

## **Fabulous Risk: Danger and Performance in Circus and Sideshow Papers**

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### **Gillian Arrighi, University of Newcastle, Australia**

Gillian Arrighi has a performance background in theatre and dance with a specialisation in mask performance. She worked as a touring performer with the Cahoots Theatre Company for ten years, then in the area of popular culture as the editor of directories for the Australasian music industry and the Australian sports industry. Post-graduate research includes an MCA (2003) concerning the neutral mask, and she is currently writing a PhD thesis about the FitzGerald Brothers' Circus. She is based at the University of Newcastle where she teaches a physicalised approach to acting.

### **Imagining National Identity at the Circus: The FitzGerald Brothers' Australian Circus 1892-1905**

The FitzGerald Brothers' Circus achieved broad colonial attention during the depression years of the early 1890s. Popular seasons in Melbourne and Sydney led *The Bulletin* to assert that the company was 'one of the most genuine artistic successes ever known in Australia' and to submit to its national readership that 'in this line of business Australians can hold their own as performers, athletes, horse-trainers, or organizers with any other nations in the world.' The company's increase in size and popularity was for a time underwritten with marketing rhetoric that colluded with the isolationist and protectionist ideologies of the left side of Australian politics but over the course of their performance history to 1905, the FitzGerald Brothers authored a variety of marketing narratives. Reflecting the complex nature of Australian citizenship, they participated at times in emerging nationalist mythologies, while at other times they collaborated with Australia's role as Britain's imperial partner in the Pacific. But the public shows of this late nineteenth-century circus were more varied and diverse than the promotional language of the company's newspaper columns and advertising heralds. Although the FitzGerald Brothers eventually proposed their success as a metonym for the late colonial story of patriarchal progress, the discourses underpinning many of the acts in their circus contravened dominant cultural attitudes concerning race and gender. This paper will examine some of the narratives of nation, identity, and belonging that were articulated in the marketing, and imagined in the various shows of the FitzGerald Brothers' Circus during the years 1892-1905.

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### **Bill Blaikie, Charles Sturt University**

Bill Blaikie is a senior lecturer in Theatre/Media at Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, NSW, where he has developed a series of workshop exercises in acrobatics which help introduce his students to circus as a creative theatre form. Many Theatre/Media graduates work in circus and physical theatre around the world. Bill is an external advisor to the New Zealand based Circo Arts training course in Christchurch and has close ties with Circus Monoxide and Circus Oz.

### **'Circus and Carnival!**

Circus is a carnival site that offers critique of official culture. This is fun and it is dangerous. It takes us to the people's 'second life' an inverted world order where

other voices are heard, other meanings are made, and where a fresh dialectic can be opened up. This is a place where the people can live and assert oppositional meanings about the purposes of life.

Current official culture and the push for globalism mean that these forces need stronger oppositional voices at the same time as the language of opposition is being curtailed and diminished to a point where we have almost lost the language of opposition. Has circus been bought out, or can it provide the site for the resurgence of the people's utopia?

If we follow the lead of such companies as Archaos and La Fura dels Baus, Footsbarn and the prewar German Kabaret we may glimpse these possibilities. The task is to stake this claim, and through the tricks and routines of the officialised circus performer find our ways toward that carnival utopia.'

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### **Lilly Blue**

Lilly Blue is a professional artist and educator recently returned from a 6 year adventure in the United States. She spent her time there working in remote and impoverished areas of NY and NJ utilizing a social circus model to address emotional, educational and psychological concerns. Lilly has been teaching circus arts, physical theatre and spontaneity to children, adolescents and adults for 15 years. A six year old taught her how to ride a unicycle. Lilly recently returned from a five day training with Cirque Du Monde and 2 day social circus conference in Chicago.

### **Dangerous Love - Taking Emotional Risks and Social Circus**

Sometimes the risk is to fly on a high trapeze and face death and sometimes it is a greater risk to hold someone's hand, or to tell a bold and unapologetic truth, or to fall in love. I will also talk about the conference and training in Chicago and would like to mention Reg, as this was his passion and the conference is in his honor.

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### **Yoram S. Carmeli, University of Haifa**

Yoram S. Carmeli is with the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Haifa, Israel. He studied The British circus (fieldwork 1975-79, 2002-2003) and published on circus extensively. His interest in modern and post modern society has also led to other publications, focused on new reproductive technologies, consumption and sport.

