

Running Away to the Circus

A PILOT STUDY FOR A NATIONAL SURVEY OF AUSTRALIAN CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS
EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE AND MOTIVATIONS OF PRACTITIONERS

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Master of Research Thesis
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And with regard to my factual reporting of events... either I was present at the events which I have described or else I heard most of them from eye-witnesses whose reports I have checked with as much thoroughness as possible... It will be enough for me... if these words of mine are judged useful by those who want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future.

Thucydides, c. 400 BC¹

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¹ Warner, 1979: 48

Dedication

**This thesis is dedicated to Paul Bouissac, whose first book
allowed me to pursue a life in circus,
and to the collective and founders of Circus Oz,
who started everything.**

Table of Contents

Abstract	vii
Statement of Original Work.....	ix
Acknowledgements	xi
Abbreviations, Terms and Definitions	xii
Abbreviations.....	xii
Terms and Definitions.....	xii
Key Motivations.....	xiii
Link to Interviews.....	xiv
Chapter One: The Great Stumble Forward	1
Introduction.....	3
Aims, Question and Definitions	7
Situation and Literature.....	8
Research Methodology.....	13
History	21
Chapter Two: Waiter, There's a Circus in My Soup.....	25
The Decade	27
ROBIN LAURIE	31
Lived Experience	32
Motivations.....	34
TIM COLDWELL	37
Lived Experience	38
Motivations.....	39
Conclusion	43
Chapter Three: Appetite.....	45
The Decade	47
ANNI DAVEY	49
Lived Experience	50
Motivations.....	51
ANTONELLA CASELLA.....	55
Lived Experience	56
Motivations.....	57
Conclusion	60
Chapter Four: Precarious.....	61
The Decade	63
MIKE FINCH.....	65
Lived Experience	66
Motivations.....	68
MEL FYFE.....	71
Lived Experience	72
Motivations.....	73
Conclusion	76

Chapter Five: Barely Contained	77
The Decade	79
Lived Experience	82
Motivations.....	83
LUKE TAYLOR	87
Lived Experience	88
Motivations.....	89
Conclusion	91
Chapter Six: Party Ghost.....	93
The Decade	95
ROB TANNION.....	99
Lived Experience	100
Motivations.....	101
OLIVIA PORTER	105
Lived Experience	106
Motivations.....	107
Conclusion	109
Chapter Seven: But Wait... There's More	111
Results	113
Lived Experience	114
Key Motivations	115
Summary.....	119
Discussion	120
Common Themes and Links.....	120
Experiences.....	122
Chapter Eight: The Three Rings of Circus.....	129
Conclusion	131
Further Research	136
Bibliography	139
APPENDICES	153
APPENDIX 1: Sample Participant Table.....	155
APPENDIX 2: Illustrations.....	157
APPENDIX 3: Nanjing Projects 1 and 2.....	171
APPENDIX 4: Areas for Further Research in Circus Studies	177
APPENDIX 5: A View from the Outside	179
APPENDIX 6: Timeline	183
APPENDIX 7: Ethics Approval Letter	195

List of Figures

Fig. 1 <i>The Great Stumble Forward</i> , 1976.....	1
Fig. 2 <i>The Little Book Of Juggling</i>	6
Fig. 3. The Participants	18
Fig. 4. <i>Barnum’s Roman Hippodrome</i> , 1874.....	21
Fig. 5. <i>The Great Stumble Forward</i> , 1976.	23
Fig. 6. Australian Performing Group, 1976.....	25
Fig. 7. Robin Laurie, 20 th April, 2018	31
Fig. 8. Tim Coldwell, 18 th April, 2018.....	37
Fig. 9. Photos from Circus Oz archival collection	43
Fig. 10. Circus Oz, 1982	45
Fig. 11. Anni Davey, 16 th March, 2018	49
Fig. 12. Antonella Casella, 15 th March, 2018.....	55
Fig. 13. Photos from Circus Oz archival collection	60
Fig. 14. Circus Oz, 1993	61
Fig. 15. Mike Finch, 19 th April, 2018.....	65
Fig. 16. Mel Fyfe, 16 th March, 2018.....	71
Fig. 17. Photos from Circus Oz archival collection	76
Fig. 18. Circus Oz, 2009	77
Fig. 19. Joel Salom, 7 th May, 2018.....	81
Fig. 20. Luke Taylor, 19 th April, 2018	87
Fig. 21. Photos from Circus Oz archival collection	91
Fig. 22. Circus Oz, 2017	93
Fig. 23. Rob Tannion, 19 th April, 2018	99
Fig. 24. Olivia Porter, 4 th April, 2018	105
Fig. 25. Photos from <i>Model Citizens</i> Programme, 2017.....	110
Fig. 26. Circus Oz, 2015	111
Fig. 27. Experience Pie Chart.....	113
Fig. 28. Key Motivations Pie Chart	113
Fig. 29. Experience Column Chart	114
Fig. 30. Key Motivations Column Chart.....	115
Fig. 31. Key Motivations by Frequency	117
Fig. 32. Key Motivations by Practitioner	117
Fig. 33. Experiences and Key Motivations.....	119
Fig. 34. Early Circus Oz Programmes, Robin Laurie archival collection	125
Fig. 35. Circus Oz, 2006	129
Fig. 36. Three Particular Key Motivations	132
Fig. 37. Effects of Authenticity, Diversity of Media and Limitlessness	133
Fig. 38. The Three Rings of Circus Venn Diagram.....	135

Abstract

This pilot study begins to explore the motivations of Australian Contemporary Circus practitioners to choose circus rather than other forms of artistic expression by interviewing two practitioners from the five decades of its development. The thesis records and examines their lived experience and takes an 'insider's' approach, drawing on my own twenty-year professional experience in Contemporary Circus. Australia has played a major role in the international development of the form which has had considerable artistic and social impact. This thesis lays some groundwork, records Australian experience, presents original research and points to the need for further investigation.

The participants interviewed have all have worked for Australia's premier Contemporary Circus company, Circus Oz, and their lived experience reflects the wider Australian cultural environment in which the form developed. This thesis identifies ten Key Motivations for the practitioners' adoption of circus professionally and shows that circus is a unique form of artistic expression for them. This thesis creates an emerging taxonomy that leads to a preliminary new framing for identifying circus as a unique performance medium, and it provides agency to the practitioners themselves, giving them a direct voice within the emerging field of circus studies.

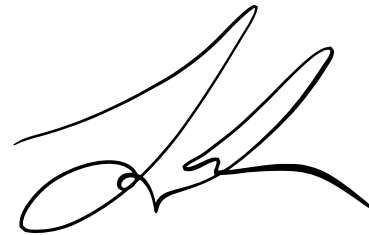
Statement of Original Work

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “Running Away to the Circus: A Pilot Study for a National Survey of Australian Contemporary Circus Exploring the Lived Experience and Motivations of Practitioners” has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, reference number: 5201701136 on 30/11/2017.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'J' followed by a series of loops and a horizontal stroke at the end.

Jesse Jensen-Kohl
(45010714)

18/10/2018

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Like a circus, this entire research project relied on a team of people and I would like to acknowledge all who have helped, supported and encouraged me and my research in this significant turning point in my association with the circus medium.

With thanks to the Department of Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies and my supervisor Dr. Jon Burt, my 'Academic Fairy God Mother', Prof. Catharine Lumby, and Head of Department, Prof. Nicole Anderson. Thanks also to all my lecturers and teachers during my year of course work, who helped form and give shape to my project, especially Prof. John Potts and Prof. Kathryn Millard. For all the technical help from the Department, providing cameras and equipment, I thank Marcus Eckermann and David Mitchell, and Holly Robinson for her advice and friendship.

I wish to thank all the participants, 'the cast' in this study, who not only agreed to take part with enthusiasm but were incredibly generous with their time and the information they all provided to me. In particular, I want to thank Mike Finch for years of friendship, who has supported my studies and research from the first week I was accepted to undertake this research and Robin Laurie who lent and trusted me with her personal archival collection. Thank you to Rob Tannion for allowing me access to the Circus Oz archival collection and to Laurel Frank who welcomed me there and allowed me to spend hours locked up alone with the history of Circus Oz. Thank you also to Genesys Australia for providing me with the opportunity to spend time in Melbourne. To Jon Hawkes for other discussions on Circus Oz, and to Reg Mombassa and Chips Mackinolty for taking the time to answer my queries about their poster designs, my sincere appreciation. I am extremely indebted to pioneer of Australian circus studies and my personal inspiration, Mark St Leon, who generously read this manuscript and provided me with valuable feedback.

Before ever considering undertaking Higher Degree Research, there has been a number of people who have been foundational to my practice, my career, my study and my life, and I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Nigel Martin, Philippe Quoilin, Michael Newbold, Carmelina Di Guglielmo, Tony Hannan, Triton Tunis-Mitchell and Michael Baxter. To Yarran Hominh and Sharon Bennett-Hill for their help and support in my initial entry to the Academy, my gratitude, as well as to my personal 'circus academic adviser', Assoc. Prof. Tom Hillard. Thank you to Liam Jensen-Kohl for all his help with the finishing touches, archival advice and intellectual discussions.

Finally, thank you to my educators and beloved parents whose belief and encouragement never wanes. For my inherent sense of humour, and for his professional advice on statistics and psychology, thank you to Stephen Kohl, and for her advice about history and art, thank you to my life coach who gently, and when necessary not so gently, pushes me to always do the best I can do, Lynette Jensen.

Abbreviations, Terms and Definitions

Abbreviations

ACAPTA - Australian Circus and Physical Theatre Association (Australia)

APG - Australian Performing Group (Melbourne, Australia)

CAST - Cartoon Archetypical Slogan Theatre (London, UK)

CSU - Charles Sturt University (Bathurst, Australia)

FFFC - Flying Fruit Fly Circus (Wodonga, Australia)

NICA - National Institute of Circus Arts (Melbourne, Australia)

NIDA - National Institute of Dramatic Art (Sydney, Australia)

VCA - Victorian College of the Arts (Melbourne, Australia)

Terms and Definitions

Acro: Abbreviation for acrobatics.

Aerialist: Someone who performs on apparatuses suspended in the air.

Bicycle: Trick bicycle apparatus designed to support, and performed by, many performers.

Chinese Pole: Acrobatics performed on a static pole or poles.

Corde lisse: A rope-like apparatus suspended from the ceiling on which acrobatics are performed.

Doubles Trapeze: A horizontal bar suspended by two ropes on which two people perform acrobatics.

Duo Acro: Acrobatics performed with two people.

German Wheel: A circular ground-based apparatus inside which a person performs acrobatics.

Hoop Diving: Acrobatics performed by propelling through hoops.

Manipulation: The overarching term for juggling objects including clubs, balls and rings and other forms such as Diablo, Devil Sticks and Cigar Boxes.

Medium: The material an artist uses (abstract or physical).

Passing: A short-hand term referring to juggling clubs thrown and caught between two or more people.

Pitching: Also known as Banquine (or bunking), a ground-based acrobatics involving performers throwing and catching other performers.

Abbreviations, Terms and Definitions (cont.)

Key Motivations

The following terms have been coined for this research and the author makes no personal value judgment about the words used by the practitioners. This thesis aims to provide agency to the practitioners themselves. For a full outline of how these terms were derived, see Research Methodology, pages 13-16.

As a result of, and for the purposes of this study, these descriptors mean:

Authenticity - A sense of the real, direct, or genuine, felt, experienced or conveyed physically, viscerally, psychologically or in any other way.

Challenge - A drive to achieve goals, overcome difficulties and achieve results.

Collaboration - A desire to work together with other artists on the same or similar goals or projects.

Community - A sense of being in a group or network of likeminded individuals with similar skills, intentions, and artistic aims.

Communication - A drive to communicate to others in any form or media, and in any way.

Diversity of Media - A feeling of having access to a wide range of media (mediums) and resources available that can be applied for the artist's use, and in their work, including various apparatuses, artistic disciplines, multimedia and theatrical devices, and any other physical or conceptual tools.

Expression - An intention to convey ideas, feelings, stories or experiences, artistically, physically or personally. Three forms of expression were discussed by the participants in this group: personal expression, artistic expression and physical expression.

Limitlessness - A sense of unlimited, boundary-less possibilities. Unfettered and endless artistic potential.

Performance Drive - A desire to perform to an audience.

Politics - A drive or an intention for the artists to express or communicate their political ethos.

Link to Interviews

<https://vimeo.com/album/5456236>

NB: Since this thesis was written, the Pram Factory website (www.pramfactory.com), live until September 2018 and cited often within the thesis, has been terminated. However, it has been archived by the University of Melbourne and is now again available for access here: <https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/research/digital-studio/projects/theatre-and-dance-platform/the-pram-factory>

Chapter One: The Great Stumble Forward²

Introduction

*The circus... joins the earthy and the ideal,
the absurd and the sublime*

Naomi Ritter³



Fig. 1 *The Great Stumble Forward*, 1976.
Album Cover, Designed by Colin Stevens, Lynette Jensen Collection

² *The Great Stumble Forward* 1976, an early production of Soapbox Circus 1976, precursor of Circus Oz. See Chapter Two.

³ Ritter, 1989: 317.

Stumbling Forward

I first began running away to the circus on the 6th July 1997. At age twelve, I was struck with a moment of inspiration and taught myself to juggle with three oranges, from the *Little Book of Juggling*⁴ that someone had given me as a birthday present. Soon after, I saved up my pocket money and bought a unicycle, which I taught myself to ride in a week. Like many of the people interviewed for this study, the circus found me, and I've never stopped running towards it.

Introduction

This pilot study is a preliminary exploration of the motivations of Australian Contemporary Circus practitioners to choose circus as their medium of professional artistic expression by talking to practitioners themselves, giving them agency and a direct voice within the emerging field of circus studies. It presents original research in the field. Ten practitioners told their own stories about their experiences and why they chose the medium of circus.

Circus combines a variety of disciplines like juggling, acrobatics, clowning, tight-wire and flying trapeze with music, colour and physicality. It employs high physical human skill, audience interaction and spectacle. For the audience, it is an immersive performance medium, stimulating many of the senses and producing strong emotional response.⁵ Like the medium itself, research into circus is multi-disciplined, encompassing many scholastic fields.⁶ However, within the literature a satisfactorily encompassing definition of circus is elusive.⁷ Circus studies is an emerging area of academic research and therefore offers a rich field for investigation.

This study is intended to form the basis for further research into the experiences and motivations of Australian Contemporary Circus practitioners.⁸ The research project took an inductive approach⁹ and was conducted as a qualitative ethnographical study,¹⁰ drawing on

⁴ Dingman, 1994.

⁵ Bouissac, 2018.

⁶ There are constantly expanding modes of enquiry into circus studies. These include in the areas of psychology, semiotics, historical enquiry, political enquiry, education, psychoanalysis, disability studies, gender studies, and media, cultural and performance studies.

⁷ For a discussion on the difficulty of defining circus, see Tait and Lavers, 2016b: 2-6. A new 'framing' for circus is presented here in Chapter Eight.

⁸ It is expected that this pilot study will lead to a proposed PhD as well as other research.

⁹ Neuman, 1994: 46-47.

¹⁰ King-White, 2017.

oral history and documentary theory techniques for data collection¹¹ and grounded theory for data analysis and interpretation. The research process was led by the data produced by the interviews with the participants and took a cross-disciplinary approach, covering research into wide-ranging areas such as performance studies, phenomenology, narrative discourse, Australian political history, art theory and philosophy,¹² and data was examined using grounded theory and critical discourse analysis¹³ from which an original taxonomy of the practitioners' motivations was developed.¹⁴

Australia has played a foundational role in the development of Contemporary Circus internationally¹⁵ and the participants in this study have played an active role in that development. This study seeks to discover what has motivated Contemporary Circus practitioners since the development of the form and is an investigation through the almost five decades of its existence. Two practitioners were chosen to represent each decade.

This study is not concerned with why practitioners became artists, or even performing artists, but with why they chose *circus* as their medium. Nor is this a history of circus, Circus Oz, or the development of Contemporary Circus, or a cultural investigation of the conditions that led to its formation, although a by-product of the study is that the history of Contemporary Circus has been reflected in the lived experiences of the practitioners and the stories they tell.

This pilot study drew on my embodied knowledge and practice-based¹⁶ research of over twenty years¹⁷ in Australian Contemporary Circus which provided a rich opportunity for an immersive ethnographical approach. In writing about the practitioners' experiences and motivations, I have tried to write in plain, straight-forward language so that the clarion voices of the participants themselves and the colourful imagery of their subject matter leads the narrative.¹⁸

¹¹ Davis, Back and MacLean, 1977; Douglas, Roberts and Thompson, 1988; Rabiger, 2009.

¹² Tolstoy and Maude, 1899; Danto, 1964; 1983.

¹³ Bruce, Rankine and Nairn, 2017.

¹⁴ See Research Methodology, page 13.

¹⁵ Mullett, 2005.

¹⁶ Babour, 2004; Spatz, 2017.

¹⁷ See Appendix 5.

¹⁸ For a discussion of effective use of language and using exemplar quotes, see Bernard, 2006: 503-505.

The chapter titles refer to productions in which one of the practitioners examined there was involved¹⁹ and a quotation from the other practitioner introduces the chapter, where their lived experiences are summarized and motivations are discussed. Chapters One to Six begin with a decade outline of events, to contextualize the experiences of the practitioners. Throughout this thesis, footnotes have been used extensively to provide a sense of the breadth and depth of the historical and cultural context that underpins the richness and complexity of Australian Contemporary Circus. Where possible, hyperlinks have been used to reinforce and support the strong visual imagery of the subject and to provide an interactive experience for the reader. Primary source images have been used to expand and reinforce the research. This thesis provides a brief overview of the experiences of the practitioners, identifies a preliminary taxonomy of their motivations and considers the place of circus within the arts, and concludes with a preliminary framing of the medium.

When I began learning circus skills in the 1990s, I was not aware that I was part of an emerging form. Throughout my career, I have personally observed a positive change in community attitude to circus,²⁰ although it continues to maintain some of its traditional mystique and ‘outsider’ status.²¹ Circus has gained in general popularity and acceptance and lost much of the prejudice that it has historically attracted within the arts and in the general community,²² however it continues to appear to be an unusual career choice and means of artistic expression and practice. This research therefore sought to uncover why practitioners made that choice.

¹⁹ This is with the exception of the last chapter, *The Three Rings of Circus*.

²⁰ As a teenager, I was always vaguely aware of slight general disapproval from acquaintances or strangers when I told them I was involved in learning circus skills.

²¹ See Ritter, 1989; St Leon, 2011; Bouissac, 2018.

²² For example, the Sydney Festival now has a specific circus section in its programme (see Appendix 2) and circus skills are beginning to be incorporated into school curricula.

Since the night I taught myself to juggle, I have been wondering why people like me 'run away to the circus' and this research has finally provided the means for me to begin to find out.



Fig. 2 *The Little Book Of Juggling*, author's collection

Aims, Question and Definitions

Aims

This pilot study aims:

- To lay groundwork for a subsequent wider study for a national survey of Australian Contemporary Circus exploring the lived experience and motivations of practitioners
- To Investigate the motivations of a sample of Australian Contemporary Circus practitioners through their lived experience
- To collect primary source material especially in the form of filmed interviews
- To provide agency and a direct 'voice' to the practitioners themselves within the emerging field of circus studies

Question

What are the motivations that drive arts practitioners to take up Contemporary Circus professionally rather than other forms of artistic expression?

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following are defined as:

- ***Professional practitioner***: A practitioner who has worked in the circus medium professionally, and is defined here by the interviewees having been employed by Circus Oz at some stage in their career, for any period of time including briefly, thus categorizing each one absolutely as being a professional circus practitioner.²³

²³ Up until 2017, employees would sign two-year contracts with the company. As a leading Australian arts company with an international reputation, working for Circus Oz provides a straightforward and clear-cut indication that a practitioner is professional.

- **Contemporary Circus:** A performance form that blends traditional circus disciplines with aesthetic, narrative or political intention, such as the work of Circus Oz, Gravity and Other Myths, Circa and Circus Monoxide in Australia and internationally, Cirque du Soleil and Cirque Eloize. It can also be called Alternative Circus or New Circus.²⁴ This style or genre should not be confused with traditional forms of circus practiced in contemporary times. Throughout this thesis, the term Contemporary Circus appears as a proper noun to differentiate it from traditional, classic or any other form of circus performance.²⁵
- **Motivation:** Any reason to take action.²⁶

Situation and Literature

Circus studies is an emerging field of research. Despite Australia's significant role in the international development of Contemporary Circus, only limited research has been conducted into Australian Contemporary Circus²⁷ and there has been even less on the practitioners themselves,²⁸ who are the creators of the form. For her 2005 dissertation, Jane Mullett interviewed Australian, French, Canadian and American practitioners about their role in Contemporary Circus in its early years²⁹ and Kristy Seymour recently interviewed Australian practitioners for her as yet unreleased PhD thesis.³⁰ Currently, there is no research about the specific motivations of Australian practitioners for choosing to adopt circus practice.³¹ John-Paul Zaccarini conducted research on the motivations of Swedish practitioners in 2013,³² however, his research was conducted using psychoanalysis and subconscious motivations, while this research investigates the conscious choices of Australian practitioners. This thesis therefore presents new research in the field.

²⁴ The term "alternative circus" was introduced by Australian circus scholar, Jane Mullett, in her 2005 dissertation, however, the term has not been widely used since. Mullett, 2005

²⁵ The choice to use the company Circus Oz for this research was also because it is one of the first companies to use the term 'contemporary circus'. See Appendix 2 for an image of Circus Oz 'History'. For a discussion on the difference between traditional circus and Contemporary Circus see Bouissac, 2018: 20-22.

²⁶ "A motive is a want or need that causes us to act". Sternberg, 1995: 556.

²⁷ Such as Tait, 2000, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2016; Mullett, 2005, 2014; Farrell, 2008; St Leon, 2011; Seymour, 2018b.

²⁸ Tait's work (2000, 2004a) is a rare example, as well as Mullett (2005), St Leon (2011) and Seymour (2018) who interviewed practitioners as a part of their investigations.

²⁹ Mullett, 2005.

³⁰ Although I have not read Seymour's thesis at the time of writing because it is as yet unreleased, from general discussions about it with the author, it is clear that she has interviewed a number of Australian Contemporary Circus practitioners. Personal communication with author, 2018; Seymour, 2018b.

³¹ Mullett's thesis discussed the influences for practitioners on the formation of the medium, and this necessarily included some indication of motivations but it was not the prime focus of the research and is concentrated on the earlier years of the formation of the form.

³² Zaccarini, 2013.

The literature about circus is paradoxically vast and scarce.³³ There have been many general non-scholarly publications written about circus.³⁴ There is also much primary source material available in the form of circus posters, newspaper articles, programmes, engravings and photographs, that provides considerable historical and cultural information,³⁵ and even considerable material culture dating back to ancient times.³⁶ It has been argued that it is difficult to confirm the accuracy of much of the literature due to the exclusivity of circus culture, the embellishment of the accounts told by individuals and a lack of written documentation of the historical events in question.³⁷ However, as scholarly literature builds, so does the substance of the subject.

A growing body of research in circus studies is developing, encompassing Australian and international circus. This includes Australian circus scholar Andrea Lemon's ethnographic research into traditional family-run Australian circuses³⁸ and Gillian Arrighi's exploration of Australian family circus and related research in circus studies,³⁹ Yoram Carmeli's substantial volume of work in cultural, anthropological and semiotic meaning, especially of British circus⁴⁰ and Linda Simon's comprehensive global circus history.⁴¹

Specifically in Australian circus scholarship, Peta Tait has published widely on Australian Contemporary Circus and has been an influential trail-blazer internationally in the field of circus studies, most notably her 2016 *Routledge Circus Studies Reader*, co-authored with fellow Australian circus scholar, Katie Lavers.⁴² In addition, Rosemary Farrell's research has identified the substantial influence of Chinese acrobats on both traditional and Contemporary Circus in Australia.⁴³

³³ Compared to long established disciplines like history, philosophy and literature for example, writing on circus studies is much more limited in volume because circus studies is a relatively new area of scholarship.

³⁴ This includes novels, personal memoirs and coffee table books and circus is a common theme of film and other media. For example, *Polly of the Circus* (1932), *Marx Brothers At the Circus* (1939), *Water for Elephants* (2011), *The Mighty Barnum* (1934), *Little Golden Books Circus Time* (1940), *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952), *Clowning Sim* (Martin, 1988) *vel sim*.

³⁵ This is the source material that St Leon for instance largely drew on in the compilation of his Australian Circus history, along with oral history interviews, as well as Arrighi's research into the FitzGerald Brothers Circus. St Leon, 2006; Arrighi, 2015.

³⁶ For example, ancient wall paintings such as the Minoan Bull-leaping Fresco, the Colosseum in Rome, sculptural representations in relief and in the round and illustrations on pottery and coins. The evidence from Rome is too plentiful to treat in any exhaustive way here, but for illustrations of the visual material that survives, see for example Lucian Jacobelli, *Gladiators at Pompeii* (2003). Written *testimonia* are to be found in Alison Futrell, *The Roman Games. A Source Book. Historical Sources in Translation* (2006), and for a relatively recent sociological approach to the phenomenon, see Fagan, 2011; Bergmann and Kondoleon, 1999 treats Greek, Roman and Etruscan cultures. For a general overview see St Leon, 2011; Simon, 2014.

³⁷ Hippisley Cox, 1951; Riggins, 2003; St Leon, 2006; Leroux, 2014.

³⁸ Lemon, 2010.

³⁹ Arrighi, 2014; 2015; 2016.

⁴⁰ Carmeli, 1995; 2001; 2012.

⁴¹ Simon, 2014.

⁴² Tait and Lavers, 2016b. See also Tait, 2000; 2004a; 2004b; 2005; 2016.

⁴³ Farrell, 2007; 2008; Tait and Farrell, 2012.

Insider's Approach

My personal experience and involvement in the Australian circus sector has not only led me to this research but also provides me with an 'insider's' perspective as a researcher. A former circus practitioner herself, Mullett⁴⁴ suggests that, "Researchers who are able to use their previous practical knowledge to assist their research have the advantage of possessing an insider's knowledge of pre-existing contacts as well as an understanding of the technical terminology of the field".⁴⁵ Canadian scholar Louis Patrick Leroux says, "For years, researchers came through with their preconceptions, gathering data, occasionally misreading signs, and pursued their route elsewhere...".⁴⁶ He argues that a growing literature by scholars with insight into circus practice is developing, "Only recently has the contemporary circus world in Quebec produced emerging scholars who have an intimate knowledge of that world's training, practices, and culture and who also possess the analytical tools and broader understanding of research needs and practices".⁴⁷

Generally acknowledged as the pioneer of circus studies, Paul Bouissac⁴⁸ has had a personal involvement in circus since childhood, that provides an insider's perspective that informs his work and has allowed ground-breaking insights into circus to emerge.⁴⁹ In Australia, there has been a growing number of scholars who have had such an insider's perspective. As well as Mullett and Seymour, they include the late Reg Bolton,⁵⁰ and Mark St Leon who has a strong historical family connection with Australian circus. St Leon says, "By virtue of my name and ancestry, I am to some extent an insider in the world of Australian circus"⁵¹ which allows him entry into the usually closed world of circus, that informs and enriches his extensive research of Australian circus. Having an insider's perspective and personal connection within the circus world can provide the insider with privileged information not readily available to other researchers.⁵²

⁴⁴ Jane Mullett worked for various circus companies in the 1970s and 1980s including Circus Oz from 1979. Broadway, 1999: 174; Mullett, 2014: 97. See also Appendix 2.

⁴⁵ Mullett, 2005: 12.

⁴⁶ Leroux, 2014: 265.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Bouissac, 1976, 2010, 2015, 2018.

⁴⁹ Bouissac refers to his extensive practical experience in circus in his latest publication. Bouissac, 2018. Also in *The Pleasures of Time: Two Men, A Life*, Stephen Riggins discusses Bouissac's personal involvement in circus since childhood, including starting his own circus as a university student. Riggins, 2003.

⁵⁰ Reg Bolton was the first to be awarded a PhD in Australia on the subject of circus for his dissertation, *Why Circus Works: How the Values and Structures of Circus Make It a Significant Development Experience for Young People*. Bolton, 2004.

⁵¹ St Leon, 2011: x.

⁵² In traditional circus, a certain secrecy about its techniques and 'tricks' was an economic imperative, and to some extent this continues in Contemporary Circus. Leroux, 2014: 265.

While an insider's approach can provide the researcher with considerable rapport with the subjects under investigation, there are considerations that need to be observed, as Michael Patton says, "as an interviewer, I want to establish rapport with the person I am questioning, but that rapport must be established in such a way that it does not undermine my neutrality concerning what the person tells me."⁵³ Robert Alexander Innes points out the debate about the validity of 'insider' versus 'outsider' research and argues that "insiders pose questions that challenge preconceived notions of their communities and expand scholarly knowledge"⁵⁴ and Mullett draws our attention to the growing body of work that "discusses the issues that arise for a researcher investigating familiar territory".⁵⁵ As part of the debate, some scholars argue that some subjects and areas should only be studied and researched by the insider, for which Innes gives the example of feminism,⁵⁶ and others argue that in some cases being an insider can hinder the validity of the research. In regards to circus however, it is this researcher's belief that circus studies will benefit greatly from a balance between both an insider and outsider perspective within scholarship.

An insider's perspective therefore underlies this research and has allowed access to the practitioners through my network, their open and genuine responses, and an assumed and shared background in the terminology and experiences of the circus medium, while this researcher remained conscious of the need for academic neutrality in the design of the study and the gathering, analysis and presentation of the data.

Circus Oz Research

Although Circus Oz itself is not the focus of this study, it was however, a significant factor in the selection process to identify a small sample of professional Contemporary Circus practitioners. Therefore, much of the existing literature about the company was investigated. Research specific to Circus Oz and its development, was conducted by Mullett, who situates the role of Circus Oz and its founding members as pivotal to the development of Contemporary Circus internationally.⁵⁷ Other scholarly writing on Circus Oz has included the

⁵³ Patton, 2002: 365.

⁵⁴ Innes, 2009: 440.

⁵⁵ Mullett, 2005: 12.

⁵⁶ Innes discusses the debate in which some feminists believe that only women should research women's issues, for instance. Innes, 2002: 442.

⁵⁷ Mullett, 2005.

work of Peta Tait, Sue Broadway, David Carlin and Rosemary Farrell.⁵⁸ Newspaper articles and interviews with the company members provided a valuable perspective relating to the artistic critique of the company, as well as the Circus Oz Living Archive⁵⁹ which contains primary evidence videos of performances that included most of the practitioners interviewed in this study.

Art and Philosophy

A full discussion of the philosophy of art and aesthetics, and how they relate to circus, is not within the scope of this thesis, however, in the final analysis and discussion of the findings of this study, it became clear that the identified motivations of these practitioners would also be shared among other arts practitioners in other areas, particularly performance. Therefore, some literature about art, aest

hetics and philosophy was consulted in order to contextualise circus practitioners within the arts more widely. The literature consulted included: Arthur Danto's discussion on the changed perspective of the nature of art following Warhol's pop art introduction of the *Brillo Box*;⁶⁰ Immanuel Kant's discussion on perception, subjectivity and taste;⁶¹ and Leo Tolstoy's reflections on the abstract meaning and definition of art and art practice.⁶²

⁵⁸ Broadway, 1999; Tait, 2004b, 2005: 120-140, 2016; Farrell, 2008; Carlin, 2014.

⁵⁹ <http://archive.circusoz.com> accessed 6/10/2018.

⁶⁰ Danto, 1983. See also Danto, 1964. For a discussion on pop art see Tunnicliffe and Jaspers, 2014.

⁶¹ Kant, and Walker, 2007.

⁶² Tolstoy and Maude, 1899.

Research Methodology

Method

This research is based on grounded theory⁶³ and borrows the techniques of oral historians⁶⁴ and documentary filmmaking for data collection (the filmed interviews), and inductive *in vivo* coding⁶⁵ was used to analyse and interpret the data.⁶⁶ Data was collected through fieldwork involving interviewing ten Contemporary Circus practitioners about their motivations and experiences. Participants were chosen to cover all the decades since the emergence of Contemporary Circus in the 1970s.⁶⁷ Interviews were conducted in person at the place of each interviewees' choice⁶⁸ and filmed, providing primary source material that guided the investigation and that will provide opportunities for further use and research.⁶⁹ The resulting footage provided a record for the data analysis: <https://vimeo.com/album/5456236>.⁷⁰

As described by H. Russell Bernard, grounded theory is, “an iterative process by which you, the analyst, become more and more grounded in the data” and can be broken down into six steps. This research project was designed to reflect these steps:⁷¹

- 1) **“Produce transcripts of interviews and read through a small sample of text”** – Over ten hours of filmed interviews were viewed and transcribed by the author and although this was onerous and time consuming, it was an extremely useful method to familiarize and ground the author with and in the data, in addition to recording the information.
- 2) **“Identify potential analytic categories – that is, potential themes – that arise.”** – Both the footage and transcripts were reviewed from all ten interviews, and as potential themes arose, they were noted and highlighted in the transcripts and footage timecode was noted. Information was recorded in note form in specifically designed

⁶³ Glaser and Strauss, 1977; Bernard, 2006: 492-503.

⁶⁴ See Janesick, 2010; Douglas, Roberts and Thompson, 1988; Davis, Back and MacLean, 1977.

⁶⁵ Richards, 2005: 95.

⁶⁶ See Nichols, 2010; Rabiger, 2004.

⁶⁷ The Australian performing company New Circus formed in 1974 (there is some discrepancy in the sources here, Broadway, 1999 and St Leon, 2011 give the date as 1973), Soapbox Circus in 1976 and these two companies merged to form Circus Oz, incorporated in 1978. Broadway, 1999; Robertson, 2001; Mullett, 2005; Wolf, 2008; St Leon, 2011.

⁶⁸ This method of interview was chosen to provide the participants with a sense of maximum control and comfort in order to put them at ease to elicit natural conversation flow and responses to the questions. Briggs, 1986.

⁶⁹ The filmed interviews are extremely rich in information and are historically valuable, and would provide ideal material for online or other archival resources such as documentaries in the future if the participants are agreeable to it subsequently being used in this way.

⁷⁰ The footage represents the entire interviews with editing only to remove irrelevant, extended digressions or private information to the participant or author. Removed sections are indicated with cross dissolve fades.

⁷¹ Bernard, 2006: 492.

tables (see Appendix 1) for each interviewee, which divided information into the individual's Experiences and Motivations. Potential analytic categories were developed using inductive coding, specifically *in vivo* coding,⁷² a process involving the internal use of words and terms of interviewees, and reoccurring phases, similar words and ideas were coded into single words or short phrases.

- 3) **"As the categories emerge, pull all the data from those categories together and compare them."** – The potential categories were colour coded and preliminary titles were applied and information was grouped and compared. Moveable physical lists were developed and analysed. These coded categories became the Key Motivations.
- 4) **"Think about how the categories are linked together"** – A considerable period of incubation⁷³ was undertaken during which time all data was considered at length, while other research was also conducted, which developed from the interviews, and the filmed interviews were edited and up-loaded online. Two major wall charts were created for both Lived Experience and Motivations to understand and analyse links between individuals and the data they presented.
- 5) **"Use the models against the data – particularly against negative cases."** – The Key Motivations were compared and assessed against all the interviews and changed, removed or renamed to match new findings as they emerged from the previous step.
- 6) **"Present the results of the analysis using exemplars, that is, quotes from interviews that illuminate the theory."** – Transcripts were re-examined to identify clear quotations related to each Key Motivation for each interviewee. Chapters Two through to Six of this thesis include numerous direct quotations which illustrate the Lived Experiences and Key Motivations for each practitioner. In Chapter Seven these experiences and motivations are discussed and common links identified. Tables, charts and graphs are used to illustrate the data and results.⁷⁴ Chapter Eight attempts to identify, understand and discuss the meaning of the findings in relation to arts, performance and further presents a preliminary framing for identifying the circus medium.

⁷² Bernard, 2006: 493; Richards, 2005: 95.

⁷³ Incubation is a term used in psychology, particularly in the study of creativity, and is applied to the method of incubating an idea or creative thought process. For a discussion on incubation see for example Nečka, 2011: 669.

⁷⁴ Neuman, 1994: 437-438.

The *in vivo* coding process⁷⁵ resulted in ten Key Motivations being identified: **Communication, Expression, Limitlessness, Authenticity, Politics, Diversity of Media, Community, Challenge, Collaboration** and **Performance Drive**.⁷⁶ These Key Motivations are defined on pages 19-20. Although each of the practitioners reported nearly all the motivations identified, through detailed assessment of their interviews, only the Key Motivations for each participant were isolated. The labelling of the motivations in this study, in accordance with *in vivo* coding, was derived from the words of the participants themselves where possible, like ‘Limitlessness’ and ‘Authenticity’, or using terms to sum up responses, such as ‘Performance Drive’ and ‘Diversity of Media’. Some terms were used as over-arching descriptors, like ‘Expression’ which includes artistic, political and self-expression, and each Key Motivation is discussed in the practitioner’s section of each chapter. The identification of each Key Motivation was grounded in the information contained in the body of each interview and is not surmised from other material.

Throughout this inductive research project, and consistent with grounded theory, the interviews were key to guiding the development of the investigation and led to further and specific research in the literature and other resources⁷⁷ about themes revealed in the interviews such as Australian cultural, social, theatrical and general artistic context that is reflected in the personal experiences of the practitioners that have been discussed in the relevant chapters.⁷⁸ Primary source material was also investigated from the Circus Oz archival collection and other sources.⁷⁹

Oral history seemed to provide a particularly effective means of collecting information from this group of practitioners because of its ability to encompass the tone, intonation and physical response of interviewees. Ronald J. Grele describes two forms of oral history: the first being oral history as archival practice; and the seconded is oral history and social history. This project is focused on the latter, although an expected result (access to the filmed interviews)

⁷⁵ Richards, 2005: 95.

⁷⁶ The motivations identified in this current research would all likely fall into Maslow’s top two tiers: Esteem Needs and Need for Self-actualization. Maslow and Langfeld 1943; Sternberg, 1995: 569.

⁷⁷ The literature included subjects such as Australian history, performance studies, psychology art history and aesthetics. The sources included newspaper articles and reviews, company websites, and online and other archives such as the Pram Factory website <https://www.pramfactory.com/pfhome.html> accessed 26/9/2018.

⁷⁸ For a discussion about “comparing and contrasting across multiple data resources” see McGinn, 2010: 287.

⁷⁹ A week was spent in the Circus Oz archive at the company’s headquarters in Melbourne in consultation with Laurel Frank and Rob Tannion. Other sources include Robin Laurie’s personal collection, the Lynette Jensen Collection and the author’s personal collection.

would fall into the former⁸⁰ and it aims, “to create a history of the everyday lives of those who had heretofore been ignored by historians and thereby produce a ‘better’ history...”.⁸¹

Because this group comprised of physical performers used to expressing themselves physically, and because of their varied experiences, confidence levels, education and other factors, the device of using filmed interviews allowed a more nuanced and accurate record to be captured, especially of the physicality their body language. As oral historian, Alessandro Portelli points out,

The tone and volume range and the rhythm of popular speech carry implicit meaning and social connotations which are not reproducible in writing – unless, and then in inadequate and hardly accessible form, as musical notation. The same statement may have quite contradictory meanings, according to the speaker’s intonation, which cannot be represented objectively in the transcript, but only approximately described in the transcriber’s own words.⁸²

Considerable care was taken in transcribing the interviews, consistent with oral history methods, to note tone of voice, physical movements and other non-verbal responses and where appropriate, the practitioners’ tone, physical reactions and responses are included in this thesis where possible. In addition, it was considered more valuable to the reader of this thesis to have direct access to the filmed interviews available to them online, rather than mere written transcripts, which would not have conveyed the considerable physical communication of the participants as effectively.

The method outlined above was considered most suited to discovering the motivations of Contemporary Circus practitioners and providing agency to the practitioners themselves allowing the practitioners to have ‘a voice’ within the academic field.

⁸⁰ Grele, 2007: 34-40.

⁸¹ Ibid: 37-38.

⁸² Portelli, 2006: 34.

Scope and Limitations

This pilot study was conducted over a period of approximately eight months and takes a multi-disciplinary approach. With the necessarily limited scope of this study,⁸³ only two representatives were selected from each decade of the form and all were chosen from having worked for one particular company. It has therefore been taken into consideration that the lived experience of these practitioners does not necessarily represent the experience of other performers of the same era and so this thesis focuses on the common links and ties between the practitioners interviewed and their motivations to take up circus to a professional level.⁸⁴

Personal memories and perspectives of individuals are subjective and can be flawed, incomplete or inaccurate, however, the use of oral history, and grounded theory methods, to draw out the experiences and motivations of individuals provides a particularly vivid and direct picture, especially when used with other accounts, evidence and research.⁸⁵

Through necessity, only a fraction of the rich material shared with me by the participants has been presented here and it has been reduced to strict summarisation,⁸⁶ but it is envisaged that the interviews will provide an ongoing valuable resource for future examination and study and I'm extremely grateful to the participants for their frankness, generosity and company.

Sample and Selection

The sample of ten practitioners was chosen in consultation with Mike Finch⁸⁷ and a balance of gender, experience and circus disciplines was aimed for. To eliminate other factors that might have influenced the motivations of the practitioners, and are not within the scope of this research project, such as cultural bias or family history in circus, the selection criteria included that: the practitioners had worked for the performing company Circus Oz at some

⁸³ Under the guidelines of Macquarie University MRes programme there were only eight months for research, data collection, analysis and writing and a strict a 20,000 word limit.

⁸⁴ Neuman, 1994: 437.

⁸⁵ For a discussion on grounded theory, see Glaser and Strauss, 1977; Charlton, Myers and Sharpless, 2007: 105-110; Bernard, 2006: 492-505.

⁸⁶ Not to mention difficult, practically and emotionally, because the information is so rich, comprehensive and generous.

⁸⁷ The advice of Mike Finch was sought for a number of reasons: 1. the long period in which he was Artistic Director of Circus Oz during which time he oversaw the transition of the company from its original performance form and style to its development from 1997 up to 2015 when he stood down; 2. his wide network of Australian Contemporary (and other) Circus practitioners; 3. his academic training in Theatre Media; 4. his considerable interest in and understanding of the medium; and 5. because I have known him for many years and he has consistently encouraged me and many other people to think deeply about circus.

stage of their careers; they did not have a family history in circus; and they all originated from Australia.⁸⁸ Neuman warns researchers that “Qualitative researchers need to be sensitive to distinctions of race, sex, and age, and to other major social divisions”.⁸⁹ The participants were therefore identified, being two representatives from each of the five decades encompassed by this study.



Fig 3. The Participants

⁸⁸ Because this is a study aimed at discovering the Australian experience, the sample needed to be selected from participants who had been born or who had lived substantially in Australia, so that other cultural factors were eliminated.

⁸⁹ Neuman, 1994: 437.

Interview Questions

The selected practitioners were asked questions designed to explore their lived experience and that relate to how they discovered circus skills, why they continued to learn these skills and why they pursued them to a professional level. Questions were open-ended and couched in straightforward language, and designed to encourage natural conversation and to avoid interviewees being led in any way by the researcher.⁹⁰ Questions to participants were supplied in advance if requested.⁹¹ Each participant was asked the same seven questions to allow for both consistency throughout the research as well as freedom to respond in various ways:⁹²

- How did you get involved in circus?
- Were there other people doing it at the time?
- How long have you considered yourself as a professional practitioner?
- How do you describe what you do?
- Why did you choose circus as your artistic medium?
- What can you express using circus as your medium that you couldn't express in another form?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

The Key Motivations

As stated above, the identification of each Key Motivation in this study was grounded entirely in the information contained within each interview through an *in vivo* coding process. The following terms represent a characterization of the motivations expressed by the practitioners themselves and are broad, over-arching terms. These terms have been coined specifically for this research and the author makes no personal value judgment about the words used by the practitioners.

⁹⁰ See Davis, Back and MacLean, 1977: 17 – 22; Bernard, 2006: 269-270

⁹¹ Questions were carefully considered and chosen in order to cover as much potential response as possible, encourage conversation and to uncover wide-ranging background material and subjects such as political climate, social conditions and general arts practice which relate or led to the interviewee's experience and motivations, consistent with oral history (Portelli, 2006; Perks, and Thomson, 2015) and documentary methods (Rabiger, 2009).

⁹² According to their experience and personal style.

As a result of, and for, the purposes of this study, these descriptors mean:

Authenticity - A sense of the real, direct, or genuine, felt, experienced or conveyed physically, viscerally, psychologically or in any other way.⁹³

Challenge - A drive to achieve goals, overcome difficulties and achieve results.

Collaboration - A desire to work together with others on the same or similar goals or projects.

Community - A sense of belonging in a group or network of likeminded individuals with similar skills, intentions, and artistic aims.

Communication - A drive to communicate to others in any form or media, and in any way.

Diversity of Media - A feeling of having access to a wide range of media (mediums) and resources available that can be applied for the artist's use, and in their work, including various apparatuses, artistic disciplines, multimedia and theatrical devices, and any other physical or conceptual tools.

Expression - An intention to convey ideas, feelings, stories or experiences, artistically, physically or personally. Three forms of expression were discussed by the participants in this group: personal expression, artistic expression and physical expression.

Limitlessness - A sense of unlimited, boundary-less possibilities. Unfettered and endless artistic potential.

