that has recently become increasingly restrictive to the natural development of a growing generation.⁹ All over the country, organisers of youth activities have spent thousands of hours explaining their procedures, and pleading with insurance brokers for liability cover. Whether it is a pony club, school camp, amusement park or indeed a youth circus, they have all suffered from sudden rises of premiums or total refusal of cover. Consequently, many youth activities have closed down, or are hedged around with such cumbersome safety regulations that the potential adventure element is nullified. As an example, there was a vigorous debate in *On One Wheel*, the unicycle journal, about whether or not to wear safety helmets. (Harden and Wood, 1999). Countering the usual emotional arguments about head injury, and the financial arguments about directors' liability, was the point that children joined a unicycle club because it was fun, and that riding gave them a sense of risk and adventure. If helmets were compulsory, some children would quit the group, and these were exactly those children whose bravado needed to be channelled, for their own safety. Other factors, like the relatively slow speed of a unicycle, and the fact that one's feet are never more than six inches from the ground, had no sway on the safety enthusiasts, who consider an unstable vehicle to be something children should be protected from, rather than directed towards.

Insurance practice is not easily understood by lay-people, but it has been thoroughly investigated by *The Center for Justice and Democracy* and *Americans for Insurance Reform*. The well-researched case by these bodies is that insurance companies lose money, not on claims but on the stock exchange, and that cyclical premium rises are always accompanied by fraudulently perpetuated anecdotes of ludicrous pay-outs:

Anecdotal descriptions of a few atypical lawsuits intended to shock or amuse the public have been the cornerstone of the business community's anti-jury advertising and public relations campaign since the 1980s. Focusing on a few rare, anecdotal cases, instead of the majority of cases that pass through the courts each year, feeds into a false and dangerous perception that the system is overflowing with frivolous lawsuits[...]
When journalists or researchers do track them down, they find in virtually every situation that such cases have been misreported and misused.

(Americans for Insurance Reform, 2004)

Their latest research concludes " there has been no 'explosion' in lawsuits, jury awards or any tort system costs at any time during the last three decades, [...] insurance companies raise rates when they are seeking ways to make up for declining interest

⁹ Television is another alleged conspirator in my theory, but unfortunately space does not permit me to build a convincing case here. Instead may I refer the reader to Gerry Mander, Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television (1980), Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death (1987) and Robert Hodge and David Tripp, Children and Television: A Semiotic Approach (1986). These works attest to the geo-political power that is wielded by television against the most delicate of targets, the brain of a growing child. More recent explorations of this theme include Newton and LaMay, Abandoned in the Wasteland [...] (1995).

rates and market-based investment losses". (Freedland, 2003, p. 8). I shall argue later, in the section *Wednesday's Child – Risk* (2.3), that the restrictive actions of the insurance industry, whether fraudulent or not, are detrimental to a generation of young people, growing up deprived of the necessary element of adventure in their formative years. Later still, in *Risk re-visited* (5.3), I shall explain that circus activities are not only inherently safe, but may be a means of teaching risk-assessment and risk-management from an early age.

What if we miss childhood? A reading of *The History of Childhood* suggests that before the modern era, childhood was a dark tunnel of emotional, physical and sexual abuse, a purgatory of labour, trauma and neglect (de-Mause, 1974).¹⁰ Linda A Pollock, in *Forgotten Children*, examines diaries and autobiographies, 1500-1900, and finds the past not to have been so uncompromisingly bleak. Certainly, she finds that children were more "ephemeral creatures" in times when infant mortality was higher. (1983, p. 96). However, she has much evidence that children have always played, and that "cruelty to children was not as widespread as has been claimed" (268)

In 1974 I was in Puerto Rico, performing a clown show with my wife, Annie Stainer, and our small son, Jo. I remember being invited to perform in one of the shanty-towns on the hillside of San Juan. There was of course no theatre, not even a public open space. The biggest clear area they could find was a boxing ring. As we prepared, in a bare concrete changing room, I noticed big young men in uniform grey shorts and cropped hair sweeping the ring and picking up broken glass from the surrounds. Noticing my puzzlement, the organiser explained to me that these were all convicted juvenile offenders. Part of their rehabilitation, which they had all agreed to, was to relive some of the childhood they had missed. The re-education régime included the boyish clothes and hairstyle, early nights, plain food, simple games and story telling. A period of time spent like this apparently helped these boys pass through neglected stages. They were able to laugh and weep more, to enjoy physicality without aggression or sexuality. They could enjoy and pass through the stages of resenting authority, testing it and finally assuming the responsibilities of their true years. This unusual corrective régime seemed to be effective, and it is exactly this sort of deficit/catch-up option that circus activity offers young people.

I cannot, with authority, assert that children NEED this or that experience or quality in their formative years, although instinctively and from experience I might believe it. I can, however, from my vantage point of fifty-eight years, and from a study of literature, film, folklore and other cultural records assert what our children lack today compared with previous times, and other societies. As I stated earlier, I have identified six elements for specific examination.

As these elements will appear listed from time to time in this thesis, they may be recognized by one-word labels: **self**, **risk**, **trust**, **dream**, **work** and **fun**. Each concept will be explored and expanded with reference, where possible, to childhood

¹⁰ This theory set me thinking that perhaps it is necessary that everyone should go through a stage where they are subjected to a cruel, irrational discipline. How else do we explain Aerobics?

autobiographies, classical literature, or popular culture, to ensure recognition of the particular trait. Some investigation will be made into current theory and practice in education and child development. The result may be an unusual potpourri of academia and ephemera, but both childhood and circus comprise this mix. The Russian futurist, Nikolai Forreger, in his 1922 article, presaging the post-modernism of popular culture, *The Art of the Avant-Garde and the Music Hall* speaks of “the monstrous mélange of all sorts of entertainments”. (Foregger, p. 231). I should warn the reader that this thesis contains the same ‘monstrous mélange’ as does circus itself. I have consciously provided many disparate examples, so that as I make the case, I hope we come to share an understanding of these six elements.

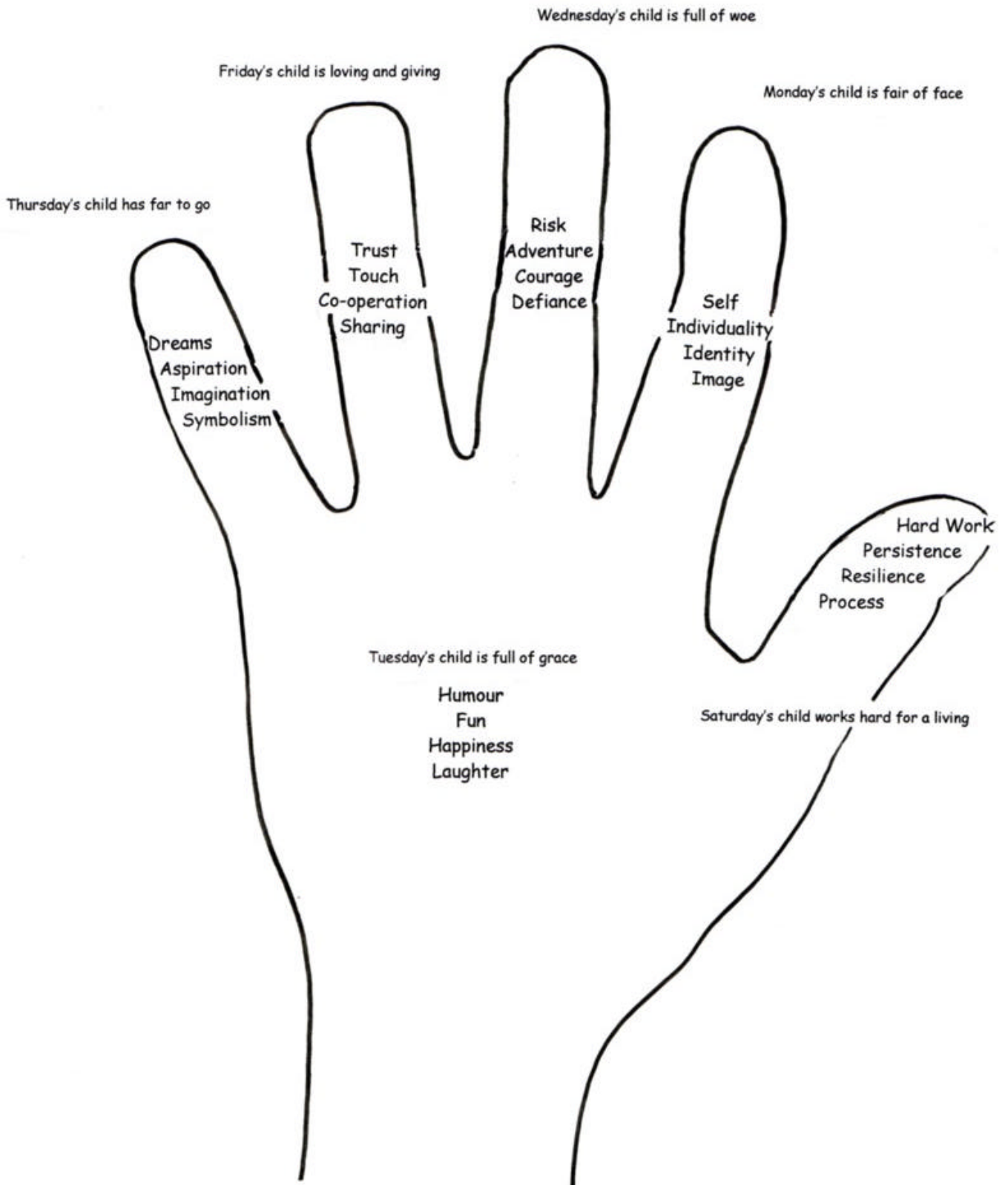
In searching for an exemplar which would present, in recognizable caricatures, these six aspects of childhood, I considered several rhymes, stories, models and cartoon strips, including Disney's *Seven Dwarves*, the *Bash Street Kids* from the British comic, *Beano*, Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* and *Secret Seven*, and *Our Gang*, formerly *Little Rascals*. Finally a well-known and surprisingly apt list was found in the Nursery Rhyme anthology. Written anonymously early in the nineteenth century, first recorded in 1838 (Opie and Opie, 1951), this jingle is known in various forms, throughout the English-speaking world. The first six items correspond neatly with the six categories of this study, with the final couplet evoking a satisfying integration of all the positives:

Monday's child is fair of face	self
Tuesday's child is full of grace	fun ¹¹
Wednesday's child is full of woe	risk
Thursday's child has far to go	dreams
Friday's child is loving and giving	trust
Saturday's child works hard for a living	work
But the child that is born on the Sabbath Day	
Is bonny and blithe and good and gay.	

As a personal aide-memoire, and as a means of explaining my theory in conversation and public speaking, I have another graphic schema, which I shall occasionally refer to, as I progress through the text. It consists of the five fingers of a hand, plus the palm. The index finger, the one that points, represents self-design, individuation, showing-off. The middle finger, the one that sticks out and gets hurt most often, represents risk. The ring finger, cosily enclosed by the others, suggests trust and comfort, and also raises the important issue of touching. The smallest finger, alongside all the bigger ones is about aspiration, as it dreams of being big one day. The thumb is utilitarian and functional, and evokes the idea of hard work and resilience. Finally, the ticklish, sensitive palm represents the element of fun, play, laughter and happiness.

I should stress that neither the ‘Monday’s child’ nor the ‘fingers’ mnemonics have guided the development of the theory. The six elements have been observed and tested by me and others for many years. The devices are for the convenience of the reader, to help follow an argument through the proposition of six elements, a wide-ranging exploration and a comparative juxtaposition.

¹¹ The unexpected association of **grace** and **fun** is explained in section 2.2.



2.1 Monday's Child is Fair of Face The Index Finger Self-design, Individuation

The baby new to earth and sky
What time his tender palm is prest
Against the circle of the breast,
Has never thought that "this is I. "

But as he grows he gathers much,
And learns the use of "I " and "me",
And finds "I am not what I see,
And other than the things I touch."
So rounds he to a separate mind
From whence clear memory may begin,
As thro' the frame that binds him in
His isolation grows defined.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam* section 45. 1850

This aspect of the child encompasses self-actualization, self-awareness, self-design, self-presentation, and individuation. In educational theory, it is "the belief in or the process of developing the actuality of one's idealized image." (Houston, 1995). The French word, 'salut' has two meanings; one's own well-being and showing respect to others. This is exactly the connection I hope to make later, by identifying aspects of circus culture that resonate with those key moments in a child's life when he becomes acutely aware of his self, and how he presents himself to the world. The use of the short word **self** for this investigation should not be confused with 'self-esteem', which is a passing phase of educational practice that is proving itself woolly in theory and perilously unworkable in schools.

In children's books, such as *William, Swallows and Amazons* and *The Golden Years*, children dress up and adopt names and disguises with or without reference to the "Olympians" (adults). Anyone with children will recognize these stages children go through. I recall Robin Silman, who sat behind me in Primary School, announcing in a way that would tolerate no contradiction, that from that day he was, in fact, named Robin Hood. My good friend Jimini Hignett, the Amsterdam based painter, was christened with a perfectly good girl's name. However, as an ardent supporter of the Celtic Football Club, she re-named herself Jimmy, after Jimmy Johnstone, the star striker. Everyone will have examples like this. Children dress up, they cross dress, they play roles. As teenagers, they do fashion, and as young adults they can transform themselves beyond recognition with hair colour and shape, piercings, tattoos, clothes, posture and manner.

This is not a universal phenomenon, and traditional cultures such as many Asian and Australian Indigenous traditions see children's individuality apparently subsumed to the will and image of the family, tribe or community. Each child's identity, family position and 'skin group' are known, and will affect her future, so her unique identity is

respected, and there is generally no need nor opportunity for the Western mode of childish display and showing off.

However, looking at Western cultures, the considerable trade in Barbie sandals, Superman capes, Harry Potter glasses and Bob the Builder helmets bears witness to the urge of children to re-present themselves throughout their youth. There are, of course, manifestations of this urge in many streams of adult life. A new, thriving business in Kyoto, Japan sees young women paying a high fee for a two hour make-up and costume transformation into a geisha, and for an extra charge, she is accompanied for a tottering walk in public among the cherry blossoms, becoming a photo opportunity for plain clothed tourists.¹² Fancy dress parties and masked balls are always popular, and the extreme role-play of S/M, and B/D gatherings, or 'scenes', is becoming more open, presumably more widespread.

As Bakhtin explains, humanity has always had this urge to transgress reality and convention, by periods of carnival. "They were the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance [...] The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was of particular significance [...] People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations." (Morris, 1994, p. 199). In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman hypothesizes that Orwell had it wrong in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), and that Huxley's prediction was far more accurate. *Brave New World* warns of a totalitarian state of pleasure. (1932). Certainly my experience has been that an increasing leisure budget at every corporate and government level has created more and more work for entertainers like myself, and for event managers, whose duty it is to ensure as many people as possible are having a good time. Bumper stickers, tee shirts and caps, no less than funny hats and face paint, identify the customer as a member of the tribe who attended this concert or support that team. Never were there such opportunities for adults to pay for the privilege of self-actualization. The tentative, improvable hypothesis underlying this work is that these six elements represent stages a child would normally go through. If the experience is denied in childhood, then it will surface in the adult, often in inappropriate ways and with negative consequences.¹³ Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) has, as a basis, the theory that human beings are motivated by unsatisfied needs, and these must be met before they can move on with integrity. His pyramid, with a foundation of physiological essentials, moves upwards through safety needs, love and belonging, through esteem or ego to a level of 'self-actualization' where a person can then act unselfishly. Later versions have two higher levels, of the desire to know and understand, topped by aesthetic needs.

¹² In 2004 I witnessed the same commercial dressing-up opportunity with imperial/operatic costumes available for both Chinese and Western visitors, in Beijing's Forbidden City.

¹³ Freud's theories of repression suggest that it is the re-emergence of repressed emotion or memory, rather than the repression itself, which may become pathological. I suggest that the late emergence of repressed childhood behaviour may similarly prove to be socially pathological. See "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 20 pp. 77-174 (1926).

My hesitation about offering the 'fingers' schema for my proposed six elements is in part caused by the abuse I have seen perpetrated upon Maslow's pyramid. I share his, and the Buddha's view of a progression through stages, but I fear the ease with which systems of thought can be simplified into bullet-points.

Returning to the element of self-design, between Bob the Builder and Roxanne the Dominatrix, both on a chronological and a social scale come other recognizable examples. Johnny Rotten and Sid Vicious of the *Sex Pistols* are among the thousands of young men and women who adopt a new name and persona to suit a new life they plan for themselves. Many Sanyasins, followers of Sri Bagwhan Rajneesh, still carry names like Sanjiva, Kavisha, Paratosh and Sahyma, which they adopted in the 1970's and 80's, to symbolise their move from the old life to the new.

Big business has for some time realized that Monday's Child wants to be even fairer of face, and so has targeted the natural self-awareness and vanity of the child and the vulnerability of the parents. In 2004, Mattel Corporation announced their new campaign:

Barbie Fashion's first ever advertising campaign has been launched this season to support the autumn/winter collection through print and outdoor media. The massive one million pound spend is targeting both mothers and daughters and is the biggest campaign ever seen in the UK according to the company. The sunny campaign was shot on location in Los Angeles, with the strapline 'Barbie Style. Real Fashion for Real Girls'.
(Mattel Corporation, 2004)

Even 'real' infants and toddlers are now becoming targets for a self-awareness and self-indulgence campaign, exploiting and promoting anxiety around those instincts that traditionally have been appeased by an afternoon with the dressing-up box. After reviewing the values and structures of circus, I shall return to this theme to see in what ways a circus experience can allow young people to revise and re-present themselves, albeit temporarily, as circus acrobats or clowns. Kaplan, in her book about childhood and adolescence evokes an acrobatic metaphor to describe a child's significant discovery of independent self-awareness:

As he walks away on his own two feet—the toddler's body-mind has reached its moment of perfection. The world is his and he the mighty conqueror of all he beholds [...] As long as mother sticks around in the wings, the mighty acrobat confidently performs his trick of twirling in circles, walking on tiptoe, jumping, climbing, staring, naming. He is joyous, filled with his grandeur and wondrous omnipotence
(Kaplan, 1984, p. 90)

Perhaps, through circus, a child can be helped to resist the predators and inhibitors, and find again that early glory of self-discovery as an independent moving being.

2.2 Tuesday's Child is Full of Grace

The Palm

Humour, Fun, Play, Happiness

There is another aspect of school games, which is usually considered good but which I think on the whole bad; I mean their efficacy in promoting esprit de corps. Esprit de corps is liked by authorities, because it enables them to utilise bad motives for what are considered to be good actions [...]

But school games, as they now exist, embody the spirit of competition. If the spirit of co-operation is to take its place, a change in school games would be necessary.

Bertrand Russell *On Education* 1926

Of the six days, both Tuesday and Wednesday need some indulgence by the reader, to allow me to tweak my chosen six personal qualities into the well-known rhyme. Accepting the Oxford English Dictionary's first definition of *grace* – as 'pleasing qualities' (Oxford, 1994), we extend the notion to both pleasing others and being pleased oneself; in other words pleasure, happiness, humour and fun.

Of these, the word **fun** is the notion apparently most sought by children, judging by the number of times it is used in advertising. Furthermore, the amount of fun commercially available to children is rising steadily, represented locally by the columns devoted to entertainers in the *Perth Yellow Pages*, being seventeen in 2003, compared to one in 1985. Discrete newspapers and websites are devoted to children's fun activities, and the successful American journal *Laughmakers* published instructions, shared experiences and sold products to children's entertainers throughout the 1980's and 90's.

The concern I want to suggest in this section is that, for various reasons, children are becoming less able to generate their own fun, and this would seem to be born out by observing playground behaviour today, and comparing it with that chronicled by Ritchie in *Singing Street* (1964) and *Golden City* (1965), and by Iona and Peter Opie in *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959). There are those who argue that children will always be able to create their own play. I fervently hope this is true, but currently a conspiracy of saturation marketing, alleged danger in playgrounds, educational pressure, electronic games, family vehicles, home security and other environmental factors we cannot yet understand (linked with Attention Deficit Disorders) all contribute to a much less fertile landscape of child's play in 'Western' society.

In attempting to define terms, I propose a spectrum of phenomena representing a progression from fun to sport, from natural to artificial, from benign to malign, informed by some writers who have attempted, with more or less confidence, to map this difficult territory.

Plato, quoted by Huizinga, talks of play in terms of 'pleasure' and 'charm' (grace):

That which has neither utility nor truth nor likeness, nor yet, in its effects is harmful, can best be judged by the criterion of the charm that is in it, and by the pleasure it affords. Such pleasure, entailing as it does no appreciable good or ill, is play.

Plato on Play (music). Politics viii 1399 (Huizinga, 1950, p. 160)

Epicurus, too, in *Letter to Menoecus*, published as *A Guide to Happiness*, predates Freud impressively in his assertion that "blessedness is a pain-free body and a tranquil mind". Like Freud he finds "pleasure is the guide in all we choose" and "when we suffer from the absence of pleasure, only then do we feel the need for pleasure" (Epicurus, 1996, p. 5)

Freud, admittedly writes on *The Pleasure Principle*, not "The Fun Principal", but his theory has some internal contradictions in that he first describes child's play as an indication of wishing to be older:

[...] it is obvious that all their play is influenced by a wish that dominates them the whole time - the wish to be grown-up and to be able to do what grown-up people do
(Freud, 1984, p. 286),

while later, about the pleasure/play instinct, he says :

Apart from sexual instinct, there are none that do not seek to restore an earlier state of things. (p. 314)

But he admits, as others will, that pleasure (grace) may be beyond analysis:

and the impressions that underlie the hypothesis of the pleasure principle are so obvious that they can scarcely be over-looked. On the other hand we would readily express our gratitude to any philosophical or psychological theory which was able to inform us of the meaning of the feelings of pleasure and unpleasure which act so imperatively upon us. (p. 225)

These are observations on happiness and contentment, but Huizinga, Caillois and others use the implied principles of pleasure to inform their analyses of fun, play, games and sport. Huizinga, in his 1938 book, *Homo Ludens (Playing Man)* admits:

Now this last-named element, the fun of playing, resists all analysis, all logical interpretation. As a concept, it cannot be reduced to any other mental category. No other modern language known to me has the exact equivalent of the English "fun". The Dutch "aardigheid" perhaps comes nearest to it (derived from "aard" which means the same as "Art" and "Wesen" in German, and thus evidence, perhaps, that the matter cannot be reduced further). We may note in passing that "fun" in its current usage is of rather recent origin. French, oddly enough, has no corresponding term at all [...]

Any thinking person can see at a glance that play is a thing on its own, even if his language possesses no general concept to express it. Play

cannot be denied. You can deny, if you like, nearly all abstractions: justice, beauty, truth, goodness, mind, God. You can deny seriousness, but not play.

(Huizinga, 1950, p. 3)

His analysis sheds some light on our search for significance. He neatly combines Monday's and Tuesday's child in his observation on dressing-up play:

The 'differentness' and secrecy of play are most vividly expressed in 'dressing up'. Here the 'extra-ordinary' nature of play reaches perfection. The disguised or masked individual 'plays' another part, another being. He is another being. The terrors of childhood, open-hearted gaiety, mystic fantasy and sacred awe are all inextricably entangled in this strange business of masks and disguises (p. 13).

Caillois is less reticent than Huizinga or Freud to launch a theory, and his is based on a categorization of four types of play, *Argon* (competition), *Alea* (chance), *Mimicry* (simulation) and *Vertigo* (physical excitement). It will be interesting to see how these four features exist in 'Circusplay' (adapting the Dutch word 'Circusspel') and where they fit in Caillois' vertical axis from the anarchy of *Paidia* through to the structured play of *Ludus*. Interestingly, under *Vertigo* he places children's "whirling games" at the most instinctive, *Paidia* level, and tightrope walking at the organized sport end of the spectrum, *Ludus*.¹⁴

In summary, these analysts of play have provided frameworks but not conclusively answered the question, why children play. Iona and Peter Opie represent another brand of research, looking at what children actually do, and holding it sacred. They state:

The interplay between and among children is best left alone. Don't teach them how to play their own street games; your own games, yes, but not theirs [...] Adults produce these dreadful playgrounds which are just sheer lakes of cement or asphalt, and what the child is interested in are the cracks in the cement; he can't play his games without those."

(Cott, 1983, p. 294).

The Opies have chronicled the play and the games, without defining the fun, and have decisively avoided sport. Bertrand Russell's beliefs are echoed when they suggest, for example:

[...] children do not really enjoy competitive athletics. The only running-race that comes to them naturally is the one that follows the challenge 'Last one there is a sissy!' (or, as Samuel Rowlands reported in 1600, 'Beshrow him that's last at yonder stile').

(Cott, 1983, p. 255).

¹⁴ It would be instructive to analyse trapeze on this scale, from a simple child's swing to the ornate and dangerous aerial passages of the flying trapeze.

This is a benign interpretation of racing compared with that expressed in *Dangerous Sports* by Missy Allen and Michel Peissel. These authors view sport as “fully and purely” experiencing four aspects of the human condition:

to wage war; to procure the best food before a rival can; to perform ritual drama and dance; and to dominate the natural environment.
(Allen and Peissel, 1993, p. 7)

Perhaps the same urges, “manifestations of some of the most primal human activities and needs” (7) do inspire both adults and children. But which is more civilized, children aspiring to be adults, or adults playing like children? Persuasive answers came to me in conversation with Dr June Factor in Melbourne, in 1999 about the difference between play and sport. Opie said, “Play is unrestricted, games have rules. Play may merely be the enactment of a dream, but in each game there is a contest.” (Cott, 1983, p. 255). Dr Factor pointed out to me some of the rules that make games/sport degenerate into a contest. In play, the boundary is the creek, fence or road, whereas in sport it is a line. In play, it ends when you are tired, hungry, hurt, bored, or when it gets dark. In sport, the clock and whistle rule. In play you play with your friends. In sport, you must beat your friends. Watching adult men playing amateur rugby football on the grounds around the Melville YMCA Circus School in 1999, I was struck with the thought that, not only is sport far too adult for children, but it is clearly much too childish for adults! I anticipate our journey through circus will present a play landscape much more sympathetic to the true nature of children than is the cosmology of sport, with its associations with war, conflict, victory and its camp-followers of image, commerce, drugs, injury and fashion.

Moving to laughter, I have no evidence that children laugh less than children used to, but they certainly laugh less as they grow older. A child’s laugh is precious and energizing. Swinburne (1837-1909) wrote:

Golden bells of welcome rolled
Never forth such notes, nor told
Hours so blithe in tones so bold
As the radiant mouth of gold
Here that rings forth heaven.

If the golden-crested wren
Were a nightingale - why, then,
Something seen and heard of men
Might be half as sweet as when
Laughs a child of seven.

From *A Child's Laughter* (Swinburne, 1920, p. 219)

Interestingly in these times when, as Neil Postman says, we are *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1987) an industry has grown around amusing the children, and while children are presumably less able to find their own comedy, adults have discovered therapeutic qualities in organized laughter. Dr Madan Kataria started the first Laughter Club in 1995, in Mumbai, inspired by Norman Cousins’ experience of laughing his way out of an

'incurable illness', Ankylosing Spondylitis. Laughter Clubs or Laughter Yoga is now practiced world-wide and is credited with significant health benefits. This may be so, but to some professional comedians, Kataria's philosophy, to 'laugh for no reason', extolled in his book *Laugh Your Way to Health*, (1999) is a bit like having sex with no love.

Despite (or because of) our care, protection and entertainment, children are apparently suffering an increase in mental illness. In 1996 the US Center For Mental Health Services reported, "One in every thirty-three children and one in eight adolescents may have depression." (N.A.M.I., 2004). Personally I have seen cases where well-intentioned but deadening burdens have been placed on children by labelling them and oppressing them with educational terminology. I remember a naughty boy in a school telling me he had to stay behind after school to 'do self-esteem'. Another child I met in a corridor once. He had been sent to the principal, not for cheek, not for mischief, for 'negative outcomes'.

The Western Australian Education Department has thirteen *Overarching Learning Outcomes*. (2004). They refer to numerical and spatial concepts, creativity, technology, civic responsibilities and other worthy values, but not once does the WA Education Department admit responsibility for a child's happiness - or fun. The *UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child* has ten sections; again, no happiness, no fun. The nearest approach, in clause seven, is the right to play and recreation, "directed to the same purposes as education", which echoes the Western Australian outcomes, and ends with "social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society." (United Nations Organisation, 1959). I hope that our examination of circus may suggest ways in which children may produce their own fun, and become contented members of their exclusive society, namely the 'State of Childhood'.

I know that, like Freud and Huizinga, I have avoided the key definitions. I have not even, as the Opie's did, given specific examples of children's fun, but the field is too large, and our space too limited. I hope we may agree on an approximation to what fun might be. Any child can certainly tell us what 'no fun' means, and how abundantly that quality may be found.

Finally, may I indicate aspects of our contemporary 'adult' behaviour that may possibly indicate a repression of play in childhood, by offering three lamentable examples of what we may call 'late flowering fun'. I refer to golf, casinos and uncomfortable, deviant sexual behaviour. Strange, how the television caution 'Warning - adult themes' always heralds examples of extremely childish behaviour.

All this leads us back to the Yellow Pages, and the ominous proliferation of Party Clowns, Clowns of America, (which I have described elsewhere as "the Rotary Club in drag") and Clowns For Jesus. This last manifestation of the *Clown, Mime, Dance and Puppetry Ministry Inc.* may have brought levity to some heavy sermons, but to my knowledge it has also alienated teenagers who, when ready to make a spiritual connection with their maker, have been confronted with a painted preacher, doing *The Prodigal Son* with modelling balloons.

Robert Frost, in *Birches* says, "Earth's the right place for love". (1920, p. 11). I would add that 'Childhood's the right place for fun'.

2.3 Wednesday's Child is Full of Woe

Middle Finger

Risk, Adventure

How strange, that all
The terrors, pains and early miseries,
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part,
And that a needful part, in making up
The calm existence that is mine, when I
Am worthy of myself.

Wordsworth *The Prelude* (1:344-50)

Wordsworth saw terrors, pains and miseries bearing 'a needful part' in making up a 'calm existence'. It is difficult to argue that children should be deliberately hurt or terrorised, but we must look at the importance of risk in childhood.

Peril, Harm and Injury are to be avoided. Threat and Menace are wilful indications that these harms might occur. Risk, Hazard and Danger are almost interchangeable terms that, without threatening, are suggesting the possibility of harm in a given action. The subtle differences in this last group are: -

Danger – one should avoid it

Hazard – one should heed it

Risk – at some stage, one should take it.

A toddler, learning to walk, must risk falling. She may fail many times, but her skill and therefore her chances will improve, and ultimately she will succeed; she will win. Each attempt to stand is a gamble. If you want to avoid the risk of falling, simply remain sitting or lying down.

In this short examination of the importance of encouraging 'risk behaviour', I return to Robert Frost. The poet, seeing bent birch trees, likes to think of a boy who has become "a swinger of birches", who climbed to the topmost branches, and held on,

Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.

This is not a forest vandal, but a child taking risks, both physical,

and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open

and spiritual:

I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
 And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
 But dipped its top and set me down again.
 That would be good both going and coming back.

It is not insignificant that this is a solitary boy, taking his own risks in his own time,

Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,
 Whose only play was what he found himself.
 (Frost, 1920, p. 11)

The level of protection we give our children varies considerably across history and among different societies. It is possible that today's Western society exercises more protective control than ever before, or anywhere else. In *The Continuum Concept*, Jean Liedloff looks again at our principals of child-care after living among indigenous tribes deep in the jungles of the Amazon:

After the fourth expedition I was struck by the number of small children being chased by grown-ups in Manhattan's Central Park. Mothers and nannies were to be seen flapping about, bent unbecomingly at the hips, hands outstretched and voices shrill, begging with unconvincing threats for the fugitive toddlers to come to heel.
 (Liedloff, 1986, p. 94)

This contrasts with the apparently heedless attention to toddlers she has been witnessing in the jungle:

When he goes about on hands and knees, a baby can travel at a fair speed. Among the Yequana, I watched uneasily as one creeper rushed up and stopped at the edge of a pit five feet deep that had been dug for mud to make walls. In his progress about the compound, he did this several times a day. With the inattentiveness of an animal grazing at the edge of a cliff, he would tumble to a sitting position, as often as not facing away from the pit. Occupied with a stick or stone or his fingers or toes. He played and rolled about in every direction, seemingly heedless of the pit, until one realized he landed everywhere but in the danger zone.

The only suggestion from the members of his family and society was that they expected him to be able to look after himself:

A baby has no suicidal inclinations and a full set of survival mechanisms, from the senses, on the grossest level, to what looks like very serviceable everyday telepathy on the less accountable levels. He behaves like any little animal that cannot call upon experience to serve its judgement; he does the safe thing, unaware of making a choice. He is

naturally protective of his own well-being, expected to be so by his people. (p. 89)

I recall an argument in Oslo, Norway, after my wife and I had presented our show for children, *Trolls*, at a Scandinavian Children's Theatre Conference, in 1972. Delegates argued that Annie's portrayal of the Snow Queen was too powerful, and that children would have nightmares. Besides which, there was no such thing as the Snow Queen. Others replied that, firstly, children have nightmares anyway. Better to dream of the Snow Queen who is not there when they wake up, while the nightmare of their parents still remains. Secondly, if you don't believe in the Snow Queen, go outside and turn left (north) and keep walking. You'll find her. These arguments and observations are building my case that fear and risk are essential parts of childhood, and if avoided, will occur inappropriately in later years.

Peter Birnie, a founder of *CircoArts*, the Circus School at Christchurch Polytechnic, New Zealand, uses the term 'vertigo moment' to describe that urge of some children to seek out the most exciting apparatus in the playground, the most stomach-churning ride in the funfair. He sees this as a natural progression from the eternal delight a baby has in being held or tossed in the air, then caught again in the safe arms of a parent. "That would be good both going and coming back."

In a long row of books on gymnastics in a Paris shop, I found *La Gymnastique Vertigineuse à l'Ecole*. (Demey, 1994) Among the tomes of 'safe practice', this book revels in the 'vertigo moment'. It suggests many ways of falling backwards, of jumping into space, of swinging over obstacles. Children would love these activities, but as adults are the buyers, this book remained on the shelf. I anticipate our examination of circus will show a fertile field of such vertiginous experiences, giving first to the performer, then to the audience, the impression of being exciting and dangerous.

Richard Schechner, the theatre director and writer, has developed a notion of 'dark play', characterised by contradictory realities, like "the Brahmin who dreamed he was an untouchable who dreamed he was a king", or "entirely private [play] known to the player alone [which] subverts order, dissolves frames, breaks its own rules". He invited graduate students to write examples of dark play from their own lives, and the resulting tales involved "Russian roulette with New York City traffic", deliberate drunk driving, provocatively putting oneself in danger on a cliff edge, and telling elaborate lies. From his observations of these examples, Schechner suggests "that the players themselves are not sure if they are playing or not - their action becomes play retrospectively." (Schechner and Appel, 1990, p.39)

If our adolescents survive them, then, in retrospect, we may see the ubiquitous 'risk-behaviours' of binge-drinking, smoking, body-piercing, unsafe sex and drugs simply as 'dark play'. On the other hand, if their young lives provide enough 'vertigo moments', and enough opportunity for extreme role-playing, they may experience an adolescence free from real peril. We have mentioned the stultifying effect of such terms as 'self-esteem' and 'negative outcomes', and we should look again at 'at risk', when applied to young people. While acknowledging that children should be shielded from real harm, I

believe strategies are lacking for consciously allowing children to explore risk themselves.

Insurance companies and their subject empire of clients use the term 'risk management' a lot, and when applied to playgrounds, community events and school camps, it is a euphemism for risk elimination. We spoke of the toddler gambling as she learned to walk, with nothing to lose but her dignity. The insurance companies are our biggest gamblers, and as they merge and get bigger, so their power of prohibition tips the odds in their favour. It is paradoxical that they often sponsor sports teams – mercenary warriors who clash every weekend without even rehearsing! A bizarre role model! 'Risk management' is surely due for a re-assessment.

Mayer Hillman presented a report in Canterbury, England, in 1999, called *The Impact of Transport Policy on Children's Development*. He chronicles and deplores the increasing use of the family car as opposed to the bicycle for children's daily local travel. He contrasts "children's detention in their own homes" with the need to have

adventures in what are to them relatively dangerous situations, be mischievous, set just-attainable challenges that give pleasure from meeting them, take risks, be adventurous and make mistakes and suffer the consequences, gain self- esteem and self-confidence by being successful, reliable and punctual, and contribute to family and community life by shopping, visiting or running errands (Hillman, 1999, p.3).

On the obviously resulting lack of exercise, he claims:

we may have a time bomb on our hands which will explode in twenty or thirty years as the incidence of heart disease could rise sharply owing to the insufficiency of daily exercise during the critical years of childhood (p. 3).

He suspects the merit in the plethora of child-protective organizations, stating:

The apparently worthy initiatives of the Walking Bus for children on their way to school - as if going through a minefield, Safe Houses where children are told they can find help if they feel threatened, the Parent Watch schemes in which parents volunteer to supervise parks and play areas, and the Stranger/Danger campaigns such as that of Kidscape which advises parents to tell their children to Yell, Run and Tell if approached by a stranger, all contribute to a siege mentality in children's minds (p. 4).

He sees the overall effect as "withdrawing children from danger rather than withdrawing danger from children." (8) With the new technological marvel of 'Kindy-cam', (where parents can watch their toddler playing in another suburb) and other surveillances, I would agree with Hillman's conclusion:

Children are individuals whose inalienable rights are of no less value than those of adults. Now that we have evidence of the deleterious effects

of growing restrictions on their independence outside the home, it is difficult to believe that a civilised society will not wish to reverse the process which has brought that about (p. 9).

I have been discussing the importance of risk and adventure in early years. Now I shall turn to manifestations in adults. Even more insidious than 'late flowering fun' is 'late flowering risk behaviour', another instance of adults behaving childishly. In her article, '*Shit Happens*': *The Selling of Risk in Extreme Sport*, Catherine Palmer considers "sports such as rock-climbing, mountaineering, canyoning, bungee jumping and snow boarding" which she significantly describes as for "the young, or the young at heart." (Palmer, 2002, p. 323). Her main concern is irresponsible marketing that highlights the fun of the risk, but not the danger. She finds:

the 'risk society' is media rich and commodity replete. Previously 'on the edge' behaviour now features in a whole range of media to sell a whole range of mainstream commodities such as sunglasses, soft drinks, watches, alcoholic beverages and clothing. (p. 325)

Strangely, she concludes that "the answer to the question as to why people feel the need to risk their lives like this still remains largely elusive." (p. 335). My suggestion, which I hope to support in the body of this thesis, is that childhood is the right place for risk. We are reaping the result of cotton-wool childhoods, risk-free playgrounds and safe family vehicles dominating those years where children should be learning survival lessons. Small wonder some of our liberated teenagers are making up for lost time with car-theft, drugs and other risk behaviour, and small wonder that we lost forty-five young 'urban adventurers', mostly Australians, as they were tragically flushed down a canyon near Interlaken in 1999. Sadly, as childhood becomes more restricted, and adulthood less inhibited, we can only look forward to an increase in 'death by lifestyle'.

Wednesday's child may be 'full of woe', but at least, being a child, he can, like Jack, go 'to bed, And mend his head, With vinegar and brown paper.' Then, the next time he and Jill climb up the hill, he will be more careful. This is called growing up.

2.4 Thursday's Child Has Far to Go

Little Finger Dreams, Aspiration, Vision

A boy's will is the wind's will
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *My Lost Youth*, 1912, p. 132

In the film, *City of Lost Children* (Adrien and Jeunet, 1995), the anti-hero, Krank, is a creature of technical resourcefulness, but unable to dream. He kidnaps children, and plugs himself, via gothic gadgetry, into their imaginations for his own indulgence, but the atmosphere of his laboratory, in an offshore rig, produces fear and resentment in the children, who then only dream nightmares.

Krank is a megalomaniac who sees the imagination of a child as a fertile resource, but he is not the first to realize this. Children have been increasingly exploited and colonised as if they were new territory, terra nullius, unclaimed and available to all. Melanie Eckford-Prosser explains that children have become the conquests of *Imperialism* – being a dominating centre with distant territories, and *Colonisation* – whereby settlements are planted on these territories. She sees childcare experts as the equivalent of Anglo-Indians who somehow understood the natives better than the natives themselves, and who processed them through a superior language (Eckford-Prosser, 2000).

Daniel Thomas Cook, in an article about *Moral Panics in Children's Culture* examines sales campaigns by McDonalds, Pokemon, Chase Cards and Beanie Bags aimed to capitalise on a child's instinct to collect. (Cook, 2001). He is objective about this, offering the argument that to shelter children from the market economy is to shelter them from the truth. I am less sanguine, aware now of two, maybe three generations who have become grist for the corporate mill. Many of today's children miss even the imaginative landscapes of their parents' story-telling, as entire households surrender to the collective fantasy of television, and the domestic fallacy represented by the 'family restaurant'.

The McDonald brothers saw in 1948 that "the kids loved coming to the counter [...] they could still see Mama in the car, but they also could feel independent. Pretty soon, it sinks in that this is great for the business." (Love, 1986, p.16). By 1958, Jim Zien, McDonald's president, saw television

as the means of reaching the segment of the market that he believed was the key to unlocking all others. "I knew if we could get the kids, we would get their folks, too," Zien says. "If the kids asked to go to McDonald's, the old man was going to say 'okay' because the food was so cheap." (p. 216)

Clearly, Zien is being disingenuous here, completely ignoring the 'nag factor', which is the real way children influence their parents' purchasing choices. (Sutherland and Thompson, 2000). Bart Simpson does not appeal to Homer's budgetary sense to get at those Krusty Burgers. He simply nags until the 'old man' says 'okay'. In the early sixties, Bozo the Clown, played by Willard Scott, was contracted by McDonald's from a successful TV franchise:

There was nothing subtle about his sales pitch; Scott's appeal to children was a direct plea to "get Mom and Dad to take you to McDonald's." Yet, his tone was always happy, innocent, and sincere¹⁵. (p. 220)

In 1963, Bozo was retired and Ronald McDonald was born:

¹⁵ George Burns, the centenarian comedian, once said, "The most important thing about show business is sincerity – once you can fake that, you've got it made".

"The concept was that Ronald did everything kids like to do," Scott recalls, "and the commercials showed him roller skating, biking, swimming, or playing baseball. Ronald was their pal." (p. 223), and "In time, network television commercials featuring Ronald would create the only commercial character in the United States with a recognition factor among children equalled only by Santa Claus. (p. 224)

In Australia, the original McDonald's décor was an outback theme, and the menu reflected Australian taste, but understanding the crucial importance of tapping into the children – Krank style – they adopted the American menu, the red and yellow livery and Ronald McDonald. The Australian CEO

now estimates that less than 5 percent of his customers remove the [un-Australian] pickles from their hamburgers. The Australian president attributes that change to the influence McDonald's has on children, whose tastes are not yet biased against the American menu. As they grew up, McDonald's succeeded in winning more customers over to the standard American menu, and when McDonald's Australia finally revoked the menu modifications it had made, its operation moved into the black after eight consecutive losing years. (p. 435)

This 'family restaurant' franchise is just one example of the commercial success that corporations have had by using the child's imagination as a conduit for the family's money. That advertisers target children is universally recognized. Cook cites the pragmatic argument that the children should experience the same 'true life' as their parents. But could this argument be extended to all adult behaviour, including aberrant behaviour? Corporate paedophilia¹⁶ is so widespread that it is not seen as aggressive and exploitative with the unchecked potential to corrupt developing imaginations. Marianne Faithfull sings:

Who will take your dreams away
Takes your soul another day.
What can never be lost is gone,
It's stolen in a way.
(Faithfull, 1995)

A child's dreams are too precious to be lost, gone, stolen or even slightly defiled by forces not concerned with the child's welfare and health. Einstein is reported to have said, "If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales." He did not advocate taking them to the pictures. It is a truism that many people prefer radio plays to television, 'because the scenery is better'. It has been frequently argued that Walt Disney's portrayal of folk- and fairy-tales not only reduces the power of the tales, but also of the viewer's imagination, by imposing lasting images of characters and landscape. Disney gave the seven dwarves all cute names, while early versions of the Snow White story suggest identical, animalistic males. Einstein also apparently said, "To know is

¹⁶ A term frequently used by, and possibly termed by, Philip Adams, the writer and broadcaster.

nothing. To imagine is everything." With young imaginations stifled and standardised by the massive power of global image-makers, it is possible that the creative/deductive originality that made Einstein will be diminished among future generations.

A child's imagination, his vision, is infinite. In *I Can Jump Puddles*, Alan Marshall, writing of his childhood as a polio survivor, writes of himself as an imaginary alter-ego:

The Other Boy was always with me. He was my shadow-self, weak and full of complaints, afraid and apprehensive, always pleading with me to consider him, always seeking to restrain me for his own selfish interests [...] He wore my body and walked on crutches. I strode apart from him on legs as strong as trees.

(Coe, 1984, p. 55)

So, Marshall, like every child, allows his imagination to re-invent himself and manifest his infinite potential. All great 'childhoods' (Coe's term for literary self-portraits of the artist when young) feature the fantasy landscape of inner vision. Examples are countless, but anyone who has experienced occasional snowy winters in their youth will understand the polar exploits of young Dylan Thomas and his friend:

We were so still, Eskimo-footed arctic marksmen in the muffling silence of the eternal snows - eternal, ever since Wednesday - that we never heard Mrs. Prothero's first cry from her igloo at the bottom of the garden. Or, if we heard it at all, it was, to us, like the far-off challenge of our enemy and prey, the neighbour's polar cat. (Thomas, 1978, p. 9).

I concede that 'nostalgia isn't what it used to be', and that everyone's past ages are golden, but whereas in previous times we could believe in Longfellow's "long, long thoughts", today the thoughts of boy or girl are likely to be brought up short by manifestations of Harry Potter, Pokemons, Basketball Cards, Yameguchi or the wonders of the Playstation, where the 'I wonder...' and the 'what if?' have all been pre-programmed in the real interest of the shareholder rather than the child. Ionesco wrote:

Childhood is the world of the miraculous or of the supernatural. It is as though the entire creation had surged up suddenly, all luminous, out of the night, new-minted, fresh-fashioned and wholly astonishing. Childhood ceases at the moment when things cease to astonish [...] losing one's childhood means losing Paradise.

(Ionesco, 1967, pp. 64,65)

Rather than astonishing and inspiring, the market forces that trade in children's imaginations seem to tantalize and seduce and ultimately to control. This enquiry looks into circus activity for a means of liberating, to some extent, the imaginations of young people, and restoring their vision from commercial to individual ownership.

If not, then what? The consequences are beyond the scope of this work, but if individuals' dreams, fantasies and ambitions are hi-jacked just at the age they most need them, they may re-appear in later life. Dissatisfied adults, finally free to imagine

their own future, might eventually follow their own dreams, abandoning family and security. This may seem a noble thing, as in 'follow your dream', but it seems to me that childhood is the right place to dream. "Thursday's child has far to go", and she deserves to be left sufficiently free to go where her imagination leads her.

2.5 Friday's Child is Loving and Giving

Ring Finger

Trust and Touch

We have overlooked that the most precious gift we can give the young is social space: the necessary space or privacy in which to become human beings. Peter Opie, *Pipers at the Gates of Dawn*, p. 257

Love and giving is the birthright of all children. Recent generations of children have, for various reasons, become less gregarious, less trusting, and more introspective. In this section I shall deal with aspects of trust: of trusting oneself, one's environment and one's peers. Once again, I shall attempt to describe this aspect of child development with reference to literature, research and experience.

In *Lark Rise*, when Flora Thompson's twelve-year-old autobiographical persona, Laura, happens upon the bull in the farmyard,

in the act of justifying its existence, the sight did not warp her nature. She neither peeped from behind a rick, nor fled, horrified, across country; but merely thought in her old-fashioned way, 'Dear me! I had better slip quietly away before the men see me.' [...] and she thought it quite natural that the men in attendance at such functions should prefer not to have women or little girls as spectators. They would have felt, as they would have said, 'a bit okkard'. So she just withdrew and went another way round without so much as a kink in her subconscious. (Thompson, 1973, p. 35)

Thompson wrote in the 1930's about the 1890's, and she does not even mention the questions of regulation and litigation that would concern us given this situation today. Laura's personality was shaped by her life among all the characters, male, female, old and young in the hamlet. An African proverb says: 'It takes a village to bring up a child'. The proximity of the family and neighbours, and the social richness of the environment formed in Laura and the other children a solid independence of thought, and interdependence of action. Ultimately, we get the impression that here is a little girl who trusts herself.

In discussing trust in the context of youth circus, we must not avoid the issue of physical touching. Today, there is so much media and academic material produced about the dangers of child-abuse, that it is almost unthinkable that we can turn back the clock to a time of more innocence and trust. No-one, certainly no male, could campaign for the right to touch children. However, there is increasing evidence that depriving

children of physical contact is harmful, and we are doing children a disservice by taking the easy option of avoiding touch.

Ashley Montagu brought this issue to public attention with his study, *Touching – The Human Significance of the Skin*. Among many revealing experiments and theories, he cites the psychoanalyst Michael Ballint, who would divide his patients into two groups he called philobatic and oncophilic. He states:

The suggestion is that the child who has enjoyed a satisfying primary object relationship, that is, the child who has been satisfyingly tactually stimulated, will not need to cling, and will enjoy high places, thrills, and being swung about. (philobatic). By contrast the child who has been failed in his clinging needs, especially during his preverbal reflex period of development, will react to this traumatic experience with an excessive need to hold on, to cling, with fear of the unsteady and of the support that may fail. (oncophilic)
(Montagu, 1971, p. 219)

Our study will provide examples of oncophilic children who have found, in circus activities, both the re-assurance of non-threatening touch and the opportunity progressively to overcome the “fear of the unsteady”.

Some writers have recently dared to approach the subject of youth sexuality. Judith Levine's *Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children from Sex* is based upon the premise, “for our part, adults owe children not only protection and a schooling in safety but also the entitlement to pleasure.” (Levine and Elders, 2003). She discusses the hysteria of the 1980's and 90's about touching. She summarises the research indicating that touch is good for children and other living things and that tactile deprivation is frequently associated with violent behaviour. Loving touch seems to promote not only individual health, but social harmony as well. She cites research showing that America is an exceedingly ‘low-touch, high-violence’ culture. Children and adults are taught that sexual touching, such as masturbation and play between children, is wrong. However, ‘outercourse’, or the collection of sensual and sexual acts that don't involve sexual intercourse, are important, safe, and healthy in sexual maturation. Levine discusses the various ways that touch can and should be encouraged. In her chapter “Manhunt: The Paedophile Panic” Levine argues that the emphasis on ‘predators’ and suspicion of strangers fractures the community of adults and children; it can leave children defenceless in abusive homes. Projecting sexual menace onto a monster and pouring money and energy into vanquishing him distracts adults from teaching children the subtle skills of loving with both trust and discrimination.

This thesis will propose that youth circus presents a context for non-abusive, consensual touch, which may in some cases make good a deficit in a child's tactile experience. Yes, the same may be said for rugby football, but questions must be asked about single sex, violent and passionate human contact within the context of a territorial war game.

Having briefly addressed trust of self, and the building of trust of one's social environment, we consider peer trust. Once again, this is not an argument about what children absolutely need. This I could not sustain. However, I sense that our present generation of Western children are lacking certain social experiences that were part of growing up in earlier times.

One indication would be in the personification of the child in popular children's literature. It is beyond the scope of this work to conduct a thorough analysis, but I would like to suggest that there is a discernible changing pattern over the last few decades; a trend away from child as group member towards child as a solitary protagonist in a more or less hostile world. Of course there will be many exceptions, but the contrast between the bonded groups of Enid Blyton's schoolchildren and the solo heroes of Roald Dahl's works epitomise this suspected development.

The playground games chronicled by the Opies and Ritchie show a discrete children's culture, shared and transmitted by peer groups of children in the 1960's and 70's. The Opies link this to unbroken lines of tradition in England, lasting over several centuries. Today's playground games tend to be more sport (i.e. teacher) focussed. Naturally forming groups tend to be smaller, and conversations very frequently turn on television and other mass-media matters. The one-to-one communication of mobile phones and text-messaging further divides the young population into singles and partners rather than groups.¹⁷ Naturally, this is a desirable result for the forces of capital and consumption, as isolated individuals consume more than social groups. Why share a lawn mower, when you can buy one each?

In Flora Thompson's era, children spent time together, lived in close proximity, relied on each other for play, for stories, and for the natural social interaction which was their rehearsal for adult life. Without this complex interaction, which should continue for a decade or more, a child will look for role models, antagonists, conflict and resolution elsewhere. *Friends* and *Neighbours* on television may become more real to a growing child than the people next door and the children at school.

Australia's Prime Minister, sixty-year-old John Howard, urged that the concept and word, 'mateship' be included in a preamble to a new 1999 Australian Constitution. "It is the one word in all of this which is unarguably, distinctively, and grammatically and proudly Australian. You wouldn't find it in any other preamble." (Howard, 1999). If this was a significant feature of Australian culture through the World Wars, and into Howard's beloved 1950's, it has not recently been a highlight of Australian life, except in a nostalgic sense. Perhaps this mutual trust and reliance among close friends is outmoded, and in need of official rehabilitation; perhaps not. This preamble of mine is not designed to make socio/moral judgements, but simply to indicate the nature of the qualities we will be looking for as we explore the nature of the circus experience.

¹⁷ A mother of young teens disagrees with me, explaining that her daughter's circle of mobile phone friends is as close as any 'gang' or 'group' she experienced in her own youth. We await research on this new phenomenon.

2.6 Saturday's Child Works Hard For a Living

The Thumb

Hard Work, Persistence, Resilience

One out of a dozen reasons why Robinson Crusoe should be so popular with youth, is that it hits their level in this matter to a nicety; Crusoe was always at makeshifts and had, in so many words, to play at a great variety of professions; and then the book is all about tools, and there is nothing that delights a child so much.

Robert Louis Stevenson, From *Virginibus Puerisque* (1892)

Many folk-tales and popular children's stories feature a young hero committed to a task. Through achieving this task, s/he assures safety and prosperity to loved ones, usually the family. Often the task is performed with the help of other agencies, such as the fairy who helps Jack (of the beanstalk), but as often, the journey is arduous and risky, and must be undertaken alone. Frodo Baggins is ultimately personally responsible for the Ring, and Roald Dahl's heroes, James, Charlie, Matilda and others have to go it alone. In all these cases, to quote the Chinese acrobatics dictum, 'persistence leads to success'.

Clearly this notion has an appeal to young readers, who possibly identify in themselves the potential to save the world through their personal talents and efforts. Video games are based on the same premise as, mostly alone, the player is pitched against increasingly difficult odds. The length of time children play these games testifies to the instinct for perseverance and success, but they hardly develop young bodies. Mayer Hillman's study of children and bicycles indicates the benefits of daily cycling to school. (Hillman, 1999). There is no way in which spasmodic bursts of high impact athletic exercise in school P.E. can substitute for the natural continuous physical play and testing that can be observed in most young mammal species.

In a child's world, there seem to be many sites for 'virtual' hard work, but apart from sport, decreasing opportunity for real labour. As children grow, their muscles must be exercised in order to develop correctly. Their balance of diet and exercise is crucial if we are to avoid a generation living with the dangers of obesity. Even twenty years ago, children's books contained inspirational exhortations to 'help Daddy in the garden, and help Mummy in the kitchen'. One observable result from the gender bias corrections of recent decades is that children in the West are less able to cook and cultivate, or also sew, run errands, or (a cynic may add) sweep chimneys and work in coalmines. They are also increasingly detached from their parents' work, including their work ethic. Flora Thompson, like all the children in *Lark Rise* in the 1890's knew exactly what labour all the village people performed, and she was also well aware of the pride the Oxfordshire farm hands took in their stamina and productivity:

Their favourite virtue was endurance. Not to flinch from pain or hardship was their ideal. A man would say, 'He says, says he, that field o' oo-ats's got to come in afore night, for there's a rain a-comin'. But we didn't flinch, not we! Got the last loo-ad under cover by midnight. A'moost too fagged-out to walk home; but we didn't flinch. We done it!'

(Thompson, 1973, p. 40)

If your parents are white-collar workers, it is not likely that your playground games and hobbies will be inspired by accounting, law or management. Today's child is more likely to get exhausted by watching too much television than by walking too far, or playing rough games for too long. S/he is more likely to suffer anxiety than blisters, insomnia than muscle fatigue. Before we have two or more generations of people who have forgotten the joy of physical exhaustion, and the satisfaction of a tough job well done, it is well worth looking for a children's activity that can revive these pleasures.

Tolstoy, a fanatical, life-long hard worker, was a landowner with a profound interest in and respect for the lives of his labourers. In *Anna Karenina*, Levin, a character who reflects much of the true life of his author, understands the pleasure of physical work, and determines to spend a day mowing with the peasants:

' I need physical exercise; without it my character gets quite spoilt,' thought he, and determined to go and mow, however uncomfortable his brother and the peasants might make him feel. (Tolstoy, 1973, p. 281)

Despite the pain of unaccustomed movement, and the awareness of being out of his social element, he perseveres all day, and eventually,

[t]he scythe seemed to mow of itself. Those were happy moments. Yet more joyous were the moments when, reaching the river at the lower end of the swaths, the old man would wipe his scythe with the wet grass, rinse its blade in the clear water, and dipping his whetstone-box in the stream, would offer it to Levin.

' A little of my kvas? It's good!' said he, with a wink.

And really Levin thought he had never tasted any nicer drink than this lukewarm water with green stuff floating in it and a flavour of the rusty tin box. And then came the ecstasy of a slow walk, one hand resting on the scythe, when there was leisure to wipe away the streams of perspiration, to breathe deep, to watch the line of mowers, and to see what was going on around in forest and field.