### **The Traveling Circus of Mid-1970s Britain: Danger and the Circus Being**

The drama of danger in the circus should be analyzed in the context of the cultural and historical significances of the show as a whole.

During the mid-1970's, the British traveling circus had presented displays of the travelers' performing bodies as well as displays of their itinerant life. Travelers were perceived by the circus public as objectified through their self-display and, thereby, as being socially and ontologically apart. Within the circus Big-Top, the spectators illusorily recuperated a sense of 'community' and 'history', lost in modernity and now

conjured up through the performance of the circus' apartness from social time and relations.

Danger to life is dramatized and perceived in this circus as highlighting the performer's shift between control and loss of control. The performer embodies a 'subject' objectified through his/her own performance, the peril and destructive course of a human being de-realized and turned into an image and sign of a human being. The spectacle of danger thus dramatizes the social and ontological exclusion of the performer, and encapsulates the unique modality of the circus being. This unique being, and the nostalgic conjuring of a totality of which the circus is apart, are at the core of the public's attraction to the circus in the mid 1970's.

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### **Georgine Clarsen, University of Wollongong**

Georgine Clarsen teaches in the History and Politics Program at the University of Wollongong. Her research interests include the history of technologies, particularly women's engagements with automobile technology. She is currently working on a counter-history of the Round Australia Redex Trials of the 1950s. Georgine is a qualified motor mechanic, and a long-time member of Circus Oz.

### **From “Struggle to Juggle, Dare to Grin” to “Tolerance, Diversity and Human Kindness”: Circus Oz and the Politics of Hope**

Circus Oz, framed from its inception as a specifically Australian cultural expression, was born both political and transnational. Transnational, because of its foundational debt to a global form, however much it aspired to invent a new version of circus. Political and transnational, both, by its inspiration in the utopian and internationalist movements of feminism and the new left. This paper considers the history of political expression in Circus Oz's thirty-year history, and explores the imaginative resources the company has variously drawn upon to articulate their engagement with an oppositional Australian politics. The anarchistic and unkempt physicality of Circus Oz's performative politics, the radical openness of its comic form and its brazenly cheerful appropriation of styles and ideas, offers a vehicle for conjuring possible other worlds. In those worlds, difference, weirdness or failure is made a source of comedy rather than fear, collectivity enables, and courage becomes a nonchalant everyday attribute. This politics of conviviality, to use Paul Gilroy's term, suggests other ways of conceiving community beyond fixed, closed boundaries in which fragile privileges must be carefully defended. In the risky business of circus performance, disenchantment has no place, and audiences are invited to engage in a renewal of hope. Precisely how that has been expressed, and to what ends, has reflected the changing nature of Australian political debates.

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### **Michael Cohen**

Michael Cohen is a theatre practitioner, academic and event producer whose professional practice has all centred on cultural projects in diverse public spaces. As a solo performer, he toured a street show Emu Performance extensively in Asia and Europe for over 12 years. He co-founded Sydney site-based company Theatre Kantanka and worked on its projects for ten years as performer, director and producer. As an academic Michael worked for seven years at the University of Sydney (Performance Studies) focusing his publications / research areas focus on the cultural genres of festival and spectacle. Recently, he co-produced the Live Bait

Festival (Bondi, 2004) and for the last three years has been the Programme Director of an annual public events programme in Newcastle NSW called Live Sites, running activities over 100 days per year.

## **"Everything and Nothing: Snapshots of Circus and Street Arts in Montreal and Toronto"**

In this paper I examine two urban renewal projects in East Coast Canada: TOHU Cite des Arts de Cirque and Harbourfront Centre Toronto.

A recent professional development placement in Canada shed some valuable light on two very different approaches to the funding, programming and management of urban revitalisation through the arts.

My work with Live Sites in Newcastle NSW follows this same model of cultural regeneration of industrial urban zones. What kind of role can circus and street arts play in major city developments?

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### **Anne Collett, University of Wollongong**

Anne Collett teaches in the English Literatures Program at the University of Wollongong. Her interest in circus is related to an interest in performance in literature and art, generated initially by Caribbean poetry, and more recently by the work and lives of Mohawk poet, Pauline Johnson-Tekahionwake, Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo and New Zealand solo-flyer, Jean Batten. Anne is editor of *Kunapipi: journal of postcolonial literatures*.