Performance Drive - A desire to perform to an audience.

Politics - A drive or an intention for the artists to express or communicate their political ethos.

⁹³ The use of the word 'authenticity' here denotes its common English usage meaning.

This brief historical overview is included here to provide a context for the stories of the practitioners that follow, and subsequent decade backgrounds introduce the following chapters.⁹⁵

With its roots in the ancient world, nomadic troupes and itinerant performers,⁹⁶ modern circus emerged in the late 18th century during the Enlightenment Era when it was formalized⁹⁷ into a recognisable entertainment format that included equestrian demonstrations, rope-walking, juggling and acrobatics performed in a ring.⁹⁸ The form quickly spread from England across the world, including to Australia, New Zealand,⁹⁹ and America, where Barnum and Bailey advertised it as 'The Greatest Show on Earth'.¹⁰⁰ The large-scale three-ring circus format became popular across America,¹⁰¹ however proved less popular for European and Australian audiences, who favoured smaller single-ring circuses.¹⁰²

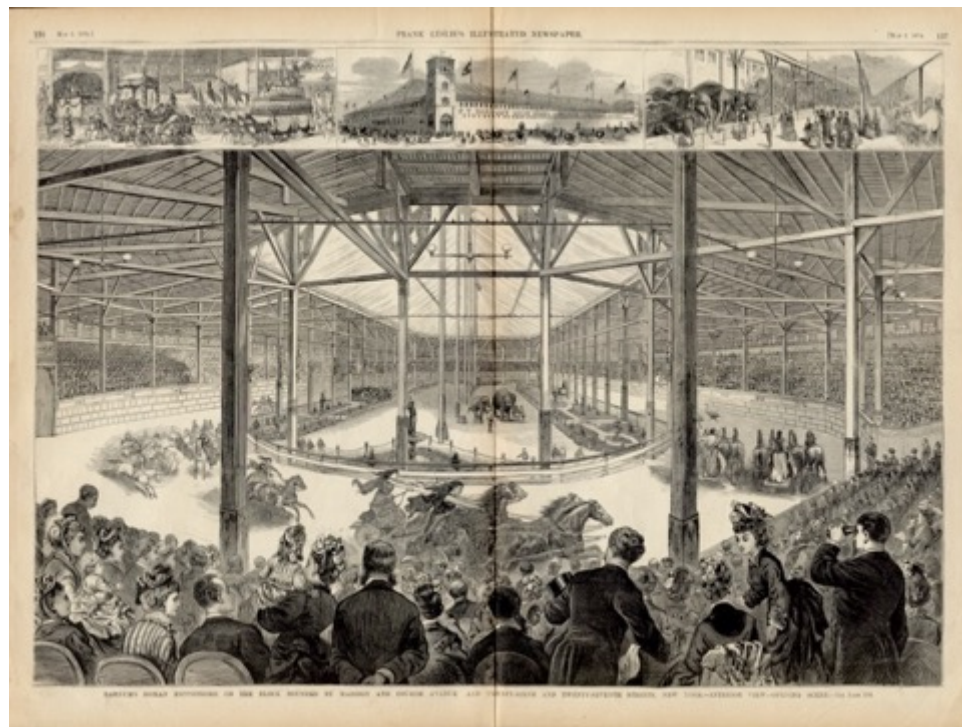


Fig. 4. *Barnum's Roman Hippodrome, 1874.*
Antique Wood Engraving, Lynette Jensen Collection
See detail Appendix 2

⁹⁴ A Timeline related to the development of Australian Contemporary Circus is also included as Appendix 6.

⁹⁵ Chapters Two to Six.

⁹⁶ St Leon, 2011: 3-6; Simon, 2014: 7-48; Boussiac, 2018: 3-6.

⁹⁷ By Philip Astley and others. See for example Hippisley Cox, 1951; St Leon, 2011; Simon, 2014; Arrighi, 2015.

⁹⁸ Hippisley Cox, 1951; Boussiac, 1976; Davis, 2002; St Leon, 2006, 2011; Simon, 2014; Arrighi, 2015.

⁹⁹ St Leon, 2011; Arrighi, 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Davis, 2002; Simon, 2014; Saxon, 2016.

¹⁰¹ Davis, 2002: 2; Simon, 2014: 70.

¹⁰² St Leon, 2011; Simon, 2014: 70.

As St Leon observes, when European settlement began in Australia in 1788, many of the first settlers would have been familiar with the form,¹⁰³ and examples of circus arts were exhibited in Australia since 1833¹⁰⁴ and the first Australian circus was formed in 1847.¹⁰⁵ Australia's Ashton Circus is still extant and had its beginnings in the early stages of the colonies.¹⁰⁶ By the 1960s in Australia, "the circus all but died, in standard as well as strength, not to mention the public's esteem",¹⁰⁷ until it was rethought and re-energized by radical theatrical performers.

Contemporary Circus formed in the early 1970s, following the significant world-wide cultural revolution or 'counter-culture',¹⁰⁸ brought about primarily by the disaffection of a young generation born as part of a post war 'baby boom' which came into full force in the 1960s.¹⁰⁹ Across the world, this era saw a cultural change that rejected the *status quo* and introduced an ethos based on personal freedom, equality and self-expression. The changes were aided by post-war developments in technology such as wide-spread use of television, the contraceptive pill, and labour-saving devices that provided increased leisure time. Many young Australian members of the *intelligentsia* and the arts communities,¹¹⁰ travelled to Europe and Britain, the centre of the 'swinging sixties', where they were imbued with the music, fashion, art, politics and radical philosophies that informed the character of the times.¹¹¹ By the late 1960s, many younger Australians were keen to express an independent 'Australian Voice' politically, socially and culturally.

The development of Contemporary Circus is a result of this cultural revolution, which in Australia was heightened by the introduction by the Whitlam Government of free tertiary education in 1974 and increased funding for the arts.¹¹² In theatre, a New Wave¹¹³ of

¹⁰³ St Leon, 2011: 29.

¹⁰⁴ Examples of the circus arts, specifically ropewalking, were exhibited in Sydney as early as 1833 although the first signs of an identifiable circus industry did not emerge until 1847-8. St Leon, 2011: 20; Ward, 2014: 72.

¹⁰⁵ St Leon, 2011: 29; Arrighi, 2015: 8.

¹⁰⁶ St Leon, 2011: 33. Formally known as Ashton's Circus, two wings of the family now operate as Ashton Entertainment and Circus Joseph Ashton. Interestingly, the Ashton family's latest show *Infamous* has a more Contemporary Circus style and yet still maintains the family, tent tradition. Author's personal communication with St Leon and Jordan Ashton. <https://infamous.net.au> ; <https://www.ashtonentertainment.com.au> accessed 6/10/2018.

¹⁰⁷ St Leon, 2011: 239.

¹⁰⁸ The term 'counter-culture' was coined in 1969 by Theodore Roszak in *The Making of a Counter Culture*. See Roszak, 1995.

¹⁰⁹ Roszak, 1995; Coombs, 1996: 176-177; Roberston, 2001; Wolf, 2008.

¹¹⁰ Like Germaine Greer, Clive James, Richard Neville, Barry Humphries, Martin Sharp and Jenny Kee. Coombs, 1996; Wolf, 2008; Morgan, 2017.

¹¹¹ Clark, 1995; Coombs, 1996; Wolf, 2008; Morgan, 2017.

¹¹² Clarke, 1989; Clark, 1995; Tink, 2014.

¹¹³ New Wave Theatre in Australia was centred on the Nimrod Theatre in Sydney, La Mama and the Pram Factory in Melbourne and Flinders University in Adelaide where Wal Cherry had introduced the first media course. New Wave was part of an international theatrical movement that explored experimental theatrical form, genres and performance methods. In Australia, there was an interest in finding an 'Australian Voice' through realism, use of the vernacular and absurdist satire. Robertson, 2001; Meyrick, 2002, 2017; Worby, 2007; Wolf, 2008.

experimental theatre formed, centred on the Nimrod Theatre in Sydney, Flinders University in Adelaide and La Mama Theatre¹¹⁴ in Melbourne.¹¹⁵ The Australian Performing Group (APG) in Melbourne formed from the radical young writers, actors, filmmakers and musicians at La Mama and opened a performance and workshop space, the Pram Factory.¹¹⁶ It was here that the two Contemporary Circus companies, New Circus and Soapbox Circus, merged to form Circus Oz, funded by the APG and incorporated in 1978, beginning Australia's international foundational role.¹¹⁷ Circus Oz is the last remaining living wing of the APG, and it began a revolution of its own, from which would rise Contemporary Circus in Australia.



Fig. 5. *The Great Stumble Forward*, 1976.
Inside Album Cover, Designed by Colin Stevens, Lynette Jensen Collection

¹¹⁴ La Mama is a theatre that was established by Betty Burstall in 1967 which encourages Australian writing, performance and theatrical experimentation. Robertson, 2001; Wolf, 2008; <http://lamama.com.au/about-la-mama/la-mama-history> accessed 13/9/2018. Originally it included a group of people Laurie had known from University and she names: Kerry Dwyer, Peter Corrigan, Graeme Blundell and Bill Garner.

¹¹⁵ Meyrick, 2002, 2017; Robertson, 2001; Wolf, 2008.

¹¹⁶ <https://www.pramfactory.com/pfhome.html> accessed 26/9/2018.

¹¹⁷ See Footnote 67.

Chapter Two: Waiter, There's a Circus in My Soup¹¹⁸

1970s

Robin Laurie and Tim Coldwell

...so that was an interesting start to things

Robin Laurie¹¹⁹

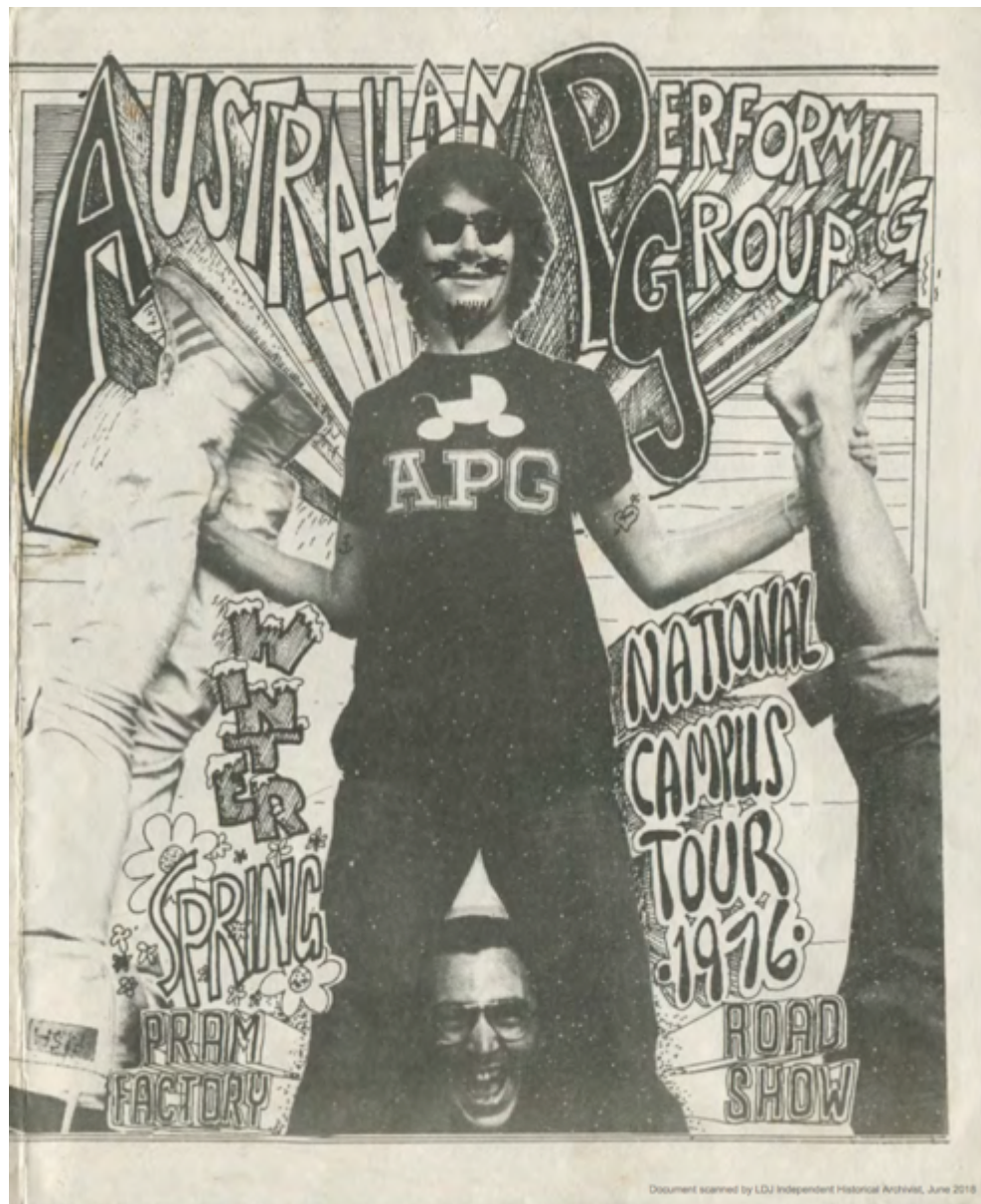


Fig. 6. Australian Performing Group, 1976.
Programme Cover, Robin Laurie archival collection

¹¹⁸ *Waiter, There's a Circus in My Soup* was performed by New Circus (featuring Tim Coldwell) at the Last Laugh in Melbourne in 1977 <https://www.ausstage.edu.au/pages/organisation/8056> accessed 30/9/2018.

¹¹⁹ Laurie, 2018.

The Decade

Following the social revolution brought by the 1960s, in 1972, Gough Whitlam¹²⁰ swept into government as Australian Prime Minister, following decades of conservative government.¹²¹ Whitlam's election galvanized a general mood for change in the Australian community encapsulated by the powerful 'It's Time' election campaign¹²² and it brought sweeping social reform.¹²³ In 1975, amidst political and social furore, Malcolm Fraser replaced Whitlam, dramatically removed from office by the Governor General.¹²⁴ In South Australia, Premier Don Dunstan¹²⁵ led significant cultural and social changes there that would last throughout the decade.

In 1970, a young member of the Sydney Push,¹²⁶ Germaine Greer, published *The Female Eunuch*, which became a seminal text that helped popularize the Women's Movement worldwide.¹²⁷ In 1973, the Sydney Opera House and the Adelaide Festival Centre opened, highlighting an emerging Australian shift in focus towards art and culture. Shortly before the decade began, Macquarie University in Sydney¹²⁸ and Flinders University in Adelaide¹²⁹ had opened in 1967. Both institutions focused on a new, more liberal, egalitarian form of education that contrasted with the more formal British-influenced approach of older academies.¹³⁰ The Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) opened in 1972.¹³¹ The Australian Union

¹²⁰ Australian Labor Party. Grattan, 2013: 324-353.

¹²¹ This period was mainly under Robert Menzies, who was Liberal Prime Minister from 1949-1966. Clarke, 1989; Clark, 1995; Grattan, 2013; Tink, 2014.

¹²² The 'It's Time' campaign drew on the youth culture's ideals of freedom, equality and change and included many current popular identities such as Jack. Thompson, Jackie Weaver, Bobby Limb, 'Little Pattie' (Patricia Thelma Thompson) and Bert Newton and who joined in the singing of a rousing anthem sung by popular singer Alison MacCallum which embodied the *zeitgeist* of the times and interspersed moving footage with black and white still shots of Gough and Margaret Whitlam, thus portraying a woman having an important part in a leadership team. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqMCZBjvmD4> accessed 25/9/2018.

¹²³ This reflected the emphasis at the time on youth culture and rights. Free tertiary education and liberal funding for the Arts were introduced and the voting age was lowered to eighteen years. <https://www.aec.gov.au/About/AEC/25/theme1-voting-history.htm> accessed 25/9/2018.

¹²⁴ See Clarke, 1989; Clark, 1995; Tink, 2014.

¹²⁵ The Dunstan Government also reinforced the social changes of the Whitlam Government, but had much more longevity. Don Dunstan was Premier of South Australia in 1967/68 and between 1970 – 1979. Dunstan was a social reformer with a commitment to arts, equality and freedom of expression. During his time in office, the Death Penalty was abolished, homosexuality was legalized, Aboriginal Land Rights were recognized and he established the South Australian Film Corporation. <https://www.dunstan.org.au>, accessed 13/9/2018. See also Branson, 2016.

¹²⁶ Coombs, 1996: 109. The Sydney Push was a loosely grouped network of Left-wing and radical intellectuals, writers and social commentators which centred on the University of Sydney. Coombs, 1996; Farrelly, 2009

¹²⁷ This con-currently brought international attention to Australia and to women. See Greer, 1970; Coombs, 1996; Dux, 2010.

¹²⁸ Mansfield and Hutchinson, 1992.

¹²⁹ Robertson, 2001.

¹³⁰ Such as the University of Melbourne, the University of Sydney and the University of Adelaide.

¹³¹ The VCA was involved in an early Circus Oz production at the Victorian National Gallery. Broadway, 1999; Laurie, 2018. See also Chapter Three, Davey Lived Experience.

of Students organized the Aquarius Festival¹³² in Nimbin, NSW in 1973, which connected young Australians in the belief that their generation was different from previous ones.¹³³

On television, Australian characters¹³⁴ were increasingly emerging from earlier dominance of English influence, having begun in the 1960s with *The Mavis Bramston Show*¹³⁵ and *My Name's McGooley, What's Yours?*¹³⁶ These likable, irreverent and usually working-class characters were often portrayed in urban or suburban environments¹³⁷ and even emerged in TV commercials in the form of Paul Hogan's iconic *Anyhow, Have a Winfield* cigarette advertisements, beginning in 1972.¹³⁸ On ABC TV, *Countdown*¹³⁹ began in 1974, bringing weekly national exposure to Australian bands like Skyhooks¹⁴⁰ and providing an accessible vehicle for Australian youth culture, and the absurdist and surreal *Aunty Jack Show*¹⁴¹ portrayed an entirely new way of seeing Australians.

An 'Australian Voice' was emerging also in the arts, where the avant-garde New Wave theatre movement championed Australian characters and writing, and a 'golden age'¹⁴² of Australian filmmaking occurred. In Melbourne, the APG¹⁴³ had set up at the Pram Factory, where playwrights like David Williamson introduced gritty, confronting realism in work like *The Removalists*¹⁴⁴ and Jack Hibberd parodied Australian small-town life in *Dimboola*,¹⁴⁵ which

¹³² Usually called colloquially 'Nimbin', or 'Nimbin Festival', the Aquarius Festival was inspired by the American rock festival, Woodstock (1969) and emphasized arts and environmental concerns <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/under-rainbow-nimbin-aquarius-festival>; <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2013/06/05/3775354.htm> accessed 5/9/2018. Tim Coldwell mentions the Festival, which he attended, in his interview with the author. Coldwell, 2018.

¹³³ The French high-wire artist Philippe Petit (see Footnote 148) performed at Nimbin Festival.

¹³⁴ On shows such as, *Number 96*, (1972) *The Paul Hogan Show*, (1973) and *The Sullivans*, (1976).

¹³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6nFAP7XqQ-Y&t=326s> accessed 4/9/2018.

¹³⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hp9xVbuAfDw&t=657s> accessed 4/9/2018.

¹³⁷ Previous Australian characterization had tended to focus on more rural characters such as the shearers, farmers, stockmen or swagmen (Australian 'hobos') who tended to be portrayed by writers such as Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson, and in paintings by Tom Roberts and Arthur Streeton.

¹³⁸ These advertisements launched the comic and acting career of Paul Hogan, a former Harbour Bridge labourer, who was later the archetypal Australian 'bloke' in the *Crocodile Dundee* films (1986, 1988, 2001) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gS5LEJVApSE> accessed 4/9/2018.

¹³⁹ The weekly ABC show was hosted by Ian 'Molly' Meldrum, a former *Go Set Magazine* journalist. Wood, 2013; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7Wq7hJbkjs> accessed 6/10/2018. Also in 1975 the Captain Matchbox Whoopee Band (founders of Circus Oz) featured on the show, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXB4p-eWmss> accessed 4/9/2018.

¹⁴⁰ The Band Skyhooks formed in 1973, and had links to the APG. It began as a subversive band appealing to inner-city intelligentsia audiences with songs about realist local subjects, including drugs and prostitution, and political critique, and uses flamboyant, often circus-inspired costumes and make-up. It quickly received general popularity and had high exposure on *Countdown* and other television shows.

¹⁴¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tL3l0ZEoKlg&t=258s> accessed 14/9/2018.

¹⁴² See Davies, 2010; O'Donnell, 2015. There was a plethora of iconic Australian films produced during the 1970s including *Walkabout* (1971), *Wake in Fright* (1971), *Stork* (1971), *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1972), *Alvin Purple* (1972), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975), *Mad Dog Morgan* (1976), *Caddie* (1976), *Storm Boy* (1976), *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978), *My Brilliant Career* (1979), *Mad Max*, (1979).

¹⁴³ The APG began in 1968 Wolf, 2008; Robertson, 2001; <https://www.pramfactory.com> accessed 13/9/2018. See also Timeline, Appendix 6.

¹⁴⁴ Walker, 1986; Gough-Brady, 2009.

¹⁴⁵ *Dimboola* was written by Jack Hibberd and performed at La Mama in 1969 and directed by Graeme Blundell. Its cast included, Robin Laurie, Bruce Spence, Jon Hawkes, Graeme Blundell and Kerry Dwyer. <http://www.pramfactory.com/chrono.html> accessed 14/9/2018. The film was released in 1979. Duigan, 2006.

later became a film. In visual art, Martin Sharp¹⁴⁶ had moved from 1960s psychedelia to a simplified, carnival-like ironic pop-art that re-imagined Australia¹⁴⁷ and crossed boundaries from commercial to fine art, and at the close of the 1960s, installation artist Christo¹⁴⁸ had wrapped Little Bay in Sydney, crossing the barrier between performance and visual art, introducing performance art to Australia.¹⁴⁹

In 1965 Michael Edgley had brought the Moscow Circus to Australia¹⁵⁰ and in 1969 the Australian Bullen's Circus had closed.¹⁵¹ In 1973, French artist Philippe Petit crossed the Sydney Harbour Bridge on a tight-wire, echoing Christo's installation and symbolising the sense of subversion of authority felt by a generation.¹⁵² The radical youth-culture movement identified with romantic and anarchistic symbolism of troubadours, gypsies, folk heroes and anti-heroes,¹⁵³ and colourful imagery from carnivals, fairgrounds and circus began to be incorporated into pop-culture through re-interpretations of cultural stories in *Jesus Christ*

¹⁴⁶ Martin Sharp was the designer of early Circus Oz posters, which made much impact and helped shape the public image of Circus Oz as sassy, cheeky, energetic and satirical <https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?irn=58149> accessed 7/10/2018. Sharp was one of the group who produced *Oz Magazine* in Sydney and later London. On his return he ran the Yellow House in Sydney which was a centre for experimental art and staged "happenings" (installation/performance art), music alongside visual and other forms of art. The Yellow House and happenings is mentioned by Mic Conway (see below) in this interview from 1973 (time code 4.18):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMshIFl6x00> accessed 7/10/2018. His psychedelic artwork was emblematic of the 1960s and recognized internationally and used on high profile album covers by the Who and Eric Clapton, and his later pared-down, child-like pop-art style, employed especially on posters, was used by Circus Oz, Nimrod Theatre, Adelaide Festival, Brighton Council (UK) and the Sydney Festival. Morgan 2017; Tarling 2016, 2017; <https://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/exhibitions/martin-sharp-sydney-artist> accessed 27/9/2018. See also Appendix 2.

¹⁴⁷ Designer Jenny Kee was also re-imagining the iconographic symbols of Australia, with bright, bold, colourful and simplified imagery and motifs that emphasized joy and colour in contrast to the browns and ochres that had previously predominated in the visual expression of Australian imagery. Kee had returned to Australia from 1960s London and opened Flamingo Park in the Strand Arcade in Sydney with Linda Jackson, and her colourful, knitted clothing began to be seen and worn internationally, including by Dianna, Princess of Wales <https://collection.maas.museum/object/377626> accessed 14/9/2018. Her exuberant and playful colours and designs were echoed by artist Ken Done in the 1980s <https://collection.maas.museum/set/774> accessed 14/9/2018.

¹⁴⁸ Christo and Jeanne-Claude were brought to Australia by designer and philanthropist John Kaldor in an installation project, *Wrapped Coast*, that took place in 1968-9 at Little Bay, where 14.5 kilometers of coast-line were wrapped in plastic to extraordinary artistic effect and drawing focus on the environment. The project was an important piece for Australian art and culture, and paved the way for Philippe Petit's walk across the Harbour Bridge in 1973 on a tight-rope to be seen in an artistic, political and social context. <http://kaldorartprojects.org.au/projects/project-01-christo-and-jeanne-claude>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IU5oBJ0zoV8> accessed 14/9/2018.

¹⁴⁹ The introduction of performance art and its counter-culture association with freedom, individual expression, protest and public ownership of symbols of authority, was a factor in the growth of street performance (along with protest marches and demonstrations) and the emergence of a blurring between art, performance, public entertainment and satire allowed the work of Circus Oz to be so immediately recognized and understood by the public. In many ways, Circus Oz reflected and summed up the spirit of the times.

¹⁵⁰ The clean, stunning spectacle of the Moscow Circus and the skill and production values of the show were a revelation to Australian audiences who had grown used to tired, smaller, predictable local circus productions that seemed to have lost their vigour. For an example of a Moscow Circus programme, see Appendix 2.

¹⁵¹ St Leon, 2011: 259.

¹⁵² Petit himself discusses the experience, and his artistic intentions in Petit, 2016: 455 and for discussion of tightrope walkers and the Australian Indigenous rope-walker, Con Colleano, see St Leon, 2011, 2016; Lavers and Burt, 2017.

Marsh, 2008; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWCOQnRLwQQ>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hl8mUEy7pYQ>; accessed 14/9/2018. Shortly after, he was asked by Doug Ashton of Ashton Circus, who paid his fine, to walk across the Lion's cage. Coldwell, 2018. For footage of Petit walking over the lion's cage, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6LsfcPLGxY> accessed 14/9/2018.

¹⁵³ Laurie mentions that this had a direct influence on her thinking. Laurie, 2018. It is also evident in the popular culture of the times, in music like folk songs of Bob Dylan and Joan Baez <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xqgp-50AfUQ> (accessed 14/9/2018), movies like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKryo4iafls> (accessed 14/9/2018), the fashion for flamboyant, colourful and vintage clothing, the era's long hair and rejection of authority, and 'outsider' characters in literature like *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Pirsig, 1974.

Superstar,¹⁵⁴ *Godspell* and *Rocky Horror Picture Show* which expressed the general mood for change. In 1978, the same year the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras began,¹⁵⁵ two circus companies merged to form Circus Oz and the youth circus school Flying Fruit Fly Circus (FFFC) was established in 1979, the Year of the Child.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ *Jesus Christ Superstar* portrayed Jesus as a realistically human, hippy-like, peace and freedom loving wanderer, misunderstood and mistreated by authority. The musical was written by Lloyd Webber and Rice in 1970 and a film of the musical was made in 1973. It created a world-wide sensation and controversy within conservative Christian circles. In the Australian production (1972-4), rock performer Jon English played Judas <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YgtwR56PVl> (accessed 6/10/2018), Marsha Hines played Mary Magdalene <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vuK2r6gs3H8> (accessed 6/10/2018) and Reg Livermore played King Herod <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWBXD-IOLxI> (accessed 6/10/2018).

¹⁵⁵ The first protest and march occurred in 1978, the same year as the first performances of Circus Oz. Activist Chips Mackinoly, who had designed an early Soapbox Circus (precursor of Circus Oz) poster portraying clowns as freedom fighters was one of the 53 people charged by police during the demonstration, and subsequently named in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Mackinoly, marching in support of the gay community, was one of the many people injured by police. Mackintolty, 2016; Dumas, 2016; Gillespie, 2016; <http://www.abc.net.au/radio/darwin/programs/afternoons/chips-mckinoly-mardi-gras/9500104>; <http://www.printsandprintmaking.gov.au/works/7019/images/8130/> accessed 27/9/2018.

¹⁵⁶ Flying Fruit Fly Circus was established in 1979 (see also Chapter Three, The Decade). St Leon, 2011: 239-249; Mullett, 2014: 98-99. The International Year of the Child was an international UNISEF initiative. Black, 1986. Jim (Jimbo) Robinson and Pixi Robinson who were founding members of Circus Oz were also the founding trainers at FFFC. Broadway, 1999: 182; <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/ref/vic/biogs/E000406b.htm>; <https://www.unicef.org/about/history/files/Child-Nation-M-Black-Ch15-p353-377-year-of-child.pdf> accessed 27/9/2018.

ROBIN LAURIE



Fig. 7. Robin Laurie, 20th April, 2018
Photo: Jesse Jensen-Kohl

...we didn't think this would be here in 40 years.¹⁵⁷

Robin Laurie¹⁵⁸ was interviewed at her home in Melbourne, Victoria, on 20th April, 2018. As an APG member, Laurie was a founding member of Soapbox Circus, Circus Oz and the Women's Theatre Group. As a circus performer, Laurie was primarily an acrobat and clown who combined slapstick comedy with physical skills and irony to create politically satirical, educative and socially inclusive performances. Her performance style is joyful, playful, ironic and physically clean, crisp, fluid and energetic.¹⁵⁹ She has worked in filmmaking,¹⁶⁰ community theatre¹⁶¹ and psychology. Laurie has performed, directed and taught extensively throughout Australia and internationally and continues to be a social and political activist. Since the late 1960s, she has continuously directed and performed in Australian theatre and film and has acted in films including *Dimboola* (1979), *Molly* (1983) and *Snakes and Ladders* (1987).¹⁶² I first encountered Laurie when she was a panellist at the Sydney Festival forum *Talking Circus*¹⁶³ in 2017, and was introduced to her by Mike Finch¹⁶⁴ and Carmelina Di Guglielmo.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁷ Laurie, 2018.

¹⁵⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpJpZUFCfXk> accessed 15/9/2018. I am very grateful to Robin Laurie who as a result of the interview, lent me her own circus archive (some of which is pictured) which contains important documentation of early and pre Circus Oz days, which has been extremely useful during this research.

¹⁵⁹ In Soapbox Circus, Laurie played the comic character Joni Spagoni in a duo with Jon Hawkes as Alfonso Spagoni.

<http://archive.circusoz.com/clips/view/3674> accessed 15/9/2018.

¹⁶⁰ <http://www.auswhn.org.au/blog/we-aim-to-please/>; Harris, 2017.

¹⁶¹ <https://thingsthatfallover.wordpress.com/2012/10/12/introducing-robin-laurie-co-director/>

<http://footscrayarts.com/event/missa-pro-venerabilibus/> accessed 15/9/2018.

¹⁶² <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0491413/>; <https://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/snakes-and-ladders/clip2/#> accessed 27/9/2018.

¹⁶³ *Talking Circus: Circus Elders*, Sydney Festival 20/1/2017. The panel was moderated by Mike Finch (see Chapter Four).

<https://2017.sydneyfestival.org.au/circus-elders> accessed 27/9/2018.

¹⁶⁴ See Chapter Four, Finch.

¹⁶⁵ Carmelina Di Guglielmo is an actor and was a pivotal member of Handspan Theatre, a puppetry and performance troupe, and has worked with La Mama and is an actor and an active practitioner of community theatre, especially involving the migrant community. She

Lived Experience

Laurie grew up in Melbourne, and describes her family as “sporty” and left-wing, “there was a critique of the world as it currently functioned...”. A physically active child, she was always interested in performance and, “did shows behind the couch in the garage when I was little” and was an avid surfer¹⁶⁶ in the 1960s. Laurie graduated from the University of Melbourne in 1966 and “ended up”¹⁶⁷ in London and “worked there with a street theatre group called CAST”¹⁶⁸ and attended the London Antiuniversity¹⁶⁹. She wryly describes this time as an “interesting start to things”.

In 1967, La Mama had established in Melbourne and Laurie became involved. She says, “It was a very interesting mix, because it was a mix of the filmmakers and the performers” and that the group was interested in exploring new methods of performance.¹⁷⁰ Laurie was particularly interested in physical performance, “To perform with the voice and body rather than relying on theatre sets or costumes to communicate a story”.¹⁷¹

The Pram Factory¹⁷² was established in 1968 and Laurie became involved after returning from another overseas trip.¹⁷³ Describing the various “streams” of people there, she says that she and Bill and Lorna Hannan¹⁷⁴ were, “very interested in language, and multiculturalism” and

has worked on a variety of theatre and film productions including *Wogs Out of Work* and *Big Mama's Boy*. She supported my early filmmaking productions with my brother when we were teenagers, including acting in our science-fiction spoof, *Zerna*. She has also produced and directed a variety of productions. <http://handspantheatre.com.au/info/Carmelina+Di+Guglielmo> https://www.showcast.com.au/showcast/View/ViewActorProfile?actorId=46008&d=0VStABvfiGYrwo_VbBG1A accessed 27/9/2018.

¹⁶⁶ Surfing was then an unusual thing for women in the 1960s, and Laurie's participation in the sport is an early sign of her activism, strength of spirit and independence.

¹⁶⁷ Laurie says she didn't initially want to go to England because that's what everyone else did, for example, Martin Sharp, Germaine Greer, Richard Neville. Morgan, 2017.

¹⁶⁸ Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre, which she says was organized by Roland Muldoon and also included John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcey <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/6bf9957b-cb11-35cd-9303-b82ea5cb25ea?component=66b65356-144b-32b4-9978-80ac12fd9ef7> accessed 6/10/2018.

¹⁶⁹ Laurie says, “R.D. Laing and David Cooper were part of what was called an ant-psychiatry movement and they started an antiuniversity and I went along as an antistudent”. The Antiuniversity was short-lived but more recently there has been an interest in reviving its spirit and the Antiuniversity Now was established in 2015. Jakobsen, 2015; [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kbi_KgBA7-c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kbi_KgBA7-c;); <http://www.antiuniversity.org/ABOUT> accessed 15/9/2018

¹⁷⁰ These techniques included the theatrical techniques from the Polish director and theorist Grotowski, who Kerry Dwyer had met and worked with. Wolf, 2008; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUMyPLzkDg> accessed 27/9/2018.

¹⁷¹ Laurie gives as an example the experimental American play *Calm Down Mother*, in which she says the performers all wore uniform black costumes and could only “transform to the next scene” by using voice or physicality. The play, by American playwright Megan Terry, is a stark feminist exploration of female relationships and was performed at La Mama in 1969 <https://www.pramfactory.com/chrono.html> (accessed 13/9/2018) and Laurie was part of the Sydney tour of the play <https://www.pramfactory.com/memoirsfolder/Laurie-Robin.html> accessed 14/9/2018; Van Hooser, 1990.

¹⁷² Developing from La Mama, the APG took over an old pram factory in Carlton, Victoria, which they used as a performance and rehearsal space as well as accommodation for its members. Laurie worked as a drug counselor at the Buoyancy Foundation and then taught film and television at Melbourne State College before becoming involved in the Pram Factory through her association with the Women's Theatre Group, as well as her relationships with many of the members of APG since university days. Robertson, 2001; Wolf, 2008, Laurie, 2018.

¹⁷³ After her experiences in London, Laurie says she took the “hippy trail back to Australia”, a route from Europe to Australia or the USA and Canada via Asia pioneered by Laurie's age peers, and those that came before them from the mid-1950s onwards, that became commonly known as the Hippy Trail. Ireland and Ireland and Gemie, 2015; Gemie, 2017.

¹⁷⁴ <https://www.pramfactory.com/memoirsfolder/Hannan-LornaandBill.html> accessed 13/9/2018.

that they “did stuff in other languages because we wanted to communicate... and we did stuff physically for the same reason”. She says the group¹⁷⁵ performed to workers at factories, “Bill and Lorna taught us Greek and Italian songs, and that was when we met Mic Conway¹⁷⁶ and we used to practice strange physical things on mattresses at the Carlton Gardens... and then slowly that all coalesced into Soapbox Circus”¹⁷⁷ which began touring across Australia at university campuses, “pubs” and “on the back of semi-trailers in outback Queensland”.¹⁷⁸

Laurie says that the members of Soapbox Circus had to develop skills however they could, including studying acrobatic show programmes, and from a Moroccan acrobat Mike Price met on the street.¹⁷⁹ While touring, the company met the members of New Circus¹⁸⁰ in Adelaide, South Australia and the two companies decided to combine, “John Pinder¹⁸¹ down at the Last Laugh facilitated that in some way by setting up that show, *Waiter, There’s a Circus in My Soup*”.¹⁸² From that first meeting of Soapbox Circus and New Circus, soon after the two groups merged to form Circus Oz.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁵ Which included Jon Hawkes, a central member of the APG Pram Factory collective, who performed with Laurie as the Spagoni Family. See Appendix 2.

¹⁷⁶ Mic Conway was a visual artist and musician who, with his brother Jim Conway, formed the Captain Matchbox Whoopee Band, which joined with Robin Laurie, Jon Hawkes and other APG members to form Soapbox Circus in 1976. For Soapbox Circus, Conway was a ringmaster, musician, juggler and acrobat. www.micconway.com accessed 13/9/2018. Conway’s current work includes children’s entertainment and membership of Mic Conway’s National Junk Band <https://nationaljunkband.com> accessed 13/9/2018; <https://www.pramfactory.com/memoirsfolder/Conway-Mic.html> ; Olijnyk, 2014; Elder, 2015. Conway and the Captain Whoopee Band discuss their musical intentions in 1973, including their visual influences and mention of the Tribe is made, which Laurie says was associated with the APG: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMshjFI6xOO> accessed 14/9/2018. Mic Conway says, “Also one of my roadies was John Koning and he was working at the Pram as a carpenter. Now John Koning and I had many times shared a dream of getting together a vaudeville circus with a political edge. Captain Matchbox had performed at the Vietnam Moratoriums and were always a part of the counterculture, but Jon Hawkes and Robin Laurie had the same Idea- Political Circus. *Soapbox Circus* hadn’t begun but they were doing exploratory workshops and out of the blue they invited me to join them”.

¹⁷⁷ Laurie says Soapbox Circus was chosen as a name because of its association with political discussion and public lecturing. Historically, ordinary people could stand on a soapbox, a wooden crate, and make speeches on street corners or anywhere they could find a group of people who might provide an audience. Laurie says, “There used to be here, in Melbourne, down by the river, where the tennis centre is now, every Sunday, the Yarra Bank it was called, people used to go down and stand on soapboxes and rant, talk, discuss things. That was still going through until the 50s probably, 60s, 70s even” and in Sydney the Domain was a favoured place. The practice was international, egalitarian and associated particularly with the working class who might otherwise not have found a platform (metaphorically and literally) to have their voices heard. For a discussion on the practice see for example, Walker, 2006; Williams and Meyers, 2017.

¹⁷⁸ Laurie says they even performed their *The East Timor Show* at Gough Whitlam’s Christmas party which she says, “was very unpopular” because of Whitlam’s political involvement in East Timor.

¹⁷⁹ Laurie says, “We’d look at the pictures and go, ‘Hm, I wonder...’ and we’d try to get in and out of these amazing balances and things, at great peril to ourselves” as well as seeking advice from a few individuals such as a Moroccan acrobat, “Mike Price met him in the street and he came and showed us a few things”. Mike Price was not only a founding member of Circus Oz but also taught Anni Davey circus skills at her school. See Chapter Three, Davey’s Lived Experience.

¹⁸⁰ See below, Tim Coldwell.

¹⁸¹ John Pinder played a significant role in the development of comedy and physical theatre in Melbourne including through the Flying Trapeze Café and later the Last Laugh Theatre Restaurant, laying much of the groundwork for the Melbourne Comedy Festival. He was a founding member of Circus Oz. Robertson, 2001; Wolf, 2008. See also Timeline, Appendix 6.

¹⁸² According to Broadway, Pinder first saw New Ensemble Circus perform at the Adelaide Festival Centre amphitheatre in 1976. Broadway, 1999: 173.

¹⁸³ Circus Australia Ltd. was initially funded, according to Laurie, by the APG. See also, Robertson, 2001; Mullett, 2005; Wolf, 2008; St Leon, 2011. The founding members were: Sue Broadway, Tony Burkys, Tim Coldwell, John ‘Jack’ Daniel, Laurel Frank, Kevin Gedy, Jon Hawkes, Ponch Hawkes, Robin Laurie, John Pinder, Michael Price, Alan Robertson, Jim Robertson, Pixie Robertson, Helen Sky, Jim Conway, Mic Conway, Rick Ludbrook, Peter Mulheisen, Gordon McLean, Steve Cooney and Colin Stevens. Mullett, 2005.

In 1982, Laurie was asked to work with a group of students who “were the first graduate Fruit Flies who wanted to keep going as performers”.¹⁸⁴ While Laurie was working at FFFC, Melbourne arts identity, Carrillo Gantner¹⁸⁵ initiated the Nanjing National Training Project¹⁸⁶ in 1983 for which Laurie describes her role as “major liaison between the Chinese and everybody else” and says it was “a transformative event at many levels” because “they brought equipment... and that introduced the group bike, the poles, straps, the hoops”.¹⁸⁷

Laurie has continued working in performance, community theatre and Contemporary Circus including directing Rock ‘n’ Roll Circus, FFFC and working with Club Swing¹⁸⁸ and This Side up Acrobatics¹⁸⁹. She currently teaches *feldenkrais*¹⁹⁰ and continues to devise, write and direct performance and film, and remains an activist, advocate¹⁹¹ and mentor.¹⁹²

Motivations

Laurie’s interview revealed five Key Motivations for adopting circus practice: **Politics, Communication, Expression, Authenticity and Limitlessness.**

Politics

Laurie is fundamentally driven by politics. Her experiences show a clear and strong political underpinning to her life and she describes her family as “left wing” who had, “a desire for fairness and equality and support of indigenous struggles”. Her decisions have continued to

¹⁸⁴ Laurie reports that she was asked to work for the Leapers by Robert ‘Bomber’ Perrier, the Artistic Director of FFFC at the time. Laurie worked with them for a year devising shows and performing at local high schools. Members of the Leapers were employed by Circus Oz in 1984. Mullett, 2014: 98.

¹⁸⁵ <http://www.liveperformance.com.au/halloffame/carrillogantner1.html> accessed 13/9/2018.

¹⁸⁶ Nanjing Project I was initiated by the Melbourne arts identity and philanthropist Gantner, then attaché to China, and Laurie and members of Circus Oz, to increase circus skills of performers across Australia. It was funded by the Australian Federal Government and was held at Flying Fruit Fly Circus Albury/Wodonga in 1983 and brought Australian performers together with Nanjing, China acrobats. According to Rosemary Farrell, Gantner witnessed the students of FFFC and the Chinese acrobats informally training together after the students had seen the acrobats perform, which gave him the idea. Farrell, 2008: 187. See also Appendix 3 and Chapter Three, The Decade.

¹⁸⁷ These Chinese circus disciplines are not only still currently used, but have characterized Australian Contemporary Circus and have continued to be taught at the FFFC and the National Institute of Circus Arts (NICA).

¹⁸⁸ For a discussion of the complex intentions and reception of Club Swing’s *Appetite*, and the controversy it aroused at the 1995 Edinburgh Festival, see Tait, 2005b: 125. Interestingly, a feminist production can be seen as exploiting women when viewed out of the context of its performance.

¹⁸⁹ <http://www.bpacc.com.au/events/performance/controlled-falling-project/168> ;

<http://www.thissideupacrobatics.com/index.php?cID=113> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8DEKqFNgsI> accessed 27/9/2018.

¹⁹⁰ <http://www.feldenkraiscarlton.com.au> accessed 16/10/2018

¹⁹¹ Laurie is an advocate for groups including migrants, refugees, workers and women.

¹⁹² For example, her role as a Circus Elder at Sydney Festival in 2017.

be politically driven including travelling to Europe, participating in political demonstrations and street-theatre, attending Antiuniversity, traveling to India to support her friend “dodging the draft”, and she says she “had a link to the anarchists”. Laurie was motivated to use circus as a means to make political statements, which she saw as a useful tool for expressing and communicating politically driven philosophy and creative ideas, and for empowering audiences across cultural barriers.

Communication

Communication is a Key Motivation for Laurie. Her experiences show an enduring involvement with many forms of communication including drama, filmmaking, political rallies and protests. Laurie reports a strong interest in diverse cultural backgrounds and story-telling including communicating across languages and cultures because and says, “we understood that everyone didn’t speak English...”. Laurie discovered that circus allowed her to perform in a way that communicated in a multicultural, cross-cultural, and multi-media form without dependence on language, and with physicality, metaphor and universal visual imagery, “if you don’t speak the same language of words, you can communicate physically, always”.

Expression

Laurie is intellectually driven and circus provides her with a means to express complex and extensively researched theories and ideas. In addition, physical expression has been extremely important throughout her life, and as an artist, circus provides her with a medium with which she can express herself artistically, politically and physically. Because circus is not limited to sets, text or venues, it provides her with a form that can be taken to a variety of locations including factories and hotels, meaning she can share and experiment with expression in many applications beyond the theatre. Her ideas, driven by history, politics and cultural concerns, are given wide, effective and rich expression through the medium of circus.