The longer Levin went on mowing, the oftener he experienced those moments of oblivion when his arms no longer seemed to swing the scythe, but the scythe itself his whole body, so conscious and full of life; and as if by magic, regularly and definitely without a thought being given to it, the work accomplished itself of its own accord. These were blessed moments. (ibid, p. 286)

Perspiration, aches and self-consciousness are all absorbed in an experience of joy, ecstasy, oblivion and blessed moments. Children, who blur the boundary between work and play, are capable of, and deserve to experience many of these 'blessed moments'.

We have considered 'late-flowering fun' and 'late-flowering risk'. Let us think about 'late-flowering hard work'. Consider those who willingly drive in their large cars to a torture chamber of chrome, steel and black rubber devices, called a gym, where they perspire and sometimes expire. Consider that these same people (we) 'work' at

computers or paper, to buy labour-saving machines for household chores, and buy processed food to avoid the effort of growing our own. We drive to and from work, then go jogging. We also drive our children to school, and wonder why they are so unfit.

Perhaps we will never again work in the fields like Levin, where the “little boys and girls” would bring the lunch, “through the long grass, hardly visible above it, carrying jugs of kvas stoppered with rags, and bundles of bread which strained their little arms”. (ibid, p. 287). However, Levin’s pleasure, and the child’s satisfying association with labour we see in nineteenth century England and Russia, reminds us of the importance of hard-work to a growing child. It may be the case that some fiction tended to idealise child-labour at the same time that Dickens, Reade and others were condemning it in their books. Clearly a balance should be struck. The photographs of British primary school children of the nineteen fifties indicate a healthy balance. *Moving and Growing: Physical Education in the Primary School* and *Planning the Programme* present fit looking children, some whippet-thin but active, at a time when there was still homework to be done, and vigorous games to be played. (Ministry of Education (UK), 1953, 1952). The clock cannot be turned back, but clearly there is a need to find a valid replacement for child exertion to suit the twenty-first century.

2.7 The Challenges of Childhood. Conclusion

Was There a Time?

Was there a time when dancers with their fiddles
In children's circuses could stay their troubles?
There was a time they could cry over books,
But time has set its maggot on their track.
Under the arc of the sky they are unsafe.
What's never known is safest in this life.
Under the skysigns they who have no arms
Have cleanest hands, and, as the heartless ghost
Alone's unhurt, so the blind man sees best.
(Dylan Thomas, 1974, p. 45)

Dylan Thomas's 1936 poem helps put into perspective the concerns expressed in the previous sections, about the sanctity of childhood, and the forces ranged against it. Like many before and since, including the present writer, Thomas mourns the loss of a time when it was different, when books and children's circuses could animate the emotions of a child. The threat that time has now “set its maggot on their track” evokes the perennial lament for a lost Elysium, but specifically lost not to the individual child growing older, but to all children, as the world decays, time-eaten, and they become vulnerable, “unsafe”. “What's never known is safest in this life” has echoes of Thomas Gray, from almost two centuries before, contemplating Eton boys at play:

Yet ah! why should they know their fate?
Since sorrow never comes too late,
And happiness too swiftly flies.
Thought would destroy their paradise.

No more; where ignorance is bliss,
'Tis folly to be wise.
(Gray, 1939, lines 95-100)

Gray, however, does not see childhood under threat, but rather the blissful ignorance of each child who has not yet encountered the inevitable

Ministers of human fate
And black Misfortune's baleful train
(56-57)

Dylan Thomas's final four lines, the most often quoted, comprise a list of "ignorance is bliss" paradoxes, but the point of difference has been made; the maggot is on the track of childhood – not each child. "Under the arc of sky" has an inescapable, terrible totality about it.¹⁸ Yet two lines later, Thomas places the child victims "under the skysigns". There is no doubt that the poet is suggesting nothing zodiacal here, but only crassly commercial. In the same year, 1936, George Orwell writes, in *Keep The Aspidistra Flying*, "On the miry water, lit by the glare of skysigns, the muck of East London was racing inland." (Orwell, 1987, p. 76). For Thomas, as for the deeply cynical Gordon Comstock, Orwell's hero, the skysign represents an intrusion and a threat. Thomas suggest in that this evil light (not so much an arc-en-ciel, but more an electric arc-light) children may be better off armless, heartless and blind.

In this argument I wish to respect both Gray and Thomas. The former, from the viewpoint of mature years, extols the bliss of "careless childhood", and seems to urge that it should last as long as possible, since "happiness too swiftly flies". In the same sense, I am exploring means in which a child may have a full childhood, within what Thomas vividly describes as a universal decay of the landscape of childhood.

I cannot countenance the implied retreat either into Thomas's ignorance of the blind, or Gray's bliss of the ignorant. My concerns are no less, but my interpretation and response are less poetic. We move on from this depressing scenario of time's maggot and misfortune's baleful train to explore more optimistic possibilities, where we hope and expect to shine lights altogether more benevolent than skysigns, and to divert the baleful train into a siding.

We shall now explore the real and imagined circus.

¹⁸ Like Cleopatra's lament at Antony's death:
"And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon." Shakespeare (1955)

3. Representations Of Circus Introduction

As soon as you have made a thought – laugh at it
Loa Tse

When a thing is funny, search it for a hidden truth
George Bernard Shaw

In this chapter I shall explore perceptions and representations of the circus. This is essential to the argument because, as people approach circus activities as teacher or student, they are generally armed only with what they have seen, or been told; the view from outside the big top, or at best, from the benches. I will look at the various lenses through which circus is habitually distorted, and tried to assess the effect of these distortions. As Helen Stoddart writes: “The circus is mendacious, eternally opportunistic, at turns demotic and status seeking, absurd and charming, breathtaking and predictable [...] Alternatively, sometimes simultaneously it is conservative, outlawed, conformist and transgressive.” She quotes Marcello Truzzi: “the true nature of this organisational structure has been heavily obscured by hosts of romanticized fictions and histories.” (Stoddart, 2000, p. 1). Clearly, the truth will not be easy to identify.

While many philosophical studies have, as their aim, the establishment of a truth, this work is not such a study. I shall not claim to have reached the truth. I shall not even claim the infallibility of my examples and interpretations. Indeed if some of my observations are proved to be false (easier to establish than the truth), I should still maintain their validity; they contribute to my understanding of the subject, and to the totality of this work. I take some comfort from what George Watson wrote in his wise and candid book, *Writing A Thesis*:

A proposition is not reliably to be judged by the grounds that have caused someone to believe it. A ground for believing in a true proposition may have been highly inadequate, and the proposition no less true for that.

One way to describe my belief in pi [the geometrical formula] would be to say that I believe it on authority; another, that I have been conditioned into believing it. Neither description is inaccurate; though either of them, if left unexplained, might be thought designed to reduce the standing of pi in the scholarly world. But what the instance really demonstrates, if soberly pondered, is that no proposition is any the worse for having been believed on inadequate grounds.

(Watson, 1993, p. 62)

In this chapter, particularly, we are concerned with a child's beliefs established by hearsay and representation. Lewis Carroll again helps us here, with the Bellman's dictum: “What I tell you three times is true”. (Carroll, 1948, fit 1). The reader of this chapter will be told, as are children, more than three times what is ‘true’ about circus. Inductive reasoning may lead us to consider generalising a reliable theorem based on a critical mass of particulars. But, as Popper points out, a critical mass of white swans led seventeenth century Europeans to the confident assertion: “All swans are white”.

Then Joseph Banks returned from Australia with a black swan. Popper sees falsification as a necessary and positive step in scientific progress. (Popper, 1969). A convincing falsification of my theory would be welcome, if only to validate my reticence to declare 'truth'. I am content to concede that my own study of the 'misprisions' (Harold Bloom's term) of circus 'texts' could also be full of misprisions. Consequently, I stress that this study does not and cannot prove a case. It opens subjects, highlights correspondences, suggests connections and ultimately asks what I hope may be accepted as a sincere philosophical question: "In the light of all this, what do you reckon?"

This chapter, then, will comprise a litany of misconceptions, exaggerations, poetic imaginings and ballyhoo, most of which the circus will not disown. The eminent philosopher, Daniel Dennett, distains the widespread concept of 'zombie philosophy' as it is used as a model in consciousness studies¹⁹. His point seemed to be that a connection with the subject of 'B' grade movies is demeaning to his noble calling. However, in forty years of association with circus people, I have never heard a complaint from them about bad publicity or misrepresentation. It seems that only misappropriation of their traditional skills, or more importantly, their name, raises their hackles.

In 1980, Gerry Cottle, who launched a 'New Concept in Circus' including 'students from the British Circus School' (but no animals) was obliged to resign from the Circus Proprietors' Association as his production no longer matched their definition of circus. (Bolton, 1986, p. 72). When I interviewed John McDonnell, ringmaster of *Lennon Bros Circus, Australia*, I asked him what he thought of all these 'New Circuses'. He said he had no problem with them "as long as they don't call themselves 'Circus'". Question: "What should they call themselves?" Answer: "Cirque". (Interview, McDonnell, 2002). Cirque, of course is French for circus, but the word is now associated, throughout the English-speaking world, with the Canadian global enterprise, *Cirque du Soleil*.

My observation is that traditional circus is secure in knowing itself for what it is, and has little need of approval from the outside world except their 'bums on seats'. Any publicity is good publicity, and campaigns to educate people through handouts and school-kits, are driven either by reactive politics (e.g. the animal issue) or by circus fans.

My book *New Circus* was published in the nineteen eighties, but the genre was born in the sixties, when a young generation was determined to turn the establishment on its head, as creatively as possible. Lyotard (not Léotard) defined post-modernism as "incredulity towards meta-narratives", or a sceptical scorn of big ideas or institutions. (Bolton, 2003). The circus was an easy target for post-modern scorn, as it seemed caught in a vicious circle of nature imitating art, imitating tradition, imitating expectations. In the traditional circus, men are manly and women are angels. The

¹⁹ "Knock-down refutations are rare in philosophy, and unambiguous self-refutations are even rarer, for obvious reasons, but sometimes we get lucky [...] Just such a boon is the philosophers' concept of a zombie." Dennett, *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 4.2 (1995)

deformed, moronic clown is funny. The ringmaster has the top hat, whip and boots, like a master of hounds. The music is martial. Apart from a few sadly no-quite-topical clown gags, we could be in a nineteenth century big top. Like the Dickensian Christmas, it is a construct, perpetuated by the mutuality of commerce and nostalgia.

So for the young theatre makers of the sixties and seventies, circus was ripe for parody. Le Grand Magic Circus, Footsbarn Theatre and Welfare State all burlesqued the circus, but many groups and individuals became enamoured of the real techniques of circus arts, and parody became less amusing, as the flattery of imitation became ascendant. Pickle Family, Circus Oz, Suitcase Circus and many others developed this way. Many young people have been seduced into the reality of circus, having been first tantalised by the myths, archetypes and caricatures. Where do these misconceptions begin? How are they perpetrated? Is there truth in them?

First I shall look at the prevalence of **the metaphorical use of circus** in the English language. The questions are why are there so many instances, how did they develop, why are they so inaccurate and why do they persist even in times when much that circus represents is unfashionable? How does metaphorical usage affect circus performers and students?

The media may be responsible for much of the persistence of circus metaphors, as journalists struggle to produce colourful prose. I shall examine the relationship between circus and the news media. There is a symbiosis, as one needs the publicity while the other welcomes the photo opportunities and the advertising revenue. Furthermore, the whiff of controversy is very tempting to journalists and if a contentious story generates a flood of letters to the editor, then not only does the paper's circulation rise, but the attendance at the circus is almost guaranteed to increase, too. I shall look at the media's treatment of the traditional tenting shows, the radical new circuses and circus in schools, and finally at how the media respond to the professional marketing machines of the big circus corporations, noting how much the readers, listeners and viewers are receiving 'news by press release'. Children often receive their ideas about circus from schoolteachers and parents who in turn, with little direct experience, rely on the news media to inform their opinions. So the media can heavily influence a child's perception of what circus is about.

Of all countries, France has the most extensive and credible body of circus **criticism and theory**. *Arts de la Piste*, a world-leading journal dedicated issue 12, in 1999, to "Work and criticism – a necessary dialectic". Inspired by France, and despairing of circus criticism in Australia and the UK, and happy to see some improvement in the USA, I shall review the current position as far as possible throughout the world. My hope is that an informed readership becomes an intelligent and enthusiastic audience, and that ultimately this can affect a young person's understanding of circus. The amount of serious intellectual investigation of circus is depressingly low. My academic bibliography, although not comprehensive, probably lists most of the significant scholars. I shall review a limited range of papers and books with an analysis of the main issues. I shall indicate that, although many are genuinely enquiring into the nature of circus, many continue to use it metaphorically, as an illustration for other concerns, e.g.

the body, transgression, the other, and risk, or to road-test a cultural theory e.g. semiotics, or to make comparisons with other cultural phenomena, such as carnival, magic and theatre.

While all these explorations are of interest, many are sadly ill-informed and are based on some of the same misconceptions as we find purveyed by the mass media, and will find in many of the areas still to be examined. Those few academics and serious writers who have diligently explored circus, and successfully represented it with accuracy and perception will be highlighted in this section. My hope is that their works will become fundamental to future serious study of the subject.

The History of Childhood was mentioned in chapter two, when I addressed the developmental needs of children. In the introductory essay de Mause bemoans the almost complete lack of history of childhood. He comes down heavily on biographers and historical sociologists, then turns his fire on literature. "The literary historians, mistaking books for life, construct a fictional picture of childhood, as though we could really know what happened in the nineteenth century American home by reading *Tom Sawyer*. (de-Mause, 1974). This argument may sit well with historians and psychohistorians, and while de Mause's impressive book is dense with statistics and censuses, referring to diaries, journals, letters, instruction manuals and artworks, in all the four hundred pages there is no mention of Charles Dickens. It is a truism among literary scholars that not only did Dickens invent Christmas, he also invented childhood! My argument here, and in the next section in this chapter is that **fiction** is a profoundly important illuminator of the human condition. It not only sheds light on the past and present, but also by the strength of its images, has a great influence on the future. I would argue that de Mause's example, *Tom Sawyer*, continues to influence American culture through illustrators like Norman Rockwell, and cartoon-strips like the American *Dennis the Menace*. Generations of parents have expected, and to some degree encouraged Tom and Huck's boyish spirit of enterprise and adventure in their own children. In this way, fiction can become fact, art become nature. I shall cite fiction by, among others, Edmond de Goncourt, Charles Dickens, Henry Miller, Paul Gallico, Conan-Doyle, Marion Bradley and Angela Carter. I shall consider the extent to which these writers have understood or misunderstood their subject, and to what extent their writings have influenced both public opinion and the development of circuses themselves.

Few **poets** have made circus their subject. I shall wonder why, while examining some eminent examples. Together with some samples of why it should sometimes be avoided. Americans Ogden Nash, Vachel Lindsay, Robert Lax and e. e. cummings have boldly explored the genre. British circus poetry seems coyly metaphoric in comparison. While some may argue that circus poetry will not influence young people, there is no doubt that imagery in **lyrics** of pop songs will significantly shape a perception of circus among young people. I shall review a range of songs, looking for evidence of the 'elements' of this thesis.

Spot Goes to the Circus. So does *Noddy*, *Rupert*, *Postman Pat*, *Super Gran* and, for all I know, so do *The Teletubbies*, *The Smurfs*, *The Wiggles*, *The Wombles* and *Wurzel*

Gummidge. I shall look through the shelves of **children's books** to see what they find there. I shall trawl through the 'literature' for work that portrays circus in a way that combines integrity with inspiration. And I shall sift the oeuvre for clichés, misconceptions, lies and moral judgements among those most formative of media, children's books and television.

Circus and **theatre** have a difficult relationship. Many directors have foundered when they try to combine the genres. This section will examine the conceptual difference, which turns on the notions of suspension of disbelief and simple belief. I shall look at the early twentieth century work of Eisenstein and Meyerhold. Then I shall use examples from the twentieth century and contemporary practice to see if circus is changing towards theatrical principles. My prime interest is the reaction of theatre-going audiences and critics to the new wave of physical theatre that is inspired by the circus, and, as always, how such developments may affect young people.

In the **cinema**, I find that most directors either demonize the circus as the low-life, the dark side, as in *Freaks* and *La Strada*, or idealize it as in *Wings of Desire* and *When Night is Falling*. However the same can be said about films about the police, or ghosts, or bears, or almost anything. I will re-examine this theory, but also look at what appears to be the middle ground: the Hollywood blockbusters and the Australian TV series, *Clowning Around*. I shall be looking at how audiences are being fed circus images, and how the representation of circus in cinema might influence young people.

The chapter continues with an overview of circus in the **visual arts**. Many well-known impressionists and post-impressionists felt an affinity with circus people and circus life. Not only the paintings, but also the circumstances around their creation will be reviewed. I shall also look at the works, and the words, of Laura Knight, William Calder and some lesser-known artists, asking what did they all see in the circus and what have they helped others to see?

After so many flattering representations, we turn to **opposition** to the circus. The first impressions children get of the circus are often negative, whether through cartoons, through metaphor or from the conversation of their elders. I look at the different varieties of mud that are slung at circus, remembering that most children are rather partial to mud. Finally, there are demographic studies of **circus audiences** in several countries. I shall review some, wondering if it is true what Gerry Cottle said to me in an interview: "thankfully it still takes three or four adults to take a child to circus." (Interview, Cottle, 2001). Many contemporary circuses now target teens and young adults with their new style and content, so a new generation of young people, deciding on their future, is confronted with an unexpected and appealing career option.

The task I have set myself in this chapter is to corral, for inspection, a very large number of manifestations of the circus, real or imagined. They will be – like sheep on a hillside – many varieties rounded up from a wide landscape and penned together, to be examined. Just as the sheep may be cursorily examined for identification and a health check, my herd of disparate ideas will be inspected for signs of suitability for the market of youth work.

The ideal veterinary (or doctoral) practice is to examine one sheep at a time, in exhaustive detail, until we know everything about that particular sheep. It may seem that I, having crammed so many beasts into this one pen, have leaped, like an Australian sheepdog, onto their backs, and am running around on the surface of the mob, yelping and sniffing here and there.

It should be remembered that the author of this work is serving as shepherd, sheepdog and vet, and that the very act of running about on the backs of sheep is sufficiently spectacular in itself that it was celebrated in the film *Crocodile Dundee*, when Paul Hogan walked on the heads of the crowd in a New York subway station. (1986). Hopefully, as my flock of ideas is checked for the market, it will be seen that in this case we had to gather them all together to get the general picture rather than devote all our time analysing and classifying just one or two specimens, while the others got away.

3.1 Representations of Circus in Metaphor

The multiple possibilities of phenomenological interpretation become like acrobatic bodies in motion; somersaulting, back flipping, shifting shape and meaning in a rapid succession of moves in and out of the fixed poses of social categories.

Peta Tait *Fleshed, Muscular Phenomenologies: Across Sexed and Queer Circus Bodies*. (1998, p. 76)

I mean, why didn't they do it? Why didn't they do it, why didn't they backflip twelve months ago? I mean, it is a backflip, but it's a welcome backflip. I mean, some backflips are welcome if they produce good policy. I mean, I am not opposed to sensible backflips by oppositions. I am not opposed; I think there's a lot to be said for them.

John Howard, *ABC Radio*, (2004)

Professor Hugues Hotier, in his books and his doctoral thesis *Le Vocabulaire du Cirque et du Music-Hall*, explains how, with its Romany origins and social introversion, the circus community has retained or devised a jargon which, like many exclusive argots, quickly divides circus members from 'jossers' (outsiders). (Hotier, 1984), (1995). It is paradoxical, therefore, that we, in daily conversation, and in the media, have seized many aspects of circus life and performance and applied them, often incorrectly, as metaphors in our common speech.

'This Company/Office/Parliament is becoming a Circus'. I imagine if it did - with act following act with perfect timing; with each 'performer' earning a round of applause for truly seeming to be the 'world's greatest'; with each member specialising in what they are good at, and not interfering with the others' virtuosity; an operating mode based on cooperation rather than antagonism; with comic interludes to keep everyone alert, and to help demonstrate by contrast the status of the serious issues.

I imagine if the business/enterprise/organisation outsourced none of its functions, but the multi-skilled workforce managed its own marketing, transport, erection of premises and catering. I imagine generating and satisfying a whole new clientele in just two weeks, leaving them calling out for more 'product', and that this product is known by name, and understood by every age group, every demographic group in every culture.

Furthermore, imagine that this is all achieved - venue, marketing, product, customer satisfaction, as well as human resource management, financing and budgeting, insurance, research and development, training, forward planning - all the myriad functions of any business, all achieved with no visible evidence of an administrative centre, save a mobile phone and a small caravan.

With this in mind, we must consider how circus has earned such a derogatory role in our metaphorical usage, and how this may affect a young person's perception of circus. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, in definition 2(b) of its 8 sections on 'circus' refers to "a disturbance or uproar; a lively or noisy display. Orig. USA," and its first example is 1869, Mark Twain, *Innocents Abroad*: "It [Constantinople] was, well it was an eternal circus". Among numerous other examples, in 1951, we find the first example of a modern version: M Kennedy, *Lucy Carmichael* "She was lovely and strange and agitating, but he did not want to turn his life into a three-ring circus." (Oxford, 1994). Twain's usage is not derogatory. The author/narrator is hesitant, then decisive, and, as we gather from his top billing in the dictionary, creative. He also uses the adjective 'eternal', which is a high status term when applied to a city (usually Rome), and in this case derides neither Constantinople nor the Circus.

Authors, as artists, are generally concerned with originality, and pursue an integrity that will qualify their work for posterity. Their words will generally not be remembered and quoted, without these qualities. Journalists, however, especially radio and TV reporters, have little thought for posterity, and usually have to work fast, and communicate immediately. They seem to find the circus an irresistible source of images, many of which are disrespectful and often completely incorrect.

From a provincial press over a short period, here are some examples-

- Circus (Police Corruption Royal Commission, Parliament, Media)
- Backflip (John Howard, Amanda Vanstone). We'd like to see that!
- Balancing act (a budget)
- Keeping the balls in the air (management)
- A juggled mark (football)
- Safety net (medical insurance)

We have to suspect that journalists' word-processors have a default macro sequence, or inbuilt spell check, whereby the words 'clown' or 'clowning' are always followed by 'around'. Apart from the alliterative/rhyming tonality of this appalling phrase, there seems to be the attempt to disqualify the notion of clowning as a bona fide, full-time occupation. 'Around' seems to denote a temporality or insincerity.

Here I list other examples of circus-related metaphors. ('Balls' to 'Trick' are quoted from the *Dictionary of Metaphor*).

BALLS IN THE AIR (to have too many) - to attempt to do more than can be coped with.

CIRCUS (to be a) - to be a disorganised affair

HOOPS (to jump through) - to undergo some imposed ordeal

FINE LINE (to tread a) - cautiously to take action in circumstances where either too much or too little will cause difficulties

MERRY GO ROUND (to be on a) - to be sent from one bureaucrat to another

SAFETY NET (eg a safety net scheme) - a scheme for dealing with exceptional cases not covered by normal arrangements

SPOTLIGHT (to turn the Spotlight on something) - to draw public attention to something

TIGHTROPE (to walk a) - to do something very dangerous

TRICK (one cannot teach an old dog new tricks) - people get irreversibly set in their ways

(Renton, 1990)

Also consider:

FACE THE LIONS

STAND IN THE CENTRE RING

FALL THROUGH THE SAFETY NET

JUMP ON THE BANDWAGON²⁰

CRACK THE WHIP

TEARS OF A CLOWN

MAKE A FOOL OF YOURSELF

PUT YOUR HEAD IN THE LION'S MOUTH

STRONG MAN

BEND OVER BACKWARDS TO...

DO A BACKFLIP

FLYING HIGH

FOLLOW THE BAND

PLAY THE CLOWN

HEAD OVER HEELS

A LOOPHOLE²¹

A SIDE SHOW

A ONE TRICK PONY

There are writers, sympathetic to circus and aware of the swarm of metaphors that follow it around, who cannot resist using them for ironic mischief. Bottari is one such.

²⁰ A commentator on ABC Radio National's 'A.M.' Programme, on 20/7/02, spoke of the "reverse bandwagon effect", predicting that disenchanted Liberal voters in Tasmania would nevertheless vote Liberal, fearing that others might not.

²¹ The loophole is the fastening hole in a canvas tent, through which small children allegedly peep. Stoddart observes that Dickens describes circus itself as a loophole in the rigid society of Coketown, in *Hard Times*. Stoddart (2000) p. 137.

In *The Last Real Cirkus*, Tom is told that: "the Ringmaster is both a CEO and, unfortunately, a proxy civil servant. It's a job that requires an almost inhuman balancing feat. A juggling tour de force!" His brother Renfred, the animal trainer, has an easier task. "Even the big cats lionised him" (Bottari, 1995, p. 41).

In a Time Magazine feature on Cirque du Soleil:

Roger Parent, a technical consultant who has been with Cirque since the beginning, says the evolving circus will retain its unique quality if attention is paid to each single step. "It's like walking on a tightrope; you have to know what you're doing," he notes. "Otherwise you fall and break your neck." So far, Cirque has not tripped over its own feats.

(Mitchell, 1992, p. 45)

Circus people have tolerated being other people's metaphors, with great patience. Unfortunately, as we will see when we consider the media, this slack use of language can affect the listener, to the detriment of circus. Nietzsche alerts us to the perils of hiding truth behind metaphor in *Truth and Lie in an Extra-moral Sense*:

[We] possess nothing but the metaphors of things - What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short the sum of human relationships which, on poetic and rhetorical heights, were transformed and adorned and, after long usage, are considered by the people to be established, canonical and authoritative.

(Nietzsche, 1964, p. 40)

Without wishing to lessen the colour that circus metaphor brings to the English language, I would propose a better understanding of the reality behind the metaphor. Any child who has practised circus acrobatics will know that if and when John Howard does a backflip, he will finish, still facing forward, slightly further back, and will receive an enthusiastic round of applause. Considering why circus metaphors are so prevalent, we discover that most of them concern the relationship of an individual with society, or with the physical world. In a similar way, metaphors in psychology, the individual's relationship with the inner world, are predominantly hydraulic. Somehow, grief has 'outpourings', feelings are 'bottled up', emotions 'well up', and if my thoughts were 'flowing' better, perhaps I could explain this.

The 'raft' of circus allusions in our language, and their usage, can be explained by the binary nature of performance - up/down, dead/alive, success/failure - and the beneficent scenography, where deeds are performed to, and on behalf of, the audience, who then feel an ownership of the artist and the act. So a 'backflip', a 'strongman' and 'clown', and actions like 'walking a fine line' and 'falling through the safety net' become archetypes whose inaccuracy does not matter because we share an understanding of the broad concepts. Thus circus images become part of the linguistic currency of children without their needing to visit the circus.

3.2 Representations of Circus in the Media

People write about circus (in local newspapers, children's books, fans' books) in a style that discloses its own exaggerations, a writing that represents yet plays its own signs, a writing that clowns, that plays signification itself.

Yoram Carmeli, *Circus Play, Circus Talk, and the Nostalgia for a Total Order*

In this section I highlight the lack of competent circus criticism in English.²² One consequence of this deficit is that young people, and indeed all the public, are deprived of the opportunity to understand circus theory, history and aesthetics, and instead are often fed controversy and trivia. I contend that an understanding of circus theory will prepare young people for other critical thought. Furthermore, when young people participate in circus, they develop an understanding that begins at the preverbal level. From this viewpoint, much media comment will seem ill-informed, patronising and trite, deepening the comradely bonds among young performers, who will see themselves united in the face of an adult world which, as usual, does not understand them:

The theatre, the ballet, the cinema and music all have their own critics who, armed with such knowledge and experience, keep the public informed of what is good, bad - and if they are good critics - why it is good or bad. But in England and America the press employs no circus critic. The tickets for the first night of a circus go to the dramatic critic, or perhaps to the man who reviews the books. They don't know much about it because it's not their job. The circus is nobody's business or, as I prefer to think, it's everyone's business. It's up to the audience to fill the gap.

(Hippisley-Coxe, 1980, p. 21,22)

So writes Antony Hippisley-Coxe in the opening chapter of his *A Seat at the Circus*, an excellent, clearly written and well-respected work that he offers as

a primer which, I hope, will help you in the early stages to form your own standards and remain of some use while experience is being gathered. All this may take some time; for not only does the circus stretch round the world, but it will lead you back over two centuries in history, and its subjects range from the build of a horse to the anatomy of laughter.

(p. 22)

Coxe, more journalist than academic, is concerned with real communication. The style of the paragraphs quoted is so readable as to be understandable by a bright primary school child. The content of the book, however, is far from simple. It is a huge job of scholarship, covering every circus act, its history, styles, languages, luminaries and

²² In a sense I am continuing a literature review here, but specifically, I am searching through critical representations of circus, looking for our six elements.

special difficulties. The book's exquisite illustrations and its footnotes, glossary and bibliography contribute to its unassailable authority, and confirm that circus warrants a very close examination by historians, theatre academics, cultural theorists and philosophers. And yet, it is written in a deceptively clear and simple style.

Here is the paradox of circus writ large (and clear).²³ In circus, surface is everything. Posters are huge, gaudy and aggressive, although paper-thin, and peel away when the circus has left town. The sawdust ring exists only while the big top is up; a week later this magical arena, this hot-plate of colour, drama and amazement will be just a slightly discoloured patch on a municipal football field. The aerialist's make-up, the clown's face paint, these are facades; the sequins and tinsel both attract and repel (by reflection) our gaze. Beneath the make-up, beneath the glitter, hide the artists. To seem to expose so much, and yet to hide everything, is one of the circus arts. Paradoxically, despite the masks and facades, what you see is certainly what you get - and you see so much that you reel, glutted with spectacle and emotion, out of the shared mysteries of the magic wigwam into the starlit reality of the car-park, and the drive home with sleepy children.

But what is below the surface? Who are these people? How did they learn these things? Are they really the greatest in the world? What tradition, what style are they following? If something didn't quite work, why didn't it? Who are the new stars? What messages are being conveyed in the show? Did the audience receive them? Is it circus, or is it a hybrid theatre? Does it matter? How does it compare with their previous tour? Or with other companies? These are the questions a critic should address, and the public should expect to see answered, in the popular press. It is not happening enough, even in journals.

There are no refereed academic journals in English whose primary subject is circus, although *The Drama Review* and *The Journal of Popular Culture* and others do occasionally publish circus related articles. However, there is a body of specialist magazines which, among other things, review circus productions and address relevant issues. Among those with significant informative and provocative critical content are *Arts de la Piste* and *Le Cirque Dans l'Univers*, both French, and *Spectacle*, from the USA. Others such as *King Pole* and *Planet Circus* review productions, generally favourably, and feature profiles and historical items. Reviews also occur in journals like *Juggling* (USA), *Kaskade* (Germany) and *The Catch* (U.K.) - the latter sadly dropped since 1998. The general public will hear about the circus in their town through local and national papers and the electronic media. The tabloid press is generally locked into clichés, and thrives on accidents and controversy. Their coverage of circus in schools is often appalling. 'Clowning Around in School!', 'School's a Circus!' and so on. A new feature, however, is the blanket coverage granted to each tour of Cirque du Soleil. They have learned a lot from P.T. Barnum²⁴ about mounting an advertising campaign so extensive that it becomes a story in itself, about gaining the trust of relevant decision makers, about involving large numbers of local people. It used to be gangs of men

²³ I return to the paradoxes of circus in chapter 4.

²⁴ Barnum's story is told by among others, Harris (1973).

recruited to hammer tent pegs, who then had a vested interest in bringing the family to see 'my circus'. Soleil interviews large numbers in every city they visit, for bar staff and many other jobs. Somehow even the people who fail the interview still feel motivated to buy tickets for a show so good, it would not hire them. The marketing people generally leave it to local journalists to effect the subtle put-down of the opposition circuses that are smaller, older and cheaper. Finally, à la Barnum, a snowstorm of interesting press releases always arrives well before copy date, along with tickets for reviewers and invitations to the exclusive party. Just one short excerpt from a 1993 *Time Magazine* review shows some of the results in the reviewer's representation to us, the readers:

Forget the word circus; it conjures up nothing more magical than slapstick and animal odors. The grand, ethereal Cirque du Soleil is really primal theater - an age-old blend of music and motion. The weirdly soothing, polylingual background score, which could be elevator music at a harmonious U.N., rolls out a verdant carpet of sound for all the pretty beasts to strut on. At every moment, in every corner of the Cirque world, stage-craft approaches genial witchcraft. It's an out-of-Broadway experience.

(Corliss, 1993, p. 67)

In this concluding paragraph, the reviewer denigrates all other circuses and Broadway shows, and twice, with reference to 'U.N.' music and to the 'Cirque world', seems to predict the global nature of Soleil's future development. Their efficiency in marketing is just one feature of the remarkable paradigm shift *Soleil* made at their inception in the nineteen eighties, the corporate decade. The modern era of circus was born in the eighteenth century when Philip Astley consummated the totally unexpected marriage of military equestrianism and the age-old traditions of gypsies and the fairground. It seems that Guy Laliberté and his associates have engendered a successful new hybrid by merging the old traditions with the values and strategies of 'the big end of town.' The 1986 *Soleil* programme, in only their fourth year of touring, carries endorsements from two Prime Ministers, four cabinet ministers and three sponsoring CEO's, plus this in the 'enjoy the show' message from Laliberté:

I've searched high and low, but in no dictionary could I find the words to express the feeling of camaraderie that runs through the Cirque du Soleil [...] Part of this new momentum is the common will shared by performers and administrators to make the Cirque du Soleil a unique and solid cultural institution æ well as a business that contributes to the economy.

Unfortunately, we are not in the habit of associating "culture" with "finance". But facts must be faced: cultural development implies financial development. And at the Cirque du Soleil, we sincerely believe that we are able to operate a business without sinking into flagrant commercialism.

(Laliberté, 1985, p. 3)

The astonishing 'financial development' that followed over twenty years, whereby they now produce nine or ten productions simultaneously, world-wide, bears witness to a

wonderful symbiotic relationship with the press. It is relatively easy to write good copy when you are provided with top quality press kits, photographs and interviews. Rigorous criticism is not expected in the popular press, and may be seen as ungracious. Certainly, in the current climate, circus criticism is not easy, as I know from experience.

In the early nineteen nineties, I was asked to write a review for *The Australian* (our national newspaper) of the *Flying Karamazov Brothers*, the world-renowned juggling act, at the Perth Festival. Apart from the pleasure-killing aspect of taking notes while everyone else is enjoying the show, and writing the review while everyone else is partying, there were other dilemmas. As an experienced juggler I knew what was hard and what was easy for them, which most of the audience did not. To highlight this would have drawn attention to me as an elite critic. I could compare them with other acts, as a dramatist might be compared with other playwrights, - but this would mean nothing to the readers. As the company was only performing in Perth, and the column would be read across Australia, I finally produced a review which extolled juggling per se, and in this case, excellent juggling, as legitimate arts festival fare.

I am also the man who shocked listeners to the ABC by saying he did not enjoy Cirque du Soleil's *Saltimbanco*. In that case I felt some critical judgment was necessary in an atmosphere of well-orchestrated ecstatic hyperbole. However, I was dreading the call to come back on the same programme to review a traditional Australian family circus that followed a year later. It did good business – better than all the city's theatres combined, and was ignored by the media. How could I go on air as an 'expert' again, and point out that the production was slack, the acts substandard, the props and costumes dirty, the music awful, the presentation uninspired, the performers tired, and the aesthetic regressive? I also loved the show, so how could I have maintained my critical credibility?

Tabloid television is even more insidious than the press and, as always, the phrase 'clowning around' seems to be defaulted into their script keyboards. In 2000, Channel Seven's *Today Tonight* featured the *Kensington Primary School Circus*, of Perth, Western Australia. The anchor's and the reporter's comments repeat again and again that this is about children trying to be funny, while the teacher, Carl Sanderson and the students, and all the footage of their juggling, unicycling and stilt-walking all emphasise physical and social achievements:

Anchor: One of Perth's schools is actually teaching pupils to clown around. Students at Kensington Primary School devote twenty minutes of every day learning to make people laugh. But as Deanne Cassidy reports, behind all the fun and games, there's a serious side. The programme also helps these young circus performers to become better students [...]

Teacher: It's something that very few people can do, and that's always a very big incentive for the kids. "I'm going to do something less than five percent of the population can do." [...]

Reporter: So what's new? Clowning around in the classroom is as old as blackboards and inkwells. But these primary school students are actually

being taught to be the funniest, most skilled classroom clowns in town [...]

Teacher: It's really important we understand the essential safety considerations [...]

Reporter: It may seem like fun and games, but this clowning around is actually improving their reading, writing and concentration skills [...]

Teacher: We discovered that the behavioural problems in the playground were diminishing at an astonishing rate. It was incredible how the children learned to co-operate, learn together [...] and it just leaped them forward [...]

Teacher, quoted by reporter: for kids with little confidence, the mateship and determination to master a skill gives them a huge boost [...]

(Cassidy, 2000)

Perhaps only the circus children involved learned the important lesson that what you see on television may not be true. This sort of journalism certainly confirms for them that their work is underrated. Its effect on other young viewers, parents and educators is probably negative, as it only tangentially refers to the educational benefits of circus in education, and even then, with an ironic lifting of an eyebrow. Once again, participating children will develop a solidarity in the face of an adult world not aware of the intensity of their hard work and the nature of their aspirations.

Finally, a ray of hope shines from, as usual, France. In that country there is a highly developed four level network of over three hundred circus schools, most receiving respect and funding from local government. It cannot be unconnected with the high quality of circus criticism, itself examined in *Arts de la Piste*, in that special issue called *Work and Criticism, a Necessary Dialectic*. A dossier of articles by eminent critics examines the critic's role from every angle. Yan Ciret opens the discussion with an encouraging observation that new circus and postmodernism were made for each other:

The role of criticism is inherent in its capacity to provoke crisis. The circus itself is at a turning point in its history, caught between returning to its tradition and opening up to other genres. The explosive encounter [with criticism] nearly did not happen due to a lack of reasoning that could have established a true critical genealogy for the circus. The disintegration of grand theories, however, is now enabling us to start exploring the signs, armed with tools appropriated from all disciplines. (Ciret, 1999, p. 23)

Philippe Goudard, a prolific writer on circus theory examines "Tools and Hypotheses for Bringing Critical Argument up to Date" and like Pond and the Fratellinis, (both to be reviewed later) examines "the invariable cyclic structure of space and time represented by the circle", as well as aspects of gesture, objects, gravity and balance seen both as physical and emotional topoi. (Goudard, 1999, p. 44).

Laurent Gachet posits the contemporary circus critic, not as one watching out for pitfalls of deception, but rather as "an explorer, tracing a new path, blazing a new trail,

and setting out the first pieces in a puzzle of comprehension... being both on the fringes of creation and slightly upstream of it." (Gachet, 1999, p. 1). Rene Solis quotes Barthes, as he tries to define the critic's role. "I don't ask you to believe in the truth of what I say, but in my decision to tell it." He concludes, in conversation with Yan Ciret: "I would situate the function of critics somewhere between a lighthouse keeper and a tourist guide, something of a look-out, yes, that would be a good definition: a look-out". (Solis, 1999, p. 35).

These have been brief indications of the quality of criticism that is possible for circus. Almost by definition, young people are more postmodern than us, and less bound by the attitudes and traditions of the past. As Ciret and Lyotard say, grand theories are disintegrating. It is for the young to fashion new theories and new criticism. It is ironic that the field of circus, so attractive to the young for its mystery and transgression, should be so emasculated and stigmatised by the unthinking reactionary press. It is time for educators to grasp the possibility that the young can re-fashion circus, not only as an art form, but also the very model of critical thinking, which can have ramifications right across contemporary culture. As we have seen with the French critics, it is not a problem, but a wonderful opportunity that circus criticism has been left as terra nullius, to be explored and developed by the new generation. It is an opportunity that seems absolutely in line with the one of the desired outcomes of the West Australian Education Department (English), whereby

[s]tudents progress towards becoming analytical and critical viewers of an extensive range of visual texts. They analyse the sociocultural values, attitudes and assumptions that are projected and reflected in visual texts; and the ways viewers are positioned and their interpretations are shaped. Students adopt viewing strategies that facilitate detailed critical evaluation of visual texts (West Australian Department of Education, 2000).

In this examination of circus criticism I have not yet established a significant homology with our schema of six elements. What this review does show, however, is the importance and potential of critical discourse in the media, which can undoubtedly influence the effect of circus on children.

3.3 Representations of Circus in Academic Discourse

Writing is vulgar
 Travel is so common
 Speaking is obscene
 Thinking is too easy
 And making love is dated

There remains the possibility of inscribing mnemonic signs, above and beyond the conscious amnesia, in the insignificant verbum of current minds.
 Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories IV*, (2003)

In reviewing 'the literature', or the field of academic discourse on the circus experience, there is a risk of exploring territory not directly connected with this

thesis. We may safely assume that young people, particularly 'youth at risk' will not be reading texts in books and journals dealing with sociological, anthropological, philosophical and historical aspects of circus, nor seeing that the post-modern diacritical possibility that Baudrillard is hypothesising (above), could actually be circus. However, as this body of writing has done much to inspire and inform the present writer, and because there will be a trickle down of influential theory via administrators, funders, teachers and policy makers ultimately affecting young people and their perception of circus, then a review of the academic literature on circus subjects is of importance.²⁵

This review cannot be comprehensive, and whilst all of the authors cited here will be underrepresented, my hope is that they will not be misrepresented. The works can be divided into eight categories, representing the theoretical framework supporting the work. The approaches I have identified are semiotic, educational, aesthetic, feminist, historical, sociological, anthropological and mythic/psychological. I inevitably, like me in this study, some authors do not confine themselves to one discipline, as for instance Hughes Hotier, whose best known books reflect his background in semiotics, but whose earlier work covered aspects of circus history, especially the changing use of language, and whose more recent books are concerned with education.

In this section I shall look in some detail at only three of these categories, and indicate what awaits the researcher in the other five. I shall conclude with a semi-serious proposal of how a theory of circus might contribute to a circus of theory.

The first category is semiotics. Hughes Hotier and Paul Bouissac are both semioticians who have published widely and taught communication theory at universities. Both have also run their own circuses, Bouissac for a short period in the sixties produced *Debord Circus*, an experimental circus, while Hotier from 1976 onwards, has directed and presented *Cirque Educatif* - a full-scale circus in the Cirque Building in Reims and in a big top in Douai (which I attended in 2002). Both Hotier and Bouissac are French, although Bouissac has spent his academic life in Canada, and is an Emeritus Professor at Toronto University. Both are professors of communication, and both have a desire to communicate about circus.

²⁵ I would add a caution that one must not assume merit in a published article, just because it is in a reviewed journal. Dr. Moriarty, ostensibly writing on "*Australian Circuses as Cooperative Communities*", opens her abstract with trivial tabloid clichés. "The color, the skill, the artistry, and the exotic animals as well as the clowns, tents, and sawdust are all part of the magic of the circus." (Moriarty, 2000, p. 297). Going on to extol the community cooperation of her own research group, she briefly finds aspects of circus life which can be said to match the criteria of a model proposed by Johnson and Johnson, which in turn carries that most suspicious hallmark of educational theory, the alliterative acronym. *The Three C's of Effective Schools: Cooperative Community, Constructive Conflict, Civic Values*. (Johnson and Johnson, 1998). This would be acceptable as a light-weight piece of educational writing, except for the unforgivable multiple references to a flying trapeze act as a "high-wire". It is reasonable to expect that a journal's editorial panel, if not the writer or her lauded colleagues, should correct such a fundamental error of terminology.

Bouissac isolates different aspects of the circus performance, and subjects them to the analysis of semiotics, in order to discover the rules that govern it:

Contrary to the case of games of cricket or chess, the rules of the circus code (henceforth considered as an Heuristic concept) are not explicitly verbalized, any more than the basic rules of a culture as a whole are. They can be discovered only through investigation and comparison of given instances with respect to the conditions required to account for their meaning.

(Bouissac, 1976, p. 67)

His excitement is tangible, as he seems to find circus to be the perfect subject for a semiotic examination. Not only do the individual acts, props, even gestures, cry out for classification, but the whole experience has to be located somewhere outside normal experience:

In the case of the circus, particularly with respect to the type of acts described and tentatively interpreted in this chapter, it is significant that the performances take place in the "vacuum" of a circular arena, a *proxemically* neutral space, and usually not during normal working hours. We should keep in mind that although the circus is daily work for the artists, it represents an exceptional event for the audience. Once or twice a year it punctuates, like a ritual, the otherwise homogeneous "text" of "reality" itself.

(pp. 80-81).

His book *Circus and Culture* includes a flow chart demonstrating "two semiotic systems functioning simultaneously during a performing horse act", an "information and decision network that determines the appearance of circus posters" and a table showing "signifier/signified elements of acrobatics act". While it is acknowledged that semiotics is currently a victim of theory fashion, Bouissac's work has the considerable merit that beyond this chosen discipline, he has a demonstrated perceptive awareness of the nature and structures of circus. He comes very close to Fellini, who said "I know everything and nothing about circus" as he writes, "A circus performance is easily understood because, in a way, it is redundant with respect to our culture; and it is gratifying because it enables us to grasp its totality in a limited time and space [...] perhaps the circus seems to stand outside the culture only because it is at its very center." (Bouissac, 1976, pp. 7,9).

I discovered this book in New York in 1976. At this time, I was seriously researching circus for the first time, and was continually anxious that I may have been wasting my time on something frivolous and superficial. My meeting there with Gregory Fedin, the awesomely wise Moscow acrobat, and my dive into the depths of Bouissac's scholarship both convinced me that although I had indeed been wading in shallow waters, there were untold depths in circus yet to be explored.

Hotier, more than most theorists, has swum deep. His thirty years of producing Cirque Educatif, meeting and coordinating hundreds of professional performers, give authenticity to his writings. Unlike many French writers who can variably contribute to

the philosophy of circus from the outside, Hotier is immersed, and has the right to position himself where he will. Clearly, his circus looks back more to tradition than do many of the Cirques Nouveaux of Europe, and he is vulnerable to the criticism that he is a reactionary among his revolutionary compatriots. One of his recent books, *Un Cirque Pour l'Education* (Hotier, 2001) was reviewed mercilessly in the columns of that excellent journal *Arts de la Piste*. (Moreigne, 2001, p. 47.) However, Hotier's life work and his analytical writings are highly significant, especially in the context of his pioneering educational work.

Whereas *Signes du Cirque* (Hotier, 1984) is billed as an 'Approche Sémiologique', and like Bouissac's work truly tests the effectiveness of the semiotic method, in *Cirque, Communication and Culture* (Hotier, 1995) his work has become less rigid, more eclectic and certainly more available to the average reader. It can be read as a history, and it benefits from Hotier's provocative opinions on many subjects, including word origins e.g. 'palquiste' and 'banquiste', bad management in circuses, the circus obsession with looping, circus as an opera, the importance of hair, why clowns must be parodic (as circus is serious), the scenography and musical and visual rhythms of circus, circus communication, and the threat posed by the 'intello', or pseudo-intellectual, to the circus.

Searching for serious writing about **circus seen from an educational viewpoint** has been disappointing until recently. Hotier's most recent book, *La Fonction Educative Du Cirque* (2003), is a collection of papers opening up the subject in France. Hubert Montagner writes the main paper, "How can the Circus help the Child to Re-build or Re-model Himself?" As a professor of education, Montagner examines, as I do in this thesis, various necessary aspects of a child's development and how they are found, either in the viewing of, or the participation in, circus.

In the USA, the National Circus Project and Dave Finnigan's Juggling Institute have had far reaching effects. Many educational journals carry articles on the educational benefits, particularly of juggling in the classroom (e.g. "Juggling and Handwriting" by Sara Lipowitz in *Teaching Elementary Physical Education*. (Lipowitz, 1996). In English, the journals *Kaskade* and *Juggling* have in their archives many serious articles and explorations of circus in education. A researcher may look for 'Circus' in education journals, or 'Education' in circus journals, and find interesting differences of approach. My general impression is that circus artists and teachers regard each other with a degree of mutual suspicion.

In Australia, *Circus in a Suitcase* (Bolton, 1988) and *Circus in Schools* (Woodhead and Duffy, 1998) both explain techniques and promote the concept in a tone more evangelical than empirical. What is lacking is more research that may test what so many of us know instinctively and hear anecdotally about the benefits of circus activities on the curriculum. This area will be explored in section 3.9.

Moving to a third category of circus analysis, we find that the exploration of **an aesthetic understanding of circus** has been approached in many ways. Every show is a practical process of choices made often from an aesthetic point of view although other

considerations might include set-changing, status of acts, availability of performers or the need to lengthen or shorten a show. Among all the different artistic choices – lighting, costume, attitude, tempo and so on, of each act, various writers have looked for an underlying circus aesthetic, starting a process that might do something to address the imbalance between circus criticism and that of theatre, music, literature, visual arts and dance.

Among these pioneers, we have already reviewed Hotier and Bouissac. Briefly let us look again at Hippisley-Coxe in England, then Irving Pond in the USA and Tang Ying in China, who have all written books specifically attempting to break the circus aesthetic code, and to isolate the 'circus gene'. In his 1951 book, re-published in 1980, Antony Hippisley-Coxe declares:

What I have written is neither simply a history nor a technological treatise, though it contains a bit of both. It deals with the technical 'how' and 'why' as well as the historical 'when' and 'where'; I have even tried to deduce from these a 'wherefore' (p. 22).

Chapter after chapter illuminates the qualities of each act, with description, an historical context, and his own aesthetic observations and recommendations. He says of voltige (acrobatics on horseback), "It makes an excellent opening number if it is taken at great speed and is performed by one person, for then it whets the appetite for what is to follow. But like all good aperitifs it should be dry, brisk and taken in small quantities." (p. 48)

Coxe's main concern is with the reality of circus, and he deplores any pretence. Paradoxically, he admires both the rich cultural history of circus acts and the immediacy of the circus experience for any audience: "Over there is a cabinet minister, and next to him a plumber's mate. There is no special circus-going public. The wise are there no less than the foolish, and the young no more than the old." (p. 25). Fellini's observation is recalled again, as Coxe writes: "The circus is nobody's business, or, as I prefer to think, it's everybody's business." (p. 22). Like the present writer, Coxe does not want to position himself too far down an academic corridor, beyond the clear understanding of his readers. His contribution to the aesthetics of circus is English, set in the mid-twentieth century, with only hints of the changes to come, yet it is a significant contribution, if only for its clarity and comprehensive sweep. His conclusion reminds us of Charlie Holland's observations from his position as coordinator of London's Circus Space school: "Circus is all about Wow, Yuk and Ha-ha!" (Interview, Holland, 2002). Coxe writes of the circus audience, "Above all they love the directness of the circus spectacle, whether it sends a shiver down their spine or a laugh which shakes their diaphragm." (p. 230)

In his foreword, Coxe commends Raymonde Toole-Stott's "magnificent and meticulous" four-volume world bibliography *Circus and Allied Arts* (1958-1971). Toole-Stott in turn has recommended Irving Pond's *Rhythms of the Big Top* (Pond, 1937) as among the top one hundred circus books. Pond was one of America's most eminent architects, when, in 1937, he began this book with the juxtaposition of a horizontal canvas big top and a vertical city of skyscrapers. "These two examples of man's venture into the field of

aesthetic endeavour challenge a study and a comparison" (p. 4). His book, like Coxe's, guides the reader, in his company, through the whole circus. But while Coxe moves chronologically through the programme, Pond takes us geographically in, through and behind the circus, on the ground and in the air:

I am conscious that I have a distinct advantage over some of the throng with which I enter. I know what I am going to see and how to see it. I know why it is as it is and how it got that way, and if my neighbors on the benches are favorably disposed to my presence and can look and listen at one and the same time, I may be tempted to impart some of my knowledge, promising, however, not to rob the show of any of its glamor promising rather to enhance in a measure the effect of the persuasive and compelling rhythms in which we all shall find our beings immersed.

(Pond, 1937, p. 9)

Thus his chosen aesthetic element is rhythm, be it the annual rhythm of a show's tour-schedule, the complicated bouncing and turning rhythms of an acrobat or the spiritual rhythms of the individual in the cosmos. Like so many good circus writers, he seems to be imbued with the desire to show respect to his subject by performing as well on the page as the artist does in the ring. The book is poetic, and eccentrically illustrated by the author. As a postscript, Pond, like the poet Paul Hyland, evokes Shakespeare to conjure the magic of the circus experience:²⁶

The glorious pageant has faded; and while these, our actors, were not wholly spirit, neither were they wholly matter, that which was material responded eagerly and lovingly to spiritual impulses and before our eyes made the material deeply spiritual. Each particular evanescent and beautiful expression of their art may of itself vanish into air – into thin air; but these our actors remain to awaken within us again, and yet again, ecstatic thrills and to reassure us that we are not animated clods, but that truly "we are such stuff as dreams are made on," and like our actors may we live our dream life joyously and may that life be rounded with a dreamless sleep (p. 231).

Finally, and quite differently, let us consider the two books on circus aesthetics by the Chinese scholar and producer, Tang Ying. These are not available in English, and the excerpts I cite were translated by my generous colleague Loretta Ho, of the University of Western Australia. Tang Ying was the overall production director of the 1993 Chinese International Acrobatic Festival in Wuqiao, China, in which I participated. In our conversation about circus theory, it emerged that she is also a scholar and writer. Her two books come closer than any others to an examination of the pure aesthetic code of circus. Her 1989 book, *The Exploration of the Beauty of Acrobatics* (Tang, 1989) identifies five key features of what she calls the foundation or the DNA of Chinese acrobatics:

- ✍ The level of difficulty
- ✍ The risk and danger

²⁶ Circus poetry is explored in section 3.6.

- ✍ The wonder and the awe (the chemistry)
- ✍ The sense of humour and absurdity
- ✍ The aesthetics; the beauty (5)

It is important to note that Tang Ying is describing a performance style whose scenography is essentially front-on, as Chinese acrobatics (what we call circus) is usually performed on a stage. The performances at the 1993 festival were actually in the round, in a 12,000-seat entertainment centre, but most of the Chinese acts performed in one direction only. This book deals with universal elements - act creation, technique, dance, music and design. It goes on to anticipate changes in the centuries-old evolved Chinese style of presentation.

In *Acrobatics - the Extraordinary Art* (Tang, 1993) she analyses acrobatics as a 'super art', exploring its dynamics, its spirituality, symmetry, rhythm, and above all, its morphology. She sees change as an inherent characteristic of circus performance - from chaos to order, from beauty to absurdity, from danger to not danger. She includes danger and risk as aesthetic elements in that they "make us hold our breath while we sit and watch. They make our hearts pound" (p. 15). Sometimes the danger is in the act and sometimes in the environment, as in the high wire. Sometimes the fragile props face danger, such as the spinning plates, the pagoda of bowls or vases spun on the head. She criticises elements of modern circus as providing 'cheap danger' (p. 15).

At the 1993 Wuqiao festival, the Western influenced Hong Kong troupe, performing the traditional hoop-diving, used a hoop incorporating a ring of knife with points facing inwards. Traditionally the audience's holding of breath and heart pounding would come simply from wondering whether the acrobat would dive through the top hoop without dislodging it. The knives added gratuitous danger, not appreciated by the Chinese audience, whose aesthetic appreciation already incorporated the risk of failure. She sees modern Chinese circus as potentially reverting to the pre-revolutionary tawdriness as outlawed by Zhou Enlai.²⁷ On the other hand, in her section "All is for Tomorrow" (p. 159), she looks forward to a new Chinese acrobatics aesthetic that moves from a closed to an open system, from the oral tradition to a systematic framework, and predicts that Chinese acrobatics will continue to pursue beauty, including the beauty of the individual among the interaction of the company.²⁸

Apart from these few books, there are several journals that address circus aesthetics, via a variety of theories. *Spectacle* in English and *Le Cirque dans l'Univers* and *Arts de la Piste* in French, are all capable of real criticism, while most other circus appreciation journals tend to be too laudatory to be useful, except as information and inspiration.

As forewarned at the beginning of this section, the detailed exposition of academic circus theory pauses here. However, future researchers might consider the following.

²⁷ See the section on amateur circus, section 4.5.

²⁸ This thesis proposes the element of individuation as a benefit of circus work in Western cultures. Tang's theory suggests a convergence of her tradition and ours. My visit to Wuqiao School of Acrobatics in 2004 gave me no indication that this convergence is happening yet.

The majority of circus scholars have taken an **historical** perspective, and among the best are Mark St Leon (1983), Janet Davis (2002), Henry Thétard (1947), Paul Adrian (1984), George Speaight (1980) and Fu Qi Feng (1985). For an introduction to a **feminist** reading of circus culture, consult Peta Tait (1996, 1998, 1999) and Mary Russo (1994). For a **sociological** reading, see the many articles by Yoram Carmeli, (1989, 1990, 1995, 1999, 2001), Helen Stoddart (2000) and the theses of Pete Turner(2000)²⁹ and Brigitte Bailly. Among the unacknowledged founders of **anthropology** are the nineteenth century observers of street, fairground and circus life, Henry Mayhew (1968) and Thomas Frost (1874, 1875). Finally in a category we may call **mythological/psychological** I highly recommend the work of Rogan Taylor (1985) and Carolyn Steedman (1995).