### **Clown-atrocity: Dickens, Grimaldi and the relationship of Clown to class in English 'hard times'**

Recalling the life of the man who gave the name 'Joey' to Clowning and came to epitomize the English Clown, *The Athenaeum* wrote:

'No actor on the stage, in our recollection, could ever produce such effects as [Joseph] Grimaldi produced - and in the streets, the middling and the lower classes almost worshipped him. He was identified with their best feelings of innocent relaxation, pure warm-heartedness and boundless humour.' (1838);

and a year later *The Humorist* claimed Grimaldi to be 'a household word': a word that was short for 'fun, whim, trick and atrocity - that is, clown-atrocity, crimes that delight us.' (1839) *Household Words* is also the name of Charles Dickens' weekly journal in which he published his philosophical and political views, in journalistic and literary form, from 1850-59. The first issue declared that 'in all familiar things, even in those which are repellent on the surface, there is romance enough' - romance enough to offset the 'grim realities' of these "hard times". The novel, *Hard Times*, that features a circus (and the daughter of a failed clown), was serialised in the journal from 1854. It is a novel that might be seen to represent the placatory policy satirised by Juvenal - to give a restive or repressed people 'bread and circuses'. Less well known is Dickens' 'biography' of Joseph Grimaldi, published a year after the clown's death in 1838. *Biography* is a misnomer, being rather the thrice-edited volume of Grimaldi's memoirs, dictated over the last 2 years of his life, of which Dickens' ultimate editorial atrocity was the change of first to third person narration. With reference to nineteenth-century commentary on clown, pantomime and circus, Dickens' *Hard Times* and *Household Words*, and *The Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi*, this paper will

offer an analysis of class attitudes to the social, cultural and political significance of the clown in England during the first half of the nineteenth-century.

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### **Cath Davies, Sydney University**

By day, Cath Davies is a first year doctoral candidate at Sydney University's Media and Communications department. By night (and by stage name), she is a freelance provocateur, public spectacle and performer of lewd acts. Her fetishes include being inappropriate, totem tennis and playing with body fluids.

### **LactoGrrl at the Carnival**

'There's mutiny in the Milk Bar. The Lactamania girls are flirting with Maria Lactans, La Milquetta's popped the cork on another bottle of Liebfraumilch and the adult babies have scoffed all the melon balls again. Milk is spilled all over the kitchen floor (not that anyone is crying over it), the cops are at the door with obscenity charges — and there's a queue of nipples blocking the footpath waiting to join the party. LactoGrrl, ringleader of this Lactation Celebration, can no longer contain herself and embarks upon a little self-expression...'

LactoGrrl at the Carnival examines the lactating body and the contexts in which it is permitted to perform. Lactating bodies are undeniably grotesque: excessive, irrational, spectacular and the site of multiple and explicit corporeal connections. As such, they are often restricted to the private realm of bathrooms and bedrooms, restrained by law and common decency but never quite contained ... for such bodies are by their very nature irreverent and blasphemous. Erotically erect nipples and engorged areola wantonly seep profanity right through their reinforced foundation garments and spray obscene graffiti on toilet walls. Wet-breasted strippers, whores, Dommies, porn stars and performance artists use their milky mammaries to provoke and titillate. It's only fitting that LactoGrrl, irrepressible lactator extraordinaire, finds herself at the Carnival. For the Carnival is the place where the devourer meets the devoured, the sacred meets the sacrilegious and grotesque bodies come out to play.

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### **Mark Douglass**

Mark Douglass has been juggling, twirling and manipulating objects for over 10 years. His knowledge and interest is not only in the practical, but also in the theory, history and documentation. He shares his passion of juggling through teaching and performance, which he has done in many parts of Australia, New Zealand, USA, Sweden and France.

### **Music, Mathematics and Juggling Using Rhythms to Create Juggling Patterns**

Whilst on the way to the Sydney Juggling Convention, my friend, James Ross, was reading his new juggling book. He was reading about siteswaps, and noticed a similarity with a type of rhythm he uses when teaching body percussion. After the convention, the two of us sat down and over a great meal worked out a process to change these rhythms into a siteswap, which is a mathematical description of a juggling pattern. I focused on the 3/4 rhythm and went about mastering the patterns that were created, and developed other ideas based on the 3/4 idea. From this

evolved a performance piece that involves counting, rhythms, shapes, sound and of course juggling.