Authenticity

A Key Motivation for Laurie's choice of circus is that she sees it as being authentic. When asked about circus, her first response was a physical, performative one: she pinched and slapped herself, to give a clear indication of the physical realness of circus. She believes that circus provides an authenticity that can be experienced and shared by performers and audience and communicated powerfully and directly without cultural or language barriers. The physical presence of performers and audience, combined with performance physicality, makes it an authentic form for her, "the kinaesthetics, the physical presence... people can do extraordinary things". For Laurie, the circus is a particularly authentic medium which is a Key Motivation for her.

Limitlessness

All of Laurie's life has been concerned with freedom and the expression of it. She chose circus because she felt that it was an unlimited form, "I chose it because it was physical... because you could do anything in circus...". She felt that there was no limit to what could be included in a circus performance, "music, dance, comedy, stories, spectacle, wonder, magic, the lot". Laurie's life-long commitment to freedom makes the limitless potential of circus a Key Motivation for her and she says, "that's why I chose circus - boundary-less".

Synopsis

True to her politics and ideals, Laurie was motivated to choose circus as an authentic form of cross-cultural communication that allowed her to express herself in unlimited ways.

TIM COLDWELL

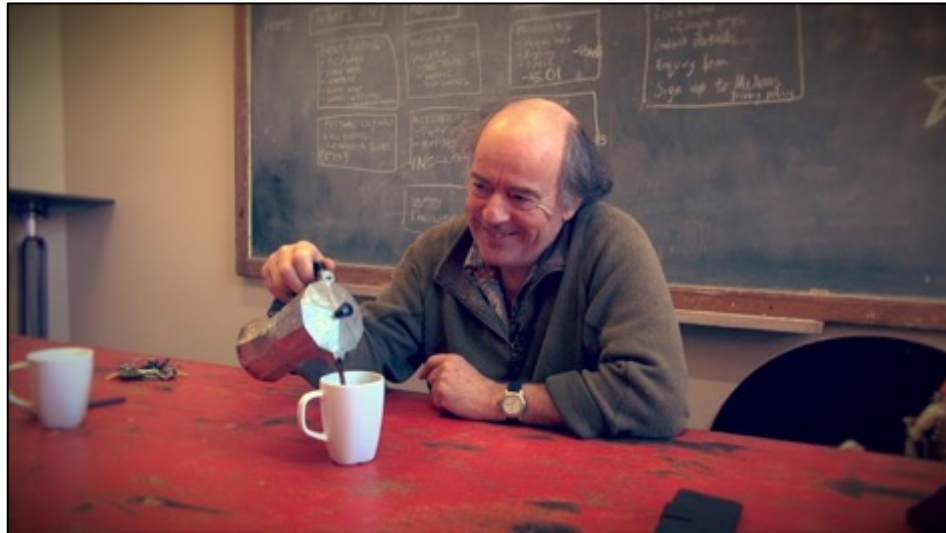


Fig. 8. Tim Coldwell, 18th April, 2018
Photo: Jesse Jensen-Kohl

*...and we thought we'll go and start our own circus...*¹⁹³

Tim Coldwell¹⁹⁴ was interviewed in the Small Meeting Room at Circus Oz, Collingwood, Melbourne on 18th April, 2018. He has continuously worked in circus arts for over forty years in many roles including performer, engineer and director. Prior to becoming a founding member of Circus Oz, he founded New Circus, one of the world's first Contemporary Circus companies.¹⁹⁵ Coldwell is most well-known for his clown persona, Happy Simpson,¹⁹⁶ an ironic, wry, vaudevillian-style character. Coldwell has performed extensively across Australia and internationally. Having trained with the Ashton family¹⁹⁷ in the early 1970s, Coldwell has a close relationship with the Australian traditional circus community. Coldwell is one of the two founding members who continue to work full-time at Circus Oz¹⁹⁸ where, because of his multi-skilled talents, his role is almost indefinable.¹⁹⁹ I have known Coldwell since 2004, and since then I have worked with him on numerous tent seasons for Circus Oz, most recently at the Sydney Festival in January, 2018.

¹⁹³ Coldwell, 2018.

¹⁹⁴ <http://archive.circusoz.com/clips/view/52309> accessed 6/10/2018.

¹⁹⁵ New Circus, which later became New Circus Ensemble, is the earliest recorded Contemporary Circus in Australia. It was formed by Coldwell with Michael Harbison in 1973, Broadway, 1999: 172; St Leon, 2011: 240 or in 1974 (Robertson, 2001:132; Mullett, 2005:6). The USA's Pickle Family Circus, which developed from the San Francisco Mime Troupe, a radical experimental theatre group similar to the APG, was also established in 1974. Lorant and Carroll, 1986.

¹⁹⁶ <http://archive.circusoz.com/clips/view/2563> accessed 6/10/2018.

¹⁹⁷ See Chapter One, History.

¹⁹⁸ The other founding member is Laurel Frank, although original member, Ponch Hawkes continues to work as a photographer for the company, in a freelance capacity.

¹⁹⁹ In a 2016 *Sydney Morning Herald* article, Coldwell described his role as, "Senior Circus Artist / Head of Production / Tribal Elder / Founding Member / Circus Clown / Happy Simpson / Trumpet Player / Co CEO". White, 2016.

Lived Experience

Coldwell grew up in Victoria²⁰⁰ and was always academically successful. He reports being awarded a scholarship to attend a private school,²⁰¹ followed by a Commonwealth Scholarship²⁰² to university. Coldwell says that he developed a “reverse class thing” at private school and that he felt “rebellious” and “resentful” during his time at university, “(I) didn’t feel like I wanted to do any of the things that I was being led towards”. Having abandoned a science degree in Melbourne²⁰³ Coldwell moved to Adelaide to study Drama and Mathematics at Flinders University²⁰⁴ because he was, “interested in something else that was more about ideas and communication”.²⁰⁵ Coldwell was involved with other students studying Popular Theatre, where definitions of theatre were broadened to include forms like sport and church²⁰⁶ and “the circus then occurred as something that fitted that bill”. He says he could see the potential that circus offered for communication, “there were openings there and because it felt like there was an audience, it was stuff that people wanted to see”.

Two other events that inspired Coldwell’s choice to take up circus were seeing a performance given by Philippe Petit²⁰⁷ on the university campus and his friend and fellow student, Mike Harbison, joining Ashton Circus,²⁰⁸ “so it kind of grew from that really, and then I went off to Ashton Circus to learn the ropes, you know, literally”. He travelled, trained and gained experience with Ashton²⁰⁹ and then with Frank Gasser at Circus Royale,²¹⁰ and later formed

²⁰⁰ Coldwell’s parents were from England and his mother was a school librarian and his father a mechanical engineer, and they had no other family in Australia. Coldwell’s father worked at a high level of the Post Master General’s Office (GPO, Now Telstra) in Melbourne, although Coldwell was not aware of his father’s responsibilities until after his death, “My mother told me that he was actually for a long time in charge of the largest fleet of vehicles in the Southern Hemisphere – I had no idea.”. Coldwell, 2018.

²⁰¹ Although he doesn’t mention which school this was in this interview, he has reported elsewhere that the school was Scotch College, Melbourne. See Waldon, 2003.

²⁰² Introduced by the Menzies Government in 1951, the scheme paid university fees for the most academically gifted students. https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1718/Chronology/StudentInco meSupport accessed 27/9/2018.

²⁰³ Coldwell “dropped out” of Monash University.

²⁰⁴ And according to him, played with motorbikes, “so we spent a lot of time mucking around with old motorcycles because you could get old motorcycles in Adelaide really easy”.

²⁰⁵ After studying a science degree in Melbourne for a year, Coldwell says he felt distracted by world events that were current in the early 1970s, particularly the Vietnam War, which was heavily influencing Australian politics, and by the general social and political atmosphere of the youth culture.

²⁰⁶ Paul Bouissac discusses the connection between circus and church in his recent publication *The Meaning of Circus*, (Bouissac, 2018), and see also the relationship of performance and ritual in Ritter, 1989; Schechner, 2002.

²⁰⁷ See Footnote 152.

²⁰⁸ Mike Harbison later became Lord Mayor of Adelaide 2003 – 2010. https://www.cityofadelaide.com.au/assets/documents/LIST-cityofadelaide_lordmayor_mayor.pdf accessed 15/9/2018. Coldwell reports that Harbison was involved when Doug Ashton, proprietor of Ashton Circus offered to pay Petit’s fine for illegally walking a tight-rope across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. “and then Doug Ashton went and bailed him up on the steps of the courtroom and said, ‘I’ll pay your fine if you walk across the lion’s cage’ so my friend Mike was involved with that process, because he was there at the time”.

²⁰⁹ This development of New Circus is reported in Jane Mullett’s 2005 PhD dissertation, where Mervyn Ashton is quoted as saying, “They were all good cleaning living young fellows... in those days (their attitude) was anti-establishment ... everybody was on that binge ... (the point is) they did things that didn’t hurt people ... (they learnt) how to knock in pegs. We all knocked in pegs ... they were always willing to offer an idea ... they’d just go ahead and (do the work) they were intelligent and very cooperative ... “ Ashton quoted in Mullett, 2005: 128.

²¹⁰ Mullett quote’s Frank Gasser’s impression, “they were interested in everything, finally we had a good talk and they said ‘Yes, it’s because we want to do a modern circus’ and I suddenly realized that they were here for a learning period, so I told them and showed them

the group, New Circus,²¹¹ which led to eventually meeting the members of Soapbox Circus²¹² who together formed Circus Oz.

Coldwell has a strong interest in the holistic and technical side of the circus medium as well as performance and direction, and he reports he has had many roles over his career as a circus practitioner: clown, animal trainer, technician, director, musician, high-wire artist, and Tent Boss. Coldwell's career has seen the development of Contemporary Circus directly, and he has personally been fundamentally involved in its formation, influence and development, having worked within the medium throughout his life. As a result of his vast knowledge and experience in the medium, at Circus Oz, Coldwell is described simply as 'Senior Circus Artist and Founding Member'.²¹³

Motivations

There are six identifiable Key Motivations that led to Coldwell's choice of circus: **Politics, Communication, Authenticity, Collaboration, Diversity of Media** and **Limitlessness**.

Politics

During his education, Coldwell was disillusioned by 'The System' and like many of his generation, he was involved in the sweeping social and ideological changes of the counter-culture era and its general disillusionment with 'The Establishment'. Despite his academic ability, he left university to directly practice the politically driven ideals of his drama courses. Coldwell took direct action to adopt the circus medium, that allowed communication directly with a wide popular audience and practical and creative collaboration within a collective community, "there's always been the sense that circus is kind of for everybody" and that "there wasn't a whole set of rules that you had to go (by), which meant there weren't a whole lot of really rigid kind of standards about what counted...".²¹⁴ For Coldwell circus was a way to

what I thought would be necessary for them, especially putting tents up (...) For me it was very joyful to see boys like that, with that interest, so it was easy for me to show them". Mullett, 2005: 219.

²¹¹ Tim Coldwell formed New Circus in Adelaide in 1973/4 with Michael Harbison. 'Jack' Daniels and Dave Black, and later Sue Broadway joined the group. Broadway, 1999; Robertson, 2001; Mullett, 2005; St Leon, 2011.

²¹² See Robin Laurie above, also St Leon, 2011; Mullett, 2005; Broadway, 1999.

²¹³ <https://www.circusoz.com/circus-oz/current-mob/details/41/tim-coldwell.html> accessed 15/9/2018.

²¹⁴ It is ironic that it was the lack of rules that attracted Coldwell to circus given the vigorous training and strict discipline it involves, which is one of the paradoxes that makes circus so complex and compelling.

create a lifestyle un-reliant on establishment rules, making it a direct socio-political statement of non-conformity to the constraints of mainstream society.

Communication

Circus is an essential form of communication for Coldwell. He says that it is, “absolutely about the audience” and he considers that circus performance is a “conversation” between performers and the audience. He reports that he studied drama rather than continuing with his science degree, because of his interest in “ideas and communication”. The circus then, became a form with which Coldwell can directly communicate and he employs a holistic approach, saying it’s, “a way of bringing joy to people and having a conversation or having a communication”.

Authenticity

For Coldwell, circus communicates in an authentic and direct way. He reports that, “it’s about that point of connection with the audience really, with me and them” and says that some performances have, “a truth about them that feel like they’re more meaningful”. Coldwell says of Circus Oz, “what I like... is it’s *big* but not too big and it has a sort of sense of reality about it... from the audience to the performer (there) is a short distance and there’s a strong connection”. In addition, Coldwell has always taken a ‘hands-on’ approach to circus, and the directness and reality of the whole medium attracts and sustains him personally and creatively. The authenticity of circus is fundamental to Coldwell’s choice to use and live it.

Collaboration

As a circus practitioner, Coldwell is intrinsically and fundamentally a collaborator, having always been involved in group productions and companies as a 'team player'. Throughout his discussion, it is clear that Coldwell has consistently been committed to working in collaborative teams. His experience working in traditional circus involved many different roles that all played a part in the success of the production, and his decision to adopt circus as a life-style as well as a creative medium, also indicates his commitment to collaboration. Coldwell's attraction to the co-operative, collective nature of circus makes it a Key Motivation for him.

Diversity of Media

The combination of all the different aspects of producing and running a circus strongly motivates Coldwell, including putting up tents, performing, driving trucks, building sets and props and playing music, "I'm an artist and these are all the things that I use, meaning circus tents and rigging and trucks if necessary and acrobatics and building props and all of that sort of thing... that's the medium". In addition, his performance practice uses a variety of circus disciplines including tight-wire, clowning, acrobatics, Chinese Pole and chair-balancing. Since his first experience with circus, Coldwell has been strongly attracted to the diverse media and roles it involves.

Limitlessness

Coldwell is strongly motivated by a sense of the unlimited nature and potential of circus. His natural interest in machinery, physics, building, invention, performance and theatrical effects combine in his performance style, in his understanding of circus practice, and in his artistic expression and output. His imagination, artistic vision, practical ability and keenness to entertain and communicate with an audience result in his attraction to the endless possibilities of circus. By having an unlimited range of diverse disciplines, media, applications and situations to draw on, and a holistic approach, Coldwell is able to express, communicate

and connect without limitations, “just good to have that sort of sense that you’re with this group of people and they can go anywhere”.

Synopsis

Coldwell chose circus as his medium because it allows him to combine various media without confinement, politically or artistically, making circus an authentic form of communication.

Conclusion

As two founders of Circus Oz and Contemporary Circus, Robin Laurie and Tim Coldwell were both influenced by the strong social and political climate of the 1970s, in which the youth movement that had begun in the 1960s reached its full realisation and resulted in social changes that in their case, were to begin Contemporary Circus. For both Laurie and Coldwell, the circus medium they adopted and adapted, helped them bring about social change, communicate with audiences and find an authentic form of expression that allowed them to 'walk the walk' by directly living the idealistic theories with which they and their contemporaries were imbued. Circus Oz, the company they gave birth to, took the radical philosophies of the 1970s and turned them into genuine social change, creating Contemporary Circus. Having revitalized the medium of traditional circus, they "renovated"²¹⁵ the medium, creating a vibrant, living re-invention of the circus form that was to grow in popularity, acceptance and style.



Fig. 9. Photos from Circus Oz archival collection
Left: Robin Laurie
Right: Tim Coldwell

²¹⁵ Laurie, 2018.

Chapter Three: Appetite²¹⁶

1980s

Anni Davey and Antonella Casella

I recognized a new voice for Australian theatre

Antonella Casella²¹⁷



Fig. 10. Circus Oz, 1982
Programme Cover, Designed by Martin Sharp, Circus Oz archival collection

²¹⁶ *Appetite* was a show devised and performed by Anni Davey and others in 1992, which toured nationally and internationally throughout the 1990s.

²¹⁷ Casella, 2018.

The Decade

Bob Hawke²¹⁸ was Prime Minister of Australia for most of the 1980s, leading with an approachable, down-to earth style that appealed to Australians' sense of egalitarianism. For most of the decade, there was a general sense of optimism leading up to the Bicentennial celebrations in 1988. However, in Queensland, the long-standing conservative government led by Joh Bjelke-Petersen²¹⁹ was at odds with the general feeling of freedom and hope throughout most of Australia.

The social changes that had occurred in the previous decades had ongoing effect, and in the 1980s, general concern for social issues like the environment, Indigenous and gay rights and gender-equality continued to grow and non-sexism was becoming mainstream.²²⁰ The Gay and Lesbian Mardi-Gras²²¹ gained momentum as a popular annual celebration. In the streets of Sydney, Martin Sharp's joyful, ironic posters appeared advertising the Nimrod Theatre, Circus Oz and the approaching Bicentennial,²²² creating a general sense of celebration and optimism.²²³

On television, the presence of Australian characters continued to grow. Newsreaders lost their formal, British-inspired accents, and comedies like *Kingswood Country*,²²⁴ and 'soap-operas' like *Neighbours*²²⁵ and *The Sullivans*²²⁶ re-enforced Australians' constant quest for national identity. Satirical TV comedies like *The Gillies Report*²²⁷ parodied Australian politicians and cultural identities, while *Countdown*²²⁸ continued to bring local and overseas bands to its

²¹⁸ Australian Labor Party. Grattan, 2013: 380-407.

²¹⁹ Country Party. Clarke, 1989; Tink, 2014.

²²⁰ Differentiation between 'boys' and 'girls' toys, clothing, colour association and language was reduced in marketing, TV advertising and education, replaced by gender-neutral approaches. This can be seen in products like Lego. Since then blatant sexism has reemerged, however. Campbell, 2012; Sweet, 2014. TV programmes like Sesame Street by the Childrens Television Workshop (USA) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srSdFH1SE8w> (accessed 27/9/2018) and the Australian Children's Foundation which made shows such as *Kaboodle* <https://aso.gov.au/titles/tv/kaboodle-series-1-episode-1/>, *Winners* <https://aso.gov.au/titles/tv/winners-just-friends/> and *Touch the Sun* <https://aso.gov.au/titles/tv/captain-johnno/> accessed 27/9/2018.

²²¹ <http://www.mardigras.org.au> accessed 27/9/2018. See also Footnote 155.

²²² Australia celebrated the Bicentennial of European settlement in 1988, 200 years since the British First Fleet landed in Botany Bay, Sydney, on 26/1/1788. The celebration was not without controversy, since it represented the colonisation of Indigenous Australian land by European settlers. One result of the celebration was that it began to focus public attention on Indigenous rights. Circus Oz had their 10-year anniversary tour in association with the Bicentennial event. See Appendix 2, also <http://archive.circusoz.com/clips/view/1322> accessed 27/9/2018.

²²³ See Chapter Two, The Decade.

²²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6A66ENfJUEE> accessed 27/9/2018.

²²⁵ *Neighbours* is an iconic local and international symbol of Australian culture and has become a barometer of social and cultural conditions and mores. It is currently Australia's longest running television show <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0Ex1odiFTM> accessed 27/9/2018.

²²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jbP9lSVtew> accessed 27/9/2018.

²²⁷ Devised, written and presented by former APG member, Max Gillies <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AOEa96hOE> accessed 27/9/2018.

²²⁸ See Chapter Two, The Decade.

young audiences. In 1987, the Melbourne Comedy Festival began,²²⁹ and by the end of the decade, a new style of stand-up comedy came to prominence when *The Big Gig* appeared on ABC TV.²³⁰

Circus Oz had quickly gained a place in Australia's affection and psyche and in 1980 had its first international tour which included Port Moresby, Holland, Belgium and London.²³¹ In 1985 a British immigrant, Reg Bolton,²³² settled in Western Australia continuing his community education through circus. Canadian company, Cirque du Soleil formed in 1984,²³³ the year Circus Oz performed at the Los Angeles Olympic Games.²³⁴ The Nanjing Projects in the early 1980s resulted in a diaspora of Australian Contemporary Circus performers across Australia, notably giving rise to the formation of groups and companies around Australia including Legs on the Wall in Sydney in 1984, Cirkidz in Adelaide in 1985 and Rock 'n' Roll Circus in Brisbane in 1987.²³⁵

²²⁹ Launched by Barry Humphries and English comedian Peter Cook <https://www.comedyfestival.com.au/about-us/background> accessed 27/9/2018.

²³⁰ The popular US TV comedy *Seinfeld*, the 'show about nothing' appeared in the late 1980s and was also the result of a growing popularity of stand-up comedy internationally.

²³¹ Broadway, 1999; Mullett, 2005, 2014; Coldwell, 2018; Laurie, 2018.

²³² <http://www.regbolton.org> accessed 1/10/2018. Also see Chapter Five, Fyfe's Lived Experience and Chapter Six, Salom's Lived Experience.

²³³ <https://www.cirquedusoleil.com/about/history> accessed 27/9/2018.

²³⁴ Broadway, 1999; Mullett, 2005, 2014; Coldwell, 2018.

²³⁵ See Chapter Two, Laurie's Lived Experience; Farrell, 2007; Mullett, 2014. For the full list of participants, see Appendix 3.

ANNI DAVEY



Fig. 11. Anni Davey, 16th March, 2018
Photo: Jesse Jensen-Kohl

I was determined to be the strongest woman in the world!²³⁶

Anni Davey²³⁷ was interviewed at her home in Collingwood, Melbourne on 16th March, 2018. Davey is a circus performer and director with a background in acting. She devises her work in collaboration with other performers and uses various performing genres and disciplines including circus, singing and acting to create shows based on ideas and concepts. Davey has an exuberant, forceful and ironic style that exudes strength, will, confidence and wit.²³⁸ Davey has been an aerialist and acrobat in multiple disciplines,²³⁹ working across Australia and internationally with companies including Death Defying Theatre,²⁴⁰ her own aerial company Club Swing²⁴¹ and the show *Retro Futurismus*²⁴² featuring her twin sister Maude²⁴³ in its cast. At Circus Oz, Davey has been an ensemble member, circus arts trainer and show director. I have known Davey since 2004 and have seen her perform in various shows, as well as being her niece's circus arts teacher at Cirkidz in Adelaide.

²³⁶ Davey, 2018.

²³⁷ <http://archive.circusoz.com/clips/view/2802> accessed 28/9/2018.

²³⁸ For example see <http://archive.circusoz.com/clips/view/46428> accessed 6/10/2018.

²³⁹ These include trapeze, Chinese pole, hoop diving and human pyramids.

²⁴⁰ Now known as Urban Theatre Projects. <http://urbantheatre.com.au/about/history/> accessed 27/9/2018.

²⁴¹ <https://www.carnivalcinema.com.au/making-razor-baby-club-swing-1998/> accessed 27/9/2018.

²⁴² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggaE9Je2BWQ> accessed 28/9/2018.

²⁴³ Maude Davey also has a successful performing career in theatre and television. <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0202739/> accessed 5/9/2018.

Lived Experience

Davey identifies herself strongly as a circus practitioner and says that circus practice brings her joy.²⁴⁴ She has been driven to perform since childhood and was determined to become an actor and at high school²⁴⁵ learnt some basic circus and acrobatic skills from Mike Price,²⁴⁶ as part of the school's theatre arts curriculum. Davey's circus career began while working with the political theatre company, Death Defying Theatre,²⁴⁷ where Linda Mickleborough,²⁴⁸ administrator of the company at the time, introduced her to members of Circus Oz. Both companies were performing in the Sydney Festival and began teaching workshops together. Davey was instantly drawn to the work of Circus Oz and she, "pestered them" until she was asked to join the company in 1987.²⁴⁹

Circus Oz was foundational for her as a circus performer, since she had very few formed circus skills and was predominately performing as an actor. Davey recalls a performance review by Stephen Burton²⁵⁰ and Tim Coldwell²⁵¹ who told her, "you'd be more useful if you were stronger". Davey took on this advice and was determined to develop her strength. She trained religiously and in six weeks had developed strength and learned disciplines including doubles

²⁴⁴ Davey says, "There's something about it, isn't there? It's fun, it's fun! It's fun... I got up onto the catch bar a couple of years ago and ... I haven't done any catching for years, my knees are shit you know, and catching is a shit thing to do, but I got onto the catch bar, and felt happy, went 'this is where I'm really happy and I'm sitting here, waiting for somebody to throw me something. I love sitting here in training sessions with other acrobats". Davey, 2018.

²⁴⁵ John Curtin High School. Davey reports that she and her twin sister Maud Davey attended a number of schools, predominantly an alternative school based on the theories of British educational theorist John Holt <https://www.johnholtgws.com> (accessed 5/9/2018). In her interview, Davey told the author that she went to see the new school principal on her own initiative, believing that the alternate school, which was student rather than academic achievement based, would not give her the academic results she wanted. Subsequently, when she quickly realized in her new classes that she was behind the other students, she demanded that the principal of her old alternative school give her lessons every week to catch up. The principal agreed and Davey truanted sport every Wednesday afternoon to have extra lessons. Davey believes that the alternative school let her down, but ironically, it is likely that its principal saw Davey as a success of the school's ethos to encourage self-direction and self-motivation.

²⁴⁶ One of the founding members of Circus Oz. See also Chapter Two, Laurie's Lived Experience.

²⁴⁷ In the interview, Davey couldn't specifically recall when she started with Death Defying Theatre, but she has recently written a biography that has been published with her article about becoming Artistic Director at the Flying Fruit Fly Circus and gives the year as 1985. <https://performing.artshub.com.au/news-article/opinions-and-analysis/performing-arts/anni-davey/extraordinarily-human-training-the-next-generation-of-circus-artists-256327> accessed 5/9/2018. She was involved with the theatre in the production Coal Town, among others <http://www.labourhistory.org.au/hummer/no-11/coal-town/> ; <http://urbantheatre.com.au/critical-writing/the-middle-years-death-defying-theatre-transformed/> ; <https://www.ausstage.edu.au/pages/organisation/989> accessed 5/9/2018.

²⁴⁸ Mickleborough was also the Project Co-ordinator for the Nanjing 2 in 1985 and later went on to work at Circus Oz and as a Circus Oz Board member. Mickleborough was with Davey after a major accident in Edinburgh in 1991. <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/bravehearts-bare-all-meet-four-of-melbournes-most-courageous-women-20160226-gn47kq.html> (accessed 5/9/2018) Davey says she woke up and said "I remember waking up one day and Linda was sitting over my intensive care bed and I said to her 'Will I ever hoop dive again?' She said to me 'Anni, you don't hoop dive'". As a board member, Mickleborough played a part in the appointment of Mike Finch as Artistic Director in 1997. She is currently Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art <https://acca.melbourne/about/people/> accessed 5/9/2018.

²⁴⁹ See also her Story in the Circus Oz Living Archive about seeing the show <http://archive.circusoz.com/clips/view/15352> accessed 28/9/2018

²⁵⁰ An early Circus Oz member, also responsible for helping with the early development of Western Australia's Bizircus, and inviting Mel Fyfe to join Circus Oz, see Chapter Four, Fyfe's Lived Experience. Burton was also a participant of the Nanjing 1 Project in 1983/4. See Appendix 3.

²⁵¹ See Chapter Two.

trapeze²⁵² and Chinese Pole. This led to Davey's role as Strongwoman and paved the way for Mel Fyfe²⁵³ to take up a similar position almost a decade later.

Davey describes herself as, "a facilitative director" and says that she would rarely say, "I have a vision and I want you to do it". She develops shows in collaboration with performers and creative teams and most of her work involves an ensemble and is often presented in a cabaret style like *Retro Futurismus*, which combines music, dance, singing, comedy, storytelling and physical skill.

In 2016, Davey was Guest Artistic Director of Circus Oz and produced the appropriately named *TWENTYSIXTEEN*, maintaining the ethos and style of the Circus Oz company, and receiving critical acclaim.²⁵⁴ As Tour Director, Davey took the company's present show, *Model Citizens*, to regional Australia. She has been a Board member and Chair of the Melbourne Fringe Festival,²⁵⁵ Chair of ACAPTA²⁵⁶ and in 2018 was appointed Artistic Director of the Flying Fruit Fly Circus.²⁵⁷

Motivations

Six Key Motivations were identified for Davey's choice to take up circus practice:

Performance Drive, Challenge, Authenticity, Expression, Collaboration and Communication.

Performance Drive

Since childhood, Davey was strongly driven to become a performer. She says, "I find it difficult to understand people who don't know what they want to do". She says that "I *wanted* to be an actor, I was *driven*, I was passionate about what I wanted to do, I was *going* to do it whatever happened". While being an actor and after her exposure to Circus Oz, she was

²⁵² See Terms and Definitions, page xiii.

²⁵³ See Chapter Four.

²⁵⁴ <https://dancemagazine.com.au/2016/07/circus-oz-offers-brilliance-in-twentysixteen/> ; <https://www.circusoz.com/news-and-reviews/article/295/melbourne-twentysixteen-a-brand-new-show-and-brand-new-show-director.html> accessed 11/10/2018.

²⁵⁵ Davey was a Board member for 10 years and Chair in 2006 and 2007.

²⁵⁶ Australian Circus and Physical Theatre Association. Davey was Chair from 2010 – 2017.

²⁵⁷ Her appointment was made official and announced only a few days after this interview.

immediately drawn to them and saw circus as an ideal performance medium for her and thought, “That’s what I want to do. I want to be part of *that*, I want to be part of *them*”.

Challenge

Davey says that she never wanted to “do the things that were *easy*”, and made continuous decisions to push herself physically and mentally throughout her career and always set and overcame challenges. Throughout the interview, Davey gave examples of this, including from school days,²⁵⁸ overcoming a major accident²⁵⁹ and recent work as an older performer.²⁶⁰ An example was her reaction to her performance review feedback after being told she’d be more useful if she was stronger and “so I was determined that I would become the strongest woman in the world.” This determined love of challenge fits well in the circus medium where skills are difficult to acquire, and is one of Davey’s Key Motivations.

Authenticity

Davey describes other forms of theatre as being “The Pretendy Arts” whereas circus is “true”.²⁶¹ Davey points out that actors, “tell stories which aren’t true, they pretend things”, whereas circus “involves an authentic exchange”. Davey uses the example of her doubles trapeze act performed with Antonella Casella and says, “Look, I’m going to climb up on that trapeze and throw Antonella around, and I’m *really doing that*”. She says the audience is therefore required “to engage in the witnessing of it authentically”. Davey suggests that this “authentic exchange” creates a “collective will” and that the audience is “complicit in the successful completion of a show”, therefore becoming “part of the contract”. Davey’s

²⁵⁸ In the last year of school, Davey after she decided to transfer high schools she specifically requested to, “study the hardest course” which resulted in shocked response from her new school principal. “ ‘ I want to study the hardest course, I want to do Maths 2, 3, Physics, Chem and Literature’ and he went ‘Really?’ and I went ‘Yep’ “. Davey, 2018.

²⁵⁹ Davey fell while performing her act with Lisa Small during a media call at Edinburgh Festival in 1991, breaking her wrists and her neck in two places. She spent 5 months in traction in hospital and says that it took about two years before she could return to training. Rayson, 2016; Davey, 2018.

²⁶⁰ Davey was part of *The Classics*, a show about women, performance and aging with Sue Broadway and Deb Batton. My, 2015.

²⁶¹ Davey is making the point here that many other theatrical forms such as acting or ballet require the suspension of disbelief and is not making any judgment about the validity of these forms. By “pretendy” she made it clear that she means the performers are necessarily pretending or acting, playing characters that they are not in real life. While this is sometimes true of circus, the physical risk, effort and effects are “true”.

recognition of, and commitment to, her belief in the authenticity and realness of circus is a strong motivation that drives her to use the medium.

Expression

Davey is motivated and inspired to express ideas. Much of her work has been created from the inspiration of a simple idea which is then developed and finds expression through the circus medium. With her show, *Appetite*,²⁶² Davey describes the development as, “Four weeks in a room with some circus equipment, four aerialists, two directors, and a dramaturge”. For *Crying in Public Places*, Davey pitched her idea to her sister as simply, “‘I’ve got a really good name for a show, *Crying in Public Places*’ and she said ‘OK, what are we going to do?’ and I said ‘Sing! We’ll sing!’ and she said, ‘Ok, maybe we should get some singers’. So, we got two girls who could sing and we made a show”. Her ironic explanation illustrates clearly that developing and expressing even a simple idea is key for her artistically.²⁶³

Communication

Davey is acutely aware of how her work can communicate to the audience and seeks to maintain direct and clear communication, “what are we telling people? What are they witnessing and how are they witnessing it, how are they feeling about it? Let’s move people. Let them sit in a collegiate environment looking at each other across a ring and feel something as a crowd, feel the same thing”. Throughout the interview, Davey talked persuasively about communication with the audience and its response, making communication one of the Key Motivations of her practice.

²⁶² Which became internationally successful and was toured internationally for a most of the 1990s.
<https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/7249705> accessed 5/9/2018.

²⁶³ From simple ideas her shows build to complex productions, and can have complex implications and meaning.

Collaboration

Davey works in collaboration with other artists and practitioners and it was clear throughout the interview that the collaborative process was a Key Motivation for her. She has strong, clear ideas and enjoys the interaction with other artists that bring them to fruition. The work she is involved in is exuberant, challenging and witty, as she is, but it is achieved through the fusion and development of her own ideas combined with those of other artists, "I usually go to a group of people who have asked me to do it and work with them... and say, 'OK, so what do you do?'" Do you have any ideas? Are they good? Do you want to show me? That looks good, what about this?"". Because of her personal drive, passion and gregariousness, Davey enjoys working with other people and the work that results from her collaborative process conveys a strong sense of joy, fun and co-operation that is conveyed to the audience.

Synopsis

Davey has been driven to perform and throughout her life, she has undertaken challenges in order to achieve personal and artistic goals. She believes circus allows her to express her ideas authentically with clear communication with her audience in a form that challenges her.

ANTONELLA CASELLA



Fig. 12. Antonella Casella, 15th March, 2018
Photo: Jesse Jensen-Kohl

We were all artists who were also radical activists²⁶⁴

Antonella Casella²⁶⁵ was interviewed at her home in Melbourne, on 15th March, 2018. As Senior Artistic Associate at Circus Oz, Casella is an active member and advocate of the Australian Contemporary Circus sector, regularly participating in circus forums and conferences. Casella has been a circus performer since the age of seventeen and has been an acrobat and aerialist, and has specialized in doubles trapeze and duo acro.²⁶⁶ Casella played a major role in the development of Contemporary Circus as a co-founder of Rock 'n' Roll Circus²⁶⁷ in 1986 as well as being co-founder of Vulcana Women's Circus²⁶⁸ in 1995. As a performer, Casella has toured extensively across Australia and internationally. Casella's performance style is clean, crisp ironic and bold²⁶⁹ with direct political undertones using the circus medium as a form of activism and story-telling. I first met Casella in Adelaide in 2004 and have kept in contact with her since.

²⁶⁴ Casella, 2018.

²⁶⁵ Duo Acro act with Chris Sleight <http://archive.circusoz.com/clips/view/2581> accessed 28/9/2018.

²⁶⁶ See Terms and Definitions, page xiii.

²⁶⁷ For a discussion of the development of Rock 'n' Roll Circus see Seymour, 2018a.

²⁶⁸ <http://www.vulcana.org.au> (accessed 28/9/2018) Casella was also the company's first Artistic Director.

²⁶⁹ Doubles Trapeze act with Anni Davey <http://archive.circusoz.com/clips/view/46424> accessed 28/9/2018.

Lived Experience

As a child, Casella had some training in dance and gymnastics, however her primary interest in performing was acting. She says she was, “very interested in telling stories and changing society” and “very driven by the possibility of making the world a better place”.

During the mid 1980s, Casella attended a Brisbane Metro Arts Centre Open Day, which included theatre performances by independent artists. Casella distinctly remembers a performance that she described as, “three women doing a clowning and comedy knockabout routine about living in an inner-city share house”. This was a pivotal moment for Casella, “immediately I saw it as a new voice for Australian theatre that I wanted to be a part of” and she joined the community circus project²⁷⁰ being organized by Street Arts Community Theatre Company.²⁷¹ Casella and seven other participants in the project decided to continue and developed Rock ‘n’ Roll Circus.²⁷² Casella deferred her degree in journalism to pursue her newly found interest in circus arts.

Rock ‘n’ Roll Circus was driven by political and social motivations to help empower audiences to give them a voice in an era that Casella describes as “an oppressive government”.²⁷³ She says that the company expanded quickly and within a few years had developed many aspects including an outreach project, a women’s circus project, and projects in Indigenous communities in addition to the touring show, “we were basically sort of expanding as a company in lots of different directions”.

During Expo ‘88 in Brisbane,²⁷⁴ Casella met international street performers who had come to participate in the event and says, “through those buskers we started to get connected with the contemporary circus that was happening in England”. Inspired by these performers, Casella and her performance partner, Chris Sleight, left Rock ‘n’ Roll Circus in 1990 to go to

²⁷⁰ Casella says “At the end of the performance, they basically announced to the audience that if you were interested in being involved in their community circus project, you just had to turn up at Mitchell Street Hall, and that was the beginning of the first Rock ‘n’ Roll project, which led to the formation of Rock ‘n’ Roll Circus. So I was involved in that whole process.” Casella, 2018.

²⁷¹ Street Arts founded in 1982 by Denis Peel, Pauline Peel and Steve Capelin (Denis Peel and Steve Capelin both attended Nanjing Project 1. See Appendix 3) <https://www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer-library/ms/uqfl229.pdf> ; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Street_Arts#/media/File:Streetarts.jpg ; Watts, 2017.

²⁷² Also reported in Seymour, 2018a. Founding members were: Antonella Casella, Chris Sleight, Lisa Small, Ceri McCoy, Chantal Eastwell, Robbie McNamara, Richard Teatro, Sally Herbert and later Derek Ives. Casella, 2018 and personal communication with author.

²⁷³ Bjelke-Petersen Government, which led Queensland for 19 years. Clarke 1992; Clark 1995; Tink, 2014

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-01/sir-joh-bjelke-petersen-qld-30-year-cabinet-documents-released/9270744> accessed 28/9/2018.

²⁷⁴ World Expo ‘88 was a six-month long event held in Brisbane in the area now called South Bank. It was opened by Queen Elizabeth II <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLI5G2mLjc> accessed 11/10/2018.

Europe. Casella says, “I think that was probably that point when I went, ‘Yeah, OK, now I’m going to invest in this as my career.’” In Britain they performed street shows and worked with Snapdragon Circus,²⁷⁵ and taught and trained at the London Circus Space.²⁷⁶

Casella returned to Australia in 1991 to perform with Circus Oz. In 1995, she was involved in founding the Vulcana Women’s Circus in Brisbane and returned again to Circus Oz in 2002. She currently holds the position of Senior Artistic Associate there, where she works closely with Tim Coldwell²⁷⁷ and Rob Tannion²⁷⁸ to ensure the artistic development of the company and is, “really engaged in supporting younger artists to find their voice and tell stories and figure out what the artform can do...”.

Motivations

Five Key Motivations were identified for Casella: **Expression, Communication, Politics** and **Limitlessness** of the medium.

Expression

Casella was drawn to circus as artistic expression because of its physicality and its potential for storytelling. She describes herself as “inherently a physical creator” and says that her “natural territory was to express with my whole self”. Casella reports that she has always been interested in communicating through performance and says, “it seemed to me that it was an expressive medium which you could use to tell any story...” and that artistically expressing herself through physicality was central to her choosing to use the circus medium.

²⁷⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMtJxP7GkA4> accessed 10/10/2018.

²⁷⁶ London Circus Space became the National Centre for Circus Arts <https://www.nationalcircus.org.uk> accessed 28/9/2018.

²⁷⁷ See Chapter Two.

²⁷⁸ See Chapter Six.

Authenticity

Because of this physicality, Casella feels that Circus can communicate to its audience very authentically, “the fact that you can use everything that human beings are capable of, not just text but in fact everything – physicality – and I think physical interaction can be, you know, metaphorical but also very real too”. Her dual drive for storytelling and physical expression makes circus an ideal form for her, “it’s that fascinating interplay between telling a story that is not literal but at the same time literally doing the physical things that are empowering for the performers”. Because Casella is also intellectually driven, the combination in circus of literal and metaphorical makes it an authentic form for her, and a Key Motivation.

Communication

Casella reports that communicating to broad audiences and making theatrical work that was accessible to them was essential to her and the other members of the Rock ‘n’ Roll Circus and says they were all, “artists who were also radical activists”. They aimed to “speak to the broader community” to inspire social change. Communication through story-telling continues to be fundamental to Casella who is still motivated to produce accessible circus work that communicates powerfully to audiences and she is concerned to also encourage newer performers to “tell their stories”. For Casella, communication is a Key Motivation in her circus practice.

Politics

Political motivation is fundamental for Casella. Throughout her career, she has been politically motivated, which is evidenced by her involvement with women’s circus, Indigenous projects and social activism. The work of Rock ‘n’ Roll Circus directly responded to the political climate of the times in Queensland and a general feeling of disempowerment. Casella says, “it was a very corrupt government but it was also a very oppressive government...” and that the work of Rock ‘n’ Roll Circus was a deliberate attempt to empower audiences, “rather than fighting

the Establishment we were more rallying the community” and political concerns for gender, racial equality, fairness and self-empowerment continue to drive her work.²⁷⁹

Limitlessness

Casella believes that the circus medium is not bound by the limitations of other artforms and as a result it creates a sense of limitlessness of what can be created within the performance, and what can be conveyed through it, “people’s expectations around circus are very open, they really don’t know what they are going to experience, so that gives you a lot of freedom in terms of what type of conventions you can use to tell the story. It’s really limitless I think”.

Synopsis

Casella chose circus because it allows her to express and communicate through physical performance in a form that can produce accessible work that speaks to broad audiences and does not limit her artistically.

²⁷⁹ A major tenant of the 1960s and 1970s youth and counter-culture had been the right and necessity of self-empowerment, personal freedom and self-expression. Because of the reactionary Queensland government, these attitudes were repressed there, in contrast to most of the rest of Australia where social change and personal expression were being taken for granted in mainstream society by the 1980s. Using art as activism and an agent for education and change had been widely used by the members of Melbourne’s APG and many others world-wide (and had always been historically employed, for example the work of Brecht, from which the 60s and 70s radical performers drew inspiration. Schechner, 1967) but in Queensland, significantly, young radical activist artists like Casella organically employed the same methods to move and inspire audiences and to ‘fly under the radar’ of the government which did not allow more overt protest.

Conclusion

These practitioners provide two perspectives that are similar in many ways, and both have continued to play major roles in the development of Contemporary Circus since the 1980s. Both Davey and Casella began their careers wanting to become actors and were interested in political theatre before they were introduced to the Contemporary Circus form and both instantaneously recognized the potential of circus and its significance. Casella's practice developed from inspiration and political oppression and she only became aware of Circus Oz after the creation of Rock 'n' Roll Circus, whereas for Davey, already active in political theatre, it was the experience of seeing Circus Oz that motivated her to become a circus practitioner. Both are motivated by the ability of circus to communicate directly and powerfully to mass audiences through its physicality and performance potential.



Fig. 13. Photos from Circus Oz archival collection
Left: Anni Davey
Right: Antonella Casella

Chapter Four: Precarious²⁸⁰

1990s

Mike Finch and Mel Fyfe

*...lucky enough to be in an industry where you make a difference
in everyone's lives*

Mel Fyfe²⁸¹



Fig. 14. Circus Oz, 1993
Programme Cover, Designed by Reg Monbassa, Circus Oz archival collection

²⁸⁰ 'Precarious' is the name of Mike Finch's early performance group, formed at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst NSW in the early 1990s. This group was the precursor to Circus Monoxide and remains the company's business name. Personal communication with author 10/9/2018.

²⁸¹ Fyfe, 2018.

The Decade

In 1991, Paul Keating²⁸² replaced Bob Hawke as Prime Minister, continuing a long period of Labor Government until 1996 when John Howard²⁸³ became Prime Minister. In Queensland, Premier Bjelke-Petersen had retired from office in 1988, heralding the end of a long period of conservative government there. In 1990, Carmon Lawrence became the first Australian female Premier, followed in Victoria in the same year by Joan Kirner.²⁸⁴

Having celebrated its Bicentennial in 1988,²⁸⁵ Australia now focussed on preparations for the New Year's Eve 2000 celebration, and the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, which were announced in 1993 and ignited an energetic sense of national pride. The 1990s saw the introduction of mass use of mobile phones, the internet and email, which vastly changed communication methods and reduced Australia's 'tyranny of distance'²⁸⁶ within its own borders and internationally.

Musician Mandawuy Yunupingu²⁸⁷ was appointed 1992's Australian of the Year, the same year a recent NIDA graduate, Baz Luhrmann, released *Strictly Ballroom*, a cartoon-like satirisation of Australian suburban life through the anachronistic ballroom-dance culture, and the film became an unexpected international success, followed in 1996 by *Romeo + Juliet*.²⁸⁸ In 1994, two comedies about very different aspects of Australian character, *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*²⁸⁹ and *Muriel's Wedding*²⁹⁰ were released. On television, the *Big Gig* continued to bring

²⁸² Australian Labor Party. Grattan, 2013: 408-435.

²⁸³ Liberal Party of Australia. Grattan, 2013: 436-467.

²⁸⁴ Clark, 1995: 333; <http://labouraustralia.anu.edu.au/biography/kirner-joan-elizabeth-20604> accessed 25/9/2018.

²⁸⁵ The Bicentennial of European Settlement in Australia. Tink, 2014. See also Chapter Three, The Decade.