As scholars and policy-makers may be expected eventually to turn an analytical spotlight on circus, which may affect its chances of being supported as an educational tool, it seems appropriate that we should pre-empt and prepare them with a short examination of the relationship between theory and circus. Russo, in *The Female Grotesque* enjoys a diversion from the theory of carnival into 'The Carnival of Theory'. In that spirit, I welcome you, dear reader to sit back and imagine a 'Circus of Theory' in which each act and several aspects of the circus could be viewed through a different critical framework, or theory. At the end, we could consider whether circus may merit, or may even provide, a wholly separate code of analysis, usable in other cultural media.³⁰ The programme might be as follows:

Circus Posters	as presented by	Semiotics
The Circus Site	as presented by	Grounded Theory
Banners	as presented by	Prototype Theory
Sideshowes	as presented by	Bakhtinian Carnival
Spruikers	as presented by	Bullshit Theory ³¹
Freaks	as presented by	Monster Theory
The Big Top	as presented by	De-construction
The Programme	as presented by	Stylistics
The Ringmaster	as presented by	Structuralism
Ladies and Gentlemen	as presented by	Response Theory
Clowns	as presented by	Freudian Psychoanalysis
Showgirls	as presented by	Feminism
Equestrian Acts	as presented by	Marxism
Elephants	as presented by	Post Colonialism
Exotic animals	as presented by	Orientalism
Adagio	as presented by	Queer theory

²⁹ Turner's M.A. thesis sees the work I did in Britain and its aftermath as "a possible site of the disruption of the habitus, both as a site of confrontation with the habitus in contemporary British society, as an art and a cultural practice, which can then operate as a critique of British society." Pete Turner, "Arbiter Elegantiarum. Bourdieu and New Circus," M.A., Leeds Metropolitan University, 2000, p. 5.

³⁰ I return to this possibility in my conclusion, Chapter Seven.

³¹ First developed in the paper "Bullshit Variations: Quality Bullshit, and Why We Buy It", given in 2003 by Reg Bolton at Murdoch University.

Tradition	as presented by	New Historicism
New Circus	as presented by	Postmodernism

All these theoretical possibilities of circus are stimulating and useful, and have guided my own reading of circus as a cultural/historical concept. This understanding informs both the way I approach the work I do with young people, and the overall development of this thesis. There are many other frames of reference for studies in this area. Albert Smith wrote *The Natural History of the Ballet Girl* (1847) in which he follows the stages of development of a ballet dancer, from baby to married woman in the spirit of Cuvier, Linnaeus, Buffon, or Gilbert White of Selborne, whose title he suggests. Carolyn Steedman, who cites Smith in her study of childhood and interiority, *Strange Dislocations* (1995), herself uses a unique methodology, as she travels through the cultural history of the nineteenth century, observing street children, actors, dancers and acrobats, pursuing the essence of a fictional character, Goethe's Mignon from *Wilhelm Meister*.

Compared with the theatrical forms that preceded it, circus was born out of many of the values today seen as postmodern. It was self-designed, choosing randomly from a range of forms connected with theatre, minstrelsy, carnival, animal husbandry, the military and science. Not only its sources, but also its presentation was apparently random, with act following act with no narrative progress. Its hallmarks included deception, mystery, irony and narcissism. It never depended on review or criticism for its success, but boldly advertised with self-chosen superlatives, hyperbole and lies. "The greatest wonders in the world, offered in all humility at four in the afternoon on Saturdays and Sundays" declared an Astley bill in the nineteenth century. (Wykes, 1977, p. 71). It boldly slid across class barriers, appropriating horses and Shakespeare from aristocracy and high culture, mixing them with jugglers and clowns from the streets, with a generous lacing of exotica from no known culture, in wild animals and foreigners. Notions of social position were confused by appropriation of titles like the Hon. William Cody (Buffalo Bill) and, in response, the self-appointed nobility of 'Lord' George Sanger,³² just as educational status was gratuitously assumed by shows like Barnum's *American Museum*, his *Ethnological Congress* and his *Great Moral Show*, all variations and precursors of *The Greatest Show on Earth*.

All this occurred and flowered through the ages of enlightenment, reason, industry, colonization and modernism. It is ironic that today in a postmodern era, circus, the most radical, irrational and mendacious of cultural miscreants should suddenly be deemed reactionary, old fashioned, and, like God and the novel, dead. Robert Jones, in his examination of circus in German literature, suggested that circus "is being pushed to the limits of its adaptability." (1985, p. 9). However, with circus in many different guises appearing and flourishing all over the world, it seems that reports of its death are greatly exaggerated. Like Houdini, the circus always has another shamanistic resurrection trick up its sleeve.

³² The story is told in Sanger, (1938) p. 187.

3.4 Representations of Circus in Fiction

All tales of circus life are highly demoralizing
James Joyce, *Ulysses*, 1928 (p. 481)

In our trek through the landscape of representations of circus, we now enter a large and significant territory – circus in literature. I have chosen not just to pick out a few specific examples to support my thesis. To present selected evidence seems not wholly legitimate. My research has been extensive, and having travelled far, I intend to map a wide area, drawing attention to a series of features and genres. This will give the reader an idea of the context from which several key points can be made.

Firstly, looking at Dickens, Grahame and others, I acknowledge that circus acts themselves are very difficult to present literally. I will introduce various literate attempts to describe juggling, and conclude that it is circus life, rather than circus acts that is most likely to inspire young people reading fiction. Then I shall assemble a taxonomy of different approaches to the subject – the epic, the fantastic, the demonic (ringmaster), the ominous, the polemical, the freakish, the crime-scene, the apparently autobiographical and the poetic. In each of these genres I shall indicate ways in which some of the six elements of childhood are evoked.

I shall conclude with work by Jean Genet and Henry Miller, who seem to me to epitomise the way literature can communicate with a reader. A passage in a book may offer an epiphanic moment of discovery, but it continues to exist as a background of support, allowing a young person entering the circus world to feel part of a vast continuum of art and inspiration.

Helen Stoddart shows that Charles Dickens, like many other canny writers, carefully avoids describing circus acts themselves. (Stoddart, p. 118). In *Hard Times* (Dickens, 1854) in *Astley's* (1996) and in *Pictures From Italy* (1998), he uses the circus either as a context for looking at an audience, or as a contrast to the civic milieu, be it Coketown or Modena. Perhaps circus is literature-resistant; but as fiction may be the way some young people first encounter circus, we must look at the range of circus literature, and the challenges involved. For instance, in attempting to describe a trapeze act, it is worth comparing the writings of Alfredo Codona and Sam Keen. Codona's legendary performance raised him to the top rank of aerialists, inspiring a generation, and leaving a model for all future fliers.³³ Sam Keen, however, was an amateur newcomer to trapeze at sixty-two, and will never produce heart-stopping moments to an adoring crowd, but as an experienced writer and educator is able to communicate verbally more of the thrill and beauty of trapeze than is Codona:

What are angels but flyers given feathers and wings by our imaginations,
inspired bodies not bound by the constraints of time, space, or gravity?
The fundamental reason our hands sweat when we watch a flyer leave
the trapeze is because we all yearn to fly. We are creatures of longing.
We do not need to climb the long ladder to the pedestal or grasp the fly

³³ Codona's heroic/tragic story is told by Ogden (1993) and Culhane (1991).

bar to be airborne. What I call the aerial instinct - the drive to transcend our present condition - is the defining characteristic of a human being.

(Keen, 1999, p. 26)

Codona's account, albeit ghost-written by a journalist, comes across not only as inaccurate, but also pedestrian:

My speed, when I leave my trapeze for the triple, has been accurately measured; I am travelling at a rate of sixty-two miles an hour. At that speed I must turn completely over three times, in a space not more than seven feet square, and break out of my revolutions at precisely the instant that will land me in the hands of Lalo, who, hanging to his trapeze by his hocks, has swung forward to meet me.

(Fenner and Fenner, 1970, p. 174)

In fact, according to Keen, Codona's speed has been calculated not at sixty-two, but seventeen mph. Yet he is the master, Keen but a latter day disciple. Codona is saying what the readers of the *Saturday Evening Post* want to read. His real art is in doing what they want to see. Keen, however, is not just explaining the trapeze in his book. He is celebrating it, and that makes for much better reading.

Kenneth Grahame shows that infatuation needs no explanation in this wonderful passage from *The Magic Ring*, when he celebrates the impossibility, and inappropriateness of putting circus into words. Grahame, as an adult writer, puts beautiful, Virgilian words into the mouth of a young boy, who is actually describing a younger boy's utter inarticulateness. The threefold depth of this passage gives it its richness:

Harold was less taciturn. With shrill voice, uplifted in solemn chant, he sung the great spherul circus-song, and the undying glory of the Ring. Of its timeless beginning he sang, of its fashioning by cosmic forces, and of its harmony with the stellar plan. Of horses he sang, of their strength, their swiftness, and their docility as to tricks. Of clowns again, of glory, of knavery, and of the eternal type that shall endure. Lastly he sang of Hær - the Woman of the Ring - flawless, complete, untrammelled in each subtly curving limb; earth's highest output, Time's noblest expression. At least, he doubtless sang all these things and more - he certainly seemed to, though all that was distinguishable was, "We're goin' to the circus!" and then, once more, "We're goin' to the circus!" - the sweet rhythmic phrase repeated again and again. But indeed, I cannot be quite sure, for I heard it confusedly, as in a dream.

(Grahame, 1898, p. 61)

In an attempt to isolate what is the specific difficulty in describing a circus act, I have chosen to look at various ways in which juggling has been described, from the technical to the literary. Juggling is one of those activities where the complexity of the moves will necessarily be beyond all but the most expert in an audience. However, it is not sufficient at any level to write, "the juggling was amazing - very complicated indeed. You had to be there, etc." To teach techniques through books, several forms of notation have been developed, often by brilliant mathematicians at universities. None

of them makes comfortable bedtime reading. Martin Probert's book declares that there are 29,693 patterns for four balls. To help with one, the 'Mill's Mess with Four Balls', he explains:

Technically minded jugglers may like to attempt the theoretically possible variation on Mills' Mess with Four Balls in which the second three throws mirror the first three, 4f5f3c4f5f3c and 6c3c3c6c3c3c, The arm movements (though not of course the throws) in these variations are identical to the arm movements illustrated here.
(Probert, 1995, p. 156)

Too many to list here are the variations in notation, choreography, flick-books and computer graphics used to teach juggling. Similarly the varied attempts to replicate juggling in sciences fiction, fantasy and children's books are generally unsuccessful.³⁴ At the end of my perceived spectrum between the practical (as represented by Probert) and the artistic, we find William Hazlitt. In *Table Talk*, 1824, he uses his experience of watching Indian Jugglers in London to wonder about the importance to artists of 'getting it right', concluding:

Objects, like words have a meaning; and the true artist is the interpreter of this language, which he can only do by knowing its application to a thousand other objects in a thousand other situations.
(Hazlitt, 1824, p. 81)

To reach this point in his argument he first describes the act, and does so in a way that is colourful, poetic, inspired and, to a juggler, completely inaccurate. But it does not matter because, of all these descriptions, here we have something of wonder, of magic, evoking the beauty of the act itself, rather than containing and constraining it, as technical descriptions will do. He goes beyond many story-tellers by presenting himself, the author, as astonished, rather than as a complicitous assistant, claiming some vicarious credit for the juggler's skill:

To catch four balls in succession in less than a second of time, and deliver them back so as to return with seeming consciousness to the hand again, to make them revolve round him at certain intervals, like the planets in their spheres, to make them chase one another like sparkles of fire, or shoot up like flowers or meteors, to throw them behind his back and twine them round his neck like ribbons or like serpents, to do what appears an impossibility, and to do it with all the ease, the grace, the carelessness imaginable, to laugh at, to play with the glittering mockeries, to follow them with his eye as if he could fascinate them with its lambent fire.
(Hazlitt, 1824, p. 78)

³⁴ A range of descriptions of juggling may be found, via my bibliography, in the works of Dancey (1994), Gilson (1990), Bedford (1994), Silverberg (1980), Finnigan (1987), Morrisey (1996) and De Paola (1979).

These descriptions of trapeze and juggling begin to indicate, as Dickens felt instinctively, that a book about circus, particularly fiction written by a non-performer, is not as easy a task as it might seem. However, a considerable body of circus fiction exists, and I shall introduce some of its recurring themes, connecting this brief summary to the thesis, asking what there is in these representations of circus that may inspire and influence the young reader.

In the task of constructing a taxonomy of circus-as-it-seems-to-be, it would be folly to restrict the literary study to 'good' writers. Indeed, probably only Dickens and de Goncourt would make it into the Western Canon. Henry Miller, Jean Genet, Paul Gallico, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Angela Carter, Ray Bradbury, Katherine Susannah Pritchard and Heinrich Böll are all names celebrated for other work besides their circus novel, but there are many lesser-known authors who should be included in this brief examination of this treatment of circus in fiction. Many of these writers only wrote once on the subject, but as Clive Robertson once said on ABC Radio National: "Why would anyone go to the circus twice?" We might ask: "Why do authors only go once?" Perhaps it is because each, in his/her own way, sums up all they have to say on the subject, in the one narrative.³⁵ Certainly in most, the standard cast of characters appears, the 'peep behind the scenes' exposes a sordid sub-culture, and there is usually an accident, fire or blow-down. But generally, when the drama is passed, the circus is ready to go on forever, meeting all challenges. This specific category might be called the epic, or saga novels. *Spangle* (Jennings, 1987) follows a circus family through three continents and eight hundred pages. But *Haxby's Circus* (Pritchard, 1979), *Umberto's Circus* (Bass, 1950), *Red Wagon* (Smith, 1930), *The Zenganno Brothers*, (Goncourt, 1899) and *Love, Let Me Not Hunger* (Gallico, 1963) all have these elements.

The *Circus World* (Longyear, 1980) trilogy follows a circus, not back through generations, but forward and onto another planet, seeing a new civilization born of the structures and values of the American circus's 'golden age'. Altogether more light-hearted, but also looking forward, to 2020 in Australia, is Bridie Bottari, with her first novel, *The Last Real Cirkus* (1995):

During the last half of the twentieth century, clamorous protestation had been building steadily against the circus as an institution. It was perceived by many to be an anachronism that was bent on cruelty to animals and peopled by disreputable freaks. In this the wowers were only partly right, it was indeed peopled by freaks: capricious, spontaneous folk who spurned, by gad, the rigours of modern societal dictates (even going so far as to form their own opinions).
(Bottari, 1995, p. 8)

These fantasies are benign compared with the work of Bradbury, Stevens, Dunn and Carter, who all take the dark side of circus and fairground beyond realism. The landscape is bleak and ominous and the plots doom-laden. Yet in each of these stories is a hero who is of the milieu, yet rises above it; heroes who are more heroic because

³⁵ I shall argue later that a one-off circus experience is often enough for a child's developmental needs.

they are tainted, or blessed, by their association with circus. Stevens's *Tattoo Girl* (2001), Carter's winged Amazon, Fevers (1984) and Dunn's weird narrator of *Geek Love* (1983), Olympia, are all something more than human. Olympia is a bald, albino, hunch-back midget, whose charismatic brother, Arty the flipper-boy, articulates their relative power:

Arty said," We have this advantage, that the norms expect us to be wise. Even a rat's-ass dwarf jester got credit for terrible canniness disguised in his foolery. Freaks are like owls, mythed into blinking, bloodless objectivity. The norms figure our contact with their brand of life is shaky. They see us as cut off from temptation and pettiness. Even our hate is grand by their feeble lights. And the more deformed we are, the higher our supposed sanctity."

(Dunn, 1983, p. 114)

Young readers may identify with Dunn's freaks. Jim Rose certainly did, and acknowledges *Geek Love* as a major inspiration as he formed his now world-travelled *Jim Rose Circus Side Show*. Others will associate with Bradbury's adolescents, Jim and Will in *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1967), who grow in stature throughout the novel to defeat a demonic ringmaster, Mr. Dark. The Messianic ringmaster is a recurrent theme in circus literature. Children's sources generally give the impression of a man, usually with demonic whiskers, wielding both the whip and unlimited powers over animals and performers alike. Usually it needs an outsider, like the benefactor in *Astroboy* (Tezuka, 1982) or the astute investigating youngsters in *Circus Detectives* (Abels, 1973) to unmask the monster as Dorothy does to the Wizard of Oz, thus exposing the ogre as a harmless impostor.

Adult versions are more ominous, often with religious overtones, and the night mare is less easily resolved. The manipulating millionaire Maurice Conchis wields supernatural power over the 'every-fool' Nicholas Urfe (Earth?) in *The Magus* (Fowles, 1988). *Millroy the Magician* (Theroux, 1993) has the same repulsive charisma, as does Mr Haverstock in *Blind Voices* (Reamy, 1978) and Master Howard, the ringmaster of The Crown Circus in *Tattoo Girl*. He "called himself the creator, and once told Lucy that it was his goal to convince his performers that they had not been born, but rather he had invented them." (Stevens, 2001, p. 111)

Here, as in *The Tempest*, there is a confusing conflation of author and ringmaster. Exactly who is in charge here? It is Prospero or Shakespeare who can cause the tempest and the wreck, and who threatens to rack Caliban

"[...] with old cramps,

Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar," (Shakespeare, 1988, 1:2), or fill the island with "sounds and sweet airs"? Between the covers of the books, or on the boards of the stage, an author wields much more power than ringmaster ever can in his ring. When Prospero/Shakespeare abjures his "rough magic" and drowns his book "deeper than did ever plummet sound" (5:1), the author acknowledges that the magic was all his to command.

This question of 'Who is in charge here?' occurs to all children from time to time. They move from being in the thrall of their parents, through the school experience where, hour by hour, year by year, a new magus, master or ringmaster rules the ring and cracks the whip. During adolescence they become aware of their impending autonomy, bringing an awareness of sexual, physical and social power, then, hopefully, an understanding of responsibility. Experience of working in a circus themselves, along with exposure to the ringmaster syndrome in literature and film, will help a young person see the many sides to the daunting process of accepting responsibility with power.

Without knowing how many examples it takes to define a genre, I would propose at least a sub-genre in literary circus representations which I might call 'the ominous circus'. More often describing a fairground than an actual circus, these novels have many things in common. The arrival of the show is mysterious, and the landscape it invades is especially ordinary. Indeed it is often seen as such by young residents, who put themselves at risk at the circus site, often to be rescued by heroic action of older people in the community who themselves have carried the stigma of this ordinariness. Charles Halloway, the father and library-assistant-ex-machina epitomizes this action in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Bradbury, shrewd as ever, has an observation on the ambiguity of ordinariness. "Let's see. Charles William Halloway. Nothing extraordinary about me except I'm fifty-four, which is always extraordinary to the man inside it." (Bradbury, 1967, p. 169). We may anticipate the librarian's role in the dénouement when, at the first appearance of the poster, "Charles Halloway shivered. Suddenly there was the old sense of terrified elation, of wanting to laugh and cry " (p. 28).

The circus or fairground in this genre arrives unexpectedly, announced or anticipated by a flurry of suspicious rumour. Expectations are raised. The advance posters of *Something Wicked* [...] and *The Circus of Dr Lao* and the opening spiel by Louis Ortiz in *Blind Voices* promise impossible manifestations, inviting scepticism. The impresario, or at least the writer, then amazes the audience, and to a lesser extent the reader, by making these impossible things appear. Here is an aspect of these novels that needs examining. In these stories of impossibilities, are the writers simply using licence to produce what they will, or are they using the whole device to portray the act of mystery implied by the appearance of a travelling show, and by the performance of more and more impossible feats by unlikely people, which is the very essence that circus seems to purvey? In *Blind Voices*, we and the audience wonder how Haverstock's Wonder Show manages to produce the effect of a Mermaid, a Snake Woman, a Minotaur and a Medusa. Backstage we, the readers, find out the secret. They are not illusions. They are actual supernatural beings. Unlike the freak family in *Geek Love*, their abnormalities are not produced by pre-natal chemical exposure, but by the psychokinetic powers of the show owner, Mr. Haverstock. This unapologetic trick naturally brings some disappointment to the reader. One is reminded of the line in Douglas Adams, where, faced with a logical impossibility, the hero explains his dilemma to a small boy on the street, who thinks for a moment, then says, "I t's bleedin' obvious, innit, he must've 'ad a bleedin' time machine?" (Adams, chap.27). At least Adams has a gracious sense of irony. Not all readers of ominous circus fiction will have this feeling of being cheated, but anyone involved in the magic of performance,

including young people, must contemplate the nexus of suspension-of-disbelief and simple belief.

This genre takes this essence of inexplicable power, and moves it outside the ring of caravans, or at least invites the protagonist and reader inside this secret zone, and makes a story about the rare and catastrophic meeting of these two cultures – the inquisitive and the all-knowing, the workaday and the unique, the simple and the infinitely unfathomable. This confrontation is menacing, dangerous and often deeply sexual. In *The Circus of the Earth and the Air* (Stevens, 1993) the protagonist's wife is taken by the circus. In *Blind Voices* (Reamy, 1978), Francine is enticed and raped by the Minotaur. In *Something Wicked [...]*, (Bradbury, 1967) Miss Foley is lured to the fairground with a promise of youth, and the transformation of this old lady to a young woman, then a girl, is deeply disturbing for young Jim and William. In [...] *Dr Lao*, (Finney, 1935) the college boys are captivated by the impossibly lewd peep show, just as the town boys are in *Blind Voices*. Books of reminiscence and fictionalized fact like *Circus Parade* (Tully, 1928), including lurid details of circus couplings and goings-on in the hoochie-coochie tent, provide a plausible inspiration for the voyeuristic adventures we find in 'ominous circus' writing.

Ultimately for us, the significance of this genre of books and similar TV programmes is that of the continuing fascination the travelling show has for young men and women. It is an alternative culture against which to judge and pit oneself. It is an incursion of charismatic, self-designed individuals into the bland civic landscape of the young. In its characters, their dress, their brazen self-exhibition, it is a sudden display of sexual alternatives. All these factors add to the appeal of circus fiction to young people.

There are polemical novels that come to the circus, either making circus itself an issue of controversy, or using it as the context for their cause. The implications of Amy Reade's anti-circus rants are considered in section 5.6. Mrs. O F Walton's immensely successful *A Peep Behind the Scenes* (1907) pulled back the curtain of the nineteenth century travelling players, exposing show business as "foolish play in objectionable language" and also lamenting the cruelty of keeping children away from the solace of the lamb, Jesus Christ. Both Reade and Walton will be considered as we juxtapose considerations of hard work and commitment with the possibility of child exploitation.

John Irving's novel, *A Son of the Circus* is ambivalent about the position of children and freaks in the Indian circus. Dr Farrokh, the main protagonist, revisiting his homeland, avoids sentimentality and sees the practical benefits of circus to the community:

To the doctor, however, the circus was an orderly, well-kept oasis surrounded by a world of disease and chaos. His children and grandchildren saw the dwarf clowns as merely grotesque; in the circus, they existed solely to be laughed at. But Farrokh felt that the dwarf clowns were appreciated maybe even loved, not to mention gainfully employed. The doctor's children and grandchildren thought that the risks taken by the child performers were especially "harsh"; yet Farrokh

felt that these acrobatic children were the lucky ones - they'd been rescued.

(Irving, 1994, p. 27)

After the polemics of Reade and other reformers, it is refreshing to see this argument stated. Both stances inform current discussion about circus apprentices in China and elsewhere.

Chang and Eng (Strauss, 2000), *The True History of the Elephant Man* (Howell and Ford, 1980) and *In The Days Of The American Museum* (Edric, 1990) all look at the issue of freakery, going beyond the binary positions of gawkishness and mawkishness, to look at the world through the eyes of the 'special people' themselves. In the pervasive twenty-first century climate of self-righteous indignation, we may expect more sympathetic fiction along with increasing reportage about conjoined twins, gigantism, unsuccessful plastic surgery and other human extremes. The worlds of the freak show and everyday life converge, as obesity becomes officially neither a sad affliction nor a fairground attraction. Conjoined twins are the subject of a recent Hollywood comedy, *Stuck on You* (Wessler and Yellin, 2003). Today, even clowns find it hard to design outrageous costumes, faced by the garish competition of road-workers and commuting cyclists. Two things are happening: firstly, difference is no longer a valid reason for finger-pointing, and secondly, those who are happy to be different, e.g. punk rockers, are finding it harder to stand out from the crowd.

Children are taught social correctness at a younger and younger age, and sometimes never get the chance to point and say, "He's weird". I recall my two-year-old son, in a lift with me and a very large man. Jo said to me, "Is that a giant, Dad?" The man smiled. This 'satiated curiosity' (which is how the elephant's child got its trunk)³⁶, is now suppressed throughout the formative years, re-emerging as a vast audience for self-exposure, daytime TV programmes, Michael Jackson specials, and other manifestations of weirdness. Consider this lament, from *Geek Love*:

Mama often said that fat folks went out of fashion (in the freak show) because every tenth ass on the street now was wider than the one in the tent. Folks could see it free on any block. Giants were also out of work owing, according to Mama, to basketball and the drugs they fed to babies to make them tall enough to play the game.

(Dunn, 1983, p. 22)

It seems reasonable to suggest that the air of aberration associated with the circus may be attractive to children, with two effects. Firstly, as I have seen in many instances, the very short or very overweight child, or the child with a mental disability, sometimes embraces the youth circus as an opportunity to say, "This is me. Accept me. Enjoy me." Secondly, all children have the chance to present themselves as odd. What is a clown, if not a collection of handicaps and deficiencies; feet too big, pants too baggy, face too white, nose too red, no dress sense, no balance, no social graces, no

³⁶ Kipling's *Just So Stories* are available at <http://www.online-literature.com/kipling/165/>

grasp of reality? Red Skelton said, "I've got the sixth sense. I just don't have the other five." (Bolton, 2003, p. 12)

Still reviewing and sorting the wide range of representations of circus in literature, we visit another genre, circus as a crime scene, where we gather little except that the usual suspects are the usual suspects. *The Veiled Lodger*, by Arthur Conan Doyle could function as a stereotype-primer for would-be circus fiction writers. The characters, whose mystery Sherlock Holmes unravels, are straight from Commedia del' Arte. Rondo, the circus owner, is a brutal Braggadocio or Capitano with "a dreadful face [...] ruffian, bully, beast", Leonardo the strong man – a cowardly Arlecchino, has "the self-satisfied smile of many conquests". The veiled lady herself, Eugenia, is a damaged Columбина, and then there is "little Jimmy Griggs, the clown. Poor devil, he had not much to be funny about [...]" (Conan-Doyle, 1951, p.214). Other thriller, or whodunit writers who visit the circus, once, include Alistair MacLean (Maclean, 1975) and Kerry Greenwood (Greenwood, 1994). There are also a number of books that simply fictionalize the facts of circus life. Joe McKennon, who has published several factual and logistical books "written by one who was there", combines his knowledge of circus history and actuality in a mighty saga, *The Horse Dung Trail* (McKinnon, 1975). Four autobiographical books by women, *Josser* (England)(Stroud, 1999), *Roustabout* (USA)(Chalfoun, 1996), *Chautauqua Summer* (USA)(Chace, 1993) and *A Trip to the Light Fantastic* (Mexico)(Hickman, 1993) are all recent accounts written by women who joined the circus. *Roustabout* is declared a fiction, and is much darker than the others. Perhaps drugs, rape, sodomy and other violence are deemed aspects of circus more likely to sell books; but not always, as may be witnessed by that rare but remarkable 1928 novel, *Circus Parade*, which has all those elements, plus child-abuse, animal murder, lynching and more. This novel is also full of humour. "At the age of twelve she could carry her father and mother. At thirteen she began to support her entire family as a weight lifter" (Tully, p. 118), but essentially paints the circus community as a low-life, predatory pack:

Plundering and stealing, cheating and lying, labouring, fighting and loving; taking all we could and returning little, we went our careless and irresponsible ways, with laughter in our hearts and sneers on our lips - as anti-social as the hyenas who howled at the changes of the weather (p. 16).

As we continue this wide-ranging survey of circus in literature, I do not argue that all these example of circus fiction will provide role models for children. This was never their intent. However, the quick learning mind of the developing child is fickle and spasmodic, finding inspiration at unlikely sources. Personally I recall reading *A Peep Behind the Scenes* (Walton, 1907) at about ten years old, and being immensely irritated by all the 'improving' passages about the blood of the lamb, and I remember that, like Toad, I found myself drawn to the nomadic life of a little horse-drawn caravan. I got the point, but completely the wrong point, and it has stayed with me ever since.

Thankfully, we may never know the effect of literature on children; we do not know what they will read, nor how it might affect them. We must leave such forecasting to the 'Hidden Persuaders' who manipulate the consuming public. This study has more

regard for the creative than for the consumptive aspect of youth. Another literary example here will reiterate this aspect of the unpredictable effects of cautionary tales.

Mary Power's detective work, published in *The James Joyce Quarterly*, 1981, identifies the book that Molly Bloom is reading in bed, and which Leopold carries in his pocket, along with a kidney, for the rest of that famous Dublin day. It is the aforementioned *Ruby. A Novel. Founded on the Life of a Circus Girl* (Reade, 1890), the moralistic, anti-circus, propaganda book by Amy Reade, which Bloom finds more than a little interesting:

He turned over the smudged pages. 'Ruby: the Pride of the Ring'. Hello. Illustration. Fierce Italian with carriagewhip. Must be Ruby pride of on the floor naked. Sheet kindly lent. 'The Monster Maffei desisted and flung his victim from him with an oath.' Cruelty behind it all. (Joyce, 1928, p. 62)

The book had clearly disappointed Molly, who makes no mention of the author's moral intentions:

- Did you finish it? he asked.
- Yes, she said. There's nothing smutty in it. Is she in love with the first fellow all the time?
- Never read it. Do you want another?
- Yes. Get another of Paul de Kock's. Nice name he has (p. 62).

The point, only hinted by Joyce, but clearly stated by the reviewer of *Ruby* in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, is that readers may pick up the wrong message. Quoting Power, "The review cautions that such realism might be harmful in itself and "unwittingly provoke the very abuses it ought to have attacked." It concludes icily that, "even though the cover shows a bright circus scene, this is no Christmas book for children". (Power, 1981, p. 120). In the second edition, the publisher removes the word "damn" and that salacious illustration that shows, apparently "Ruby ... on the floor naked. Sheet kindly lent."

It is later in *Ulysses* that Bloom declares, "All tales of circus life are highly demoralising." (Joyce, 1928, p. 431). Perhaps he uses the same meaning as André Breton, in his attributed function of surrealism – 'to demoralise the population'. If tales of circus do no more than make the reader look again at the moral system of society, then perhaps this is a valuable function in the development of a growing mind.

Finally there are a few books and stories where eminent writers have used the circus/clown/variety stage as the context for their own original tales. In *Nights at the Circus*, (Carter, 1984) Angela Carter paints circus as a parallel world, both gorgeous and squalid, which exists anywhere, in London, deepest Russia or in our dreams. Chekhov's *Kashtanka* (Chekhov, 1887) is inspired by Durov, the famous Moscow animal trainer, and Henry Miller's remarkable *The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder* is inspired the works of painters including his friend Fernand Léger. There are tales, by Kafka, Böll, de la Mare,

Kern, and others, that may be found in my and other bibliographies, but Miller's little parable should not be left without comment, as several of today's significant performers, including Kim Olsen of Melbourne, acknowledge it as their great inspiration. Miller can hardly account for the story himself. In his epilogue, he writes:

Let no one think that I thought the story out! I have told it only as I felt it, only as it revealed itself to me piece by piece. It is mine and it is not mine. Undoubtedly it is the strangest story I have yet written.
(Miller, 1996, p. 46)

His clown, Auguste, who quits a successful circus career in search of a moment, a feeling, a smile, is significantly close to those elements of **aspiration**, **risk** and **self-design** with which this search through literature aims to connect. Miller's inspiration comes from others, "keeping me company were the poets and painters I adored, Rouault, Miro, Chagall, Max Jacob, Seurat. Curiously, all these artists are poet and painter both. With each one of them I had deep associations" (p. 46), yet the story started with his own self:

I got to thinking of the clown which I am, which I have always been. I thought of my passion for the circus, especially the 'cirque intime', and how all these experiences as spectator and silent participator must lie buried deep in my consciousness (p. 44).

The lesson from Miller and from all circus literature is continuity; ones right and duty to draw from the creativity and re-creation of the past, and our obligation to move on, and to make our own contribution the future:

Joy is like a river: it flows ceaselessly. It seems to me that this is the message which the clown is trying to convey to us, that we should participate through ceaseless flow and movement, that we should not stop to reflect, compare, analyze, possess, but flow on and through, endlessly, like music. This is the gift of surrender, and the clown makes it symbolically. It is for us to make it real.
(p. 47)

Of all the definitions of clowning, in my *Wisdom of Clowns* (Bolton, 2003) or the elegant *Fools, Clowns and Jesters* by P Cline (1981), none is as direct and truthful as Miller's, "A clown is a poet in action." (p. 46). He writes:

The circus is a tiny closed off arena of forgetfulness. For a space it enables us to lose ourselves, to dissolve in wonder and bliss, to be transported by mystery. We come out of it in a daze, saddened and horrified by the everyday face of the world. But the old everyday world, the world with which we imagine ourselves to be only too familiar, is the only world, and it is a world of magic, of magic inexhaustible (p. 48).

Ultimately the clown, Auguste, like the great painter/poets he names, does not need the circus, but has discovered that the "old everyday world" is a site of sufficient magic. Honouring the artists, Miller concludes: "In word, in image, in act, all these

blessed souls who kept me company have testified to the eternal reality of their vision. Their everyday world will one day become ours. It is ours now, in fact, only we are too impoverished to claim it for our own." (p. 49)

Young readers discovering this book, or Genet's *Le Funambule*, may be inspired by the spirit of the clown or the tightrope walker. Feeling themselves immortal, which is the prerogative of the young, they may try on the role of the performer, either really in a circus, or symbolically, in their lives. Just as Hazlitt took a lesson from the Indian Juggler to apply it to writers, so Genet, inspired by his young lover, the wire walker Abdullah, challenges and inspires the young everywhere to risk all to declare to the world, "the beauty of your dance".

I will add that you must risk an absolute physical death. The dramaturgy of circus demands it. It is, with poetry, war and the bullring, one of the only remaining games of cruelty. Danger is its reason; it requires your muscles to succeed with exact perfection, the least error causing your fall - injury - death, and this exactitude will be the beauty of your dance (Genet, 1999, p. 113, trans. Bolton).

3.5 Representations of Circus in Poetry

How forcible are the right words!
Job 6:25

Circus is to Theatre as Poetry is to Prose
Anon.

In considering circus poetry and its role in inspiring young people, the question may be asked, how many young people are influenced by reading obscure poetry? I shall use an inclusive and generous definition of poetry, as a form of speech or writing that aims to be evocative and succinct.³⁷ This can equally include good pop song lyrics, advertising slogans, pithy announcements and dramatic speech. Even contemporary 'reception theory' is unable to quantify how often an unconsidered trifle of verse, or a moment of television or a newspaper cartoon may provide an epiphanic inspiration leading to a significant act of creativity. My own interest in circus poetry stems from an early show by Brisbane's *Rock 'n Roll Circus*, entitled *Beautiful Lies* in which Lisa Smith, the presenter, provided links and announcements in a style that was undeniably performance poetry. That production is forgotten now even by the current Rock 'n Roll company, but it has stayed with me. Beyond the germinal capacity of circus poetry, in the ring or on the page, there are two other reasons to justify this examination in relation to young people's development.

Firstly, the use of words in the ring is minimal. Announcements by the ringmaster must be structured, short and effective; in short, poetic. John McDonnell, Australia's best-

³⁷ "A word fitly spoken" Proverbs, 25.11

"The best words in the best order" S T Coleridge *Table Talk*

known professional ringmaster, has analysed his craft, and explained to me his principle of 'The Subliminal Ringmaster'. (Interview, McDonnell, 2002). Rather than the long, linear introduction to an act, explaining where it is from, who should be thanked and so on, he introduces the handbalancer simply as "From Hungary, Miss Anna!" With her very first pose, using his microphone, he gives a series of almost inaudible "Ah's" and "Ooh's". A former political journalist, he has also studied advertising and consumer behaviour. His ultra-short introductions and emotional sub-commentary are designed to bypass the conscious mind, and appeal to what he calls the 'Medulla Oblongata', or the 'reptile brain'. He cites research that 'when two levels of mind are in conflict, the baser one wins.' While this technique may not be recognisable as poetry, it has some connection, being formed speech, designed to affect the emotions. Hugues Hotier examines his own ringmaster technique in much the same way in the chapter "Le Verbe au Cirque", in *Signes du Cirque* (Hotier, 1984). He speaks of the ringmaster's words as the "special poetry of the modern bonimenteur" (p. 133). 'Boniment' is patter or bullshit, but can be translated, almost literally, as 'beautiful lies'. He writes of the verbal potpourri of the circus, including the non-stop, intoxicating instructions of the animal trainer, the clown dialogue, the cries of the programme vendors, all contributing more to an ambience than to a communication of ideas. "You could say that these cries and these onomatopoeias are part of the music of the circus, as they blend with the sounds of the instruments in a symphony perceived simultaneously through the ears, eyes and nose." (p. 130, trans. Bolton)

Clown dialogue, traditionally without microphone, often with repetition and audience responses is almost liturgical. "Oh, no it isn't." "Oh, yes it is," - examples of sparse dialogue and rhetoric that has been shaped and perfected. Young people producing a circus will be involved in this verbal creativity and selection, and will develop an understanding of effective writing and speech, learning to refine their announcements and dialogues, as John McDonnell did night after night, until they have the most effective (poetic) formula.

Secondly, this brief look at circus poetry highlights the uniquely florid verbosity associated with the circus since the eighteenth century, reaching its baroque height in the late nineteenth, with echoes into the twenty-first. Stoddart and Davis demonstrate that circus, in the 'golden age', invented many elements of modern advertising, including,

pioneering use of the new technologies of image-making and spectacle in constructing colossal, coloured and panoramic advertising images (effectively, therefore, inventing the billboard) (Davis, 2002, p. 53).

and these billboards were often full of very public examples of exaggeration, onomatopoeia, obfuscation and deception:

On the posters flamboyant pseudonyms [metonyms?] were used in place of the simple word 'circus'. Shows went out under names such as 'Equescurriculum,' 'Hippolyriad,' and 'Cirzooladon'; they were called 'Egyptian Caravans' and 'Paris Pavilions,' and described as 'Nickel-Plated.' (Hippisley-Coxe, 1980, p. 37).

The public, reading the Astley poster “world's greatest offered with due humility” experiences a poetic ambiguity of courtesy and shamelessness – in short, humbug. It was P. T. Barnum who most famously capitalised on his discovery that the public actually enjoyed being well humbugged.³⁸

Reviewing the rarely assembled oeuvre of circus poetry, we find we can identify four main categories of circus poems – Parasitic, Taxonomic, Spiritual and Celebratory. By parasitic, I mean those meaningless, inaccurate jingles found in children's books, greeting cards and so on, which do nothing but make the circus seem trivial and unartistic. We will move on.

A master of poetic taxonomy (making an interesting list) is Ogden Nash. Not all his verses have great merit, but many can be seen as part of a self-imposed labour, in which he seems to reflect the challenge of a circus artist, namely, to set himself ludicrous tasks, and then achieve them. He admits:

I lack the adjectives, verbs and nouns
To do full justice to the clowns
(Nash, 1936)

but juggles words with,

In outdoing Barnum and Bailey, and Ringling,
Saint Saens has done a miraculous thingling
(Nash, 1992).

His *The Big Tent Under The Roof* collection of cameos fits in our ‘taxonomic’ category, as each verse portrays a new circus character or act. Dave Ward's little collection, *The Circus in the Square* similarly goes through a circus programme, with thoughtful fragments like:

the clowns are not really happy
the clowns are not really sad
they just make mistakes
like me and you
maybe they didn't mean to be clowns
it was all just a big mistake
(Ward, 1984, p. 9)

³⁸ If the art of poetry is a search for ‘le mot juste’, then Barnum's famous jape in 1841, at the American Museum, is pure poetry, an example of choosing and using exactly the right word at the right moment. His museum was full and overflowing with visitors, moving too slowly around the exhibits including Tom Thumb, the Siamese Twins (in wax) and the Fijian Mermaid. More customers (more dollars) were queuing up outside. Barnum's brilliant ploy was to hang an internal sign, ‘This Way To The Egress’. Many flocked through the signposted door, and found themselves out on the street. They learned that the ‘Egress’ was not another fabulous beast nor a pickled freak, but an exit – a very short, participatory performance poem.

Paul Hyland's parade of circus parts, *Kicking Sawdust*, again describes the usual suspects, including the fat lady: "I make a deep impression on the mud", the knife-thrower's nervous assistant, "I smell her sweat, and wish she had more scents" and the bandleader, "I've my baton, the ring-master his whip, he rules the space but time is mine to keep." Hyland's Shakespearian Ringmaster has two stanzas, to top and tail the collection:

Outside my canvas let the tempest roar!
 At the still centre of this ring I prosper,
 doff my top-hat, conjure my creatures' best.
 Anarchy's ordered here. I'm self-possessed.
 But on stark nights or stormy matinees
 tent creaks, poles groan and guys grow mutinous;
 fearful I'll lose my touch, loosen my grip,
 I bind thongs to my wand and make a whip (Hyland, 1995, p. 38).

Then after nineteen perceptive and well-crafted portraits, he returns, like Prospero, to "sink his staff" and then, like Lycidas, he

moves on to hire things, turns and pastures new,
 leaving a ring of bleached grass to the dew (p. 44).

Robert Lax is one poet who goes well beyond the taxonomic parade. Known variously as a minimalist, a religious and a spiritual writer, he was at one time a juggler, and toured Canada with the Cristianis. He was also revered as a teacher by Jack Kerouac and other writers of the beat generation. He spent his last twenty-five years on the Greek Island of Patmos, and his book, *Circus Days and Nights* was published in 2000, shortly before his death. It is a compilation of three poem cycles on the circus, written in the forties and fifties. His work is spiritual in the sense that it evokes another ethos, sensed through and beyond the performance in the ring, recalling Ellen Tinsman's observation, quoted in *Big Apple Circus* by Peter Angelo:

There's something in the middle of the ring [...] an all encompassing purity. And there's an energy there. It's very, very pure and very quiet – but underneath it's boiling! (Angelo, 1978)

Lax evokes biblical parallels, and sacred rites in his portrait of Mogador, the youngest of the Cristianis family of equestrians:³⁹

Think, Mogador, of the freedom, in a
 world of bondage, a world expelled
 from Eden; the freedom of the priest,
 the artist, and the acrobat. In a
 world of men condemned to earn their
 bread by the sweat of their brows, the
 liberty of those who,

³⁹ Lax also conveniently justifies the association of 'grace' with 'fun' and 'play' I make in section 3.2.

like the lilies of the field, live by
 playing. For playing is like Wisdom before
 the face of the Lord. Their play is
 praise. Their praise is prayer. This
 play, like the ritual gestures of the
 priest, is characterized by grace;
 Heavenly grace unfolding, flowering
 and reflected in the physical grace
 of the player.
 (Lax, 2000, p. 108)

How inspiring it must be for a young person involved in acrobatics, to find expressed in poetry this connection between physicality and spirituality, as in the works of Genet and Miller, mentioned in the previous section. Genet and Lax seem to transcend the banality of circus performance, and explore the heroic and tragic dimensions of the performer's quest.

Finally, looking for sheer celebration of circus in poetry, and hoping to surpass the insipid doggerel of most primary school books, we find the astonishing Vachel Lindsay. Known for his percussive, declamatory singing poems like *Congo*, and for radical anthology titles like *Rhymes to be Traded for Bread*, he published *Every Soul is a Circus*, two years before his death in 1931. His grand-daughter, Emily Lindsay, a wire-walker living in Melbourne, has shown me, and passed on to her own sons, including a new Vachel, the inspiring musical delivery of the poems, as recalled by her father, Nicholas Cave Lindsay. Not only his family, but also huge audiences, and many thousands of American school children have experienced the excitement of group-chanting with words like these, from *Every Soul is a Circus*:

My brothers of the poet-trade
 Leave your ivory towers, and stand
 On the porch, and watch this ardent band
 And praise, with me,
 This Masquerade.
 [...]
 With a song for beast or clown,
 Victoriously singing, over the sprawling town
 Go find the wonders of the dawn
 And bring the wonders down,
 Bring, bring the wonders down,
 Shower, shower the wonders down,
 Ring, ring the wonders down,
 [...]
 For every soul is a circus,
 And every mind is a tent,
 And every heart is a sawdust ring
 Where the circling race is spent. (Lindsay, 1929, pp. 3,6,8)

If we have any faith at all in poetry to inspire humanity, then this body of work should not be overlooked. I imagine a child, with the spark of circus enthusiasm in his eyes, glumly leafing through a poetry anthology. Perhaps he glimpses the word 'clown' or

'acrobat' and stumbles upon a circus poem. He may then share something of the poet's inspiration, and himself aspire not only to achieve impossible circus feats, but also to express that poetic triumph in words.

3.6 Representations of Circus in Popular Songs.

You never turned around to see the frowns on the jugglers and the clowns
When they all came down and did their tricks for you.
You never understood that it ain't no good.
You shouldn't let other people get your kicks for you.
Bob Dylan, *Like a Rolling Stone*, 1965

If there is any doubt about the power of poetry to make impressions on the young, there can surely be no question that the lyrics of pop music are a powerful influence on their growing understanding of the world around them. While an English teacher may struggle to deconstruct a Sylvia Plath poem with a year-eight class, most of her students will know dozens of pop song lyrics word for word, and will have analysed their rhyme, scansion, imagery and choice of words, puzzled over metaphors, enjoyed puns, and will have adopted phrases from the songs to enter forever their personal lexicon of maxims and epigraphs. Noel Coward wrote; 'Extraordinary how potent cheap music is' (Coward, 1979, Act I), and this survey of popular lyrics will show us another potent force influencing the young.⁴⁰

Bob Dylan, above, yokes circus and clown together, and presents them as another world behind and beyond the protagonists of the song. This aspect of the relative status between their world and ours is vital to understanding most of the occurrences of circus in the popular canon.

As surely as 'Aussie Aussie Aussie' elicits 'Oi Oi Oi' today, so generations of Beatles fans know that 'Gather round' is an open invitation for 'all you clowns/ Let me hear you say, ay, ay/ Hey you've got to hide your love away'.

I will briefly survey the occurrence of clowns and circus in the landscape of popular music, to see whether the treatment by songwriters suggests any of the elements common to circus and childhood that this enquiry is seeking to explore. Nursery and preschool songs often evoke happy, laughing clowns, or 'Nellie the elephant pack[ing] her trunk' and, depending which radio channels are played in the home or car, sooner or later, the clown's smile will turn nasty and children will understand why Nellie "said goodbye to the circus". (Butler, Hart, 1990)

The image of the broken-hearted clown is appealing to anyone trying to keep up appearances when the world is treating them badly. The popular song from 1892 'On with the Motley' from *Pagliacci* by Leoncavallo sets the tone, as the clown sings to the dressing room mirror:

⁴⁰ All songs mentioned in this section are cited in bibliography 5. pg xviii

You're just a clown. On with the show, man
 And put on your white face.
 The people pay you and you must make them laugh.
 And if Harlequin should steal your Columbine, laugh.'

Four years earlier, British audiences were laughing at the plight of Gilbert and Sullivan's 'Private Buffoon' in *The Yeomen of the Guard*, who, like Pagliacci, finds the clown's calling to be a tough one:

Though your wife ran away with a soldier that day
 And took with her your trifle of money
 Bless your heart, they don't mind
 They're exceedingly kind,
 They don't blame you so long as you're funny [...]'

In 1962, Anthony Newley asked plaintively, 'What Kind of Fool am I?' and Smokey Robinson, in 1970, philosophically explained:

Now there's some sad things known to man
 But ain't too much sadder than
 The tears of a clown
 When there's no one around

If 'Tears of a Clown' are already evoking the jingle of circus fairground music, how much more clearly does it sound in:

Goodbye cruel world
 I'm off to join the circus
 Gonna be a broken hearted clown

The catchy bars from Fucik's 'Entry of the Gladiators', rarely actually heard today by young people, and difficult to obtain at music stores, have, like circus images, a wide social currency well beyond their actual circulation.⁴¹ This image of a circus or a clown's mask as a place of false refuge occurs again and again, clearly evoking the possibility in circus of redesigning oneself; to show oneself with a different image. Sadly, most songs in this genre explain that fate is fate, and no amount of face-paint will hide the tears. 'Cathy's Clown' (Don Everly) seems to epitomise that archetypal funny fellow who hangs around the edge of the TV/cinema/pop song portrayal of an American High School male pack, and who seldom gets the girl. Again, the clown persona provides no shelter:

[...] you gotta stand tall,
 You know a man can't crawl

⁴¹ Any time I introduce juggling or unicycling in a school, a student will start singing the 'dum dum diddle-iddle um dum da dum' refrain.

In a much more positive frame of mind, writers (usually of musicals) have penned various cheerful songs about the positive aspects of circus and clowning. Jules Léotard, circus's first international aerial superstar, was eulogised by George Leybourne in 1868 as 'This daring young man on the flying trapeze'

'Be a clown, be a clown', sang Judy Garland and Gene Kelly because 'All the world loves a clown'. Perhaps they did in 1948, but as the century ended, images of Ronald McDonald, Stephen King's *It* and *Killer Clown's From Outer Space* (Chiodo, 1988) contributed to a wide spread coulrophobia.⁴² Why do clowns get such a bad image in rap music? My research among young people indicates two main reasons. Firstly, the clown is the ultimate uncool adult, and secondly, as John Lennon and Bob Dylan showed earlier, lots of words rhyme with clown. Get down! As a sample of this vogue of clown vilification, there is Graham Parker's ditty 'They Murdered the Clown' including the verse:

The kids rode the elephant heavy as lead
 I think he'd much rather have sat on their heads
 They're ripping the horn from the Rhino tonight
 So some fat Sheik can fuck all night
 And watch out for Coco when he's had a drink
 He'll tickle the children right where they're pink
 You might run away with the circus for fun
 But it looks more like somewhere that you'd run from.

This recalls Dog Fashion Disco's song 'Pogo the Clown', opening with the catchy couplet:

Pogo happy clown molester
 Paints his face to disguise the jester [...]

In rap songs, whose words are seldom heard by one's parents, the singer has license to 'dis'[respect] all aspects of authority, stability and comfortable orthodoxy. The clown is a prime target. He is the adult who tries too hard to amuse, and whose intimate relationship with children can so easily be transformed into a threat. At the same time, the clown's role makes him powerless to resist aggression, so making him an easy target. To finish this selection, Freestyle Fellowship sing from their album *Temptations*, 'Slappy the Happy Killer Clown'. You possibly know the catchy refrain:

We finnin' to get these motherfuckers
 Eh eh man, what's up nigga? (sirens)
 You motherfucka' (gunshots)
 Take that motherfuckas!

And may recall these words from the concluding stanza:

I caught him at the carnival, on my home turf
 Right up in the audience, at the Greatest Show on Earth [...]
 Beat him like he stole some'm, until the dude dropped
 Tie him up with liquorice, he's getting' a little scratchy

⁴² www.ihateclowns.com will tell you everything about why you hate clowns.

Slap him up and gag his ass, with a handful of taffy
 Put him on a unicycle, and send him down a hill
 Put a nose and wig on him, so we can clown for real
 Got a problem come to me, or go to Bozo
 Krusty or my homie Homey, and that's fo' sho though.

So it seems that after the benign presentation of circus to small children, things change radically. Many writers use the cultural shorthand of the circus trope to echo the uncertainty of teenage years, when young people begin to imagine the reverse side of an essentially positive or neutral feature, such as parental authority and government, and reify it in a cultural landscape where the dark side of the psyche is envisioned, portrayed and confronted through music. The manifestation of this form of dark music may be ultimately cathartic for the audience (the young), but is often very disturbing if accidentally overheard by their elders.

How does this clown abuse register with the young? It is hard to tell without deeper research, but superficially, traditional clowning is certainly uncool at 'street level', as perhaps it should be. The reference to unicycling in 'Slappy', reminds me with a communication I had from the recently formed Perth Unicyclist Group. I quote, "This group is about Trials, MUni, Freestyle and just plain old riding around, not about circus skills. Of course, clowners are welcome! Just leave the red shoes at the door" (email correspondence 19/4/04). The word 'clowners' is a new one and interestingly evokes an activity that stops and starts, rather than a state of being. For adolescents, when one's changing identity is a big issue, perhaps there is a need for adults to be consistent, and there is a mistrust of elders who choose to literally transform themselves. Teenagers need to attack their parents, and simultaneously criticize and depend on the conservative stability of Mum and Dad. How frustrating it must be to have morphing adults around you, becoming an elusive, moving target. These observations are hypothetical, offering yet another research possibility. I explored the field in a paper, *Clown Abuse*, presented at the Clowns International Symposium, in England, October 2003. (http://www.circusshop.net/Articles/Clown_Abuse.htm).

Returning to the song lyrics, we find Slug in reflective mood in 'Sad Clown Bad Dub II':

"Hey daddy, tell me why the clown is crying."
 "Well son he's got the task of cheering up the ill and dying.
 On top of that everybody thinks that he's insane.
 Can't fathom why he'd wanna ease the pain."

This brings us thoughtfully back to the singer as clown, and the charming self-portrait by the band Fury and the Slaughter House and their song 'In Love with a Clown':

And I always spill the wine,
 I never come in time
 I forget to wash my feet
 But I give you what you need
 Life is upside down
 Cause you are in love with the clown.

Olivia Newton-John is less ironic and possibly a bit pretentious when she sings:

I don't have a big red nose or wear his funny clothes
But everybody knows, the biggest clown in all the world is me.

Many of the representations of circus in fiction, like the massive novel *Spangle*, have benefited from the inventorial nature of a circus programme. Songwriters often use the idea of a list. The Beatles literally quoted a nineteenth-century showbill in 'For the Benefit of Mr Kite' on *Sergeant Pepper*. Bruce Springsteen did it in 'Wild Bill's Circus Story', and Procol Harum in 'Twas Tea Time at the Circus' also use the convenience of a list in the self-conscious university/hippy poetics of the sixties:

'twas tea-time at the circus, though some might not agree
As jugglers danced, and horses pranced and clowns clowned endlessly,
But trunk to tail the elephants quite silent, never spoke
And though the crowd clapped desperately they could not see the joke.

Madonna, singing 'What a Circus!' From *Evita* simply confirms popular metaphoric usage. While Jon Bon Jovi in 'Learning How to Fall' mixes his circus and carnival metaphors⁴³, as do Talking Heads in their political satire 'The Democratic Circus':

Found out this morning
There's a circus coming to town
They drive in cadillacs
Using walkie-talkies, and the secret service [...]

And when they're asking for volunteers
We'll be the first ones aboard
And when the ringmaster calls our names
We'll be the first ones to go...to sleep'

They see the politicians/ringmasters like the villain Krank (see section 2.4) and recall Marianne Faithfull's song, with:

Stealing all our dreams
Dreams for sale
They sell 'em back to you. (ibid)

Where does Stephen Sondheim fit into this spectrum? With 'Send in the Clowns' he is using, with a degree of respect, a circus cliché phrase as evocative as the calliope riff in 'Goodbye Cruel World'. Circus and clowning carry a baggage of associations that can be shifted easily and radically from benevolence to malevolence, from security to

⁴³ Even Elvis Presley, in the 1964 musical film *Roustabout* knew the difference:

'Elvis: "I never thought I'd be running off with the circus".

Barbara Stanwyck: "Let's get one thing straight. This is not a circus. This is a carnival.

There's a big difference".

Elvis. "I guess you're right. I guess a circus has elephants."

menace. They are images presented by adults to impressionable children becoming, in Lyotard's term, 'meta-narratives' (big stories) of great significance, as we have seen in childhood autobiographies, most notably those reviewed by Coe (1984). In this postmodern climate, where the young, above all, are set to storm the ramparts of meta-narratives, the circus/clown motifs are tempting, taunting targets, easily lampooned. Not surprisingly, this hostile yet frivolous anti-cultural movement shares blurred borders with ethical battles being fought on animal issues. The balancing act being achieved by Cirque du Soleil is to distance itself from the beleaguered past, while still living off the deep-set emotional appeal of circus and clowns.

This leaves many young people ambivalent about the circus. In previous generations the child's role was, to quote Enid Blyton, to cry, *Hurrah for the Circus!* Today, young people in the West expect ownership of their recreation. They have it with accessible music downloads, with email and mobile communications, and most expect to have disposable income for their fashion and leisure needs. Circus has, over the last two decades, become another resource for them. Even Denis and Gnasher of the popular English comic, *The Beano*, attended a circus workshop back in 1996 (D C Thompson).

So on the one hand circus in popular music comes replete with images of menace and abuse, and on the other hand it is a world of pathos, happiness and innocence. This ambivalence is epitomised in a sweet song by Ricki Lee Jones, called 'Juke Box Fury':

Polly and I went to the circus
Polly got hit with a rolling pin.
We got even with the circus
We bought tickets
But we didn't go in.

Finally, there is a hard rock genre called Circus Metal.⁴⁴ Although far from the mainstream, this phenomenon shares with youth circus the licence to present oneself as outrageous within a context of performance, which is ultimately donative. Similarly, when MTV shows a group of young adults posing and prancing, gesticulating and wearing clothes of various degrees of absurdity, even though their lyrics may be criticising clowns with extreme prejudice, young viewers may well be inspired by emulate the extrovert folly of these groups, and claim clowning for their own generation. Young Hal, after his coronation, observed of old Falstaff, "How ill white hairs become a fool and jester" (Shakespeare, 1966, 5:5) and everyone knows 'there's no fool like an old fool.' So the mantle of clownery may be seized and proudly worn by the young.

⁴⁴ Circus Metal. From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circus_metal

Also described as art house metal or avant garde metal, the **circus metal** genre often incorporates circus or carnival music into the heavy metal sound. Bands like Mr. Bungle, Dog Fashion Disco, Secret Chiefs 3, Vicious Hairy Mary, Headkase and Darth Vegas were known also to mix in elements of ska, punk, jazz, bossa nova, salsa, Egyptian, Arabian, surf rock, industrial and techno with their already quirky 'circus music meets death metal' sound. Often frowned upon by serious metalheads, who accuse the genre of being too much of a light-hearted mockery of metal.