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### **Rosemary Farrell, La Trobe University**

Rosemary is a Ph D candidate in Theatre and Drama at La Trobe University, Melbourne. She is in the third year of her doctoral research into the Nanjing Project and its relationship to Australian new circus. She has presented papers at the Australasian Association for Drama Theatre and Performance Studies conference in 2005; The 16th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in 2006; she was a guest speaker at 'Chinese Living: memories, stories, images' forum at the Burke Memorial Museum, Beechworth in 2006. She has been a drama teacher for twenty-eight years.

#### **'Unmasking Chinese circus skills in traditional Australian circus'.**

In 1983, a group of Chinese acrobats were welcomed to Australia as 'master' trainers and performers of Chinese circus skills in the Nanjing Project. My doctoral research into the Nanjing Project revealed an assumption among some Australian participants that 1983 marked the first Chinese circus skills and performance contact with Australian circus. This paper draws on new historical research to dispute this and presents evidence of Chinese Australian circus contact at a significantly earlier date in the nineteenth century. On the Victorian goldfields in the nineteenth century, race relations between Chinese migrants and European settlers were volatile and violent requiring the government to establish Chinese segregation camps. The activities and celebrations of the Chinese communities in the camps became places for Europeans to visit and write about as examples of an 'exotic' side show alley. Within this boundary Chinese acrobats performed for a mainly Chinese audience. However this paper will provide evidence of possibly the first Australian circus to engage Chinese circus performers as 'star' attractions performing for a wider multi-cultural community. It also identifies specific circus acts and performers with historical links to China not recorded in Australian circus histories. In the nineteenth century Chinese migrants were marginalised identities in the Australian landscape and 'exotic' attractions in the circus.

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### **Tanya King, University of Melbourne**

Tanya King was born in Corowa, the 'Birthplace of Federation,' and grew up in a nearby farming community. Her background is reflected in her academic writing, which has focused on issues of nationalism, rural identity, class and gender, environmental perception, and definitions of agricultural 'work' and 'leisure.' She has recently completed a PhD in Anthropology at the University of Melbourne, during which she investigated conflicts between local and state understandings of the Australian commercial fishing industry.

#### **Whitefellas and Blackfellas, Bullocks and Broncs: The stage of professional rodeo as a space for exploring white/indigenous relations in north-eastern Australia**

When white, professional cowboys and – increasingly – cowgirls mount a bullock or a horse and compete in an Australian rodeo, there is a paradoxical element to their

performance that reflects what various scholars have described as a peculiarly white Australian national identity.

In this paper I consider the stage of the rodeo as a space for exploring both explicitly sanctioned and aberrant expressions of white/indigenous relations in north-eastern Australia. I will begin by presenting two examples of paradox in white Australian national identity, as it is played out through those involved in the Australian Professional Rodeo Association national circuit. The first describes how individuals repeatedly compete to win against their peers, while maintaining a strong narrative of egalitarianism and fraternalism. The second describes rodeo as a travelling competition in which young men and women lead a mobile lifestyle, sometimes for years, and how the image of the cowboy and cowgirl, one predicated upon an intimate connection to a rural locale and labour-intensive lifestyle, remains a feature of the role they affect. In both examples, there is a sense in which the corral is a mobile stage upon which riders and audiences can temporarily explore various contradictions – the triumphant champion who is no better or worse than their peers, or the home-town country boy or girl who spends the majority of their time moving from one distant regional centre to the next.

The purpose of the paper is to use these apparent slippages to propose new research into the past and present interaction of white and indigenous participants in Australian rodeo. Given the historic involvement of indigenous horsemen in those regions where rodeo is particularly popular, I am interested in whether or not the stage of the rodeo creates a space for indigenous and white riders to relate to each other in a way that challenges the past and ongoing racial tension that exists in many parts of north-eastern Australia.