²⁸⁶ The phrase was coined by historian Geoffrey Blainey with the publication of his book of the same name in 1966, and refers to the restrictions of distance and isolation from the rest of the world that has impacted on and effected Australian culture and the development of the nation since European settlement. Blainey, 1966; <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/the-tyranny-of-distance-geoffrey-blainey-classic-turns-50-/news-story/30477685f87b58523e883f556b40e059> accessed 25/9/2018.

²⁸⁷ Mandawuy Yunupingu was the lead singer and song writer for Yothu Yindi, famous for the song *Treaty*, which drew mainstream public attention to Indigenous Land Rights.

²⁸⁸ Luhrmann's partly biographical stylized expose of the stale and small-minded world of ball-room dancing portrayed the characters as 'carnavalesque' grotesques, apart from the romantic protagonists struggling against the prejudice and conformity of their world. This theme was later reinforced by *Romeo + Juliet*. The highly colourful, cartoon like characters, sets, make-up and costumes, reflected a growing social trend in popular arts for flat bright colour and circus-like iconography that would later be developed into films like *Babe: Pig in the City* (1998) and Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge* (2001).

²⁸⁹ *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* follows the adventures of a group of 'drag queen' professional entertainers who travel to 'out-back' Australia and the film presents the juxtaposition of country-town conservatism with inner-city exotica and flamboyance, and it expanded the Australian image of its identity. The story is said to be partly inspired by real-life Les Girls performer and cultural identity, Carlotta <http://www.carlotta.com.au/#bio> accessed 25/9/2018.

²⁹⁰ *Muriel's Wedding* is a comedy which explores Australian identity and culture through the experiences of its protagonist, Muriel in the lead up to her wedding. The film follows on from *Dimboola*, and sets the scene for *Kath and Kim* and other Australian character parodies. Like 'bloke movies' (Lumbly, 2008) such as *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* and *Crocodile Dundee*, *Muriel's Wedding* parodies Australian cultural stereotypes. It launched the international career of actor, Tony Collette, and introduced the comic phrase "You're terrible, Muriel". <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjILKzu99o4> (accessed 25/9/2018) Mike Finch says in his interview that Gabby Milgate, who delivered the line, was a performer in an early production of Circus Monoxide.

stand-up comedy and a female perspective²⁹¹ to a general Australian audience and introduced many comedians, circus and physical performers like Doug Anthony Allstars,²⁹² Flacco²⁹³ and Lano and Woodley.²⁹⁴ Other shows on television included *Sea Change*²⁹⁵ and *Good News Week*,²⁹⁶ while *Neighbours*²⁹⁷ continued.

In 1990, a Circus Summit²⁹⁸ was held in Melbourne and the Tasmanian Circus Festival²⁹⁹ began. During the decade, many now long-standing Contemporary Circus companies formed, including Bizircus, Women's Circus, Circus Monoxide, Vulcana, Aerialize and Flipside Circus.³⁰⁰ In 1999 Cirque du Soleil³⁰¹ had its first tour to Australia. 1997 saw the sesquicentenary³⁰² of circus in Australia, marked by a special circus edition of Australian stamps and Circus Oz appointed a young new Artistic Director, Mike Finch, and by the late 1990s only three of the founding members of Circus Oz remained in the company,³⁰³ which celebrated its 21st birthday in 1999.³⁰⁴

²⁹¹ Through its presenter, stand-up comedian Wendy Harmer, whose anecdotes and jokes about her experiences as a woman were quite ground-breaking for Australian TV, as was her appearance which, due to having had a cleft palate as a child, broke the accepted stereotype for female TV identities <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2007/04/30/1910192.htm> accessed 25/9/2018.

²⁹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-BG1Q1U6ek> accessed 25/9/2018.

²⁹³ Paul Livingston <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhULrNH8-9Y> accessed 25/9/2018.

²⁹⁴ Originally called The Found Objects <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3Qb2hHSOdY> accessed 25/9/2018.

²⁹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mnycD81yGw> accessed 25/9/2018.

²⁹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LymTypLGdhE> accessed 25/9/2018.

²⁹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T27p2EJDDME> accessed 25/9/2018.

²⁹⁸ Initiated by Mark St Leon, the Circus Summit was funded by the Australia Council and the state arts funding bodies, which brought together many people involved in circus both in its traditional form and in the growing style of Contemporary Circus and set the scene for the establishment of the National Institute of Circus Arts in 2000. St Leon, 2011: 259; personal communication with author, 5/10/2018.

²⁹⁹ The original festival began in Tasmania, initiated by Tony Rooke, and it relocated to Mullumbimby in 2001 and is now the Mullum Circus Festival <http://mullumcircusfest.com/our-story/> accessed 7/10/2018.

³⁰⁰ Company Websites: <http://www.bizircus.com> ; <http://www.womenscircus.org.au/about/#herstory> ; <https://www.circusmonoxide.com.au> ; <http://www.vulcana.org.au> ; <http://aerialize.com.au> ; <http://www.flipsidecircus.org.au> accessed 20/9/2018.

³⁰¹ The company toured their show *Saltimbanco*. See also Chapter Three, The Decade. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-649OhBAClY> accessed 7/10/2018. See also Appendix 2.

³⁰² 150 years of circus in Australia, dated from the foundation of Tasmanian Radford's Royal Circus in 1847. Although there had been some circus performances in Australia earlier than this, Radford's was the first fully formed Australian circus. St Leon 2011: 29.

³⁰³ Tim Coldwell, Laurel Frank and Ponch Hawkes.

³⁰⁴ See Broadway 1999: 181. See also Appendix 2.

MIKE FINCH



Fig. 15. Mike Finch, 19th April, 2018
Photo: Jesse Jensen-Kohl

*...this is my identity, I am a circus performer...*³⁰⁵

Mike Finch³⁰⁶ was interviewed in the gardens of his apartment complex in Melbourne, on 19th April, 2018. Finch is a director and identifies himself as a circus practitioner. He was a juggler and acrobat with Precarious³⁰⁷ and Circus Monoxide,³⁰⁸ which he co-founded in the early 1990s. He combines parody, humour and political commentary in his practice. His directing technique is highly collaborative using wide and divergent ideas and concepts to devise work. After graduating from Theatre Media at Charles Sturt University and following the formation of Circus Monoxide in 1996, Finch toured in a bus across the east coast of Australia with the company. In 1997, he was offered the position of Artistic Director at Circus Oz where he remained for seventeen years. He initiated the BLAKflip programme and oversaw the company's move to new purpose-designed headquarters Finch has received widespread local and international critical acclaim for his work,³⁰⁹ and has toured extensively around Australia and internationally. I first met Finch while working as an usher during the Circus Oz tent season in 2004 when he suggested I watch Tim Coldwell's Roofwalk³¹⁰ act standing on my head, which I did.

³⁰⁵ Finch, 2018.

³⁰⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpLJfPpud3g> accessed 1/10/2018.

³⁰⁷ See Footnote 280.

³⁰⁸ Circus Monoxide is now based in Wollongong, Australia <https://www.circusmonoxide.com.au/history/> accessed 7/10/2018.

³⁰⁹ See arts reviews: <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/12/07/arts/circus-review-topsy-turvy-wacky-zany-and-funny.html> ; <https://www.circusoz.com/news-and-reviews/article/17/london-the-guardian-review.html> ; <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/10/theater/reviews/circus-ozs-from-the-ground-up-at-new-victory-theater.html> ; <http://artsreview.com.au/circus-oz-but-waittheres-more/> accessed 28/9/2018.

³¹⁰ <http://archive.circusoz.com/clips/view/56923> accessed 28/9/2018. See also Footnote 194 for another incarnation of this act.

Lived Experience

Finch grew up with a conscious sense that “the world can be changed by performance”, a belief taught to him by both his parents,³¹¹ who took up positions at the University of New England and were involved in community theatre and radio in Armidale and Sydney. Although he was involved in theatre as a child, Finch reports that it never occurred to him that performing arts could be a career, which led him to consider many other vocational options.

However, in the early 1990s, Finch graduated from the Theatre Media course at Charles Sturt University (CSU) which had a strong focus on practice, and this was pivotal to his development.³¹² During his first semester, he signed up for a field trip to Melbourne Comedy Festival and particularly remembers The Castanet Club,³¹³ Archaos,³¹⁴ and Found Objects³¹⁵ saying they were foundational inspiration for his later work in circus, “in this one particular trip, when I was probably twenty-one it all went, ‘Right, there’s three massive influences right there’”.

Finch and some class-mates formed a group to practice and perform circus skills,³¹⁶ that drastically improved after being introduced to a Moscow Circus School trained performer.³¹⁷ The group called themselves Precarious, and started touring shows to schools and small communities.³¹⁸ Tim Durak, who Finch says, “was the one who was most passionate about

³¹¹ Finch’s parents, Barbara Finch and Trevor Finch, were actively involved in the counter-culture movement and New Theatre in Newtown, Sydney, during the 1970s and 1980s http://newtheatrehistory.org.au/wiki/index.php/The_1970s_-_Premises ; <https://newtheatre.org.au/our-history/> ; <https://www.ausstage.edu.au/pages/organisation/122> accessed 7/10/2018.

³¹² Which is still on offer at the University. See <http://futurestudents.csu.edu.au/courses/communication-creative/bachelor-communication-theatre-media> 28/9/2018. Finch found the course after a period of unsureness about what subject to pursue, having an aptitude in engineering and science like Tim Coldwell and a flair for journalism. He first heard about the course at Bathurst from a fellow traveller on a bus. The Theatre Media course taught communication and media with an immersive hands-on approach, providing the students the opportunity to practice their work in a variety of forms and media including street theatre, site specific performance, circus arts, film and television. “the Bathurst course is, I mean a fabulous course, I could talk about that all day”. Finch, 2018. It was foundational to his arts practice and his personal development.

³¹³ The Castanet Club was made up of a cast of comedians and musicians including Mikey Robins, Steve Abbot (The Sandman) and their 1991 film featured Russell Cheek, who later co-directed with Finch on the Circus Oz 2002 tour. Finch, 2018; Salom, 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S55D15aTCVw> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEqa4LlqyBE> accessed 7/10/2018.

³¹⁴ <http://www.archaos.info> A French circus company with a unique gritty and joyful style, which uses heavy machinery, fire and industrial materials integrated into its performances. According to Finch, Tim Coldwell was the Tent Boss during this season. Coldwell talks about his admiration for Archaos in his interview. Coldwell, 2018; Finch, 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHA5ypvetQA> accessed 28/9/2018. An original copy of the program is held at the Australian National Museum [https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/4770485?lookfor=author:%22Melbourne%20International%20Comedy%20Festival,%20\(1992\)%22&ofset=1&max=1](https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/4770485?lookfor=author:%22Melbourne%20International%20Comedy%20Festival,%20(1992)%22&ofset=1&max=1) accessed 29/9/2018.

³¹⁵ This show was the precursor to comic duo, Lano and Woodley Show and included Colin Lane, Frank Woodley and Scott Casley. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_r0DxYMktc accessed 29/9/2018.

³¹⁶ Students in Theatre Media were encouraged to take a hands-on and self-directed approach to performance and theatre generally, and the group performed individually, in duos or with the whole the group in the streets of Bathurst and in local schools.

³¹⁷ Inthasone Phetsiriseng was a mature-age student at CSU, who had been a circus performer in Laos, and had trained at the circus school in Moscow. Finch, 2018.

³¹⁸ The group spent their university breaks touring.

circus”, died in an accident on tour.³¹⁹ Finch says that this salutary and traumatic event was critical and that, “After Tim died we all sort of re-grouped... then Precarious became an actual entity”.³²⁰

After the success of Precarious’ first major production, *Circus Monoxide Mountain Madness Under the Big Top*,³²¹ the group received an Australian Arts Council grant with a proposal for a traveling circus show in a (yet to be purchased) double-decker bus. The collective began touring to mainly country towns across the east coast of Australia, calling themselves Circus Monoxide. Their iconic black and yellow striped bus became not only transport, but also the ensemble’s accommodation and stage set.

Finch’s involvement with Circus Oz had begun in the early 1990s when he undertook a university internship and met company members including Alan Robertson³²² and Linda Mickleborough.³²³ In 1996, he heard about two job positions advertised for an Assistant Director and Artistic Director at a major contemporary circus company, which turned out to be Circus Oz.³²⁴ Thinking he had applied for the Assistant Director position, he discovered during the interview that he was being considered as Artistic Director “so I was embarrassed and said ‘Oh, I’m sorry for wasting your time’”. To his surprise, at twenty-seven, he was given the job.³²⁵ Finch left Circus Monoxide to become Artistic Director and Co-CEO of Circus Oz in 1997.³²⁶

Finch steered the company towards a new millennium. Understanding the company’s ethos,³²⁷ he blended together the ideals and style of the company and its ensemble. Finch left the Circus Oz in 2015 and is now a freelance Director, producing work for companies across

³¹⁹ Tim Durak fell from a cliff at a campsite while the group was on tour.

³²⁰ The group named themselves Precarious partly because it refers to the risk in circus and partly as a “dark humour” reference to Tim Durak’s fall off a cliff that led to his sudden death and therefore also refers to the precariousness of life. Precarious remains the registered company name of Circus Monoxide who developed from the group Precarious. Finch, 2018; personal communication with author 10/9/2018.

³²¹ *Circus Monoxide Mountain Madness Under the Big Top* occurred during the Bathurst 1000 car race when the city held an associated festival called Mountain Madness. “It was a big cabaret and street party that had been going on for the car race weekend. All the yobbos would come to town, 30,000 hoons driving up and down in their V8 Fords and Holdens”. The show was parodying the atmosphere in the city filled with carbon monoxide and car loving ‘petrol heads’ and was performed in a large hired circus tent. Finch, 2018.

³²² Robertson (APG, Soapbox Circus, Circus Oz) later built Circus Monoxide’s aerial frame for their touring show. Finch, 2018.

³²³ See Chapter Three, Davey’s Lived Experience.

³²⁴ Finch says that he was given a small newspaper clipping by a friend.

³²⁵ Finch has a sense that the company might have been impressed with what he and the Circus Monoxide collective were doing and that his ethos and politics echoed those of Circus Oz.

³²⁶ Finch reports that after a week’s orientation in Melbourne at the Circus Oz headquarters then in Port Melbourne, he was immediately sent to New York where the company was performing at the New Victory Theatre <http://www.playbill.com/article/circus-oz-to-defy-physics-at-nys-new-victory-to-jan-4-com-72291> accessed 8/9/2018.

³²⁷ Finch described a thorough process of meetings with the individual company members to determine their ideas about the directions for the show and about the way they saw Circus Oz. Personal communication with author, 24/9/2017.

Australia, including his recent show at the Sydney Opera House in January 2018³²⁸ and a collaboration with Sydney Theatre Company in September 2018.³²⁹ Finch continues to be a leading advocate and network facilitator for circus practice within and outside Australia.

Motivations

There are six clear Key Motivations for Finch's choice of the circus medium for his arts practice: **Communication, Authenticity, Collaboration, Politics, Diversity of Media, and Limitlessness.**

Communication

Finch has a powerful communication drive, exhibited in all his conversation about circus, and in his work. It is a consistent and central theme throughout the interview and under-pins every aspect of it. His artistic focus is on what is communicated, how it is communicated and how it is received. Finch unites communication with communion, and says a performance communicates and elicits shared emotional response, "the thing that audiences get when they gasp, or involuntarily laugh... when their mirror neurons go off in their head". For Finch, the effect of this is an equalizing and uniting of an audience because the circus medium blends elements that produce what he describes as "emotional *Umami*", likening the experience to the complex satisfaction of the taste and suggests "there's other ways to produce that feeling, but circus is the absolute strongest one".

Authenticity

His 'umami effect' is closely associated with how Finch sees circus as an authentic medium. This shared sensation and communication discussed above is a clear indication of his sense of the authentic, mutual and deep response in the audience elicited by circus performance. Finch

³²⁸ The pirate-themed children's show *Captain Hook's Pirate Party*, which included in its cast previous Circus Oz ensemble members Luke Taylor (see Chapter Five), Stuart Christie and Rockie Stone (see Chapter Six, Porter's Lived Experience).

³²⁹ *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, Sydney Theatre Company, Sydney Opera House season September 10 – October 27, 2018. https://youtu.be/3UnFdeE_Ohw accessed 29/9/2018. See also Chapter Six, The Decade.

says circus is unlike any other performance medium and has a powerful and genuine effect that provides a unique theatrical authenticity, “My definition (of circus) is something that you can just appreciate and feel, an emotional response to something that you don’t have to pretend is happening or not there. They’re either on the wire or on the ground... either balls are in the air or they’re on the floor...”

Politics

Finch has a strong belief³³⁰ that theatre and popular entertainment can effectively communicate to mass and varied audiences and unite people through performance. His education taught him that every choice is political, “thinking about the context of the venue you choose being a political choice, the way you market the show is a political choice, the ticket price is a political choice if there even is a ticket price”. A strong social and political understanding and desire to encourage equality and connection between people is at the heart of Finch’s work and philosophy,³³¹ “For me personally, my politics say that the audience are united across age, socioeconomic, gender, all of those things dissolve and disappear and people all just burst out into laughter, gasping, applause, whistling, cheering...”. Finch’s underlying and encompassing belief that everything is political, is a Key Motivation for his arts practice.

Collaboration

Finch is inherently collaborative, creatively and socially. He grew up imbued with the philosophies of the 1960s and 1970s through the ethos of his parents. His early involvement with community theatre, and his family’s ideologies about equality, community and social communication meant that by the time he studied Theatre Media at Bathurst he naturally adopted the performance theory taught there, with its strong emphasis on devising and performing work collaboratively, and sharing it with wide audiences in diverse contexts.

³³⁰ From his upbringing, education and personality.

³³¹ This approach has been apparent throughout his career and is exemplified by his work with the collective Circus Monoxide, his commitment to equality throughout his time at Circus Oz, and his development of social initiatives including BLAKflip <https://www.circusoz.com/sidesault/blakflip.html> accessed 1/10/2018.

Finch's career has been characterized by collaboration, with performers, company members and other directors. All his artistic output, before, during and following his work with Circus Oz, is based on collaboration.

Diversity of Media

Because of his interest in a wide range of media, within and outside the arts, which includes science, mechanics and filmmaking, along with his propensity for eclectic thinking, Finch is naturally drawn to the diverse possibilities of the circus medium, "I think I'm inherently eclectic, inherently curious. I'm quite comfortable flipping from one idea to another and I really like combining things that maybe haven't been combined before". This approach allows him to see wide possibilities and potential in unusual and unlikely combinations, materials and performance disciplines, which widen artistic possibilities.

Limitlessness

Finch's interests are in, "combining things in unusual combinations to ideally make something that's more than the sum of the parts" and circus allows him to produce work in a form that does not limit what he can create or define as 'circus', "I'm a circus director, I don't know how many more acrobats I really will be working with, but I will be making what I call circus". Underlying the entire interview was the clear impression that he believed he could do anything with the medium, and that the medium itself could be anything, "This ballistics idea and this piece of music or this musicianship and this acrobatics or whatever combination it is, I think I really enjoy being open to any possibility". For Finch, the possibilities of circus are endless.

Synopsis

Through his experiences and education, Finch chose circus as his artistic medium because it allowed him to put his life ethos into practice to communicate authentically to unite audiences, and circus provides him the ability to create performances collaboratively using diverse media.

MEL FYFE



Fig. 16. Mel Fyfe, 16th March, 2018
Photo: Jesse Jensen-Kohl

*I'm out of here. See ya dance world, hello circus!*³³²

Mel Fyfe³³³ was interviewed in the Big Meeting Room at Circus Oz, Collingwood, Melbourne on 16th March, 2018. Fyfe began her life in the arts through dance, and has an ironic, compelling individual style and she became a performing Strongwoman, acrobat and German Wheel artist. Her performance style is a mixture of demonstrating strength, in character and in circus skills, often with a mock brash, and ironically aggressive persona.³³⁴ Fyfe is a dance-trained acrobat who has worked for Bizircus³³⁵ in Perth, trained with Rock 'n' Roll Circus and has had many roles with Circus Oz including ensemble member, Tour Manager and Operations and Venue Manager. She has performed internationally and toured extensively. I first met Fyfe in 2004 in Adelaide, South Australia while she was performing with Circus Oz, and I worked with her most recently during the Sydney Festival 2018 season, when she was the Front of House Manager.

³³² Fyfe, 2018.

³³³ For an example of her work throughout her Circus Oz career see <https://www.smh.com.au/video/video-entertainment/video-stage/mel-fyfes-circus-career-20151120-46koh.html> accessed 23/9/2018.

³³⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2jYBjbu14> accessed 5/9/2018.

³³⁵ <http://www.bizircus.com> accessed 5/9/2018.

Lived Experience

Although Fyfe had been performing as a dancer since she was three, her first experience of circus performance was at nineteen years of age. Fyfe was cast by Reg Bolton³³⁶ and Helene Embling³³⁷ in the Western Australian production of *Barnum the Musical*, who had seen her performing at a vaudeville-style show in Perth, “I was lucky enough to get in and work with Reg and Helene on that show, which then gave me just a small passion for circus”. After touring internationally as a dancer, Fyfe returned to Perth and reconnected with Bolton “he introduced me to all the Bizircus crew... and I ended up doing shows for Bizircus as well as working with Reg”. Fyfe began performing with Bizircus in street and corporate shows.³³⁸

Fyfe says that she was initially invited to audition for Circus Oz in the mid 1990s, after company member Stephen Burton saw her work³³⁹ but she had reservations about her abilities as a circus performer³⁴⁰ and turned down the invitation, instead attending a Rock ‘n’ Roll Circus³⁴¹ training project to develop her skills. She began performing with Circus Oz the following year. Fyfe reports that “it took a few years for me to find my feet with Circus Oz even... I guess they nurtured me for years” and this was pivotal to her development as a circus artist, “it wasn’t until I started working with Bizircus that I discovered that I was actually strong and in Circus Oz... they were on the hunt for a Strongwoman I guess.³⁴² They were not pushing me but they were molding me to be that person as well and I loved it. I loved being the Strongwoman”.

Fyfe continues working with Circus Oz and is currently Operations and Venue Manager. In addition to performing, she has also played various other roles in the company. Fyfe describes herself as always being a Strongwoman no matter what her role “I’m a Strongwoman in the circus, ‘cause no matter what role I play, or do, with Circus Oz, I have to be a Strongwoman”.

³³⁶ <http://www.regbolton.org> accessed 1/10/2018. A small amount of footage of Bolton and some comments about his beliefs about circus is available on the video here at time code 1:38 <https://www.carnivalcinema.com.au/pick-net-circus-lunartics-lunar-circus-documentary-2001/> accessed 28/9/2018. See also Chapter Three, The Decade and Chapter Five, Salom’s Lived Experience.

³³⁷ Helene Embling currently works at the National Institute of Circus Arts in Australia [http://www.nica.com.au/userfiles/file/NICA%20Teaching%20staff%20list\(1\).pdf](http://www.nica.com.au/userfiles/file/NICA%20Teaching%20staff%20list(1).pdf) accessed 2018.

³³⁸ During that time, Fyfe was also working in Bolton’s circus shop and was involved in starting Bolton’s circus school.

³³⁹ Stephen Burton, an early member of Circus Oz and significant Australian Contemporary Circus figure, had been employed by Bizircus to direct their outdoor show. He is also referred to in Chapter Three, Davey’s Lived Experience.

³⁴⁰ Fyfe reports that she still considered herself as a dancer and not a skilled circus performer.

³⁴¹ See Chapter Three, Casella’s Lived Experience.

³⁴² After Anni Davey’s departure. See Chapter Three, Davey’s Lived Experience.

Motivations

Fyfe indicated four Key Motivations in her choice of the circus medium: **Expression, Community, Politics, Performance Drive** and **Challenge**.

Expression

Fyfe strongly suggests that circus is a performance medium that has allowed her to present an honest representation of herself. Unlike dance, Fyfe feels that circus provided her with a form that allowed her to, “be myself, 100%, and just Mel, on stage” whereas, in dance productions and companies she was constrained as a performer and had to conform to stereotypes, and she makes this point throughout her interview, “I went off and travelled overseas dancing, doing cabaret ‘tits and feathers’ shows in Japan and Korea which I loved, but it wasn’t everything I wanted”. For Fyfe, circus provides a very strong opportunity for self and artistic expression that she believes is not possible for her in other media.

Community

The role of community has been a major attraction for Fyfe to work in circus since she was introduced to it by Reg Bolton, which she finds accepting and nurturing. Witnessing the joy circus classes bring to students, working within the small circus community, performing and teaching with like-minded people and being part of the organizational functioning of a large company have been a major source of personal and professional satisfaction for her which drives much of her desire to work in the medium, “being able to see down into all our rehearsal spaces here and being able to see outside people doing workshops, coming in and their faces and personalities change... they walk in the door and they’re one person and they walk out the door and they’re another person. It’s that stuff that keeps me in”. At Circus Oz she says she has been encouraged and nurtured by the community and she has found the collective, creative atmosphere nurturing and fulfilling. Her involvement in the circus community is a Key Motivation for her.

Politics

For over twenty years, Fyfe has witnessed and experienced the way circus can affect people and be an agent for social change. She asserts that in circus, she can be a powerful role model³⁴³ through honest representation of herself on stage. Fyfe says, “What I couldn’t do in dance is be a role-model, which was really important for me as a performer and as a Strongwoman and as a person who wasn’t a Size 8 on stage. So just to be a role-model for people, particularly for teenage girls but anyone really...”. Fyfe’s choice to take up circus was strongly influenced by her dissatisfaction with strict gender stereotyping and she emphasizes the role circus can play in self-empowerment, “circus is just inspirational for every generation, from kids to adults, you just go to a circus show... you can believe that it’s you up there. It’s just f**king inspiring and inspirational and it can change people’s life... and that’s true, people actually say that...”.

Performance Drive

Fyfe has been driven to perform from a young age. She began her career as a dancer as a child and has pursued a life in arts ever since, “I did my Year 12, and I just deferred uni, went away dancing and just never went back”. Fyfe says her family have an expectation that, “you have to have something to fall back on, you can’t survive in the arts, which is crazy”. Her commitment to following her career in the arts and her defiance of social expectations despite family opposition, severe injury and years of disciplined training,³⁴⁴ make her drive to perform a Key Motivation.

³⁴³ Especially young girls, or other people who don’t see themselves as fitting cultural norms.

³⁴⁴ While attending the training programme at Rock ‘n’ Roll Circus in Brisbane, Fyfe says she severely injured her neck, and after a serious operation, was told by doctors that she would be unable to continue acrobatics. Fyfe, 2018.

Challenge

Fyfe is strongly motivated by challenge, personally and professionally. Many examples given in her interview indicate this, including recovering from significant injury, leaving her home state to develop her skills and career, fighting against family expectation, learning difficult apparatuses³⁴⁵ and developing into the role of Strongwoman. Fyfe says “I was a *determined* Strongwoman too, if I’m going to be on the bottom, it’s a bloke standing on top of me, not a girl smaller than me, I want the big guy on top of me. So I was pretty determined to make sure that I was a *real* Strongwoman.” This determination and enjoyment of rising to challenge is a Key Motivation for Fyfe’s choice of circus, with its constant demand for physical and mental challenge.

Synopsis

For Fyfe, circus is a challenging form of self-expression that allows her to present a true representation of herself within a joyful, supportive community that is an agent of social change through its performance and cultural application.

³⁴⁵ When she entered Circus Oz, Fyfe says she was primarily a general acrobat and dancer however she was encouraged to learn a particular circus discipline, and took up the German Wheel, which was a rare apparatus in Australia at the time.

Conclusion

Although the life experiences of Mike Finch and Mel Fyfe and their paths to circus strongly differ from each other, coming from different states, having dissimilar upbringings and education, and taking up circus in different ways, they both came to it at around the same age as young adults. In terms of their motivations to take up circus as an arts practice, there are many similarities. Both Finch and Fyfe discuss aspects of the circus community and both are highly collaborative in their working style and report that the community drives this process. For both, circus is a form of direct engagement. Both practitioners have political motivations including, for Fyfe, the ability to provide positive role-modeling and for Finch to unite audiences across socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicity, age and gender. Fyfe's experience in Circus Oz has formed her as a circus artist and provided her with a medium that allowed her to develop regardless of her image or gender. For Finch, Circus Oz was a role-model and the company invested in his potential. For both Finch and Fyfe, Circus Oz played fundamental role and circus is a unique form of artistic expression and communication.



Fig. 17. Photos from Circus Oz archival collection
Left: Mike Finch
Right: Mel Fyfe

Chapter Five: Barely Contained³⁴⁶

2000s

Joel Salom and Luke Taylor

...and I'm still doing it... I can't believe it!

Joel Salom³⁴⁷



Fig. 18. Circus Oz, 2009
Programme Cover, Designed by Paoli Smith, author's collection

³⁴⁶ *Barely Contained* was a Circus Oz production directed by Mike Finch which was performed and toured from 2009 and featured Luke Taylor (also on the programme cover, lower right corner).

³⁴⁷ Salom, 2018.

The Decade

John Howard remained Australian Prime Minister when the decade began, succeeded in 2007 by Kevin Rudd³⁴⁸ who in 2008 officially apologized to Indigenous Australians on behalf of the Nation.³⁴⁹ 2001 saw the centenary of Australian Federation.³⁵⁰

The 2000 Sydney Olympic Games³⁵¹ focussed world attention on Sydney and its Harbour and on its arts and cultural community which combined to produce spectacular and innovative Opening and Closing Ceremonies featuring older and new Australian motifs.³⁵² Following the bombing of the Twin Towers in America in 2001, Australians were rocked in 2002 by the explosion of terrorist bombs in Bali, a favourite holiday destination, where many Australians were killed and injured³⁵³ and again in 2008 by an international Global Financial Crisis and by the Black Saturday bushfires of 2009.³⁵⁴

On television, the decade saw the introduction of *Big Brother*, *Kath and Kim*, *At the Movies* and *Australian Idol*³⁵⁵ while *Neighbours* continued. In film, *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* were released along with *Avatar*, *Gladiator* and Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*.³⁵⁶ With the introduction of Web 2.0, social media grew to become a dominating means of communication and social interaction,³⁵⁷ and business became more reliant on the Internet and email. Many older forms of communication and operation were becoming redundant.³⁵⁸

³⁴⁸ Australian Labor Party. Grattan, 2013: 468-488.

³⁴⁹ Labor Prime Minister Rudd officially apologized to Indigenous Australians for the treatment they had received from the European settlers to Australia since British colonisation in 1788 <https://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australians-indigenous-peoples> accessed 28/9/2018.

³⁵⁰ See Clarke 1989: 144; Clark 1995: 211; Tink 2014: 1; <https://www.australia.gov.au/about-government/how-government-works/federation> accessed 28/9/2018.

³⁵¹ The Games brought the Indigenous Australian athlete, Cathy Freeman, who lit the Olympic flame <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtUZDS7P5s4> (accessed 28/9/2018) and won the Women's 400 Metres Sprint to international attention and introduced the world to the Australian vernacular catch-cry, 'Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi'.

³⁵² Including stockmen, whip-cracking and horses, Aboriginal dancing and iconography, giant puppets using imagery from *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, popular-culture motifs like giant thongs and beach culture and the *Eternity* emblem by Arthur Stace, which also featured in fireworks on the Harbour Bridge at the opening of the new millennium on New Year's Eve. Williams and Meyers 2017; Morgan 2017: 45.

³⁵³ Three bombs were detonated in Bali at popular night-spots and outside the American Embassy, killing 202 people including 88 Australians http://www.nma.gov.au/online_features/defining_moments/featured/bali_bombings accessed 28/9/2018.

³⁵⁴ 7th February, 2009, 173 people were killed and hundreds injured http://www.nma.gov.au/online_features/defining_moments/featured/black-saturday-bushfires accessed 28/9/2018.

³⁵⁵ *Big Brother* 2001, *Kath and Kim*, 2000, *At the Movies*, 2004. The science fiction film *The Truman Show*, directed by Australian Peter Weir, had inspired the *Big Brother* series, which was part of a growing wave of reality TV. *Australian Idol* 2003, featured Mark Holden as one of the judges, a former *Countdown* teen-idol and pop singer, as well as a descendent of the Holden circus family who, according to Merv Ashton via Facebook (Pixi Robertson account) combined shows with the Ashton Circus around 1936. Holden Bros. Circus was one of the first Australian circuses to make use of motorized trucks for transport. St Leon, 2011: 213. Mark Holden is currently (2018) touring his show, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, a reference to his circus background, borrowing the famous Barnum and Bailey show description as its title <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=poV8KuuJ1uw> accessed 7/10/2018.

³⁵⁶ *Lord of the Rings* 2001, *Harry Potter* 2001, *Avatar* 2009, *Gladiator* 2000 and *Australia* 2008.

³⁵⁷ See Potts, 2015: 52.

³⁵⁸ These include standard posting of letters, fax machines and land-line telephone communication.

By the 2000s, much had changed in the development of Australian Contemporary Circus. The 1999 first tour of Cirque du Soleil³⁵⁹ had brought a changed perception of circus to a general audience and many local practitioners. In 2001, Baz Luhrmann's film, *Moulin Rouge* brought 19th century *Nouveau Cirque*³⁶⁰ and *burlesque* to wide attention. Also in 2001, the first graduates of the National Institute of Circus Arts (NICA) Pilot Project emerged and NICA continued to grow in the following years. Brisbane's influential Rock 'n' Roll Circus changed its name to Circa³⁶¹ in 2004, and in 2005 the video-sharing website YouTube was created, meaning that circus practitioners could now study the work of performances across the world more easily.³⁶² In 2006, Reg Bolton unexpectedly died. During the decade, flying trapeze as recreation boomed in Australia through companies like Quasar³⁶³ and Sydney Trapeze School³⁶⁴, and circus skills became increasingly integrated into education and community programmes. The renowned Gravity and Other Myths³⁶⁵ was formed in Adelaide by Cirkidz graduates in 2009 and in 2008, Circus Oz celebrated its 30th birthday.³⁶⁶

³⁵⁹ In 1999, Canadian company Cirque du Soleil had their first Asian Pacific tour which included visiting and performing in Australia for the first time in its history and their arrival brought with it a different way of looking at the circus with its higher focus on story and large scale production that was unlike Australian Contemporary Circus at the time. See also Footnote 301 and Appendix 2 for an image of the 1999 show programme.

³⁶⁰ Simon, 2014: 48, 61.

³⁶¹ www.circa.org.au accessed 29/9/2018.

³⁶² Prior to this, skill sharing and development involved word of mouth, books, magazines and VHS tapes often passed around within the community.

³⁶³ Now called Circus Arts <https://www.circusarts.com.au> accessed 28/9/2018.

³⁶⁴ Founded in Sydney in 2008 by twin brothers Frank and Rob Taylor with the author

<https://secure.sydneytrapezeschool.com/indexUser.html> accessed 28/9/2018.

³⁶⁵ <http://www.gravityandothermyths.com.au/the-company/> accessed 7/10/2018. Gravity and Other Myths was formed by former Cirkidz Performing Troupe members, Triton Tunis-Mitchell, Lachlan Binns, Jascha Boyce, Martin Schreiber, Jacob Randell, Tilda Cobham-Hervey and Brie Henwood, shortly after joined by Musician Elliot Zoerner. Personal communication with Triton Tunis-Mitchell, 2/10/2018.

³⁶⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixFJAi8R3Ng> accessed 28/9/2018.

JOEL SALOM



Fig. 19. Joel Salom, 7th May, 2018
Photo: Jesse Jensen-Kohl

...the combination of interaction, comedy and physical skill, I just love it so much!³⁶⁷

Joel Salom³⁶⁸ was interviewed in the Sawtooth Room, Circus Oz, Collingwood, Melbourne on 7th May, 2018. Salom's performance style is a mix of comedy, play and cutting satire, with a modern, edgy twist on vaudeville. Salom's main discipline is juggling³⁶⁹ but his repertoire covers a variety of circus disciplines including flying trapeze, acrobatics, mime, movement, puppeteering and clowning. Salom has a particular interest in percussive juggling, and his performance style is musically driven, comedic and fluid. He is generally known for his remote-controlled Erik the Dog act³⁷⁰ and inventing JAMIDI,³⁷¹ a juggling musical device. He is Tour Manager for Kitty Flanagan³⁷² and regularly performs in her stand-up comedy show, which is currently on tour around Australia. Salom first performed with Circus Oz in 2002 and has performed internationally for over thirty years, including at Edinburgh Fringe Festival,³⁷³ Teatro Zinzanni,³⁷⁴ San Francisco and New York. I first met Salom in Adelaide in 2004, where he became one of my juggling role-models.

³⁶⁷ Salom, 2018.

³⁶⁸ <https://www.joelsalom.com> accessed 28/9/2018.

³⁶⁹ As well as other forms of object manipulation.

³⁷⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kb2IX5wBwdI> accessed 7/10/2018.

³⁷¹ JAMIDI is an electronic pressure activated musical juggling instrument and stands for Juggling Activated Musical Instrument Digital Interface.

³⁷² Kitty Flanagan is an Australian stand-up comic and writer who performs regularly on television, including currently the *Weekly with Charlie Pickering* (ABC). and *Have You Been Paying Attention* (Channel 10). <http://www.kittyflanigan.com> accessed 28/9/2018.

³⁷³ <https://www.edfringe.com> accessed 28/9/2018.

³⁷⁴ Teatro Zinzanni is a spiegel tent based show <https://zinzanni.com/seattle/> accessed 28/9/2018. Spiegel tents originated in the 1890s and a number around the world are still extant, including at Circus Oz which owns the Melba Spiegel tent <https://www.circusoz.com/the-spiegeltent/about-the-melba-spiegeltent.html> accessed 28/9/2018.

Lived Experience

Salom grew up on a dairy farm in Western Australia and had a natural inclination to physical activity. In the early 1990s, he attended regular weekend circus classes taught by Reg Bolton.³⁷⁵ At school³⁷⁶ Salom wrote a curriculum for a weekly circus class, which attracted interest from other students, which became a “school circus”. Salom found that circus satisfied his need for physical activity, “when I started the school circus we got into mini-tramps and, you know, jumping on crash mats and stilt walking and just having that physical expression I suppose”.

Salom used his circus skills to start performing on the street with Bolton’s son Joe,³⁷⁷ learning to engage with an audience physically and verbally, “I remember working with Joe Bolton on the street and he’s going, ‘just do some stuff and just start talking to people to start the show’... it’s such a frightening, frightening skill to be a talker. But God I’m just so glad I persevered with it”.

Salom left Western Australia and moved to Hobart, Tasmania, where he continued street performance.³⁷⁸ Tony Rooke, who had just started the Tasmanian Circus Festival,³⁷⁹ invited him to the next festival where Salom connected with performers from across Australia. He began travelling around Australia and overseas, performing in street shows, theatres and at festivals, and soon became aware that this lifestyle had the potential to be a career, “I went to Europe and hooked up with all these performers there and they got me Glastonbury and they got me Winchester Hat Festival³⁸⁰ and all these other festivals, and all of a sudden that was a point I reckon, I went, ‘Oh shit, this is a career! This is actually an industry’ ”.

Salom’s first experience with Circus Oz was in the mid 1990s when he witnessed the company’s high production level, “I remember seeing Circus Oz in Sydney and just going, ‘Ahh! God, performing on *that* stage with that level of production, you know, that’s the enticing

³⁷⁵ See also Chapter Four, Fyfe’s Lived Experience.

³⁷⁶ Salom attended a Montessori school.

³⁷⁷ Joe Bolton currently runs Suitcase Circus in Perth, Australia, which he took over from his father when Reg Bolton died in 2006. Mel Fyfe (see Chapter Four, Fyfe’s Lived Experience) performed with Joe Bolton in the Western Australian production of *Barnum the Musical*. <http://www.suitcasecircus.com/about-us/joe-bolton> accessed 28/9/2018.

³⁷⁸ Salom says that he left school early (because he saw that he could make “good coin” from his circus skill) and he is the only one in this group of practitioners to do so. He said, “I remember knowing people who were 19 and working in the bank for \$4 an hour and going ‘F-ckin’ 25 bucks an hour?! There’s no turning back!’”. Salom, 2018.

³⁷⁹ See Chapter Four, The Decade.

³⁸⁰ <https://hatfair.co.uk> accessed 28/9/2018.

element". However, he was not interested in joining the company, because he could make a better income as a successful street performer. He joined the ensemble in 2002, "Mike Finch...³⁸¹ offered me contracts for maybe four years before I said yes... I *loved* Mike and he first saw me in Adelaide when he was with Circus Monoxide³⁸² and I just always got such a good vibe from him...". Salom reports that it "all just kind of lined up" and he worked with Circus Oz until 2004. Salom is currently Chairman of Spaghetti Circus,³⁸³ the proprietor, operator and developer of Chuka Chuks³⁸⁴ and he continues his international solo career.

Motivations

There are five Key Motivations for Salom's decision to practice the circus medium: **Diversity of Media, Communication, Expression, Challenge and Limitlessness.**

Communication

Salom thrives on direct feedback from his audience. As a "comedic juggler", the response from the audience is what drives him, constantly searching for 'bigger and better laughs'. This rapport with his audience is both hard-won and essential for him personally³⁸⁵ and for the success of his shows. Throughout the interview, Salom relayed many stories about his enjoyment of communication and connection with an audience. Personally quite reserved, it is apparent that audience interaction is especially reinforcing for him, and that performance allows him to communicate more effectively. He says that on the streets of Brisbane, he learnt to play with a crowd,³⁸⁶ not merely attract them, and developed an audience interaction that is genuine and essential to his performance, "that interaction, oh it's just like, it's the, greatest, it's the *greatest* thrill".

³⁸¹ Artistic Director, Circus Oz 1997-2015, see Chapter Four, Finch.

³⁸² At Adelaide Fringe Festival 1996 http://fringevault.com.au/mini_sites/1996 (accessed 28/9/2018) Circus Monoxide was performing their show in Rymill Park.

³⁸³ A long-running major Australian youth circus school in Northern NSW and co-host of the Mullum Circus Festival <http://www.spaghetticircus.com> accessed 28/9/2018.

³⁸⁴ <https://chukachuks.com> accessed 28/9/2018.

³⁸⁵ In his interview, Salom emphasized how difficult it has been for him to learn to speak and interact with an audience.

³⁸⁶ 'Crowd' tends to be more commonly used among street performers and buskers than 'audience' because the nature of their performance genre means that they have to attract or 'pull' a crowd for their performance to be successful artistically and also financially. To do this, street performers and buskers use a variety of devices, such as laying a rope in a ring on the ground to create an imaginary performance stage, blowing a whistle, playing loud music or calling out and joking with passers-by while they set up their equipment and so forth. These 'tricks of the trade' are taken for granted among them and are passed around between them. Both busking and street performance require considerable personal confidence, bravado and showmanship.

Expression

Salom's artistic expression is based on his physicality. In circus he has found a continual means of artistic expression and sees the results of his work reflected in the responses of his audiences. Comedy acts like his Club Juggling act express complex symbolism and cultural meaning addressing subjects like vulnerability, social hierarchy, the meaning of masculinity and anti-establishmentarianism.³⁸⁷ With his Erik the Dog alter-ego, he uses traditional subjects and devices of traditional clowning and puppetry, mixing them with a futuristic, existentialist and dualistic contradiction and menace.³⁸⁸ This complexity is achieved through apparently simple devices. Salom uses his great comic ability and physical skill to express himself through his medium, "And I certainly can't express myself in that capacity in any other form".

Challenge

Salom is motivated by challenge, creatively, personally and physically and believes that "failing" is part of learning. As a circus practitioner, Salom creates his own props and equipment including JAMIDI, Erik the Dog and Chuka Chuks and he repeatedly spoke about the perseverance and satisfaction of bringing projects to fruition.³⁸⁹ Throughout the interview, he asserted that hard work and persistence are key for his practice, particularly street performance, "the street is just such a harsh teacher, where if you're not good, people are going to just keep walking and you're just going to cry, again! I mean its *soul* destroying as well. But then once you crack it's like *anything* can happen and you just roll with the punches, and that's just a skill that helps you in every part of your life". In every area of his circus practice, Salom is driven by challenge and circus provides him with constant endeavour, making challenge a Key Motivation for him.

³⁸⁷ "men are taken so seriously... this is like (his act) messing with the system". Salom, 2018. For an example of this act see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vh9FEiSe6Nl> accessed 28/9/2018.

³⁸⁸ <http://archive.circusoz.com/clips/view/46788> accessed 7/10/2018.

³⁸⁹ And also to market, in the case of Chuka Chuks.

Diversity of Media

Because Salom is so driven by challenge, the diverse disciplines and media of circus suit him well and provide him with a way to combine his various physical, mental and artistic skills.³⁹⁰ The challenge of combining unusual materials, the ability to rework traditional forms of entertainment, his comic ability and his high-level skills, provide expansive potential for his artistic expression, “the combination of interaction, comedy and physical skill - I just love it so much”. Salom explains that no other medium provides him with the ability to combine these elements together artistically making his drive to use a diverse range of media a Key Motivation.

Limitlessness

Throughout Salom’s interview, he makes it clear that with his love of challenge, communication and performance, he is especially attracted to the limitless possibilities of circus. His use of diverse media in his practice, his insistence on constantly “tweaking” his acts to achieve perfection³⁹¹, his delight in the unusual and its surprising effect on the audience, and his constant drive to develop new ideas, methods, performances and materials, with his combination of performance genres in his work, show very clearly that his attraction to the limitlessness of the circus medium is a Key Motivation for his choice and why he says, “it just made so much sense to me”.