The word 'clown' derives from various early European languages, meaning clod, clot, or lump. How it ever evolved upward to reach a high status, particularly in France, gives great credit those who made it an art form. As a word, it shows great resilience, compared with the parades of superannuated euphemisms used and quickly used up in sensitive areas like race, sexuality and disability. Compared with the confusing choice of words among, say, 'crippled', 'lame', 'suffering', 'handicapped', 'disabled', 'disadvantaged', 'special' and 'challenged', a clown is a clown is a clown.

In songs, a clown has the potential to be subject or object, choice or victim, and the circus can provide an escape from the world, or a colourful universe of possibilities. Both are significant to our argument, invoking the index finger of **self-design** and the little finger of **imagination**, as well as clearly manifesting the middle finger of **risk** and **defiance**.

3.7 Representations of Circus in Juvenile Literature

Ei! Ei! What a circus! My Circus McGurkus!
 My workers love work. They say "Work us! please work us!
 We'll work and we'll work up so many surprises
 You'd never see half if you had forty eyeses!
 Dr Seuss, from *If I Ran The Circus*, 1956

As children pass through the 'impressionable age' of primary school years, they are confronted with many images and manifestations of circus, and inevitably begin to build up their own individual idea of what 'The Circus' might be. I shall review some relevant juvenile literature, comics, cartoons and television. While the adult literature and poetry considered earlier may only indirectly affect children, this multi-faceted juvenile cultural landscape has a much greater potential to directly inform the child, truly or falsely, about the nature of circus.

A circus story or a classroom discussion may be the first time a child is faced with a real and current moral dilemma. Although she has seen heroes face choices in fairy stories or in TV cartoons, a circus is closer to home. When the teacher tells the class that circus is cruel to animals, while the parents happily buy tickets for the show, life's rules of conduct are suddenly less clearly defined.

I shall consider some disparate issues about ethics and stereotypes, misrepresentations and binaries, before considering the dearth of circus instruction books. Then, surveying juvenile circus fiction, I shall again specifically identify our six elements, concluding with observations that the totality of circus life has an overall appeal to young people trying to decide where they fit into the world.

Many 'tales of circus life' available to young readers are, to quote Joyce, 'highly demoralising' in that they de-stabilise social and cultural norms in exciting and provocative ways; the outsider being the hero, the humble being exalted and the comfortable discomfited. Another common feature of juvenile circus images is the stereotyping of individual roles and associated characters. We have seen a typical

commedia-like cast of characters in *The Veiled Lodger* (Conan-Doyle, 1951). This cast of characters recurs, with slight variations, across circus literature, from *Slaves of the Sawdust* (Reade, 1892) to the film *Santa Sangre* (Argento, 1989), and with a lighter moral undertone, they recur in most circus illustrations, cartoons and stories for children. In *Astroboy*, young viewers are even given a spot-the-stereotype lesson. As the benefactor-ex-machina arrives to save the boy, he asks, "You, are you the manager here?" The wicked ringmaster, who has been seen to whip Astroboy, and is now lounging, smoking, and has slicked hair and a handle-bar moustache, replies, "Can't you tell by looking?" (Tezuka, 1982)

As prevalent as the moral dimension and the stereotyping, is the simple and blatant misrepresentation of circuses to children. In *Circus in a Suitcase*, alongside a typical drawing of a juggler, with a semi-circle of balls above his head, I noted, "When you see a picture of a juggler, it looks like this. It's called the low-level, six ball shower, and it's impossible." (Bolton, 1988, p. 39). Similarly, circus rings crowded with clowns, animals and acrobats all at once just do not happen. Funny clowns do not really sleep in funny beds. Animals do not talk. It seems that whilst books on history, science, nature and culture tend towards accuracy for the sake of education, the circus is fair game for the writer's fantasy, being based as it (apparently) is on deception and humbug. I can see the attraction in fantastical narrative and illustration, and I am merely pointing out that circus represented to children is rarely associated with reality.

Finally, unlike theatre, dance, music and stories, the circus narrative often deals in binaries. Its simple properties of funny or serious, up or down, on or off, alive or dead, along with this immunity from reality, make it an ideal subject for colouring books, maths exercises, spelling games, model making, wallpaper and lunch-boxes. So, in a child's world, images of circus are everywhere, but seldom are young readers invited to step beyond this simplistic, colourful world, to experience circus themselves.

On two occasions, fifteen years apart, the outstanding British publishing house, Dorling Kindersley, conducted market research into the feasibility of an illustrated children's book on 'How to do Circus'. Both times, Peter Kindersley, the C.E.O., and I, the author-in-waiting, were surprised and disappointed to be firmly told, "The market doesn't want this book." We should ask why not? There are many successful instructional children's books on dance, art, sport, cookery, needlework, computers, magic as so on, but very few on circus. Examining eight examples, from 1923 to 2000, mostly small, unambitious publications, we sense we are being involved in an intimate backyard activity, using face-paints and cardboard, pretending to do something that may already be steeped in falsehood. These quotations, culled mostly from the opening address to the young reader, are here in chronological order, from 1923:

Circuses put on by home talent are by no means new. This production is out of the ordinary in that it is a burlesque circus. It is entirely a home-made affair. (Hacker and Eames, 1923, p. 9)

Our circus is a game, but we want to make it as close to a real circus as possible. (Enevig, 1973, p. 7)

In 1979, circus is still seen as a game of pretence:

You can put on your own circus with very little help. Most of the tools and materials you'll need are easy to find – usually things from around the house. (Klayer and Kuhn, 1979, p. 10)

You see, in our circus, everyone can be what he wants to be, a human or an animal, or both by turns. Why not? [...] Each 'failure' can turn into a special comic act. Don't despair. What counts is the way you act, wearing the right costume – and a bit of practice. (Alfaenger, 1982, pp. 13, 40)

Later writers begin to present circus skills as attainable:

If you can attract and arrange an audience, if you can amuse, entertain and AMAZE them, you have a Circus. Read this book, gather some friends together, learn the techniques, collect some props and costumes, and begin to rehearse your own CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE (Bolton, 1982, p. 3).

These acts may seem hard to do, but you can learn them with a good teacher and lots of practice. Being a circus performer will make you feel special because it is challenging and unusual (Kalman, 1997, p. 5).

Some contemporary books in this genre expect children to apply themselves to real learning:

All the time you are planning, preparing and rehearsing, agree to ban the words 'no', 'can't', 'impossible', 'embarrassing', and 'difficult'. (Bolton, 1999, p. 5)

And even if later, you don't become a professional artiste, you would have learned the essential lesson, "to live with your head in the stars". For the circus is much more than a school of rigour and technique; it is an art, and a school of liberty. (Laurendon and Laurendon, 2000, p. 5, trans. Bolton)

The writers seem to become less patronizing, and to hold higher expectations of the children. This is consistent with developing educational practice, but it is possible that all the writers still lag behind a change in the world view of young people. None of these books has become a best seller. Are they too specialized, too esoteric? Do they lack a necessary parental support base? Or is circus perhaps an anti-literary genre, and an instruction book is out of place? This is an important issue because, as I argue that the circus experience provides necessary elements in a child's development, the lack of suitable resources for teachers and students is deplorable.

The most recent on the list, *Le Cirque*, seriously addresses all circus acts, with sage advice from professionals, but never once suggests that the readers should start their own circus. Yet, in several autobiographies and articles, including Irving Pond, e. e.

cummings and John Steinbeck, we read of the ingenuity of children re-inventing the Big Top in their own gardens:

I recall the "shows" the boys were wont to give - shows for which the barns and haymows were requisitioned while swings and trapezes were slung from the rafters and the beams. No charge could be made for shows given in the open under the old apple tree where the branches furnished apparatus and the moist turf was soft to "tumble" on; but when the barn was used an entrance fee was exacted, and it generally was, to the extent of one penny for adults and five pins (no bent ones) for the boys and girls. (Pond, 1937, p. 34)

Perhaps these were exceptional children, but I meet significant numbers of adults today who recall walking stilts and tightrope, and juggling, as youngsters. It is apparently a truism among publishers that circus books do not sell. 'How to do Circus' would probably cause the same panic among publishers' liability lawyers as it does among insurance risk assessors. Fear of litigation may be why publishers dare not publish, and fear of accidents may be why parents do not buy children's 'How to do Circus' books. One result is that children may come to see circus as something excitingly beyond advice manuals; a forbidden territory ripe for discovery.⁴⁵ So we see the youth circus movement growing without much reference to textbooks. In the Netherlands, *Circus Op School* is a four hundred page manual for school teachers, with sections of assessment and accreditation but completely lacking in joy, astonishment and magic. The English language currently lacks a 'How to do Circus' book that is comprehensive and enticing, and which positions circus as a vital tool to help children's overall development.

Moving from manuals to fiction, it is clear that many children's authors have happily met the challenge of allowing their hero to join the circus. Examples include Enid Blyton (1952), Dr Seuss (1956), Hugh Lofting (1922), and Noel Streatfield (1938). Children's heroes such as Paddington, Spot, William, Rupert and Supergran have also joined the show, with or without their original authors. Illustrators such as Peter Spier (1994), Brian Wildsmith (1991), Sutomi I chikawa (1981) and Dick Bruna (1974) have produced classics on a circus theme. For a writer, the subject is tempting, as the circus performance is episodic, suiting the picaresque style; carrying great possibilities for frequent action and drama; providing stereotypical characters who can come with their own codes (e.g. sad clown) or who can surprise us by breaking the mould.

The two parallel narratives and very different landscapes represented by the show itself and the 'peep behind the scenes' meet at the ring door, the site of many revelations and dénouements. It is here that Sim, in *Clowning Around* (Martin, 1992) having defied everyone with his illicit and bold performance, meets his nemesis, the Circus Director. Expecting expulsion he is instead praised and rewarded. He has performed his own rites, and this is his passage. In this as in many juvenile circus

⁴⁵ There is no government health warning on a packet of Marijuana, and high school sex advice never really tells it how it is. Teenagers just have to find out for themselves.

texts, the hero is permitted to **design** himself, and by an act of courage and generosity, surpasses the expectations of peers and family, and moves on to a higher level.

Examining fifty works of circus juvenile fiction, I have analysed their content and, to some extent, attitude, in an attempt to see what impression of circus may be gained by young readers. Clearly, no one expects any one child to have read a great number of these works, as they stretch over eighty years and several languages, and many clearly had low distribution. A list of the works surveyed, and findings, is in appendix three. Among the most prevalent clichés are the sad clown (16%), the animals who want to escape, (10%) and the despotic ringmaster (8%). Most narratives, however, steer clear of moral judgments and stereotypes, concentrating more on colour, excitement and exposition.

I found that of my six designated 'circus qualities', by far the most prevalent was **Fun** (78%).⁴⁶ Possibly this reflects the author's wish for the reader to enjoy the book! Second of the significant elements is **Self-Design** (58%). Good examples are the Alex and the Mirelle stories, where the child begins in an ordinary life, which is transformed by the learning and perfecting of a circus skill (McCully, 1992, 1997, 2000) (Peg, 1981, 1986).

The **Hard Work, Leading to Success** (56%) is exemplified in *A Very Young Circus Flyer*, where the young Tato Farfan, the subject of this photo essay, says:

Before I go up, my Dad usually makes me sit down and *think* about what I'm going to do. First I learn my timing. Then I learn how to control my distance in order to be catchable. Then I work on getting enough height to my swing. The last thing is to make my wrists stiff enough so the catcher can catch me. That's the hardest part for me. I have marks all over my hands where Poppy catches me but can't hold on because my wrists are too loose. (Krementz, 1979, p. 28)

It is interesting to recall *Slaves of the Sawdust*, where

hapless apprentices had to go through their bending, splits, flip-flaps, and other feats enough to cause injury and strains to the strongest children, for terrible is the nervous tension necessary to perform them accurately and gracefully. (Reade, 1892, p. 236)

This is a critical adult's view, and makes no concession to the possibility that a child may take pride in the visible evidence of her hard work, be it hand bruises, or a successful splits. *A Peep Behind the Scenes* (Walton, 1907) like *Slaves [...]*, was written as a cautionary tale, and also carries the critical quotation marks in the term 'show' business. It is very possible that young readers can miss the irony, the moralizing, indeed the whole point of the story, as I did as a child, reading *A Peep Behind the Scenes*. So the bruises on Tato Farfan's hands could be just the inspiration needed to

⁴⁶ This represents the percentage of the fifty books in which **fun** is either the main theme, or a very significant element.

attract the young reader to the rigorous life of the circus. This submission to a hard discipline does not lessen the fun, if a child is committed to it. I witnessed this commitment among the two hundred young full time students, aged eight to fifteen, at the Wuqiao School of Acrobatic Arts, China.

Dumbo the Circus Elephant (Disney, 1978) is a ridiculous child, surrounded by high achievers, who nevertheless aspires to something greater, and in the circus, achieves it. This **aspiration** recurs frequently in our sample, (48%) and is the fourth most frequent of my six elements. **Risk and danger**, always a convenient page-turning device for writers, comes next (46%). Enid Blyton's *Circus of Adventure* (1952) is full of villains, political intrigue, kidnapping and daring escapes. For children of the fifties, the *Adventure* series provided their equivalent to the *Dick Barton* radio serials that enthralled their parents. Circus was a fertile landscape for vicarious risk. Finally, the element of **mutual trust** occurs in many juvenile circus stories (44%). Even recent factual publications like *Zippo's Book of the Circus* (Jamieson, 1999) and *Le Cirque* (Laurendon and Laurendon, 2000) emphasize the inter-dependability of circus people, and the way circus can become an alternative (and much more exciting) family for those fortunate enough to join it.

On television, *Circus Boy* (Snow and Grimsley) was first seen in 1956 to 1958, and repeated for many seasons.⁴⁷ Looking now at remaining episodes on video, and the *Circus Boy Annuals*, it is clear that *Circus Boy* provided vicarious adventures for young viewers. The Circus environment represented the orphan Corky with a new and wonderful family, including a baby elephant, Bimbo, and stock human characters who, true to the nature of sitcoms and commedia dell'arte, would behave predictably given any extraordinary circumstance. Viewers would undoubtedly have seen Corky's circus, and by extension, 'the circus', as a close-knit and supportive unit, in which any member could be him- or herself, and where all would be appreciated for their own qualities.

Clowning Around (Martin, 1992) comprises two eight-part award-winning TV series for children, made in Perth, Western Australia, and Paris, France in 1992 and 1993. My personal interest in this production is that I was contracted by the Producer, Paul Barron, as trainer and consultant for the circus scenes, and co-wrote the clown scenes with the director, George Whaley. Because I was touring my own performances and workshops extensively in the 1990's, when these episodes were shown and frequently repeated, I was able to gauge the response of the young viewers, as well as of parents and teachers. The series was very popular, and my own status considerably enhanced by my association with the show, and with stars like Ernie Dingo and Noni Hazelhurst. The irony, of course, is that children would believe what they saw on television much more than what we actually did together. It seemed that because I had been on TV (as a character in the series), therefore I was 'real'. Sadly, adults seemed to share the same ludicrous belief. This unreasonable power of television is significant as we assess the media through which circus is represented.

⁴⁷ Corky, the young hero, was played by Mickey 'Braddock' (who later used his real name, Mickey Dolenz, when he became a member of *The Monkees*).

The plot, developed from the juvenile novel *Clowning Sim* (Martin, 1988), follows the aspirations and picaresque journey of Simon Gunner, an almost orphan. He sets his sights on becoming the world's best clown, and by some standards, achieves it. The usual mini-series range of prejudice, accidents and disasters besets him and his dreams, but with the help of coincidence and a cast of characters as lovable as those in *Circus Boy* forty years earlier, he wins through. Once again, a young audience sees the possibility of creating oneself, and of following one's **dreams**. In this series, they also come to understand that **hard work** is a circus virtue, as the taskmaster, the solemn clown Anatole (Jean Michel Dagory), makes Sim (Clayton Williamson) practise his craft over and over and will not let him perform as a clown until he, the trainer, judges him to be ready. This is a welcome, and influential, reminder of the Chinese training aphorism, 'persistence leads to success'.

Moving on from an Australian dram to a Japanese cult cartoon series, consider this dialogue from *Astro-boy*, whose name is Toby:

Toby: Dad says I'm not his son

Ringmaster: So you've been thrown out, tossed aside, which means you're free to go wherever you want, and do whatever you like

Toby: What am I going to do?

Ringmaster: No need to worry about that. Why don't you come with me?

You see, I'm the ringmaster of a circus, a most amazing robot circus. If you come with me, I'll make you the greatest star in the whole world.

Come with me and I'll sign you up. What do you say?

Toby: O.K.

(Tezuka, 1982 episode 1)

This short passage contains three of the recurring motifs of circus literature: the adoption of the orphan, the aspiration to greatness and the wicked ringmaster. Reference to the works of Popp, Campbell, Travers and Jung may open new possibilities for the analysis of circus narratives compared to folk tales.

Coincidences of characters and events occur constantly in juvenile circus literature – the wicked ringmaster, the unexpected benefactor, the life-saving animal and so on, but these are not necessarily cases of art imitating art. Perhaps there are a number of stock situations in circus fiction as inevitable, and as expected as the cliché acts and stereotypical characters seen in the circus ring itself. Within this environment apparently so alien, so transgressive, so 'other', the reader/audience gets re-assurance from order and repetition.

I shall conclude this section with three parallel examples where a young hero saves the day because of his specific circus qualities and abilities. Young readers who come across this recurring story must be influenced by the nature of those qualities, including the six we are investigating. In one episode, when only Astroboy can save the stricken boys, Professor Elephant says, " You can do it. Remember the circus." Circus life, for Astroboy (and the viewer) was a time when, despite hardship and loneliness, he finally achieved something amazing. In that case it was pure showing off. Now it can save the lives of his 'friends'. The learned ability to fly from a trapeze through a

flashing web of megavolts (*Robot Circus*) comes in handy when the fairground ride full of bullies goes off the rails, and needs the intervention of a specifically trained, fearless and generous superhero. (*Save the Classmate*)

Similarly, in *Frontier Circus*, as the maddened horses towing the blazing wagon are galloping towards the Big Top, "flaming death bore down on the circus", it needs "Mace Manton, the world's greatest rider (see him defy death)". Fortunately, in this "truly desperate situation [...], Mace Manton lived up to his reputation. In the nick of time he swerved that flaming wagon away from the circus." (Groom, 1962, p. 57)

In *Circus of Adventure*, while it is Philip's very English empathy with animals that soothes the angry bears and saves the circus, it is the European acrobats' innate skills that rescue the children from the tower. Jack explains: "My two best friends are Toni and Bongo, the acrobats - they might be able to think of some plan. It's their job to think of good ideas." (Blyton, 1952, p. 213)

To a young reader, wondering occasionally about a future life and vocation, a 'job to think of good ideas' must be a delicious concept. In these and many other examples in juvenile literature and film, the circus would seem to offer the acquisition of so many esoteric and seemingly unnecessary skills which, however, will turn out to be exactly what is required, and specifically, to save those people who have showed little confidence in your career choice. Time and again, the protagonist in these dramas uses circus 'good ideas', or specific skills to rescue the group, or to defeat the bad guys, and seldom causes pain, and never death.

This short survey of juvenile circus sources indicates that the six elements of **self-design, risk, trust, aspiration, hard work and humour** all feature prominently in the circus landscape of the young imagination.

3.8 The Relationship Between Circus and Theatre

If anyone takes the theatre, as Peer Gynt did the onion, and tries to peel off its accretions one by one to get at the heart of what Theatre really is, he can begin easily. He will no doubt find that the most recent accretion is Scenery. Scenery is here today but was not there three hundred and fifty years ago.

Thereafter, the peeling is progressively harder. Probably the Auditorium would be next to go; the theatre is then out-of-doors. Next might follow the Stage as a raised platform to act upon; take that away and the player is on the ground. Going relentlessly on, that player would next have to be stripped of his Costume and Mask. Remove these and there will probably fall apart two separate pieces, leaving nothing inside; those two pieces would be the Player and the Audience. Take these apart and you can have no theatre.

Richard Southern, *The Seven Ages of the Theatre*, 1962, (p. 21)

The circle is the natural shape that an audience takes up when it assembles round an open space to watch the action of a group of players. (p. 57)

In *The Seven Ages of the Theatre*, Southern seems to be nearing a definition of a circus, but he stops short of taking away that most theatrical of onion skins, the playscript, and while acknowledging the significance of an encircling audience, he is unable, throughout his book, to mention the circus. So, as usual, circus is omitted from the theatrical roll-call. This leaves us with the challenge of positioning it in the spectrum of dramatic art, as we continue to look at manifestations and representations of circus in other forms, to try to grasp what circus may mean to a young person. As we examine the circus/theatre relationship, we need to consider it three ways – as planned by the creator (writer or director), as received by the audience and as experienced by the performer, especially the young performer. We begin by considering what happens when circus and theatre are mixed. As a circus teacher among theatricals at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts for fifteen years, I had ample opportunity to gauge the relative power and merit of forms of circus compared with forms of theatre.

The actor Robert Taylor, now resident of Hollywood, was a student at WAAPA in 1986, and I credit him with an important observation. In a class discussion, we had reached the arguable conclusion that the power of circus was that, without using words, it could bypass the intellect, and affect an audience viscerally. Watching a walker on the high wire, we know what height signifies, we know how thin the wire is, and that the beckoning void between wire and sawdust needs no mediator. Our hearts and stomach get the message, and we share the drama and tension of the situation. It was Robert Taylor who then said, “but a good actor can have that affect on an audience – without even using a high wire!”

Taylor’s remark goes to the heart of performance theory explored by Victor Turner, Richard Schechner and others. Their quest is for “universals of performance”, to ask “whether or not the same methodological tools and approaches could be used to understand a non drama, a football game, a Yaqui deer dance, a Broadway musical, a Roman Catholic Mass, an Umbanda curing ritual, a Yoruba masked dance, and a postmodern experimental performance?” (Schechner and Appel, 1990, p. 3) What Taylor noticed is that there are different means to the same effect, and for the current enquiry it shows that the circus experience can open the mind to theatre and vice versa, and that there are dramatic codes in common.

Theatre has developed a complex interdependent structure of buildings, companies, playwrights, scripts, directors, actors, critics and subsidies. As we have noted in an earlier section, the circus is almost completely ignored by theatre critics. Specific circus buildings, once found in many European cities, are now a rarity.⁴⁸ The theatre, in many forms, continues to dominate the landscape in terms of news coverage, public subsidy, critical theory and script writing. Circus is relatively ignored by all four functions. It has not always been so. In Russia, following the revolution, a new theatre was necessary; to replace what was deemed a decadent, bourgeois form. Eisenstein and Meyerhold particularly embraced the elements of circus.

⁴⁸ France now has four, compared with about a hundred in 1900.

Vsevolod Meyerhold's interest in 'anti-illusionist' theatrical forms, like circus, Kabuki and Commedia dell'arte, led him to develop 'biomechanics', a rigorous training discipline in which actors prepared their bodies to be available as versatile conduits for the director's will. Sergei Eisenstein, first a student, then a colleague of Meyerhold, formed the *Proletkult* ensemble and created a series of truly revolutionary productions, which became more and more cinematic, leading to the career in film for which he is most known. In his production of *Wiseman*, the nominal author, Ostrovsky, is ignored and scandalised in Eisenstein's hands. The stage is a circus arena, the

text was entirely rewritten, expanded, and drastically revised; the characters were totally reconceived. Jokes, puns, and buffoonery were added; popular songs of the time interpolated; acrobatics, novelty acts, and clown shows inserted, as well as topical political allusions and references to local issues (Gerould, 1974, p. 73).

In later years, the culture ministry of the Soviet Union rehabilitated Ostrovsky and other classical writers, and the eccentricity of Eisenstein and others was forgotten. But those years of the nineteen twenties in Moscow must have been electrifying for the revolutionary audiences who flocked to see the new theatre. The critic Gerould summarizes the outstanding innovations:

The eccentricism of the acting consisted of generalized metaphorical expression of emotions through physical action, combining techniques from commedia dell'arte and ancient farce. Portraying astonishment, the actor did not simply give a start - he did a double somersault. All metaphor became literal and physical. Eisenstein later amplified how this fundamental device operated:

"A gesture turns into gymnastics, rage is expressed through a somersault, exaltation through a salto-mortale, lyricism by a run along a tightrope. The grotesque nature of this style permitted leaps from one type of expression to another, as well as unexpected intertwinings of the two expressions". (Gerould, 1974, p. 74)

So there is little new in physical theatre today, except that it is always an act of discovery for the participants, and it all seems quite innovative to today's audiences. One interesting parallel is the adoption of Capoeira as a training method, which apparently

brings together in a very natural way awareness of our bodies, competition and cooperation, learning and play, philosophy, history, music, martial arts and creative expression. In one activity you have a complete ability to do many of the things that make us human without 'compartmentalising' them into distinct areas with distinct boundaries, which is what adults in our society tend to do. (Planet-Capoeira, 2004)

The universality expressed here by the editor of the on-line Capoeira journal echoes the idealism of Meyerhold's first experiments.

In his *Notes of a Film Director*, Eisenstein describes his attitude to theatre in those early days. "I must probe its secrets, draw aside its veils. I must become a maestro. Then I can tear off its mask, expose it for what it is, destroy it." (Barna, 1973, p. 53). There is a 'teenage' quality about the indomitable energy and defiance of Sergei Eisenstein. He dismissed all theatre up to his time, and made the future his own. His 'montage of attractions' was absurdly bold, yet carried off fearlessly. Circus was perfect for him, representing the art of the proletariat, and was also conveniently primal, episodic and non-verbal. Young people today embrace circus with a similar spirit. Pioneers like Pierrot Bidon (Archaos), Andre Heller (Roncalli) and the collectives of the Pickle Family and Circus Oz worked with the same fearless spirit. Most of these young people were fully engaged in performance themselves, and perhaps once you have learned to throw yourself into a back somersault, then a cultural revolution holds no fear. Like the young Eisenstein, they take "a maximum degree of passion as a point of departure", and see "a breaking of the customary dimension as a method of its embodiment." (Barna, 1973, p. 68) This spirit is consistent with our element of **self-design**, and the necessity for a child to take a **risk**.

A founder member of a contemporary French circus talks wistfully of their ideals, in the video *Les Plumes font leur Cirque*:

I wanted to change the world and so did some of my friends, but not all of them.

This feeling of rebellion, this desire to change the world means that – well we can't change the world. My God, we haven't changed it at all. It's still the bloody same. The injustice.

Anyway we tried not to let the world change us too much [...]

We produce nostalgia for the time we were all angels [...]

Like children we didn't want to stop playing, and we invented a way to continue.

(Ponfilly, 1994)

It is significant to this thesis that these Russians were in their early twenties during this time, and Eisenstein, after his unfettered experiments with theatrical 'montages' went on to become a world leader in the grammar of cinema. Meyerhold's biomechanics is now enjoying a world-wide revival as a performance training technique. Not all young people will become geniuses, but these are two examples of the power of circus and physical theatre in a liberated environment.

Regarding the circus/theatre nexus, there have been times when theatre has idealized clowns and many times when it has exploited and abused clowns. I recall a play called *Scaramouche Jones*, a very popular one-hander performed by the actor, Pete Postlethwaite, which did for adult audiences what Ronald McDonald does for hungry children, i.e. makes them so replete with false sustenance that they feel they never need to see another clown (or a real one). *Slava's Snow Show* had a similar effect on me when I saw it in a mainstream theatre. It seemed to be a show about a clown. The audience, safely alienated from real involvement or risk, felt free to give a standing ovation, while for me, the biggest gag of all was the fact that the clowns had sat on the

stage for the final twenty-five minutes watching the well-heeled audience playing like children in the auditorium with a few big beach balls. I had previously seen another version of the act, purchased in toto and reproduced on licence, by Cirque du Soleil in *Alegria*. It was Salvador Dali, that great public buffoon who wrote, "It is forbidden to do a representation of a clown". If circus and clowns are treated as poor relations of theatre, then this will clearly impact on how they are viewed by drama teachers and their students.

The Russians, and others who have used circus in theatre, have generally been intimidated by the ring itself, and have either stayed with the proscenium arch or adopted other forms of scenography. Eisenstein's production following the circus-style *Wiseman was Gas Masks*:

[H]e wanted to break out of the confines of the conventional stage and proposed creating a setting specially suited to the action - which takes place in a gasworks. Eisenstein was always telling his colleagues that 'the theatre should become real life' and, in conformity with this contention, hit on the novel idea of staging the play in a real gasworks. (Barna, 1973, p. 69)

The Melbourne-based *Women's Circus* has made a speciality of finding unusual venues for their shows, including factories and docks, and "sites of architectural or historical interest". Luckily, they have fared better than *Proletkut* in the gasworks, where

[t]he pitfalls soon became only too evident, however: not only was the work of the gasworks being seriously disrupted, but the audience did not take kindly to the effects of the evil-smelling gas. After only four performances, on 4 and 6 March 1924, the actors were asked, none too politely, to leave. (Barna, 1973, p. 70)

The *Women's Circus's* annual November season is always sold out and critically acclaimed. On a further point, their shows always contain theatrical elements – ideas, plot, dialogue, music and songs. Like school circuses, discussed later, this contemporary blend of circus and theatre seems to work, and opens up possibilities for the development of youth circus.

Still with circus in theatre, I recall in another WAPAA moment, being asked to 'put a bit of circus stuff' into the production of a contemporary Australian play. The director was amazed when I declined. I explained that it would be too strong. Coleridge coined the term, 'willing suspension of disbelief' about poetry, but it has been universally adopted in theories of theatre and story telling. While an audience willingly accepts stylized characters, dialogues and plots, the moment an actor suddenly starts juggling, all bets are off. This is reality. How can they not applaud? They clap, not the character, but the performer. The audience's excitement may be enhanced, but the plot is lost. The theatre has become opera.

Hotier argues that opera and circus have a lot in common. In *Cirque, Communication et Culture*, he draws provocative parallels. Both forms play with emotions; both are

acrobatic, either corporal or vocal and both are presented as a series of stand-alone numbers, with alternating emotional tones. Both repeat a known repertoire of known sequences or gags, and hold few surprises. Both represent heroic qualities of prowess, labour and generosity. Both are real:

The opera lover who goes to the circus will not be greatly surprised; the opening parade – that's the opera's overture. The extraordinary interpretation that elevates us to enthusiastic admiration, the constant attention to aesthetic detail which functions like a lightning conductor for our emotions, all these things lead us to believe that our beloved circus and the opera are of the same nature. They lead us to claim that circus is an opera. (Hotier, 1995, p. 151).

Circus and opera have similarities to the English Pantomime, to Kabuki Theatre, to Beijing Opera, the Punch and Judy Show and other forms where the audience feels free to shout and clap whenever they like. Western theatre, like concert music, prefers audience participation to happen at the end.

Earlier I mentioned a stage show about a clown. It is interesting to see what happens when real circus clowns are transplanted onto a stage. The stars of the European circus in the early twentieth century were the Fratellini Brothers, Paul, Francois and Albert. Their clown entrées were the highlight of the Paris circuses, and they were idolised, not least, by eminent theatre artists including Jean Cocteau, Darius Milhaud and Jacques Copeau. The latter wrote, "Their superiority over theatre people is that they are truly a brotherhood, a corporation, people who work together and cannot outdo each other." (Aslan, 1983, p. 215, trans. Bolton). Odette Aslan, in her article *The Actor and the Clown* cites Cocteau's astonishment that clowns manage to survive as performers in a 'bullring' where anything can happen and where there are obstacles and traps at every turn. In contrast, Pierre Loiselet saw the Fratellinis on stage, where "they are nearly always gauche, dazzled, astonished by the light that does not come down from the sky, and against which they hurl themselves like moths." (ibid, p. 208).

The great Swiss clown, Grock, at home both on stage and in the ring, said, "the circular arena on the ring allows more freedom to play the audience than does the theatre stage, where the public is only in front of you." (p. 208). Another problem is that you can only say things once. In the ring you can try again, in another direction, with another inflection:

At the circus, what freedoms are available to the clown that an actor does not have? Surrounded by spectators, he does not feel himself encircled. He breathes easily, as does everyone with him, in the welcoming space of the big top. He is master of the limited kingdom of the ring. Thirteen metres in diameter, the measure required in every country of the world, from the beginning, so horses could have the standard length of training lunges. The clown's legs know this circumference. A horseman from way back, he knows this course well. When hit by any emotion he does a complete tour of the ring, legs half-bent, walking/running, which is an exaggeration, a prolongation of a tour of himself. In this way he runs the course of surprise, indignation,

happiness. He unloads himself in full view, and returns to the starting point for a new situation. He leaves his partner, he experiences a separation, he gets the public's attention, and he heads back. At each turn the belt is re-buckled. You don't get this relaxation and this efficiency in forms of theatre where all significant movements are lateral, linear, relying on a psychological continuity (ibid, p. 209).

To conclude this investigation into circus in theatre, we must look at the position of circus within the theatre arts curriculum in schools. With a few exceptions, it is ignored. The West Australian theatre arts curriculum guidelines do not mention circus, although the relevant volume includes photographs of children on unicycles and dressed as clowns, and although at least thirty West Australian schools have some sort of circus programme. Similarly in New South Wales, Sharon McCutcheon runs the very successful Clyde Circus at Bateman's Bay, and she too finds that insufficient credit is given. Her M.A. thesis on Circus in Education received a high distinction. Her students have performed dozens of times, including shows with three professional circuses, but the circus remains unfunded, and with no official status within the school. McCutcheon told me:

The Editors of *State of the Arts*, a publication of research done by Drama teachers in NSW, wanted me to re-write my research for publication in the context of theatre; so as not to further "alienate Drama teachers from an already marginalised form!" (personal correspondence, 2004, and see McCutcheon, 2003).

This epitomises what we have seen when circus is either appropriated by theatre, or compared with theatre. It is frequently misrepresented or resented, but its truly circus characteristics of strength, flexibility, endeavour and a very thick skin ensure that it can survive both hybridisation and neglect. I have seen this culture of pragmatism in circus as personified by school students who, while claiming to be no good at drama as such, are quite able to manifest the same range of necessary abilities as they perform in the school circus.

Now, changing perspective, a contentious issue among circus artists, and which often demarcates the barricades between 'traditional' and 'new' circus is the insertion of theatre into the circus ring. In some ways this is surprising as for a significant period of its development circus was synonymous with 'hippodrama', epic, romantic or historical narratives played out, with lots of spectacular horse riding, in the indoor auditorium. Thus:

By the early years of the nineteenth century the format of programs at Astley's had become standardized and ran something like the following. At 6:30 the curtain rose on the featured piece, a hippodrama with some resounding title like *The Brave Cossack*, *The Blood Red Knight*, or *Uranda the Enchanter of the Steel Castle*. At 8:30 half-price was taken, and the spectators so admitted, if the house was full, were let into the empty ring where they witnessed the concluding scenes of the spectacle. Next came the "Scenes in the Circle," lasting some forty-five minutes and including the acts we associate with the circus today - gymnasts,

contortionists, clowns, strongmen and always featuring a fine display of horsemanship. The action then reverted to the stage where a burlesque, pantomime, or pedestrian melodrama rounded out the evening's bill (Saxon, 1978, p. 21).

Hotier writes of 'la vraie nature du cirque', maintaining that the true nature of circus is different from that of theatre in many ways. His annual *Cirque Educatif* has a production theme, but not a plot. What he calls the 'intangible characteristics of circus' are circularity (a ring), animals (in the western tradition), clowns, a spectacle to stimulate the emotions, but 'not to provoke intellectual reflection', acts evoking different emotions, an aesthetic dimension, and a wholesome air of family entertainment. (Hotier, 1995, p. 123).

However, much of what is called circus today does 'provoke intellectual reflection' - it makes you think. New Australian circuses like *Circus Oz*, *Circus Monoxide*, *Women's Circus* and *Rock 'n Roll Circus* often address big issues in their shows. *Rock 'n Roll* (now called *Circa*) have made circus shows about safe sex, and about political prisoners and torture. *Circus Monoxide* was founded at Bathurst, home of Australia's foremost production car race, to suggest an alternative to the petrol culture. *Circus Oz*, in its early days, made raucous satirical comments in their shows about land rights, nuclear power and other contemporary debates, while they publicly and self-consciously lived in a style advocating other concerns - feminism, collectivism and sustainability. Chris Waite, observing the troupe anthropologically, found that "The Circus is still, for the majority of its members, a political statement. The troupe attempts to move opinion by a process of working together rather than by delivering political information." (Waite, 1985, p. 27). Sometimes the company would consciously present itself as "a potent experiment in social change, along Marxist-Feminist-Anarchist lines" (p. 1), whereas, when it came to an act, like the cannon-ball clown suicide act, the author of the piece could abandon dialectic and say, sincerely, "I reckon thinking stuffs it." (p. 136).

Despite Hotier's desire to respect the purity of the circus form, it is being constantly amended. Circus Ethiopia exists and thrives because of the contracts it gets from the government to spread messages about nutrition, hygiene and STD's.⁴⁹ I myself have devised and performed circus-style acts about drugs, HIV/AIDS and smoking. While we are not actively selling snake-oil, we are, perhaps, performing in the tradition of the old-time medicine shows, where a spoonful of circus helps the audience accept the message, or buy the product. The *London Millennium Dome Show* and most of the productions by *Cirque du Soleil* have some sort of plot. Following the storyline is an optional extra, as it is evident that to most people the acts are sufficient, and the narrative, the songs and the programme notes are unnecessary.

However, with youth circus and specific interest groups there is a difference. I saw a *Lunar Circus* community production about wild-life conservation where the involvement of the young performers was evident. The emotion was raw; they really did want us, the audience, to save their world. The vertical pole-climbing act was enhanced, rather

⁴⁹ Circus Ethiopia information may be found at <http://www.lefourneau.com/artistes/circus/index.htm>

than spoiled, by the way the performers wore masks, costumes and tails of native tree-climbing possums.

Over their ten years, *Women's Circus's* productions have become increasingly professional in standard, but they always contain theatrical themes and plots concerning their foundation issues – women's safety, domestic abuse and celebration of survival. Watching a school circus, we generally do not expect a very high standard of acrobatic skills. The teachers, from a theatre arts background, are uneasy about a pure skill display, à la gym club, and often write a play to incorporate the circus acts. It sometimes works very well. The circus acts take the audience's mind off the poor quality of many teachers' script writing. Most audience members are there to watch one particular child, so the plot itself is secondary, although it may be so blatant, with binary good and evil elements, that it is hard to miss. Furthermore, the teachers will always have in their class some students who are better at speaking than they are at circus tricks, so a theatrical circus is the answer.

Finally we must look at the nature of the experience of a child performing either theatre or circus.⁵⁰ We noted in *Monday's Child* that dressing up is an important aspect of childhood; but not all children, at all times, want to go as far as a complete transformation. Lisle Jones, the theatre teacher, once told me that Paul Hogan's performance in *Crocodile Dundee* was not exactly acting; it was 'heightened behaviour'. I welcomed that phrase. It summed up exactly what I do in performance, and what circus allows children to do. They may be themselves, with their own names, say what words they want to – or none, and present themselves in a way that suits them today.

It cannot be long now before theatre arts educators realize that a youth circus performance can enhance a student's understanding of what Southern call the 'accretions' of theatre. From a basic function of showing a skill to an audience, the child will learn about scenography, self-presentation, dramatic structures, audience response, choreography and commitment to a team.

Theatre has, at its heart, the representation of characters, by actors, in order to tell a story. Generally that story is not the actor's story, but the characters. In the circus, the story belongs to the actor; the juggling balls are his to catch; she, herself, must cross the tightwire. Even the clown is not dissembling. "Clowns are just like you and me, only more so." (Bolton, 2003, p. 11).

The appeal of circus in the performing arts context for young people is manifold. Referring to our model, students can **self-design**, they will need to **trust** other company members, they will have to **work hard** to achieve a high standard of performance, **risk** the possibility of failure, but in most cases, they will thoroughly enjoy the process.

⁵⁰ I am reminded of Patrick Malahide, the Scottish actor best known for his TV roles in *The Singing Detective* and *Minder*. He was my neighbour in Scotland in the 1970's and once remarked, as he was leaving for work, "This is a funny job. I'm going spend the day wearing someone else's clothes and someone else's shoes, saying someone else's words."

3.9 Representations of Circus In Cinema

The special characteristic of the circus is that one is creating and living at the same time, without having to keep inside fixed bounds, as one has to do with painting and with literature - one is constantly involved in action. It's an entertainment that's got force, courage - and I think the cinema is just the same.

Federico Fellini, quoted in Stoddart, 2000 (p. 147).

Fellini's 1971 film, *The Clowns* (Fellini and Zapponi) opens with him the author, as a child, awakened by the arrival of the circus in the night. He is attracted and repelled, hypnotized and finally horrified by the unpredictability, anarchy and violence of the clowns. In the next sequence, still as a child, he sees clowns in the grotesque and entertaining behaviour all around him - in village characters and bumbling civic officials.

This autobiographical work then follows him in a search for images of his childhood clown legacy - the Fratellini Brothers, Footit and Chocolat, Rhum and Pipo. The soundtrack carries the words:

Where are the clowns of my childhood? Where are they today; that terrifying comic violence, that noisy exhilaration? Can the circus still entertain? The world which it belonged to no longer exists. Theatres transformed into runways. Glowing ingenuous sets, the childish naïveté of the public; they no longer exist. What remains of the old circuses? Subtle, wasted traces.

(Fellini and Zapponi, 1971)

His wistful conclusion, that perhaps the clown is dead, is followed by a manufactured film/circus that both celebrates this possibility (it is an elaborate and chaotic clown funeral) and also denies it, as it is brilliantly performed by circus clowns, in a circus ring. Fellini's convoluted non-conclusion about the death of the clown seems to be an indication of the paradoxes inherent in the viewing of circus by young people. Circus is old-fashioned, yet the young can fashion it. Circus is on the outer, rejected by the mainstream, yet it is clearly a self-contained tribe. Circus is dangerous, yet it happens every night, so it must be achievable.

Recalling my experience as circus consultant with *Clowning Around*, the TV series produced in Perth and Paris by Barron Films and the ABC, I intend to examine some predicaments and characteristic solutions regarding the challenge of portraying circus in film and television.

First, there is the question of attitude. Many films, as indeed most photographic studies, take the provocative and easy approach to circus, focusing on off-stage moments, titillating the audience's fascination with the dark side. Among many examples are *Freaks* (Robbins, 1932), *Santa Sangre* (Argento, 1989), *Lola Montes* (Saint-Laurent and Wademant, 1955), *La Strada* (Fellini and Flaiano, 1954), and *Circus of Horrors* (Baxt, 1960). Others elevate circus performers to an angelic state, extending their theatrical super-human qualities beyond the ring into a state of grace or nobility that is, like the horror, an illusion nurtured in the imagination of the viewer.

There are fewer examples of this genre, but *Wings of Desire* (Handke and Wenders, 1987), *Roselyne and her Lions* (Beineix and Forgeas, 1989) and *When Night is Falling* (Rozema, 1995) may be included. *Clowning Around* (Martin, 1992), aimed at young audiences, with a sympathetic young hero, looks neither up nor down at the circus, but meets it at ground level.⁵¹

Clowning Around, an Australian, French, American, Canadian co-production had a world-wide television distribution with many repeats throughout the nineteen nineties. As I mentioned in section 3.7, I toured schools throughout Western Australia soon after working on the series, and was thus able to move from performing and producing actual circus, through the fascinating experience of translating it to film, on to an unofficial wide-ranging research project into how circus survived this metamorphosis, and was perceived by young people. From this casual but keenly observed investigation I offer a few thoughts.

First, let us consider the point of view (P.O.V.). In the circus, you have a fixed vantage point. You do not move, except to crane your head around an obstructing tent pole. For most spectators the backdrop is a mirror image of themselves. In this way the circus can generate the same cyclonic energy that sweeps around a football stadium, cock fight, bullring or boxing match. The performers are the meat in a sandwich of spectators. Jacob, in 'Le Cirque et Ses Victimes' describes them as the offerings in sacrificial circus rites. (1999, p. 169). There are no cutaways, no close-ups, no curtain to descend, and rarely a blackout. This vulnerability to the gaze is part of the visceral power of good circus. In *Clowning Around* I designed, and performed in, an intense twenty-minute traditional clown entrée, with Whiteface and Auguste, happily interrupted by the young hero, Sim, 'Le Petit Kangarou', as a reckless larrikin clown, who made our traditional routine seem old-fashioned. The final edited version is eight minutes long, and has only about thirty seconds of the full-ring shots that a true audience member would see. The rest is close-ups, cutaways to the laughing crowd, and

⁵¹ Incidentally, a useful historical categorisation of circus cinema genres appears in the chapter headings of *Cirque au Cinema; Cinema au Cirque* by Adrian (1984).

The Ancient Circus And Roman Arena

From Mountebanks To Wirewalkers

A Screen In The Fairground, A Fairground On The Screen

The Lords Of The Juggle

Illusions Everywhere

The Cinema On Horseback

The Western - Was It Born In The Circus?

The Myth Of The Sad Clown

Animal Stars

Two Men, One Woman ... A Trapeze

Break Your Heart For The One Who Breaks His Neck

Different Beings

There is one significant category apparently omitted from Adrian's list - the American genre of the Big Show, of which many examples flourished at the introduction of Cinemascope. Perhaps the archetype is *The Greatest Show on Earth*, Cecil B de Mille (1952), and others include *3 Ring Circus*, Joseph Pevney (1954), *Circus World*, Henry Hathaway (1964), *Trapeze*, Carol Reed (1956), *The Big Circus*, Joseph M. Newman (1959), and *Jumbo*, Charles Walters (1962).

reminders of the sub-plot, with police and circus managers. Sim rides a unicycle on a plank across my belly, just once. "Cut", says the director, "that's fine". We want to do it again, better, but the only improvement he allows, months later, is my voice-over, saying "Ooomph!" with more of a French accent. By contrast, the scene where the police inspector whispers in the ear of the circus manager has the luxury of several takes, with detailed instructions from the director.

My point is that the act itself, the epitome and defining moment for the circus artist, is taken for granted in cinema. The plot, the dialogue and the acting reign supreme. In fact an unembellished film of a circus act, as of a theatrical performance, is nearly always unsatisfactory, and video is even worse, as big things look smaller and small things bigger.⁵² One rare occasion when I was physically moved by circus on film was seeing an Omnimax surround-screen version, in Circus World, Florida, of a sway-pole act. Several other spectators were physically moved like me – towards nausea.

So, in the main, circus on the screen needs a plot and is secondary to that plot. How this narrative, and how the associated cine-tricks modify the essence of circus, is of interest to this enquiry, as we look for more ways in which the screen mediates and transforms the true nature of circus, particularly to young people.

Returning to the P.O.V., it is interesting to see how different cinematographers have tackled the arena challenge, physically to evoke the dynamic circle of the diegetic crowd, what Canetti describes as the "doubly closed ring" (Canetti, 1960, p. 27), given the actuality of parallel rows of silent, still viewers staring at a flat cinema screen. *Ben Hur* (Wallace and Tunberg, 1959) and *Gladiator* (Franzoni, 2000) fill the background with real or virtual extras in togas, alternating from the hero's view of this encircling mob, to the P.O.V. of individuals within that mob, watching the protagonists against a background of animated humanity. *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (Hayes and Miller, 1985) has a smaller surrounding crowd, but the camera looks out from the ring and circles completely, establishing that there is no escape from the claustrophobic ring of faces. On a smaller scale, the same effect was achieved by Peter Brook in *Lord of the Flies* (Brook and Golding, 1963). In *Clowning Around* there is a scene where the camera was spun on the tripod to suggest Sim's own view of the audience as he hung suspended by his ankle, spinning on the Spanish Web. This comes near to the stomach-churning effect of the sway poles at Omnimax.

Most circus films, as most circus novels, contain a disaster. The usual cliché is the falling trapezist, but tent fires, train crashes, floods and escaped animals recur frequently. Emotional disasters follow misunderstandings, with romantic relationships muddled by clown disguises, or physical proximity to other barely dressed athletes. The disaster in *Clowning Around 2* is financial ruin. On this occasion, as with other fictional circus climaxes, the show somehow goes on, and presumably moves on to more thrilling adventures.

⁵² A point made to me by the ringmaster, John McDonnell.

This formula tells us two stories. The viewer/reader sees circus as a community of survival where, as in Enid Blyton's *Circus Of Adventure* (1952), the unique skills, boundless ingenuity and mutual commitment of the company lead to triumphant success against the odds – a very sympathetic scenario to children beginning to form peer groups distancing themselves from the hegemonic parental ruling class.

Also of significance is the expectation of danger. Catherine Palmer, in her article *Shit Happens; The Selling Of Risk In Extreme Sport* (2002), makes the observation that the way these activities are promoted both exploits and denies the true possibilities of risk and injury. The recurrence of disaster at the micro and macro levels in circus films may have the same attractive qualities for young people. Circus represents a world where the artists defy death daily in their acts and where the circus community surfs over calamities that would swamp mere mortals.

There are many ways in which cinema has to lose the essence of circus to be faithful to the essence of cinema. One is the reduction of the marvellous to the ingenious. When Charlie Chaplin made *The Circus* (1928), he really walked the tightwire, and was really joined on the wire by a troupe of unrehearsed monkeys. The scene was improvised and brilliant. In the early days of cinema, audiences knew that Chaplin, Keating, Lloyd and others had actually performed the stunts they saw. As they sat and watched the screen, they knew they were watching flickering shadows, and that Chaplin did not fall, that Keating did not get flattened as the house fell, and that Lloyd had survived, hanging on to that clock face, high above the traffic. It is a short step to today where every child over about seven understands about stunt doubles, hidden wires, jump-cuts, matte blue-screen technique and computer animation. Today's audience is entertained by the visual narrative, then intrigued and instructed, often on the same DVD, by an explanation of how it was done.

In 2002 a series of videos was published in California called *Secrets Of The Circus Revealed* (Loo, 2001). Watching them reminded me of a pamphlet I once read called *How To Make Your Own Scotch Whisky*. As I recall, you need a clear stream in the Scottish Highlands, pure barley grown in a certain soil, a specific and very elaborate still, aged wooden barrels and centuries of inherited knowledge and instinct. Once you have all these ingredients, it is simple! Similarly, the secret of the circus bears no resemblance to *The Secrets Of Magic Revealed*, that base TV show that generate huge ratings by giving away essential tricks that have intrigued us for generations. Rather, *The Secrets Of The Circus Revealed*, like the secret of making your own Scotch, shows that it demands skill, years of training, respect, tradition and dedication.

In *Clowning Around*, Jo Bolton, playing Sim, does a sequence where, atop a rola-bola (solo see-saw) on a rickety table, he juggles a ladle, an apple and an egg. This is real. He catches the egg in his hat, hushes the audience, then takes from the hat a cheeping, fluffy, day-old chick. This is not real. This is a basic 'cutaway' film trick. Children ask, and I explain, that this was false, and the rest was real. But how do they know? How can we ever believe cinema? It, like story telling and theatre, involves the willing suspension of disbelief. Live circus demands belief. Young people often come to learn

circus in a search for something real and tangible, which is not faked. This is what separates students at circus school from those studying cinema and cultural theory.

Most circus films portray artists ready-made and stereotyped – the strongman, the contortionist, the sad clown – and like much children's literature, they hitch a ride on the bandwagon of pre-conceptions. However, a few films do show what is needed to achieve these roles. *The Girl On The Bridge* (Frydman, 1999) explores the nervous energy innate in the relationship between the knife-thrower and his human target. *Farewell My Concubine* (Lee and Lu, 1993) shows the extremely arduous training necessary for success in acrobatic Beijing Opera.

Searching for the ultimate circus lesson, that of systematic hard work, we find it in the most unexpected place. In the 1962 film *Jumbo*, Doris Day sings a jolly waltz, while surrounded by fluorescent pink gaiety, a bouncy beach ball leads the camera around an implausible ring-full of circus trainees. If anyone ever listens to lyrics, they will hear these words, trite but cautionary, on a theme seldom considered when circus is shown on the screen:

Swing high, swing low, upon the trapeze
And first you'll fall, but then
A year from now you'll do it with ease,
Over and over and over again
A star does not come out of the sky,
He starts to work at ten
To reach the top
You gotta keep trying,
Over and over and over again

(Hecht and MacArthur, 1962)

3.10 Artists' Representations of Circus

Every child is an artist. The problem is to remain an artist once he grows up.
Pablo Picasso

Only he who attempts the absurd is capable of achieving the impossible.
Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo, Spanish philosopher (1864-1936)

Circus has long been an inspiration for painters, and in turn, their representations serve to inspire generations of viewers. It is not possible here to review the huge body of circus art, but the list of familiar names includes Matisse, Picasso, Rouault, Lautrec, Watteau, Goya, Degas, Dufy, Dali, Miro, Buffet, Seurat, Klee, Renoir, Ensor and Leger. The role call of lesser-known artists who depicted circus themes could run for pages. The focus of this thesis is the ideas and impressions young people might draw from representations of circus, and those images to be found in galleries, art books, posters and postcards can be the most lasting, and may have the most considerable influence. Without attempting to quantify this influence, we may at least begin to qualify it; to look both at the way artists have been drawn to the subject, and the way they have chosen to portray it, so we may understand more about the way circus is presented in visual arts, and to see to what extent the six elements we are investigating are present in the work of artists, photographers and cartoonists.

The appearance of so many Paris based post-impressionists in the list of circus artists is no surprise, as their time coincided with the golden age of the French circus. Artists would congregate at the circus after shows, and mix with the clowns and acrobats:

Gertrude Stein's recollection indicates that Picasso and [his lover, Fernande] Olivier, as well as Apollinaire, his fellow poet Max Jacob, and others, did more than simply watch the performances: "At this time they all met at least once a week at the Cirque Medrano and there they felt very flattered because they could be intimate with the clowns, the jugglers, the horses and their riders." (Carmean, 1980, p. 56)

Olivier recalled that Picasso "would stay there all evening, Braque sometimes with him talking to the clowns [...] He admired them and had real sympathy for them." p. 57.

Decades earlier, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec could be found dwelling in the demi-monde of Paris, where the brothels, the Moulin Rouge and the Cirque d'Hiver provided many of his recurring subjects. His famous series of circus drawings was executed in 1899. He had been confined to the Saint James Clinic at Neuilly suffering from alcoholism and exhaustion, but in less than a month he was working feverishly. To justify to his guardian Dr. Semelaigne that he was recovering, he undertook a series of drawings for publication, and he chose to recall the circus. Apart from a possible visit, under guard, to the amateur Cirque Molier, all the drawings were from memory. This was a feat so impressive that he was released after seventy-five days. The drawings show a series of horses, riders, acrobats, trapezists and wild clowns and dogs set against the sweeping curves of strangely empty seats. The singer Yvette Guilbert, herself a victim of his most savage caricatures, found in these drawings, "a feeling of nightmare [...]"

The ring has become a tragic circle where howling madness leads the game of beast and men." (Seitz, 1967, p. 5)

It is significant that while more modern painters like the Americans Robert Riggs and Milton Avery deliberately portray the ring as a site of chaos and folly, Lautrec chooses the circus in his search for sanity and respect. In Amsterdam and in Western Australia, I have met alcoholics and drug addicts who see the circus workshop as a haven of sympathy and an opportunity to focus their bodies and minds for a while. This is the message of Lautrec's circus drawings, particularly applicable to those working with youth circus, social circus and intervention programmes.

Marc Chagall's prolific output of lithographs contains hundreds of circus images. His 1923 *Acrobat* shows a handstanding Jew, against a background of a clown, a bull and a ball, and one of his final works, *Circus Burlesque*, produced in his ninety-ninth year (1985) includes many of his circus topoi – the handstander, an acrobat on horseback, clowns, a cock, a band and an audience. Many of his early works are religious landscapes peopled by orthodox Jews, musicians, cows and angels set within a circus ring. Chagall wrote:

I have always regarded clowns, acrobats and actors as beings of tragic humanity, to my mind they resemble the figures in certain religious paintings. Even today, when I paint a crucifixion or another religious picture, I have the same sensation that I had when I was painting the circus people, and all the same there is nothing literary in these pictures and it is difficult to explain why I feel this psycho-plastic similarity between these two kinds of composition. (Chagall, 1967, p. 3).

Other pictures actually portray acts – a juggler, a lion and trainer, a trapezist and the acrobat, often standing with a leg vertical alongside the head. Chagall's best known early works often feature impossible physical positions, such as *The Anniversary*, 1915, where the man, besotted with his bride, floats above her, distending his neck to kiss her, as she walks away to put the flowers in water. In *Promenade*, 1917, the young man (Marc) stands in his cubist village landscape while his lover (his wife Bella) holds his hand, but floats ecstatically in the sky above him. In the circus, Chagall discovered a place where physical dislocations are an accepted act of beauty, where humans and animals co-exist, as his cow, cockerel and horse hybrids do in his paintings, and where a beautiful woman may truly float in the air – on a trapeze.

His circus lithographs of 1967 tell of deep love, expressed in the warm colours and in the tone and the gaze of the clowns, acrobats and trapezists situated in the public/private world of the circus ring. The popularity of these images among young people suggests that this romantic view of the circus strikes a chord, especially with young lovers. The clown who gazes at the viewer from a Chagall circus is gently defiant. His is a **self-designed** persona in a self-chosen arena. He can defy gravity, he can withstand the public gaze, and he can do anything for his beloved. All these characteristics are taken for granted by a besotted teenager.

We may be excused the generalisation that up to the 1920's, serious artists could produce paintings **of** the circus, but since then, most circus art is **about** the circus, or using the circus to make a point about something else. This relationship, where the artist uses the circus model to explain his art, will be further explored at the end of this section in relation to Calder's Circus.

We continue to survey, albeit briefly, the range of visual arts addressing circus, looking for instances where they may present to the young viewer inspirational resonances with their own world. An important mode of art, aimed simply at reproducing and recording the circus runs as a parallel strand alongside the more stylised and symbolic manifestations. Among these recorders are the engravers of early circus posters, and of Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1968). The Dover edition carries apparently authentic pictures of stilt-dancers, a clown with an educated pony, a street conjuror with his table of props and balancing posture-masters.