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### **Andrea Lemon, University of Melbourne**

Andrea is a highly awarded researcher, writer, director, animateur and dramaturge of circus, physical theatre, visual theatre and other forms of performance and text. She was Artistic Director of the Women's Circus, and has directed and written for many other circus companies and projects. She is currently writing *Circus Girl* for the Flying Fruit Fly Circus, premiering in October this year. She was co-writer and director of the *Snakehouse Trilogy - The Serpent's Fall; Walking on Sticks and Tiger Country* - with Sarah Cathcart; and dramaturge and director of *Car Maintenance, Explosives and Love* with Donna Jackson. Her book *Rodeo Girls Go Round the Outside* examined women in Australian rodeo and country music, and was turned into *Rodeo Noir* - a yodelling musical which won the major Australian Writers' Guild Award, and the LEND International Exchange Award, being performed in San Francisco and New York. Amongst other pursuits such as horse-riding and meeting people, Andrea is currently developing a contemporary cultural history of traditional circus communities in Australia as a PhD in partnership with the Australian Centre of the University of Melbourne, and the Performing Arts Museum of the (Victorian) Arts Centre.

### **Traditional Circus – Risk and Survival**

In the last ten to twenty years contemporary circus, and more recently sideshow, have become areas of burgeoning audience interest – as performance, and as community activity. Over that same period traditional circuses have found survival a risky business, with at least three of Australia's largest and most popular circuses being forced to close their tent doors. Operating without the benefit of government or philanthropic support, and without development or production budgets, traditional circuses eek an existence playing out an historic role and searching for a modern

identity. Contemporary circus and sideshow perform a romantic ideal of circus, drawing their inspiration, skills and acts from traditional circus, and presenting them within the safety of an urban performance culture. But the reality of life on the road for Australian circus families is very different from these performative notions of freaks and misfits. In fact most circus families have forged relatively conservative identities in their endeavour to survive, fighting the continuing misconception of circus artists as criminals and vagabonds, and attitudes of 'bring in your washing the circus is in town'. These circuses take enormous risks every day – physically and financially – often appearing to keep their juggernauts rolling through sheer force of will. This paper explores the role of traditional circus in Australian performance, the risks they take to survive, and why contemporary artists performing mythic narratives of circus find willing audiences while traditional circuses are often rejected for upholding the very traditions on which contemporary circus performance is based.

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### **Jane Mullett**

Jane Mullett completed her PhD thesis, titled *Circus Alternatives: the Rise of New Circus in Australia, the United States, Canada and France* at La Trobe University. She has worked for, and been a member of many circuses, including Circus Oz, The Flying Fruit Fly Circus, Circus Royale, and Circus Tarrangos. She has also worked as a project manager at NICA, and organised 1993's Search Conference into the Establishment of a National Circus School.

### **Acts of Conscience: political comment and alternative circus**

Alternative circus began in the 1970s on the basis of a radical political agenda. Founding members of alternative circuses, both in Australia and other western liberal democracies, had mostly been members of alternative theatre groups. While not all these theatre groups were politically radical, all were interested in working outside mainstream theatre in performance that was raw, physical, popular and immediate.

The circus was attractive because of its presentation as a socially marginal activity and its inhabitation of an apparently self-contained, lived environment. The founders of alternative circus embraced circus as a way of living/acting out their political and theatrical convictions — including a critique of capitalist society that extended from the politics of patriarchy to that of consumerism.

Circus was a form of popular performance broad enough to contain robust comment on contemporary political issues including gender and identity. The founders of alternative circus were deeply committed to the idea that live performance is a vehicle for social change and this optimism was expressed through the staged performance of acts of co-operation. Comedy, particularly in the form of parody, was used to critique the bastions of social conformity.

This paper asks how has that radical legacy affected the subsequent development of alternative circus companies in Australia and overseas? Is it still meaningful to talk about radical alternative circus? And if so, what form does this radicalism take? How has the current reign of neoliberal ideology with its corporatisation of cultural activity (including circus) and the increasing privatisation of the public sphere affected the development of alternative circus companies and the sort of performance they produce? Does the circus still exist in a liminal relationship to the mainstream, and did it ever? These questions will be pursued by examining examples of contemporary circus acts.