Synopsis

Salom chose circus as his primary artistic medium because it provided him with a form of direct communication between himself and his audience that allows physical and creative expression with an unlimited range of diverse media.

³⁹⁰ In his performance acts, Salom combines juggling, stand-up comedy, music, vaudeville, movement, puppetry and subtle political underpinning and reference. He designs his own costumes and make-up, makes his own props, of which Erik the Dog is a good exemplar of the work and diversity of ideas, materials and skills that made up its development and production. This is all done by Salom himself, writes and develops his own material and devises musical accompaniment and integration.

³⁹¹ In “tweaking” his acts, Salom says he makes conscious reference to the methods of vaudevillians who constantly crafted their acts aiming to produce flawless delivery.

LUKE TAYLOR



Fig. 20. Luke Taylor, 19th April, 2018
Photo: Jesse Jensen-Kohl

...as an artist... you can be a lyrical circus performer, you can be someone who tells a story within a circus act, or you can just do sweet-arse skills...³⁹²

Luke Taylor³⁹³ was interviewed in The Big Meeting Room at Circus Oz, Collingwood, Melbourne on 19th April, 2018. Taylor is a juggler and an acrobat specialising in group acrobatics like human pyramids, pitching³⁹⁴ and bicycle. Taylor has a childlike, joyful performance style, which exudes a sense of innocence and straightforwardness on stage, presenting his high-level skill mixed with humour and slapstick comedy. Taylor attended FFFC and NICA. His work has included touring with Lunar Circus,³⁹⁵ working as a Circus Oz ensemble member and he is currently a member of the international performance troupe, The Chipolatas.³⁹⁶ I first saw Luke perform in the *Circus Oz Birthday Bash* in Melbourne, 2008, and was reacquainted in 2017 during rehearsals for Mike Finch's *Captain Hook's Pirate Party* performed at the Sydney Opera House in January, 2018.³⁹⁷ We think we might have met as teenagers but were 'too cool' to acknowledge each other then.³⁹⁸

³⁹² Taylor, 2018.

³⁹³ <http://archive.circusoz.com/clips/view/56065> accessed 28/9/2018.

³⁹⁴ See Terms and Definitions, page xii.

³⁹⁵ Lunar Circus, derived from 'Lunartics Circus', is a Western Australian company formed in 1995 by 'Fat Matt' Yates (whose name is obviously derived from the traditional Australian ironic inversion for nicknames like Bluey for red-heads – Matthew Yates is anything but fat) who has performed with Circus Oz <https://lunarcircus.com> ; <http://www.fatmattshow.com/fatt-matt-show/> ; <https://www.carnivalcinema.com.au/pick-net-circus-lunartics-lunar-circus-documentary-2001/> accessed 28/9/2018.

³⁹⁶ <https://chipolatas.com> (accessed 28/9/2018) The Chipolatas were one of the author's early performance inspirations when, as a member of the Cirkidz Performing Troupe, we performed at the same Adelaide Fringe Festival in the late 1990s.

³⁹⁷ *Captain Hook's Pirate Party*, January 2018, directed by Mike Finch, Sydney Opera House <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=VsDL-rHAWNc> accessed 28/9/2018. See also Chapter Four, Finch's Lived Experience.

³⁹⁸ We both suspect we might have met in Adelaide as teenagers when he was touring with the Flying Fruit Fly Circus and I was a member of the Cirkidz Performing Troupe. Our trainers organized a barbeque together for the two children's troupes and we remember the details but not each other.

Lived Experience

As a child, Taylor had some experience in sports and physical activities but was not attracted to competition, feeling more comfortable in group environments with mutual support. He grew up in country Victoria.³⁹⁹ At the age of twelve, Taylor joined FFFC⁴⁰⁰ and after attending the school for a few years he realized that this opportunity⁴⁰¹ was rare,

I thought it was kind of normal. But then, the more you train and (you meet other people), and they are like ‘Nah man, this is like really special, there’s *only* one place in Australia where you can do this’ and then I went, ‘Oh, it’s very unique... and you’re really privileged to be here’.

FFFC provided him with a supportive group environment and this has been foundational to his professional career. Most of his work has been in collaborative form and he rarely performs solo, and the shows he has been involved in were devised by collectives of performers, including those with clearly defined directors.

Following his high school years, after working and traveling with Lunar Circus, Taylor enrolled at NICA where he says he was surprised to find that students without a circus school background did not seem to have the same sense of community support that he and his peers had at FFFC,

when I first got into NICA it was a bunch of gymnasts and dancers and actors, it was all a competitive industry, and I think it was only two other Fruit Flies in it, me and Shane Witt⁴⁰² at the time, and we were like, “You guys are wankers man, like its meant to be a cooperative team effort thing, we are all after the same goal.”

Taylor first joined Circus Oz after replacing an injured ensemble member in 2006 and was offered a contract with the company in 2008. After leaving Circus Oz in 2012, Taylor now

³⁹⁹ Castlemaine and Wodonga.

⁴⁰⁰ Taylor says that both he and his brother went to FFFC and both joined at the same time.

⁴⁰¹ Including the opportunity to travel and perform as well as the education in circus arts.

⁴⁰² Shane Witt is a former student and trainer at FFFC, an original cast member of The Tom Tom Crew and has been guest trainer and ensemble member of Circus Oz. <https://www.strutnfret.com/artist-production/tom-tom-crew/> ; <https://aussietheatre.com.au/features/crank-it-up-with-shane-witt> accessed 11/10/2018.

performs as an independent artist and with the performing troupe The Chipolatas as well as being involved in Circus Oz programmes like BLAKflip.⁴⁰³

Motivations

For Taylor, there are three Key Motivations: **Communication**, **Community** and **Limitlessness**.

Communication

Taylor says that performance is, “like passing knowledge through watching”. He feels most rewarded when he senses he has connected with his audience, such as hearing from audience members that they were inspired, or hearing that they understood the complexity of an act, “In America they didn’t really understand sarcasm at all... But it wasn’t till we (Circus Oz) got to Princeton and a couple of university students watched it and they came up to us after the show and just went, ‘My god, that was performance art, I have never seen anything like that before!’”. Describing his recent work in *Captain Hook’s Pirate Party*,⁴⁰⁴ much of his emphasis was on communicating with the audience. Taylor found this experience very professionally and personally rewarding. His work for Chipolatas is similarly driven by the company’s strong audience communication and interactive style. Taylor’s experiences reflect the real and genuine communication opportunity that circus provides him.

Community

Throughout the interview, Taylor emphasized the community of people he works with, both currently and in the past. Taylor explained how he and his fellow troupe members bonded as children and still meet regularly, “especially our generation of Fruit Flies, we all stuck

⁴⁰³ See Chapter Four, Finch. Also, for a discussion of this programme see Lavers and Burtt, 2017.

⁴⁰⁴ Taylor animatedly told of his delight at being in costume as the audience was being seated and interacting with them in character, and how he used the opportunity to communicate with people directly, while also deliberately subverting stereotypes. The subversion of stereotypes, such as the portrayal of Captain Hook as female, and the revealing of one male pirate’s secret desire to wear a tutu (achieving both comic and political effect for the young audience) ran throughout the show, which combined innocence, humour and delight with socio-cultural allusions and messages.

together... there's probably eight or nine of us that will get together every now and then... so it's made lifelong friends for sure".⁴⁰⁵

He mentions the importance of community often and refers to it in a number of ways including supporting fellow performers through injury, training and socialising, collaborating artistically and experiencing a circus lifestyle together. This bond and commonality with the circus community is a Key Motivation for Taylor.

Limitlessness

The circus arts have provided Taylor with a sense of freedom, both artistically and in lifestyle. As a form of artistic expression, he says there are no limits to what a performer can express through juggling and other circus disciplines. He believes that circus provides him with endless opportunity for expression and life experiences, "I just recently just did Borneo with The Chipolatas, that was pretty interesting... I'm just about to go to Japan next week as well... yeah, travelling, meeting new people, performing in amazing places...". For Taylor, the opportunity for both limitless performance application and expansive life experiences are Key Motivations for his choice of circus practice.

Synopsis

Taylor is motivated to perform circus because of the supportive community of other practitioners who surround him in the medium. He sees no limitation to the ways he can perform and what can be expressed, and believes his practice provides him with unique life experiences.

⁴⁰⁵ In the interview, Taylor says that the bond between himself and his FFFC cohort, especially with the other jugglers, is so strong that his wife thinks they're "weird".

Conclusion

Both Joel Salom and Luke Taylor have close similarities to each other in many ways. Both began learning circus skills in their early teen years, they chose juggling as their primary discipline and both had longstanding national and international careers before joining Circus Oz. However, both Salom and Taylor also have differences in their experiences and motivations. Unlike Salom, Taylor had considerable formal circus education by attending both the FFFC and NICA.⁴⁰⁶ Salom considered himself a professional from his first paid performance as a teenager, whereas Taylor considered himself a professional circus practitioner only after he was employed at Circus Oz.

The experiences reflected by these practitioners show that by the 2000s, the form of Contemporary Circus appears to have significantly increased in popularity, which is reflected by Salom's ease of finding performance work and Taylor's ability to find a community through the formal circus education which was now available, and standards of circus skills required by Circus Oz had significantly increased. It is clear from this evidence, at least of these two practitioners, that Contemporary Circus was becoming more wide-spread and well established. Neither Salom nor Taylor reported any sense of feeling that the medium was newly formed when they began.



Fig. 21. Photos from Circus Oz archival collection
Left: Joel Salom (detail of show 2005 poster)
Right: Luke Taylor (detail of 2011 show programme)

⁴⁰⁶ Although Salom attended weekend children's classes run by Bolton, and as a teenager himself formed a 'circus school', these are not formalized institutions like FFFC or NICA.

Chapter Six: Party Ghost⁴⁰⁷

2010s

Rob Tannion and Olivia Porter

We take everything and we own that as our genre

Rob Tannion⁴⁰⁸



Fig. 22. Circus Oz, 2017

Programme Cover, Designed by Andrew Ashton and Karen Veiser, author's collection

⁴⁰⁷ *Party Ghost* https://fringeworld.com.au/whats_on/party-ghost-fw2018?venue=623%3A145 (accessed 7/10/2018) is a show devised and performed by Olivia Porter (see below) and Jarred Dewey, who was one of the author's students at Cirkidz. Dewey was a performing troupe member in the same class with the founding members of Gravity and Other Myths, Adelaide. See also Footnote 365.

⁴⁰⁸ Tannion, 2018.

The Decade

Julia Gillard⁴⁰⁹ became the first female Australian Prime Minister in 2010, beginning a decade marked by an unprecedented quick turn-over of Prime Ministers. In America, the first black President, Barack Obama, had been elected in 2009 and his presidency lasted until 2017.⁴¹⁰ After years of campaigning, same-sex marriage was legalized in Australia in 2017 and in 2018 the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras celebrated its 40th anniversary.⁴¹¹

During the decade, social media flourished and for Australians, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter⁴¹² were widely used and continued to reduce Australian isolation.⁴¹³ On television, talent shows like *The Voice*, *X-Factor* and *Australia's Got Talent*⁴¹⁴ and reality shows like *MasterChef* and *Survivor* proliferated⁴¹⁵ while comedic news shows like *The Project*, *The Weekly with Charlie Pickering* and *Have You been Paying Attention?*⁴¹⁶ emerged. A higher profile of Indigenous and other non-white presenters, actors and personalities developed throughout the decade⁴¹⁷ while streaming channels like Stan and Netflix challenged free-to-air TV. *Game of Thrones*⁴¹⁸ attracted world-wide attention, and *Neighbours*⁴¹⁹ and *Home and Away* continued. By this decade, video games had become an accepted pass-time among

⁴⁰⁹ Australian Labor Party. Grattan, 2013: 490-505.

⁴¹⁰ Obama was succeeded by Donald Trump in 2017 and whose election, said to have been the first time that social media, especially Twitter, had played a major role in an American political campaign, confronted and shocked the world.

⁴¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/03/its-going-to-mean-a-lot-more-2018-sydney-mardi-gras-marks-major-milestones> accessed 7/10/2018.

⁴¹² These are three current popular social media platforms. Social media was first made possible by Web 2.0. Potts, 2015.

⁴¹³ This was in addition to cheaper and more wide-spread international flights, cheaper international telephone (via various phone plans) and Skype which had been released in 2003 and was now commonly and freely used.

⁴¹⁴ *The Voice*, Channel 9 <https://www.9now.com.au/the-voice/season-7/extras> (accessed 2/9/2018) *X-Factor*, Channel 7, 2005, 2011-2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oduJ4gW5No> (accessed 2/9/2018) *Australia's Got Talent*, Channel 7, 2007-2012, Channel 9, 2013, 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OI4h7dV1k> (accessed 2/9/2018) A judge on this show, Red Symons, former member of the popular Australian band Skyhooks, was involved with the APG and Pram Factory in the 1970s (Robinson 2001: 20, 93). "I played in a somewhat theatrical band in the back theatre in the early seventies and we were perceived as being satirical. That same band played weeks later in Broadmeadows, in Melbourne's deep west, and we were perceived as being the Skyhooks. The punters didn't seem to feel the same need to deconstruct." Red Symons <https://www.pramfactory.com/memoirsfolder/Symons-Red.html> accessed 2/9/2018.

⁴¹⁵ *MasterChef*, Channel 10, 2009- present <https://tenplay.com.au/channel-ten/masterchef/about> (accessed 7/10/2018) *Survivor*, Channel 10, 2016 – present (revived series) based on American series <https://tenplay.com.au/channel-ten/australian-survivor> accessed 2/9/2018.

⁴¹⁶ *The Project*, Channel 10, is produced by comedian Rove McManus' Roving Enterprises and developed from a segment on *Rove Live* (2000-2009) featuring current presenter Carrie Bickmore reading news ironically <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldVH07LD5TM> The show began as the 7pm Project (2009 – 11) and adjusted its name in 2017. As a presenter Waleed Aly, who replaced Charlie Pickering, provides a high profile positive, intelligent presentation of non-white personalities (an Australian Muslim lawyer, writer and academic. See Aly, 2007a, 2007b, 2008) to popular audiences. *The Weekly With Charlie Pickering*, ABC TV, 2015 – present, features comedian Kitty Flanagan. See Chapter Five, Salom's Lived Experience. Also see Flanagan, 2018; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcQ-mMAfgWE> accessed 5/9/2018. *Have You Been Paying Attention?*, Channel 10, 2013 – present. The series features a changing cast of Australian comics recounting current news and events, and is produced by Working Dog Productions, whose members include a number of Australian comedic actors including Rob Sitch, Jane Kennedy and Tom Gleisner who presents the show, and which was responsible for *Frontline* and *The Dish* <https://tenplay.com.au/channel-ten/have-you-been-paying-attention> accessed 2/9/2018.

⁴¹⁷ For example, Stan Grant, Miriam Corowa, Waleed Aly, Jeremy Fernandez, Karina Carvalho, Deborah Mailman and Elizabeth Warren.

⁴¹⁸ 2011 – present. A fantasy drama based on the book series, *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R.R. Martin. The genre of fantasy, a combination of science fiction and historical fiction situated in alternate worlds, had become popular by the 21st century and its wide popularity is a relatively new phenomenon, and the genre is now widely used in fiction and gaming. Earlier examples include *Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien) *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (C.S. Lewis) *Alice in Wonderland* (Lewis Carroll) and the BBC TV series *Dr. Who* (which situates much of its stories in alternate universes from where its protagonist derives, although it uses Earth as its centre point) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5gsVRxzzl4> accessed 2/9/2018.

⁴¹⁹ *Neighbours* continues to reflect current social topics in its story-lines, in which as this thesis is written, a same-sex marriage is a current major theme <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRfuP6eaHyA> accessed 7/10/2018.

adults⁴²⁰ and became increasingly interactive and sophisticated, and ‘Gaming’ became an area of scholastic investigation.⁴²¹ The decade saw a marked popularity of super-hero films like *The Avengers* in 2012 and *Suicide Squad* in 2016, and *The Greatest Showman*⁴²² was released in 2017. In theatre, musicals enjoyed a growing revival,⁴²³ and a number of shows appeared including Australian productions, *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*⁴²⁴ and *Muriel’s Wedding*.⁴²⁵ In 2018, the 1968 Absurdist play *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* resurfaced, bringing slapstick to the stage of Sydney Opera House.⁴²⁶

In circus, during the decade, Australia lost a number of people who had been important to the development of Contemporary Circus, including Gough Whitlam and his adversary Malcolm

⁴²⁰ As well as children.

⁴²¹ See Penix-Tadsen, 2013.

⁴²² *The Greatest Showman* starring Australian actor Hugh Jackman, which is based on the life of American circus showman, P.T. Barnum who was responsible for much of the popularization and development of American circus, including introducing the three ring circus and side and ‘freak’ shows. He combined with Bailey to produce the self-described ‘Greatest Show on Earth’. Davis, 2002; Simon, 2014; Saxon, 2016. Unlike the earlier depictions of the circus entrepreneur, *The Greatest Showman* brings a joyful perspective of one of the leaders in the early development of Modern Circus as well as bringing the circus to a young and contemporary film audience although it is of course a highly romanticized interpretation.

⁴²³ Australian Baz Luhrmann’s 2001 *Moulin Rouge* set in Paris at the turn of the 20th century, used a format similar to 1940s and 50s popular musicals, combining popular music with the narrative. The film spoofed the musical genre in many ways, and yet it seems to have played a considerable role in revitalising the musical genre, in film and especially on stage. The ongoing popularity of the cult-classic *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, originally a stage show and popularized by the 1975 film starring Tim Curry and Susan Sarandon, may also have played a significant part in the revitalisation of musical theatre. This re-use and re-interpretation of older theatrical media is similar to the revitalisation of the medium of circus that began in the 1970s resulting in Contemporary Circus.

⁴²⁴ The 2009 musical was written and produced by Stephan Elliott and is a theatrical adaptation of the 1994 film, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, also by Elliot. The show continues to tour internationally and in Australia. The film and later musical are likely to have had an influence on Queensland circus/physical theatre company Briefs Factory in both style and content <https://priscillathemusical.com.au> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UB7btinDuLs> accessed 2/9/2018.

⁴²⁵ 2017 <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/programs/making-muriel/> accessed 2/9/2018.

⁴²⁶ *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* by Italian experimental and political playwright and director, Dario Fo was first performed in Australia at the experimental Nimrod Theatre in 1981 (<https://www.ausstage.edu.au/pages/event/6242> accessed 2/9/2018). Dario Fo, who was in part influenced by the traditions of street theatre (Mazzilli, 2016), was part of an international counter-culture theatrical movement interested in experimental theatre and political expression that included the Australian APG and American San Francisco Mime Troupe, both of whom spawned Contemporary Circus companies: Circus Oz, Australia and Pickle Family Circus, USA (Mullett, 2005; Lorant and Carroll, 1986) The play juxtaposes police corruption and brutality with outrageous comic scenarios and lines, and highlights systemic madness. The theme is echoed in APG playwright, David Williamson’s *The Removalists*, first performed in 1971 at La Mama (<https://www.ausstage.edu.au/pages/work/2132> accessed 2/9/2018), however Williamson uses stark realism and Australian vernacular to expose police violence compared to Fo, who uses the Absurdist genre. Theatrical Absurdism, a kind of existentialist questioning, of which *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, 1953, is a good example, and which developed mainly following WWII, (Esslin, 1969) was an important artistic influence in the Circus Oz style, and much of the experimental work at the APG was in the Absurdist genre, such as *Dimboola* by Hibberd, 1969, *The Hills Family Show* by ensemble, 1975 and *Mary Shelley and the Monsters* by Robertson, 1975 (Roberson 2001; Wolf 2008: <https://www.pramfactory.com/chrono.html> accessed 2/9/2018) and Soapbox Circus and therefore Circus Oz developed from this tradition. The 2018 Sydney Theatre Company production features an all women cast, which in Brechtian (Bertolt Brecht) style produces audience objectivity to recognize archetypes and see the political point. In 2018, it also questions and highlights gender stereotypes, behaviours and motivations. The production features slapstick and physical comedy by former Circus Oz Artistic Director, Mike Finch. See also Chapter Four, Finch’s Experience.

Fraser,⁴²⁷ Martin Sharp,⁴²⁸ John Pinder,⁴²⁹ Derek Ives⁴³⁰ and Frank Ford,⁴³¹ and in 2018 a fire destroyed the Melbourne La Mama theatre, birthplace of the APG⁴³². Between 2010-2018, a number of significant scholastic circus publications were released, including *Circus: The Australian Story*⁴³³, *The FitzGerald Brothers' Circus*⁴³⁴ and the *Routledge Circus Studies Reader*.⁴³⁵ At Circus Oz, long-time Artistic Director Mike Finch⁴³⁶ stepped down in 2015 and Rob Tannion led it towards its 40th birthday celebration with the production *Precarious*⁴³⁷ in 2018.

⁴²⁷ Gough Whitlam (Australian Labor Party) was replaced by Malcom Fraser (Australian Liberal Party) in a political and social uproar in 1975. Whitlam died 2014 and Malcolm Fraser died 2015. Both leaders played a major role in the social environments of their time and the events surrounding the sacking of Whitlam rallied the young generation to response and action, including members of the APG and Soapbox Circus (Clarke, 1989; Clark, 1995; Tink, 2014; Morgan, 2017).

⁴²⁸ Martin Sharp died in 2013. He was responsible for the design of the early iconic posters and programmes of Circus Oz and a key identity in Australia's youth culture movement of the 1960s and 1970s. He was a member of the team who produced the counter-culture magazine *Oz Magazine* in Sydney and London. Morgan, 2017; Tarling, 2016, 2017. See also Appendix 2; Footnote 146.

⁴²⁹ John Pinder, (see Chapter Two, Laurie's Lived Experience) founder of the Last Laugh Theatre Restaurant, died in 2015 <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/rnafternoons/remembering-the-late-john-pinder/6504518> accessed 7/10/2018.

⁴³⁰ Derek Ives who was associated with the founding of Rock 'n' Roll Circus in Queensland and attended the Nanjing Project 1 (see Appendix 3), died in 2016. Bailey, 2016; <https://www.carnivalcinema.com.au/carnival-cinema-archives-derek-ives-bucket-love-2007/> accessed 11/10/2018.

⁴³¹ Frank Ford died on 27th September, 2018 during the final writing of this thesis. He was considered the 'father' of the Adelaide Fringe Festival and founded the Adelaide Cabaret Festival in 2001 <https://www.adelaidecabaretfestival.com.au/about/history/> accessed 29/9/2018.

⁴³² La Mama was also consequently 'grandparent' of Circus Oz, which was formed and funded by the APG, see Chapter Two <http://lamama.com.au> accessed 29/9/2018; Broadway, 1999; Robertson, 2001; Mullett, 2005; Wolf, 2008.

⁴³³ St Leon, 2011.

⁴³⁴ Arrighi, 2015.

⁴³⁵ Tait and Lavers, 2016b.

⁴³⁶ See Chapter Four.

⁴³⁷ *Precarious* is the name of one of the latest Circus Oz productions. It is interesting and poetic, although co-incidental, that the production has the same name as former Artistic Director Mike Finch's first performance company. The show had various working titles including *Stumped* and *Unearthed* before they chose *Precarious*. Personal correspondence with author 10/9/2018. See also Chapter Four, The Decade and Finch's Lived Experience.

ROB TANNION



Fig. 23. Rob Tannion, 19th April, 2018
Photo: Jesse Jensen-Kohl

*...to be on a visceral journey...*⁴³⁸

Rob Tannion⁴³⁹ was interviewed in the Small Meeting Room at Circus Oz, Collingwood Melbourne on 19th April, 2018. Tannion is a director of circus with a background in dance and physical theatre. He has a clean, pure and sophisticated style in his productions and in his own performance. Tannion's work communicates narrative and emotion through physical movement, and mixes a wide variety of media such as music, dance, lighting, circus apparatus and text. Originally a dancer, Tannion has had an international career and has worked with companies such as DV8 and for Teatro Circo Price⁴⁴⁰ and is also co-founder of the physical theatre company, Stan Won't Dance.⁴⁴¹ In 2016, Circus Oz appointed Tannion Artistic Director and Co-CEO of the company, which is the role he currently plays. I first met Tannion at his Welcome to Circus Oz party in 2016.

⁴³⁸ Tannion, 2018.

⁴³⁹ <http://robtannion.wixsite.com/tannion> ; <http://robtannion.wixsite.com/tannion/video-reel> accessed 29/9/2018.

⁴⁴⁰ <https://www.teatrocircoprice.es> accessed 29/9/2018.

⁴⁴¹ <https://vimeo.com/12245838> ; <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2010/mar/10/stan-wont-dance-review> accessed 29/9/2018.

Lived Experience

Tannion began his performing career by studying dance at Queensland University of Technology (QUT)⁴⁴² having always felt “driven” by physical activities like athletics, gymnastics and other sports.⁴⁴³ He left Australia soon after graduation to relocate to Europe where he reports that he first encountered circus arts, “my first *contact* with circus was working with DV8 Physical Theatre⁴⁴⁴ where we all had to learn *corde lisse*...⁴⁴⁵ I thought it was the hardest and most painful thing I’d ever experienced”. He worked as a dancer and choreographer for many years, but felt that he would be a performance director and made a conscious decision to gain experience first.

He says he began feeling “jaded with dance and physical theatre” and identifies two events that led him to circus, his involvement in a Creative Lab Project,⁴⁴⁶ and in the musical production of *Lord of the Rings*.⁴⁴⁷ His exposure to circus in both these projects changed his perspective “I felt like I discovered... performers who not only had an incredibly high set of skills... but they were multi-skilled... I felt like there was a *richness*” that he feels other performers⁴⁴⁸ did not possess, “but there was also a *hunger*, and I think this a key thing for me, there was a hunger from the circus performers to soak up any new information”. Tannion considers that both these experiences were “instrumental” in his choice to adopt circus as his artistic medium.

Tannion reports that his exposure to circus through his work increasingly led to his specialisation in it. His productions include the re-opening of the South Bank Centre⁴⁴⁹ in London, circus projects in South America and major productions for the Teatro Circo Price.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴² Tannion originally studied in the Physical Education Department, before deciding to specialize in Dance and he says that others studying in his year were Gavin Robins, formerly Legs on the Wall and currently Head of Movement, NIDA <https://www.nida.edu.au/courses/undergraduate/our-teachers/teaching-staff/gavin-robbins> accessed 7/10/2018, and Wesley Enoch, currently Artistic Director, Sydney Festival <https://www.afr.com/lifestyle/arts-and-entertainment/theatre-and-dance/why-wesley-enocho-doesnt-mind-if-you-loathe-his-sydney-festival-20180116-h0j9as> accessed 7/10/2018. Tannion, 2018.

⁴⁴³ These were activities like athletics, gymnastics and other sports although he never had the opportunity to pursue them to a high level, because his family moved many times. During his school years, he encountered dance through the schools Rock Eisteddford Challenge.

⁴⁴⁴ <https://www.dv8.co.uk> accessed 23/9/2018.

⁴⁴⁵ See Terms and Definitions, page xii.

⁴⁴⁶ For which he was invited to mentor performers as a choreographer. Organized by Circomedia.

⁴⁴⁷ Tannion says that *Lord of the Rings* was a large-scale production with a budget of 30 million dollars, and a cast that included ten performers who were circus practitioners, and Tannion reports that as part of his role he conducted workshops as part of the auditioning process that included working along-side a circus trained practitioner, Australian Alex Frith, also a trained dancer.

⁴⁴⁸ Performers such as dancers or actors. He said, “Dancers only dance”.

⁴⁴⁹ <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk> accessed 23/9/2018. Tannion says, “Liam Steel and I had a company called Stan Won’t Dance and we were Artists in Residence at the South Bank in London for about three years. Our swan-song to finish our Artists in Residence coincided with the re-opening of the South Bank Centre, so we did a big public performance with 110 performers which included the entire graduating year of what was then called the Circus Space which is now the National Circus School in the UK”. Tannion, 2018.

⁴⁵⁰ At Teatro Circo Price, Tannion devised and directed a variety of productions and says of the space, “the 1,600 seat purpose-built circus theatre right in the heart of Madrid. It’s very, very beautiful. It only just re-opened in 2007. It existed for many, many years in its old

He describes his first production for Teatro Circo Price as “a baptism by fire” since it was the first time he had directed an entire cast of circus performers and says that the adjustment to the medium was difficult and sometimes fraught. He says he initially approached the work like dance, “In hindsight, I probably would have killed someone if they (the performers) hadn’t been so flexible with me”.⁴⁵¹ By 2008 he says he considered himself a director of circus and had “found a new calling”.

In 2016, Tannion was appointed as the new Artistic Director and Co-CEO of Circus Oz.⁴⁵² Since his appointment, he has led the production of *Model Citizens*,⁴⁵³ a surrealist exploration of Australian identity and individuality and *Precarious*,⁴⁵⁴ a retro-futurist presentation of bureaucratic disconnection with environmental reality, a production for the 40th anniversary of Circus Oz.

Motivations

Tannion’s five Key Motivations to choose circus as his medium are: **Expression, Diversity of Media, Authenticity, Communication and Limitlessness.**

Expression

Artistic expression is a driving force for Tannion and lies at the centre of his decision to take up the circus medium. He says, “I guess my ethos was I would do work that inspired me... or that I needed to create”. As a child, he says he experimented with different artistic media, “I was always artistic, I was always looking for mediums of expression... I was always looking for

wooden, traditional (state) kind of like a resident circus place in Madrid” <https://www.teatrocircoprice.es/programacion/dirigido-por-rob-tannion> accessed 23/9/2018.

⁴⁵¹ Generally in circus performance when there is live music, it is the role of the musicians to follow the movement of the performers, unlike in dance where usually the dancers follow the cues of the music. This is also discussed in Bouissac, 2018: 30-32.

⁴⁵² He describes his dual responsibilities of being both an executive and creative artist as sometimes conflicting, “I don’t want to say Jeckle and Hyde, I want to say Jeckle and Jeckle - or Hyde and Hyde...” he continues, “So the challenge for me here is finding how do we harness that sense of drive and creativity when... there are time constraints, actually instead of driving towards the deadline actually pull me away from the deadline”. Tannion, 2018. Tannion is making reference to the ‘split personalities’ of Dr. Jeckle and Mr. Hyde in Robert Louis Stevenson’s 1886 novel, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jeckle and Mr. Hyde*.

⁴⁵³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqB0pYeCPpQ> ; <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/model-citizens-review-new-artistic-director-walks-tightrope-between-companys-old-and-new-identities-20170623-gwx8og.html> accessed 29/9/2018.

⁴⁵⁴ *Precarious* deals with environmental issues in a retro-futuristic style, and the title plays on the double meaning of the precariousness of circus performance and the fragility of the environment. It uses humour to highlight the clumsiness, ridiculousness and naivety of bureaucratic measures to date. *Precarious* was directed by Rob Tannion and Kate Fryer. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZHjjOe2Thg> ; <https://www.circusoz.com/news-and-reviews/article/337/review-precarius-the-age.html> accessed 17/9/201.

some creative outlet, I felt like I needed to be *creative*". In circus, Tannion found his most effective form of expression as an artist "why I ended up choosing circus is because it allows a wide variety of expression".

Diversity of Media

Tannion is motivated and inspired by the way circus combines various media. He says, "I could have a song on stage as much as I could have an 'act' on stage, and I could have a moment of theatre..." and he emphasizes how the circus is a "hybrid art form" that is not confined to a single discipline. In addition, he points to diversity of performers as well, saying, "individual bodies and people and looks and shapes are valid, and valued... beyond any other artform".⁴⁵⁵ The ability to combine an endless array of media gives Tannion the artistic freedom to express what he is driven to say artistically, and the fact that circus provides this to him uniquely is a Key Motivation for him. "We take everything and we own that as our genre".

Authenticity

For Tannion, circus is an authentic form. Throughout the interview he returned to the idea of the "realness" of circus, "For me it offers a sense of *realness* in a moment, this ability for the audience to be on a visceral journey with you". This is partly, he says, "because of the real risk that is associated with it... I think circus owns that ability to play with tension". For Tannion, the authenticity of circus is conveyed through its real risk, physicality, shared experience of performers and audience and the ability of the medium to unite and transcend. Tannion exhibits a sophisticated understanding and mastery of the form of circus, and its authenticity is a Key Motivation for his choice to use it.

⁴⁵⁵ This understanding of the use of the variation of the shapes, sizes and look of people themselves as artistic material reflects some of the work of scholars, notably Peta Tate, who discusses the use of bodies as artistic material (Tait 2005). It is also consistent with much performance and installation art, movements primarily begun by the counter-culture in the 1960s and 70s (including Christo and Philippe Petit in their different ways) (<https://www.theartstory.org/movement-performance-art.htm> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Fs1cmYghDs> accessed 7/10/2018) who experimented with the physicality of the body itself as a medium of visual artistic expression, or canvas (Yoko Ono's work is an obvious example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGCKom0bKIk> and the work of Marina Abramovic https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4so_Z9a_u0 accessed 11/10/2018) and the body has traditionally been a favourite subject of visual art. At the formation of Circus Oz, Soapbox Circus (see Chapter Two) had deliberately played with visual juxtaposition in addition to performance and music, and some original members, particularly Mic Conway, were art student students experimenting with visuals in juxtaposition with music and physicality <https://www.pramfactory.com/memoirsfolder/Conway-Mic.html> accessed 5/9/2018.

Limitlessness

Throughout the interview, Tannion referred to the complexity and potential of the medium of circus, which for him is a vehicle for endless artistic possibility and audience experience and communication. His description of discovering the medium implies a revelation, and he constantly describes ways that circus opens up ideas, experiences and possibilities. His directing style involves creating shows that are built on concepts and narrative, which lead to the expanding possibilities his work consistently conveys. Tannion was attracted to the medium of circus because he saw endless, limitless artistic possibility in it, and this was as evident throughout the interview as it is in experiencing his work.

Communication

Tannion is very powerfully driven by what he can communicate through circus, and his conversation was under-pinned by this. Having a clear sense of what he wants to say through art he says, “I’m going to say something with the art instead of just doing it” his work is predicated on communication. Tannion believes that circus provides him with the most effective vehicle for communication.⁴⁵⁶ “I didn’t get into the arts because I *wanted* to get into the arts, I got into the arts because I *had* to say stuff and I *needed* to express myself”. For Tannion, circus provides a unique and powerful form of communication that is a Key Motivation.

Synopsis

Tannion chose circus because he can artistically express himself as a director through a medium that allows him to use a diverse range of media in an authentic performance that creates a “visceral journey” with the performer and audience in unlimited ways.

⁴⁵⁶ He says he also has a sense that the motivation to express and communicate appears to be decreasing among current practitioners, which concerns him, “...I’m surprised that now there is a generation, or generations, of people who have got nothing to say”. Tannion, 2018.

OLIVIA PORTER



Fig. 24. Olivia Porter, 4th April, 2018
Photo: Jesse Jensen-Kohl

Everybody was really inclusive... and I felt like that really created amazing, different bodies of work...⁴⁵⁷

Olivia Porter⁴⁵⁸ was interviewed in the garden of her family's home in Sydney on 4th April, 2018. Porter has performed internationally with numerous shows and companies including Circus Oz, and *La Soirée*⁴⁵⁹ in Denmark. Porter started performing in 2008 in cabaret-style shows in Brisbane, Queensland. Her self-styled juggling technique differs from conventional forms and is not restricted to keeping the balls in the air. Her style is quirky and unique, combining juggling with clowning and movement, and her stage character portrays a sense of awkwardness and a mix of innocence and menace.⁴⁶⁰ In her show, *Party Ghost*, Porter explores psychological concepts such as loss and grief through the confronting juxtaposition of clowning, movement and slapstick comedy which questions feeling of remorse, loss and anger associated with death.⁴⁶¹ I first met Porter at the premiere of the Circus Oz Sydney Season in Moore Park in 2014.

⁴⁵⁷ Porter, 2018.

⁴⁵⁸ <https://www.oliviaporter.net/media/> accessed 7/10/2018.

⁴⁵⁹ <http://www.la-soiree.com> accessed 29/9/2018.

⁴⁶⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xm5uiLTFbT8> accessed 29/9/2018.

⁴⁶¹ In her show *Party Ghost*, with Jarred Dewey and directed by former Circus Oz and Circus Monoxide ensemble member Nicci Wilks, Porter explores psychological concepts such as loss and grief as her character haunts her living partner after death, using the juxtaposition of light hearted play, with clowning, movement and slapstick comedy and brings up deep feeling of remorse, loss and anger associated with death. <https://www.oliviaporter.net> accessed 20/9/2018.

Lived Experience

Porter began her circus practice within an artistically rich environment in Brisbane, Australia.⁴⁶² She began performing soon after attending classes at Circa⁴⁶³ and Vulcana Women's Circus.⁴⁶⁴ The community of performing artists in Brisbane encouraged Porter's artistic development as she learned skills and participated in cabaret-style shows, allowing her to develop her physical and performance techniques, and providing a creative, supportive environment, "(there were) a lot of people around that time generating really good strong work, like obviously Briefs,⁴⁶⁵ and there's Crack Up Sisters...⁴⁶⁶ there's just lots of little shows".

Porter always felt inclined towards creative activities and was also a physically active child. From the age of nine she began competing in soccer and this clearly informs her juggling style, and she enjoyed the combination of the physical activity and social aspect of the sport. She began learning circus skills when she was eighteen after meeting Rockie Stone⁴⁶⁷ at the café where she worked.⁴⁶⁸ Porter says "It was so quick to go from just training and then becoming an emerging performer... I felt like it had a real over-lap of still learning while performing".

Porter began working at Circus Oz in 2014 where she bore witness to some major events within the company, including its transfer to new headquarters⁴⁶⁹ in Collingwood, and the transition of Artistic Directors⁴⁷⁰ from Mike Finch to Rob Tannion. After having a year away from the company to develop her own show, *Party Ghost*, to perform with *La Soirée* and to work with various companies in America, she returned to join the cast of *Model Citizens* under the direction of newly-appointed Rob Tannion. Porter then performed and toured with the show throughout 2017 and is now focusing on her solo career, developing her own work.

⁴⁶² Porter says that at that time "we had a lot of access to different spaces. Some friends of mine, there's also the Hoopla Clique crew ... it was Julian Roberts, Mikey Bailey and Lachy Shelley, and those boys used to do a lot of clowning stuff and then Marianna Joslin, also started working with them and they created a warehouse called Ice-cream Factory that was in West End. Then we had the Brisbane Powerhouse, the Vulcana space and then also had CIRCA...". Hoopla Clique: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6YtDc-UtAE>; Ice-cream Factory: <http://www.westendmagazine.com/ice-cream-factory/>; Brisbane Powerhouse: <https://brisbanepowerhouse.org> accessed 20/9/2018.

⁴⁶³ Previously Rock 'n' Roll Circus www.circa.org.au accessed 29/9/2018. See also Chapter Five, The Decade.

⁴⁶⁴ www.vulcana.org.au accessed 29/9/2018.

⁴⁶⁵ Briefs Factory <https://www.briefsfactory.com> accessed 20/9/2018.

⁴⁶⁶ <https://www.crackupsisters.com> accessed 29/9/2018.

⁴⁶⁷ Rockie Stone, who became a Circus Oz ensemble member https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=za_cEegp1fQ accessed 3/9/2018.

⁴⁶⁸ Even though she was aware of circus arts classes through a school friend who was attending classes at Rock 'n' Roll Circus, the friend told her that she was too old to start circus at the age of 14. Porter, 2018.

⁴⁶⁹ Circus Oz moved from its old premises in Port Melbourne to purpose-designed headquarters in Collingwood, Melbourne in 2014. Price, 2014; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6UwL4r-Tg8>; <http://www.abc.net.au/local/photos/2014/03/28/3973559.htm> accessed 25/9/2018.

⁴⁷⁰ Mike Finch (see Chapter Four) stepped down in 2015 and Tannion began in late 2016. In the interim, Anni Davey (see Chapter Three) was Guest Director for the show *TWENTYSIXTEEN* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o99rQHujpR8> accessed 7/10/2018.

Motivations

There are three Key Motivations for Porter's choice to use circus as her artistic practice: **Expression, Community and Diversity of Media.**

Expression

Porter uses the circus medium to experiment with ways to express herself. She reports that her choice of the medium is, "able to offer me expression because juggling for me is very much the way I express myself". Since she was naturally inclined to physical activities and was a creative child, she now has an ability to combine both of these in the circus medium, "I was really physical and I love being physical, but I was also really creative and I feel like circus has that element that no other kind of discipline does...". Through the use of juggling and the incorporation of various circus and other disciplines, Porter's drive for self-expression is practiced through circus, which allows her to express ideas, experiences⁴⁷¹ and concepts. A strong desire to express herself artistically is a Key Motivation.

Community

For Porter, the community of circus arts performers, in Brisbane and further afield, is a Key Motivation. As an artist, Porter mostly performs solo, however, she is motivated by other Contemporary Circus practitioners and is an active member of the community,

I just think it has a very special community and I think, especially in Australia, that that social and professional aspect of it is something that's really interesting... a really supportive environment that allows people to be pushed or to flourish and grow into really interesting performers and create interesting things and push boundaries.

⁴⁷¹ For example, Porter has performed in burlesque shows with her act that experiments with the genre by subverting the image of being 'sexy' by wearing deliberately unglamorous underwear and she projects a sense of discomforting awkwardness. Circus allows her to combine complex and psychological concerns with the physical expression of them.

Throughout the interview, Porter returned to the importance of being nurtured and challenged artistically in a community of practitioners, citing the Brisbane environment especially, and Australia generally, as a supportive, creatively vibrant circus “scene” and it is clear that the existence of this community, and the inspiration and support it gives her, is a strong motivation for her pursuit of the medium.

Diversity of Media

Porter uses various media to guide her creative process and she uses a variety of sources to create performance such as song lyrics, music, character, or emotions to express on stage. The style of her primary juggling discipline is in itself a combination of media, drawing from traditional ball juggling, soccer, mime, movement and physical theatre, “I really pull in elements of character and movement and I guess dance in a way... I like to play with those kind of different elements and so it’s nice to have this kind of flexibility and freedom within it to kind of pull in the other elements”. Therefore, the use of diverse media in her arts practice allows Porter to comprehensively explore the medium and express herself artistically. Making her attraction to use of diverse media a Key Motivation for her.

Synopsis

Porter chose circus as a means of artistic and physical expression because the medium provides her with the ability to experiment creatively with a diverse range of media. In addition, Porter is motivated by what she believes to be a very supportive Contemporary Circus community in Australia.

Conclusion

From the interviews of Rob Tannion and Olivia Porter there are many differences and some similarities in their experiences and motivations. Tannion's entry into circus was through having an established and well-practiced performing background and Porter significantly developed her performance skills through performance practice. Porter uses the medium to explore and experiment, as way of finding her voice as a performer and Tannion reports that the circus was a medium that allowed him to communicate most authentically what he already wanted to say. Both Tannion and Porter grew up in Queensland, Australia, and also both report that when they began their careers in the medium they were aware of an environment and culture of many other practitioners, groups, companies and teaching institutions⁴⁷² using Contemporary Circus, although Porter found these in Australia and Tannion overseas.

The reports of these two practitioners suggest that by 2010 and the years following, Contemporary Circus had become an established and well-populated form with wide artistic application and an extended community of practitioners. It is worth noting that, like the previous two practitioners, neither Tannion nor Porter made direct mention of political intention to take up their practice, unlike most of the other previous practitioners in this study.⁴⁷³ For both Porter and Tannion, their reported chief concerns and motivations are artistically focused, and although issues like gender and body diversity, essentially socio-political in nature, are addressed,⁴⁷⁴ for them the context seems to be primarily artistic or philosophical.⁴⁷⁵ It is also noteworthy that neither of these practitioners mentioned that they needed to defend their decision to take up circus practice, and I had no sense in their conversations that it had ever occurred to them that they would need to.⁴⁷⁶ Both these

⁴⁷² In Australia and internationally.

⁴⁷³ The practitioner's in Chapters Two, Three and Four all reported political motivations to take up their practice, apart from Davey. Although Davey's Key Motivations for her choice to take up circus does not include Politics it was however clearly a motivation in her choice to take up performance and be involved in political theatre such as Death Defying Theatre's *Coaltown*. She came to circus after having already been heavily involved in political theatre.

⁴⁷⁴ Both artists are clearly well aware of issues like these and incorporate them into their work and ways of thinking.

⁴⁷⁵ There are a number of reasons why this might be so, including less need currently to use circus as a form of political expression, more political awareness in the general population and therefore less need for artists to be politically overt, that these two artists are driven more by personal or conceptual inspiration, or that Contemporary Circus has become less used as a vehicle for political expression or change. The experiences of a sample of two is, of course, not a reliable indicator, but is nevertheless interesting. More work on this needs to be done.

⁴⁷⁶ Some of the other practitioners mentioned concern or disapproval from families or friends about their decision to pursue circus professionally (and certainly I encountered some disapproval from some people myself, though not from my family who were supportive) and it would be interesting and useful to look further into whether the acceptance of circus by the wider community correlates with the growth of Contemporary Circus (which one suspects it must) in further research, and whether social acceptance might be damaging to the circus medium, with its association with risk, danger and outsider status.

practitioners, in this period of time, seem to be artistically and personally free to concentrate on developing the medium, and it might be that, from their perspectives at least, the medium has matured.