The Vesque sisters, Marthe and Juliette, trained as floral painters at the Sèvres ceramic works and took their meticulous skills to the circus to produce an astonishing archive of hundreds of water-colours between 1903 and 1947. They promised each other not to sell their works nor disperse the collection. It is now housed in the Musée National des Arts et Traditions. In the book of their work, *En Piste* (Boustany, 1992), we can see details of props, costumes and moves that would even escape photography. Con Colleano, the world-renowned Australian Aboriginal wire-dancer is shown, as he was universally perceived, as a man of grace and beauty, and the Vesque illustrations of his backflip and front somersault on the wire unequivocally recall his courage. Both Mayhew and the Vesques, by their meticulous observation, honour circus as practical and functional, being a very special occupation, but nonetheless, a job. This is a rare mode of circus depiction, and one that must interest young viewers who are still in a position to dream about their future.

Dame Laura Knight, the English academician, was also concerned with accuracy. Her autobiographies, *Oil Paint and Grease Paint* (1936) and *The Magic of a Line* (1965) demonstrate her personal creative quest for perfection in the simplest line of a drawing. She is also passionate to redress inaccuracies of perceptions of circus, and to reduce the marginalisation she sees imposed on the circus community:

Circus performers are not rogues and vagabonds as sometimes is thought, but a proud and disciplined people with the strictest moral code: their habits are as austere as those to be found in any monastery. They are of a race all their own, for the world is their workshop; and in defiance of the law of gravitation, they daily take their lives in their hands for the sake of a mere hand-clap. (Knight, 1965, p. 203)

Her many months spent with circus companies clearly inspired her with two of the 'elements', trust and hard work:

Although the personnel of such performances consists of many nationalities, a bond exists between all: the life of any one of them may at any moment depend on the swift reaction and goodwill of another.

Nevertheless, they accepted my presence in their midst perhaps only because I also was a hard worker. They gave me every chance to draw and paint, and would pose for me between their acts in the Ring. (p. 203)

Knight, like many circus teachers today, seeks to present an image of circus life contrary to the dominant inaccurate idea of frivolity and irresponsibility. This view will be attractive to any young circus enthusiast faced with sceptical parents.

Clown organizations seem to attract painters keen to immortalise their colleagues on large canvases, which must be the painterly equivalent of the vanity press, as there is probably only one potential buyer for each portrait. An exception in clownery is Bill Ballantine, whose books, including *Clown Alley* (1982), *Memoirs of a Clown* (1994) and *Wild Tigers and Tame Fleas* (1958) are self-illustrated. His line drawings are detailed and amusing, and with his biographical pedigree, we may assume accurate. In the same spirit of these artists of accuracy are recorders in other genres. I move away from visual artists to include an aspect of circus life that suits children who see themselves as collectors. *King Pole*, the journal of the Circus Friends Association (U.K.) has a regular page devoted to circus modellers. These sticklers for detail, whose miniature circuses, like model railways, have the potential to take over their lives, have little in common with Alexander Calder, creator of the world's most famous model circus. Collectors of posters, programmes and autographs have the same instinct, without the same creativity. Between these come the biographers and bibliographers, whose quest for comprehensive accuracy demands creative research.

Raymond Toole-Stott's monumental five-volume world bibliography, *Circus and Allied Arts, 1500-1970* (1958-1971) is evidence of a dedicated, creative researcher over a lifetime, as is the forthcoming bibliographic work of Jean-Paul Jenack of Florida. Henri Thétard's great work, *La Merveilleuse Histoire du Cirque* (1947) is not a biographical encyclopaedia, but contains an interesting *Martyrologie du Cirque*, listing hundreds of circus-related fatalities. John Turner, the English researcher, has published two volumes of *British Circus Biography* (J. Turner, 1995, 2000) so far, but probably no more. He quotes John Clarke as an epigraph to Volume One, "Whoever is foolish enough to attempt to write a history of circus and circus families will perish in a madhouse." (Turner, 1995). That inventive sense of identity that we have recognized as a recurrent element in circus culture leads to enormous tasks for historians to glean genealogy from hyperbole.

The above recorders may seem out of place in section about artists, but there is a connection. As child psychologists, and parents, will recognise, there is a stage, usually around early adolescence, where a child will collect things, explored by Cook in his article on 'exchange values and moral panic' (2001). This urge, more noticeable in boys has been exploited most recently by 'sets' of things to acquire, like basketball cards and pokemons. This instinct to delve and arrange, as exemplified by Toole-Stott and the others is one which a child may easily satisfy, once aware of the great range and complexity of circus history.⁵³

⁵³ *Big Top Mania* is an American book which explores the phenomena of circus modelling and collection of 'circusania' (Horsman, 1994).

Returning to pictorial representations, we should consider circus in cartoons, especially political satire. Early, when we considered metaphors, we saw how the circus presents fertile ground, with its back flips, fine lines, safety nets, lions to face and so on. Children who are generally not interested in the political issues of the day may find their first graphic representations of clowns and circus in their parents' newspapers. The cartoons will, of course, exaggerate the characters and environment of the circus, with clowns more grotesque, high wires more dangerous, and with animals usually given human characteristics. So with these cartoons on the breakfast table, a child may often get an introduction to the extremes of circus long before entering the big top.

Circus photography has generally two polarities, with little between. Pages of pictorial books, programmes and fan magazines show artistes in their best poses, or they catch the dynamism of their moving acts at the perfect moment. On the other hand, books like Mary Ellen Mark's *Indian Circus* (1993) and Peter Lavery's *Circus Work* (1997) show circus scenes and characters unexpectedly frozen in the spotlight, with every saggy sequin, spotty face or damp armpit exposed for infinite contemplation. This is not the way of the circus, which is a moving, colourful, renewing process. Ellen Handy explores the history of circus photography in her essay "Photographing the Splendidest Sight That Ever Was" in *Images From the World Between* (Gustafson, 2001), concluding:

Photography, the most temporally exacting of mediums, has pictured many aspects of circus life, if not often its essence as a whole. And it appears to have looked more at the underside of the circus than at its joyous facade. Somehow, the subject of the circus has paradoxically inspired an extensive body of photographic representations that contradict the public consensus about the circus's basic characteristics, portraying it as a dark existential place of alienation. (Gustafson, 2001, p. 113).

Jack Rennert in *One Hundred Years of Circus Posters* (1974) claims that the circus industry invented the billboard. It was certainly a pioneer in depicting itself in public art works:

A turn-of-the-century trade publication, *Billboard Advertising*, observed that the circus was the first business in the United States to master the use of the poster. Initially featuring just one colour in its antebellum days, each fin-de-siècle railroad circus poster contained at least six or seven eye-catching colours. Some posters were designed as individual puzzle-like pieces that formed a single giant banner when pasted together; one banner, comprising thirty-two posters, was reportedly some 70 feet long. In 1896 Ringling Bros. spent \$ 128,000 for posters alone (Davis, 2002, p. 45).

The art of the circus poster is to grab the attention and hold it. The posters Davis evokes from the American 'golden age' often portray impossibilities, diagrammatic aerial somersaults with too many twists, elephants twenty feet high, parades of thousands, as indeed, exaggeration is an integral part of the circus experience. John Ringling said:

The language of the circus poster is unique. Originally it was the result of opposition shows striving to outdo one another in startling announcements. We understand now, although we did not at the time, that we had struck upon the child-appeal in another form. All children, and all primitive minds, love big words, and love exaggeration. The boy who sees four dogs in the back yard invariably says that there are a thousand dogs out there. When he offers to bet, he always wants to bet a hundred million billion dollars. He is not striving to deceive, but to express bigness in his own way [...]

The circus posters do the same thing. There is no effort to deceive the public but to express the hugeness of everything in figures that carry the idea. (Rennert, 1974, p. 3)

Many circus enthusiasts, including John Masefield, John Steinbeck, Kenneth Grahame and Mark Twain insist that circus appeals to children by its very nature, consistent with this thesis. It follows that circus poster art can be a vital visual stimulant for children. Touring circuses have always fly-posted on unauthorised walls and poles. This gentle form of lawlessness probably inspires children of the graffiti generation to advertise their own circus show in a similarly entrepreneurial way. Gerry Cottle, former owner of four touring circuses in Great Britain, told me that there was still no better way to advertise a circus than word of mouth, half price vouchers and posters.

European circuses, like the Swiss Circus Knie and the Polish State Circus have commissioned top contemporary artists to design their posters, which then became collectables. The French artist, Andre Francois writes:

With their play of resonances, my paintings appear to me more like fetishes or talismans. I don't believe in art for art's sake. Rather than producing a ritual gesture for the good of the community, today's artist paints for his own wellbeing [son propre salut] and, hopefully, others will also find theirs there. (Jacob, 1996, p. 78, trans. Bolton)

The idea of 'one's own salute' is very close to the **self-design** and individuation of the Monday's Child of our schema. The circus poster says to the public, "here's what I can do. Come and see if I can impress you!" much in the spirit of an assertive teenager.

Finally we return to Alexander Calder. Known for his mobiles, he was famous in Paris and America in the 1920's and 1930's for performances of *Calder's Circus*, a sort of 'Suitcase Circus' that he carried about in five trunks. Trained as an engineer and fascinated by toys and popular culture, he gradually assembled his mini-circus of performers and animals oddly made with wire, string, buttons and bits of fabric. Photographs of this eccentric work appear in circus art books, but compared to the attention to detail of the circus modellers mentioned earlier, Calder's objects seem unformed and childish with no aesthetic integrity.

However, there is a film of Calder animating his own show and it is only when seeing it in motion that one realizes the significance of the models. They move, they balance, they are animated by Calder the impresario, the ringmaster, the Prospero. It is a show.

His other wire sculptures and his drawings may look good, when static in the galleries, but *Calder's Circus* is an event, and these spindly figures depend on the show to come to life. The show was not always slick. Sometimes things did not work, but Calder relished the audience's tension caused by the artist's fallibility. Some audience members did not enjoy squirming while he tried a trick again and again, but enough did, and audiences of such status that his became the show not to miss in the highest artistic and society circles.

Howard Gardner, the psychologist who brought us *Multiple Intelligences*, (1983) celebrates Calder's understanding of the importance of childishness:

The tension between creation and chaos, between control and serendipity, constitutes the eternal lure of any circus, and the thrill of this particular circus performance. The audience laughs, but its nervousness is palpable [...]

Although children do not discuss existential issues in abstract terms, they are intimately conscious of this tension - this is why they are so attracted to myths and fairy tales, to witches, ogres, tricksters, and other gods and demons of ambivalence. (Venn and Weinberg, 1999, p. 171)

Here Gardner has made a point that is essential for this thesis. 'Existential vision', like literary and artistic theory, is not part of most children's discourse; but the tension, the bridging, the confluence between the known and the unknown, what Koestler called the 'nexus' of creativity (1976), has a sub-intellectual, primal effect on young minds, and thus is essential to our enquiry. Gardner continues:

As a masterful artist, Calder intuitively understood and exploited these tensions. Some of his works spoke more audibly (and visibly) to the innocent child in us, others to the sophisticated adult. The Circus strives toward a universal language - one equally comprehensible by persons of all ages, drawn from cultures of every stripe. (p. 171).

In the same volume, the theatre director Robert Wilson recalls, "Baudelaire once said that genius is childhood recovered at will. I think that is true of Calder's Circus." (p. 172). Unfortunately, the essence of *Calder's Circus* cannot be recovered at will. The work is described in the catalogue as "Mixed media: wire, wood, metal, cloth, yarn, paper, cardboard, leather, string, rubber tubing, corks, buttons, rhinestones, pipe cleaners, bottle caps. 54 x 94 x 94 in. (137.2 x 239.4, x 239.4 cm) overall". But the ringmaster has left the building. The apparent deadness and uselessness of his personal toy world, now growing old and sanctified in the Whitney Museum epitomises what can also happen to the circus when shown in two unmoving dimensions. Photography intrigues us by presenting circus like a corpse in a mortuary; cartoonists and metaphoric artists use it as common currency. However, the most significant circus art remains that made by its own associated contemporaries, the post-impressionists, by its own advertising posters and, as happens in primary schools all over the world, by children who, like Calder, feel they have the power and the duty to make the impossible happen at their hands, in three dimensions or two.

I know, from the reams of pictures that children have drawn for me following performances in schools, that circus is no great challenge to a child with a pencil. They will draw the highest stilts, the most rickety unicycle and the most irrational representation of a surrounding audience, with no apparent inhibitions. A child's eyes are eager to see, and the young brain eager to register, impressions. What they see of circus, represented on paper or canvas, will help them form an image of what circus may be. At the age of four to ten they are as visually creative as any professional artist, and possibly less self-conscious. I imagine most would be quite nonchalant about seeing their own painting hanging next to, say, Léger's *Les Acrobates*, or Renoir's *Jongleurs à la Cirque Fernando*. So, as they progress through childhood and adolescence, they may understand that circus is not a closed world, but open to their own unique contribution, in real participation as much as in visual representation.

3.11 Opposition to the Circus

My mother said, I never should
Play with the gypsies in the wood.
British nursery rhyme.

There is a tradition of cautioning children against the circus, widespread among parents and teachers. Most often it is on the grounds of alleged cruelty to animals, but there has always been a general undercurrent that circus is low and corrupting. As early as 1685 we have Sir Robert Southwell warning his son, the honourable Edward, about the entertainments to be found at the Bartholomew Fair. He asks the big questions - why pay to watch danger, why someone would play the clown rather than undertake honest labour and why the misshapen would celebrate their afflictions rather than live in odium. He writes:

The main importance of this fair is not so much for merchandize, and the supplying what people really want; but as a sort of Bacchanalia, to gratifie the multitude in their wandering and irregular thoughts. There you see the rope-dancers get their living merely by hazarding of their lives, and why men will pay money and take pleasure to see such dangers, is of separate and philosophical consideration. You have others who are acting fools, drunkards, and madmen, but for the same wages which they might get by honest labour, and live with credit besides. Others, if born in any monstrous shape, or have children that are such, here they celebrate their misery, and by getting of money, forget how odious they are made.
(Frost, 1874, p. 56)

The first actions we find opposed to animal cruelty are in the nineteenth century, appearing alongside the flourishing movements against slavery and against child-labour. Richard Martin, MP, known as 'Humanity Dick' formed the SPCA, later the RSPCA in London in 1824. Today, groups with similar aims flourish, the largest, with untold and undisclosed wealth is PETA, the American-based People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. This organisation and others like it maintain a steady campaign advocating the end of the use of animals in circuses. On the other side of the debate are circus owners, enthusiasts and some representative organisations who occasionally publish

their rationale on smaller, less glossy leaflets. The most visible proposals of the retention case are the shows themselves, which continue to draw big crowds.

Increasing numbers of national and local governments are banning, within their jurisdictions, shows with performing animals. These decisions are often prompted by an orchestrated campaign of letters to representatives and to local papers.

All these factors will play on the mind of a young person developing an opinion about circus. Highly visible demonstrations, often attended by young protesters, are frequently organised to target touring circuses, and these have interesting effects. Lennon Brothers told me that they always inform the Animal Rights groups that they are coming, to generate a protest group, which in turn generates ticket sales. Inside the big top, the ringmaster has some ironic comments about "those people outside", along with a reassuring homily about the lineage, health, safety, happiness and longevity of the performing lions and the elephant. Other circuses, like Gerry Cottle's and Australia's Circus Royale, have bowed to the pressure. Royale have gained many friends and great publicity by presenting a group of performing Friesian cows. They are still at pains to reassure a sensitive public: "We take particular pride in our animals, who we regard as priceless. We well exceed the requirements of the RSPCA and the National Standards for the Care and Management of Circus Animals." (Barry Nixon, www.circusroyale.com 2004)

Although most young people, like their parents, will not get the full picture from leaflets, news reports and circus advertising, both sides of the debate have clear arguments, which may be briefly stated as follows:

Against animals in circus.

- ? Cruelty of confinement and transport
- ? Brutality of training
- ? Humiliation in performance
- ? Wrong ecological message to children about power and domination
- ? Danger to people of wild animals

For animals in circus

- ? A traditional culture
- ? An extension of pet ownership
- ? Less inhumane than horse racing, meat eating etc
- ? Inter-species communication
- ? Breeding stock of endangered animals
- ? Showing fine specimens to the public
- ? Circuses support and observe animal welfare regulations
- ? Cruelty is unacceptable

In my research I have spoken with many people who simply refuse to countenance captive and performing animals, and who, presumably, will feel a duty to influence children in their care. As we have seen, however, there is no guarantee that the views and values of a child will survive adolescence unchanged.

Today, the many biographies and autobiographies of animal trainers have become unfashionable, but still make very interesting reading. They range in tone from the occasionally shocking to the insightful and sympathetic. These include Keller (1962), Hough (2001), Brick (1960), Dhotre (1961), Hagenbeck (1909), Court (1954), Beatty (1946), (1965), Bouglione (1962), Chipperfield (1963; Chipperfield, 1975). From all these lives we get the strong impression that these trainers did their jobs because they loved animals. The American circus owner, Al G Barnes is described in the foreword to *Master Showman*. "Instead of the blatant, flaring type of person sometimes associated with the big outdoor shows, Al G. Barnes was soft-voiced, well-poised, mild-mannered, courteous and kindly, sympathetic and generous." However, among so many autobiographies, his is one of the few to describe moments to make the present-day reader wince. Bill is a bear:

One day he broke loose and jumped on a camel's back, frightening the animal into a panic. I grabbed a board and slapped Bill on the rump. As he leaped off the camel he charged at me. I still had the short piece of board in my hand, and I grabbed a tent stake in the other hand. He leaped at me and I thrust the stake into his mouth. He knocked it away with a blow and I jabbed him in the mouth with the piece of board. This kept up for several seconds, while the men were trying to come to my assistance. Finally someone threw a lariat about Bill's neck and dragged him away, and the fight was over. It was a dangerous few minutes, as Bill was determined to get me and he fought desperately. Needless to say, I fought desperately too, for a Russian grizzly bear is more than a match for any man.

(Barnes, 1938, p. 276)

Mary Chipperfield and her husband were found guilty of mistreating circus animals on their farm in England, largely on video evidence of their beating an elephant, a camel and a baby chimpanzee. These apparently indefensible actions were nonetheless vigorously justified by Chipperfield and defence witnesses, as being reasonable in the circumstances. Certainly, the Chipperfield videos have done more than anything else to discredit the circus animal tradition in the United Kingdom.

The writer, Pof! (sic) wrote a column in the British Jugglers' journal, *Catch* during the 1990's. Although she is an aerialist, and does not work with animals, she often provoked a strong reader reaction by justifying traditional animal acts in circus. In one article, she targets her critics' anthropomorphism. Responding to the phrase "sad circus animals", she writes, "and penguins look like waiters, and bears look cuddly, and mice look like bloody Beatrix Potter characters [...]" (Pof!, 1994). In my article *Animal Liberation, a Fantasy*, I proposed a more objective look at the issue, projecting forward to a time when

we will suddenly realize that our urge to 'consume' timber, rubber, minerals, coffee, energy and real estate means that the gorilla, the tiger, the elephant and the aardvark are being squeezed out of their remaining available habitat. The cry will go up from the chattering classes "What can we do before it's too late?" I am hoping that an enterprising conservationist will come up with a solution, an idea so

audacious that it's never been considered before, an idea so bold, so direct, that its message cannot be ignored, an idea that may just reverse the rush to species destruction, and persuade the human multitude that the earth is to be nurtured and shared, not consumed. (Bolton, 2001)

The 'audacious idea' is simply a circus with the accent on conservation. Bridie Bottari, in *The Last Cirkus* has a similar idea. The show in her novel is deemed a 'Travelling Conservation Exhibition – Type H/E. (Hist/Ed).' This is in the near future, when greed and 'civilisation' have destroyed most natural habitats, or:

ensuing population explosions and localised wars dealt the final blows, and fauna friendly environments were eliminated altogether. Zoos became a necessity, a sanctuary. And those early sporadic and unconnected breeding and conservation projects soon became an orchestrated campaign. With the 'wild' gone, animals were now found only in zoos, period. The circus, clutching tightly to the zoos' coat-tails, managed to carve itself a niche as a legitimate travelling/educational/entertainment arm of the zoological bandwagon. (Bottari, 1995, p. 11)

Rarely do performers in the new animal-free circuses condemn the practices of their predecessors and colleagues in traditional circus. *Cirque du Soleil* flirted briefly with the public relations advantage of human circus. Guy Laliberté, their director, cited in *The New American Circuses*, said in their early days, 1988, "I would rather give jobs to three artists than feed one elephant." (Albrecht, 1995, p. 219). *Cirque du Soleil* went on to work with the Swiss *Circus Knie*, famous for its exotic animals acts. Gilles St Croix, Soleil's co-founder, later created *Cheval Theatre*, an immensely popular show, which like *Zingarro* in France, generated huge audiences for a circus very close to its equestrian roots of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Albrecht's book describes the role of the American animal protection organisations, PETA, APIA and SPCA. He also cites some of the more articulate justifications for animal training, such as this by Paul Binder, founder of Big Apple Circus:

We spend a great deal of our time, energy, effort and treasure on the care, training and presentation of animals.

We do it from a profound belief that the ritual of circus must admit and include the confrontation and resolution of man and beast. It is in our view the beginnings of a solution of living with nature and her issue on this planet [...] We have to alert the public to the logical end [of the argument]. Are we saying that man and animals don't belong together? If so animals are doomed." (Albrecht, 1995, pp. 219,20)

Dr Kylie-Worthington surprised her commissioning body, the RSPCA, when her extensive study of animals in zoos and circuses concluded:

Many humans' lives would be substantially impoverished if they were not able to associate with and even live with animals. Also, it can be argued that many animals' lives would be impoverished equally because they have no contact with human beings [...] Circuses are perfectly placed to do

scientific research on cognition: how and what different species can learn, how and what they think, and how they perceive the world. They could play an important role in educating the public and heightening the respect for individual animals, their unique intelligences and amazing abilities.
(Kiley-Worthington, 1990, pp. 221,22)

So we see strong and emotive arguments echoing around the growing child, who often takes a strong position on one side or the other. With the anti-circus animals side having the predominance in terms of articulation, it is worth remembering the bond that exists between children and their pets, and how this may develop. Here is Pof! again, still indignant: "If you keep a pet, you should ask yourself why, and take a long hard look at how much time it spends alone before you start hurling accusations at the rest of us. Can your dog do tricks? Is it well-behaved?" (1994) In *Lion Boy*, a fifteen-year-old boy's interest becomes a passion, and a passion becomes a career:

For Cedric [Crossfield] not only likes lions. He intends to make the study and training of them his whole life's work.
"If they attack me now I shall die happy". And if you find that rather difficult to believe, Cedric will explain quite simply. "It's just that I love lions as much as all that."
(Clark, 1954, p. 10)

The proposed Kate Winsett film about Mabel Stark, like its predecessor, The French film *Roselyne and the Lions* (Beineix and Forgeas, 1989) will spark a new interest in working with big cats. The Stark film, to be based on Robert Hough's fictionalized *Final Confession* [...] (Hough, 2001), may also highlight the erotic nature of a close inter-species relationship. The touch, the warmth and the smell of our pets are so often what endears them to us, as well as their docility and apparent affection. It is not unreasonable to see a progression to a relationship, à la Jane Goodall (1972) or Dian Fossey (1988) with larger mammals. Whereas Cedric Crossfield and his like may never see themselves as high-profile field researchers in Africa, they may reasonably believe in the possibility of joining a circus, to enjoy the proximity and relationship with domestic and exotic animals.

Returning to Sir Robert Southwell's caution to his son, it is inescapable that criticism of circus is to a large extent class-related. When I have visited a traditional Australian circus I am struck by the ethnic diversity of the audience compared with that of the theatre. The circus is open to all, without cultural inhibitors. It is also affordable, The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2003) reports that in 2002 audiences (as a percentage of the population) were as follows:

Popular Music Concerts (including hotels and festivals)	26.4
Theatre, (including Theatre in Education, community theatre and more)	18.0
Dance, (including ethnic, folk and school performances)	10.9
Circus (simply defined as travelling companies of performers)	9.2
Classical Music	9.0

Circus, largely unsubsidized, largely un-reviewed and supposedly dying out, still clearly has a devoted public. Western Australia, with no resident circus except Lunar Circus

who are currently on a world tour, has the highest attendance rate of 12.2%, or 174,200 per year (ABS).

Some significant trends emerge from recent surveys in France. In the 1990's circus attendance rose from 9% to 13%, another two million visits. The 2001 survey by sociologist Florence Levy interviewed four thousand audience members of ten 'new' circuses, in Paris, 1996-2000. Significantly, answering an open question about the comparison with traditional circuses, only 5% of respondents mentioned the absence of animals as a significant factor. Also important was the fact that between a half and two thirds of visitors came without children, and mostly with friends (Levy, 2001).

A very comprehensive French survey in 1993 asked important questions about criticisms of the circus. Participants said they agreed or strongly agreed to the following statements:

Uncomfortable seats	43%
Often too far to travel	41%
Poorly advertised	37%
Too expensive	32%
Parking problems	35%
Shows not original	30%
Cruelty to Animals	23%

(Nicolas, 1993, p. 8)

So, to the wider French circus-going population, animals' performance was not a major issue in 1993. However, in interviews with audiences of 'new circuses' (less than five years old), the animal issue scored 40%, behind only bad seating, unoriginality and bad advertising. It may be deduced that there is a trend away from animal circuses, or that a new form of circus has emerged in which animals are irrelevant, or both. To balance these negative questions, I shall briefly mention some of the positive opinions expressed in this very interesting survey.

A sample from the 'I totally agree' list:

Circus is a school of perseverance and courage	80%
It is a spectacle with no deception	63%
One must take children to the circus	48%
Circus produces the strongest emotions	35%
Circus is the sort of life one dreams about	16%

(Nicolas, 1993, p. 7)

In France, both traditional and contemporary circuses enjoy public respect and government assistance, but there is one very telling concluding note to the survey: "The percentages cited consist of a representative sample of the national population ages fifteen plus. The sixteen percent of French people hostile towards all circus performance are not cited." (Nicolas, 1993, p. 8.) One wonders whether dance, opera or theatre has an avowedly 'hostile' percentile of the population.

Back in Australia, Sharon McCutcheon highlights a subtle class distinction apparent even in her high school. She cites in an email to me, March 2004:

the perception of Circus as "lacking" in Culture in some way (when compared to the Theatre!); this blurring of the High/Low Class distinction that is usually present in the Arts makes teachers feel uncomfortable - "out of their comfort zone" and the fact that Circus attracts a VERY DIFFERENT AND DIVERSE array of students than your average Drama class- something the staff don't understand and therefore don't/can't condone. (Personal email, 2000).

Sharon's school circus does not involve animals at all, yet still, her down-to-earth, informed determination is in sharp contrast to the verbose, emotional dogma so often found in animal liberation literature. Peter Singer, the eminent philosopher, and author of *Animal Liberation* (1977), lends his name to a book entitled *Save The Animals! 101 Easy Things You Can Do*, which includes a chapter on circus called *The Show Must NOT Go On*. In a very telling foreword, Linda McCartney wrote "We stopped eating meat the day we happened to look out our window during Sunday lunch and saw our young lambs playing happily, as kittens do, in the fields. Eating bits of them suddenly made no sense. In fact, it was revolting." (Singer, Dover and Newkirk, 1991). How nice to have Sunday lunch, and how marvellous to have fields and "our lambs" playing like kittens visible through the window. Young Cedric Crossfield, growing up in Middleton, Lancashire, "a big industrial town [where his] father has a good, steady job at a local works" (Clark, 1954, p. 10) clearly experienced, like Linda McCartney, an epiphanic moment regarding animals. His, however, was at Bellevue Zoo, Manchester, at the age of nine. "I walked around and I saw [the lion] Sultan. That's when I made up my mind." (p. 10). Hopefully Sir Robert Southwell's son, and all young people, retained the right and the ability to make up their minds, whatever they might be told by their elders.

3.12 Representations of Circus Conclusion

I do not know how boys live through the wonder and the glory of such a sight.

William Dean Howells, writing about circus in *A Boy's Town*, 1890 (p. 96)

In the forgoing examination of the many representations of circus, I have looked at the interpretations, exaggerations, falsehoods and fantasies of circus that are presented by secondary media (outside circus itself). I consider this essential, as representations of circus hugely exceed actual experience of circus. I have attempted to suggest the ways in which young people might perceive, in how they see the circus, some of those elements of childhood that they instinctively feel they need to experience.

I have looked at circus as used in daily speech, and as it is portrayed in the media, in academic discourse, in juvenile and adult literature, in art, in theatre and in cinema, and how a derogatory image of circus may be fed to children by parents and teachers. "Highly demoralising," says Joyce. Anything that is demoralizing, or capable of confusing or confounding a moral system, will be vicariously attractive to growing children, themselves struggling to identify their place in society, and testing their world at various points to see where it might be penetrated or upset. Struggling to

show itself, although distorted by so many different media, circus still remains interesting, evocative, challenging and, just possibly, accessible to the young person.

From this tour through the world of circus representation, circus clearly offers many instances of the six elements – self-design, risk, trust, aspiration, fun and hard work. In 2001 I conducted a simple experiment to test the impressions of circus before and after practical experience. Four classes of year-ten theatre-arts students at Corpus Christi College, Perth, were asked to list adjectives, verbs and nouns they associated with circus. After a five-week course of circus skills training and then performing a little show to junior students, they were asked to repeat the exercise, with no reference to their earlier papers. From the results, the *adjectives* list will give some indication of the change of perception.

The 'before' list was headed by *funny* (27), followed by *fun* (apparently also an adjective, 21) After that came *big* (19), *exciting* (18), *loud* (12), *colourful* (11), *happy* (8), *bright* (7), *amazing* (6) and *entertaining* (5). Fifty other adjectives were used, scoring between 4 and 1.

In the 'after' list, there were some differences. Again *fun* (24) and *funny* (20) lead the list, followed by *happy* (16), *entertaining* (14), then some new words that had not even appeared five weeks before, *tricky* (10), *easy* (8) and *hard* (8).

Clearly, the students associated this activity with experiencing and producing happiness (not one of the official educational outcomes in the West Australian schools system.) (West Australian Department of Education, 2000) Significantly, the process of working with circus skills, and having to shape a show for younger (year-two) children, had focussed the minds of these students on the hard work involved. It is interesting that within the group, the skills were perceived equally as easy and hard.

In the next chapter we travel, like those students, beyond the representations, to circus practice itself, to see to what degree the six elements are consistent with the real experience of circus.

4. Manifestations of Circus Introduction

Narcissism, that's all it is. But what the fuck else do you think a circus is all about? Philosophy! Philosophy my ass! And the same goes for human nature! Want me to wreck my goddamn business? Listen! If the Fat Lady were not the fattest and the Thin Man the thinnest in the world - we're talking first principles now, buster - no one would pay to see them. Where are all your goddamn noble abstractions when the circus collapses and we're all of us out on the streets? Adaptation, boys and girls! Expediency! And to hell with nature!

Robert Coover, *The Romance of the Thin Man and the Fat Lady*, 1973, (p. 112)

Coover's emphatic ringmaster epitomises a common perception of circus – that it is a crass business of extremes and archetypes, with no place for reflection or humanity. However, reading histories and biographies, interviewing circus people, and above all, working in circus, gives new insights into the ethical, aesthetic and social values inherent in circus life. This chapter will examine the real circus. Again we shall be looking out for resonances with the six elements of childhood outlined in chapter two. After examining how circus is defined by its history, we will examine three manifestations of circus practice, amateur, traditional and the new circuses. Then our spotlight turns on three sites of contemporary participation in circus, on vocational circus schools, on community circuses, including primary and high schools, and on social circus projects. Finally in this chapter, drawing on what we have seen across the spectrum of the real or imagined circus, I shall offer a hypothesis about the deep and largely unrecognized significance of circus to the human psyche.

I have just used the words 'looking out for', 'spotlight', and 'spectrum', suggesting a metaphor of reliable visual examination. However, I feel I should refine this analogy before we embark on the next chapter. I imagine looking down at night at the vast, dark desert of circus scholarship. My expected options are to shine a spotlight down on one particular place in the darkness, which will be illuminated, but still isolated, as there are no roads to it, or alternatively, to stay at the edge of the darkness, and merge my light with neighbouring clusters, such as theatre, human movement, education, history or sociology. I have made another decision to rely less on the customary sharp-focussed spotlight of the researcher, and instead I use a floodlight to illuminate the whole field. I hope this light will be of use to future researchers.

As we move from visiting imaginary circuses to examine manifestations of circus as it is, we should briefly consider the paradoxical rules of engagement under which it operates. Just as, to many contemporary educators, the term 'circus school' seems oxymoronic, there are many paradoxes in the perception of circus. Everyone has an opinion about it, everyone recognises it, can describe it, and most people take moral positions regarding it. Its nature has been further simplified by its appropriation into metaphor.

However, the same people who will simplify the circus down to a cliché will also concede that it deals with mysteries and techniques that will always be inaccessible and unknown. This duality of known/unknown joins the list of other binaries inherent in the nature of circus:

In culture yet out of culture
It excites yet disturbs society
Its performers are sublime yet untrustworthy
It is deceitful yet true
Respectable yet dangerous
Populist yet deemed unpopular
The experience is intense, yet evanescent.

My argument is about the strength of these paradoxes - not their weaknesses. The experience of circus can be almost shamanic, whose revelations and changes are so strong that little comes near it as an adolescent rite of passage in our ritual-deprived culture. More paradoxes are revealed to initiates once they begin to produce and perform circus arts. They will discover psychic effects, bypassing the intellect. They will work hard to make it look easy, yet realize that awe can be generated by flummery. Then comes the understanding that the world often sees circus through a haze of ignorance disguised by bigotry. Many of these paradoxes will be scrutinized in this investigation, and will inform the conclusions regarding the correspondence of circus and childhood.

4.1 History

Dr Sengespiel, a historian who obtained an administrative job in the Circo Sarrasani, suddenly realized that stars and star turns had roots that went deep into the mysterious past. He began to make researches into the hidden origins of stardom, and applying to his work the most severe rules of criticism, lost his "way in the details and gave up the job as hopeless".

G J Renier, cited in J. Turner, 2000, (p. i)

We saw in chapter three that critics, artists, film-makers and academics are quite happy to perpetrate inaccuracies when representing circus, with a recklessness hard to imagine in another context. We have also observed that 'Circus is mendacious' (Stoddart, 2000, p. 3), and guards its truths and secrets jealously. As we turn now to the history and definition of circus, Renier (above) reminds us of the difficulty of the task.

My experience is that young people coming into circus have scant regard for its history. Unless blessed with a patient and competent teacher, they will often have a similar disregard for technical discipline. In the words of Lee Nelson, as a third-year student at *Circoarts*, New Zealand, "Just teach me the tricks." (Nelson, 2001) Nelson actually did submit to rigorous discipline under his trainers, but as for culture and history, he fully intends to make his own. Asked about his ambitions, he said, "To die a natural treasure, never to be mediocre, get paid lots to do cool tricks, work on cruise ships and found a lasting company." (Nelson, 2001)

I have found that circus history is significantly different from the patriarchal, militaristic, colonial history I was taught, and also different from the closed histories readily accessible to young people today - things like popular music charts, coca-cola collectables, sports statistics and 'retro' fashion statements. I call them closed because they are essentially owned and controlled by élites, with little access from outsiders. My reading of circus history leads me confidently to a conclusion that the book is not closed, and that you and I can make circus history.

The word 'circus' comes from Rome, where entertainments in the round or oval arena included chariot racing, gladiatorial combat and hunting and slaughter of exotic animals and Christians, but also trained animals, jugglers, acrobats and clowns. After the Roman Empire fell, so did the occurrence of mass entertainment. However the elements of circus continued throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, coming together, with the general exception of the combat and slaughter, in London, in 1768.

The received wisdom of circus history generally states that 'modern circus' began with Philip Astley's Equestrian Arena, at Ha'penny Hatch, near Westminster. However, details of this bastard birth, like the origins of the 20th century 'new circus', are blurred by coincidence, synchronicity, hyperbole and retrospective historicism. Like all the cultural stereotypes of 'The Circus', 'The Clown', 'The Juggler' and so on, most histories present us with 'The First Circus', of Philip Astley, in 1768. This is contested. Hotier, for instance cites Defraigne, in Vienna in 1755. (Hotier, 1995, p. 34) Coxe

mentions Henry Angelo at Wilton, Near Salisbury, performing horsemanship in a ring for Lord Pembroke, while Astley was still in the Army. (Hippisley-Coxe, 1980, p. 28). In addition to these scholars, alternative views of the nascent circus are found in Stoddart (2000), Speaight (1980), Thétard (1947), Croft-Cooke (1976), Frost (1875), Wykes (1977), Auguet (1974) and Jando (1977).

Hotier, in his chapter "The Pre-History of Circus" refers to chronicled examples of animal training in the 15th Century (1995, chap. 1). Chinese scholars proudly cite paintings and sculptures of acrobats and jugglers from the 10th century. (Fu, 1985). Contortionists and jugglers appear in the pyramids, from the 4th century BC. (Croft-Cooke, 1976, p. 7). Shamanic researchers, truly travelling pre-history, tell of magic and wonders performed with objects and animals by tribal 'witch doctors' and clowns. (Taylor, 1985) (Kirby, 1974). So we stretch back to what is possibly the earliest and simplest form of showmanship.

Just as the history of circus is elastic and inconclusive, so is its definition. Circus, Cyrk, Cirque, Circo, Zirkus etc. is known in almost every country in the world, but there are no absolutely consistent elements. Hotier lists his 'intangible characteristics'⁵⁴ (1995, p. 123), but it is possible to find significant exceptions to every rule. (I apologize for reducing his interesting paragraphs to one-word features, and I compile the following list aware that it contains some examples that Hotier would not consider circuses.) To be a circus, Hotier expects:

The Ring	yet Chinese acrobatics is performed face-on.
Animals (in the West)	yet even Gerry Cottle presented an animal-free circus
Clowns	yet Victoria Chaplin's <i>Cirque Imaginaire</i> was pure beauty
Beauty	yet <i>Archaos</i> was an anti-circus, glorifying ugliness
Nothing Intellectual	yet <i>Rock 'n Roll Circus</i> created political satires
Sequence of Different	
Emotions	yet many children's circuses are purely clowns, with no emotion but laughter.
Wholesome Entertainment	yet the <i>Bindlestiff Family Circus</i> and the <i>Circus of Horrors</i> are not recommended for children.

It seems there may be as many types of circus as there are theatre styles. It also seems that not only today, but for most of its history, circus has been available for re-invention. Despite its image of tradition, it has always been a pioneer. Between the earliest and the contemporary forms of circus is a procession of innovations and adventures, many of which have led the world. Not only have we seen artists and dramatists inspired by circus forms, but as Janet Davis argues, it has had a profound effect on the development of nations, particularly the USA. She examines the big shows of the golden age, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and proposes that they played a very significant part in opening up the country, influencing the young nation's view of technology, industry, internationalism, education, feminism, and

⁵⁴ Strange, how Hotier's word 'intangible' evokes two opposite meanings. It could mean 'inviolable, unassailable', but it could also mean 'ethereal and vulnerable'.

athleticism. (Davis, 2002). This influence is only realized in retrospect, but a reading of programme notes of *Circus Oz*, *Cirque Plume* and *Cirque du Soleil* are to be believed, much contemporary circus likes to believe it can influence the thinking of a society. *Circus Oz* certainly started with high ideals, and only slips when it attempts to do a circus **about** circus. Baudrillard warns against self-referential art in any form:

Art dies with inbreeding. This is not unlike the story of mad-cow disease and the animal food - live animals being made to eat pulverized dead ones. Art has, in this same way, begun to live off its own pulverized feed, a residue of old forms and of a diligently freeze-dried art history. Most importantly, art has devoured its own idea, or has been devoured by it - an incestuous autophagy, combined with a recycling of its own excrement for internal use.

(Baudrillard, 2003, p. 97)

Young people, discovering that they can write their own personal history through circus, may be over-influenced by teachers who only half know the traditions. This can result in stereotypical ringmasters, showgirls, and lots of 'clowning around'. Hopefully they will pass through his stage to a state of real creativity. It is thrilling to see young, new companies going 'back to the future' of circus. Hotier credits the Tsiganes (gypsies) for maintaining the circus mysteries throughout the Middle Ages continuing to the present day. (Hotier, 1995). Interestingly in the UK, Europe and Australasia, it is clear that 'New Circus' groups have modelled themselves on, or evolved the style of, nomadic tribes. Pierrot Bidon, creator of Archaos, started in 1975 with a collection of horse-drawn caravans, walking through France (Lesaing, 1981).

The gypsy tradition of circus had two defining conditions for survival: one, you instruct your family, and, two, you don't instruct anyone else. The 'New Circus' movement has jettisoned both of these rules. Most performers come from a non-circus background, and most of them have been involved in teaching - from informal 'kids circus workshops', via cooperative circus festivals, to joining the faculty of one of the dozen or so tertiary circus training schools around the world.

Circus fans and biographers have delighted in constructing family trees of the 'aristocracy' of circus; families like Knie, Ashton, Chipperfield, Hanneford, Gasser, and Hagenbeck. Usually from humble beginnings, they become more and more eminent, whereas traditional aristocracies rocket to the top (often from Royal patronage) and gradually dissipate over generations. When a circus dynasty becomes too big to function as an economic unit, it divides, as in the case of the Australian Lennons and Ashtons. (Cannon and St-Leon, 1997), (Fernandez, 1971). Compare these family trees with other famous families - united by a need to hold onto power (monarchies) or wealth and property (dynasties), and those whose creativity or expertise is inherited (Huxley, Waugh, Bach, Rosetti, Powys). Rarely do these inheritances go beyond two generations.⁵⁵ Circus families, however, seem to maintain their solidarity, and pass on their traditions, sometimes through four, five and six generations.

⁵⁵ Seven generations of Bach musicians are the remarkable exception.

For something so anonymously generic as circus (as in 'we went to the circus' and 'I don't like circus') the identification of families within the tradition is vitally important. One is reminded of the vitally important and extremely complex system of skin groups in Australian Aboriginal society. In traditional circus, inter-marriage between families of performers, though not arranged as in India, is at least encouraged, creating strategic links, business liaisons, and genetically modified acts. Circus genealogists, fans and circus people put great stock on weddings, which are often performed in the big top, with entire companies, including favoured animals as witnesses.

Certainly, circus communities are socially introverted. Children grow up as nomads, with little chance to interact with the wider community. (St. Leon and Ramsland, 1993) (Murray, 1958). At the age when most enter tertiary education, these young people are coming to the peak of their years of training, of their physical fitness, ability and marketable good looks. The family, the business, needs them. Promises are made, expectations of succession are re-affirmed. The hierarchical structure of circus reminds them constantly that the family rules, and to leave is betrayal. Titus Groan's leaving Gormenghast is scarcely less dramatic and painful than the departure from the big top of the heir to a circus dynasty (Peake, 1946).

Chris Waite's study of *Circus Oz - Utopian Entertainers* describes the early days of a new type of dynasty - a self-selected 'tribe', doing it the hard way, living by the mantras of equality, self-sufficiency, inclusiveness and so on. Their struggle with inevitable dissension, growth, failure and success, all the while living by an unwritten ideological code, could have led to an incestuous 'family' whose agreed ethos was the lowest common factor of disparate dreams. (Waite, 1985) (Broadway, 1999). *Circus Oz* continues to create and tour successful shows, twenty-seven years later, and includes some original members, including the photographer, the wardrobe designer, and one performer, Tim Coldwell. Finally, some members of *Circus Oz* have had children, but there was already a feeling of inter-generational inheritance, as members of the Flying Fruit Fly Circus, The Leapers, and now graduates from NI CA have joined *Oz*, and are becoming a new circus aristocracy in Australia.

It is as if members of this new circus species can choose their own parents. The question asked is not "Who are your father and mother?" but "Who or what got you started in circus?" Waite recalls a significant feature of *Circus Oz* recruitment, when the musical director asks the newcomer, not "What instrument can you play?" but "What would you **like** to play?" (Waite, 1985, p. 68)

4.2 Historical Circus Performers

The greatest wonders of the world, offered in all humility, at four in the afternoon on Saturdays and Sundays

Attributed to Philip Astley in Wykes, 1977, (p. 71)

This excerpt from a show bill epitomizes the ambivalent attitude of the circus manager to his public. Carmeli (1995) writes on this ambivalence, suggesting that although their lifestyle is transgressive, and their acts superhuman, circus people are essentially creatures of the bourgeoisie, and slaves to royalty, imperialism, commerce or any other

hegemony. He makes a convincing case, based on the reading of four mid-twentieth century circus books, whose authors are identified by Carmeli as middle-class.

I would timorously hope that children are in a 'class' of their own, and that their understanding of circus might be more ingenuous than those of the cited writers and their readers. Perhaps the very fact that circus is outlandish, but ultimately submissive, suits the spirit of the child, who, while ready to upset the parents by staying out late, would not yet consider leaving home.

This is a brief examination of some historical circus figures recalled to us in biography and autobiography. I intend to limit myself to three lives, a Lloyd, a Sanger, and a Wirth. I shall be looking for character traits and actions intrinsic to their roles as circus entrepreneurs recalling (or prefiguring) some of the six elements of our search. There are more famous names and more reliable memoirs in the circus canon, including Astley, Barnum, Franconi, Knie, the Ringlings, the Ashtons, the Smarts, Mills and Chipperfields and so on. I have no doubt that all of the above could offer salutary lessons but I would rather look at circus routes 'less travelled by' to see if we find consistent characteristics among lesser-known historical figures.

By their very nature few circus priorities are 'lesser known', and even fictional owner/ring masters like Blyton's *Galliano* (1972) and Pritchard's *Haxby* (1979) are self-promoters by nature and necessity. However, the name James Lloyd is not a circus byword unless you visited his small circus in England or Ireland in the nineteenth century, or unless you have read *Circus Life; Being the Life and Adventures and the World Travels and Experiences of an Artist and Circus Proprietor Now Aged 79 Years* (Lloyd, 1925).

GK Chesterton, in the preface, positions Lloyd's work significantly in relation to his own artform. "This is life at once more confused and more convincing than Literature" (vi). Then he goes on to put theory in its place vis-a-vis action:

The great difficulty in all our debates which are supposed to be so democratic, is that the pronouncement upon a problem is so often made by the man to whom it is only a theorem. I mean the man was not faced with the thing to be done, but only with the thing to be demonstrated. And both in the matter of living an individual life and of writing an individual book, Mr. Lloyd at any rate has been and gone and done it (p. vii).⁵⁶

Lloyd's father worked at Astley's in the early nineteenth century, and young James was clearly desperate to join the ranks of the circus himself. His breathless, staccato account of his boyhood adventures contains situations that any child would love to have witnessed. He tells of a gentleman, a Mr. Thorp, a slack rope performer, who came to the theatre drunk one night and was not permitted to perform. His pay was stopped, so he said he would not perform anymore. "He got on his rope to where it was fastened,

⁵⁶ I have explored the relation between the artist and the theorist in my article "The Philosopher on the Flying Trapeze: Lyotard and Léotard" , *Discourse* 9 (2003).

and while sitting on the rope he cut it. Down he fell, and he never performed again." (p. 13). On another occasion young James got into the sort of mischief that boys dream about, an incident very reminiscent of Bart Simpson, the 'I didn't do it' kid:

I nearly set the theatre on fire. I went into the property room where the hemp or tow was kept for the making of torches. I loved to see it flare so I set light to some. A bit of the lighted tow fell into the box of tow and set a light to two bundles, which caused a lot of smoke. I turned the box upside down, and put it out. The stage manager rushed into the property room, and asked what was the matter. I said I saw the hemp on fire and turned the box over and put it out. Mr. West said I was a good boy, and gave me a threepenny bit (p. 13).

Throughout his life, Lloyd had the ability to turn catastrophe, even tragedy, to advantage, and to come away smiling. He writes: "It is so pleasing in the mind to get over trouble." (p. 60). After a series of disasters including dying horses, wrecked wagons and drunkenness, and two days without sleep,

the sun shone again, and there was good business. There are no two days alike with a circus. The amount of trials and troubles will make a man ever ready for any eventuality. We can bear easy what we have borne long. A man used to vicissitude is not easily dejected. (pp. 46/47).

This clearly represents his attitude to life, as later he writes:

I got so callous and indifferent to all that happened – accidents with the carriages and horses through drunken men. It's strange how soon I forgot the past. I got so I smiled at calamity. (p. 77)

Looking at the 1925 photograph of the septuagenarian author, once reported as 'England's greatest bare-back rider' we see an upright figure with white hair and moustache, a crumpled suit and his right hand on a chair back. After reading *My Circus Life*, we look again at the picture and notice that he is standing with his back to a velvet curtain, looking as if into a ring to see that all is going well, and we can imagine that at any moment he could rise into a handstand on the chair or lift it and balance it on his chin. We certainly know that his stern face could split into a broad smile and that deep chest heave with laughter as it did that time the horse was electrocuted:

Six men attempted to put the horse off the live rail. It was funny. All the men were electrified. I got a pole and levered the horse off the rail. Its neck was burnt, and the animal was dead. I put in a claim, but got little compensation (p. 77).

Fun is one of our six trace elements of childhood. Lloyd's life, told so vigorously in his autobiography, teaches the lesson that life can be fun if you determine to enjoy it. But he is no laughing spectator; as Chesterton says, Lloyd 'has been and gone and done it'. For Lloyd the circus was a life of continual application and endeavour. Like Saturday's child, he 'work[ed] hard for a living':

To be a circus proprietor you ought to know how to splice ropes, sew canvas, to box a wheel, shoe a horse, make your seating and be a letterer, and not afraid of work, and an early riser: and be a performer, know the country and the best seasons for each part; and be Jack of all Trades. (p. 77)

Like James Lloyd, another nineteenth century circus proprietor, 'Lord' George Sanger has an eminent author to preface his book. Kenneth Grahame (of *Wind in the Willows*) writes in awe of this man of action. Like Chesterton, Grahame is clearly impressed by the magnitude of the achievements of circus life: "from the moment that he first took over a circus [he] seems to have recognized the one and only profession for his powers, and never looked back." (Sanger, 1938, p. xxv). Like many other circus writers, he sees Sanger as a Prospero: "For a magician George Sanger really was, sending out his Ariels along all roads of the world." (p. xxvi). If these two great writers can dream in these terms, how much more inspiring the circus life can be for young imaginations. Thursday's child has far to go. We are looking for aspects of circus that fire the imagination of children who, like the self-styled 'Lord' George Sanger can design their own lives and map their own routes and travel as far as they like.⁵⁷

Sanger was a master of **self-design, work** and **aspiration**. Starting as a spruiker with his father, who had learned a bit of "conjuring and hanky panky" at sea, by the age of forty-six George bought Astley's in London, Britain's foremost permanent circus building. He recalls:

As a little boy I had been taken to Astley's by my father, and sitting in the gallery, entranced by the performance, I thought I would give the world to become the proprietor of such a show. On the Boxing Night of 1871 I remembered this visit and desire of mine as I looked round the brilliant crowded house of which I was now the owner. I had achieved another of my ambitions, and my heart went out in thankfulness to the Providence that had been so kind to me, while at the same time there was a dash of sorrow in my cup of joy, inasmuch that my dearly loved parents had not lived to share it with me (p. 171).

His autobiography, like many ripping yarns, tells of ambushes, fights, deaths, animal escapes, all interspersed with examples of affection, dedication and solidarity. Even the chapter headings speak of this duality:

- v. The Scourge and Some Strange Remedies
- xi. Grim Tragedy and Legal Farce
- xxvii. I Lose my Father and Gain a Wife

⁵⁷ Willy Ramsay was eight years old when he joined a youth circus in Pennywell Road, Pilton (made famous in *Train Spotting*). Within a year he had toured Scotland, visited England and France and appeared on television in the same show as Marcel Marceau. In his teens he joined the Gerry Cottle Circus. In his twenties he married into the family and performed in an award-winning bare-back act. By his thirties he was in Hollywood, coaching and choreographing Angelina Jolie in the bungee scene in the film *Tomb Raider*. He manages European tours of *Circus of Horrors* and is in constant demand as an aerial performer and teacher all over the world. Pilton's story is told in Bolton, (1986), (1988)

- xxx. My First Child is Born and I Lose My Mother
 xxxi. I Meet York's Lord Mayor and Many Misfortunes

I have not included optimism and improvisation among the six particular qualities that we are pursuing. I believe both are the birthright of children, for whom pessimism is not a viable option, and whose daily contact with the world requires constant experimentation. These circus proprietors in this sense never grew up and continued to pit themselves against any challenge that arose and succeeded ultimately by their own resources, often with the solidarity of family and company and, it should be said, with huge luck which they seem to create themselves.

Touring independent circus companies today are being rendered inoperable in the United Kingdom by new licensing regulations, and there is a possibility of the same thing happening in Australia. At the same time, global entertainment enterprises – television, cinema, and chains of 'family restaurants' are growing stronger. It is hard not to see this as part of a political tendency, possibly the 'new world order', where individual and family companies and small businesses are being repressed and eliminated by bureaucracy, while more and more power goes to the big companies. It is astonishing that the circus, the epitome of the rogue enterprise, operating out of the mainstream, can exist at all.

Anyone, including children, trying to establish and maintain an individual identity, faced with the awesome power of corporate culture, can take inspiration from the ingenuity of circus people. They are often said to be the best amateur veterinarians; after all they have generations of experience and invested interest in their animals' good health. Today only accredited vets are supposed to treat animals and few have experience with elephants and lions. In the nineteenth century, Lloyd and Sanger were part of the circus sub-culture of do-it-yourself, and their talents often extended to medical care of their own families. When George Sanger's father found the family stuck in the middle of a smallpox plague, he acted:

When the pustules on my sister were fully developed, he got us other children together and operated on us. His instrument was a long darning-needle. This he passed through the upper part of the muscle of each one's right arm. Then into the tiny wound on each side he rubbed a little of the syrum taken from the pustules of the sufferer. I cannot think of the operation even now without a shudder, but the results were all that could be wished (Sanger, 1938, p. 23).

In the same era, James Lloyd confronted another pestilence in a similar way:

We had at that time five children. One had the measles. I put the four others with her who had the complaint. They all had the measles together. It saved a lot of bother (Lloyd, 1925, p. 24).

Today, we protect our children by every means we can. A Perth woman recently said to me, "My son is nineteen and I've just realized he has never been in trouble in his life. He just couldn't cope". She lived in dread of his being confronted by a thug, losing his

car, or having his heart broken by a lover. One of our trace elements of childhood is **risk**, and the stories of these men who lived in hazard everyday and who still lived to a happy old age, must be seen as an inspiration to children to seek adventure, thereby to grow into maturity.

Most figures from recorded circus history, as in most histories, are men, but since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, women of great talent and courage began to claim their own pages in the circus record. America's great circus pantheon includes Lilian Leitzel, Mabel Stark, Bird Millman and the great Australian-born equestrienne, May Wirth. A brief summary of her life is full of the features so often found in juvenile fiction, which are there because they appeal to children. She was born (in Queensland) of mixed heritage, her father John Zinga being a Mauritian acrobat, and her mother an Anglo-Indian. (St-Leon, 1999). They left Australia leaving little May (sometimes Mae) to be adopted by Marizles Wirth and her husband John Martin. She was already an accomplished acrobat and Marizles set to train her in 'rosin-back' – equestrian acrobatics, or 'voltige'. The Martins already had a daughter, the beautiful Stella. Photographs of the period show May as a tough looking bruised but defiant tomboy, while Stella, who achieved none of May's success, was clearly the boss's daughter. So May began as a 'Cinderella'. At seventeen she and her adoptive family were in the USA, invited by John Ringling to join 'The Greatest Show on Earth'.

A year later she had her only serious accident in the ring, slipping from her rearing horse and catching a foot in a restraining strap, and the horse, used to hearing signals from May, continued to canter around the ring: "for five full circuits while her head repeatedly struck the ring curb like a wrecking ball." (Kirk, 1972, p. 58) After some months she recovered completely and went on to become the circus's main attraction, billed as 'The Greatest Bare-Back Rider of All Time'. Like many great artists she impressed her peers by mastering tricks whose true difficulty could only be appreciated by other riders. On horseback facing the rear, she would execute a back twisting somersault to land facing forward.

Her work ethic was legendary. She would practise at every opportunity and had a series of huge white horses whom she loved dearly. The press said: "pretty of face and finely formed, she is the acme of ease and grace but she does not rely on her physical attractions for her success. She is an equestrienne in all that the word implies." New York Clipper (Ogden, 1993, p. 375) She wore a short tunic and a trademark bow, but the photos show a strong woman, more tennis star than showgirl. She epitomized the new woman that Davis describes in *The Circus Age*:

In the collapsible canvas world of the circus, these "New Women" seemingly erased corporeal boundaries between the sexes. Women performers proudly displayed rippling bodies while demonstrating impressive feats of strength and handling dangerous animals.
(Davis, 2002, p. 82)

In all the above features, her hardship, her determination, her triumphs, and her love of horses, May Wirth can be seen as an attractive role model for a growing girl. Perhaps another inspirational element in her life is that at 22 she married her

childhood sweetheart Frank. When she eventually retired from the ring, she joined his agency business and they were still married and working together when she died in 1978 aged 82. May Wirth was celebrated on an Australian postage stamp in 1987 along with Con Colleano. Why these world famous Australian artists are so little known in their home country can only be explained by the fact that they were not in sport, theatre, or music, whose cultures have historians, libraries and whole departments to honour their stars. By contrast, this is the circus - that ephemeral, transient, transgressive, unacceptable, motley troupe. Young people, however, if only they can escape the pincer-like hype of pop and sport, if they can look beyond Britney and Thorpey, will find in the true stories of circus heroes all they need to spark their imagination, and to inspire them to work hard, to risk all and to create the best possible life for themselves.

4.3 Traditional Circus

Walk up! Walk up! See this show while you live! For you'll be dead a long time!

Traditional Australian circus call, cited by Mark St Leon.