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## **Kylie O'Connell**

Kylie O'Connell's mother went into labour as she was selling fairy floss and tickets for the Saturday matinee performance. As her father began the circus performance, her mother left in a brightly painted truck, in search of Crown Street Hospital. Kylie was greeted by her father after the evening performance. She grew up in this family circus, worked on 'the show grounds' as an adolescent and went on to do a PhD in cultural studies. She currently manages policy for the South Australian Attorney-General's Department.

### **Greatest Show on Earth: Performance and identity**

Drawing on an autobiographical journey, this paper will consider the interaction between performance, identity, race, class, sex and gender. Reflecting on the experiences of being raised in a small 'family circus', this paper will give a grounded, perspective on the 'risks' and 'dangers' in overvaluing the performative or spectacle. In doing so, unique observations will be made as to the place of 'travelling people' in the recent history of Australia.

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## **Pixi Robertson**

Pixi is currently an Aerial skills teacher for the Getting Air project for LiveSites/Newcastle and Circus Avalon. She has been a member of ACAPTA, a guest lecturer at NICA and a contributor to many and varied circuses from Collie WA to Albury NSW. In August 2006 she received a Masters degree in writing from Edith Cowan University, Bunbury, WA.

### **Pixi Robertson: Bakhtin 'World Upside Down' in the Antipodes**

This paper examines the ways in which Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of 'carnivale', or world turned upside down, is the lived experience of circus performers, both traditional and contemporary.

I contend that the life of the itinerant performer is the living embodiment of the inversion of the hierarchical structures of 'normal' society posited by Bakhtin in his examination of the works of Rabelais. By placing oneself 'outside', the performer is thus construed as 'other'. Fools and clowns, acrobats and aerialists, all are carnivalised ways of being. Living 'on the road' or 'on tour' subverts all notions of a life lived behind the manicured rose-bushes and snowy white curtains of suburbia.

Through Bakhtin's theory of carnival I will examine the ways in which the 'normal' life of the itinerant performer is the antithesis of the life of the 'local' or 'townie'. I will show that, indeed, one man's fish is another man's poisson.

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## **Mark St Leon**

Mark, born in Sydney in 1952, is a 5th generation Australian and a descendant of one of Australia's earliest circus families. Since 1969, he has been devoted to the recovery and documentation of Australia's circus history. During his employment at the Australia Council in the 1980s, he was instrumental in launching a renaissance of

Australian circus. He recently completed his PhD entitled 'Circus & Nation'. A Chartered Accountant by profession, Mark lectures in a wide range of business subjects (accounting, economics, management) at postgraduate level, but would prefer to lecture on circus - its history, arts and management.

### **Building The Nation: Australian Circus & Australian Identity**

While the term 'nation' infers the existence of a society and an economy within its borders, it recognises the existence of social and economic divisions and differences between individuals and groups of individuals. Since at least 1847, one such group of individuals present within the Australian nation has been its community of circus people. Leaving aside its primary and considerable contributions to the formation of a modern Australian culture, how has this transitory group of people participated in the act of building a new nation and confirmed the existence of Australia as a 'place' in the world, the tyranny of distance notwithstanding? This paper explores the politics of Australian circus: how it has contributed to the shaping of, and how it has been shaped by, the emerging nation called Australia.

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### **Paul Sharrad, University of Wollongong**

Paul lectures in the English Department at the University of Wollongong, and has research interests in Third-World cum Post-Colonial (and colonial) literatures plus cross-cultural ventures in literature. He also has areas of interest in literary history, canon formation, literary reflections of the shaping forces (and contradictions) of contemporary post-colonial cultural politics and its engagement with new (and old) imperialisms. Paul has published on English-language writing from/about India, Australia, South-East Asia, and The Pacific. (Raja Rao, C. J. Koch, Nick Joaquin, John Kolia, Wilson Harris, Anita Desai, Ruth Jhabvala, EK Brathwaite, KS Maniam, Witi Ihimaera; past editor 'New Literatures Review').

### **Man or Mouse? Circus in Peter Carey and Salman Rushdie**

Beginning with some thoughts on how writers dramatise their art via circus metaphors, this paper goes on to consider Rusdhie's idea of the artist as both performer and subversive idealist, particularly in his recent 'Shalimar the Clown', and the similar interest in exhibitionist display in Carey's fiction that finds circus format in 'The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith'. In both writers, the fictional content is reflected in their own professional balancing acts, wire-walking between global metropolitan stardom and regional groundedness.