Fig. 25. Photos from *Model Citizens* Programme, 2017. Circus Oz archival collection

Left: Rob Tannion

Right: Olivia Porter

Chapter Seven: But Wait... There's More⁴⁷⁷

Results and Discussion

...well I don't know what we thought were doing, but it wasn't that

Robin Laurie⁴⁷⁸

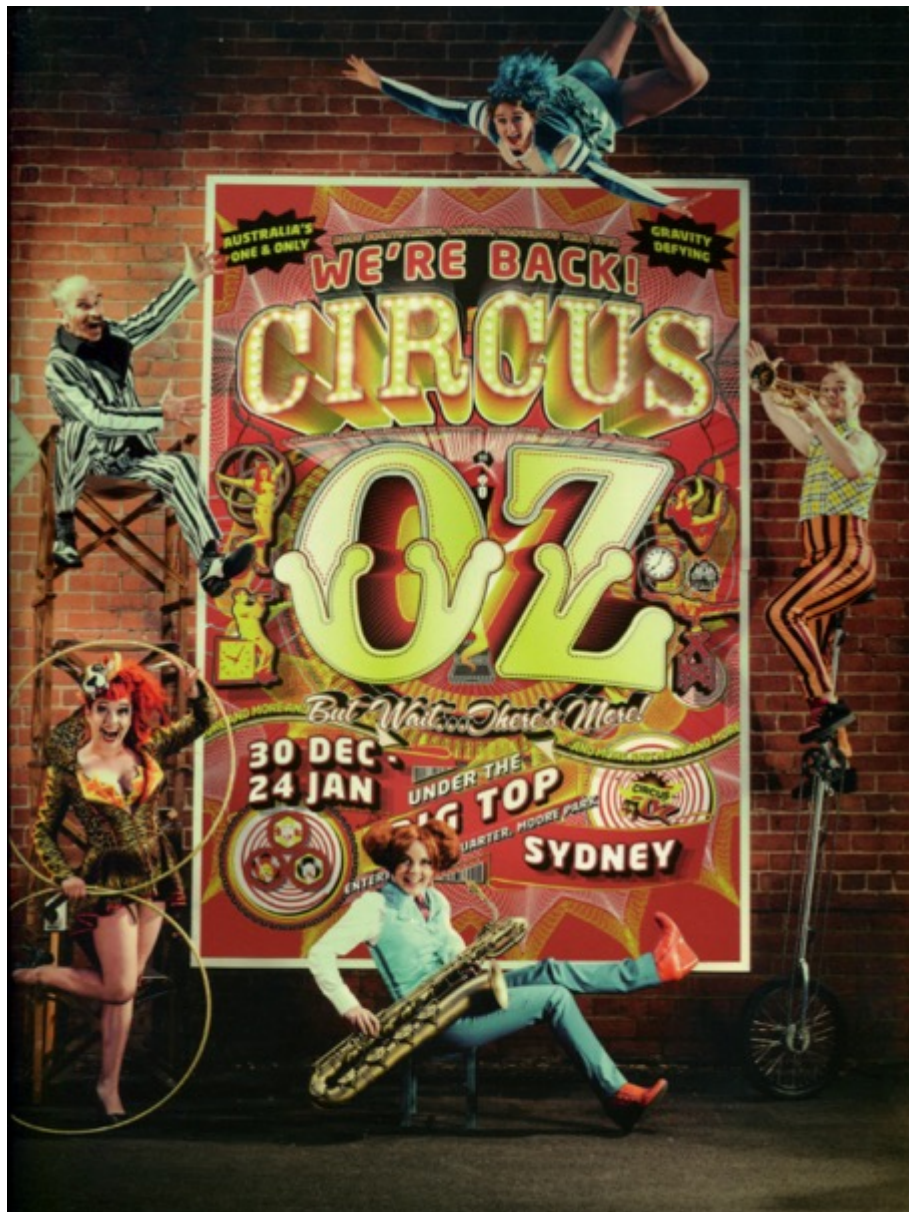


Fig. 26. Circus Oz, 2015
Programme Cover, Designer unknown, author's collection

⁴⁷⁷ *But Wait... There's More* was a Circus Oz production that toured from 2015-2016, and was the last show with Mike Finch as Artistic Director.

⁴⁷⁸ Laurie, 2018.

Results

While a group of ten is not a large enough sample to provide meaningful statistical analysis, nevertheless the material provided by the participants is illuminating and does provide some patterns and interesting connections and information about their lived experiences and motivations for adopting the circus medium. Although the experiences of the participants did not suggest significant patterns, there were ten Key Motivations that were identified by this research.

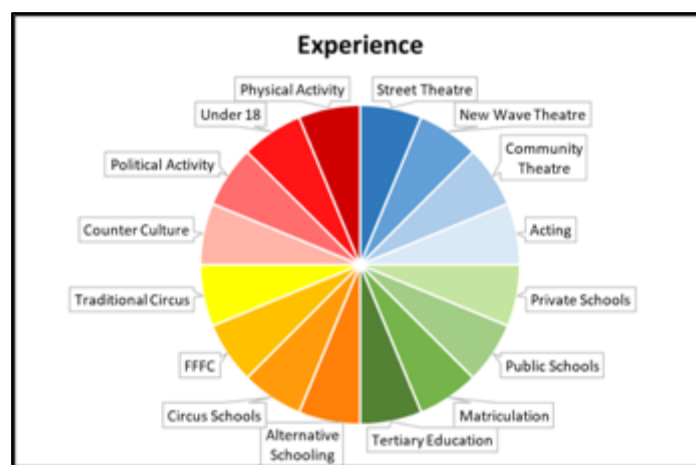


Fig. 27. Experience Pie Chart
Illustrates the range of experiences reported by participants



Fig. 28. Key Motivations Pie Chart
Illustrates the range of Key Motivations identified in this study, arranged in no particular order

Lived Experience

There was a wide range of experiences revealed by this group of practitioners of which some differed and some were shared. There were some over-laps, such as tertiary education, physical activity before circus adoption, involvement in street theatre and matriculation⁴⁷⁹ from high school. Other factors, such as in what states the practitioners originated⁴⁸⁰, whether they were from the city or country and whether they had been exposed to circus as children did not seem to be significant. There did not seem to be any experiential patterns that affected their choices to pursue the circus medium. The most striking consistencies among the participants seemed to be that many reported that they had come upon circus accidentally or naturally,⁴⁸¹ saying, “the circus found me”,⁴⁸² most discovered it after they had graduated from high school, all displayed a deliberate choice of the medium for artistic expression; and an intentional, conscious control over their exercise of it. Many of the experiences reported are indicated in the chart below.⁴⁸³

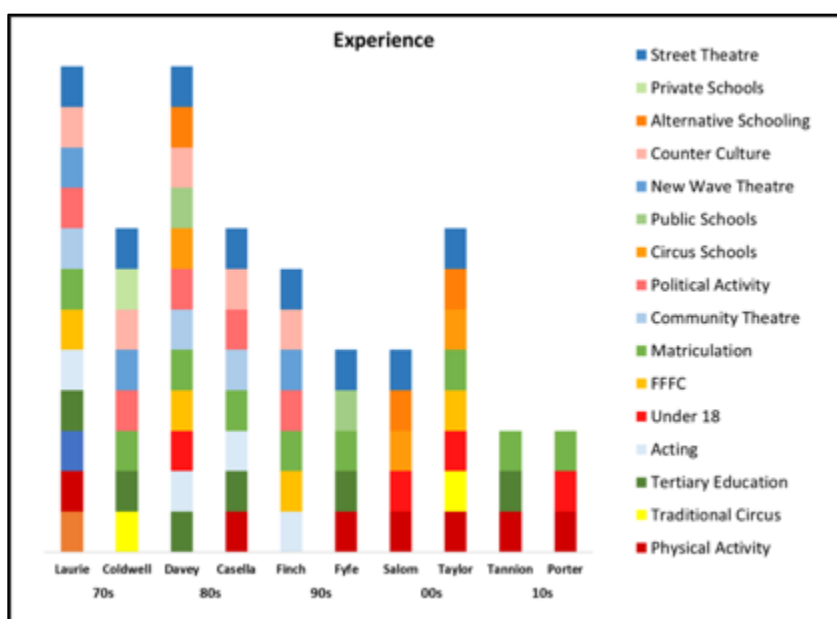


Fig. 29. Experience Column Chart
Illustrates the range of experiences reported by each participant across the decades

⁴⁷⁹ All but one of the practitioners matriculated.

⁴⁸⁰ This was a quite surprising result to me since I had expected that there might be a predominance of practitioners from Victoria, because that is where Circus Oz and NICA are located and were developed.

⁴⁸¹ This is to say that it is a vocation for them.

⁴⁸² Casella, 2018. Four other practitioners echoed this sentiment in very similar words to Casella: Laurie, Salom, Taylor and Porter.

⁴⁸³ Due to the sample size and direction of this study, no statistical conclusions should be drawn from this chart.

Key Motivations

Through the experiences of the practitioners ten Key Motivations were identified: **Communication, Expression, Limitlessness, Authenticity, Politics, Diversity of Media, Community, Challenge, Collaboration** and **Performance Drive**. As discussed in the Introduction, for every practitioner, all their motivations were recorded, and their Key Motivations were identified.⁴⁸⁴ Each of the practitioners reported most, or all, of the ten Key Motivations, however, only those motivations that seemed on analysis to predominate in their individual interviews were determined as Key Motivations and these are shown on the chart below:

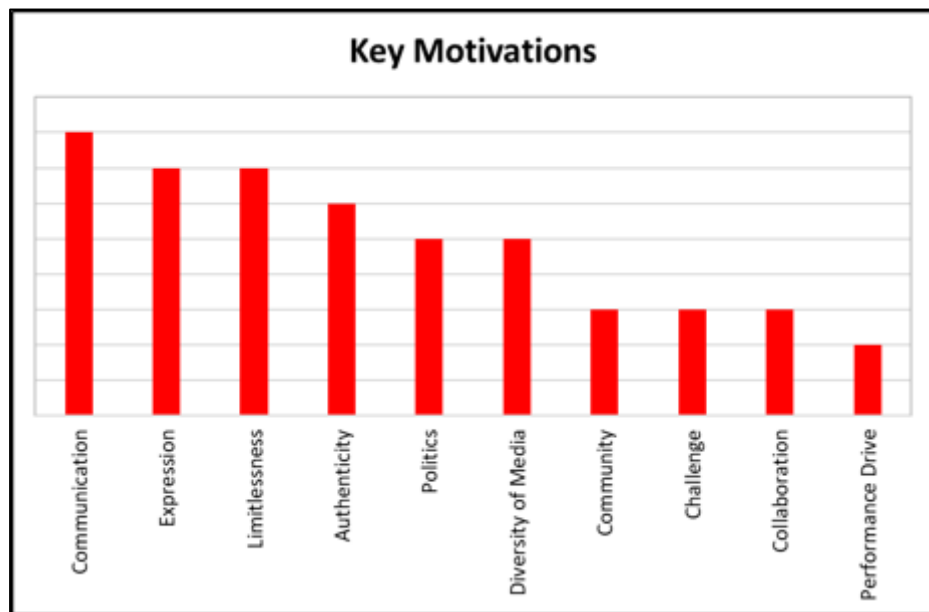


Fig. 30. Key Motivations Column Chart
Illustrates the range of Key Motivations identified by this study, ranked by frequency

⁴⁸⁴ See Chapter One, Method.

KEY MOTIVATIONS	PRACTITIONERS	NO
Communication	Laurie, Coldwell, Davey, Casella, Finch, Salom, Taylor, Tannion	8
Expression	Laurie, Davey, Casella, Fyfe, Salom, Tannion, Porter	7
Limitlessness	Laurie, Coldwell, Casella, Finch, Salom, Taylor, Tannion	7
Authenticity	Laurie, Coldwell, Davey, Casella, Finch, Tannion	6
Politics	Laurie, Coldwell, Casella, Finch, Fyfe	5
Diversity of Media	Coldwell, Finch, Salom, Tannion, Porter	5
Community	Fyfe, Taylor, Porter	3
Challenge	Davey, Fyfe, Salom	3
Collaboration	Coldwell, Davey, Finch	3
Performance Drive	Davey, Fyfe	2

Fig. 31. Key Motivations by Frequency

LAURIE	COLDWELL	DAVEY	CASELLA	FINCH
Communication	Communication	Communication	Communication	Communication
Expression	Limitlessness	Expression	Expression	Limitlessness
Limitlessness	Authenticity	Authenticity	Limitlessness	Authenticity
Authenticity	Politics	Challenge	Authenticity	Politics
Politics	Diversity of Media	Collaboration	Politics	Diversity of Media
	Collaboration	Performance Drive		Collaboration
FYFE	SALOM	TAYLOR	TANNION	PORTER
Expression	Communication	Communication	Communication	Expression
Politics	Expression	Limitlessness	Expression	Diversity of Media
Community	Limitlessness	Community	Limitlessness	Community
Challenge	Diversity of Media		Authenticity	
Performance Drive	Challenge		Diversity of Media	

Fig. 32. Key Motivations by Practitioner

Summary

In this research, a number of results emerged. For example, nine of the ten practitioners matriculated from high school and many have tertiary degrees and of the remainder, some left tertiary education in order to pursue a career in the circus medium. Only two participants emphasized a dominating urge or drive to perform.⁴⁸⁵ From these interviews, it appears that until the late 1990s, the company Circus Oz was focused on general performance ability rather than specific circus skills when employing ensemble members, preferring to nurture and develop individuals. Only one practitioner reported experience with traditional circus.⁴⁸⁶ As would be expected,⁴⁸⁷ nearly all the practitioners reported involvement in some form of physical activity like gymnastics, dance or sport prior to finding circus. The participants derived from a variety of schooling backgrounds⁴⁸⁸ and geographical locations.⁴⁸⁹ The experiences reported by the ten practitioners resulted in the identification of the **ten Key Motivations** across the group that drove their choice to use circus as their artistic medium.

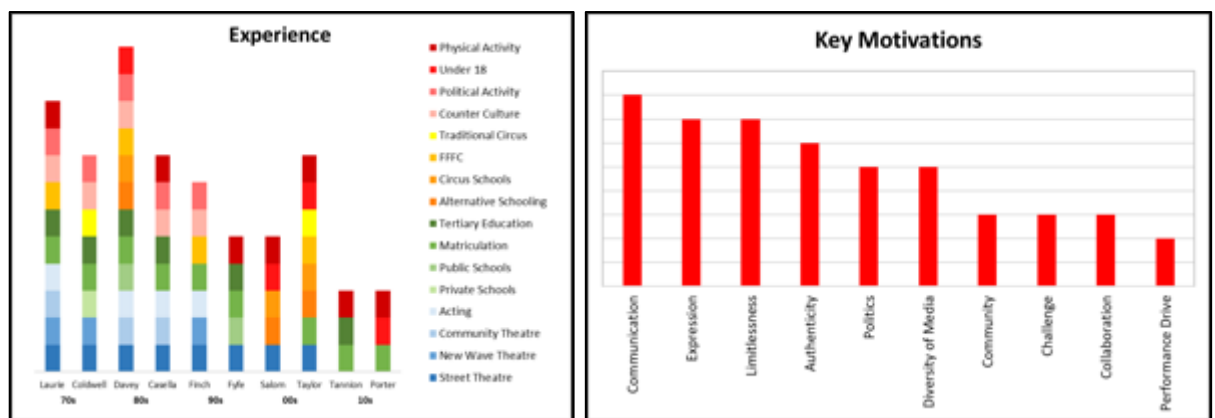


Fig. 33. Comparison Chart Experiences and Key Motivations

⁴⁸⁵ These were Davey and Fyfe. I would have expected that each of the participants would have emphasized this drive as a Key Motivation and clearly from the interviews all of them possessed it to some extent, however only Davey and Fyfe stressed it strongly in their interviews.

⁴⁸⁶ This was Coldwell. See Chapter Two, Coldwell's Lived Experience.

⁴⁸⁷ This is because the participants are all physical performance practitioners.

⁴⁸⁸ Schools attended by the participants included public, private and alternate schools.

⁴⁸⁹ Participants were brought up in urban and rural locations in a broad spread of Australian states.

Discussion

Common Themes and Links

Throughout this investigation, there were a number of common themes and links that recurred across the interviews, including those briefly addressed below:

People

In the various interviews mention of a number of people recurred: Stephen Burton was mentioned by Davey and Fyfe. Circus Oz founder Mike Price was mentioned by Laurie and Davey,⁴⁹⁰ Linda Mickleborough was discussed by Davey and Finch,⁴⁹¹ and Derek Ives was mentioned by Casella, Fyfe and Finch.⁴⁹² Both Fyfe and Salom said Reg Bolton was instrumental in their discovery of circus⁴⁹³ and Sue Broadway, a founding member of Circus Oz and member of New Ensemble Circus was mentioned by Laurie and Davey.⁴⁹⁴

Intention

Although many of the practitioners reported that their initial discovery of circus arts was fortuitous⁴⁹⁵ or accidental, they all nonetheless displayed a strong sense of intention in choosing to use and pursue circus as an artistic medium and showed a clear understanding of its use theatrically, artistically and in other ways.⁴⁹⁶ All the practitioners continue to practice the circus medium intentionally and their use and manipulation of it is highly sophisticated, discerning and purposeful. Furthermore, they exhibit clear and sophisticated understanding of theatrical form and theory. Most of the participants discussed complex considerations of

⁴⁹⁰ Laurie was a fellow founder with Price, and Davey encountered him at high school when he taught her some of her first circus skills.

⁴⁹¹ Davey knew Mickleborough at Death Defying Theatre where she introduced Davey to the members of Circus Oz and Finch first encountered her when she was Tour Manager when he was undertaking a student internship at Circus Oz and she was later on the selection panel of his application as the company's Artistic Director, and subsequently co-CEO with him.

⁴⁹² Casella talked about Derek Ives as one of the people at Nanjing Project 1 and the role he played in the early days at Rock 'n' Roll Circus, and he was mentioned by Fyfe who participated in a training project at Rock 'n' Roll Circus with Ives before she joined Circus Oz. Ives was also a rigger at Circus Oz, where Finch reports he met him while touring Circus Monoxide.

⁴⁹³ Fyfe's introduction and early influence in circus was directly informed by Reg Bolton who ran the circus classes that Salom attended as a teenager and he later worked with Bolton's son Joe.

⁴⁹⁴ Laurie discussed meeting Coldwell and Broadway in Adelaide before the two groups merged into Circus Oz and Davey worked with Broadway in a recent circus production *The Classics* <https://theatrepress.com.au/2015/12/15/review-batton-broadway-present-the-classics/> accessed 20/9/2018.

⁴⁹⁵ For many, circus is a vocation or an accidental discovery e.g. Fyfe, Casella, Davey and Salom.

⁴⁹⁶ Other ways they use the medium include for example political, educational and community purposes.

theatre and the particular use or difference of circus within that form, introducing discussion of an implicit audience contract, audience guilt or relief during performance,⁴⁹⁷ suspension of disbelief, the place in circus of the theatrical 'fourth wall',⁴⁹⁸ and the proscenium arch⁴⁹⁹ and its use, or not, in circus performance. Furthermore, every participant conveyed a strong impression that they were aware of and understood their own role in the development and exercise of Contemporary Circus.

Places and Events

FFFC was discussed throughout the interviews, including its hosting of the Nanjing Projects and its continuing role as a venue for regular national circus training. It was mentioned by many of the participants including Laurie who was involved in the development of the Leapers as well as directing some of the FFFC performing troupe shows, Finch attended training projects there during the early years of his career and recruited performers like Katherine Ellis⁵⁰⁰ for Circus Monoxide. Casella, reported that Rock 'n' Roll Circus brought their trainers to teach at Brisbane and Taylor attended and graduated from the school where he was also in the performance troupe.

As well as being located at FFFC, the Nanjing Training Projects were a repeated theme. Laurie was involved in organizing the project as well as being a participant along with Coldwell who participated in both Nanjing I and II, as well as Derek Ives who participated in Nanjing I and brought his skills to Rock 'N' Roll Circus, as reported by Casella.

⁴⁹⁷ A discussion of audience psychological responses, like guilt and relief, is given by Bouissac, 2018: 19. In her interview, Davey, who was severely injured in an on-stage accident in the UK, suggested that the audience might feel guilt when circus acts fail.

⁴⁹⁸ The 'fourth wall' is a theatrical convention and is an imaginary wall between the stage and audience, the other three walls being actual and consisting of the side and back walls of the stage, and actors or other performers usually perform as though the audience is not there. When the 'fourth wall is broken', an actor shows an acknowledgement of the audience.

⁴⁹⁹ A proscenium was a building behind the round performance area (the orchestra) in ancient Greek theatre, on which sets and scenery could be constructed. Bieber, 1971. In modern theatre, the proscenium arch refers to the framing of the on-stage performance action through which an audience views a performance.

⁵⁰⁰ Katherine Ellis later became a Circus Oz ensemble member and was trained at Cirkidz in Adelaide. She was also an instructor there where she and I taught circus classes and school workshops in 2005.

Experiences

This investigation also uncovered a range of similar and divergent personal experiences among the practitioners, some of which are briefly discussed here:

The ten practitioners interviewed represent five **states of Australia**. Davey, Salom and Fyfe were all from Western Australia, Laurie and Taylor both grew up in Victoria, Casella, Porter and Tannion lived and began their performing careers in Queensland. Finch was born, raised and educated in New South Wales and although he grew up in Victoria, Coldwell represents South Australia where he studied at Flinders University and it was there that he made the choice to take up circus.

Five practitioners reported **active and direct political involvement** in various ways although none spoke of party political affiliations. Laurie was involved in political protests during and after her time at university, and had a link to the anarchists at Melbourne University and her involvement in community theatre was a direct expression of her political beliefs. Coldwell was politically driven to choose circus as a way of living, having “developed some sort of weird reverse class thing”⁵⁰¹ at high school and becoming interested in alternate popular theatre forms and collective lifestyles at university. From his upbringing and university education, Finch was taught that “every choice is political”⁵⁰² and so has been consciously aware of the politics of the choices he makes all his life. Davey was involved in political and community theatre before her involvement in circus and Casella was particularly influenced by the political environment of the 1980s in Queensland.

Salom, Taylor, Fyfe, Finch, Casella, Coldwell and Laurie all report having had experience in **street performance**. Salom, Taylor and Finch all discussed their experience busking on the street as a form of earning income. Casella, Fyfe and Laurie have performed in street theatre. Coldwell was paid to perform at the opening of Adelaide’s Rundle Mall, which is now a popular street performance location. Both Salom and Fyfe reported that their experience in street performance played a foundational role in their development as performers.

⁵⁰¹ Coldwell, 2018

⁵⁰² Finch, 2018

All ten of the practitioners have reported having had an interest in some form of **physical activity** in their youth. These activities include, Coldwell and Salom being interested in experimenting with motorcycles, Laurie was a surfer, Porter played competitive soccer, and Tannion, Taylor and Casella report having experience in gymnastics as children. Davey was taught basic acrobatics at school and Fyfe began dancing at around age three. Although he doesn't remember when or where he learnt juggling, Finch could juggle before auditioning for his Theatre Media course at university.

Other **performing arts practice**, such as acting, dance and physical theatre, was reported by six of the practitioners. Before their involvement in circus, Laurie, Davey, Casella and Finch had experience in acting which was the particular interest of both Davey and Casella before their participation in circus. Both Fyfe and Tannion had professional performing careers as dancers.

Seven of the practitioners have had **tertiary education**. Laurie, Davey and Tannion all had completed undergraduate degrees before their introduction to the circus arts and Finch was introduced to circus during his university degree. Casella and Taylor both completed their degrees after becoming involved in circus and Coldwell left his studies at Flinders University to pursue a circus career. Fyfe matriculated, however deferred and never began her degree. Porter matriculated, but has so far concentrated on her performance career rather than pursuing tertiary education.

It was reported that the **type of schooling** that was represented covered alternative, public and private sectors. Davey and Salom were involved in alternative schools and Taylor attended the Flying Fruit Fly Circus School. Coldwell attended a private school in his senior years, having won a scholarship. The other participants either attended public schools or did not mention their schooling.

Community theatre played a significant role for Laurie, Davey, Casella and Finch as well as Coldwell, since he became involved in community theatre through his association with the APG, and who began circus performance because it was a popular theatre medium.

Three of the practitioners have lived in **country towns** as children. Salom and Taylor are the only two who reported to have had their entire childhoods in the country, whereas Finch spend his early childhood in the inner-city of Sydney and later moved to a country town with his parents where he spent much of his childhood and early adulthood. All other the other practitioners had metropolitan upbringings.

Laurie, Coldwell, Davey, Finch, Taylor and Tannion all reported seeing some form of **traditional circus** early in their lives however, none of them suggested that this experience had a direct effect on their decision to use circus as their artistic medium.

Developing technology was a topic that was brought up by five practitioners in their interviews, and they talked about how it influenced their experience in training and the learning of circus skills. Laurie discussed how she and the other performers in the APG would use photographs from programmes of circus acrobatic shows to teach themselves human pyramids and that they had very little filmed footage of their early work, which she suggests is different from current times when most people have cameras in their phones. Finch, Salom and Casella discussed how one of the only methods of viewing and learning from other performers was to watch performances and training on VHS tapes which were passed around between practitioners. Taylor, Finch and Laurie reported learning and researching from publications such as *The Drama Review*, *Oz Juggle*⁵⁰³ and juggling books.

The lived experience of this group of practitioners revealed a wide spread of experiences which differed greatly across the group. The decade in which the participants became professional had little to no effect on their motivations to take up circus practice.

⁵⁰³ *Oz Juggle*, edited by Kymberlyn Kaos Olsen, was a popular magazine among jugglers and other circus practitioners in the mid 1990s. *The Drama Review* (TDR) was an American publication on experimental theatre production

General Observations

As Mullett pointed out, Australia has played a pivotal and foundational role in the development of Contemporary Circus internationally.⁵⁰⁴ The company New Circus was operating in South Australia and touring interstate in the early 1970s⁵⁰⁵ and Soapbox Circus formed in 1976. Shortly after Circus Oz formed from the two groups in 1978,⁵⁰⁶ it very soon toured internationally, performing at the Roundhouse in London, Belgium and Holland and in New Guinea in 1980.⁵⁰⁷ This early exposure and its “renovation” of the circus medium as Laurie describes it,⁵⁰⁸ meant that the influence of Circus Oz was wide-spread and formative internationally.⁵⁰⁹



Fig. 34. Early Circus Oz Programmes, Robin Laurie archival collection
 Above left: Round House Theatre, London Tour, 1980
 Above right: Adelaide Festival of the Arts, 1978
 Right: South Pacific Festival of Arts, Port Moresby Programme, 1980

Stemming from its roots at the APG, Australian Contemporary Circus is now characterized by a sense of open playfulness, exuberance, irony, laconic subversion and the general Australian cultural characteristic of wry self-deprecating humour and a lack of pretention. Australian Contemporary Circus seems to be dominated by ensemble groups with high acrobatic focus,

⁵⁰⁴ Mullett, 2005. See also St Leon, 2011; Broadway, 1999.

⁵⁰⁵ New Circus formed in 1974. See footnote 67.

⁵⁰⁶ The usual date given for the foundation of Circus Oz is 1978, including by the company itself, which this year is celebrating its 40th anniversary, dated from the incorporation of the company and its first performances at the Adelaide and Moomba Festivals, however, founding members like Jon Hawkes and Sue Broadway say that the company actually formed in December 1977. See Broadway, 1999; https://www.circusoz.com/images/downloads/1479_1234416397068_The%20History%20of%20Circus%20Oz.pdf accessed 29/9/2018.

⁵⁰⁷ Broadway, 1999:75-76; Laurie, 2018.

⁵⁰⁸ Laurie, 2018.

⁵⁰⁹ For a discussion on the influence of Circus Oz in the international formation of Contemporary Circus, see Mullett, 2005. More research into this area is needed.

a light-hearted approach or humorous undertone, a stylized visual aesthetic, a crisp, clean and energetic physical style and high production values and has been seen as having, “Incredible floor acrobatics” with “Typical Aussie humour” as Canadian performance critic Rebecca Galloway pointed out recently.⁵¹⁰ All of these characteristics can be identified in various combinations in current Australian Contemporary Circus.⁵¹¹ The Australian character and style was directly addressed by eight of the practitioners in this research. This style appears to owe its influences to the collaborative nature of Circus Oz,⁵¹² which began the form in Australia, and the skills and disciplines introduced by the Chinese acrobats at the Nanjing Projects that continued to be taught at places like the FFFC and Cirkidz, and more recently NICA.⁵¹³

Many of the participants observed that they believe this character, style and quality appears to be changing with the influx of new performers and the influence of particular institutions and companies such as NICA and Cirque du Soleil. For example Fyfe said,

with Cirque du Soleil becoming so popular and them employing androgynous, elite ex-gymnasts that are just doing crazy shit on stage... that just changed people’s perception of what contemporary circus should be, and that it should just be mainly about skills and a show with a theme rather than being entertained on stage by great characters and amazing performances.

Others shared this sentiment, including Coldwell who expressed appreciation for smaller, intimate style circus shows and suggested that the “the genre of Contemporary Circus starts to be defined as the things that they teach at NICA”⁵¹⁴ and Taylor who said, “I think Cirque du Soleil has got a lot to answer for that and I think it’s kind of starting to corrode the Australian circus world”.

⁵¹⁰ In her industry opinion piece, Galloway discusses various overseas impressions of the nature of Australian Contemporary Circus style. Galloway, 2018.

⁵¹¹ For example, Gravity and Other Myths expresses playfulness and extremely high acrobatic skill and energy, Circa exhibits a stylized visual aesthetic, exuberance and high acrobatic focus and Briefs Factory uses subversion, playfulness, irony, and high energy.

⁵¹² The early influence of Chinese acrobatics through the Nanjing Projects and to the wry, underlying cultural identity of egalitarianism and subversion of authority. This underlying suspicion of authority in Australia as well as the ‘Tall Poppy Syndrome’ (a term commonly used in Australia to express a general dislike of people who stand out, or think themselves ‘better’ than the rest) is likely to have developed from Australia’s European colonisation in the 18th century as a convict settlement.

⁵¹³ Nanjing Project trainer (see Appendix 3) and former Circus Oz performer, Guang Rong Lu, has been Head Trainer of NICA and has been a major influence on Australian Contemporary Circus training.

⁵¹⁴ Coldwell discussed the influences of circus institutions generally and the possible effect they have on performance style, “I have some sense that the breakdown of the soviet Union and the opening up of China meant that all those people who’d been trained in those state institutions were then able to move around the world so it meant that... Cirque du Soleil very soon latched onto, ‘We can hire a whole bunch of people who are really highly skilled ...also that people that started circus schools all over the world... could get people who had been to circus school” and he therefore makes the point that it becomes a viscous cycle. Coldwell, 2018.

Since this study has been an investigation into the motivations of ten practitioners across the decades since the form developed, it is not possible to discuss or begin to determine here if the current state of Australian Contemporary Circus is changing, but it is an important subject area for further investigation, especially because of Australia's pivotal role in the foundation of the form.

In setting out to discover the motivations of Australian Contemporary Circus artists through their lived experience, although the research has uncovered some very clear answers about motivations, interestingly it raises even more questions, such as:

- Can Australia maintain its own particular style?
- As styles and disciplines merge, is circus diluting?
- Is a concentration on technical skill robbing circus of its 'soul'?
- What can the practitioners in this study teach us about how to understand the medium?
- Is circus perhaps Australia's national artform?

The practitioners in this study provide very clear evidence of sustained discipline, perseverance, courage and resilience, and their motivations for pursuing circus indicate that they are intentional, informed, thoughtful, generous, gregarious, collaborative and self-directed. Contemporary Circus has been built on and developed by concerted effort, clear motivations, and dedication to, and a sophisticated and conscious understanding of, the circus medium and its artistic use.

Chapter Eight: The Three Rings of Circus

Finale and Future Directions

Well in the end it's all about love...

Tim Coldwell⁵¹⁵



Fig. 35. Circus Oz, 2006
Programme Back Cover, author's collection

⁵¹⁵ Coldwell, 2018.

Conclusion

This pilot study set out to discover what the motivations of Australian Contemporary Circus practitioners are. It has collected valuable primary source material from ten professional Australian Contemporary Circus practitioners and it showed that they had clear understanding about their choice and use of the medium. The study identified ten Key Motivations, all of which were shared by two or more practitioners. On consideration, most of these motivations do not appear to be different from motivations one might expect to find in other artists and I speculate that practitioners in other artforms would share many of the same motivations.⁵¹⁶

Leo Tolstoy identifies three conditions on which art is dependent: Individuality, clearness and sincerity, and says, “The presence in various degrees of these three conditions... decides the merit of a work of art as art, apart from subject matter”.⁵¹⁷ For Tolstoy, there is no limit to what can be judged as being art, as long as,

a man is infected by the author’s condition of soul, if he feels this emotion and this union with others, then the object which has effected this is art; but if there is no such infection, if there be not this union with the author and with others who are not moved by the same work – then it is not art.⁵¹⁸

This is not to say that Tolstoy’s observation is definitive and the philosophical discussion on the nature of art is extensive,⁵¹⁹ but according to Tolstoy’s three conditions, circus practitioners can be considered as artists if their work meets these conditions. Circus artists, therefore, are like any other artists.

Of the Key Motivations identified in this research, being motivated to **Expression** and **Communication** would be expected to be shared by all artists from all artistic forms including visual art, theatre and music. Circus in itself is not political, although it can be used politically,⁵²⁰ and **Politics** and its expression is not unique to circus, performance, or any other

⁵¹⁶ I am unaware of any research specifically investigating the motivations of artists in other artforms. While my search for literature about motivations in the arts has not been exhaustive at this stage, it is difficult to imagine that practitioners in other artforms would not share similar motivations.

⁵¹⁷ Tolstoy and Maude, 1899: 134.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid: 133.

⁵¹⁹ For an example of such discussion of the nature of art and aesthetics, see Danto, 1964, 1983.

⁵²⁰ Because circus is a medium and therefore not sentient, it cannot in and of itself be political, however as many of the participants in this study clearly show, the medium of circus can be used as a political means.

medium or action. Theatre, radio, television and film are all arts media produced by groups of practitioners in which **Collaboration** is necessary. A **Performance Drive** would be expected to be shared by most, if not all, performing arts practitioners including singers, actors and stand-up comedians. A motivation to be involved in a **Community** is not limited to artists, but is shared with human beings in general, as is being motivated by **Challenge**.⁵²¹

The three Key Motivations, **Authenticity**, **Diversity of Media** and **Limitlessness**, seem most particular to the medium of circus.

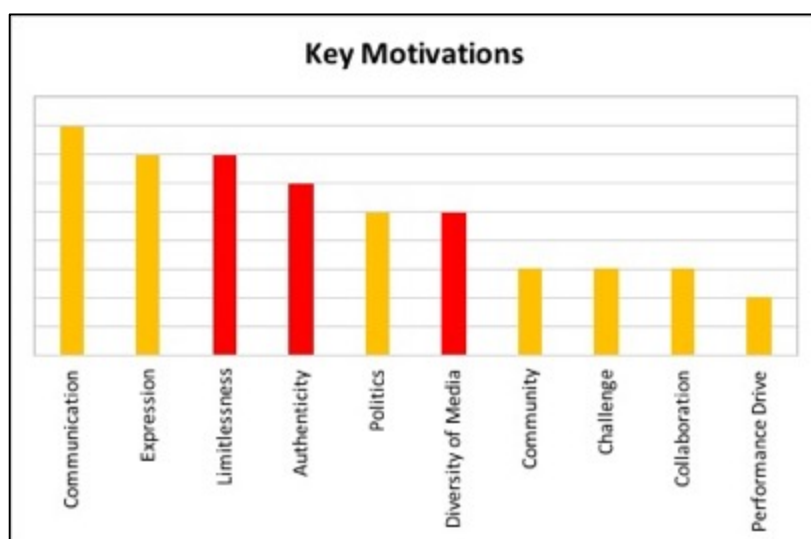


Fig. 36. Three Particular Key Motivations
The three Key Motivations that seem most particular to circus identified in red

Artists in general seem to have a drive for expression and communication, and a desire to communicate through art **Authentically**.⁵²² Circus provides an exceptionally wide **Diversity of Media**,⁵²³ including apparatuses, disciplines, found objects and other art genres, and a particularly wide range of applications can be combined and incorporated through circus,

⁵²¹ For an explanation of human need for curiosity, challenge and control see Sternberg, 1995: 571-572.

⁵²² The authentic expression of feeling, belief and truth seems to be at the heart of artistic expression in general, as a desire for the expression or communication of the self, as has been addressed historically by philosophers like Plotinus. See Mortley, 2013.

⁵²³ Other areas of art employ a variety of media, for example in visual art, practitioners like Warhol and Duchamp were attracted to the use of 'mixed media', a form that is not bound to a single medium. Arnason, 1983; Tunnicliffe and Jaspers, 2014.

leading to **Limitless** possibilities for artistic expression, “We take everything and we own that as our genre”.⁵²⁴

The Authenticity, Diversity of Media and Limitlessness of the circus medium allows artists a particularly powerful and rich means of expression and communication. It is not that the circus is unique because it contains these three, but because it is the combination of the three, and *how* they manifest in the circus medium that makes them uniquely circus.

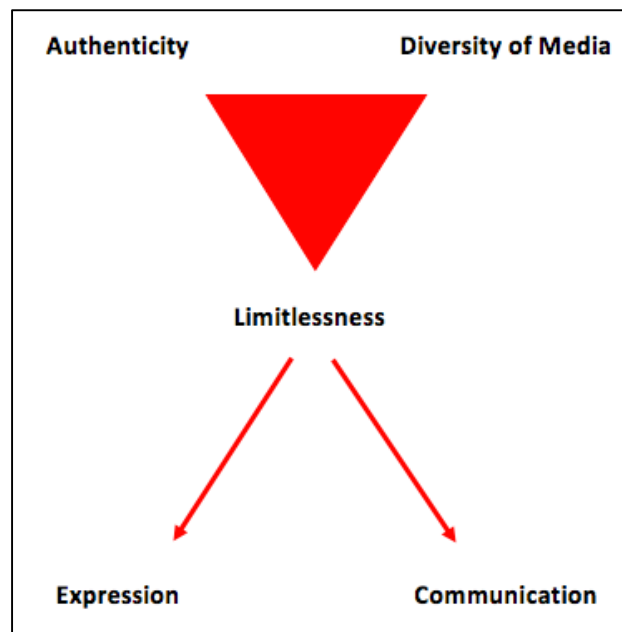


Fig. 37. Effects of Authenticity, Diversity of Media and Limitlessness

So, why do we choose circus as our medium? We do it because it provides us with endless possibility, as Laurie says, it is “boundary-less”. As arts practitioners, circus provides us with a powerful form that crosses disciplines, skill, cultures, languages and political and socio-economic borders. As artists, we are driven to expression and communication and as Casella says, we can do it with “our whole selves” and circus provides us with a sense of endless, limitless possibilities to communicate and commune with a wide range of people across many borders.

⁵²⁴ Tannion, 2018.

But what is circus? Throughout the course of research for this study, in the scholastic literature, the question of what circus actually *is* has been evasive. Circus is discussed, felt and intuitively understood, but because of its multiplicity, fluidity and diversity, it is difficult to pin down, which is part of its attraction. Definitions in the literature are general and inconclusive. As Tait and Lavers say,

As soon as one attempts to set boundaries that define or categorize the circus, it mutates, chafes at limitations and transforms itself. When a definition of circus is set up, it invites contestation.⁵²⁵

Maybe circus should never, or can never, be defined. However, from the interviews and discussions with the practitioners and the general research conducted for this project, a possible framing has emerged and I suggest that:

Circus is a performance medium that demonstrates skill and or risk in a form that encompasses any number of media to create direct and authentic communication from the kinaesthetics that invoke a visceral sensation and involuntary reaction from the audience that allows the artist unlimited ways to be expressive.

This framing suggests that ‘circus’ can be identified through these factors and it helps to eliminate any personal subjective taste or emotions that may cloud judgments⁵²⁶ about identifying the form, and requires three elements for it to be most effective. These elements are: that it has **perceived skill and/or risk**, in that audiences attend circus precisely to witness high physical skill and acts that require and exhibit risk; that there is a direct **social exchange** or communion with its audience which plays a fundamental part in the functioning of the performance; and that it is a form of **artistic expression** like other artforms.⁵²⁷ The combined information provided by the practitioners in this study suggests that circus contains all three of these elements and that it is the complex and nuanced combination of them that satisfies their desire to pursue circus practice as a professional artistic form.

⁵²⁵ Tait and Lavers, 2016a: 2-3.

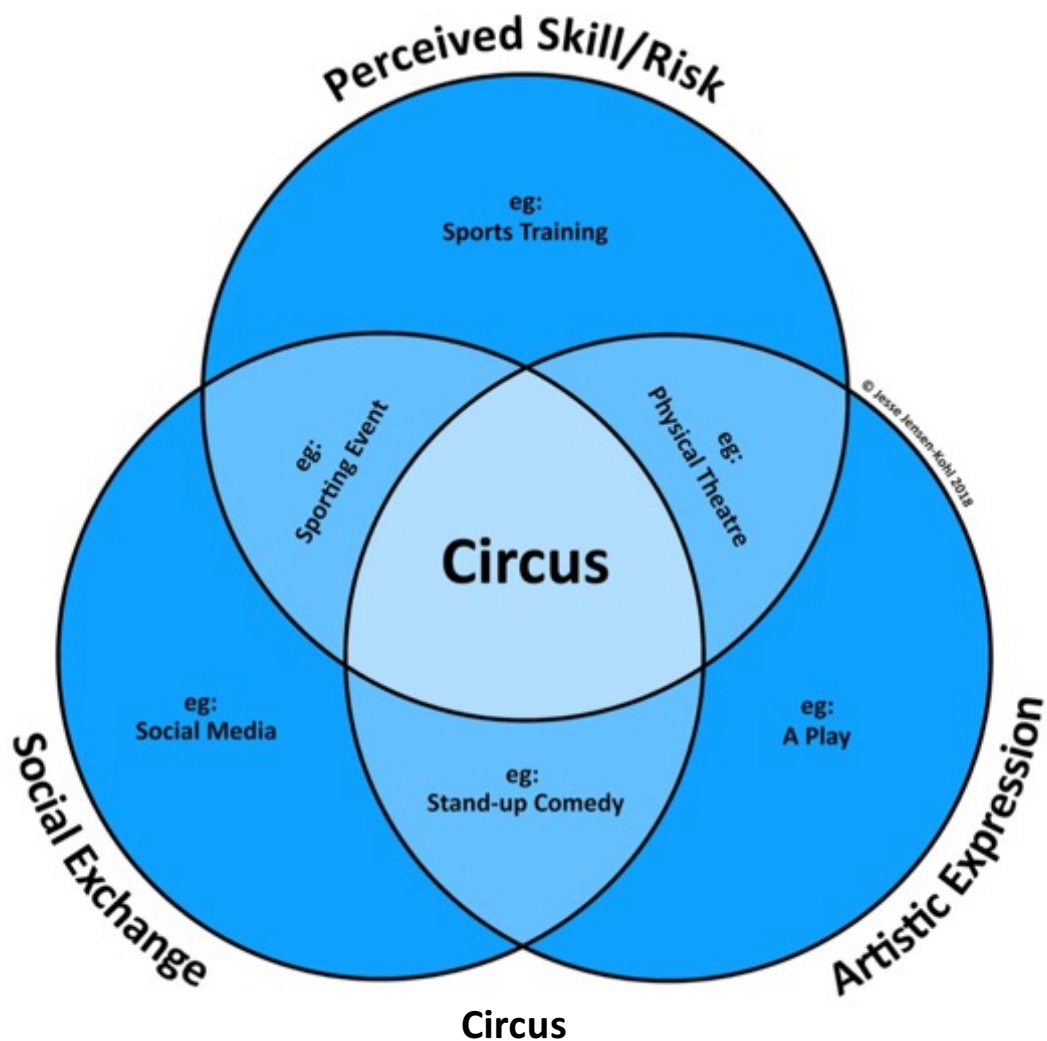
⁵²⁶ For a discussion on the subjective judgment of art and objects, see Kant and Walker, 2007.

⁵²⁷ For discussion of risk, ritual and meaning in circus and performance, see particularly Ritter, 1989; Schechner, 2002; Bouissac, 2018. Tait also addresses risk. Tait, 2016.

Framed in this way, the three identified primary elements overlap, creating areas in which various forms of human activity and performance such as physical theatre, sports and stand-up comedy exist. At the heart of these overlapping elements or rings, is circus, where a combination of all the elements lies (see opposite).

To paraphrase Tolstoy, the presence in various degrees of these three elements, decides the merit of a work of circus as circus, apart from subject matter.

The Three Rings of Circus



A performance medium that demonstrates skill and or risk in a form that encompasses any number of media to create direct and authentic communication from the kinaesthetics that invoke a visceral sensation and involuntary reaction from the audience that allows the artist unlimited ways

Fig. 38. The Three Rings of Circus Venn Diagram

Perhaps circus and its practitioners should never be tied down by definitions, but this framing provides a way to begin to perceive and understand the nature of circus and its place in performance and culture, so that it can be developed and experimented with artistically and further explored scholastically.