After attending scores of circus performances, interviewing many dozens of performers, and reading a large number of books and articles about the traditional, touring circus, I have the task of summarizing all this, and identifying occurrences of those characteristics that have some synteny with the identified elements of childhood.

My chosen solution is to present just one interview, with someone who may seem a typical traditional circus performer. Geoffrey Lennon is a son of Lindsay Lennon, one of Australia's foremost circus proprietors. He has always worked with the circus, and in 2001 was managing *Lennon Brothers' Circus* in Penrith, New South Wales. Among his many roles in the show, he presented the lions; he was what is still commonly called 'the lion tamer'. The incident that brought unwelcome headlines to the show is summed up on an animals' rights website:

A circus audience in Sydney, Australia watched as lion trainer, Geoffrey Lennon of the Lennon Brothers Circus, was mauled by two of the lions. According to spectators, one lion jumped on Lennon soon after the act began with the second quickly joining in. Circus staff used water hoses in order to free Lennon, who was treated for cuts and wounds to his chest, back and buttocks.

www.animaldefenders.org.uk 2004

I interviewed Geoffrey Lennon in Gosford, NSW, some months after this incident, and at that time he was still running the circus, though not presenting the lions. Talking with him, I felt I was simply listening to the victim of a workplace accident. "Why do I do it? It's part of my upbringing. It's what I do." He explained that he had purchased this group of lions, and they were not as predictable as the group Lennon's had raised themselves. Why did it happen? "Who knows? They could have eaten me eight months ago. Why didn't they? There was something in the air that day. Penrith is a country

area, there are animal smells on the wind, and maybe a cattle truck was passing." How does he feel towards those lions now?

It's just their natural instinct I suppose. I was in the wrong position at the wrong time [...] He came at me from behind; it was like being hit by a truck. You have to play dead, or they'll rip you apart. The other got my shoulder, and it was tug-o-war. This meant their feet were on the ground, which is good for me, all teeth, no claws. The one biting my back, he just left holes, nothing torn away [...] in fact, I had no muscle damage [...]

My brother Warren was watching the show. He put down his kids and came to help. The bloke by the door was frozen in shock, which probably gave the lions a few more seconds at me [...] They know Warren [...] his stick broke [...] they let go of me and went for him. The other bloke's come in, he threw the pedestal at the lion [...] they ran away [...] I got up and walked out. I had to do it for the audience. They gave me a standing ovation. I got through the curtain and a couple of blokes had to hold me up.

There was an animal liberator round the back. She could have sprayed some sort of female scent to get them going. In America they've done that. They've used ultra-sonic whistles to stir them up. They'll go to any extreme to make it look as if the animals are suffering.

Lennon believes that most people watch his act as they would watch motorbike racing, for the excitement and the potential danger. He is happy to move away from the 'dominating the wild beast' style of presentation. "I hate the whip. The lions hate the whip. I would rather just use the two sticks. If I knew how they did it, I would like to do an act like those trainers who can lie down with their lions."⁵⁸ (Interview, Lennon, 2002).

Lennon presents himself as an artisan/showman. He admits his faults. He respects both his animals and the audience. He acknowledges that his brother saved him. Excluding the basic arguments about whether we have any right to incarcerate and present animals at all, Lennon represents the values of calculated **risk**, **trust**, **aspiration**, **hard work** and good **humour** that this research is investigating. Although Lennon cannot singly represent the vast spectrum of people who work in traditional circus, there are some aspects of my interview with him that resonate with much of my experience, and which may have some significance in the way young people receive their understanding of circus. He is articulate and friendly, but not scholarly. His words are colloquial, not in the style of a press release, policy document or official disclaimer. If you only see him in the ring, he is a distant figure, grandly announced, and performing impossible things. If you meet him outside his caravan, as I did on that occasion, he is simply another working man, supposedly resting after an accident. He tells the story of what happened, he acknowledges his debt to his brother, he wonders about his future, and he admits that he does not know all the mysteries of his trade. If young people meet circus artists outside the ring, as they do in circus schools, they will

⁵⁸ Lennon is proud of the good health of his lions: "The average life of a lion in the wild is ten years, ours are up to twenty five."

become aware of this contrast between the real and imagined personae. It still affects me every time I meet an eminent circus artist. I discover they are people. They can talk, laugh, cry and bleed like the rest of us. What this discovery means for a young person is incalculable. In some instances the child may be disappointed, but I believe more often, if that child is undertaking circus training herself, she will be filled with inspiration. She may realize that she, like Geoffrey Lennon, John McDonnell or Dolly Jacobs⁵⁹, is also a human being with some skill and enthusiasm. She will recognize that the circus, with its combination of mystery and familiarity, its shape and its smell, and the excitement of the crowd is capable of transforming them, and indeed her, into this stupendous being – the circus artist. What a great opportunity, at any stage of development, for a child to experiment with her identity, her **self-presentation**, and to test herself against her **aspirations**.

4.4 Amateur Circus

Gross National Happiness.

Official maxim gracing the postage stamps of the kingdom of Bhutan

Only in the last fifty years, and especially in the last decade, has Youth Circus evolved as a widespread activity. (Sugarman, 2001) As we have seen in the reading of circus literature, the very notion of children training and performing circus acts had been highly controversial in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶⁰ In contrast to the necessary rigour and occasional brutality in training children for life in the ring, today's youth circus is essentially an amateur activity, rarely leading to a professional career. In order to make connections and to look for continuity, we shall now consider amateur circus as it has been manifested in many cultures over many centuries.

In China, there is archaeological evidence of acrobatics practised since the Stone Age. Each dynasty leaves evidence of development in techniques, and movement of acrobatic practice across classes, from peasants to the nobility and back again. Fu argues that modern Chinese acrobatics has a two thousand year-old tradition, whose earliest form would have been in hunting ceremonies, and which later became stylized as folk arts. (Fu, 1985). To clarify terms, 'acrobatics' is the English translation of *zaji*, which is what we see when Chinese 'circus' companies tour the world. *Zaji* includes acrobatic and aerial skills, as well as acts of strength, manipulation and balance. Traditional Chinese acrobatics may also embrace magic, animal training and bird-calls. Fu writes: 'China has only a few professional circus troupes today, but many acrobatic troupes.' (ibid, p. 117) The implication is that 'circus' represents the itinerant, tented show, while 'acrobatic' troupes are based in geographic areas, e.g. Nanjing, Shanghai and Wuqiao, or connected to the military, or associated with a particular industrial or commercial enterprise, e.g. the Shanghai Post-Telecommunications Cycling Team, pioneers of the 'Group Bicycle Act'. (ibid, p. 109).

⁵⁹ Dolly Jacobs is introduced in section 4.8

⁶⁰ The cited works of Reade, Ramsland, Otis and Steedman cover this ground.

Fu traces the origins of *zaji* to celebrations, games, contests of strength and even to aspects of self-improvement. This is exemplified in the story of Confucius where he meets a hunchback whose dexterity in catching cicadas is attributed to months of balancing two or three balls on a stick. (ibid, p. 7) Even today, most Chinese acrobatic acts revolve around household objects – spinning plates, diabolos (originally pan lids), juggling vases, balancing on chairs and bicycles. These props attest to the domestic origins of the acts, invented probably in the spirit of ‘what if?’ and developed by friendly rivalry.

As the practices moved from peasants to the court and back again, the purity of the form was sullied with more sensational street acts, developing the circus spectrum of ‘wow, yuk and ha-ha’ (Holland, 2002) known to us in the West today. But with the ‘New China’ came a purging of the dross. “Let a hundred flowers blossom” is a familiar Maoist slogan, and it continues, “ [...] and weed through the old to bring forth the new.” As part of the weeding process:

In the early 1950's, Premier Zhou Enlai said: ‘Acrobatics should give people an aesthetic appreciation and a pleasant sensation. Neither deformity nor excessive stimulus should be used to attract the audience.’ Premier Zhou Enlai's instruction has become the motto for the acrobats. Retaining what is the quintessence and discarding the dross, they took the first step to improve acrobatics – banning those presentations harmful to the mental and physical health of the performers and those which unduly stimulated the senses of the spectators. Some of the presentations banned were, ‘Climbing a Mountain of Knives’, ‘Dismantling a Human Body into Eight Pieces’, ‘Swallowing a Sword’, ‘Rolling on a Board Studded with Nails’, ‘Eating an Electric Bulb’, ‘Dancing on Broken Pieces of Glass’, ‘Swallowing Five Poisonous Creatures’, (scorpion, viper, centipede, house lizard and toad) and ‘A Snake Worms into Eyes, Ears, Nostrils and Mouth’. Meanwhile, efforts were made to study and improve upon a number of fine traditional presentations such as ‘Diabolo Play’, ‘Jumping Through Hoops on the Ground’, ‘Conjuring Tricks’, ‘Handstands on a Pyramid of Chairs’, ‘Cycling’, ‘Jar Tricks’ and ‘Juggling with the Hands’. These wholesome, lively items with artistic execution, which reflected national characteristics, were refreshing to the audience.’ (Fu, p. 105)

Among a young audience, and in comparatively young circus cultures like Australia's, there is an appetite for the ‘weeds’, those acts Zhou Enlai labelled harmful and unduly stimulating. Indeed shows like the *Jim Rose Sideshow Circus* from the USA, the *Tokyo Shock Boys* and Australia's *Happy Sideshow* present nothing but these acts, and have attracted a huge following, especially young people. We might conclude that China (and to a large extent the former USSR and France) is blessed with an educated audience who can appreciate the historical and aesthetic contexts of circus acts, while many countries, including most of the Western world, remain locked in an immature mindset, and can still be impressed by gross and basic stunts, with a largely visceral appeal; in Holland's terminology, more ‘yuk and ha ha’ than ‘wow’. It could equally be argued that the censorious intervention of Zhou Enlai and Lenin, and the generous state funding in

France have artificially changed the nature of circus in those countries, and that it should be an art form free of moral judgements.

Back in Wuqiao, the pre-eminent centre of both professional and amateur acrobatics in China, I had the honour of representing Australia in the International Acrobatics Festival, in 1993. I saw first hand the sophistication of the mass audience in the city of Shizhiaxuan. In the arena of twelve thousand people, we could sense their disapproval of the Las Vegas style of the American diabolists, and their perplexity when confronted with an erotic trapeze pas-de-deux from Montreal. Conversely, this huge crowd would offer only polite applause to traditional (but, to us, amazing) Chinese acts, until they saw either aesthetic perfection or a new move (but not too new). They then showed their appreciation.

Our small company presented a clown act, burlesquing many elements of Chinese acrobatics. Even our title, 'Journey to the East, in search of the Golden Lion', was thought to be hilarious, being a new slant on the 'Journey to the West' Monkey stories. Our fellow performers, mostly from China, were amazed that we were amateurs, in the sense that our children were not at circus school and the adults, myself, Annie Stainer and Mei Dan, had other careers. We were awarded the 'Textile Industry Award' for our 'clownery' act.

Amateur acrobatics is still popular in China, but the combination of the one-child (little emperor) policy, and the techno-cultural rapprochement with the West, means that fewer young people and their parents see acrobatics as a career; so we may expect to see a decline in its status, and thence in its popularity as an amateur pursuit.

Without yet looking at the extent of the modern wave of youth circus, we will examine some other examples of amateur circus, practised and performed usually by adults, identifying some root causes, effects and possible links to today's youth cultures.

'Folk Circus' is a hybrid term, possibly used for the first time here, and one I would be quite happy not to hear again. It will be used here to encompass aspects of folk art in many cultures, which have later been gathered into, or are reminiscent of, the circus. A cultural anthropologist may one day provide a comprehensive history, taxonomy and topology of such phenomena. Here I give only some examples in order to show a link between established and topical cultures.

Breugel's 1560 painting, *Children's Games (Kinderspelen)* is a wonderful pictorial document of an age. Two hundred children play eighty games in the street in Flanders in the sixteenth century, but many of these games are universal. On the one crowded canvas we see vivid examples of folk circus including headstand, contortion, hoops, high and low stilts, spinning tops, a balloon, balancing on barrels, 'pantomime' horse riding, stick-balancing, ball and stick play, a hobby-horse, back somersaults from a ramp, and performing to an audience.

Stilt-walking and stilt dance plays a part in rituals in Ghana, Nigeria, England, Belgium, France, India and many other countries. Usually annually, the initiates rehearse, then

publicly perform, rites which might, like many folk customs in England, be preserved by folk historians for conservational/ritualistic reasons, but which are seen by the audience simply as a dramatic attraction. In Les Landes, France, shepherds have for centuries used stilts and a sturdy walking stick to support them, so they can watch their flocks over long distances. Now twenty-one folkloric groups in Les Landes celebrate this custom in ritual displays, races and dances. One performance is called the *Salut Landais*. In Namur, Belgium, hand-held stilts were traditionally used to cross rivers and floods. There is also a tale of a military commander boasting a battalion that neither rode nor walked. The 'King's Stiltwalkers' of Merchtem celebrate every July in the main square of Brussels, with a stilt fighting display called the *Ommegang*.

As a hazardous precursor to bungee jumping, young men in Bunlap, Vanuatu, take part in the annual land-dive ceremony, which is a death-defying jump from a high pole, using liana vines tied to the ankles. Apparently this ensures a good yam crop. At first sight this seems similar to the Mexican 'Flying Men' game, where *El voladores* fly around a high pole, at great personal risk. (Bertels, 1993). Both these folk traditions are recalled in contemporary circus acts such as *corde lisse* and *tissue*.

On the island of Tonga there has long been a tradition of juggling ('hiko'). The girls do it, using the circular 'shower' technique, and achieve phenomenal levels with up to eight nuts. There is a legend of the skill of juggling having helped girls escape from Hihuleo, a Polynesian Goddess of the underworld. (Cohen, 1988) In Japan, a juggling game, 'Otedama' played with light bean bags is remembered by the old women, while a more martial, male, form, called 'Daikagura' is still practised. Inuit people also had a tradition of juggling, developing dexterity among girls, while boys learned the manly skills of forging weapons and hunting.⁶¹

Moving from folk juggling to amateur clowning, *Clowns of America*, *Clowns International* and *Clowning for Jesus* are essentially amateur organisations and movements aspiring to follow a radically selective reading of the history and practice of folly. The Clowns of America 'Code of Ethics' seems the same as the 'Clown Commandments' and 'Clown Creed' of the *Clown Ministry*, which all seem to owe more to the Rotary Club than the Lords of Misrule. (Bolton, 1986) In the case of the clowns, stilt-walkers and land-divers, and folk rituals using masks and animal costumes, there are common factors of transformation and passion. *Clowns of America*, overwhelmingly white middle-class philanthropists transform themselves into apparent buffoons to entertain (and sometimes terrify) bed-bound victims.

Stilt-walkers move in the upper world, land-divers defy the lower world. In adopting the look or the activity that we know as circus-like, people flirt with the sub-human or the super-human. Sam Keen, the American theologian-cum-guru, who took up flying trapeze in his sixties, epitomises the passion in amateur circus:

Truth told, my bag of tricks is small and there are days when I become discouraged. I wish I could tell you a heroic story - I started as a

⁶¹ Information on folk juggling can be found at www.juggling.org/museum/ethnography/

bumbling mass of quivering jelly but have learned, after many trials and tribulations, to throw a perfectly coordinated and confident triple somersault. Alas, I remain a perpetual fledgling. But there are days when some kindly wind blows through the trees, cooling my hot hands, turning the net into an Aeolian harp, and I remember my greatest achievement - I love to practice. I am a true amateur [...]

The perfect practice is one that does not depend on practice making perfect. Practice is perfect. I do not deny that I continue to make improvement in mastering the art. But this is not the point. At the deepest level the practice is about making a gesture, performing a symbolic act, enacting a sacrament. What is important is not the observable trick but what happens *within* the flyer - the metaphorical flight through space. (Keen, 1999, pp. 236, 37).

As a final example of an amateur circus, there has probably never been anything like the 'Private Circus' of Ernest Molier, in Paris, which lasted from 1880 until Molier's death in 1934. It was essentially a high society amusement, by and for 'les gens du monde'.⁶² Hughes Le Roux, in his 1890 book *Acrobats and Mountebanks* opens the chapter on Molier with a significant observation:

Whilst the acrobat was endeavouring to become a man of the world, the man of the world was becoming an excellent acrobat. The 'governing classes' determined to have their Léotard. The gentleman quitted his stall in the circus to ascend the pad and the trapeze. (LeRoux, 1890, p. 307)

A play by Jules LeMaitre, *Revoltée*, which opened in Paris in 1889, had a 'gentleman acrobat' rebutting the criticism that others in Parisian society levelled at Molier's amateur enterprise:

What do you want a man of our class to do at the present time? Politics are prohibited. They are monopolized by other buffoons, whose exercises are much more dangerous for the spectators and not so amusing. The army? Well, it is a refuge for those who have courage, and I have belonged to it. But there was too little to do in time of peace.

Literature? I should not know how to begin, and I dare own that I would not deign to adopt it. Naturalism is too dull, and diletantism too sterile. I find it better to enjoy life than to write about it. You say that I degrade my race? Nay, I revive it. You know the language used by the rhetors and journalists in describing the corrupt scions of the old aristocracy.

Well, we will regenerate this corrupt youth! We are strong, our muscles are like those of the street porters, of our ancestors the Frank warriors, of the companions of Charlemagne, who were only superb brutes. (LeRoux, 1890, p. 322)

More transformation! While acrobats, fêted and celebrated by fin-de-siècle writers like Gautier and De Goncourt and impressionist painters including Degas, Lautrec and

⁶² The Molier story is told in Thétard, (1947)

Seurat, struggled to quit their images of gypsies and mountebanks, to become respected citizens, a community of wealthy Parisians were working with no less passion to transform themselves into acrobats, show-equestrians and clowns. Thétard himself, author of the majestic *La Merveilleuse Histoire du Cirque*, presented a lion act at Molier's. He humbly admits to being responsible for a wild animal act at the 'Cirque de le rue Benouville', which was 'the most mediocre exhibition of wild animals that I ever gave.' (Thétard, 1947, vol. I I p. 252).

We have seen adult writers like Hemingway, Steinbeck, Cummings and Masefield admit to a lifelong devotion to the circus as spectators. Today's amateur performers, however, have a degree of motivation that drives them to cross the line to become, for the audience, but mostly for themselves, something new. While girls and women in Japan, Tonga and Northern Canada neglect and lose their cultural practice of juggling, thousands of young people all over the world, designing their own cultural context and tribal affiliation, are gathering at Juggling Festivals.⁶³ As the land-diving of Vanuatu loses its ritualistic roots and becomes a tourist attraction, bungee jumping and flying trapeze experiences are becoming available in many countries. The Maori women's ritual of poi, twirling decorated balls on two short strings, is appropriated and elaborated by the fire-twirling 'feral' community appearing on our beaches and in the forests throughout the Western world. Appropriation with respect is how many young people would style what they do, but just as National Geographic is evolving from exploration to adventure tourism (pseudo-exploration), so, many cultural practices that seem to manifest the dangerous, the showy or the completely pointless are moving from celebrating the community, culture or deity, to a self-enhancing experience in a global multi-cultural expo.⁶⁴

The impression given to young people must be that circus is approachable and accessible today as it never was before. I have spoken with enough traditional circus people to know that this apparent free-for-all is offensive to them, but I detect an unexpected phenomenon. Each time I meet with two hundred young people who have journeyed across Australia or across the world to Tasmania for the unique Australian Circus Festival, I know they have re-discovered the spiritual essence of this work. They trek like devotees to a sacred site, to an isolated back-block in the forest, where they create a camp, build tightwires and trapezes in the bush. Then they sweat, they fail, they learn, they practise, and ultimately they succeed. Finally, as the festival climaxes, they celebrate their transformations with public shows.

As Sam Keen writes:

The disease of professionalism that infects teachers, physicians, and lawyers, no less than flyers, begins when goals become more important

⁶³ The magazines *Kaskade* and *Juggler* devote pages to the calendar of Juggling Festivals around the world.

⁶⁴ The logo of *Clowns of America International* is a crouching clown with his arms around a globe that shows North America peeping above his arms, but the rest of the world engulfed in his motley grasp.

than process, when practice becomes a means rather than a source of enjoyment. Focusing on a distant goal, we never cherish the moment. We mortgage the present to make a down payment on a future that keeps receding. The great trick is to make the pleasure of living each day our most important 'goal.' We would do well to jettison the Western, secular myth of progress and adopt the official maxim that graces the postage stamps of the gentle Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan - 'Gross National Happiness.' (Keen, 1999, p. 237)

4.5 New Circus

Suddenly it hits you, see. All your life you been looking at circuses and you say, that's how circuses are. But what if they ain't? What if that's all a goddamn myth propagated by Ringmasters? You dig? What if it's all open-ended, and we can, if we want to, live by love?
Robert Coover, *The Romance of the Thin Man and the Fat Lady*, 1973,
(p. 113)

New Circus is not a subdivision; it is a stage in evolution. I wrote a book called *New Circus* (1986) and that term has been picked up and used generically, mostly by outsiders.⁶⁵ I coined the term in the same sense as New Dance (an early eighties phenomenon) and Nouvelle Cuisine. Julian Barnes, however, gave us a 'reality check' in *Something to Declare*, when he described Nouvelle Cuisine as the same stuff, in smaller portions, tastefully arranged on a big plate, and costing more (2002, p. 6).

There is resistance within the profession to the term New Circus and it tends to be used only when communicating with the press and funding bodies.⁶⁶ Other terms include Autre Cirque, Neo Circus, Contemporary Circus, Alternative Circus, Human Circus and so on. My editor insisted that I should make a defining list in *New Circus*, comparing the traditional and the new, for instance:

'Mysteries' only known to circus families / Techniques open to all
Animals / No animals
(Bolton, 1986, p. 7)

However, even as I wrote them I knew these binaries to be inaccurate and restrictive. I admit to causing some confusion in the UK by yoking two developments together in this book, under the one title. Chenine Bhatena, later to become a significant

⁶⁵ The term was not totally original; New Circus was an early name for one of the companies that became Circus Oz. Nouveau Cirque was one of the purpose built circus buildings in Paris in the nineteenth century.

⁶⁶ A gathering representing nine New Circus companies in Yorkshire, just two years after the publication of *New Circus*, was already fighting off the label. "The groups did agree with the suggestion that New Circus was not so much a movement as a trend, that New Circus had no agreed focal point, that there was no individual identified as the leader of New Circus and that no single group is acknowledged to be representative of all, or even most, of what New Circus could be said to represent." Bill Parkinson, *A Report on New Circus in Yorkshire* (Mimika Theatre: 1990). It seems that the **self-design** element of our investigation operates at every level.

promoter of contemporary circus companies and events, acknowledges this in her 1991 thesis: "New Circus as such falls into two categories; Community Circus and Circus Theatre." (Bhathena, 1991, p. 8)

In France there was no such ambiguity, and while the current five hundred circus schools and community circus groups were hardly imagined in the nineteen seventies, a new theatrical genre was being formed. Jerome Savary's *Le Grand Magic Circus (and its sad animals)* was a forerunner of the movement and is significant in several ways. Its birth is not recorded in the landmark chronology of circus, published in *Arts De La Piste* October 2001. (Baillet, 2001, p. 92). The omission is probably on the grounds that this 'circus' is a radical theatre company, not a circus. However, this "strange motley cohort" (Savary, 1974, p. 5) was among the first collectives, born in the spirit of the sixties, seriously dedicated to mischief and laughter. It was a revolutionary company, whose few years of existence saw them go from carefree extrovert improvisation to steel-jawed cynicism. They seem to have travelled, from 1968 to 1972 a route that would later take the British new circus movement decades to understand. In 1972, at a ceremony at the Faculty of Letters in Bordeaux, Savary said:

The child has the right to play (and often the obligation to play – Go and play!) From the emergence of the first pubic hair, from the first pointing buttons, it's the end of fun. You're grown up now. No more playing with yourself. Then, for a few decades you're nothing but a big arse (for sitting in your car) and a big head (for dreaming of what you might have done.)

Having brought carnival (la fête) to the streets of France, he admits,

we are tired, at the Magic Circus, of bringing joy to the street. We realize we are becoming an alibi for the municipal authorities [...] Carnival is not a problem of leisure, but a political problem [...] To those who ask us to make carnival for them we say, Make it yourselves!

He sees carnival as a dialogue, and detects "a vast conspiracy afoot to take from the citizen all possibility for dialogue." Even then, in 1972 he saw bistros, "the site par excellence of dialogue", being replaced by le snackbar, and the town square transformed into le parking, so the circus was banished to the suburbs (Savary, 1974, p. 65, trans. Bolton).

Webb (1976) and Knapp (1971), in their interviews and articles about Savary's work both find a desire to give credit and freedom to every member of the cast and also to allow the audience whatever participation they want. Their descriptions of his work process is not unlike what you would find with many youth circus companies today. Webb recalls the technique (new in its day) of allowing the audience to simply take over the show at the end. His description significantly recalls that *Le Grand Magic Circus* ran circus workshops for children back then, possibly another first:

As the music continued, the members of the company gradually withdrew leaving the audience to amuse itself with its own music and dancing. The whole evening could be described by the words Savary used to advertise

his children's afternoons: "In order that the children should learn to create their own circus." (Webb, 1976, p. 846)

In a theoretical and political manifesto, Savary wrote:

We don't like festivals on fixed dates. We would rather see a permanent festival. And when we use that term, we don't mean just a big laugh. Festival for us, is having total liberty to express what we mean. It is in the right of children to walk on the grass. It is the right to sing and make music in streets and parks, in front of the cultural monuments - which is to say that festival is practically impossible.
(1974, p. 42)

But the *Grand Magic Circus* festival spirit did storm the streets and parks and opened the doors of possibility for new troops and collectives throughout Europe, America, Australasia and beyond.

As we have seen, the spirit of childhood animated GMC in France, so perhaps the connection I made in *New Circus* between the new circuses, and the rise of community- and youth-circuses was not so far-fetched. Attending the 'Social Circus' gathering in France, I noted, 'perhaps we should turn to genetics as a metaphor for what we are doing.' (personal journal, 2002). Both Turner (2000) and Parkinson (1990) have described *New Circus* as 'seminal', and now I am seeking to establish synteny (a comparative research process used in genetics) between circus and childhood experience. My way to approach this in new circuses is to look at the germinal days of the new generation of circus, and at some of the key individuals. I think we will find that here lies a solid link with all our childhood 'elements', the little finger of aspiration, the index finger of self-design, the ring finger of collective trust, the middle finger of defiance and risk, the palm of laughter, and above all the thumb of hard work. As Gregory Fedin says in *Big Apple Circus*: "You want to start a circus? You must work twenty-eight hours a day. You must steal four hours from your death." (Angelo, 1978, p. 5).⁶⁷

Jerome Savary was described as the chef d'orchestre of the GMC and the family album shows him surrounded by a colourful tribe with music, extravagant costumes, little children and naked bodies.⁶⁸ He was the driving force behind the GMC and went on to become a leading entrepreneur and director of festivals, theatre and opera at the highest level. His is a story not untypical in the New Circus movement.

Paul Binder, who with Michael Christensen, founded the *Big Apple Circus* in New York in 1976, went on to marry Katja Schumann creating a new American branch of one of Europe's dynastic circus families. His circus is very much an American icon now. I interviewed him in 1979 while researching *New Circus* and it was clear even then that,

⁶⁷ John Fox, founder of Welfare State International, directed a 'Cosmic Circus' in the UK in the early 1970's, synchronously with Savary's work. He wrote, for the 1997 UK Circus Symposium, "Examine the pleasure (and pain) of work. Recognise the value of creative and gainful occupation [...] Too many of us operate from the head alone and despise manual work."

⁶⁸ He claims they invented streaking at an anti-censorship rally on 6 June 1971 (1974) p. 51

among the neo-hippies and enthusiasts of Big Apple, he had unexpected ambitions: "We are creating an institution – a cultural institution." (Bolton, 1986, p. 17).

Guy Laliberté and his juggling partner went from Montreal to Paris as young men (like the pilgrimage young Australians make to London). They learned basic fire juggling and busked in the streets. Returning to Montreal they launched a circus school and a Busker's Festival. Later they started a small, one ring circus called *Cirque Du Soleil*, this was as recently as 1986. Laliberté was at heart an entrepreneur, a developer, and even in 1988, a five-year plan was published with a growth prediction graphically illustrated with higher and higher unicycles. (Laliberté, 1988). Today Cirque Du Soleil is the best-known circus in the world, producing nine shows on four continents. Although it has become a huge enterprise Laliberté still sees it as 'a business with the soul of an artist'. (David, 1987, p. 36). One per cent of all box-office receipts go to Cirque Du Monde, their humanitarian arm. In forming and developing his own new circus, Laliberté had forged an amalgamation almost unmatched since the eighteenth century. In 1768 Astley yoked together travelling shows and military pageantry. (Taylor, 1985, p. 129). What Laliberté did was to take his circus proposal to the big end of town. Starting with subsidies he consciously traded upwards until all income was earned income, with some to spare. He employed the best artists, designers and musicians he could get and his management team created the product and generated corporate pride. So his magical fusion (some would say unholy alliance) was circus plus corporate culture.

At any level, circus elements will merge with others to generate new energy, interest and success. In *Clowning Around* Sim combines unicycle and a paper round. Youth circus has often combined circus and rap, and community circus has effectively combined circus and local politics. While purists will insist that Astley's pattern should be followed, there has clearly been a sea change in the last three decades and circus is now a form which, like visual arts, music and literature is available for any interpretation, any manifestation and is clearly seen as a territory to be explored by creative youth.

Cirque Archaos hit the circus world in 1985, with a cacophony of chain saws, angle grinders, motorbikes and corrugated iron. Pierrot Bidon, the founder, described it as an "artistic adventure" undertaken by an "ensemble of individuals". (Lachaud, 2000, p. 32). Today he is artistic director of *Circus of Horrors*, touring the UK with a cult status similar to that acquired by *Archaos*. But his history is varied. His first enterprise was the horses and caravans of *Cirque Bidon* (dustbin) walking around villages in the south of France. (Lesaing, 1981). After *Archaos* he worked for several years in Brazil and later in Guinea Conakry producing the *Cirque Baobab*. In the latter case he established a school in a country where circus was unknown and within two years produced a company to tour Europe.

An *Archaos* member, Guy Carrara says, "we live together because we're making the show; we don't make the show because we live together [...] We are not obliged to like each other to make the ensemble work, but its because we make the ensemble that we become to admire and respect each other." (Lachaud, 2000 p. 32). These are important

and subtle lessons about trust within a creative group, directly applicable to young people working together.

The epigraph at the head of this section suggests a circus that can 'live by love'. Sometimes this can happen in spite of the irony that many of the initiators of new circus actually become the ringmaster. Jon Hawkes, the original strong man and juggler with Circus Oz, went on to be director of the Community Arts Board for the Australia Council responsible for establishing a vibrant national culture of creativity. As exemplified by Binder, Savary, Hawkes, Laliberté, Adrienne Larue⁶⁹ and others, the experience of starting and running a circus could be seen as perfect training for future executive management. It provides a young entrepreneur with a chance to assemble a work force, manage every aspect of life and production, to create a working economy, to serve the public, to meet and solve problems every day – financial, mechanical, physical and emotional. They learn effective use of space and resources. They learn a range of management skills as their ensemble struggles between democracy and dictatorship. Above all, with 'showtime' announced and the public arriving, they learn the necessity of 'back timing' (assessing and addressing priorities, to be ready on time); an understanding equally vital to the chef, the politician, the air traffic controller, and the PhD researcher.

It is documented that American and German generals studied the Barnum and Bailey Circus in the early twentieth century to learn, from the circus, how to move men, horses and machines quietly and effectively.⁷⁰ Strangely, contemporary circus has not yet become an accepted model for corporate training.⁷¹ In the meantime biographies of new circus practitioners show their time with the circus to be intense, formative and memorable.

In discussions with drama teachers we agreed that the school play is an essentially autocratic process, with students often being told what to do and how to do it. The difference in circus production is that the children have the skills. They can tell the teacher what they can do and what they would like to do; furthermore the cast is often divided into autonomous groups. 'Then we will have the unicycle routine. Can you guys do five minutes please?' Just like the eminent pioneers of the new circuses, young people forming their own circus will learn to **trust** and be trusted, to decide how to **present themselves**, to **risk** following their **dreams**, to **work** hard and to have **fun**.

⁶⁹ Larue, a street revolutionary from the nineteen sixties, is now a major force in social circus in France, including projects with immigrant communities in Paris suburbs.

⁷⁰ This has been claimed by Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus for many years, but the best evidence I can find is the claims made on posters and leaflets, and confidently affirmed by the curator of the John and Mabel Ringling Museum, Sarasota, USA, in correspondence in 2002.

⁷¹ Currently both Circus Oz (Melbourne) and The Circus Space (London) conduct corporate workshops, but it is an activity far from mainstream acceptance.

4.6 Circus Students

Why do parents want their children to work in offices and not be clowns?

It's all wrong.

Attributed to Federico Fellini, film director.

If circus work is a practical metaphor – a constructed activity set up so that children can vicariously experience the challenges of life, before collecting their coats and heading home to reality, then what should we make of young people who make circus their chosen career?

My research has so far taken me to thirteen top-level vocational schools⁷² as well as community and recreational schools in a dozen countries, and many high schools and colleges where circus is an optional activity. I have interviewed hundreds of students and teachers, delving into the reasons why, in the twenty-first century, one would choose circus as a career, and what this tells us about the perception of circus to a young person.

In 1985, when I wrote the book, *New Circus*, before the internet, I listed all the circus schools I could contact in the world. I found thirty-one, in nineteen countries. Today, a search will find over a hundred, in twenty-eight countries.⁷³ France, Germany, Finland and Russia have hundreds of community- and youth-circuses, and most of the English speaking 'developed' countries have an unofficial network of circus possibilities, ranging from individual peripatetic teachers to university-based tertiary vocational courses.

In 1974, having introduced circus into community arts practice in the UK, I attended, for a few weeks only, l'Ecole Nationale du Cirque, which had been founded in 1974 by Annie Fratellini and Pierre Etaix. Much as I respected these eminent artists, my experience as a circus student was not what I had expected, appearing repetitive and discouraging at the time. Eventually, the main outcome was that I was inspired to start my own circus school, in Edinburgh, in reaction to, and different from, what I had seen in Paris.

As I recall, the Fratellini school was on the ground floor of a community centre in an unfashionable suburb. There were no set classes after the communal morning warm-up. Each student was expected to do his or her own work. I, however, was not allowed on the unicycles, tightwire, trapeze or rola-bola. I was sent to the wall to do handstands. My teacher would tell me to straighten my arms and back, and to stay there for long periods. These long periods stretched from agonising minutes to hours and days of effort.

⁷² Melbourne, London, Montreal, Bristol, San Francisco, Wuqiao, Paris, Brussels (x2), Châlons-sur-Marne, Belfast, Christchurch and Locarno.

⁷³ Many are listed in Sugarman, (2001)

Upside down, I would see jugglers, contortionists and equilibrists doing what looked like very exciting work, as I was condemned to interminable handstands. After two weeks, I objected. "Why?" The answer was uncompromising. "To be a circus artist, you must be an acrobat. To be an acrobat you must first master the handstand, and your handstand is sheet".

I left, and in 1977 started my own circus school that was, at least, fun. It was successful, and became a model for the development, in the UK and elsewhere, of recreational circus schools. In hindsight I see clearly why I was such an oddity in l'Ecole Nationale. I was English, I was an adult and I was not, nor did I want to become, a circus performer. Having seen so many vocational circus schools since then, it is clear and obvious why candidates are carefully selected. Circus training is almost a horticultural science. The better the seed material, the better will be the result.

In China until recently, the recruitment procedure was as follows. The selectors from the provincial circus company would visit every primary school and view all children around seven years old. From hundreds they would choose a dozen, based on size and shape. The next day, each child's parent and grandparents were required to attend for inspection. This was to give the selectors an idea of the child's growth potential. This dozen would be tested for strength, speed, balance and flexibility, and perhaps one or two would be chosen. They would leave home, live in a dormitory and begin an eight to ten-year apprenticeship as a circus artist. Very soon the school director would choose a skill area, and from that day, the child would be a juggler, contortionist, handstander or whatever.

Mei Dan was selected to be a foot-juggler, and for years her training involved lying on a 'trinka', tossing and spinning balls, vases, carpets, parasols, tables and small children on her feet. As a teenager, she developed an ominous dread of spending her performing life with her bottom in the air, and she made the adventurous and courageous decision to change her destiny. Practising secretly for months, she re-presented herself as a wire-walker. This became her life's speciality, although she also performed as a trick-cyclist, plate-spinner and diabolist. In her training years, the 1970's, it was a great honour and opportunity to be apprenticed to a circus company.⁷⁴ She would be well fed, paid, housed and celebrated, and possibly even travel overseas. Today it is different, as Lu Yi explained to me in San Francisco, the Chinese one-child policy, especially in the cities, has led to the 'little emperor' syndrome, where parents, once so keen to give away one of their children to the circus, now cherish their first and only born. If he goes to circus school now, it is: 'Please don't hurt my child', and if possible, that child would not have been studying circus, but computers.⁷⁵ (Interview, Lu Yi, 2003). This reversal of attitudes, which journalists would call a 'back-flip', we shall, in deference to circus accuracy, call a 'U-turn', and we shall observe it many times as we look closely at the subject of circus training.

⁷⁴ She was in the Chinese Army School of Acrobatics, and moved to Australia in 1990.

⁷⁵ At Wuqiao School of Acrobatic Arts, Hebei, China, the two hundred students, aged from eight to fifteen, work eight hours a day, six days a week.

Today in Australia, twenty students per year enter NI CA (The National Institute of Circus Arts) at Swinburne University, Melbourne. In four intakes, there has only been one member of a traditional circus family, Golda Ashton. All the others have 'run away to join the circus'. This is in marked contrast to the way things happened in the past. Children of circus families were taught, on-site, by parents or the extended family. They gradually took their places in the ring and as teenagers developed their own acts. At the age where NI CA students begin their training, traditional circus children would be approaching the height of their performing career. In China each circus child is seen as an investment for the company, and receives the best available in-house tuition, following a universal 'basic training' régime, and is often obliged to stay with the company until retirement (which may be in their mid-thirties). In the West, even circus families have had to concede to the trend of independence and choice available to young people. So while young people born and bred in circus are leaving for other careers, a new generation is coming into a circus life.

Two men very close to this transformation are Lu Goang Rong, Head of Training at NI CA, Melbourne, and Lu Yi, Master Trainer and Artistic Director of Circus Center, San Francisco. Both were senior members of the Nanjing Acrobatic Company, who first visited Australia to conduct a training residency in 1984. Both are now highly esteemed gurus in their adopted countries. Asked about the challenges of training adults, new to circus, as opposed to pliable children, Lu Yi said, "In China, if the company chooses you for acrobatics, it is for ever. Here, it is for fun. With new students here, I ask them, 'What is your goal?' If they say 'professional', I need a two or three-year plan. If for fun, they can go to the other teachers." (Interview, Lu Yi, 2003). He believes there is no amateur circus in China, except perhaps within families. I asked him what are the benefits for children, and his response was typically Spartan: "They learn discipline, body/muscle work. Through the training they learn to work together, to make the self brave. They learn how to chastise self, and say 'I can'." I interviewed one of Lu Yi's adult students, twenty-five year-old handstander, Jade. She is passionate, almost religiously zealous about her art: "When I am in the perfect hand balance, it really does feel that I have a purpose, that I am connected, that I am lifted, and if I can convey to an audience what I feel, that would be a great thing." (Interview, Jade, 2001). Jade aims to be the best in America, and to this end she had been training at the Circus Centre eight hours a day for two years already. She admits that she reveres and loves Mr Lu, but feels vulnerable in that her age, her tattoos, and her vivid blue hair will never admit her into the inner circle of this sixty-three year-old Chinese master. She and I agree that he is the kindest man, but she knows that ultimately she must take her own journey.

At NI CA, Lu Guang Rong, who was a student of Lu Yi in Nanjing, has come to terms with the fact that Western circus students come with a different set of values, which include the desire not to be hurt. Lu has looked hard at the Chinese tradition of merciless training of children, and is working on a new method of pain-free instruction, combining Eastern and Western practices. I spoke at length with three of his students, Lizzie, Aaron, and Jesse, plus Brooke who was about to start her first year at NI CA. I asked whether they preferred hard or soft training. They all agreed, "hard", but one admitted, "it makes the hard training easier if there's an instructor

there pushing you." It is interesting that they look to make hard training easier. I tried to identify what it was about these individuals that suited them to a circus school and circus career. Their answers invoked some of the elements we are finding throughout this investigation. "I don't fit anywhere else." "I'm agile, an adrenalin junkie and I like to think." "I'm strong and good bases are hard to find." "I'm stubborn. I refuse to give up." I am reminded of the lines from Dr Seuss's *If I Ran a Circus*:

"Ei! Ei! What a circus! My Circus McGurkus!

My workers love work. They say "Work us! please work us! (Seuss, 1956)

I asked these young adults if, when they have children, they would want them to do circus in any way. They were quite positive, not about the itinerant life, but about the physical and social development inherent in circus. "Yes, I'd teach them everything, especially at an early age – dance, gym etc., to develop a good body." "I'll raise my kids with all the skills, plus languages". All these students had experienced youth circus work, from both sides, and they could see the benefits to their own young students. "Confidence, an opening up. Often parents would thank me for specifically that." "You never see a twelve-year-old happier than when you hand him a fire stick and set it on fire." "On trapeze, there are those who won't let go and hang, until they trust you. It gives you as a trainer a good feeling knowing they've got that much trust in you." Were they self-conscious, being circus students – a race apart? "Being thought of as an oddity, you're something special, you're doing something not everyone can do. That's cool." (Interview, NI CA students, 2003)

Alex Shukin is an acrobatics and aerial trainer at NI CA. He is from a Russian circus family, and toured Australia in the nineteen eighties in the Moscow State Circus, performing a clown act with his father. The Shukins experienced the Soviet golden age, when, during the time of Brezhnev, the status of a circus artist was little short of that of an astronaut. Alex, whom I interviewed when he was head trainer at CircoArts, New Zealand, told me a story which exemplifies the passion a young person may have to learn circus arts. It seems his mother and father were training him gently in a variety of skills, while Alex's friend (they were both about ten) was getting the usual extreme and painful training from his own father, in the next caravan.⁷⁶ Alex was jealous! He wanted to achieve the same flexibility as his friend. His father refused – he simply could not inflict pain on his son. But little Alex was so determined that Daddy went to the neighbour, the 'cricker', and said, "If I give you my son for four weeks, and a crate of vodka, will you make him an acrobat?" The fateful reply, which eventually made Alex what he is today was, "No. But let's make it two weeks and two crates of vodka!" (Interview, Shukin, 2001).

Sandra is a forty-year-old mother, a full time circus student at CircoArts, whose son is also on the course. "He calls me Mum in class!" She is a former body builder, a long distance runner, and is awesomely fit. Her speciality is the web. "Something draws me up there. I love the spin, it's just fantastic. I have to keep my mouth shut, I just want

⁷⁶ The forced contortion and stretching of bones and cartilage in young people is what is so deplored in Amy Reade's nineteenth century reforming stories, and which a street acrobat described to Henry Mayhew, wistfully, as 'cricking'.

to scream. There's a horizontal spin we're just doing, and the blood rushes to your feet, and it's a feeling you never, ever get. You think your body's going up to the ceiling." Sandra is more than a thrill-seeker. She is concerned with her performance. "You need to get your body right for it. You're presenting your body as a performing tool. The line does need to be good." Despite her age, she is confident of moving into the highest level of professional circus. "I don't do things to just play." (Interview, Sandra Sim, 2001).

In many countries of the world, hundreds of students each year are dedicating themselves to the most arduous training, which will lead ideally to the perfection of an act, and a life acknowledged to be hazardous to body, to personal finance and to relationships. It would be a poorer world without them. Companies emerging from the schools in Châlons and Montreal are pushing the barriers of circus, surviving in small, tribal companies in the best traditions of the Tsiganes (gypsies) of previous ages. Some are subsidised, many have business plans and risk-management procedures, and most have a permanent home somewhere. But like the itinerant performers of old, they bring to comfortable, resident populations a whiff of mystery, a jaw-dropping dose of astonishment, and the unsettling realisation that there are more things to be done in this world than we ever thought possible.

Lee Nelson, now a very successful globe-trotting festival busker, told me, when he was still a circus student. "It's amazing to think I CAN DO a somersault! To live in such a body, that can do a backflip. Awesome!" He always saw this training would help him to "pick up a girl, start conversations, make friends," and he has achieved his unlikely first ambition, to "get paid lots to do cool tricks." (Interview, Lee Nelson, 2001)

4.7 Circus in School

I see impatient, quick to give up students begin to understand that you must persevere and keep working hard in order to progress. I see kids that are angry and confrontational almost magically lighten up -when they start playing with the equipment. I see them become thrilled and proud when they succeed in doing new tricks. I see my kids go from being divided and scattered to being able to work together to accomplish challenges and I see them celebrate one another for everyone's effort. Teresa Kochis quoted by Paul Woodhead.

Although circus remains a relatively rare activity in schools, there are signs of interest among educationalists. At Central Queensland University for instance, a group of academics are using traditional circus as a model for exploring and explaining 'Lifelong Learning' issues. They cite Bourdieu's concept of a 'cultural field':

Bourdieu identifies a tension between the autonomous pole of a field, made up of values that have traditionally characterised the field and made it distinct from others, and the heteronomous pole, where the field is open to values from other fields. Both education and the circus are increasingly having to juggle these heteronomous values associated with business on the one hand and formal education on the other, with

their traditional values and routines. (Danaher, Moriarty and Danaher, 2002)

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, according to Hotier, "there are more than five hundred circus schools in France." (2001, p. 7). In Australia, numbers have mushroomed over the last decade and are still growing. I estimate perhaps a hundred primary and high schools run a circus programme at some level.⁷⁷ As my thesis is concerned with a child's development, I must look closely at how circus is treated in the school context and ask to what extent its success or failure is linked with the six elements outlined in my proposal.

I surveyed Perth high schools and received replies from fifty-four schools, of which ten had active circus programmes, eleven had discontinued their programmes and of the remaining, sixteen wanted programmes and seven did not. What I was looking for were the reasons why teachers did not want circus in their schools. Reasons for stopping were mostly because of the one committed teacher or the visiting instructor had moved on. Nearly fifty per cent cited budget restraints, and two had had bad experiences; one had an accident, and another had apathetic visiting instructors. All those who replied saying they did not want the circus programme stated it was inappropriate for the curriculum. In contrast, all those with continuing programmes were extremely positive and most wanted more training and curriculum guidance.

In Dubbo, New South Wales, Paul Woodhead has been running Circus West since 1993 with considerable success.⁷⁸ In his book 'Circus in Schools' he writes:

The benefits of Circus West have extended far beyond the children in the unit. By all accounts the children have gained enormously, but so too has the school and the local community (Woodhead and Duffy, 1998, p. 48).

In spite of his success, Woodhead, like Sharon McCutcheon at Bateman Bay Senior High School (see Literature Review and section 4.7) sees himself fighting a rear guard action against some resistance from colleagues and authorities.

Twenty years ago I visited Barton Ridge Elementary School, New York.⁷⁹ The same pattern was evident there, where the immensely popular 'Center Ring Musical Circus' had to train twice a week before school, not during school hours. I have felt opposition within schools on many occasions including Balga Senior High School, where a school circus after only two weeks of training knocked the successful school volleyball team off the front page of the local paper. Some of this opposition and resentment is understandable and circus in schools has the potential to provoke the same parochial hostility we read about in the fiction and histories of the traditional itinerant circus.

⁷⁷ Based on my survey. Community Circus Activities in Australia (Perth: Australian Circus and Physical Theatre Association, 2003).

⁷⁸ He recently travelled widely on a Winston Churchill research fellowship and his report may be found at www.churchilltrust.com.au/Fellows%20Reports/

⁷⁹ The story is told in Bolton, *New Circus*, p 75.

Any school child committing to circus in this context may be seen as **risking** credibility with peers as they leave the mainstream, and take the chance of being labelled a 'clown'. This is balanced against the potential for one to **redesign** one's image in the school on one's own terms. Time and time again children tell me about heroic circus achievements by their friends and peers, and this potential for a child to experience such a radical reassessment of his/her status should not be overlooked by educators.

There is evidence, then, of a certain social **risk** involved in circus, with potential rewards in the area of **self-design** in a social context. Real risk and adventure are possibly minimised as teachers are intimidated by the threat of litigation. A Perth primary school principal contacted me when his very successful in-school unicycle programme was threatened by the possibility of compulsory bike helmets. He was concerned that the ruling would alienate precisely those children who benefit from this apparently hazardous, but very safe, activity.⁸⁰

Real and dramatic **self-design** is always possible in a show as children dress up becoming clowns, heroes, animals and so on. On many occasions I have seen teachers join in a performance, literally 'acting the clown', which one could not imagine in a school play, musical concert or gymnastic display. Primary children, especially, really enjoy seeing another side of their teacher's personality.

Enjoyment, and its close synonyms, **fun** and pleasure, are often a reason to do circus and are usually among the outcomes. However, if fun is the only intended outcome, then the project or programme is clearly undervalued. The early books on 'How to do a Circus' cited in section 3.7 show a development after the 1920's, away from circus-theme frivolity to some real learning. Sadly, many contemporary schoolteachers' grasp of the potential of circus has remained around that of the 1970's.

The fun, the satisfaction of learning and performing a skill, is a vital part of that experience. The long and worthy book, *Circus Op School* (Leper and Maele, 2001), acknowledges the importance of this pleasure. Although it is the most comprehensive school skill manual, unfortunately it does not go on to explain the principal of theatrical performance that will turn a display into a show. However, the authors and I would agree that this fun/pleasure can be found at the simplest level of a one-to-one show-off opportunity whether to a teacher or fellow student. Working at schools, I often find a student waiting early for me in the car park as I arrive, eager to show me a new accomplishment on the diabolo or the unicycle. Very often they are in pairs or groups, keen to present to me the amazing success of their friend. The satisfaction of this show-off moment can surely change a child's school day for the better.

Turning to the element represented by the thumb, or Saturday's child, we see in school circus many opportunities to '**work hard** for a living'. At various ages a child is capable

⁸⁰ I sent him the pro and anti helmet cases as fought out in the pages of the American unicycle journal, Richard Harden and Ryan Wood, "Should the USA Require Helmets for All Riders 18 or Younger in Racing Events?" *On One Wheel* April 1999. At the time of writing, I don't know the outcome of the local controversy.

of a fixation, almost a mania, and many parents have dreaded that their adolescent's fixation might be on drugs or fast cars or something else of dire consequence. It is often a relief to see a child determined to master a unicycle or to achieve the most complicated poi-twirling pattern. Certainly at school, built on a culture of graded levels of competence, the skill ladder of my 'Circus Success Certificate' finds fertile ground. Not only can students move progressively up and up their individual charts but the achievement is real, tangible, undeniable, and not at the mercy of a teacher's value judgement. The balls are in the air, or they are not. You are on the wire or you are off.

When a programme works it makes a tremendous difference to a school. Suitcase Circus (my programme) has been often contracted to do exactly that – to lift morale in a school or to give it some local distinction. I have developed a one-term (ten-week) programme for primary schools in Perth, Western Australia, and in 2002 I conducted one of these residencies at Padbury Primary School. I produced a show with the whole school (250 students) performing. The Mayor of Joondalup, whose arts budget had donated a third of the cost, is quoted as saying "it was the best use of council funds I have seen." (Wild and Atkinson, 2002). The project report also noted "parent feedback has also been glowing and our circus has featured in the press four times this year making the whole school community feel special." The post-programme student survey (of 131 students) included the following findings:

	Fantastic	OK	Didn't enjoy
What did you think of the circus lessons?	79%	19%	2%
How did you feel about performing in the big show?	87%	11%	3%

	Definitely	Maybe	No
Would you like to do circus again?	85%	14%	1%

Conclusions to be drawn so far are that circus provides fun and a sense of identity. Karen McArthur, the high school drama teacher in Manjimup, Western Australia, with eleven years experience teaching circus from kindergarten to year-twelve, observes: "Primary schools tend to use circus for fun projects not for life skilling." (McArthur, 2002). Her current programme is a six-week course for every year-eight student entering the school. She has linked her work closely to the curriculum and in addition is credited by her colleagues with achieving notable improvements in student behaviour. She says: "I can show to other teachers this 'problem kid' in my circus class, a hundred per cent concentrating for the whole hundred and five minutes, because it is actively engaging him in personal goal setting." This is in contrast to most academic goals, which are preset. In her class, the students can **identify** themselves by their **aspirations** (fulfilling two of our elements) as in "I will learn the diabolo by the end of the week". Then they do. Attitudes learned in circus overlap into other classes. Focus is sharper

and even in a maths class students are heard to say (as in circus), "I can't do this – yet!" Among other programmes is one she privately calls the 'bully and victim' group where a dozen or so selected students work in the circus room at lunch-time. They learn to share and relate well in this special room, which 'Miss Mac' ensures, by careful planning and procedure, is an emotionally 'safe' place.

Regarding the element of **fun**, she says, "circus gives them legitimate play that they can achieve success with". Of **trust** she points out that her area, including the quadrangle is an area too big for her to watch over. "I must trust them out of sight. They know that and they trust me." The aspect of **hard work** in this high school is evidenced in the high standards these students reach in their physical abilities. In a very sporty small town (with four football clubs) circus still has credibility as a physical discipline.

Woodhead suggests there need not be competition in circus although his book contains, as does my programme, levels of attainment in each skill. (Woodhead and Duffy, 1998). Mine and probably the one at West Dubbo Primary School, were designed in collaboration with school children. This is an early experience for them of thoughtfully devising a governing framework of legislation; a sort of **self-design** for the community, in short a political economy.

The ring finger of **trust** and touch evokes an outcome of school circus, cited by many teachers. I refer to the positive effect on playground bullying. We have mentioned the Manjimup 'bullies and victims' programme. At West Dubbo Primary School, Woodhead writes:

We have often found that these children are caught in bully roles that are assigned by their peers or taken on by themselves. The refuge from the day-to-day milieu of the playground that the Circus environment provides means that these roles can be safely dropped and left aside, with only sharing and respect due in return (Woodhead and Duffy, 1998, p. 9).

Less easy for teachers to talk about is what I see as the essential aspect of **touch** among children. In acrobatics, trapeze and tight-wire particularly, the student is physically learning about relationships with the earth and the air. It should be a simple step to include relationships with other bodies. The culture of many schools is to gradually discourage physical contact with and among students as children grow. Research does indicate that, at least among small children, touch deprivation is harmful. (Montagu, 1971). Circus activity including pyramids, tumbling, trapeze, wire-walking, stilts and so on give ample opportunity for functional and appropriate touching within the classroom and playground context. The one element of the six that is least in evidence in school circus is that represented by the little finger ('Thursday's child has far to go'). I labelled this simply as **dreaming**, but I associate it with the less definable qualities of circus performance and experience. As outlined in section 4.10, 'the Psyche' the circus can evoke intangible aspects of imagery, symbolism and mystery - in a word 'magic'.

In an atmosphere where the teacher is often the demystifier, explainer and solver of problems, the magic of circus is very vulnerable. In 2002 I worked as a consultant for *Elleboog*, the Amsterdam Children's Circus established in 1949. They had asked me to look objectively at all aspects of their philosophy and practice. My main finding was that there were two cultures, which had come into opposition – artistry and pedagogy. The pedagogic spirit, with its clear objectives, sound theory and outcome statements, was in the ascendant. The artists on the staff, many of whom were high level international performers, were demoralised and frustrated and some were doubting their artist's 'methodology' which included imagination, coincidence, paradox, telepathy, experiment, day-dreaming and hunch.

The same applies in schools. Art is often reserved for the art or creative writing periods; most other activities are essentially scientific in method. In this environment, not only does science find it hard (though worthwhile) to cope with circus, but also circus is intimidated by its own apparently haphazard nature, its inexplicable happenings and its physical and visceral delights.

School circus is still in a developmental phase in most countries where it is practised, so not only is it flexible and adaptable but also it is inadvisable to generalise about different countries' approaches. A reading of books from different countries cannot totally represent national trends. However, as the tone and methods in these books will have some influence on readers of their language, some comparison may be of interest. Again these works are examined in the light of the childhood/circus thesis.

Circus Op School is published in Leuven, Belgium and written in Flemish, mostly for a Dutch educational market. Over four hundred pages of theory, exercises, techniques and evaluation, make it the most comprehensive book of its type that I have seen. It is written by and for Phys Ed (Lichamelijke Opvoeding) teachers. In looking for a definition of circus, the authors note that "all theorists call it an art" (Leper and Maele, 2001, p. 18), including Phillippe Goudard, whose definition is "a modern art form whereby the exponent uses physical ability and physical expression to achieve an artistic accomplishment". The authors concede that the current focus on sports in phys. ed. has taken from the curriculum much of the variety that actually existed in the nineteenth century, and that circus skills ('Artistik' is the German term) can bring it back "to evoke a sense of beauty to spectators, providing a game more important than competition" (p. 20). The authors seem to have a clear understanding of what I call **self-design** and self-presentation. To them, the relationship with an audience, even an audience of one, can satisfactorily take the place of the motivation so easily generated by competitive sport. They write, "What stimulates pupils are the compliments and applause from their fellow students. This impels them to do better, not competition" (p. 19). The generation of this mutual support and **trust** is consistent with my thesis.

The autonomous work process of circus skill acquisition is also recognised and valued by these writers. "The students confront 'open' and achievable targets. To help them gain insights into themselves, and become independent. The process is enhanced by incorporating moments of reflection" (p. 32). In a book with little inspiration or

instruction for performance, they do tackle clowning, but beyond explaining that “giggles and acrobatics are the ultimate collaboration” (p. 61), the book does not take the exciting step onwards towards the show.