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### **Elizabeth Stephens, University of Queensland**

Elizabeth Stephens completed her PhD in Critical and Cultural Studies at Macquarie University, where she subsequently held a lectureship in critical and creative writing. Her research interests concentrate on post-structuralism, gender studies and queer theory. She is currently completing two book length studies: Queer Writing: Homoeroticism in Jean Genet's Fiction and a new project is tentatively entitled Public Exhibitions of the Body: A Cultural History from the Early Modern Period to the Present.

## **“Ladies, gentlemen . . . and the rest of us”: Queering The Female Body in Circuses and Sideshows**

This paper will examine the role of gender in circus and sideshow performance and history. In particular, the paper will concentrate on the way the exhibition of bodies with exceptional physiognomies or capabilities featured in these contexts are inflected by dominant cultural assumptions about femininity. Drawing on interviews with a number of contemporary female performers, along with analyses of archival records from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this paper will consider the ways in which women performing in circuses and sideshows both undermine and reinforce normative expectations about the female body.

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### **Wendy Suiter**

After majoring in instrumental and electronic music composition at La Trobe University Wendy completed her Honours year at Elder Conservatorium of Music in Adelaide. She is currently working towards a Master of Creative Arts in electronic music composition at University of Wollongong.

Her work has been performed in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and the Flinders Ranges in a wide variety of settings from art galleries, dedicated concert spaces, to cafes and outdoor performances. Her professional achievements to date include the soundscapes to accompany an art exhibition at 69 Smith Street, publication of a brass work Paul Keating by Redhouse Press, and the broadcast on ABC Classic FM of her piano trio Carlin, performed by Rachel Atkinson, Isin Cakmakcioglu, Danae Killian.

### **Making Music from Scratch(es).**

This paper describes my experiences and approach to making music for the Performing Older Women’s Circus, based in Footscray, Victoria, from its inception, for five performance seasons from March 1995 to 1999.

The circus was begun by some older women who had been performing with the Women’s Circus, but who felt that their specific needs for physical safety and self expression as older women were not being specifically met by the Women’s Circus. Additionally, they wanted to share the excitement of being circus performers with other older women. One of the key goals of the circus was to show that being an older woman (defined as over 40) was no barrier to participation in circus skills and performance.

I came to POW Circus at this point of conception, originally as a potential musical performer, as every circus needs music for its performances. It quickly became evident that they needed a musical director and I took on the role. My role as musical director required ‘training’ the music group weekly in music skills, and producing the music for both the main performance seasons and for small performances the Circus was often called on to do at conferences concerning aging.

My philosophy was that the participants should make the music. My role was to facilitate it by teaching them performance skills, manage performance anxiety, challenge their conceptions of the possible, build trust in the group and myself as leader, and to build on any preexisting interest or skills in music the participants brought with them.

The music group was open to any woman over 40 who had an interest in playing music. Those who came to the group were from two groups. Firstly, those who had always wanted to play music but had never before had an opportunity to try it out, and this seemed like a safe space. Secondly, there were those who had wanted to be acrobats, but found it was too hard given their disabilities, so they joined the musicians. Consequently, there was a diverse range of skills, and instruments: generally around the beginner level.

Making music with these raw materials was a challenge, which paid off with huge satisfaction for both the budding musicians and myself. This paper will elaborate on these themes and explain some of my approaches.

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### **Annie Werner, University of Wollongong**

Annie Werner is a 3rd year PhD candidate in the School of English Literature, Philosophy and Languages. Her thesis examines colonial and postcolonial representations of Indigenous tattooing. She's also a tattooed lady and a clothes designer, has published both fiction and non-fiction writing about tattoos, and has presented papers at conferences around Australia and abroad.

### **The Spectacle of the Self-made Freak**

In this paper/performance, I will address the overt objectification implicit in the display of tattooed bodies – particularly female bodies – within the circus and sideshow. In keeping with the conference's objective of breaking down the boundaries between theory and practice, I will not only be theorizing the objectification of these performers, but appearing as a tattooed spectacle myself. To break down the literal boundary between self and other, subject and object, my skin will be tattooed as I speak. The live projection of this process will confront the audience not only with the spectacle of the marked female body, but will emphasise the transgressive process of the tattoo itself.