This framing does not confine what the circus is, how it can be performed, or limit the achievement or expression of its practitioners. Nor does it suggest that there is a distinction between Contemporary Circus and traditional circus or modern circus and ancient circus, “it’s all just Circus”.⁵²⁸ However, it does suggest that circus is equal to other artforms, and a unique form of expression and performative power.

Further Research

This research identified ten Key Motivations of Contemporary Circus practitioners and found that their reasons for adopting circus as their primary artform were deliberate and considered. A preliminary framing of the circus medium also emerged. Due to the necessarily limited scope of this pilot study, this research was confined to only ten practitioners who were selected to represent the decades since the form emerged in Australia and the study did not focus specifically on its current state. Australian Contemporary Circus has been fundamental to the international development of the form and from this preliminary study there is a suggested sign that it is being affected by outside or other influences when paradoxically it might now be showing signs of maturity. There is still so much to ask: Are these motivations shared with other circus practitioners and are they different for other artists? Can this taxonomy and preliminary framing be more generally applied? Can and should circus ever be defined? Did the APG change the world through Circus Oz? Does Contemporary Circus represent Australian identity and is there such a thing? If Australian Contemporary Circus changes too much are we about to lose our ‘Australian Voice’? This study has clearly shown that there is much to be investigated, and much to be learnt from this unique form of authentic artistic expression.

⁵²⁸ Finch, 2018.

Running Away to the Circus

Circus is an enduring, powerful performance medium which is contradictory and beguiling for audiences, practitioners and scholars. It holds a unique cultural, psychological and theatrical position. Circus is joyful and menacing, playful and serious, simple and complex. I will not stop running away to the circus. After all,

***...in the end it's all about love,
it's just a way of bringing joy to people
and having a conversation...***

Tim Coldwell⁵²⁹

⁵²⁹ Coldwell, 2018.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Sample Participant Table

Interviewees

Lived Experiences and Motivations

Participants Name

Age began learning circus skills:

Performed for Circus Oz (approx):

Became professional:

Family's attitude to the choice of medium:.....

Defining Quotations:

.....

.....

Experiences Summary

Key Motivations

--	--

Appendix 1 (cont.)

NB: Multiple copies of this page were made

Experiences	Motivations

APPENDIX 2: Illustrations

Robin Laurie Collection

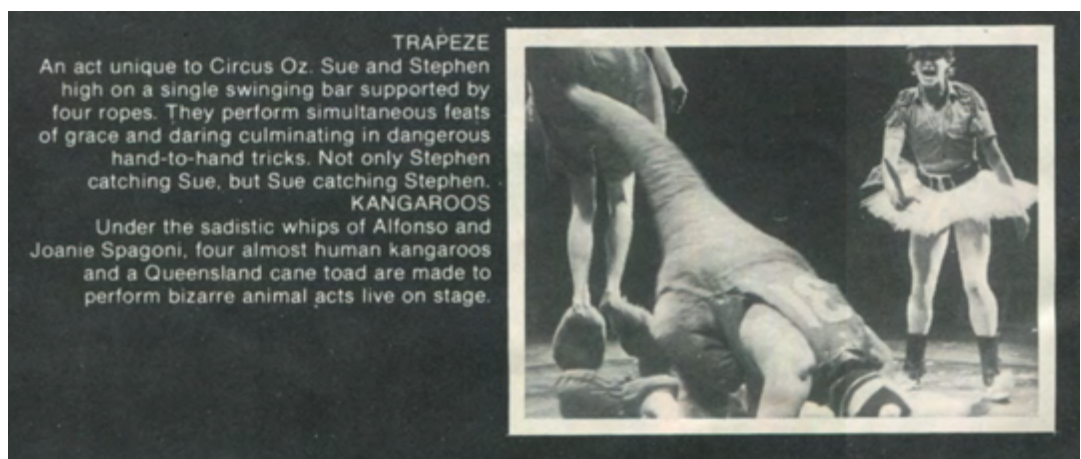
**** Robin Laurie was an APG member and founder of Soapbox Circus and Circus Oz. Her archival collection includes programmes, scripts and documents related to the founding and early years of Circus Oz and other theatrical material.***

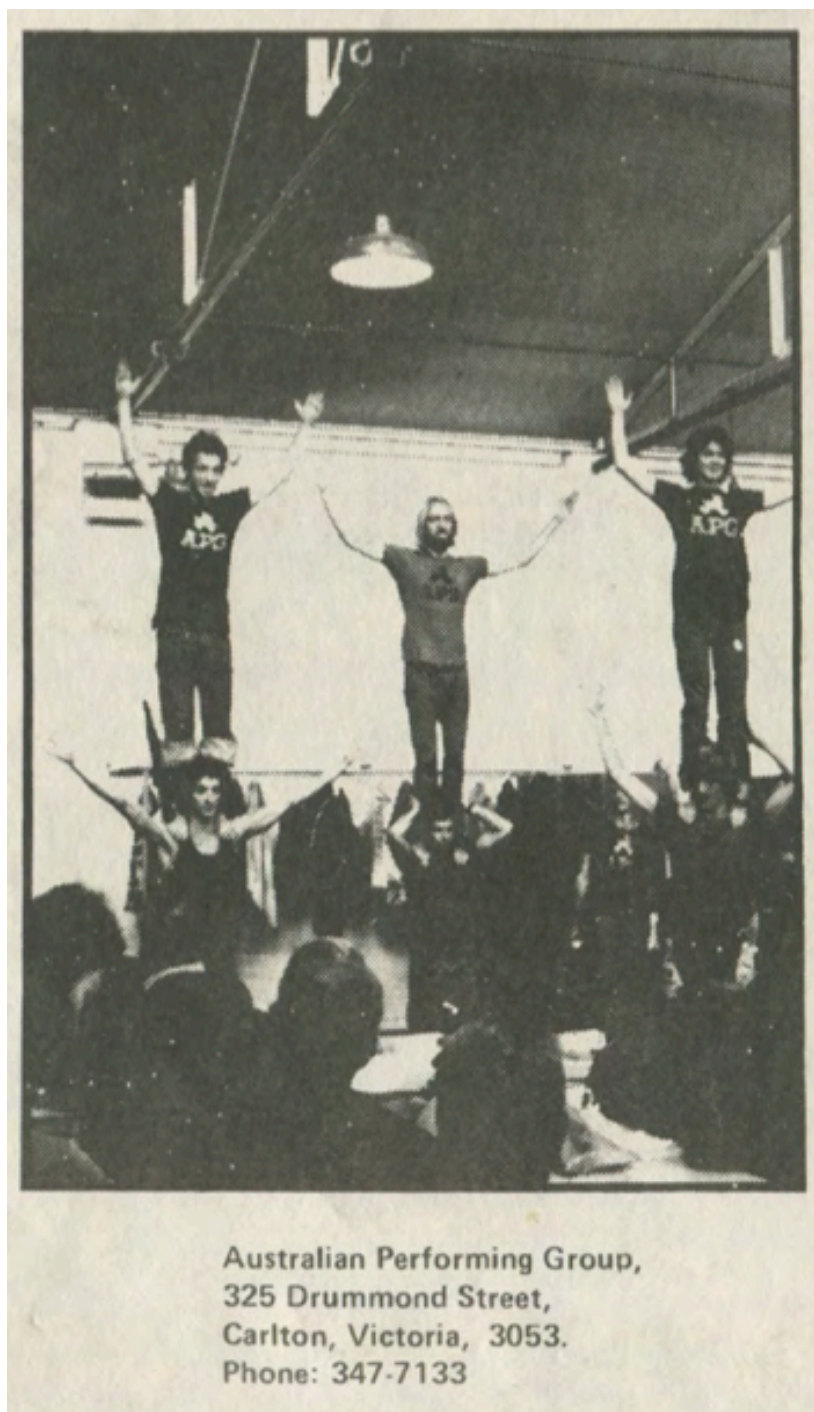


Circus Oz Paris Theatre Programme, 1980, Robin Laurie archival collection

Above: Page 6

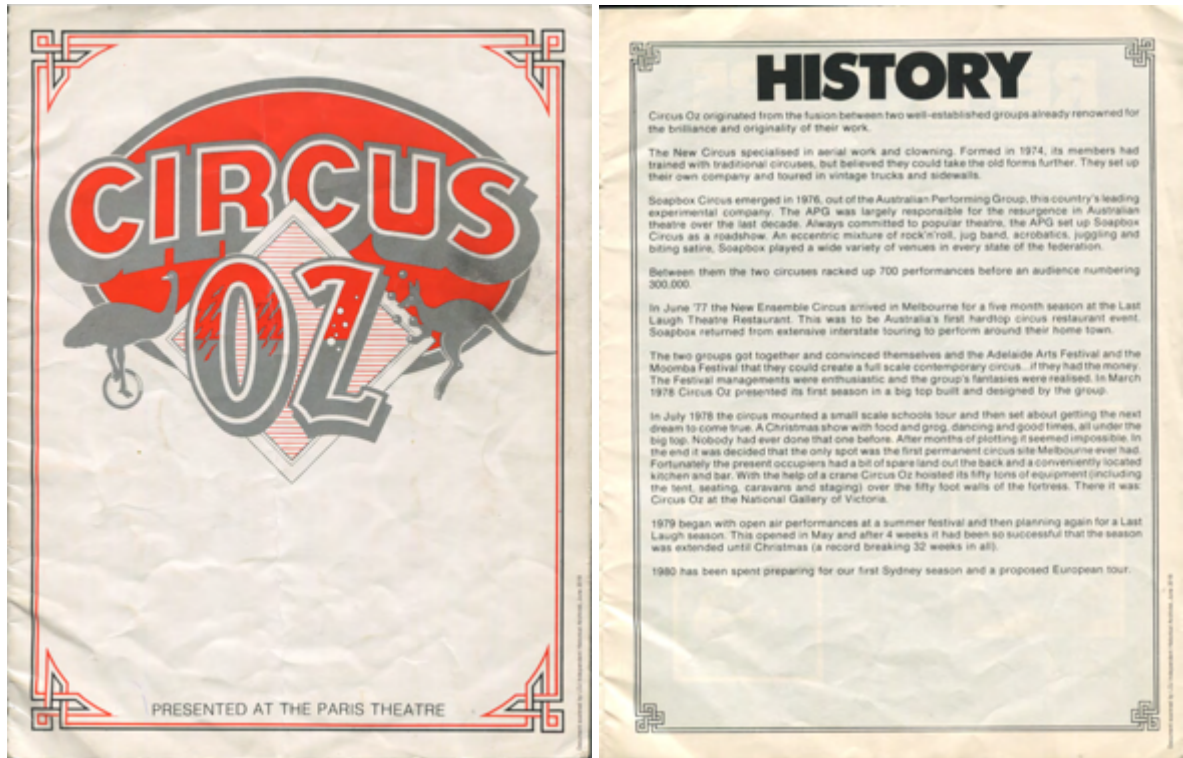
Below: Detail





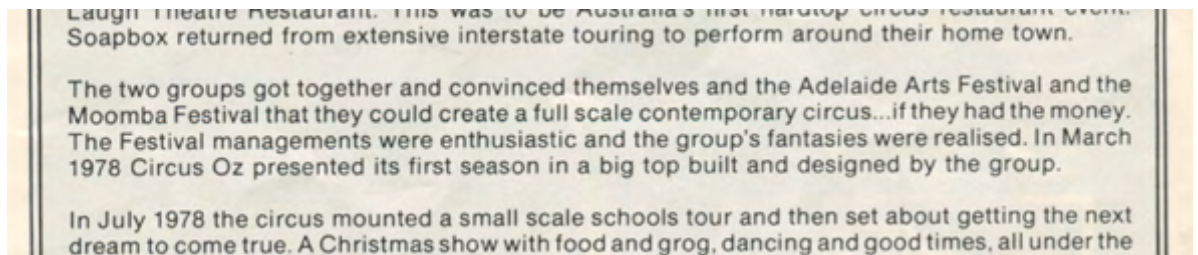
Australian Performing Group, 1976
Programme Back Cover, Robin Laurie archival collection

Appendix 2 (cont.)



Circus Oz, Paris Theatre, Sydney, 8th April, 1980

Left: Front Back Cover Right: Page 3, History, Robin Laurie archival collection



Page 3, History, detail

NB: An early example of the use of the term 'Contemporary Circus'



Page 15, Detail. Circus practitioner and 'insider' researcher, Jane Mullett 'Bio'

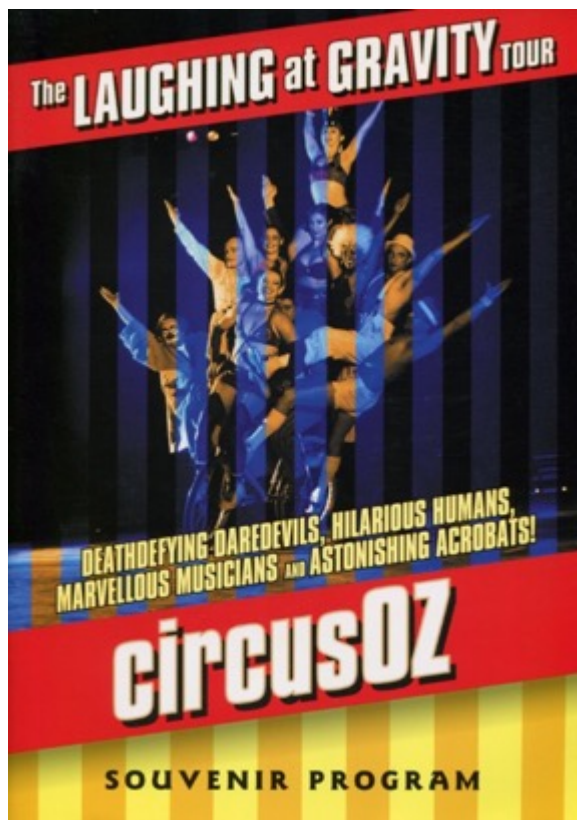
Appendix 2 (cont.)

Author's Collection

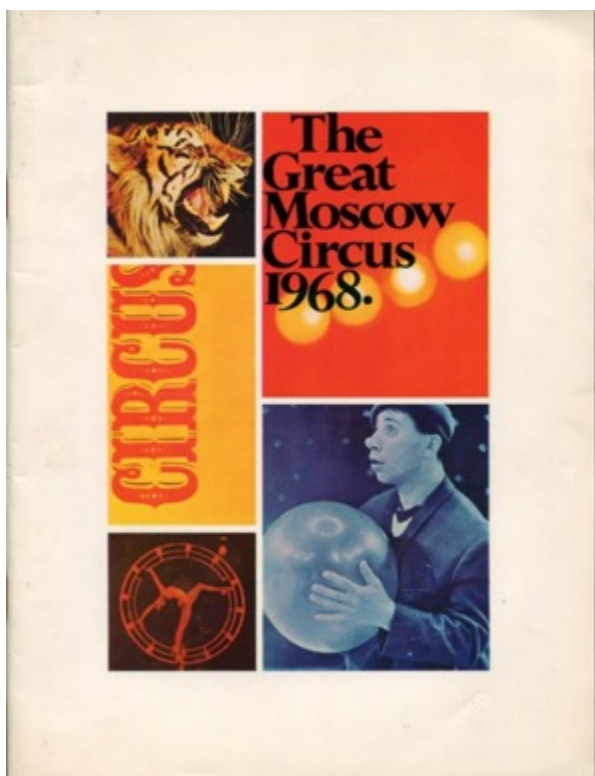
** The author's collection consists of original circus programmes and related material collected over 20 years of involvement in circus. Many of the programmes in the collection are from productions the author has personally attended.*



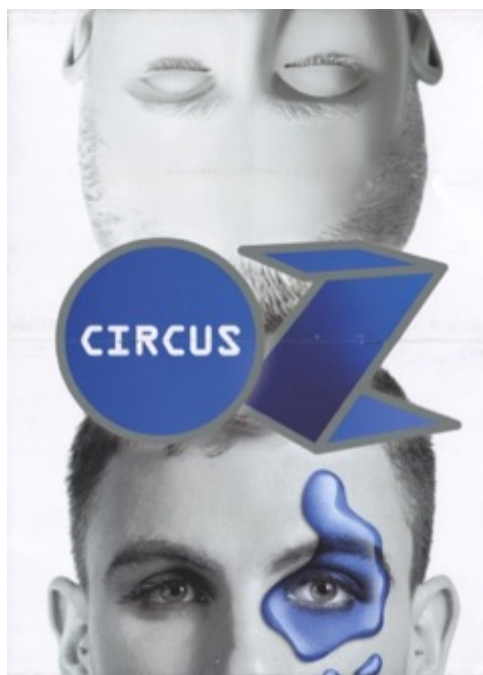
Circus Oz Programme, 1999
Back cover 21st Birthday Celebration, author's collection



Circus Oz Laughing at Gravity tour, 2006
Cover, author's collection



The Great Moscow Circus Programme, 1968
Cover, author's collection

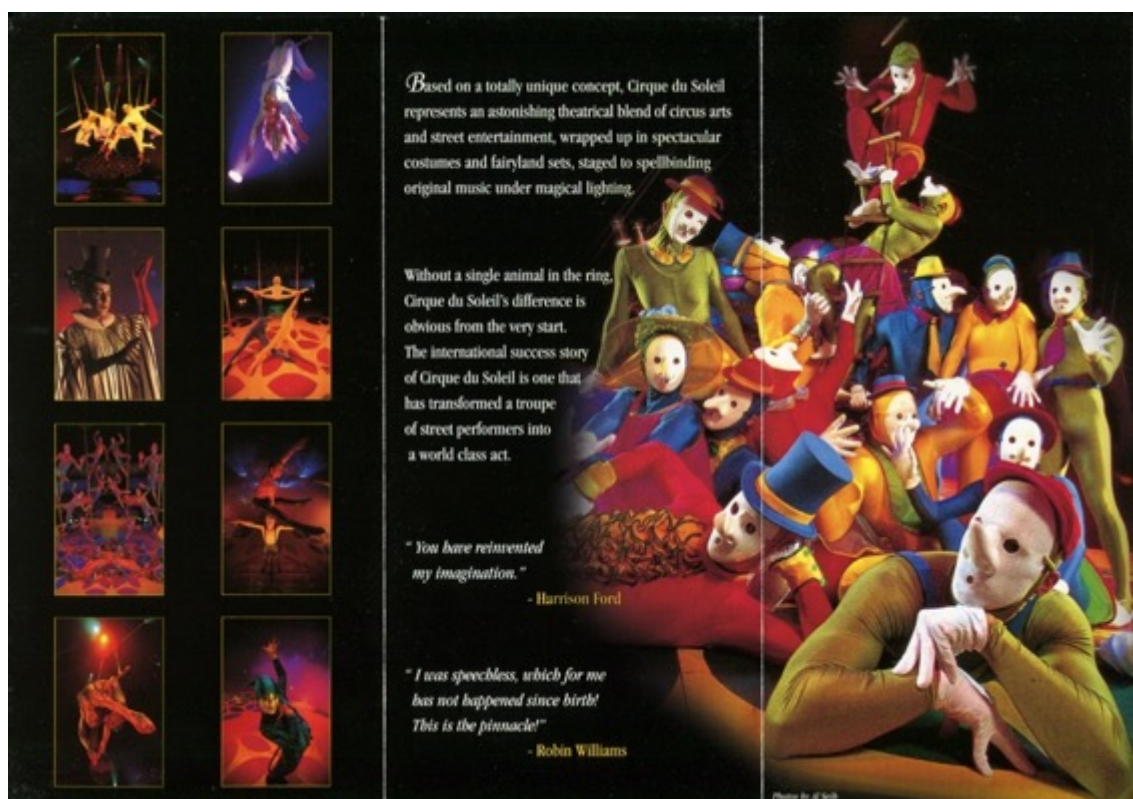


Circus Oz Programme, 2017
Cover, author's collection

Appendix 2 (cont.)



Saltimbanco, Adelaide Season, 1999.
Pamphlet, Front Cover, author's collection



Saltimbanco, Adelaide Season, 1999.
Pamphlet, Inside fold-out, author's collection

[illegible]

Appendix 2 (cont.)

Lynette Jensen Collection

** The Lynette Jensen Collection is a collection of original prints, sketches and photographs which provide visual historical primary evidence. Curated collections from this collection have been donated to collections including the University of Oxford, the University of Sydney and the British School at Athens.*



Acrobatics & Circus, Heck, 1849.
Antique Steel Engraving, Lynette Jensen Collection



The American Circus, Alhambra Palace (London), 1858.
Antique Wood Engraving, Lynette Jensen Collection

Appendix 2 (cont.)



Arriving in a City – Detraining the Tent-wagons in the Early Morning, 1895.
Antique Half-Tone Print, Lynette Jensen Collection

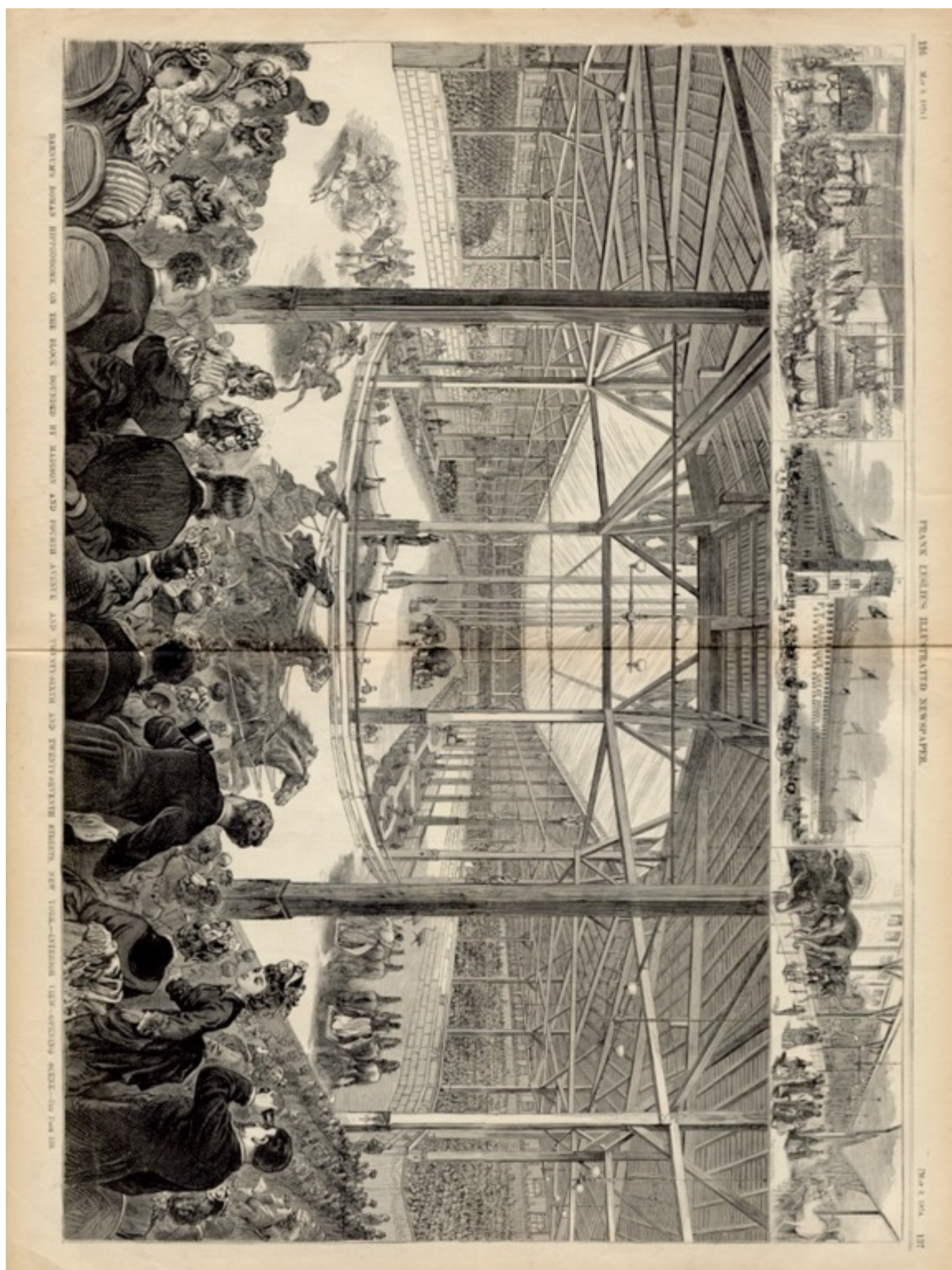


Ruins of Barnum's American Museum, 1865.
Antique Wood Engraving, Lynette Jensen Collection

Appendix 2 (cont.)



Commedia Dell' Arte Characters, c.1850.
Antique Prints, Lynette Jensen Collection



Barnum's Roman Hippodrome, 1874.
Antique Wood Engraving, Lynette Jensen Collection

Appendix 2 (cont.)

Circus Oz Archival Collection

** Circus Oz has a collection of photographs, memorabilia and programmes from its past productions. The material is kept under the care of Laurel Frank, Circus Oz costume designer and original collective member and founder. The author spent a week searching the archives from 6th – 12th August, 2018 when this material was photographed.*



Circus Oz, designed by Martin Sharp, 1989
Programme Cover, Circus Oz archival collection



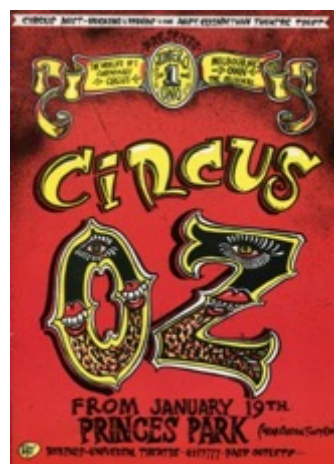
Circus Oz, designed by Martin Sharp, 1990
Programme Cover, Circus Oz archival collection



Circus Oz, designed by Lin Onus, 1996
Programme Cover, Circus Oz archival collection



Circus Oz, designed by Michael Callaghan, 1995
Programme Cover, Circus Oz archival collection



Circus Oz, designed by Bob Daly, 1982
Programme Cover,
Circus Oz archival collection



Circus Oz, designed by Martin Sharp, 1982
Programme Cover,
Circus Oz archival collection

Appendix 2 (cont.)



Circus Oz archival collection, 2018
Left: Storeroom
Right: Item



Circus Oz archival collection, 2018
Left: Poster
Right: Magazine clipping



Circus Oz archival collection, 2018
Left: Plan
Right: Poster

Appendix 2 (cont.)

* *Profile photographs found*



Laurel Frank



Ponch Hawkes



Sue Broadway



Pixi & Jim Robertson



Tim Coldwell



Robin Laurie



Jon Hawkes



Anni Davey



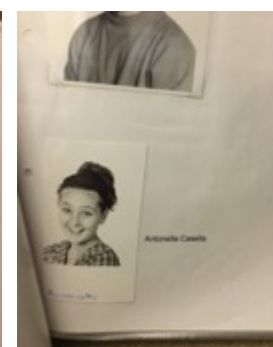
Mel Fyfe



Mike Finch



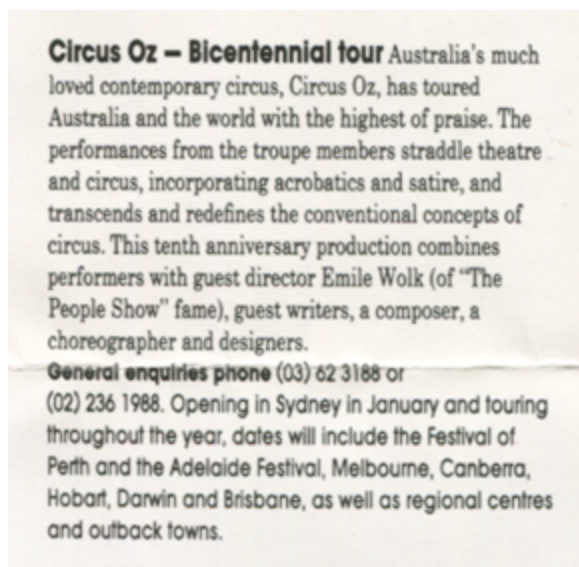
Chris Sleight



Antonella Casella

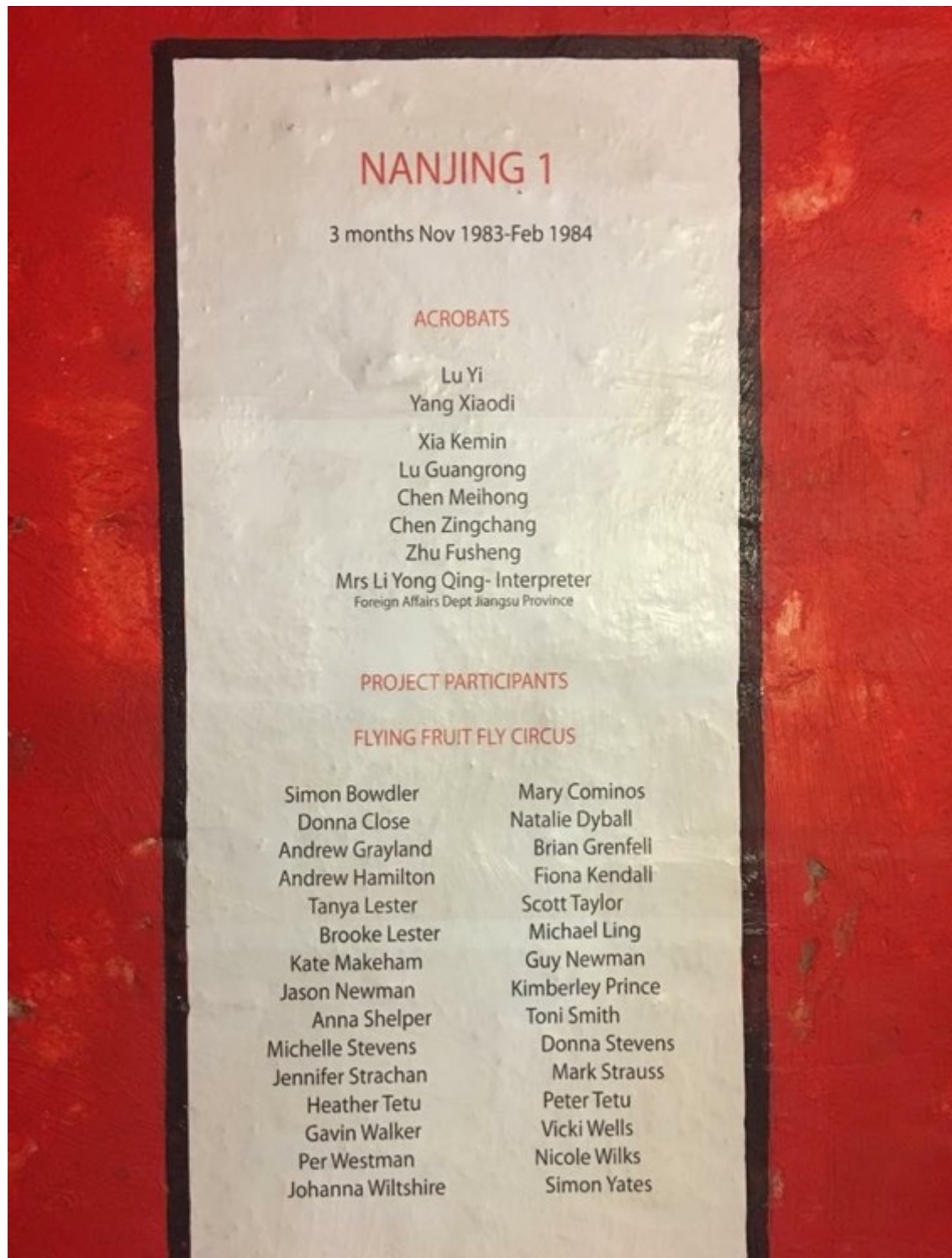


Bicentennial Arts '88, Programme, 1988, Circus Oz archival collection
Designed by Dewe Rogerson
Above: Programme Cover
Left: Partial inside fold-out
Below: Circus Oz information, detail



APPENDIX 3: Nanjing Projects 1 and 2

Nanjing 1



Nanjing 1. List of participants. The Bike Shed at Circus Oz Headquarters, Collingwood, Melbourne.
Photos courtesy of Mike Finch, 13th February, 2018

Nanjing 1



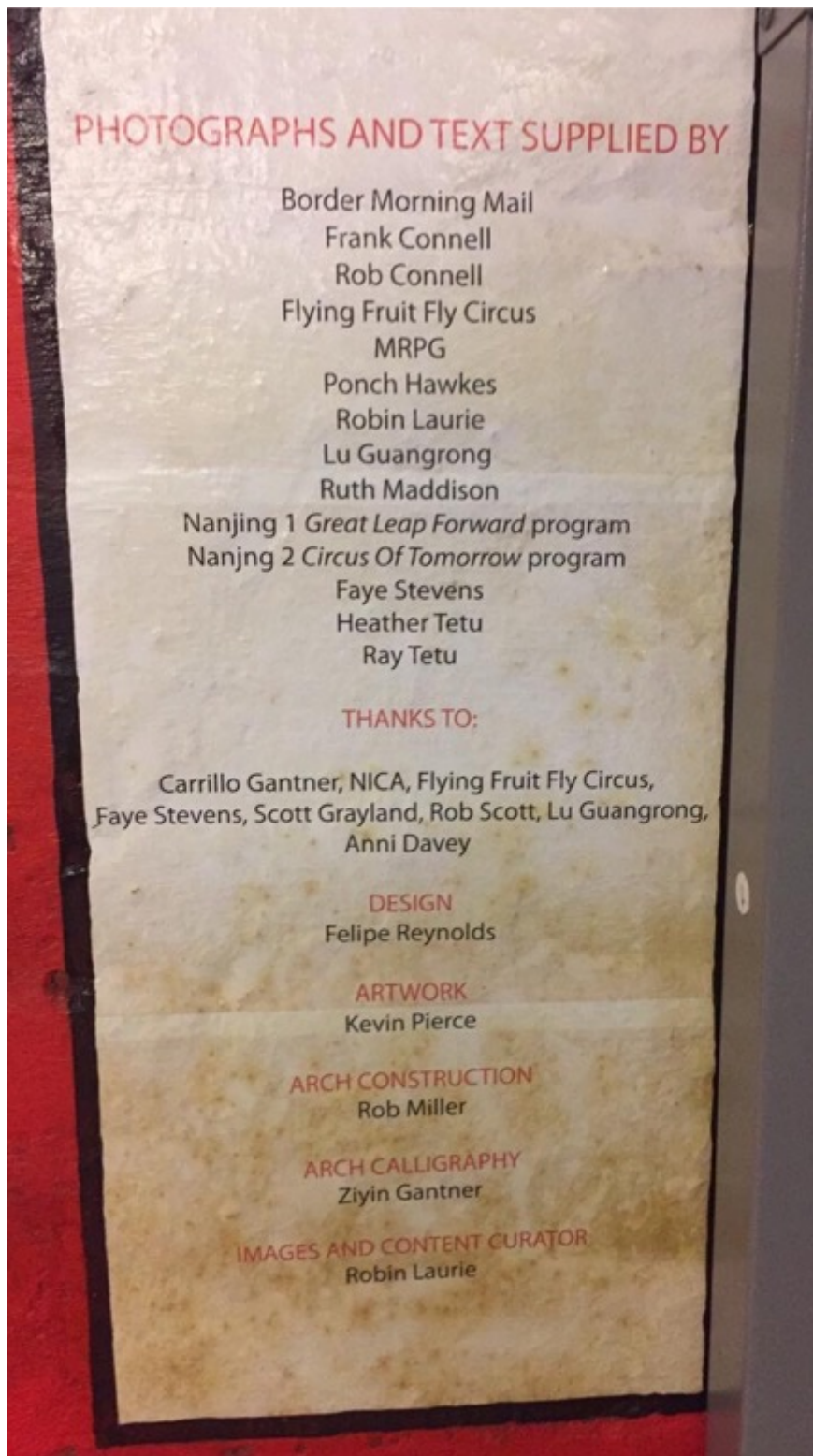
Nanjing 1. List of participants. The Bike Shed at Circus Oz Headquarters, Collingwood, Melbourne. Photos courtesy of Mike Finch, 13th February, 2018

Nanjing 2



Nanjing 2. List of participants. The Bike Shed at Circus Oz Headquarters, Collingwood, Melbourne. Photos courtesy of Mike Finch, 13th February, 2018

Nanjing 1 and 2 Bike Shed Credits



Nanjing 1 and 2. The Bike Shed at Circus Oz Headquarters, Collingwood, Melbourne.
Photos courtesy of Mike Finch, 13th February, 2018

Nanjing 1 and 2 Bike Shed



The Bike Shed at Circus Oz Headquarters, Collingwood, Melbourne.
Photos courtesy of Mike Finch, 13th February, 2018

APPENDIX 4: Areas for Further Research in Circus Studies

*** During the course of this pilot study, a number of areas for further research have been identified through general background research and through the information presented and discussed by the practitioners themselves, where there appears to be a substantial gap in the literature. Some of these are:**

Ancient Historical Origins of Circus

Since Hippisley Coxe first wrote in 1951 that modern circus traces its origin to the military and master equestrian riders of the 18th century, scholars in circus studies have maintained that circus has its origins in 1768 with Philip Astley and the performing riders who followed him. Clearly however, the medium has ancient roots for which there seems to be a wealth of material evidence and other evidence going back to pre-historic times, and circus derives its name from the Latin for circle (or ring) which is only just being reflected in the research from the circus perspective.⁵³⁰ The ancient Roman Circus Maximus is one example of the circular or oval venues in which spectacular mass entertainment events featuring trick and master riding, popular entertainment such as acrobatics, juggling and other performances, theatrical re-enactment of historical events and the display of exotic animals were held. Ancient circus is addressed in the research of Ancient History fields but is not yet specifically examined in circus studies to a very substantial degree.

In addition, there seem to be a variety of other clear historical influences on the medium of circus which are still evident in modern performance, including *commedia dell'arte*, the miracle play, the troubadour, travelling player and court jester, vaudeville, and pantomime and the tradition of the English Fair. This is a rich area for further research, where very little seems to have been undertaken to date.

The Connection in Circus of Carnival and the Fair

In modern circus, particularly modern traditional circus, the circus is associated in popular imagination with the 'sideshow' which employs much imagery, iconography and atmosphere that seems to be associated with the European *Carnivàle*, a celebration before the Christian period of Lent, when meat cannot be consumed, which gives the celebration its name.⁵³¹ Some of this association can be traced to P.T. Barnum, who combined the circus performance itself with a number of associated displays or 'side-shows'. When did the carnival become incorporated into circus, and how and why and where do you draw the line? Why do we combine rides, fairy floss, and clowns, and why do we call circus people 'carnies'? How and where did this connection arise? What makes Cirque du Soleil circus and Sydney Luna Park carnival?

The Shared Origins of Museums and Circus

The development of circuses and museums in the 18th and 19th century seems to have a shared root in the Age of Enlightenment period of geographical and intellectual expansion and discovery. As European colonial powers such as Britain, France and Spain developed technologies and navigation skills that enabled wide exploration of the 'known world' and established colonies and out-stations, they acquired new information and items of material culture, samples of flora, fauna and even people, which were recorded or brought back to Europe for study and exhibition. This resulted in a general thirst for knowledge and the fashion for 'curiosities' developed into museums and circus via P.T. Barnum. A further exploration and explanation about this connection would be very useful in the scholarship and has not been directly addressed.

The Function, Derivation and Social Role of the Clown

Some work, particularly by Paul Bouissac, has been undertaken on the semiotic language and communicative purpose of clowns, but very little seems to have been conducted about the history and derivations of the clown characters which continue to be employed in Contemporary Circus. In ancient Greek comedy, characters displayed many of the characteristics of modern clowns, including exaggerated costuming, stylized features, interaction with the audience who viewed the performance in the round and subversion and mocking of authority, and what seem to be proto-type versions of the Auguste and white-face clown.⁵³² Is clown make-up derived from ancient theatre masks?

⁵³⁰ For example St Leon, 2011; Simon, 2014; Bouissac, 2018.

⁵³¹ 'Carnival' comes from the Latin *carne(m) levo*, meaning 'put away meat'. Moore, 1996.

⁵³² For instance, Aristophanes *Wasps* includes comic archetypes like old man, fool, foppish aristocrats, crafty slaves *vel sim*. Barrett and Aristophanes, 1974.

Appendix 4 (cont.)

In modern clowning, both at contemporary and traditional circus performances many of the *Commedia dell'arte* archetype characters are still in evidence including particularly Pierrot, Columbine and Harlequin. (See Appendix 2)

How does the clown originate and what social role does it play, not only in the medium of circus, and theatre generally, where the clown is alternately 'everyman' and alien, but in personal and the public psyche? Is this a cross-cultural phenomenon? Is the stand-up comedian a modern derivation of the clown?

Cross-cultural Circus

This study has confined itself to the examination of Contemporary Circus, which is primarily⁵³³ a phenomenon of 'Western' culture, drawing its central influences from the European tradition of circus, however it would be extremely useful to build in the literature a picture of the phenomenon of circus across diverse cultures and ethnic groups internationally. In this study, many of the interview participants spoke of the ability of their medium to cross-cultural and language barriers and it would be extremely useful to extend this perspective to a much wider examination of the appearance of circus, or circus-like phenomena in cultures other than European-centric ones, and also to discover what cultures independently developed a form of circus and which ones inherited it through colonisation or influence from a Western culture. In Australia for example, some work has been done on the use and positive effect of circus in Indigenous communities⁵³⁴ but more research on the appearance of the form in indigenous cultures across the world would be extremely useful and enlightening.

A Differentiation Between Physical Theatre and Circus

In general, the terms physical theatre and contemporary circus usually seem to be used as interchangeable, which makes attempts to define the circus medium even harder. In the interviews for this study, Rob Tannion in particular, saw a clear differentiation between physical theatre and circus... As a practitioner of circus, especially one who has personally watched contemporary circus develop since the 1990s, it is clear that a blurring of the terms has partially been responsible for a delay in the validity of the circus medium as a performing art. The framing of circus in this thesis goes some way to differentiating physical theatre from circus, but a clearer understanding and examination of the two would be advantageous for circus and performance studies.

Psychology through the Circus Disciplines

Since the circus includes such a wide range of physical disciplines in its performance there is the opportunity to research the psychology of the performers who choose to dedicate themselves to particular areas. In this pilot study, there appears to be a division between the practitioners who began as jugglers and became involved in acrobatics, but not heavily involved in the aerial arts and the practitioners who primarily work in the aerial arts who did not appear to have a natural aptitude for juggling or other forms of object manipulation. Are the choices in disciplines of the practitioners based on psychological or personality factors or environmental factors such as availability of spaces to train or classes on offer to them? Would there be common traits shared among a group of practitioners who all specialize in a shared discipline?

Resilience and the Long-term Effect of Circus Schooling

Research is beginning to emerge on how the practice of circus arts has a positive effect on the participants involved in circus classes.⁵³⁵ However, there appears to be little to no specific research conducted on the people who were involved in circus classes and circus schools from a young age and how it has influenced them as adults. Australia has many long running youth circus institutions including the FFFC that began in 1979, Cirkidz in 1985 and Spaghetti Circus in 1992 and as a result, there would now be thousands of adults who have had experience as children learning circus skills. In his interview, Taylor indicated that he sees that he and his fellow circus school cohort have a shared attitude in relation to matters such as gender equality, ageism and co-operation and are generally perceived by him as being socially adept. A study in this area would provide the research with a long-term perspective that would help support and strengthen the research on current circus learning in social circus.

⁵³³ If not wholly a phenomenon of 'Western' culture, and more investigation about this is needed.

⁵³⁴ See for example Lavers and Burt, 2017.

⁵³⁵ See for example Bolton, 2004; Seymour, 2015; Lavers, 2016.

APPENDIX 5: A View from the Outside

**** Because this thesis examines Contemporary Circus from the Insiders' perspective, I asked Lynette Jensen to provide an outsider's perspective, because she has been observing the development of the form since before the 1990s and was at art school and university in Sydney in the early 1970s, when Contemporary Circus was forming.***

How Jesse Joined the Circus

Lynette Jensen, 2018

When my son and student, Jesse Jensen-Kohl, exhibited a sustained interest in, and marked aptitude for, circus as a young teenager, I set out to find out as much as I could about the medium. At the University of Adelaide library, I found only three circus books on the shelves: *Circus!*, *Women's Circus*, and the extraordinary *Circus and Culture: A Semiotic Approach* by Paul Bouissac, which was a revelation and convinced me that circus could be taken seriously intellectually and held complex philosophical and cultural meaning. Bouissac's first book is the key to Jesse's circus career.

At 12, Jesse had taught himself to juggle with three oranges one night in a hotel in Adelaide, where we were staying in town from the Barossa Valley to attend a friend's birthday party. Naturally, although we were appreciative of his new-found trick, my husband and I thought it would be a passing phase. But Jesse continued to teach himself, and was soon asking where he could learn more. In Adelaide, there was a circus shop in Norwood and the owner agreed to teach him. From her, we found out that he had an aptitude for juggling and was learning unusually quickly. He had no trouble at all learning the notoriously difficult trick, Mill's Mess. At the same time, Jesse decided he wanted a unicycle and determinedly saved his meagre pocket money to buy one. Using hay bales in the backyard to balance himself, and with no other help, he learnt to ride it in a week. Soon he was riding around the block on it in our little country town. It was then that I saw that this was serious.