Gisela Winkler's *Zirkus in der Schule* (1998) has a huge market in Germany, where 'Zirkuspadagogik' has been a feature of schools for twenty years.⁸¹ Both Winkler and Ricken tell of a widespread and popular practice of circus in schools in a country where both circus and variety have a rich tradition.⁸² One of the two German youth circus festivals is competitive, but the overall tone is cooperative and diligent. I visited, not a school, but one of the Cabuwazi neighbourhood circus clubs in Berlin, and witnessed the same variety of activities as anywhere in the world, with the same childish spirit of fun and hard work combined. In the multi-racial suburbs of Berlin, I was very conscious of the sense of trust and comradeship. The resources available to school circus teachers in Germany are unmatched elsewhere, as evidenced by the numerous features and book reviews in the juggling magazine *Kaskade*.

I have mentioned my visit to Barton Ridge Elementary School, New York. Their *Center Ring Circus* may not still be active, and is not mentioned in *Circus for Everyone*. (Sugarman, 2001). However, as may be expected, the American continent has a huge spectrum of approaches to circus, including the highly disciplined *Russian American Kids Circus* of New York, through to the talented and very friendly *Hiccup Circus* operating in the tropical paradise of Hawai'i.⁸³ Every school-based circus is still unique, and Jackie Davis's programme at Pine Hill Waldorf School is a remarkable example. She has a sympathetic understanding of young teens:

When asked if Middle School adolescents weren't uncomfortable using their bodies in the ways required in circus, Davis said, "They *are* uncomfortable; that's why this is so important. They are at an age when they start piercing their bodies and painting their hair green, but you put them up here in a socially condoned context where they can paint their hair green and it's ok. (Sugarman, 2001, p. 167).

[...] The whole thing of teendom – acting out, going for thrills and risks, experimenting with sex and drugs; circus arts can channel that energy in healthy ways (p. 171).

In France, Hugues Hotier founded *Le Cirque Educatif* in 1975, and it has four aims. The first two relate to the survival and revival of circus within French culture. The third is circus in education. The fourth is remediation, which includes concepts of intervention and re-insertion. The Association Cirque Educatif has produced for school use *Le Fichier [dossier] du Cirque Educatif*, which after sections about circus life, art and structure, carries thirty pages of specifically educational material, including lesson plans, for learning across the curriculum. It was devised with and for the Priority Education Zone 'Pas de Calais', which comprises four primary schools, three nursery

⁸¹See the thesis by Olivia Ricken, "Zirkuspadagogik in Der Kinder- Und Jugendarbeit," Masters, Universitat Bielefeld, 2001.

⁸² Trevor Griffiths wrote, "A German joke is no laughing matter" but increasingly in the homeland of Auguste, clowning is an emergent form. Bolton (2003) p. 7

⁸³ *Spectacle*, Vol 2.5 (1999) was dedicated to youth circus.

schools and a high school. The initial programme lasted a year, and the evaluation included:

The best learning situation is that in which the child is ready to collaborate, and take risks because he understands the goal of his efforts. This was certainly the case here. All the objectives were reached, with these bonuses for the students:

- ✍ New motivation is evident for school work: wanting to do well, care taken for perfection
- ✍ Discovery and respect for others in communal activity and meetings.
- ✍ Valorisation of personal and collective work, thanks to performance either as carnival or spectacle.

(Hotier, 1999, 6.2)

In March 2002, I presented a paper at a Circus in Education conference that took place in the Arthur Rimbaud High School in Sin le Noble.⁸⁴ Most of the papers were practical in nature, indicating the wide variety of school programmes in France, and why they worked.⁸⁵ As usual, I was left with the question, "If it so good, why is it not more widespread?" In France, at least, it is seriously regarded, supported and assessed, showing that parts of the French educational system apparently supports the thesis that the values and structures of circus make it a significant learning tool.

4.8 Social Circus

At the very thought of "circus"
 a swarm of long-imprisoned desires breaks jail.
 Armed with beauty and demanding justice
 and everywhere threatening us with curiosity
 and spring and childhood,
 this mob of forgotten wishes
 begins to storm the supposedly impregnable fortifications
 of our present.

e. e. cummings *Damn Everything But The Circus! page U (sic)* (Kent, 1970)

On the 31st of January, 2002, in La Seyne-sur-Mer, France, representatives from thirteen countries⁸⁶ drew up and signed a charter of social circus, or as the French called it, circus and social work.⁸⁷ The effectiveness of the charter and the potency of the network are yet to be tested, but the round table that led to this charter was

⁸⁴ How French to name a high school after a renegade, teenage, drug-taking, runaway, genius poet, famous for his relationship with the degenerate Verlaine, and for abandoning poetry for gun-running and commerce at the age of nineteen.

⁸⁵ Conference papers were published in *La Fonction Educative du Cirque, Arts De La Piste Et De La Rue*, ed. Hugues Hotier (2003)

⁸⁶ Brazil, France, Colombia, Australia, Senegal, Chile, Northern Ireland, Morocco, Canada, Spain, Argentina, Guinea, Holland.

⁸⁷ The social circus charter, drawn up by French circus sociologist Brigitte Bailly, is reproduced in Appendix 2, p. xxiv.

remarkable in itself. The delegates represented a variety of organizations, some rural and some urban, some working long-term some short-term, some inspired by circus arts, others motivated by social intervention with young people at risk. The ethnic and political backgrounds of these people are diverse and in this heterogeneity lies the remarkable achievement of this gathering. All they have in common is circus. All have discovered that, for them, it is the most effective means for improving the life and prospects for young people in difficulty.

Circus for Everyone (Sugarman, 2001) lists many of the world's social circus projects, but they are scattered in the text among dozens of circus schools, clubs and summer camps. There is not yet any significant literature about this phenomenon apart from *Circus in a Suitcase* (Bolton, 1988) and accounts of individual projects in popular and circus magazines.⁸⁸ Radio and television often reports local groups but usually in small bites near the end of the news. Typical was the report on ABC's *PM* on the Brewarrina youth circus, which featured the usual confused superlatives of the reporter, some fragments of interviews with the children and comments like this from the reporter and the project leader:

Nance Haxton [reporter]: Brewarrina is often featured in the media, though not in such a positive light. Crime, drinking and delinquency have put the town on the front pages all too often for all the wrong reasons. Project coordinator Kate Reid says the success of the circus troupe shows there is more to Brewarrina than its social problems.

Kate Reid: There's so much to Brewarrina that it's a shame that I don't think a lot of people get to see it. There's so many fantastic kids in town, and they are really talented, and there's a beautiful river, and just a beautiful landscape, and just so many different people from different places with different stories, It's a big melting pot of different stories. And, yeah, there has been a bit of bad publicity for Bree, and there's just so much more to it than that. I hope the kids are giving people a taste of the other side of the picture. (Haxton and Reid, 2004).

This bears a strong resemblance to a paragraph from *Circus in a Suitcase* written in 1983. We used to call this 'community circus', and to those involved, it was clearly a dynamic tool for social change. A local youth circus gives young people not only the opportunity to develop and re-present themselves, but in this case, to give a new image of their own hometown – an image closer to the world of the child, less concerned with demography, more with a sense of belonging, an attachment to land no less important for the tenement dwellers of Edinburgh than for the remote indigenous communities of Australia:

It's difficult to assess the impact of the Circus on the people of Pilton. Obviously there is a great deal of pride among the families of the individual children concerned. Furthermore, many residents of Pilton are tremendously encouraged to see so much press and television coverage referring to Pilton in a positive way after years of bad publicity. As they

⁸⁸ Arts de la Piste, July 2004 is a recent exception. See chapter 7 (Quentin, 2004).

travel in Scotland and England (and a tour of France is now being planned) the Circus is a great roving ambassador for Pilton. (Bolton, 1988, p. 9).

From this we made deduce that Kate Reid and I have both made the same discovery along with many others around the world, but that message has not gone out. As I wrote in 1986, "Circus is not dying, circus is alive and changing. New Circus has learned much from traditional circus, but it has not learned the lesson of self-advertisement. It's happening all over the world but the world doesn't know." (Bolton, 1987, p. 7).

Much of this pioneering work has been adopted and spread widely by *Cirque du Monde*, the philanthropic arm of *Cirque De Soleil*. They support projects world wide including *Circus Ethiopia* and *Circo Para Todos* and in Australia, in partnership with NI CA, they train people in social circus work. As an indication of the their philosophy, and recalling the examples of Pilton and Brewarrina, I quote from their training manual an early example of this empowering effect of representing your own neighbourhood. In 1991, in Brazil's biggest city, an NGO was formed to look after the interests and welfare of street kids. It was named after a samba hit, translated as 'If This Were My Street'.

To start with, street kids from downtown Rio de Janeiro and the Leblon, Ipanema and Copacabana districts were introduced to various crafts, drama, sports, the capoeira (a traditional martial arts dance), and the circus arts. 'Se Essa Rua Fosse Minha' soon realized that the street kids were most interested in the circus activities. And so the group asked members of the circus troupe Intrepide to organize circus workshops for the street kids.

A performance on the beach at Copacabana proved to be the turning point for 'Se Essa Rua Fosse Minha'. The street kids were seen in an entirely different light. As the applause rang out, youngsters experienced the rare delight of approval. That performance validated the hunch that circus workshops could help street kids renew their self-esteem. (Dagenais, Mercier and Rivard, 1999, 3.2)

So this support group, like so many others in youth work and education, found that among all the possible 'intervention' activities, it was circus that was most effective. *Cirque du Monde* has produced a promotional video called *When The Circus Came To Town*, which has a brief montage that graphically tells why circus works. (Cirque du Monde, 2001). In rapid succession we see images from both circus and street life paralleled with circus activity. The glamour and risk of a tightrope walker is followed by a shot of a group of boys perilously 'train surfing' among the cables and bridges of an urban railway line. The Chinese pole-climbing act is set against a little child shinning up a palm tree to get coconuts. The rhythm of a circus 'casting' swing suggests the power of the big waves where children are body-surfing and, echoing the speed and agility of floor acrobatics, we see children darting at speed, barefoot, among the cars on a busy city street. This short sequence shows, better than many verbal expositions, the way that circus activities can provide the risk and adventure necessary to childhood, in a way that is not antisocial or deadly.

In looking for the correlation of circus experience and childhood deficits, I shall look more closely at the motivation of three of the many individuals who have dedicated much of their life to the social efficacy of circus arts: Padre Jesus da Silva, Mike Moloney and Felicity Simpson. One of the first children's circuses to tour internationally was the Spanish troupe, Los Muchachos (the Young Ones). The group, founded in 1964, has a most unusual history and *raison d'être*. It was started by a Jesuit priest, Father Silva Mendez, to help fund the Children's Republic in Bemposta, near Orense, Spain. Their story is told in the book *The Children's Republic*. (Mobius, 1976). Father Mendez organised the community, which at first consisted mainly of poor boys. The town of Bemposta soon became an essentially self-governing, self-financing 'Republic', which in later years became the model for six such villages around the world. Since 1972 both boys and girls have been admitted, many of whom have opted to leave their families and home countries to undergo the communal education afforded by the Republics.

In its early days Bemposta was running into financial trouble. Its revenue from tourism and light industry was not meeting costs. Father Silva, whose background was in the circus, decided to take a chance. He began the first circus school and trained his first group of 'Muchachos'. Mobius gives three reasons for Father Silva's decision:

First, he wanted to direct the Muchachos' athletic drive into a genuine, if not easy, activity and lead it further into an independent achievement. Secondly, Father Silva hoped from the beginning that the school would develop a circus that would carry the message of Bemposta – in an artistic form – throughout the world. And last but not least, the travelling circus would make new sources of income available to the city-state (Mobius, 1976, p. 121).

Circus Los Muchachos has been awarded the gold peace medal of the United Nations. They went on the road in 1968 and were an instant success. Today they have a new circus school near Plaza de Toros, Madrid. The travelling company consists of up to a hundred and thirty boys and girls, and the acts include trapeze, juggling, acrobatics and horse riding and a parody of bull fighting. They have toured East and West, to the USA and Russia as well as countries as far apart as Argentina, Australia and India, and continue to be one of the financial mainstays of the Children's Republic. All of us at the Social Circus Round Table at La Seyne-sur-Mer had slightly differing motivations for what we did. Padre Silva was unequivocal. As he is quoted in *The Children's Republic*, and as he said to us in session, "A circus performance is for me the most beautiful prayer that we can direct to God" (p. 21).

The Belfast Community Circus, Northern Ireland, was started in 1983 with a small grant and some home-made props, partly inspired by what was happening in Pilton. Mike Moloney, a teacher from Mt Isa, Australia, working with Irishman Donal McKendrie, saw the potential of circus to harness some of the energy of the young in that city, and to break down some of the sectarianism dominating their lives. Moloney told me in an extensive interview in Belfast in 2002 that "kids were dying on the streets. The demos were the greatest game of cops and robbers, but there was real fire, real rubber bullets." (Interview, Moloney, 2002). The Belfast Community Circus is today one of the

best established centres of its kind, operating as a school and performance venue, as an outreach centre of circus workshops, and as an international training centre for what is now often called Social Circus. Listening to Moloney, a self-confessed 'greybeard' who is still a director of the circus and the treasurer of the organisation, it is clear that much of his approach to youth work has been inspired by many of the elements we are tracking through this thesis.

Moloney is now officially Theatre Specialist for Northern Ireland Prisons, and his work takes him into penal institutions at every level. The stories he tells show that it is the sense of **fun** that gets him accepted, as well as the fact that as an outsider, he has 'diplomatic immunity' (his phrase), and is known on the prison grapevine as 'that mad bastard, Aussie Mike'. I will retell three of his anecdotes, each one clearly (and unintentionally) featuring a different one or more of our elements. The specific prison examples are not strictly childhood experiences, but as Moloney pointed out to me, "there is suspended animation in jail, and you come out the same age as you go in", so these stories have currency. Similar things were happening in the Belfast juvenile correction facilities, which I reported on in the literature review (1.7).

In the Women's Prison, four young offenders were housed with twenty-one seasoned prisoners. There had been a suicide by a twenty-year-old, and the prison community was severely depressed. Mike introduced a young female American trainer for what he believes was the world's first prison trapeze course. Only the juveniles took part, but all the other prisoners watched. Soon all the prisons were talking about it, and the spirit in the Women's Prison soared with the young aerialists. This is an archetypal example of what we are looking for in Thursday's Child, the little finger that **aspires** upwards. The literally uplifting effect of this circus skill proved more effective than traditional counselling and self-esteem courses in that situation. I asked Mike whether there was community resentment towards this sort of positive provision for people who have been found guilty of crimes against society. He explained that prison populations in Northern Ireland are unique. Most inmates consider themselves political prisoners. Moloney, for instance was interviewed by the 'Minister of Culture' (a long-term prisoner) before he could run his programme in the Maze Prison. So re-habilitation is a priority, and as he says, "something's working here. Why hasn't it been tried before?"

The element represented by the index finger is clearly seen in the same story. The prisoner on the trapeze is able to regain and show 'her own whack', a Belfast phrase that means exactly 'son propre salut', that inward and outward manifestation of **self** that we borrowed from Andre Francois in Section 3.10. In an environment like a prison, and possibly a school playground, one's self is often subsumed by a dominant hierarchy based on aggression, and a circus skill can often be a way through this impasse. Another of my interviewees, who has to be anonymous in this telling, but who is far from nameless as an international youth circus specialist, spent three months in an English prison, for importing his own recreational drugs. He told me he feared for his life and his virtue there, but was benignly adopted by Big Stan, a considerable inmate, because Stan admired his juggling. My friend's time in custody brought about an unexpected enthusiasm for juggling among other inmates and the making of juggling

balls in that particular institution. His own specific circus **individuality** saved him in this otherwise hostile situation.

Moloney's teaching principal, 'learning what we all know', uses **fun** activities to forget the impositions and inhibitions of the everyday, and draws on innate skills and qualities. "I'd go back into the very way I'd learned everything else – by playing, by experimenting," he explained. In Belfast, as in the Balkans, where he also ran a circus project, he found himself working with children who had not had a childhood, who actually had not played together. Although circus was the outcome, he would sometimes approach it through theatre games, and it was in playing these games that the children could release some of the tension they carried in their unique situations. He describes Northern Ireland boys as "all neck and shoulders, like pugnacious terriers." With the games and circus, they finally relaxed. In Sarajevo, he found the children wanted to perform, not only the skills they had learned, but also the games he had introduced. With Aussie Mike they played 'Grandmother's Whispers', a game of creeping up and freezing on the spot, and a local variation called 'Balthazar Says', where he had to make the children blink or laugh. For years, these children had learned to be deadpan, not for fun, but because their lives depended on it. Now, finally, it was a game. The playgrounds around them were still minefields, but in the safety of the circus zone (a nuclear shelter under a bombed supermarket), there were no enemy soldiers, but this new breed of strangers who brought relief supplies of fun and laughter. 'Clowns Sans Frontières' were Mike's partners in Sarajevo, and they continue to do pioneering work in war-zones and refugee camps throughout the world.

A third element that is essential to Moloney's work in prisons is what I have described as **trust**, personified by the ring-finger, and associated with non-threatening touching. As I have found with my own work in juvenile detention centres in Western Australia, the use of stilts has unexpected results. Mike says, "I start with balance – it affects that internal stuff", and after getting the boys to balance peacock feathers on their noses (a spectacular but easy skill) he progresses through rola-bola and walking globe, eventually to tie-on stilts. As I always found, it is the dominant boys who clamour to 'have first shot'. Once on, they are certainly head and shoulders above the rest, but they are also unstable and totally vulnerable. Mike says, "Once they're on stilts, you've got them. One to one." The stilt walker needs to hold someone's hands, whether it be the instructor, another inmate, or even a warden. I have seen this happen so often, and the communication, as the boy looks gratefully down at the officer holding him, while the officer in turn seems to feel genuine pride in the achievement of this young offender, is unexpected and wonderful. In another manifestation of the trust/touch paradigm, Mike Moloney described how he arranged parties on visiting days, so the adult male inmates would entertain and play with the visiting families, including, of course, their own children. This visiting hour was extended to two hours. "The dads got to hold their kids. He was less of a stranger, and they had more to talk about than just the jail experience." He sees this as countering the 'suspended animation' of a jail sentence, as the positive physical interaction of the prisoner with his growing children keeps him in touch with the passage of time outside. This recalls my hypothesis in the introduction, that an experience of circus skills may sometimes be just what is needed to help a child through a stage of growth that is proving insuperable or retardative.

The third example, from an impressive and growing field of Social Circus, is Felicity Simpson and *Circo Para Todos*, in Cali, Colombia, which has been called 'the most dangerous city in the world.' Felicity and her Colombian artistic partner Hector Fabio toured for years with a stilt/unicycle act, mostly the German variety circuit. They performed in Australia in 1988 with Cirque Archaos. Felicity told me that in those long periods in the dressing rooms around the world, between their act and the group finale, Hector would dream and make plans for a circus school for the disadvantaged young people of his country. Now, at the time of writing, the school is a reality, and has been producing graduates for several years, and has toured overseas on several occasions. It was their French-based supporting organisation, *Cirque Pour Tous* that hosted the Social Circus Round Table in 2001. The story of the evolution of this company is a model of the doggedness of the circus spirit so often told in the fiction and biographies cited in chapter three. From their story, which will have to be told elsewhere, I extract some examples of our elements on practice.

When I started circus with young people in Craigmillar, Edinburgh, in 1975, there was one occasion where we put out the gym mat on a patch of lawn outside the tenements, and the local young boys lined up to do dive rolls over a longer and longer line of recumbent bodies. Heavy duty boots came into contact with tender flanks, there were cries of pain and triumph, but instead of the residents locking up the windows, they were opened, as the disbelieving neighbours gathered and watched as the boys had a good time, with no-one getting threatened or seriously hurt. I remember one boy wincing as he got up after clearing about twelve bodies. He came to me, and said, "here, hold this, will ye?" and gave me a six inch hunting knife from his trouser pocket. This is more than a quirky anecdote, as I realized when Felicity's story took a very similar turn. After a 'Motivation Show' in front of hundreds of people in the streets of Cali, her *Intrepida Troupe* announced circus workshops starting the next day. "Billions signed up", she said. (Interview, Simpson, 2002). Once workshops started, with children chosen by perceived need, not talent, she had a similar experience to the one I have described. As they came forward to try a trick, 'los inhalantes', the glue-sniffers, would reluctantly give up their bottle to Agnes, the trainer, at the beginning of the mat, and pick it up at the end. Later, she managed to persuade them to put their stuff in the lockers, and finally, to leave all drugs at the door. "Later," Felicity told me, "the children decided for themselves that they could not do stilt work unless they hadn't been doing glue for twenty minutes. They actually decided themselves. It's a beautiful process, that." These are examples of the building of trust through the circus method. Naturally, this process is not exclusive to circus, and can occur in many activities, but these stories of the stilts, the knife and the sniffer's bottle show how quickly and effectively **trust** can be shared, when the agenda is as simple as performing a circus trick successfully.

A final nugget taken from the rich mine of experience in Cali is what the young circus performers are called, their 'salut'. Felicity was very protective of the Cali youngsters, who came to perform in La Seyne-sur-Mer, and made it clear that they were not to be patronised. She explained in detail to me, how she has seen the harm resulting from a child's going from destitution to stardom and back to anonymous poverty again. She has an arrangement with the main newspaper in Cali, which has exclusivity, on the

understanding that the children are not shown in a negative light. So the principle is that, to funding bodies and donors, this is called 'a circus school for street kids'. To the city and national authorities, they are 'working with marginalised children'. The children see themselves as 'students', and in performance, use their own names, and are, collectively, 'students from the *Colombian Circus School*'. Working with the notoriously difficult British Press, they managed to maintain the line, 'determined youngsters succeeding against the odds.'

So these examples are drawn from the many dozens of varied projects happening on six continents, many of which can be found listed in *Circus For Everyone*. Some, like Circus Ethiopia, are used by government agencies to spread messages of health and safety programmes. Other communities, like Peru, Indiana and Sarasota, Florida have thriving youth circuses where retired circus people are cherished for their ability to pass on skills and stories to the young. In Europe, Australia and America, young people form their own social tribes as an experiment in alternative living, and others, like Melbourne's *Women's Circus*, continually remember their political origin, in their case as a positive affirmation of abuse survival. In all these cases, instances will be found of all six of the elements of this thesis, wherein values and actions integral to the performance of circus are also those needed for formative or remedial development of individuals.

In Belfast and Cali, two cities full of risk, circuses have created opportunities for their young to put themselves against inert forces of gravity and personal hazard instead of other people. As in all the examples, they learn that by working hard, by stretching their own powers of endurance and training and strength and skill in performing, the rewards can be solid and lasting. Common to all these examples is the establishment of a new 'family' often, as in Cape Town, Israel, Sarajevo, St Louis and Belfast,⁸⁹ across racial and religious divides. e. e. cummings was truly prescient of the honesty and energy of social circus. There can be no better description of today's new young circus performers than his line: "Armed with beauty and demanding justice".

4.9 Community Circus

I never went to the circus when I was a kid. This was the first circus I ever saw - and I was in it.

Darryl Hamilton, tumbler in the "Back Street Flyers", in the first *Big Apple Circus*, New York, 1977 (Angelo, 1978)

⁸⁹ The circuses mentioned can be found via:

<http://www.zip-zap.co.za>

<http://www.israelcircusschool.com>

<http://www.everydaycircus.net/html/cdf.html> (St Louis, USA)

<http://www.belfastcircus.org>

The Sarajevo circus was auspiced by Belfast.

Circus as a community activity, usually, but not exclusively, for young people, has a history of over sixty years, and now occurs in most developed countries, and increasingly, with social circus undertones, in the developing world. There is, of course, an overlap with the activities described under 'Amateur Circus', section 4.4. The difference between, say, the nineteenth century *Cirque Molier* in Paris and the *Great Y Circus* in Redland, California, established 1929, is that the former emulated the upmarket Parisian circus in every way, whereas the latter took some circus elements, especially the succession of various acrobatic acts, and suited them to its own environment – a gym full of suburban teenagers. As in so much of this analysis, there are hybrids. Peru, Indiana and Sarasota, Florida both have well-established youth circuses in the traditional American format, trained and directed by former circus artists for whom the town was once their winter quarters. When the trainers, parents and the children themselves tell me stories about the transformation and salvation of problem children, then it is clear that Peru, Sarasota, Wenatchee, the Flying Fruit Flies and many more fit at least three of my categories – amateur, community and social. It will be more useful to look again at the six 'fingers' and identify each element in six different community circus models.

Rock 'n Roll Circus began in 1983, in the suburb of West End, Brisbane, Australia. Pauline and Denis Peel, local residents, returned home after some years in Edinburgh, Scotland, where they were integral to the early development of community circus in Craigmillar and Wester Hailes, two of that city's problem suburbs. Pauline co-ordinated the first community circus festival in Manchester, England, then a follow-up festival in Wester Hailes. Denis, a saxophone player, has a great talent for producing circus bands from any musical ingredients, and they both brought their talents back to West End. In the summer of 1983, in Musgrave Park, Brisbane, Australia's first Community Circus Festival featured two school groups nurtured by the Peels' company, *Street Arts*, plus a motley collection of adults and teenagers at first called *The Razzle-Dazzle Circus*. I saw their first show that day, and it epitomised our element of pure **fun**.

I recall an uninhibited group of men and women of all shapes and sizes, doing their best, failing and laughing. I recall Tony Hannan, who went on to found Adelaide's *Cirkidz* and *Knee-High Puppets*, doing an interminable and complicated clown routine that went hilariously wrong. I recall a teenage unicyclist, there with his mother, who went on to become Derek Ives, renowned juggler, dark clown, rigger and legend; but that day, even Derek was laughing. *Razzle Dazzle* became *Rock 'n Roll*, and expanded. They made a video and many shows, including a venue-saving community extravaganza in a threatened local theatre, celebrating the culture and characters of the neighbourhood. Later, they contracted to form a small professional company, recently re-named *Circa*, which for years has produced a poetic, provocative style of circus. The success of *Rock 'n Roll Circus* is based on its genesis – a strong impulse to express enjoyment and have fun.

Circus Ethiopia has a story that must be told, and it can usefully be seen in the context of **the index finger** of our heuristic device. A Canadian teacher, Marc La Chance, started the circus in Addis Ababa in 1991, initially with a group of Ethiopian Jews. They left for Israel following government restrictions, and the circus re-formed, largely from children who had seen the original shows. Today there is a network of

twelve companies in the country, and the director of Circus in Ethiopia is Aweke Emiru, one of those original children. La Chance, who died in 1999, had written:

The children are the mainspring of the circus and maintain a surprising amount of constant energy. The school, friends and family gravitate toward their passion for the circus. An art that nourishes their soul, that gives a meaning to their lives [...] The show is a gift of the heart for everyone. The circus movement, because it is a real movement in society, is, in its history and its present development, a response to the needs and tastes of all those who participate in the show. The goal of the circus is to fascinate and to fill up with wonder.

<http://www.lefourneau.com/artistes/circus/ethiopie/histoire/histoireanglais.htm>

Their shows are immensely popular in Ethiopia⁹⁰, attracting huge crowds, and the government and other agencies have been quick to see the potential of community circuses to spread messages. A short list of some of their engagements in 1997 tells the story:

October 18th

Show before 10,000 people, including Health Department heads, and the Red Cross, about the health risks and prevention of HIV/AIDS.

November 1st

A show performed to more than 5000 spectators mostly children in an elementary school around Emmanuel Hospital. Messages about health problems caused by polio, and precautions to prevent it were communicated. Questions and answers on polio disease showed that the children have quite a good knowledge about it.

November 4th

The Europe Tour 1997 show was performed to OXFAM UK officials and staff, who expressed great interest and appreciation. The event contributed to strengthen the already existing good partnership between the two organizations.

<http://www.lefourneau.com/artistes/circus/ethiopie/cirques/ethiopia/rapport>

In this way, the desire of communities to watch their own young people manifesting themselves as acrobats, contortionists, stilt-walkers and so on has become a means of **showing**, not only the skills, but also stories, warnings and procedures. Julius Caesar famously used a diversionary tactic when he provided 'bread and circuses' to keep Romans happy, but in Ethiopia the power of circus as propaganda has been harnessed for the real benefit of the community.

Looking for an example of community circus to associate with the long finger of **risk and defiance**, I have settled on the widespread sub-culture of 'fire-tribes'. As yet I

⁹⁰ Francis Nortey, a Ghanaian studying Chinese acrobatics in Wuqiao, China, told me in May 2004, that Circus Ethiopia is the best-known African circus, and an inspiration for his country, and many others.

cannot trace any serious research into this phenomenon, although it is occurring simultaneously in many parts of the world. In Europe, America and Australia, thousands of young people meet regularly for fire-twirling and fire-dancing, with optional extras such as fire-breathing and eating. Generally, these young people are not really interested in performance, except to each other. There is seldom reference to risk or danger, and they do not see themselves as foolhardy. Nonetheless, on websites⁹¹ and at gatherings, emphasis is placed on personal safety, with hints and instructions on how to choose and handle fuel, and how not to ignite oneself or others. So although their activities transgress humanity's primitive fear of fire, and the tattooed, pierced, braided appearance of many fieries often transgresses at least their parents' standards, this is a non-threatening activity, almost devoid of policy, dogma or evangelism. Their aims seem to be visceral delight, personal satisfaction with achievement, sharing of common enthusiasm. They are a true community in the sense of a voluntary gathering of like interests. As 'Msquared', one of West Australia's best known fire manipulators, writes:

We play with fire as an artform. To us, fire is a performance tool. Fire is there to mesmerise and entrance, to trace and flow. We use it to draw patterns in the air, to flow around ourselves as we become one with the flame, intertwined among the flowing glow as it encircles us and passes between us [...] We learn from each other, we teach each other. We can teach you, we can learn from you. We watch each other and we watch others. We trade techniques, both for constructing equipment, and of creating artform with flame [...] We are a community of fire performers. A loosely-knit group of individuals from all walks of life, and with varying levels of experience, from beginners and hobbyists, up to professionals and regular buskers. We welcome all performers, with all levels of experience.

<http://fire.msquared.com.au/who.html>

A community circus built on **trust** was established in 1991 in Footscray, Melbourne. *The Women's Circus*⁹² was initially a project to give support to women who had experienced sexual assault, "along with other women from a variety of different backgrounds, cultures, with different body shapes, sexual preferences and ages."

<http://www.spinifexpress.com.au/wc/wc.htm>

It has always provided a working environment where men are largely excluded, and where every woman is completely accepted for what she is. The first shows were technically primitive but socially they were revolutionary. The word 'empowerment' has become feeble with over-use in community arts practice, but is totally appropriate for *The Women's Circus*. Women who had come to distrust their bodies, through abuse, or simply ageing and neglect, found a way steadily and measurably to restore their

⁹¹ Hundreds of fire sites can be reached via
<http://www.ringsurf.com/netring?ring=Fireart;id=151;action=list>

⁹² A 'Wimmins Circus' was established in Melbourne in the early 1980's, including Rose Wise, Sarah McNamara, Robin Laurie and others, who went on to make significant contributions to Australia's cultural life, especially through community arts.

strength and flexibility. Working together on acro-balance, pyramids and trapeze they uncovered a physical resilience parallel with an emotional resilience, which had the potential to heal some of the pain they had been through. One of the contributors to their book wrote, about climbing on a human pyramid:

I learnt that we had to watch each other's eyes closely, that we had to be conscious of our dependence on each other. That we were a formation of intricate links, minds and bodies. That we had to work together for each other and for ourselves. I learnt that I was very brave. (Liebmann and al, 1998, p. 30).

Their funding is from arts sources, not social services, emphasising their understanding of circus as a means, not to complain about their lot, but to celebrate, to the highest possible standard, their survival and their potential. In Australia, the federal Community Cultural Development Board

does not prescribe what constitutes a community. Community can refer to geographic location, cultural background, religious belief, gender, disability or a myriad of other common factors. Generally the CCDB sees a community as a group of people who wish to express, through collaboration with professional artists, something about their shared experience as individuals (The Australia Council for the Arts, 2004).

By this, and most other definitions, *The Women's Circus* is a very significant example of a community circus exemplifying the quality of **trust**.

When I visited the three-ring circus in a permanent building in the main street of Peru, Indiana, the three ringmasters were the local judge, a church minister and the high school principal. Of the three hundred young performers and three thousand people associated with the company, only one was on the payroll – Bill Anderson, ex-local police officer, now circus coach. I saw a huge show, with flying trapeze, pyramids on the high wire, dozens of acrobats and hordes of (adult) clowns. Before the show, ringmaster Judge Bruce Embrey told me:

This circus is the centre of a whale of a community project. [Local sports clubs, professional associations, and dozens of tradespeople are involved in this festival.] We're really heavily into the business of trying to recruit new industry here, and we try to get people who are interested to come in during this week. What we're showing them is a circus, but what they're seeing is trans-community co-operation, and it becomes a selling point. A company planning to re-locate wants to see a community that works together, both the public and private sector doing something together, and that's something we can show them during this period...The town is proud to have been the subject of an award-winning, one-hour TV documentary by NBC, *Circus Town, USA*. (Bolton, 1986, p. 22)

For the purpose of this argument I characterise this company, like the *Sarasota Sailor Circus* and the *Wenatchee Youth Circus* in the category represented by the little finger; they are community circuses of imitation and **aspiration**. Each is driven by

memories of circus as it has been, with a renewal each season of new young performers and new acts. In Sarasota I attended a master-class by the legendary ring aerialist Dolly Jacobs, daughter of the even more famous Lou Jacobs, the clown.⁹³ Young people watched Dolly's videos in awe, queued to take part in the training session, and asked many questions about technique and also the glory days of American circus.

In Wenatchee, Washington State, the youth circus never performs without its Calliope⁹⁴, even though some of the children told me in interviews that they were sick of it. Paul K Pugh, the trainer, like the ex-performers of Sarasota and Peru, sees the importance of passing on to the young generations a rich sense of the history and culture of the circus community. Legends are maintained, while the young aspire both to imitate and impress the elders.

In China, the home of acrobatics for over two thousand years, I looked in vain for evidence of amateur or community circus. Only around Wuqiao in Hebei province, where acrobatics (za ji) is very strong in the regional culture, might you find family groups occasionally practising in public or performing to the local village community. Besides the *School of Acrobatic Arts*, where 200 students lead an almost monastic life, training for acrobatic careers, there is also the theme park, *Acrobatic World*. Here you can see remarkable young groups of school graduates, and also acts like those banned by Zhou En Lai in the nineteen-fifties, including the ladder of knives, sword swallowing and garrotting with steel wire. My American colleagues Carlo and Orlene Gentile spent three months training at the Wuqiao school, and often observed children playing za ji, in their yards or on the street, rehearsing relatively advanced skills like contortion and vase-tossing, where we would normally expect children to play ball sports or make-believe games.

However, if we accept the Australia Council concept of 'communities of interest', then there are community circuses in China. Many of China's best companies were started within state-run enterprises. The characteristic synchronised bicycle acts, and the 'peacock tail' of thirteen or so riders on one bike were both developed by the *Shanghai Post-Telecommunications Acrobatic Company*. *The Chinese Army Acrobatic Company* has featured performers as young as seven years old, who are, technically, enlisted soldiers. So in that sense, some of these companies started as community events. However, in contrast to the dearth of real community circus in China, we find that in Russia, as in Germany, France and Finland, there is a widespread network of local circus groups. So, rather than China, let us look to Russia for **hard work** in community circus.

I interviewed Elena Davona at the San Francisco circus school in 2003. She is a pre-eminent solo trapezist who has performed at the highest level with European and

⁹³ Lou Jacobs is the only American featured on a US Mail postage stamp in his lifetime. In a series of generic portraits of entertainers, the designers assumed that his familiar, Alberto Fratellini-like, huge painted grin was public property, not belonging to one special individual. *Circus Oz* and *The Flying Fruit Flies* have been similarly represented on Australian stamps.

⁹⁴ The Calliope (pronounced Cally-ope in the USA) is the extremely raucous, originally steam-driven organ traditionally used to attract circus audiences, alleged to be audible a mile or more away.

American circuses. Knowing of the Russian commitment to extreme hard work in training, I was interested in hearing more about the nature of amateur, or community circus in the former Soviet Union. She told of her own story where, in her small town there was no sporting organisation for children, and after starting dance classes at ten, she moved to the circus club at fourteen. She trained four days a week, and her coach guided her to her speciality. She attended frequent youth circus festivals, but recalls that the competition was not important. More memorable was the camaraderie, in which all the children shared the same 'father' (the trainer), and the thrill of sleeping away from home. She does not dwell on the pain or risk in the training and performing. "We did not mind it. We just did it". (Interview, Davona, 2003). Rather she recalls the fun and pleasure of those days. According to the *Amateur Circus Association of Russia*, there are more than two hundred circus clubs, and the Moscow-based *International Union of Circus Schools* claims, "more than five thousand children in the age of from five till eighteen years are trained to circus art." Judging from Elena Davona's success, and the lists of achievements of amateur Russian circus clubs, the work ethic must be considerably more than that experienced by most children in Western countries. This is part of the English language webpage of the Russian Association:

The amateur circus collectives of Russia exist rather long time, some more than 50 pupils of amateur circuses of Russia for last 5 years have won prize-winning places on many prestigious circus international festivals in Paris, Monte-Carlo, Wiesbaden, Norchopping, Warsaw and others. Besides festivals the whole collectives of amateur circuses successfully go on tour abroad: France, USA, Emirates, Turkey, Belgium, China and others. <http://www.aca.fromru.com/> 2004

As in Peru, Indiana, these are indeed amateur groups, and Davina recalls that only the head coach was paid at her club. So whether or not competition is significant, the community spirit in these circus groups, reflecting the rigorous tradition of the Russians and Chinese, is of diligence and **hard work**.

This short exposition of six different manifestations of community circus seems to support the thesis that the six elements are integral to the success of youth circus activity.

4.10 Circus in the Psyche

Life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a comedy in long-shot.
Charlie Chaplin

Most educational theory, indeed most academic discourse, proceeds empirically, based on experiment and deduction. This is a luxury that circus studies may look forward to in the future. In this section I move beyond my 'double patchwork' juxtaposition of circus and childhood, to look at aspects of circus that are intangible and unproven, and I suggest that they are so powerful that they constitute a resonance, a subliminal effect on any audience, including the young. Perhaps I am taking E.B. White's advice,

quoted in *Learning to Fly*, "A writer, like an acrobat, must occasionally try for a stunt that is too much for him" (Keen, 1999) 231, but here goes.

In searching for truths in the academic tradition, it is sometimes worth turning over the most unlikely stones, to see what might lurk beneath. In holding an object up to the light, scientific investigators sometimes make crucial discoveries about a mundane object by using a different light - ultra-violet, infra-red, or X-Ray. Sometimes a complete shift of thinking occurs which, when verified, may nullify the accepted truths of generations or centuries. I think of the courageous work of Copernicus and Kepler in Astronomy, and of Charlton Ogburn in Literature. His convincing case for Edward de Vere as the author of the works attributed to 'Shake-speare' seems unfairly doomed to the category of 'crankery' by the inertia of centuries, of the thousands of tomes generated by the Shakespeare industry.

I hope to work in the spirit of these investigators, but as to the veracity of my discoveries, I can only offer some insights gained from some stone-turning and up-to-the-light-holding. This chapter concludes, then, with an examination of some aspects of circus viewed in the light of psychology and spirituality, remembering that my thesis is that there are values and structures in circus that make it worth considering as a developmental tool for young people. The following observations are tentative and inconclusive, but eventually it may become clear that discoveries I have made here may support the general thesis. If not, perhaps there may be the occasional proposition to help some future researcher, or the general reader. I now intend to peep through the loopholes of five huge big tops where unannounced shows have been playing for centuries to very small audiences. The spectacles, of which I can only offer the reader short reports of a tantalising glimpse, are -

- ✍ The symbolism of circus acts
- ✍ The significance of the circle, the crowd and the canvas
- ✍ The circus artist as hero
- ✍ Circus as a religious experience
- ✍ Sexuality in the circus

Hemingway did not say, "Damn everything but the circus." That was e. e. cummings. (Kent, 1970). What Hemingway actually said, in the Saturday Evening Post, and quoted in the programme of Ringling Bros, Barnum and Bailey Circus, was "The Circus is good for you. It is the only spectacle I know that while you watch it gives the quality of a truly happy dream." (Hemingway, 1953). This is a strangely limp quotation to use in the promotional blurb of a Circus. It doesn't have the same memorable resonance as those other American favourites, 'The Greatest Show on Earth', 'Ladies and Gentlemen, Children of All Ages' and 'May All Your Days Be Circus Days'. However, all public utterances of acknowledged artists deserve our respectful examination, and I intend now to look at circus as a dream, and particularly as a "truly happy dream".

Current opinion among psychologists is that the function of a dream is to assess and re-assemble lived and imagined experiences, whereby the mind attempts a reconciliation among disparate and discordant elements of memory. As Freud (1975), Jung (1964) and

others have posited, a dream is often couched in symbols, to hide the unconscious from the conscious mind. These symbols themselves, however, have an innate power, and can carry additional status and magnitude when confronted in the waking world. Whether or not connected with dreams, these symbols can also be recognized as phobias suffered by many people. The contention here is that many of these symbols, and many undisguised traumatic events are openly 'on parade', uncompromisingly 'before your very eyes' in the circus ring.

In every case we see a performer undertaking on our behalf (we have paid for it to happen), a shamanistic journey, task or attitude from which s/he escapes exposed but unscathed.⁹⁵ The circus is truly a parade of phobias, displayed publicly, and resolved. As a child, our biggest fear may have been the dark of night, mercifully always followed by day, or abandonment by mother, eventually followed by her return. Watching a circus act, we are often placed in a position of anxiety and fear, always followed by resolution and assurance.

I will list examples of nightmare and phobic images that occur in the circus, are confronted on our behalf, and resolved in the ring.

Circus Acts

Exposure
 Facing wild animals
 Humiliation
 Heights
 Leaving the ground
 Being dropped
 Too many things to do
 Knives
 Ropes (bondage)
 Whips
 Ladders (unstable progress which could lead to-)
 Falling over/off
 Snakes
 Trampoline (blanket toss)
 Somersault (foetal position)
 Looking up skirt (aerial acts)
 Locking in a box
 Severe contortion
 Fear of someone bigger than you

Clown Acts

Extreme status - fear of boss
 Social gaff
 Wrong clothes
 Gross body

⁹⁵ This aspect of circus is explored in The Drama Review 18.1 (1974)

Broken things
 Lateness
 Misunderstanding
 Smells
 Bad hair
 Public show of emotion
 Body fluids
 Clumsiness
 Extreme double act (exaggerating that played out by all domestic partners)

To my knowledge, this understanding of circus as a parade of phobias has not been seriously argued, although many writers have looked at individual acts and their psychological undercurrents. Examples include Sam Keen on flying (1999), Le Psychojonglage on juggling (Durand and Pavelak, 1999) and Philippe Petit on wire-walking (1983) (1985) (1985) (1991). Rogan Taylor, in *The Death and Resurrection Show*, finds circus:

shot through with magical references, and powerful allegories of the extraordinary experiences involved in ecstatic initiation. The show is the living remnant of an ancient and prodigious oral library which took to the road, along with the nomadic shamans and their apprentices, when their tribal cultures collapsed and died. Travelling from one settlement to another in an alien land, they bravely presented their enchanted show. No wonder we still get a whiff of magic whenever we enter that most shamanistic of giant wigwams: the Big Top. (Taylor, 1985, p. 127)

Let us now consider what authors have called 'The Magic Ring'. (Grahame, 1898) (Machotka, 1988). In section 3.8, hearing from Grock and the Fratellinis, we considered the importance of the ring as a circular arena, where the performer is "surrounded by spectators, [but] does not feel himself encircled." (Aslan, 1983) 209. Instead, the circus artist delights in the ability to perform in all directions, while the audience, seeing behind the performers a reflection of itself, feels an ownership, a responsibility for what is happening. Coxe speaks of "The almost hermetic feeling produced by an unbroken ring of spectators [which] initiates a reaction, not only between the public and the performer, but also within the audience itself. Emotion is intensified and runs round the arena like an electric current." (Hippisley-Coxe, 1980, p. 24). He compares it to the energy generated at a soccer stadium or a bullfight. Canetti, in his discourse on crowds, talks of the circus audience as a "doubly closed" crowd. Not only are those inside secure and excited, seeing each other, but they also know that those outside are completely excluded, aware, hearing, but only seeing a blank wall. (Canetti, 1960, p. 27). No wonder those Chaplinesque photographs of children crawling under the canvas are so evocative. Hotier goes further, saying that this instinctive 'circularity' of circus people is reproduced in the way they park their lorries or caravans, in the medieval defensive manner (Hotier, 1995, p. 184).

Evoking Taylor's *Death and Resurrection Show*, both Pond and Goudard look at the circular rhythms of circus, from the annual peregrinations "circling around us like the Tour de France" (Goudard, 2001, p. 157), to the life-death-life cycles innate in many

acts. Think of the somersault, the flying trapeze, the German wheel, a ring of lions. *Arts de la Piste*, Issue 10 dedicated its "Dossier Thematique" to "Les Aventures du Cercle". Parallels are drawn between old and new circus forms, both dependent on a circular scenography, and of links with the natural performance forms of tribal Africa and modern street buskers. (Ciret et al., 1998). Looking up from the ring, the audience sees the canvas, that thin membrane that is often a different colour inside than out. Stephan Matthieu, the trainer at the Balthazar Circus School in Southern France told me of the significance of the tent to him. "It trembles, it moves, unlike any ceiling. The audience is on edge, excited, and they often don't know why." (Interview, Matthieu, 2002). Some performers on cloud-swing or single trapeze deliberately build up the audience's anticipation by swinging higher and higher until that unthinkable Icarian moment when their feet actually touch that canvas sky. It is a no less defining moment than when Jim Carrey touches the surrounding wall of his virtual world in the film *The Truman Show* (Niccol, 1998).

Many stories of circus life focus on the blow-down, such as *Love, Let Me Not Hunger* (Gallico, 1963) and *The Circus is Coming* (Streatfield, 1962). Even more impressive are true accounts such as the moving report by Alexis Gruss of the terrible night of 26th December 1999, when winds up to two hundred km/h destroyed his big top in the Bois de Boulogne, Paris. "All our references, all our markers had disappeared [...] I am fifty-seven years old, but in two hours, my life was nullified [...] now, when a branch brushes the caravan, or a shutter vibrates [...] it's not a fear I have, it's an apprehension, [...] With the storm, a page has been turned, my savoir-faire has been ruptured, I've lost my bearings." (Gruss, 2001). The big top is indeed a magical wigwam, arriving and departing overnight, and there is something terrible about its involuntary deflation and destruction by the forces of nature.

We have looked at symbolic and actual manifestations of circus acts, the ring and the tent. We will continue to look at the intangible power of the circus to affect us unconsciously. This is relevant to our enquiry because in considering the real circus and its influence on young people, we must consider powers beyond rational explanation; questions that Mum or Dad sitting with the children cannot always answer.

On another tack, as I sat in the Gruss big top in Paris on a cold January night, awaiting the Festival du Cirque de Demain, 1985, the man sitting next to me, who had been gazing around rapturously, turned to me and said, "Le cirque, c'est comme un cathédrale." Looking at the eager congregation waiting in this vast edifice, I could see his point, and at that moment I began to look for other religious associations. Several books, some of them serious, have been written about the Elvis Presley phenomenon as a religion, citing parallels with Christianity, including humble birth, early death, rumoured resurrection, acolytes, sacred sites, pilgrimages and so on. (Bowen, 2000; Godfrey, 1999; Jacobs, 1996; Ludwig, 2000; Harrison, 1993). It would be possible to draw similar links with circus, and it could seem similarly far-fetched. However, I feel it is not a pointless exercise. So many people have been mesmerized by the circus and the world-wide fans' associations attest to an almost religious zealotry. Until a few years ago the slogan for the *Australasian Circus Fans Association* was 'We Fight Anything That Fights The Circus'. Furthermore there is, among circus people, a level of

commitment to arduous training, the act, the show, the tent, the audience and the life that verges on the monastic. As an exercise, let us consider some parallels between a circus show and a church service.

In the cathedral-like big top, the ringmaster is priest leading the ritual, the ring-hands the altar boys, and the animals provide incense smells as the ox and the ass stand by. The congregation claps along with the 'hymns', and engage in liturgical responses with the clown, the 'holy fools'. Miracles are to be expected, with resurrection acts heavily featured. The crowd, as uncomfortable as any pilgrim on the devotional benches, shares a communion of fairy floss as angels fly overhead. Finally, consider the image of the 'strap act'; a young man stands alone and abandoned in the ring, with two hanging leather straps coiled around his biceps. He rolls backwards and upwards, over and over, up and up, finally static, above the ring, spotlight against the dark background, arms outstretched, legs together, head thrown back. This powerful pose never fails to move an audience, as powerfully as does Dali's painting, *Christ of St John of the Cross* and the moment when the crucified Father Gabriel falls, almost weightlessly over the roaring falls in the film, *The Mission* (Bolt, 1986).⁹⁶

The death of a martyr brings us to another example of the psychic power of circus, namely the circus artist as epic hero. Christopher Vogler, in his analysis in Joseph Campbell's work identifies seven archetypal characters that return constantly in stories and movies. (Vogler, 1992; Campbell, 1968). They can all be recognized in the circus narrative, and at various times, in the ring. The Mentor, the Threshold Guardian, the Herald, the Shapeshifter, the Shadow, the Trickster, and of course, the Hero. Space does not allow us here to undertake the very tempting matching of these archetypes with circus characters and features. The most obvious match is with the daring performer as hero:

In psychological terms, the archetype of the Hero represents what Freud called the ego - that part of the personality that separates from the mother, that considers itself distinct from the rest of the human race. Ultimately, a Hero is one who is able to transcend the bounds and illusions of the ego, but at first, Heroes are all ego; the I, the one, that personal identity which thinks it is separate from the rest of the group. The Hero archetype represents the ego's search for identity and wholeness.
(Vogler, 1992, p. 39)

A circus act, particularly a solo performance, is often a crystallized narrative about the hero's adventure, and journey home, with his final bow to the audience a sign that he has returned to the group. In circus history, individuals like Auriol, Blondin (over Niagara), Lilian Leitzel, Con Colleano and Mabel Stark have, by their accomplishments, and the Homeric efforts of their publicists, become circus heroes (Kirk, 1972).

It has taken until Campbell in 1968 for us to decode what makes a hero in cinema, and it is possibly only academics who have analysed the keys to heroic literature. But we all

⁹⁶ This clown/Jesus duality is explored at length by Rev. Roly Bain in *Playing the Fool* (2001).

have our heroes, and hero worship starts young. We should not ignore the power of circus artists to galvanize a young person in a way that will affect his/her whole life. The variety and intensity of letters I receive after performing a circus show in schools affirms this, and puts a great responsibility on me as a performer and possible role model. Parents occasionally consult me to help or advise on their children's troubles, as I have unknowingly become a significant figure in their lives. Here is Kenneth Graham's boy in *The Magic Ring*, seeing his first clown:

Oh, to be a splendid fellow like this, self-contained, ready of speech, agile beyond conception, braving the forces of society, his hand against every one, yet always getting the best of it! [...] Success was his keynote, adroitness his panoply, and the mellow music of laughter his instant reward (Grahame, 1898, p. 64).

Finally, we may consider some aspects of the sexual power of circus. John McDonnell, ringmaster of Australia's *Stardust Circus*, proudly asserts that circus is the one art form that has never been censored, where Mum and Dad need have no fear for their children's sensibilities. (Interview, McDonnell, 2002). Shortly before this interview, I had watched his production, which included many images normally associated with explicit sexuality. For example, in lurid lighting, and in total view of hundreds of open gazes, a nubile woman and a virile young man, both half naked, touch, caress, grip and display each other in a series of moves and poses which become increasingly bizarre and perilous. This was a cradle act, but the description could apply to almost any trapeze, corde lisse, tissu, web or adagio act in almost any circus, and it raises the question of sexuality in the ring.

In this enquiry the subject has great importance, as we examine circus as a model, an activity for young people, at a time when their developing sexuality focuses attention on their awareness of their own and others' bodies and physical behaviour. Circus may be seen as asexual by some performers, viewers and critics, but it has not always been so, and still displays a wide range of erotically charged symbols and manifestations. Besides the many sexual activities and motives that could be ascribed to circus performers from outside, we should take a brief look at sexuality as experienced by performers themselves. This is a very personal and subjective assessment, which may well be outside, or contrary to the experience of many readers.

First, there is a relationship which is not exclusive to the ring, and which occasionally causes trouble and unwelcome publicity in swimming and other coaching circles. I refer to the trainer/student relationship. This must be addressed carefully when working with young people, and appropriate codes of conduct should always be followed. Then, regarding the sexual experience innate in performance itself, in an example of consenting circus adults, Keen, in *Learning to Fly*, talks about the sexuality of the flying trapeze. He quotes an amateur flyer, Pam Ventura:

I don't know how it is for men, but for most women, your first catcher is like your first sexual experience. A person, usually half-naked, has taken you to some mystical place you've never been before and participated in an aspect of your life that no one else ever has. [...] Who wouldn't want

to throw themselves at some gorgeous, sweaty man in tights who will lift them up to unbearable heights, lead them down the hill like a runaway freight train, and then fling them through the air to a place where they can save themselves by reaching out for something and leave them dangling above the net while people shriek and clap and cheer? Was it good for you? It sure was for me (1999, p. 179).

So there are activities in the circus ring that are sexual of themselves. Artists seldom talk about these things, and not all performers or viewers will agree, but certain presentations of South American stomping bolas-twirling have driving sexual rhythms. Fire acts, where the performer is in a world of her own, surrounded by a swirling flaming ring of her own making have been described to me by a female twirler as 'better than sex'.

The glorious horses of Zingaro and other equestrian shows, and big cats, such as those in the French film *Roselyne and Her Lions* (Beineix and Forgeas, 1989) where the animals are clearly adored by their presenters, project a strangely sexual inter-species bonding far removed from bestiality. It is beyond my scope to analyse this except to say that there is something in the air.

Circus, and clowning in particular, represents a field in which the artists can **self-design**. They can adopt a name, a gender, an act, a costume, and their own music and light ambience. Within limits, they can present themselves in any way they want to be revealed. We have moved away from the subject of sexuality, but not of gender. Annie Fratellini, whose Circus School in Paris I attended in 1974, chose to leave her career as a cabaret singer, and became a circus clown, like her immensely celebrated great-uncles, Paul, Francois and Albert Fratellini. She appeared with her husband, Pierre Etaix, both of them being augustes to the famous white face clown, Rolf Zavatta. But they were not satisfied, and Etaix himself became the white face so that they could regain what they felt they had lost - their 'complicity'. The dilemma then was what he should call her in the ring:

Pierre did not know what to call me, because I was a young woman, and I didn't want to seem like one - I wanted my persona to be sexless. First of all he called me, 'Little Man' but it never seemed to gel. And it was Pepi who found the solution: "Just call her Fratellini!" (Fratellini, 1977, p. 20).

Like Annie Stainer and Nola Rae, she was able to subsume her femininity to become a genderless buffoon. In the circus, boys can be girls, and girls can be boys, or explore any territory in between.

Marion Zimmer Bradley, before she became famous for books like *Mists of Avalon*, wrote two circus books: *Knives of Desire*, a lesbian love story published in the 1960's under the name Morgan Ives, and *The Catch Trap*, written in 1959, and not published until twenty years later (1979). The cover declares it: "A romantic, sensual and heart-warming story of gay love - the exhilarating novel of two extraordinary circus flyers who spend a lifetime obsessed with one another." Writing in the 1950's she was

courageously portraying what has always been a common relationship among men concerned with physical fitness and mutual dependence, be it the military, sport, dance, or circus. Some nineteenth century works hint at the same pattern. *The Zenganno Brothers'* love for each other is truly a circus romance albeit inspired by Edmond de Goncourt's grief after the death of his younger brother Jules (Goncourt, 1899). So the circus, both with its eclectic cosmopolitan community, and its functions of intimate physical collaboration and proud display, is clearly a sympathetic milieu for gay partners. My own experience working with young people is that circus nurtures an acceptance of differences within the group.

There is feminist concern about the role of the female body on display in the circus, but often the gaze is confidently reflected. Tattooed and feisty Kareena Oates and Mel Fyffe of Circus Oz are of a new breed of Australian circus women. They are strong, raunchy and confident and they enjoy flaunting their female power in their shows. When Circus Oz began, in 1975, women were everywhere, often in overalls, including under the truck, at the light controls, and on the bearing trapeze. Today they are no less strong, and Circus Oz retains an avowed feminist ethos, but as feminism has moved on, so has the freedom of the women to represent themselves as they deem fit. Bikinis and muscles co-exist, and whatever might be in the mind of male viewers, there is no feeling of sexual vulnerability among the performers.

In examining the paradox of sexuality in circus, an art form generally regarded as family entertainment, we have found several areas which warrant closer inspection. In a performance mode often regarded as fantastic, there may be more fantasies than first realized. Performers themselves often derive physical sexual satisfaction from their act. Each artist is free to indulge their own fancies in terms of their self-presentation and action. This is not far removed from the role-playing associated with S/M scenes and other group sex activities. At a less severe level, most of us enjoy dressing up for a party. Circus people can dress up for a living. We find that the circus ambience is sympathetic to a spectrum of sexual alignment, and we also note the significance of the audience's gaze, and how it may be manipulated or reflected by a performer.

In considering circus work with young people, we must be aware of what lies below the surface, both of our art form, and of the behaviour of the children themselves. Responsibility for sex education lies with parents and teachers, and if we are circus teachers, it is important that we should understand the issues, and be ready to discuss them with parents and, if appropriate, with the children. As we have seen in chapter two, one of the six necessary elements in a child's development is **trust**, which in the circus involves trust of self and others in the aspect of physical contact. Circus is usually a mixed gender and mixed age activity, which makes it at once more wholesome and more complicated than activities like sport and dance. It gives great opportunities for adolescents to manifest and work-through their sexually related concerns and feelings. As responsible adults, we owe it to them to understand the developmental stages they are going through (which is a matter of studying psychology and physiology), and of understanding the sexuality manifested or hidden in the field of circus. This has been the purpose of this final section of our study of 'manifestations of circus'.