With a generational background in art, I could see that the circus form could be an artistic medium like any other, and as an historian, I knew that circus had a long theatrical history going back to ancient times. Furthermore, like many artists, I was personally attracted to the psychological contradiction of circus and its interesting mix of joy and menace, and I knew that the performance of clowning can convey some of the most powerful theatrical poetry there is. As an educator and parent though, I didn't think circus looked like a very likely or wise possible career path. So I began to find out how Jesse's passion and natural ability could be supported and developed without him having to resort to running away to the circus like so many young people had had to do in the past, usually in desperate circumstances and at the very high cost of social and artistic acceptance. Paul Bouissac showed me that circus could be intellectually valid and when Jesse read the book too, it struck him powerfully.

As a first step, I contacted our old family friend at Macquarie University, A/Prof. Tom Hillard, an ancient historian whose mother had performed as an acrobat at Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey's Circus in the 1930s and I pronounced that I had appointed him Jesse's "official circus mentor" because no matter what, I wanted Jesse to maintain a belief that circus could be intellectual as well as artistic. Next, I tracked down a street performer, who I had remembered seeing in Rundle Mall, but this took a while, because buskers don't keep regular 9-5 hours, and come and go. He turned out to be Nigel Martin, the prodigiously talented and outrageous 'Mr. Spin', and he told me about Cirkidz, the Adelaide children's circus school, and the Adelaide Juggling Club. We enrolled Jesse in classes at Cirkidz, where after only a couple of months, he was invited to join the Performing Troupe, and we began spending one evening a week in the serene Adelaide Botanic Park, where the Adelaide Juggling Club gathered under the tutelage of Philippe Quoilin, a Belgium juggler who became one of Jesse's chief circus mentors.

As an educator, I believed that it was important for students to develop their individual potential and I had read a biography of filmmaker Charlie Chaplin, where I learnt that his performance style was built on a complex mix of theatrical training in ballet, mime, Shakespearean and vaudevillean theatre, so I used that as a guide for Jesse's own development. I found classes and mentors for him in a variety of theatrical disciplines, including dance, acting, circus skills, theatre direction, stunt training, filmmaking and costume and set design, in order that he could develop his own performance style and not be stylistically influenced too greatly by any one particular performer or discipline.

Appendix 5 (cont.)

In the Cirkidz Performing Troupe, Jesse gained considerable performance and theatrical experience, and the Troupe performed at major professional theatres like the Adelaide Festival Centre and Her Majesty's Theatre, performed and held workshops for schools, and toured to Victoria and country South Australia. Through the Juggling Club and Cirkidz, as well as through Adelaide's filmmaking and general arts community, we became immersed in the rich performing arts environment, and gradually we found other mentors for Jesse's developing performance and technical skills. These included Michael Newbold, a talented clown and physical theatre performer who had trained at Jacques Lecoq's school in Paris, Leigh Warren, Artistic Director of contemporary dance company Leigh Warren and Dancers, and actor, Carmelina Di Guglielmo. Nigel Martin (Mr. Spin) and Phillippe Quoilin continued to play a major role. I meanwhile, had joined the Board of Cirkidz and was invited with Ken Evans to sit on the Board of Kneehigh Puppeteers, a company based on stilt performance, begun by Cirkidz founder Tony Hannan, who I now know through Jesse's current research had been at the influential Nanjing Project in 1983.

During this period, both my sons were writing and producing short films and were involved with Adelaide's Media Resource Centre where they found mentors like Philip Elms, Adel Hann and Des Rutherford and later Tony Dyson and Colin Reck, and they incorporated Jesse's circus experience into their films. Through the use of physical theatre, slapstick comedy, acrobatics and mime, they told stories and examined film genres. When they premiered their spoof science-fiction film *Zerna* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdMOxb8Io5g>), which used Cirkidz Troupe members including Skye Gellman as its cast and was financed with the help of many supporters who included Robyn Archer, at the art-house Mercury Cinema, they highlighted circus skills in the film and in the live performance which Jesse choreographed and that was incorporated into the event. It was a gala celebration, and a full house made up of local identities, performers and politicians. As a result, Jesse and his brother were asked to write and produce a segment for Channel 7's national TV show, *The Big Arvo*.

At some time before Cirque du Soleil came to town with *Saltimbanco* in 1999, I had realized that in Adelaide there was a group of hard-to-define performing companies who were using circus as their main performance medium and that a specific genre seemed to be forming. These included Slack Taxi, Kneehigh Puppeteers and Act One (precursor of Gravity and Other Myths) and a number of individuals including Nigel Martin, Ruben De Waal and Phillippe Quoilin, and when Cirque Du Soleil's Adelaide season was announced, I brought these performers together with contemporary visual artists in a joint exhibition and performance at Cirkidz, to celebrate the emerging form. In the years leading up to this, circus and physical theatre had been developing an increasing profile at the Adelaide Fringe Festival.

Before the company had arrived, I had been approached by Cirque du Soleil's Adelaide promoters, who specialized in promoting major arts events, who said they had no idea how to promote a circus. I advised them to target Adelaide's arts and academic communities, as well as the usual local celebrities and identities, which they did to great success. I was told later by some of the performers that Adelaide had been their most appreciative Australian audience, because in Adelaide, the audience straight away "got" their work as art. Cirque du Soleil's first appearance in Australia with *Samltimbanco* seems to have been a watershed moment for the medium here, since before its arrival, Australian Contemporary Circus consisted of a growing but still fairly random group of companies, but afterwards, audiences and performers generally seemed to have a changed, clearer view of what circus was becoming and could do. Jesse and I were invited to see the show many times, and Jesse breathed it in, like air.

All of this experience resulted in Jesse's growing confidence and expertise as a circus performer, and through his own performance work and in his collaboration in filmmaking with his brother, he learnt to apply the medium in a wider artistic and social context. Through circus, Jesse developed performance confidence and experience via skills development, frequent TV appearances, performances at professional theatres and the Adelaide Fringe Festival, short courses with NIDA and many roving performances. By 17 years of age he had been invited to audition for Cirque du Soleil, had performed professionally as a juggler with the English National Ballet and was Artistic Director of his own performance duo *Flick!*, with David Milne, which combined dance, combat, and acrobatics. It was starting to look like an actual career might be possible, and we had all learnt that circus could inform artistic and wider applications and life experiences. At the opening of the new millennium in 2000, at the *Click Millennium Festival*, Jesse performed in Victoria Square at the heart of Adelaide, among all the other members of the Cirkidz Performing Troupe, while past Cirkidz members Tara Sanders (who would go on to work with Circus Oz) and Triton Tunis-Mitchell (who would go on to form Gravity and Other Myths) performed aerial acts around them at the top of city office blocks, and giant

Appendix 5 (cont.)

crane-driven puppets, devised and choreographed by Jesse's mentor Michael Newbold and designed by Kneehigh Puppeteers, danced around the square as fire-works above us all engulfed the sky. Watching them, and seeing what we had all built, I couldn't imagine a better metaphor of joy and hope for the future than what circus was able to symbolize that night.

By the time our family returned to our hometown of Sydney in 2006, Jesse had travelled putting up tents with Circus Oz, been a Core Trainer at Cirkidz, performed and learned Flying Trapeze at Club Med, shown a short film at the Adelaide Film Festival's *Fake Film Festival*, and was soon to help establish Sydney Trapeze School with the twin brothers, Frank and Rob Taylor which he helped build into one of Australia's leading trapeze schools. Having established a children's performance troupe himself at Sydney Trapeze School, where he had become Head Instructor and Artistic Director and brought the wheel full-circle, Jesse stepped down to put his experience into full-time scholarship for this research.

This is a story about how an individual without a circus background built a career in circus, carefully crafted without the benefit of any idea of a clear career path or trajectory at a time when Contemporary Circus, although organically developing, but was not "a thing". Unlike previous generations of circus performers who had no option but to run away to join the circus if they wanted to pursue circus skills, Jesse didn't have to, but unlike those who came after him, there was no clear path and he, like many people at the time, had to make it up as he went along. Current practitioners talk about circus being an "industry" and see a straightforward career option there, while the founders of the form developed it in artistic isolation. Jesse's experience fell in the gap between the two.

In retrospect, it is clear that Jesse's circus career has reflected the development of Contemporary Circus because he was an early beneficiary of the circus schools set up by founders of the form like Tony Hannan, but he was developing his career before the proliferation of recreational circus skills or high-level formal training institutions were introduced, and he has played an active role in the medium's development in Australia. When Jesse was a teenager trying to forge a path forward in circus, although he didn't know it, a second-wave of contemporary circus was developing with companies like Circus Monoxide, Rock 'n' Roll Circus and Legs on the Wall who themselves were making it up as they went along. As they went, a critical mass built up, and now it is almost impossible to think that the form has only been clearly discernible since around the turn of the 21st century. For current practitioners, classes, schools and peers are taken for granted and most of the children in Jesse's classes at Sydney Trapeze School had no idea (sadly) of traditional circus. For them, circus *is* Contemporary Circus, and an option some of them can take for school sport.

Throughout the development of Jesse's career, we were keen to make sure that his unusual vocation did not isolate him socially, and we had to fight. Sometimes, we worried that we were wrong. We emphasized the artistic potential and application of circus, its proud history, its complex and contradictory psychological role in society, its wide potential application and its symbolic meaning. In Jesse's youth, some people were disapproving, some people were delighted and inspired, and some were just confused. We were steadfast, and so was Jesse. While negative social attitudes to circus performers do still persist (and perhaps rightly, since circus is all the things that people are afraid of, and perhaps it needs to be) since the mid-1990s when Jesse began in isolation in a little country town in the Barossa Valley, there are people now who don't think of the medium as anything other than a straightforward performance choice, and the emergence of formal, technically-based circus schools has perhaps reduced its artistic and psychological impact. Can it really be circus if it doesn't delight and scare us simultaneously? Have we cleaned up circus too much? These are questions that now need to be addressed scholastically, as in the wake of the development of Contemporary Circus, the academy has begun to follow Bouissac's pioneering lead and study circus as an academic discipline. I'm extremely pleased that Jesse's interesting and fulfilling life in circus has led him there. Circus is complex and deeply meaningful and worthy of extensive research and consideration.

I haven't looked lately on the shelves of Adelaide University Library, but I suspect that there might now be more than just three books on circus, though probably still, not many. And like Paul Bouissac, I'm still attracted to the deep meaning and complexity of circus, which has provided my family with such richness. Because of him, the medium has begun to be taken seriously in scholarship, and Jesse has a fulfilling, expansive life in circus.

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APPENDIX 6: Timeline

Australian Contemporary Circus in its Social and Cultural Context

*** This timeline is in no way comprehensive but is designed to provide a general overview of the development of Australian Contemporary Circus in its wider context and will be expanded as my research continues. Circus specific events are in bold.**

1945	- World War II ends
1949	- Robert Menzies begins second period as Australian Prime Minister (Liberal Party/Country Party coalition) until 1966
1940s - 1970s	- Sydney Push – informal left-wing libertarian intellectuals, mostly students and staff of the University of Sydney, who include Germaine Greer, Clive James and Les Murray. Many of these students go on to seek experience overseas and many develop international careers including as international thought leaders
1951	- <i>A Seat at the Circus</i> by Antony Hippisley Coxe published in UK, probably the first serious writing on circus
1955	<p>- <i>Summer of the 17th Doll</i> by Ray Lawler, is performed, Union Theatre, Melbourne, and presents Australian working class characters - possible beginning of modern 'Australian Voice' in drama. Play alludes to the menacing, contradictory nature of carnivals and side-shows through the acquisition by the characters of 'kewpie dolls' on sticks, sold at travelling carnivals and agricultural shows in Australia at the time, which form the metaphorical thread throughout the play</p> <p>- <i>Rebel Without a Cause</i> (USA), Hollywood film starring James Dean and directed by Nicholas Ray introduces the idea of rebellious youth and the 'generation gap' to a wide popular audience</p> <p>- Edna Everage, the clown-like, satirical character by Barry Humphries, first appears and spoofs Australian drab, conservative suburban and country town life. Edna Everage evolves into paradoxical and unlikely glamorous and highly colourful character over the subsequent years, possibly mirroring Australia's complex 'cultural cringe' that encompasses feelings of inadequacy juxtaposed with entitlement (the Norman Gunston character who evolves later also reflects these contradictory Australian traits)</p> <p>- Melbourne's Moomba Festival is launched, a festival and street parade organized by Melbourne City Council and run over a 4-day long weekend incorporating Labour Day</p>
1956	- Television introduced to Australia
1957	- <i>Waiting for Godot</i> by Samuel Beckett, first Australian production, Arrow Theatre, Victoria, surrealist, absurdist theatre. Use of clown-like characters who display comedy and menace simultaneously (echoing clown acts in traditional circus)
1960	- Adelaide Festival of the Arts introduced – based on Edinburgh Festival John Bishop, founding Director, Professor of Music at the University of Adelaide. The first Adelaide Writers Week launched at the festival
1961	<p>- Introduction of the contraceptive 'the Pill'. Reflects and produces massive social and cultural change and helps facilitate the Women's Movement</p> <p>- Emerald Hill Theatre Company (Melbourne) established by Wal Cherry and George Whaley - dedicated to repertoire of classics, new <i>avant-garde</i> works from overseas, and new work by Australian writers</p>
1962 - 1973	- Australian involvement in Vietnam War
1962	- Indigenous Australians granted voting rights by Menzies Government

Appendix 6 (cont.)

- 1963**
- *Oz Magazine* launched - underground youth paper a collaboration between Martin Sharp, Richard Neville and Richard Walsh
 - *Les Girls* opens, male cross-dressing cabaret, Darlinghurst, Sydney NSW, featuring Carlotta
 - *Theatre of the Absurd* season at Melbourne University produced by the University's Marlowe Society (members included Hilary McPhee who later becomes prominent Australian publisher especially of poetry and other Australian writing) features international Absurdist plays which present dream-like, surreal environments, comedy and philosophical considerations about the meaning (or meaninglessness) of existence and the human condition
 - Bob Dylan (USA) releases the album *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, featuring *Blowin' In the Wind* and re-worked traditional folk songs which capture the mood of the growing youth movement and international opposition to the Vietnam War
 - **Wirth's Circus** closes
- 1964**
- Beatles (UK) tour Australia and are mobbed by mostly teenage fans. Their music and 'look' emphasizes a growing apparent 'generation gap' between the 'younger generation' and their parents
 - National Service introduced – conscription into the army to fight in Vietnam. 19 year olds called-up in ballots
- 1964 -1968**
- *Mavis Bramston Show* - satirical comedy with beginnings of 'Australian Voice' on Channel 7 TV (Martin Sharp one of the writers)
- 1965**
- **Great Moscow Circus** first Australian tour
 - Students at Melbourne University perform Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, playwright Romeril describes as "hovered between naturalism and absurdism"
 - British model Jean Shrimpton wears a mini-skirt at the Melbourne Cup and creates a national scandal reported internationally, and a fashion revolution that expresses both youth culture and women's freedom. The mini-skirt is popularized by London youth culture fashion designer Mary Quant and others, and becomes an enduring garment that provides symbolic and physical freedom for women. In Australia, the mini-skirt is thought to suit the hot Australian climate and is quickly and widely adopted among young women
- 1966 – 1968**
- *My Name's McGooley What's Yours?* TV situation comedy about a working class Australian family in Balmain, Sydney. – 'Australian Voice' in popular TV ABN Channel 7
- 1966**
- Prime Minister Menzies (Liberal) steps down and is succeeded by Harold Holt
 - *Go Set Magazine* is first published. Youth music magazine including Ian 'Molly' Meldrum among its writers, who would go on to host ABC TV *Countdown*. *Go Set* is published until 1974. **Circus Oz founder Jon Hawkes an editor**
 - Film *They're a Weird Mob*, based on the book by John O'Grady of the same name, is a comic comment on Australian culture seen through the eyes of a post-war Italian immigrant. The film sends up Australian 'ockerism', slang and racist attitudes to immigrants and other 'non-white' Australians. It lays the ground-work for later comic films and plays about the migrant experience in Australia like *Wogs Out of Work* (1987) and *The Wog Boy* (1989)
- 1967**
- La Mama opens in Melbourne. A theatre restaurant for playwrights and experimental theatre, founded by Betty Burstall. La Mama continues to be the centre of cutting edge theatre and gives birth to the APG, a radical, activist performers' collective (see below, 1968)
 - Macquarie University opens to students – its philosophy and physical design reflecting new more radical and egalitarian thinking emerging from the socio-political environment of the times
 - Flinders University opens. Wal Cherry appointed foundation Professor of Drama – 1st such department in Australia. Experimental approach to theatre influential in development of New Wave in Australian theatre

Appendix 6 (cont.)

- 1968**
- Joh Bjelke-Petersen (Country Party) becomes Premier of Queensland beginning a long period of extremely conservative government there until 1988
 - Installation artists (a form that is to become performance art) Christo and Jean Claude brought to Australia by John Kaldor, to wrap Little Bay in Sydney
 - **Australian Theatre Group (APG)** – umbrella performing group, developed from La Mama Theatre, home of New Wave in Australian theatre (with Nimrod Theatre in Sydney) disbanded 1981.
- 1969**
- The term 'counter-culture' is coined in the USA by Theodore Roszak in *The Making of a Counter Culture*
 - *Hair* (musical) Metro Theatre, Kings Cross, NSW – a symbol of protest and defiance expresses philosophy of youthful freedom and self-expression, includes on-stage nudity and seen as an important theatrical emblem of youth movement and counter-culture
 - The Woodstock Music and Art Fair (USA) Counter-culture music festival that inspires the youth movement internationally, including Australia where the 'Nimbin Festival' will occur in 1973 (see Aquarius Festival below)
 - *Dimboola* by Jack Hibberd, a play about a country Australian wedding set in the Victorian country town Dimboola and influenced by Chechov and Brecht premiered at La Mama, Melbourne. (Circus Oz founders Robin Laurie and Jon Hawkes in the cast). This later becomes popular Australian film in 1979 featuring Pram Factory members including Max Gillies, Bruce Spence and Robin Laurie
 - **Captain Matchbox Whoopee Band is formed in Melbourne, amalgamates with APG members to form Soapbox Circus in 1976**
 - **Bullen Bros. Circus closes**
 - GTK (Get to Know) 5 minute popular music show on ABC TV and precursor of *Countdown* on ABC TV runs until 1974
- 1970 - 1979**
- Premier Don Dunstan leads Labor Party Government in South Australia and brings sweeping social and political change especially in the arts and social equity policies. The rest of Australia sees South Australia as a leader of arts and liberal social initiatives
- 1970**
- **The APG opens Pram Factory.** Circus and puppet performances along with other experimental theatre and performance media, with emphasis on community theatre, audience empowerment, collaborative approach, absurdist theatre, realist theatre and an 'Australian Voice'. It becomes hot-house of New Wave Australian theatre, launching actors, playwrights, comedians and entertainers to prominent careers, including David Williamson, Helen Garner and Greig Pickhaver
 - Australian pop artist Martin Sharp returns to Australia from London and opens the Yellow House – a collective of artists and gallery space in Potts Point, Sydney. Sharp collaborates on Luna Park, Sydney (designer/artist) over 1970s
 - Nimrod Theatre in Sydney opens featuring Australian plays – iconic clown signature poster by Martin Sharp featuring Australian vaudevillian clown character, Mo McCackie (Roy Rene). Sharp also collaborates with the Nimrod on set and stage design
 - *The Female Eunuch* by Australian scholar and Sydney Push member, Germaine Greer becomes international best-seller and a seminal Feminist Movement work
 - The Tin Sheds is set up at the University of Sydney as a practical art studio and becomes a hot-house of radical, political art work especially poster art addressing issues including Feminism, Indigenous land rights, and gay rights. **An early Soapbox Circus and iconic poster is designed and produced there by Chips Mackinolty featuring clowns as soldiers**
- 1971**
- *Godspell* (musical) Playbox Theatre Melbourne, Vic. Jesus and other characters depicted in clown-like/carnavalesque costumes

Appendix 6 (cont.)

- Gough Whitlam, then Opposition Leader, goes to China
- *Don's Party*, by David Williamson, a play about the 1969 election and the emptiness of Australian suburban lives, staged at La Mama in Melbourne
- 1972 – 1975**
 - Gough Whitlam Prime Minister (Labor) brings in sweeping social change
- 1972**
 - *Cabaret* (USA) film released, set in Germany in early 1930s during the Weimar Republic, starring Lisa Minnelli and Joel Grey. Introduces comic and menacing Brechtian cabaret style to a wide international audience
 - *The Auntie Jack Show*, ABC TV, brings clown-like characters, cross-dressing, surrealism and absurdist comedy and modernized pantomime to young, broad audience. Exploring the 'Australian Voice'
 - Paul Hogan *Anyhow Have a Winfield* cigarette commercials begin appearing on Australian TV, featuring Paul Hogan, quintessential (and real - he was a Harbour Bridge labourer) Australian larrikin 'ocker'.
 - Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) established, a faculty of the University of Melbourne. Encourages experimental theatre and ideas and community out-reach
 - Designer Jenny Kee, recently returned from London where she was involved in the fashion of the 'swinging 60s' opens Flamingo Park with Linda Jackson in the Strand Arcade, Sydney where her designs, especially knitted woollen cardigans featuring flat, brightly coloured Australian motifs become internationally recognisable (Diana, Princess of Wales wears one of her designs) and help spark wide interest in Australia and help Australians see themselves and the country in a new way. Her confident focus on native flora and fauna re-invent the colour palette with which Australia is associated. Her designs incorporating the 'Oz' spelling for Australia (Aus), which incorporates reference to brightly coloured world of the Wizard of Oz, probably introduces this new way of spelling 'Aus' which is now largely ubiquitous
 - *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* directed by Bruce Beresford and starring Barry Crocker and Barry Humphries, early attempt to produce film highlighting Australian characterization. Beresford goes on to make *Don's Party* (1976), *The Getting of Wisdom* (1977), *Breaker Morant* (1980) and *Puberty Blues* (1981)
 - *Basically Black* - National Black Theatre performs its first production at the Nimrod Theatre, a trail-blazing satirical review by Indigenous Australian activists and actors Bob Maza, Aileen Corpus, Bindi Williams, Zac Martin and Gary Foley
The format appears on ABC TV the following year, see below
 - Split of Philosophy Department at the University of Sydney. Radical Marxist and Feminist lecturers in the department of Philosophy break away from the main department, reflecting a general shift in thinking in universities generally among students and staff
 - *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Capitol Theatre, Sydney (concert of the music premiered in 1972 Adelaide Festival of the Arts) socially controversial re-telling of the New Testament featuring rock music and humanistic portrayal of Jesus and the apostles. Musical is an expression of the youth movement's desire to re-claim cultural stories
- 1973**
 - Australia withdraws from Vietnam
 - Adelaide Festival Centre opens – purpose built-arts centre
 - Sydney Opera House opens (first begun in 1957)
 - Martin Sharp's Yellow House closes
 - Aquarius Festival Nimbin – counter-culture festival organized by the Australian Union of Students. **Tim Coldwell, a founder of New Circus and Circus Oz attends.** Philippe Petite attends and performs there
 - **Philippe Petit**, French rope-walker, walks illegally above Sydney Harbour Bridge and goes on to walk between the Twin Towers building in New York the following year

Appendix 6 (cont.)

- Rock band AC/DC forms and in its early iteration wears mostly 'glam rock' costumes onstage such as satin, school uniforms and other costumes. This echoes the alien, 'gender bending' and clown-like characters of the Aunty Jack Show introduced on TV the previous year. AC/DC gets wide Australian popular exposure through its performances on *Countdown*, which is introduced to Australian TV in 1974 (see below)
- **Flying Trapeze Café**, a comedy and physical performance venue in Fitzroy, Melbourne opens
- John and Gini Pinder with Humphrey Poland. Later sold to Ralph Kerle. Pinder goes on to open Last Laugh in 1976 (see below)
- *Alvin Purple* released – Australian movie exploring the effects of the youth culture and its 'permissive' sexual mores with an Australian 'anti-hero'. Made by APG members as an attempt at home-grown Australian popular film. Movie is seen as crass and over-sexualized but is a popular success
- Whitlam Government lowers the voting age from 21 to 18 years
- *Basically Black*, featuring 'Superboong', is shown on ABC – cutting, witty, ironic satire of white Australia by black activist actors. *Basically Black* was the first Indigenous TV show in Australia
- The Band Skyhooks forms, with links to APG, it begins as a subversive band appealing to inner-city intelligentsia audiences with songs about realist local subjects, including drugs and prostitution, and political critique, and uses flamboyant, often circus-inspired costumes and make-up. The band goes on to mass popular success.
- 1974 - 1987** - *Countdown* – youth popular music show introduced by ABC TV bringing Australian identity in popular music to wide youth audience. Encourages Australian musicians and provides a platform and exposure for their work
- 1974** - Whitlam Govt. introduces free Tertiary education
- **New Circus launched in Adelaide** (Tim Coldwell, Michael 'Mick' Harbison, John 'Jack' Daniels, Dave Black (1973 according to St Leon and Broadway)
- *Rockie Horror Picture Show*, New Arts Cinema, Glebe, NSW (Reg Livermore) – outrageous cross-dressing, cabaret inspired costumes, rock music parody musical. Disturbing and psychologically interesting juxtaposition of horror and catchy popular music and dance, movement and colour
- 1975** - Prime Minister Gough Whitlam (Labor) is dramatically dismissed by Governor General, and Malcolm Fraser (Liberal) is appointed caretaker Prime Minister until general election is held. Fraser Government until 1983
- Colour television introduced in Australia
- *The Norman Gunston Show* appears on ABC TV featuring the fictional TV host and interviewer and clown character, Norman Gunston, a parody of the 'little Australian battler'. The character first appeared on the Aunty Jack Show, ABC TV
- *Animal Liberation*, a seminal work for the Animal Liberation Movement by Australian philosopher Peter Singer is published
- 1976** - **The Last Laugh comedy club/restaurant opens** in Melbourne (John Pinder and Roger Evans)
- **Soapbox Circus formed and *The Great Stumble Forward* performed: Soapbox Circus and the Captain Whoopee Matchbox Band (APG)**
- ***Circus and Culture: A Semiotic Approach* by Paul Bouissac (Canada) is published – ground-breaking scholarly work on the meaning and coded language of circus**
- Pop group Mental as Anything forms, and receives wide popular exposure on ABC TV *Countdown*. The group forms from a group of Sydney art students at Alexander Mackie College (now part of University of NSW) and brings a satirical, ironic twist to the Australian image and culture. The group uses deliberately easily accessible pop music to parody and explore a

Appendix 6 (cont.)

surreal sense of the ridiculous and paradoxical emptiness and apparent pleasure of Australian suburban life (similar to the conflicting horror and pleasant blankness portrayed by Tim Burton in the USA film *Edward Scissor Hands*). In its iconography and costuming, the band employees flat colour, stylized, exaggerated, clown-like on-stage personas and a general impression of craziness and danger. **This performance style will be echoed in many of the contemporary Circus companies such as Circus Oz, Circus Monoxide, and Rock 'n' Roll Circus.**
Member of the group, Reg Mombassa will later design iconographic Circus Oz posters

1977

- Sydney Festival established (grows out of the previous Waratah Festival)
- ***Waiter, There's a Circus in My Soup***, **New Circus** performed at Last Laugh Café, Melbourne having met John Pinder in Adelaide with Soapbox Circus members
- **Circus Oz forms from New Circus (Adelaide) and Soapbox Circus (Melbourne) funded by APG**
- **Handspan Theatre** formed (Melbourne)– puppetry - collective of performance arts

1978

- **Circus Oz is incorporated and has its first performances at Moomba Festival and Adelaide Festival of the Arts** in purpose built tent designed and made at by the company at the Pram Factory. In Adelaide, the company receives popular and critical success
- *Comedy of Errors* by William Shakespeare is performed at Nimrod Upstairs, Sydney, directed by Jon Bell. Depicts all characters in clown/circus costumes by Victoria Feitscheron on a round, revolving set like a circus ring and featuring circus and side-show iconography designed by Larry Eastwood. Features then famous Australian television comic Drew Forsythe with Maggie Dence and Henry Szeps
- **Martin Sharp lends his circus collection to the Art Gallery of NSW** for an exhibition to coincide with the Sydney Festival, *Fairground Arts and Novelties*
- The Gay and Lesbian Mardi-Gras begins in Darlinghurst, Sydney with a public street protest to mark International Gay Solidarity Day at which many protesters are arrested and subjected to police brutality. The protest and the brutality results in a growing show of support from the general community which leads to an annual highly colourful parade that features floats, stylized and extreme costuming and much colour, parody and spectacle

1979

- **The Flying Fruit Fly Circus** (youth circus/school Albury/Wodonga) formed by Murray River Performing Group and others in the International Year of the Child. Name is a play on the fruit fly check-point at the border between Victoria and NSW
- *Kold Komfort Kaffee* by Bertolt Brecht is performed at Nimrod Theatre, Sydney, devised by Robyn Archer and directed by Ken Horler featuring Robyn Archer and John Gaden. Designed and poster designed by Martin Sharp
- ***Sideshow in Burlesco*** performed at Nimrod Theatre Downstairs, Sydney

1980

- **Circus Oz first International Tour** - performs at Roundhouse London, Belgium and New Guinea
- **Wimmin's Circus forms** – using circus skills to empower women and build and rebuild confidence

1981

- Australian Robyn Archer writes and performs *A Pack of Women* in London and tours around Australia in 1983. Cabaret style feminist show featuring Robyn Archer, Meryl Tankard and Judi Connelli
- Pram Factory (premises) is sold and APG folds
- The *Macquarie Dictionary* is released, the first dictionary to provide a coverage of the language spoken by Australians, including Australian idiom, and becomes an authoritative source on Australian English. The *Macquarie Dictionary* originally developed by the Linguistics Dept. of Macquarie University, Sydney and edited by Susan Butler. It plays a major role in legitimizing the 'Australian Voice'

Appendix 6 (cont.)

- 1982** - ***Barnum the Musical***, Starring Reg Livermore (former star of Sydney production of *Rocky Horror Picture Show* 1974 and *Jesus Christ Superstar* 1972) performed in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne. Production had first opened on Broadway in 1980
- 1983** - **Nanjing Project 1** – 3 month skills acquisition collaboration with Circus Oz, Flying Fruit Fly Circus and Aust. Govt. initiated by Carillo Gantner to bring performers across Australia together with skilled acrobats from Nanjing, China organized by Robin Laurie and others. Many of Australia's leading Contemporary Circus founders attend including Tim Coldwell, Sue Broadway, Robin Laurie, Simon Yates, Ollie Black, Derek Ives, Tony Hannan, Jane Mullett and Stephen Burton (see Appendix 3)
- Bob Hawke becomes Prime Minister of Australia
- 1984** - **Circus Oz performs at Los Angeles Olympic Games**
- **Cirque du Soleil forms in Canada** as part of Quebec's celebration of the 450th anniversary of Jacques Cartier's discovery of Canada
- 1985** - **Nanjing Project 2** - 8 month collaborative training project with Chinese acrobats and Australian performers (Appendix 3)
- **Cirkidz forms in Adelaide** - youth circus school founded by Tony Hannan and Michael Lester
- **Reg Bolton settles in Perth, Australia from the UK**, where he has already been working in education and street theatre using circus skills for youth, community and educational applications. Starts Circus in a Suitcase shortly after
- 1986** - Robyn Archer's *Pack of Women* television version produced by ABC taking cabaret style to wide audience
- 1987** - Melbourne Comedy Festival launched by Barry Humphries and British comedian Peter Cook
- **Rock 'n' Roll Circus forms in Brisbane, Queensland** – later becomes **Circa** (see 2004 below). 'Grungy', politically based performance aiming to give sense of empowerment and inclusion to popular audiences in an era of repressive local Queensland government under Joh Bjelke-Petersen. Antonella Casella is one of the founders
- 1988** - Bicentennial celebrations create multiple arts and community projects culminating the Bicentennial celebrations, brings heightened awareness of Indigenous community and issues to general public awareness
- Expo '88 – Brisbane, part of the Bicentennial celebration and hype, **brings buskers and other Contemporary Circus (a term already used by Circus Oz) to Australia**, which connects Australian practitioners to an international network and adds international cross-fertilization to Australian scene
- Joh Bjelke-Petersen resigns from his position as Queensland Premier
- 1989 – 1991** - *The Big Gig* ABC TV comedy show hosted by Wendy Harmer and produced by Ted Robinson features stand-up comedians mainly from Melbourne's thriving comedy scene and introduced Found Objects (later Lano and Woodley – comedy and mime), the Umbilico Brothers (mime and physical theatre) and the Doug Anthony Allstars (political satire, music and mime)
- 1989** - Bangarra Dance Company formed, Indigenous Australian dance company, Artistic Director Stephen Page since 1991
- 1990** - **The Circus Summit held at the Arts Centre Melbourne attended by 160 delegates and funded by Australia Council, initiated by Mark St Leon**
- ***Barnum* is performed by Western Australian Theatre Company** at his Majesty's Theatre, Perth starring Jan Adele and Terence Donovan with Helene Embling, Mel Fyfe and Joe Bolton
- **The Tasmanian Circus Festival begins** founded by Tony Rooke
- 1991** - Paul Keating (Labor) becomes Prime Minister

Appendix 6 (cont.)

- 1991**
- DAAS Capital on ABC TV by the Doug Anthony Allstars featuring the character Flacco, played by Paul Livingston, a dark alien-like clown character with middle-European clown references. Doug Anthony Allstars introduce a different Australian character – angry, middle-class students influenced by and parodies of the punk movement, an anti-authoritarian music, philosophical and social movement that was especially prolific in the 1980s in response to UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's conservative hard-line economic policies
 - **The Women's Circus is founded in Melbourne** as a feminist organisation working to empower survivors of domestic violence and abuse inspired by first Wimmin's Circus (see 1980 above)
- 1992**
- **Bizircus in Western Australia, first performance *Circus Absurdus Musicae*, Old Customs House, Perth, WA** - Stephen Burton brought from Circus Oz to produce
 - *Strictly Ballroom*, an Australian film made by Baz Luhrmann, NIDA graduate, achieves international success portraying and parodying Australian suburban culture through a surreal, heightened, grotesque and highly coloured comic-book style production. The protagonist innocent young lovers are viewed against a background of carnival clown-like, sinister adult characters which, like circus, are simultaneously comic and sinister. The film accidentally inspires a revival in ballroom dancing as a populist medium
 - **Spaghetti Circus, established at country Mullumbimby, NSW** – circus school for children
- 1993**
- Meryl Tankard becomes Artistic Director of Australian Dance Theatre (Adelaide) and experiments with aerial performance in ground-breaking *Furioso* performed at The Playhouse, Adelaide Festival Centre
 - Sydney to host 2000 Olympics is announced – period of extensive planning and activity involving sports, community and arts activities that will culminate not only in the sports competition of the Olympic Games, but the harnessing of many performing arts, physical theatre, and circus performers and companies in the opening and closing ceremonies
 - **Hoopla Circus Festival Darling Harbour begins**, bringing together circus and carnival with circus performances, street performance and circus-related activities. Festival runs yearly until 2014
- 1994**
- *I Dreamt I Could Fly*, Circus Oz/Handspan Theatre collaboration, Yarra River, Melbourne. Amalgamated circus and puppetry
- 1995**
- **Vulcana Women's Circus forms in Brisbane**, named after a UK feminist strong woman circus performer born in 1874
- 1996**
- John Howard (Liberal) becomes Prime Minister
 - **Circus Monoxide forms in Bathurst, NSW**, parodying the Bathurst annual car race, by Theatre Media students at Charles Sturt University including Mike Finch
 - ***Circus!* Exhibition opens at the Powerhouse Museum Sydney**, featuring memorabilia of the Jandaschewsky family of clowns and circus performers. A publication of the same name is produced and edited by curator Kimberley Webber, **including a chapter by Australian circus historian Mark St Leon, who identifies there a new style of circus emerging in Australia**
- 1997**
- **Mike Finch, the 27 year old co-founder of Circus Monoxide, is appointed Artistic Director of Circus Oz.** He remains in the position until 2015 when he steps down and is succeeded by Rob Tannion
- 1998**
- **Flipside Circus is formed in Brisbane** - a children's circus school
- 1999**
- **Cirque du Soleil first tours Australia with *Saltimbanco*.** Shows a large general audience the artistic possibilities of the medium of circus
 - **Circus Arts – first successful trapeze rig in Sydney** opened by Belinda Hultgren
 - **Aerialize – aerial skills school established in Sydney**

Appendix 6 (cont.)

- 2000**
- New Years Eve Sydney celebrations - **Legs on the Wall** and Australian Dance Theatre (**Housedance** by Gary Stewart) perform on the sails and walls of the Sydney Opera House, bringing physical theatre and circus skills combined with dance to a wide audience (performance televised across the world). Fireworks on Harbour Bridge feature Arthur Skace symbol, "Eternity" popularized in iconography by Martin Sharp
 - **Click Millennium Festival (Year 2000 celebration) Adelaide, brings together many of South Australia's circus and physical theatre and movement companies at Victoria Square – Cirkidz Performing Troupe, Knee High Puppeteers, Act One (featuring Triton Tunis-Mitchell who would form Gravity and Other Myths), Urban Dance Theatre – interactive circus and physical theatre performances, giant fork-lift based Queen Victoria puppets dance in the square and in adjoining streets (fork-lift puppets devised and choreographed by Michael Newbold, Lecoq trained Adelaide clown and circus practitioner in collaboration with Kneehigh Puppeteers). Fire-works combined with aerial acts on top of city buildings**
 - Sydney hosts the Olympic Games and receives much international attention and acclaim. Circus, giant puppets, satirisation of Australian archetypes employed in spectacular opening and closing ceremonies. Priscilla, Queen of the Dessert and bus (from the movie based on Les Girls cabaret performer Carlotta) is featured along with traditional Australian archetypes like stockmen and life-savers. The slang catch-cry, "Aussie, Aussie Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi" is revived and celebrated. Many leading Australian arts practitioners are employed for the opening and closing ceremonies, including Stephen Page, Meryl Tankard, Rhoda Roberts, Ignatious Jones and Ken Donne, and a series of arts festivals are presented in the lead-up to the Games opening and closing events. Contemporary Circus played a pivotal role and perhaps crystallized as a medium in the Sydney Olympic Games celebrations. Sydney Olympic Games set the standard for future Olympic Games
 - **The National Institute of Circus Arts** begins - a national training school for circus arts, having grown out of the Circus Summit (1990) and increased popular interest in practicing circus arts
- 2001**
- Adelaide Cabaret Festival introduced by Frank Ford - Festival stars Australian/British Caroline O'Connor, who is featured in the film *Moulin Rouge* and who performed in the Broadway USA production of *Chicago* in 2007
 - *Moulin Rouge* by Australian filmmaker Baz Luhrmann – a film that re-invigorates musicals (although it is a parody of musical film genre) and brings the world of late 19th century burlesque and vaudeville to a wide audience
- 2004**
- **Reg Bolton is awarded PhD on circus, *Why Circus Works: how the values and structures of circus make it a significant developmental experience for young people* (Murdoch University, Western Australia)**
 - **Rock 'n' Roll Circus changes its name to CIRCA** under the artistic direction of Yaron Lifschitz (A Directing graduate of the National Institute of Dramatic Arts) and completely transforms its performance style from edgy political message delivered with daring and brash artistic style to a contemporary dance-related minimalist style
- 2005**
- **Jane Mullett is awarded PhD on circus: *Circus alternatives: the rise of new circus in Australia, the United States, Canada and France*. (La Trobe University, Victoria.)**
- 2006**
- **Circus Arts opens indoor trapeze rig and circus school in Byron Bay, NSW**
 - **Mark St Leon awarded PhD on Australian circus history: *Circus and Nation* (University of Sydney)**
- 2007**
- Kevin Rudd (Labor) becomes Prime Minister
 - **The Sideshow** ABC TV produced by Ted Robinson (*Big Gig* see above) and hosted by Paul McDermott (of Doug Anthony Allstars) cabaret style show that features many of Australia's circus and physical performers including Umbilico Brothers and Tigerlil. Show captures and capitalizes on the growing Contemporary Circus zeitgeist
 - **Gillian Arrighi is awarded a PhD for *A circus and its context: the FitzGerald Brothers' Circus in Australia and New Zealand, 1888-1906* (University of Newcastle, NSW)**

Appendix 6 (cont.)

- 2008**
- Prime Minister Kevin Rudd offers apology to Indigenous Australians for mistreatment by European settlers over many years
 - **Sydney Trapeze School established**, St. Peters Sydney by twin brothers Frank and Rob Taylor. Founding employee and head instructor Jesse Jensen-Kohl (ex-Cirkidz Performing Troupe) employs male and female instructors and attempts to break down social and gender barriers to trapeze tuition and performance. School makes flying trapeze easily accessible to general population as a sport and recreational activity, and provides both beginner and high-level training. Many Sydney Trapeze School trained practitioners will go on to perform and teach around the world with circuses and at other venues.
- 2009**
- **Gravity and Other Myths formed in Adelaide, South Australia** by former Cirkidz Performing Troupe member, Triton Tunis-Mitchell with other former Cirkidz Troupe members Lachlan Binns, Jascha Boyce, Martin Schreiber, Jacob Randell, Tilda Cobham-Hervey and Brie Henwood
 - **Kim Baston awarded PhD on music in circus and theatre: *Scoring Performance: The Function of Music in Contemporary Theatre and Circus* (La Trobe University, Victoria)**
- 2010**
- **Andrea Lemon awarded PhD for her dissertation, *Tough as Buggery: Traditional Australian Circus, Community and Belonging* (University of Melbourne)**
- 2011**
- ***Circus: The Australian Story* by Mark St Leon is published, a comprehensive historical overview of Australian circus**
 - ***Like Water for Elephants***, US film set in a circus in the 1930s, starring Reece Witherspoon
- 2012**
- **Circus Arts** opens flying trapeze and circus school in Brisbane
 - **BLAKflip established by Circus Oz** – development programme for Indigenous circus artists. Project introduced under the guidance of Mike Finch
- 2014**
- ***Circus Factory* exhibition is presented at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney**, curated by Peter Cox and designed by French scenographer Gérard Cholot who created a contemporary reinterpretation of some traditions and aesthetics of traditional circus. Exhibition included Museum's collection of circus costumes and memorabilia including the Wirth's Circus collection
- 2015**
- **Mike Finch steps down as Circus Oz Artistic Director**
 - ***The FitzGerald Brothers' Circus* by Gillian Arrighi** is published, a case study of an Australian circus within the wider Australian context
- 2016**
- ***The Routledge Circus Reader*** is published, edited by Peta Tait and Katie Lavers
 - **Rob Tannion takes up the position of Artistic Director and CEO at Circus Oz**
 - **Circus Oz Strong Women Programme** is introduced to encourage personal and performance strength and artistic output and confidence in women
 - **Jon Burt awarded PhD, *Pedagogy in Performance: An Investigation into Decision Training as a Cognitive Approach to Circus Training* (Edith Cowan University, WA)**
 - **Sydney Trapeze School Youth Performing Troupe** is established (by Jesse Jensen-Kohl) and its first production is *Transitions* performed 4th July
- 2017**
- ***Model Citizens***, the first Circus Oz production by Rob Tannion is premiered
 - **Circus City**, a circus-based event including performances, lessons, activities, talks and forums introduced by the Sydney Festival and becomes an on-going event
 - **Circus Studies introduced at Macquarie University** within the Department of Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies
 - ***The Greatest Showman***, a Hollywood film about P.T. Barnum, starring Hugh Jackman is released

Appendix 6 (cont.)

2018

- Kristy Seymour awarded PhD, *Bodies, Temporality and Spatiality in Australian Contemporary Circus* (Griffith University, Qld)
- Sydney Trapeze School celebrates 10 years of operation: founders Frank and Rob Taylor with Jesse Jensen-Kohl
- Paul Bouissac publishes *The Meaning of Circus: The Communicative Experience of Cult, Art and Awe*
- La Mama burns down and the building is largely destroyed. Funds are being raised to keep its programs going and rebuild the venue
- Circus Oz celebrates its 40th Anniversary with the production *Precarious*

APPENDIX 7: Ethics Approval Letter

Re: 'Running Away to the Circus: A pilot study for a national survey of Australian contemporary circus exploring the lived experience and motivations of professional practitioners.'

The above application was reviewed by the Faculty of Arts Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval of the above application is granted, effective (30/11/2017). This email constitutes ethical approval only.

If you intend to conduct research out of Australia you may require extra insurance and/or local ethics approval. Please contact Maggie Feng, Tax and Insurance Officer from OFS Business Services, on x1683 to advise further.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Dr Jon Burt
Mr Jesse Niels Jensen-Kohl

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 30th November 2018
Progress Report 2 Due: 30th November 2019
Progress Report 3 Due: 30th November 2020
Progress Report 4 Due: 30th November 2021
Final Report Due: 30th November 2022

NB. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/current_research_staff/human_research_ethics/resources

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).
4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms
5. Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse

effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

<http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/>

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of approval to an external organisation as evidence that you have approval, please do not hesitate to contact the Faculty of Arts Research Office at ArtsRO@mq.edu.au

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of ethics approval.

Yours sincerely

Dr Mianna Lotz
Chair, Faculty of Arts Human Research Ethics Committee
Australian Hearing Hub
Macquarie University
Balaclava Rd
NSW 2109 Australia
Mianna.Lotz@mq.edu.au