4.11 Manifestations of Circus Conclusion

CIRCUS n. A place where horses, ponies and elephants are permitted to see men, women and children acting the fool.

Ambrose Bierce. *Devil's Dictionary*

In the current chapter I have examined manifestations of circus in historical and contemporary practice, looking specifically for evidence of certain values, qualities and structures corresponding to the six elements I identified as desirable in childhood.

I have saved until now an anecdote that might help to demonstrate how apposite is the comparison of childhood and circus. Philip Astley's colourful life history would have dominated section 4.2, being a historical circus character sans pareil. His story may be found in most circus histories (e.g. Speaight, Wykes, Verney, Croft-Cooke), along with a woodcut illustration often reproduced, but seldom explained. Even Thétard, features this showbill, which was found in *The Memoirs of J Decastro, Comedian* (1824), but the caption reads simply: 'A group of Astley's acrobats'. The poster, printed at the front of this thesis, has as its original title: *Surprising Exercises by the Eminent Astleys*. Kwint describes this as a "provocative headline", and this is why.

Having established a Paris circus season in 1782, Astley's cultural incursions were increasingly proscribed by regulation and revolution. In 1786 he found his licence permitted only acts on horseback. Presumably the Parisian authorities were feeling pressure from local ground-based entertainers, or were again suppressing verbal acts that could become satirical or subversive. Astley's problem was that his company included clowns, balancers and tumblers. The solution, designed by his son John, was what we see on the poster. Mounted above the saddles of a team of horses⁹⁷ was a wooden stage, on which the entire circus could take place 'on horseback'. Apparently, Marie-Antoinette, who had a penchant for John Astley, was delighted, and once again a circus proprietor, through a combination of ingenuity, **hard work, risk** and a childlike sense of **fun**, had won the day, the right to work, and the hearts of the people. The essence of Kwint's analysis of this and other stories of circus enterprise is:

These were not the actions of naïve practitioners of popular culture reeling from the sophisticated attacks of an alien bourgeoisie. Circus men were quick both to subvert the law and to wield it themselves, whether against commercial rivals, unruly employees, or the authorities (2002, p. 86).

In Astley's days (the late eighteenth century) the necessary licences had to be obtained under the 'Disorderly Houses Act'. Circus was born 'disorderly'. In retrospect

⁹⁷ The woodcut suggest sixteen horses, but a letter from Mrs Astley to a Mr and Mrs Pownall in December 1786 suggests eight: "Mr Astley has made a stage to be supported by 8 Horses for them to tumble on but it is not finished yet, but we are in hopes we shall, in spite of Nicoloy, obtain our old per mition." Willson Disher, (1937) p. 58. 'Nicoloy' was a rival, the puppeteer, Jean-Baptiste Nicolet, who opposed Astley's licence. (Kwint. Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies OUP.174 (2002): 86)

we can see Astley's life as dedicated to establishing a new art form, though at the time he seemed more concerned with moving from low repute to civic respect. By the time of 'Lord' George Sanger (1825-1911), and into the mid twentieth century, British circus enjoyed royal patronage. It can almost be said to have grown up.⁹⁸ 'New Circus' as I described it in 1986, was and is a reaction to this apparently complacent maturity. In this sense, circus has returned to its origins as an adventurous miscreant, whose 'true nature' combines all those elements of childhood that this thesis has explored.

⁹⁸ This echoes the case argued by Carmeli , Journal of Popular Culture 29.1 (1995)

5. Six Elements Re-visited Introduction

Here we are again!

Catch-phrase of Joey Grimaldi, clown.

Chapters three and four have taken us on a labyrinthine path through many aspects of circus, real and imagined. Some of the sections resounded loudly with childhood 'trace elements'. Others were relatively quiet. A new element, 'ingenuity', cropped up several times, particularly in the biographies of circus people, and the quality of 'magic' was never far away, and was specifically evoked by some commentators and circus teachers.

To sum up the argument, I shall now revisit the six 'fingers' recalling some of the correspondences we found. In six short sections, I hope to summarize how each quality is clearly offered to a child who experiences circus, especially as a participant. It will become clear that some of the names I have used for the elements have become inadequate for the complexity of each concept. Thus, I refer not just to trust, but to 'trust, touch and confidence'. Also, it is time to admit that the human spirit does not operate through bullet-points, any more than a child's value can be assessed by ticking boxes marked 'competencies'. The six elements have been a convenient framework to carry this investigation and argument, but now they become blurred or blended as we recognize the infinite complexity of the human psyche, and the creative chaos in which we live our lives and rear our children.

5.1 Self-Invention, Self-Design and Individuation Revisited

If a man does not keep pace
 With his companions
 Perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.
 Let him step to the music which he hears
 However measured or far away.
 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or Life in the Woods*

In a world where mobile phone tones are marketed as 'expressions of yourself', it is refreshing to have, in circus, an opportunity for real self-design. In chapter three, 'Representations of Circus', we found many sources of inspiration for a young person's sense of self, 'son proper salut'. Most significantly, instances occur in literature and art of individuals, often children, consciously re-inventing themselves in a new, successful form. Sometimes, as in the Alex and the Mirette children's stories, the young heroes discover they have a talent that can save the day. (Peg, 1981, 1986; McCully 1986, 1992, 2000). We found 58% of our juvenile circus books had a significant amount of self-actualization. In circus itself, we found many examples where artists and students, including children, would experiment with their identity on the spectrum clown to ringmaster, or, to quote a child in Woodhead's book, from 'zero to hero'. (1998, p. 7).

We also found that this experiment in identity can be temporary, and its transience is part of its suitability for youth development. A past in the circus is often 'forgotten' or suppressed for complex reasons we cannot examine here. I have frequently heard of people discovering late in life that their parents or other relatives were in the circus. It is hard to imagine that a sporting award or academic achievement would be a family secret, but somehow, a time with the circus, once lived, can be forgotten. My own feeling is that at any level, the circus experience carries the seeds of its own completion. The circularity of the circus arena and of so much of its iconography, as we learned about through Ciret and Goudard, is reflected in a completed circle of experience. (Ciret et al., 1998). Aslan speaks of "the belt re-buckled". (1983, p. 219). Sport leaves many 'could-a-beens' in its wake, and those other award-focussed activities like commerce, good-citizenship, cinema and so on have two aspects of non-closure. For every award, there are many perpetually disappointed ones who were passed over, and those who did win are fixed forever on the honour board, and may spend a lifetime facing up to comparisons, anniversaries and veteran honours. One's achievement in circus is fleeting, usually un-recorded and non-statistical. Its success is most deeply recognised by the artist herself, needing no external value judgement. In this way, we may see circus as a non-intrusive, sustainable form of self-understanding and self-honouring.

This more reflexive aspect of **self** brings us to a most important observation. The idea of compulsory self-confidence and individuality in children is a Western concept, and is often obnoxious to other cultures, including some Arab, Asian and Aboriginal peoples. As an example of the cultural differences, I have seen the presentation of Chinese acrobatics change over two decades. Today, the star of an act will step forward, arms up, teeth flashing, to draw applause. This is 'Western style' and is a cultural virus,

invading Chinese circus as surely as McDonalds, KFC and Starbucks are invading city streets and campuses. ("Billions Sold", says a red and yellow sign in Beijing). Chinese artists have told me how their aesthetic code has always demanded that no individual should take credit for an act. Solo acts are very rare, and the accent is on the group, and the company. Two examples: I saw a five-high column of Chinese women in the show 'Asiana' in Berlin in 2001. This is truly impressive, but what was even more remarkable was that when they came down to earth, it was impossible to tell which of these graceful women had just supported four others on her shoulders. Secondly, in 2004, in Beijing, in a 'touristic' acrobatic show with lots of Western elements, I noticed that in the plate-spinning ensemble, some among the eight girls were apparently wearing built-up shoes. My Chinese companion told me that it was obviously to make the girls as identical as possible – again consistent with traditional aesthetic values.

So, here is another paradox. In the West, we see the benefit of the 'Geek to God' syndrome. We esteem self-esteem. We promote self-promotion – up to a point. 'No-one likes a show-off', warns Grandma. And she's right. A child must learn the right level of confidence, and know the moment when he must hold back and work with the troupe. Circus, handled correctly, can teach these lessons. For instance an over-extrovert child will gradually learn the difference between 'clown' and 'idiot' as she notices the laughter and applause rise and fall. She will learn subtle rules about staying within limits. As new or less experienced members join the circus, she can guide them through the lessons by showing them how to clown appropriately. In this way she experiences group dynamics and individual commitment.

Immigrant children everywhere will take time to assimilate the culture of their new peers. Circus can help. I have seen Romany children working in Elleboog, Amsterdam, who have minimal skill but limitless charisma. I have seen Chinese children in Australia, with physical prowess but, in the context, a shy, retiring presence. Circus can also help them, as it can help all children, not to ape or compete to exceed those around them, but to gauge the right mode of self-presentation, and to nurture 'son proper salut' – their own presence in the world.

To conclude this summary of the element of **self** in the circus experience, I recall part of an interview with my friend, the tightrope walker Emily Lindsay, mentioned in relation to her grandfather, Vachel Lindsay, in section 3.5. First, she responds to the question, 'What do you get out of performing?' Her reply is very pertinent to this question of coming to perceive oneself, in the context of performing circus skills:

I can take myself by surprise. To do something so well it's a revelation to you. And you give and share the moment. It's as surprising as giving birth. How did that happen? Out of you? You surprise yourself. It's the best thing.

Knowing that her adult, and her teenage son had both been steeped in circus in their childhood, I wondered how it may have affected the older one, now a corporate lawyer:

He does really good presentations. He is imaginative and knows how to get people's interest. He's ready to take a risk. [My second son] wins

debating the same way. It's a whole other world. But who knows if it's connected to circus? Perhaps everything's easier after circus.
(Interview, Emily Lindsay, 2002)

5.2 Fun, Play, Laughter and Happiness Revisited

The experience of circus is among the supreme experiences of the Childhood [...] In the circus, the dimensions of reality and play are not merely juxtaposed, they overlap and penetrate each other.
Richard Coe, *When the Grass Was Taller*, 1984, (p. 270)

The survey I conducted with the year-ten students at Corpus Christi College found that 'fun' was the word most associated with circus. Many of those students, like the wider population, had conflated 'circus' and 'clown'. Teachers of clowning I have interviewed, including Alan Clay, Nick Fury and Jean Paul-Bell, agree that it is an art to be studied very seriously. Annie Fratellini and Pierre Etaix, who taught me in the early nineteen seventies wrote, "On naît clown ou on n'est pas" (Fabbri and Sallee, 1982, p. 8), a neat pun which means you are either born a clown or you are not one.

A child who is 'born a clown' is quickly identified in any class, and is usually a thorn in the flesh of the teacher/ringmaster. Why some children have this tendency has not been well researched, but numerous comedians have told Michael Parkinson or their biographers that they became clowns at school or in the army to survive or to compensate for physical difference, or to balance a problematic home life. Like 'Joker', the main character in Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*, (1987) they maintain a balance by seeming unbalanced, in a world gone mad. The world of primary school for me was far from the Joker's Vietnam, but even in year-five, I compensated with comedy. My report that year included, under P.E., "Too ready to act the clown. With this exception, Reginald has worked very well indeed." If only Mr R.F. Francis, my teacher back in 1955, had realised that good clowning was the result of working hard.⁹⁹

I have not differentiated fun and comedy. The former is a natural state whereby children experience exploration without responsibility, or risk without consequence. Comedy however is a product, not a state, and the process of making it entails risk (of failure) and responsibility (to maintain and repeat it). It is a highly sophisticated human interaction and it is clearly a major developmental achievement for a child to understand and achieve good clowning.

I was asked by Kevin O'Keefe, founding President of the American Youth Circus Organisation, 'How do you teach clowning to children?' My instinctive answer was, 'By osmosis', but I was thinking of children who were already funny. My considered answer was, 'I teach them routines'. Just like any circus act, there is a right way to do it, and

⁹⁹ Those who work with refugees under the *Clowns Sans Frontières* project and the *Clown Doctors* visiting the hospitals for the Australian Humour Foundation, have no doubt of the link between good clowning and hard work (see Witz 2003). The best clowns also live by Gene Kelly's dictum: "If it looks like you're working hard up there, you're not working hard enough."

a circus entrée, perfectly executed, will get laughs even if the performers don't know why, and don't 'get' the jokes they have performed, until years later.

We have seen in the biographies and interviews, including James Lloyd (4.2) and Mike Moloney (4.8), that an attitude of fun and optimism can get you through even the hardest life. Circus offers this lesson to young people both by example and practice. At Corpus Christi College, 'fun' was the big word before the programme, suggesting that circus was being anticipated in these terms. After five weekly sessions of hard training, 'fun' was still the word most associated with the circus. We must briefly look at why it is fun to juggle, ride unicycles, walk stilts and tightrope and learn bruising acrobatic skills. Is this different from sport? ¹⁰⁰

If we go with John M. Roberts' theory of 'Conflict Culturalisation' (Roberts, Arth and Bush, 1959), then sport is a model or re-enactment of real life dramas; a way to resolve oppositions in a non-threatening way. As sport becomes less of a metaphor and more of a cultural reality, especially in Australia, it is time to look for a mode of physical fun that does not involve inflicting defeat in order to succeed.

Juggling clubs and festivals around the world are gatherings of people of above average intelligence who have found the pursuit and exhibition of circus skills to be more satisfying than following the rules of a combative 'game'. As Emily Lindsay said in the last section "You give and share the moment". Like Shakespeare's "quality of mercy" it "is twice blest;

It blesseth him that gives and him that takes." (Shakespeare, 1968, 4:1)

With these considerations in mind it is gratifying that an activity which is so strongly recognised as fun, should also present developmental, intellectual and physical challenges, encourage social behaviour more creative and co-operative than competitive, and which has as its end product, an act of donation – of generosity.

5.3 Risk and Adventure Revisited

The National Circus School [in Spain] is now a reality, where over a hundred children are trained, attracted by the wonderful union of bravery and risk. They will take a message of happiness, peace and love throughout the world under the tents of the noblest shows.

Padre Silver, 2002

We have noticed that, in representations of circus, there are abundant examples of falls, maulings, blow-downs, fires, crime and financial collapse. It would seem that circus is an opportunity for risk at every level. In a sense it is. A juggler risks dropping a ball. A touring circus, like a farmer, may make hay when the sun shines, but risks all in a storm. An individual joining the circus risks social isolation. But the

¹⁰⁰ The answer will be explored in my next book, *Just Don't Do It. Ten Reasons Why Your Child Should Not Do Sport.*

upside, of artistic excitement, day-to-day adventure and group solidarity makes it worthwhile for so many people in reality, just as it does, vicariously, for readers and audiences. Geoffrey Lennon the lion trainer believes, "[Australian audiences] watch my act [...] for the excitement and the potential danger". Yet the sophisticated audiences in China and Russia and now the worldwide audiences of Cirque du Soleil are used to, and unaffected by, the safety lunges worn by aerial performers. My experience with youth circus is that the genuine risk-taker is unwelcome in the group. No one wants to be hurt or to be responsible when another is hurt. However, looking from outside, the circus activities must be attractive to a young person keen to test their shield of immortality against the universe. Here is a note I wrote in 2003:

Today a stolen car crashed after a speed chase. One twelve-year-old died, four other boys injured. Police talk about the ripple effect of devastation that will affect the boys, their families, friends and attending service personnel. Other effects are on security of cars, insurance, traffic regulations, police procedures etc. My thoughts about this, and also acts of sabotage, suicides, suicide bombs, vandalism etc. which all have their repercussions, is that there must be other ways for an individual to make a rippling effect on the world around him. Art seems the best way, if only it can be recognised. Sport makes some heroes and villains, TV makes passing celebrities, but art, including circus, can give the maker a true feeling of worth and generosity.
(Personal note 2003)

We noted earlier that circus may be seen as an alternative to other risk behaviour.¹⁰¹ Trapeze can produce the same buzz as a high-speed car chase, and clown make-up and behaviour can provide a temporary alternative for self-mutilation and drug-taking. In Amsterdam, Australia, New Zealand and England, young people have told me they don't need to take drugs when there is a chance of doing circus. The thrills of aerial work and fire-twirling provide a sufficient 'fix', and the focus required for stilt-walking and juggling demand a drug-free state of mind.¹⁰² We also noted that compulsory helmets will discourage young adventurers from joining the unicycle club. In fact, through ACAPTA, the Australian Circus and Physical Theatre Association, work is being done to encourage risk management in circus, working with health and safety researchers. Before ludicrous measures are mandated, as when Moscow circus acrobats were apparently instructed, by EEC regulation, to wear helmets on apparatus higher than a standard stepladder (e.g. tightwire and trapeze), we should reverse the equation. (Sapsted, 2003). Educators, insurers and civil moralists should understand that circus is intrinsically a process of risk management. Children undertaking a new task, even as

¹⁰¹ In one of a few recent studies of youth circus, Truscott addresses the ways community circus can benefit youth at risk. She observes that circus risk can be as addictive as anti-social risk behaviour. Lisa Truscott, "A Research Project Studying How Community Circus Can Be Used as a Tool to Benefit Youth at Risk," BA Hons, King Alfred's College, 2004.

¹⁰² An exception is a circus student quoted elsewhere in this thesis who told me he juggles better when he is stoned. "I don't just think I'm better, I know I am." He likens it to a jazz musician who is already technically brilliant and whose improvisations are freer and more daring when 'under the influence'.

simple as a backward roll, are encouraged to assess the risk, take appropriate precautions (e.g. hands behind neck), negotiate the hazard and emerge safely.

I would argue and I shall in my book, *Just Don't Do It*, that circus education is a much safer alternative than sport, teaching caution, co-ordination and co-operation, producing adults who will not take 'childish' risks, and whereas the insurance companies currently shun youth circus, they should not only insure the activity, but should sponsor it in their own interests of producing non-clumsy, non-risk-taking adults.

5.4 Dreaming and Aspiration Revisited

The child does not necessarily scale the wall and climb to the ridge of the roof in a spirit of daredevilry or bravado nor just to perform a stunt. In general in so doing he is merely using the means at hand to aid him in expressing an innate impulse toward aspiration, the inborn will to ascend. It is a cosmic tendency and something is wrong, something vital and elemental is wanting, if this spirit is not present in the makeup of the child. Its absence may be accounted for in two ways: through defective heredity or through restraint. In either case the spirit must be regained if the child is to attain to the full stature of manhood or womanhood.

Irving K Pond, *Big Top Rhythms*, 1937, (p.39)

Irving Pond's observation combines **risk** and **aspiration**, and as we approach the end of this argument, the six-fold categorisation of elements is becoming increasingly blurred or rather like ingredients, blended. I said in section 2.4 that a child's dreams were increasingly a target for corporate 'cookies'¹⁰³ and that circus was possibly a source of new, individual dreams that a child herself could make a reality.

I found in literature, particularly Miller, Genet and Lax an almost spiritual level of inspiration and throughout the review of juvenile sources (3.7) there were stories that invited a young reader to imagine himself a protagonist in a wonderful adventure. Summarising circus in art (3.10) I concluded that representations of circus held no fear for young artists and just as their hands can draw astonishing performances, so their young minds must consider that for them, nothing is impossible. This was literally the message I got from my visit to Wuqiao School of Acrobatic Arts in China. Once accepted to the school, the eight-year-old knows that he will become an acrobat. He sees the teenagers performing world class acts and he knows that if he works hard and time passes, he too has the right to aspire to similar achievements.

Occasionally chapters three and four made reference to the ingenuity of circus people. Novels and biographies told us that in unforeseen situations there was really no possibility of failure; there had to be a way. In youth circus and school circuses I have worked with, there is a list of banned words - the circus swear-words: 'No, can't,

¹⁰³ Not biscuits, but the 'Trojan horse' type mini-programmes often inserted unknowingly in one's computer to make it easier for future incursions.

impossible, embarrassing, difficult, hard'. Accepting this vocabulary restraint works like neuro-linguistic programming, and results both in accomplishment in the circus class and a more positive attitude outside. Circus children not only aspire to success, they come to expect it.

The other aspect of circus represented in this section is the imagination. We have seen in examining circus in the psyche that there are mysteries that the human intellect has not grasped, but which are felt and experienced at a higher or lower level. By lower, I mean a physical level. Working with non-English speakers and also with intellectually impaired children, I have experienced clear and lasting communication as we share a circus learning task. A trick is suggested, for instance, a spinning plate roll-over, and the student immediately understands the challenge.¹⁰⁴ By my body language or non-verbal sounds ('oh-uh', 'whoa', 'yay!') I can help and guide the action. There never needs to be an explanation or assessment. Whether attempting the trick or watching it in the circus, words are unnecessary, yet as with music, the emotions are engaged immediately and wholly.

By higher than the normal intellectual process I mean to suggest dreams, generated by and linked with our corporeal experience. Sam Keen uses Norman O. Brown's notion of the 'poetic body' and sees humans as bio-mythic animals of 'flesh and dream'. (Keen, 1999, p. 69). We do not know if we differ from animals in our capacity to dream and mythologise, but we all know that adults differ from children. Adulthood may be defined as a time when we have matured. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "When I became a man, I put away childish things." (13.11) Among the 'childish things' that most adults put away is the association of one's physical being with infinite possibilities. This is probably desirable from an evolutionary point of view, ensuring the continuation of the species. If we agree that 'childhood's the right place for dreams', we have seen that circus can encourage and nourish the most noble 'childish things' and give the opportunity for a child's dreams to become reality.

In a recent full-page advertisement, Cirque du Soleil, promoting its Cirque du Monde social circus programme, features an inspiring photograph of three adolescent Africans joyously **almost** riding a unicycle. Interestingly, the simple slogan under the picture is :

Les arts du cirque ... parce que rêver, c'est vivre
(Circus arts ... because to dream is to live)
(Quentin, 2004, p. 41)

5.5 Trust, Touch and Confidence Revisited

Columbia space shuttle astronaut David Brown, 46, was a Navy captain, pilot and medical doctor. He joined the Navy after a medical internship, then went on to fly the A-6E Intruder and F-18. He was a varsity gymnast for four years while at the College of William and Mary in

¹⁰⁴ Holding a spinning plate on a stick in either hand the performer sits, lies down, rolls over and gets up again. It is a very basic form of the Chinese 'Pagoda of Bowls' contortion act.

Virginia. During the summer of 1976, while still in college, he was an acrobat, stilt walker, and 7-foot unicycle rider with Circus Kingdom. "What I really learned from that, and transfers directly to what I'm doing on this crew, is kind of the teamwork and the safety and the staying focused," he said before the flight.

Dick Flint, *King Pole*, No. 142, March 2003

Once again our elements are blending. In this case **trust** and **risk** as we stay with Sam Keen, theologian/guru/flying man. In an interview he says, of his flying trapeze school:

Many of the abused women in the program were afraid of loneliness and of not being able to take care of themselves, so they stayed in abusive relationships. Trapeze helped them to discover that being alone and independent is less frightening than an abusive relationship. They also learned something about trust. One woman said to me, "I don't trust men. I think they're after me all the time. But having people on the safety lines, helping me on the board, and catching me has made me re-evaluate my attitude."

[...] Troubled kids typically talk about getting high: "I never knew there was another way of getting high except by drugs." They talk about how much better trapeze is because they don't get hung over and feel ashamed. *Renewing our Sense of Wonder* (Keen, 1999, p. 7)

We have seen many examples of the unexpected evolution of **trust** in circus activities, including stilt walkers in a Belfast jail, acrobats in Edinburgh and Colombia, and the NI CA student, teaching basic trapeze and getting a 'good feeling, knowing they've got that much trust in you.'

The literature and cinematography of circus portrays a tightly knit, self-sustaining band of disparate types, moving within and across a wider society. In my paper, *Intensity in Tent City*, I wrote about this 'community of inter-dependent individuals' as a liveable community. I described West Australia's *Lunar Circus* as "A new generation of young people who have re-invented a tribal nomadic culture, that, like Australia's Aboriginal peoples and Asian and European gypsies, has the family as its basis, a reciprocal commitment between the individual and the group and a way of contributing to the well-being of the land across which they travel." (Bolton, 2002).

A child, once free of the maternal embrace, looks for peers. Often, he seeks to create a new small 'family' among his friends and to find a purpose for that group. *Cirque Bidon*, *Cirque Plume*, *Circus Oz*, *Le Grand Magic Circus*, *Big Apple* and a myriad of youth circuses have begun and grown in this way.

As we saw in section 4.5, the evolution and organisation of a new circus provides an excellent training for other management challenges in later life. I mentioned in 2.5 the concern about touch deprivation on one hand, and paedophile behaviour on the other. Primary school teachers in training are currently instructed that the 'touch safe' zone is between the shoulder and the elbow. Any other touching is forbidden. Clearly this is damaging to the nourishing and

development of the young. The many successful youth circuses and school circuses indicate that here we have an example of acceptable physical contact with and among young people. Indeed, in circus work, touch is necessary, functional and supportive.

Still in its infancy, youth circus in Australia through its association ACAPTA, is working towards 'touch' guidelines, but unlike some educational departments who are manifestly litigation phobic, the Circus Association values touch as a virtue, an essential. We (I am currently Chair of the Association) see the benefits of physical contact among the young and confidently promote touch and trust as part of a child's development.

Any circus is an example of cooperation at every level, with necessary inter-dependence even in the face of death, as we heard from lion trainer, Geoffrey Lennon (section 4.3). Young people deserve to live in a supportive environment, and to move from trusting to being trusted themselves. Circus helps them to learn and follow essential rules. They learn that nothing is impossible, and that doubt and fear are to be examined and absorbed into positive action. Circus gives the opportunity to touch, to hold hands and bodies, with each other and with adults in a healthy, non-threatening, non-sexual context.

5.6 Hard Work, Application and Ingenuity Revisited

Gregory Fedin's advice:

'You want to start a Circus? You must work twenty-eight hours a day. You must steal four hours from your death.'

From Peter Angelo: *Big Apple Circus*

The dedication to work that I saw among the child students in Wuqiao, China, has no real parallel in contemporary Western Society. We saw in Mayhew an adult acrobat's pensive pride in being 'cricked' (stretched) as a child, and we recall Alex Shukin's story of going to the neighbour for acrobatic training as his father didn't have the heart to inflict the necessary pain. Toepfler writes about the sensual pleasure to be gained from extreme contortion. (1999). I have seen the same dedication to extreme achievement in circus schools from Berlin to San Francisco and have read about and often seen the young Mongolian contortionists trained by Madame Zindaioush at the National School in Ulaanbaatar. (Grandguillot and Obin, 2000).

In contrast, Chisholm writes about young female Olympic gymnasts as sub-human cute objects, who are capable of super-human feats. She worries about a growing paedophile atmosphere unchecked by the media, in their construction of the 'good little girl'. This ours/other duality in these twisting, stomping homunculae confuses the public, and the obsession for winning wreaks havoc on some girls' physical and social development (Chisholm, 2002).

This thesis has moved towards, but not confronted, a comparison of sport and circus. The context of contortion/acrobatics/gymnastics will give a future writer the perfect

opportunity to contrast styles. We will not explore the deficiencies of sport ethics and aesthetics here, but recall that most representations and manifestations of circus show us young people demonstrating their physicality in whatever ways suit them, alone or in groups, and revelling in success.

Another aspect of hard work (represented by the thumb) is that of understanding process. Most circus-related literature and art tend to skip to the miracle – ignoring the painstaking training that produced the skills. We saw some exceptions such as the young flyer Tato Farfan (section 3.7) and his bruised hands. But generally, a child coming to the circus realises very soon that it will not be easy. Carlo Gentile recalled the visit of a middle-school group to the Wuqiao School, and their surprise at the weight of the props and the strength of the young acrobats.

Often in youth circus in the West, the first stage is to 'have-a-go', in which children enjoy explorative play. Typically they then come back to the teacher, eager to learn the correct technique. Many skills have had hundreds of years of refinement, and as with playing a musical instrument, there is a right way to do it. 'Getting it right' is a valuable lesson for children.

Lloyd, Sanger and Wirth, whose lives I summarised in section 4.2, are testaments to persistence. To achieve real success, as Doris Day sings in *Billy Rose's Jumbo*,

To reach the top
 You gotta keep trying,
 Over and over and over again
 (Hecht and MacArthur, 1962)

My experience, and that of teachers I have interviewed, is that many young people have a time in their young teenage years when they are ready to devote themselves fervently, sometimes frenetically, to a cause or course of action. Once again there are corporations and worse waiting to feed on that frenzy. Parents, dreading to see that their son or daughter may become involved in drugs or obsessed with fast cars may feel relief when a diabolo or unicycle absorb every waking hour for a few weeks. Children have learning spurts and, if enthused, will work relentlessly for improvement, as we may see around the world with skateboarding and surfing.

In our exploration of circus manifested, we discovered several graphic examples of circus people's pride in their ingenuity. The tradition exemplified by Astley's first modern circus stretches before and after him in a succession of irrepressible optimists, and crafty improvisers. This hard work, commitment to success, confidence and understanding of process in circus is real enough when it happens, but is also a metaphor, a practice for a future life in which lessons learned will continue to have a positive effect.

5.7 Summary

I've been thinking it over ever since, and that ha-ha's the final consequence. Why so? Because a laugh's the wisest, easiest answer to all that's queer.

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

Having found such an abundance of the specified elements in circus, we arrive at the essence of my argument. From the accumulated examples it has become evident that circus represents childhood. Seen up close, and often in the magical ambience of a tent, the circus presents undeniable manifestations of intense experiences very close to those of childhood. Here is real wonder, real fear. Here is limitless ambition, infinite mischief. Here are hope, love, danger and survival. Here are the dreams and nightmares that are the daily and nightly currency of childhood. Here are obstacles and mysteries, overcome and solved with ingenuity and determination. Here are lofty beings of incalculable status, and alongside them buffoons more foolish than the silliest child.

The circus in its infancy was chided by the authorities as being subversive and dissolute, just as adults often scold children for being naughty and dirty. The child and the circus share this status: often loved, but sometimes derided and neglected. Both are full of unimaginable potential, capable of wonders. Many individuals throughout the world have begun to realize this potential, by providing circus opportunities to young people. Occasionally this work is uninformed and instinctive, driven by enthusiasm, curiosity or desperation. I hope this thesis will be a useful contribution to an understanding of why circus works. It has helped me in re-assessing my work methods and expectations. In the next section, I shall offer just one case study – a short residency I undertook in West Papua, during the third year of my PhD candidature.

6. Case Study. West Papua (formerly Irian Jaya)

There was an incident.

Principal of Tembapura International School, 2001

In May 2003, I returned to Irian Jaya (West Papua), for a two-week residency, hosted by the International School at Tembapura, way up the mountains above the clouds. The school has about sixty students, from kindergarten to year-ten, whose parents are employees, mostly in management, of the huge Freeport copper and gold mine. There had been an 'incident' in August 2002, in which three of the school's teachers had been shot dead, and seven others injured in an ambush. This is still under investigation by the FBI (as USA nationals were among the dead.)

Responsibility has been variously assigned to an indigenous liberation group, the Indonesian military engaged in a protection deal or the Indonesian Special Forces (Kopassus). After the incident, the school had not closed, but had been maintained by parents until a new principal and staff were appointed. They were carefully picked and, presumably, well rewarded. My invitation to work at the school followed a brief appearance I had made at their 2002 Christmas Party. I had been working at the 'downstream' sister school at Kuala Kencana, and they drove me up the switchback mine road, up 2,000 metres above sea level, where the spectacular and contentious mines operate day and night just below a glacier, only four degrees south of the equator. There I met a group of the children and produced some quick circus-type events for that concert. It was suggested that a longer residency (two weeks) in 2003 was just what the school needed to recover some of its damaged morale.

I accepted the invitation to return, but I proposed certain conditions. My short experience of this 'ex-pat' community had shown me that, more than anything else, the children needed to build bridges with the local people. Joining a local soccer tournament did not do the trick, as not only was the international team the only team with boots, but they always got beaten. My proposal was that while Freeport paid the bills, I should split my time equally with the international school, with the local national (Indonesian) school, and the indigenous children at the small school in the neighbouring village, Banti. You could hardly imagine a greater contrast in facilities and expectations between these groups of children. With each group, I conducted workshops, teaching juggling, stilts, unicycle, pyramids and so on, then brought thirty of them together to make a performing group. For three days, these thirty worked together, with the international (mostly American and Australian) students crossing the street to the Indonesian-run sports centre where, among busy badminton and basketball courts, we met the 'Banti Boys' - a group from the village who had to be ferried up the hill from their village in a company Toyota.

Our first show was in Banti, on loose, sharp gravel, watched by hundreds of locals, including a fearsome array of men with bows and arrows and spears, plus sundry dogs and pigs. They apparently liked it. The 'Banti Boys' were the stars of that show, including a five-high human tower, and Petrus, a twelve-year-old, who had mastered the five-ball flash in just thirty minutes, having never seen juggling in his life before. The next show was in the sports hall, for four hundred Indonesians, with essentially

the same programme, but this time with the Moslem children in the main roles, with all my introductions and chats translated on-the-run by thirteen-year-old Lala, in her spotless white head-scarf.

Finally, the Cuscus Circus (Cuscus is a local tree-dwelling mammal) performed in the grand setting of the Loopa Leila Club, the social heart of the highland mining town, where this same mixture of children, who by now knew each other really well, performed a mega-show, augmented by another thirty children from the international school. Watched by most of the company's executives and managers (the parents), this one-hour spectacular will be long remembered.

For me, the Banti show, with delighted little children, smiling mothers and a wall of impassive hunter/warriors, will be my lasting memory. There was no music, as the power was off, there was little applause, as clapping is not part of their culture, and hands were often full of babies and weapons. Four languages contributed the general ambience, and the highlight for many was the dozens of boxes of fried chicken distributed after the show. As with my work in Australian Aboriginal communities, I withhold judgement on the political situation I find myself in, content to know that for the duration of my project, and for some time after, a positive change is in the air, and that, without being too culturally invasive, my circus gives opportunity for children to share those universal processes of imagination, trust, risk, showing-off, fun and hard work. During the two weeks there I was able to reflect on my own process, and measure the effect against elements of my youth circus theory.

It occurs to me when teaching teachers, that an essential and sometimes forgotten element of circus is 'magic' - an indefinable expectation of the unexpected. This is an asset I brought to Tembagapura, and it affected both the techno-savvy international students and the children and adults of Banti, whose inquisitive faces filled the window-frames for the full two hours of the circus classes we conducted in their community hall. Magic is an element of circus attraction, but not among the six essential elements of childhood that my theory contains. All of the six were evident in this process, and I shall comment briefly on some. The element I have called 'dreams', including aspiration and imagination was integral from the first day. My own dream of the three-community programme was matched by the expectation of the Western children about visiting the village, and of the Banti and Indonesian children about performing at the Social Club. For the duration of those weeks it seemed we shared an unlikely dream - and then it happened.

After the final show, the principal addressed the school community, farewelling some graduating year-tens. He told how he has discussed with a year-eight student how much she would miss her departing friends. Apparently she had said, "Yes, I thought I'd miss them, but I've made so many new Indonesian and Papuan friends this week that I'm really looking forward to next year." This is an example of the trust and fellowship inherent in circus.

The hard work, the fun and the risk were all manifestly obvious in the process. However, one final element that showed clearly was that of Monday's Child - the

awareness and presentation of self. Each of the three cultures represented had a different mode of self-exhibition. The Papuans, like indigenous Australians, are self-effacing in public, content simply to be group members and do the tricks. The Moslem children, like Malays I have worked with on the Cocos Islands, have a style of formal modesty, with each trick or routine followed by a return to the line-up, and with the presenter speaking clearly and respectfully to the audience of adults, while seeming almost adult herself as she addresses the infants in the front rows. The Western children, learning to cope with an increasingly chaotic culture, present themselves with a mixture of received good manners, Barnumesque hyperbole and MTV/SMS 'coolspeak'. The circus in Tembagapura enabled each to express their own culture, and to be appreciated for being themselves.

7. Conclusion

The Child is father of the Man
William Wordsworth

Every soul is a circus
Every mind is a tent
Every heart is a circus ring
Where the circling race is spent.
Vachel Lindsay

The finding, to which all this evidence and speculation leads, is that circus, in its very nature, is composed of the same elements which characterise a fulfilled childhood. I have argued that contemporary Western children can benefit from circus because it can make up for deficiencies in six vital experiences.

I have looked at both sides of the hypothesis. In the course of investigating **why** circus works for children, I have explored **how** circus works as an art form, why it touches us, how it has survived, and what are the aesthetic codes that guide it.

I hope this enquiry has gone some way towards illuminating 'la vraie nature du cirque'. It has not been easy to see beyond the representations. When circus is the subject, authenticity gets short shrift. Circus autobiographers and story-tellers can rarely resist florid invocations of golden childhoods, and these are too often confused with the ballyhoo which circus has invented as its public language. Young Tom Sawyer may say of the circus:

It was the splendidest sight that ever was, [...] It was a powerful fine sight; I never see anything so lovely, (Twain, 1992, p. 280)

and mean it quite sincerely, while P.T. Barnum might fraudulently claim to have

'The World's Grandest, Largest, Best Amusement Institution',
(Davis, 2002)

just to drum up business.¹⁰⁵ So in this usage of extravagant description, circus and childhood find yet another instance of homology.

In fact it is my contention that circus actually represents childhood – the real childhood we all experienced, as seen from the inside, with fear, ambition, awe, dreams, nightmares, love and so on; not the belittling external view of childhood. It seems both childhood and the circus have suffered from the patronizing gaze of adults. Certainly both are currently being subjected to processes of over-protection and limitation. Western children are currently experiencing a period of extreme protection (stranger-danger, clinical environments, adventure avoidance) so that even governments are now trying to address the overweight child syndrome (never mind the scared, clumsy child).

¹⁰⁵ Is 'drum up' another circus metaphor?

At the same time the circus is experiencing more and more regulation, and criticism is found, not in the arts pages, but in editorials and letters.

My impression is that each of these entities, childhood and circus, is seeking refuge and comfort in the other. Increasingly, young people are looking to the circus experience to live out the elements of childhood from which society has protected them. Similarly, circus, although not all branches of the industry know this, is taking refuge in youth, but not in the traditional 'bums-on-seats' way. The future of circus seems assured both by the numbers of vocational schools where young athletes are training for a career and also by the thousands of children around the world learning the skills and incorporating the circus into their own experiential landscape.

As this work is within days of completion, *Arts de la Piste*, the journal I have most frequently quoted here, has produced issue 32, with the theme, 'Le Cirque dans l'Espace Social'. (Quentin, 2004). There are features about many of the social circus projects I have visited, plus interviews with, and articles by, several of the people cited in this thesis, including Pierrot Bidon, Felicity Simpson, Will Chamberlain, Adrienne Larue, Pascal Jacob and Jean-Roc Achard. As the debate rages in this journal about the relationship between the circus artist and the social worker, I feel a sense of relief and justification to see the argument I have pursued in this thesis being brought before a wider public.

This long investigation may have asked more questions than it has answered. I hope it has opened many new paths of enquiry. The process has informed and re-affirmed my belief in the strength of circus as a universal art form, critically underrated as a developmental tool. I conclude by quoting from *New Circus*, which was a call to arms I wrote in 1985, when I felt instinctively what I have now tried to show empirically:

The evidence is overwhelming that in circus we have a medium and a message crying out to be heard and used by those with the energy, fearlessness, ingenuity, charm and the desire to come together and express themselves – I mean, of course, the young! (Bolton, 1986, p. 35).

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- Who Will Take My Dreams Away? Marianne Faithfull, 1995.
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Appendix 1: Interviews

I am grateful to the following people for granting me interviews. They come from fourteen countries, and cover a range from students to professional performers, from university lecturers to circus proprietors. Only a few have been directly quoted in the thesis, but all have contributed to my experience and understanding of circus. Multiple dates indicate multiple interviews.

Staff and students of Centre National des Arts du Cirque, Châlons, France

Staff and students of Circus Center, San Francisco

Staff and students of Circus Space, London

Staff and students of Ecole Nationale du Cirque, Montreal

Staff and students of National Institute of Circus Arts, Melbourne

Staff and students of Wujiao School of Acrobatic Arts, China

Members of Australian Circus and Physical Theatre Association

Members of Bond Street Theatre Coalition, New York

Members of Circus Fans of Australasia

Members of Circus Oz

Members of Clowns International

Members of Clowns of America Inc

Members of Elleboog Circus, Amsterdam

Members of Flying Fruit Flies Circus, Australia

Members of International Jugglers Association

Members of International Social Circus Round Table

Members of International Unicycle Federation

Members of Lunar Circus, Western Australia

Members of Sarasota Sailor Circus

Members of Spaghetti Circus

Members of Unicycle Society of America

Members of Wenatchee Youth Circus

SemAbrahams, unicycle champion, Tel Aviv, 1980

Jean-Roc Achard, circus school director, Montreal, 1999

Ernest Albrecht, author and editor, New Jersey, 2001

Yuila Alechina, Russian circus artist, New York, 2001

Joe Andy, circus school director, Netherlands, 1984

Annabel Arnt, Circus Arts Forum director, London, 2000

Brigitte Bailly, social circus researcher, Paris, 2001

Clete Ball, acrobatics guru, Sydney, 1986

Chris Barltrop, ringmaster, scholar, Sarasota, 2001

Max Beckerman, youth circus worker, Melbourne, 2002

Jean-Paul Bell, mime, Humour Foundation director, Sydney, 2001

Bob Berky, clown, Edinburgh, 1979

Pierrot Bidon, Archaos founder, London, 2000

Paul Binder, Big Apple Circus founder, New York, 1984

Bill Blaikie, cultural studies academic, Bathurst, 2001
 Andrew Brassington, community circus coordinator, Tasmania, 2000
 Andy Bray, performer, Bunbury, 2001
 Sue Broadway, circus icon, Australia, 1983-2004
 Gary Brophy, Sunrise Circus owner, Mullumbimby, 2001
 Agnes Brun, artist and circus trainer, Paris, 2001
 Hovey Burgess, circus teacher and writer, New York, 1984-2003
 Peter Burley, academic and founder of CircoArts, Christchurch, NZ, 2001
 Bob Burton, performer, Melbourne, 2002
 Patti Campbell, 'Circus Mom' and trainer, Sarasota, 2001
 Chris Carrow, clown and trainer, Christchurch, 2001
 Will Chamberlain, circus school director, Belfast, 2000
 Alan Clay, clown, writer, webmaster, Sydney, 2001
 Brendan Coleman, performer, Fremantle, 2002
 Gerry Cottle, UK circus owner, Perth, 2001
 Helen Crocker, Circomedia director, Bristol, 2001
 Elena Danova, Russian trapezist, San Francisco, 2003
 Wendy Darling, poi teacher, Mullumbimby, 2001
 Anni Davey, performer, director, Melbourne, 2001
 Hermine Demoriane, wire walker, author, Perth, 1988
 Dream State Circus, Jacob and Sophie, Fremantle, 2001
 Brian Dubé, owner of juggling company, New York, 1984-2003
 Sean Dwen, CircoArts student, Christchurch, 2001
 Graham Ellis, director, Volcano Circus, Hawaii, 2003
 Helene Embling, aerial teacher, Perth, 1986-2004
 Fan, Guo Ping, festival director, Wuqiao, 2004
 Giles Favreau, regional director, Cirque du Monde, Sarasota, 2002
 Gregory Fedin, teacher, acrobat, philosopher, New York, 1984
 Mike Finch, director, Circus Oz, Melbourne, 2002
 Dave Finnigan, juggler, teacher, author, Sarasota, 2002
 Peggy Ford, administrator, Circus Center, San Francisco, 2003
 John Foss, unicycle champion and writer, New York, 1984, Tokyo 1987
 Nick Fury, clown, comic performer, Sydney, 2002
 Mellissa Fyffe, acrobat, Circus Oz, Bunbury, 2001
 Esther Gagne, regional director Cirque du Monde, Amsterdam, 2001
 Sally Anne Gaunt, lawyer, Perth, 2001
 Carlo Gentile, circus performer, Wuqiao, 2004
 Orlene Gentile, circus performer, Wuqiao, 2004
 Buster Gervais, circus student, Perth, 2001
 Tina Glover MBE, community circus pioneer, Derbyshire, 2003
 Tom Greder, clown, musician, Tasmania, 2000
 Laura Green, circus student, aerialist, Wenatchee, WA, 2001
 Teo Greenstreet, director, Circus Space, London, 2000
 John Grimaldi, clown, actor, New York, 1980
 Jack Halpern, president, International Unicycle Federation, Tokyo, 1987
 Lou Harwood, aerialist, Mullumbimby, 2001
 Annelies Heesakker, director, Elleboog Children's Circus, Amsterdam, 2001-2

Carrie Heller, circus therapist, Sarasota, 2001
 Scott Henman, juggler, musician, Fremantle, 2003
 Jessica Hentoff, director, youth circus, St Louis, 2003
 Jimini Hignett, artist, ex-performer, Amsterdam, 2001
 Sue Hird, Vulcana Women's Circus member, Mullumbimby, 2001
 Charlie Holland, director, Circus Space, London, 2000
 Hugues Hotier, professor, director of Le Cirque Educatif, Bordeaux, 2001
 Chayne Hutgren, 'Space Cowboy', busker, Happy Sideshowman, Tasmania, 2000
 Dolly Jacobs, legendary circus aerialist, Sarasota, 2001
 Jade, handbalancer, San Francisco, 2001
 Adam James, ringmaster, Lennon Brothers, NSW, 2001
 David Jamieson, circus researcher and writer, UK, 1984
 Dominique Jando, circus writer, consultant, New York, 1984, San Francisco, 2003
 Jean Paul Jenack, circus educator, bibliographer, New York, 1984-2001
 Daryll John, performer and rigger, Circus Oz, Bunbury, 2001
 Gene Jones, juggler, New York, 1984
 Gabi Keast, editor of 'Kaskade', Wiesbaden, Germany, 2001
 Pang Knik, youth circus co-ordinator, Singapore, 2001
 Paul Laporte, director, Cirque du Monde, Montreal, 2001
 Li Qing Fu, trainer, Wuqiao, 2004
 Suzy Leigh, hula hoop queen, Mullumbimby, 2001
 Geoffrey Lennon, circus director, lion trainer, Gosford, NSW, 2001
 Emily Lindsay, wire walker, flamenco dancer, Melbourne, 1983-2003
 Michael Ling, performer, Circus Oz, Bunbury, 2001
 Richard Lockwood, professor of human movement, Perth, 2000
 Guan Rong Lu, master trainer, NI CA, Australia, 2001
 Yi Lu, master trainer, Circus Center, San Francisco, 2001-2003
 Karen McArthur, drama teacher, circus trainer, Manjimup, Australia, 2002
 Hamish McCormack, Australian performer, Mullumbimby, 2001
 Lachlan McDonald, busker, writer, circus founder, Perth, 2001
 John McDonnell, ringmaster, 2000-2003
 Chelsea McGuffin, performer of neo-circus, Tasmania, 2001
 Michael McGuigan, humanitarian, juggler, teacher, New York, 1984-2001
 Stephan Matthieu, circus trainer, Balthazar Circus, France, 2002
 Johnny Melville, legendary European clown, Amsterdam, 2001
 Rob Mermin, founder of Circus Smirkus, Sarasota, 2001
 Leone Mills, head trainer of Spaghetti Youth Circus, Mullumbimby, 2001
 Greg Milsteen, director, performer, National Circus Project, New York, 2001
 Mike Moloney, founder of community circus, prison theatre worker, Belfast, 2000
 Kathryn Montgomery, circus consultant, Belfast, 2001
 Jane Mullet, performer, trainer, 'architect' of NI CA, Melbourne, 2002
 Mark Myers, director of youth circus, Canberra, 1986
 Annick Nadeau, regional coordinator, Cirque du Monde, Perth, 2000
 Lee Nelson, clown, juggler, acrobat, busker, New Zealand, 2001
 Kareena Oates, performer, Circus Oz, Bunbury, 2001
 Carla Ogle, aerialist, contortionist, health and safety officer, twin, NSW, 2001
 Nikki Ogle aerialist, contortionist, health and safety officer, twin, NSW, 2001

John O'Hagan, musical director, Circus Oz, Sydney, 2002
 Kim Olsen, juggler, founding editor of OzJuggle magazine, Melbourne, 2003
 Lilikoï Olsen, young performer, Mullumbimby, 2001
 Mister Om, contact juggler, Mullumbimby, 2001
 Patrick Osbon, executive director, Circus Centre, 2003
 Marguerite Pepper, circus and physical theatre promoter, Sydney, 2002
 Bomber Perrier, founder of Flying Fruit Fly Circus, Albury, 2003
 Rose Pinter, local councillor, ex Wimmins Circus member, Fremantle, 2004
 Jaques Portokolopoulos, director of circus remedial programme, Brittany, 2002
 KT Prescott, circus artist, Rottneest, 2001
 Susan Provan, administrator, Circus Oz, Melbourne, 1985
 Paul K Pugh, founder, director, Wenatchee Youth Circus, USA, 2001
 Qi Zhi Yi, vice headmaster, Wuqiao Acrobatic School, China, 2004
 Willie Ramsay, ex Pilton club member, now international director, Perth, 1980-02
 Jim Riley, founder director, Skylight Youth Circus, Rochdale, UK, 2000
 Tim Roberts, juggling teacher, course director, Paris and London, 1999
 Jim Robertson, rigger, circus owner, Melbourne, 1983-2003
 Pixi Robertson PhD, circus owner, performer, Perth, 1983-2003
 Tony Rooke, director, National Circus Festival, Tasmania, 2001
 Daniel Rovail, pioneer of new circus in France, Amsterdam, 2001
 Paul RubberPaul, contortionist, Perth, 2003
 Sean Ruplestiltskin, jester, lunatic, Tasmania, 2001
 Joel Salom, ace juggler, mc, comedian, Mullumbimby, 2001
 Carl Sanderson, primary school circus teacher, Perth, 2004
 Theo Schut, administrator, Elleboog children's circus, Amsterdam, 2002
 Claude Shannon, eminent scientist, juggling theorist, Las Vegas, 1984
 Joanna Sherman, humanitarian theatre and circus traveller, New York, 1984-2003
 Alex Shukin, Russian acrobat, now coach at NI CA, New Zealand, 2001
 Padre Silva, founder/director of Los Muchachos Children's Circus, France, 2002
 Godfrey Sim, director, CircoArts Circus School, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2001
 Sandra Sim, graduating student CircoArts, New Zealand, 2001
 Felicity Simpson, founder/director, Cirque Pour Tous and Cali Circus, France, 2002
 Suzanne Simpson, musician, Circus Oz, Melbourne, 2002
 Jenny Smith, youth circus trainer, Northern NSW, Mullumbimby, 2001
 Gypsy Snyder, performer, director, Pickle Family Circus child, San Francisco, 2001
 David Southern, ex Splott Circus member, youth worker, Rochdale, UK, 2000
 Dave Spathaky, ex Ra Ra Zoo performer, UK, 1999
 George Speaight, circus historian and author, UK, 1984
 Mister Spin, legendary performer and busker, Mullumbimby, 2001
 Mark St Leon, circus historian and author, Sydney, 2002
 Bill Stone, pioneering juggling educator, New York, 1984
 Robert Sugarman, researcher and author, Sarasota, 2001
 Sam Thacker, ex-member now coach, Wenatchee Youth Circus, USA, 2001
 John Towsen, performer, teacher, scholar, author of 'Clowns', New York, 2001
 Bernard Turin, director of French National Circus School, Melbourne, 1999
 Pete Turner, youth circus director, scholar, Leeds, UK, 2001
 Azara Universe, performer, Sydney, 2002

Susan van Esch, , regional director, Cirque du Monde, Amsterdam, 2001
Adrienne van Hilten, acrobat and teacher, Elleboog Circus, Amsterdam, 2002
Rita van Opzeeland, aerialist and trainer, Circus Oz, Bunbury, 2001
Doc Veselak, circus trainer, Community College, Long Island, New York, 1984
Michelle Vickers, administrator, Legs on the Wall, Sydney, 2002
Liz Walsh, consultant, former manager, Flying Fruit Fly Circus, France, 2002
Steve Ward PhD, circus educator, Leeds, UK, 2000
Vincent Wauters, director, Brussels Circus School, Belgium, 2001
Terry Wells, member of All Star Fish, family of performers, Mullumbimby, 2001
Per Westerman, ex Fruit Fly, long time Circus Oz performer, Melbourne, 1987-2003
Dick Wheeler, youth circus director, Sarasota, USA, 2001
Toby Whittington, human statue, Rottnest, 2001
Matt Wilson, 'Crash Matt', performer and director, Bunbury, 2001
Rebecca Wilson, performer, co-ordinator, Rottnest Circus Festival, Fremantle, 2001
Gisela Winkler, archivist, author, youth circus consultant, Berlin, 2001
Sosina Wogayehu, Ethiopian juggler and contortionist, Circus Oz, Sydney, 2002
Paul Woodhead, primary school circus teacher, author, researcher, Dubbo, 2002
Xiao Hong Weng, clown, juggler, teacher, New York, 2001
Matt Yates, 'Fatt Matt', founder, director, Lunar Circus, Margaret River, 2002
Anna Yen, circus teacher, performer, director, Mullumbimby, 2001

Appendix 2

Charter of the Creation of the United Nations of Social Circus

We, individuals and institutions representing twelve countries (Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Spain, France, Guinea, Ireland, Morocco, Holland) united on the occasion of the 'First International Round Table of Circus and Social Work' held at La Seyne-sur-Mer from 28-31 January 2002, are committed to unanimity and to a confederation of social circus. This confederation is dedicated to cooperating to produce social transformations using circus arts as a tool.

The members of this confederation are moved by the conviction that circus is an educational instrument of emancipation and economic development. We also believe that circus is a particularly efficient means of communication. It operates as a magnet for disadvantaged groups and clearly demonstrates its potential for social change.

This confederation is naturally open to all people and institutions following the same objectives, once accredited by the group. We recognise that the American and Australian participants are happy with the expression 'social circus', the Irish and Dutch prefer the expression 'community circus' while the French prefer to evoke a meeting of 'circus and social work' to maintain the specific identity of these two genres. The following people and associations witnessed this charter:

Name	Organisation	Country
Geraldo Miranda	Rally Circo Social	Brazil
Rima Abdul-Malak	Clowns sans Frontières	France
Fabian Hoyes	Circo para todos	Colombia
Brigitte Bailly	Independent	France
Reg Bolton	Suitcase Circus	Australia
Jean-Michel Brayere	La Fabrik	Senegal
Alejandra Jiminex Castro	El Circo del Mundo - Chile	Chile
Sarah Cathcart	Womens Circus	Australia
Will Chamberlain	Belfast Community Circus School	Northern Ireland
Rosine Feferman	Larue and Company	France
Laurent Gachet	Shems'y	Morocco
Paul Laporte	Cirque du Monde	Canada
Adrienne Larue	Larue and Company	France
Kathryn Montgomery	Independent	Northern Ireland
Andrea Ousley	Women's Circus	Australia
Tortrel Portrona	Payasos Sin Fronteras	Spain
Jacques Portokalopoulos	Les Saltimbanques de l'Impossible	France
Marianna Luna Ruffolo	Circo Social del Sur	Argentina
Padre Silva	Los Muchachos	Spain
Felicity Simpson	Cirque Pour Tous	France
Isabelle Sage	Circo Baobab	Guinea Conakry
Adrienne Van Hiltern	Elleboog	Netherlands
Alain Veilleux	Independent	Canada
(trans. Bolton)		

Appendix 3

Fifty works of juvenile circus literature used in the survey in section 3.7

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- Jenkins, Alan C. Circus Through the Ages. London : Chatto, Boyd and Oliver, 1972.
- Kelly M E. Visit to the Circus. Sydney: View, 1985.
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- Krementz, Jill. A Very Young Circus Flyer. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1979.
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- McCully, Emily Arnold. Starring Mirette and Bellini. Sydney: Scholastic, 1997.
- McKenna, Terry. The Fox and the Circus Bear. London: Victor Gollancz, 1982.
- Packard, Edward. The Circus. Bantam, New York: Choose Your Own Adventure, 1981.
- Peg, Gianni Alex. The Amazing Aerial Acrobat. New York: A and C Black, 1986.
- Peg, Gianni Alex. The Amazing Juggler. New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1981.
- Petersham, Maud and Miska. The Circus Baby. New York: Macmillan, 1950.
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- Redoules, Stephanie. L'Imagerie du Cirque. Paris: Editions Fleuris, 2001.
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- Schlensinger, Roger. The Pop-Up Circus Book. London: RHS, 1968.
- Shannon, Mark and Shannon, David. The Acrobat and the Angel. New York: Putnam, 1999.
- Smith, Laura R. The Circus Book. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1913.
- Smith, Parkes. Circus Time. Sydney: Methuen, 1984
- Smith, Rosemary. The Circus Book. Kenosha, Wis: John Martin's House, Inc, 1946.
- Spier, Peter. Peter Spier's Circus. London: Concorde House, 1992.
- Tibo, Giles. Simon et le Petit Cirque. Toronto: Tounndra, 1997.

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- Watson, Clare. Powerhouse Circus Super Fun Book. Sydney: Powerhouse, 1996.
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- Wilson, Forrest. Super Gran. London: Puffin, 1987.
- Wright, Gillian. The Circus. Oxford: Oxford, 1995.
- Unknown. At The Circus Coloring Book. New York: Creative Child Press, 1994.
- Unknown. The Circus Annual. London: Birn Bros, 1949.
- Unknown. The Circus Comes to Town, Copenhagen: Lego, 1989.
- Unknown. Circus Frolics. Sydney: View, 1985.
- Unknown. My Monarch Book of the Circus. London: Purnell, 1969.