Introduction
The Circus: Reflecting and Mediating the World

Gillian Arrighi and Jim Davis

In 2018 we marked the 250th anniversary of the founding of the modern circus, an event traced to the entrepreneurial initiatives of Philip Astley (1742–1814). Astley enclosed a circle of ground on the south side of the Thames in 1768 where he exhibited his unusual equestrian skills for a paying public. The circus's specialised history in different parts of the globe reveals that for just over 250 years this hybrid entertainment, with its own codes of physical and comic performance, visuality, and business management, has developed and diversified through multiple cycles of reinvention. Oscillating through phases of illegitimacy on the fringes of society and validation for its aesthetic and entertainment appeal, the circus's restless evolution has always been influenced by unique confluences of the political environment, artistic heritage, and aesthetic trends particular to its geographic context.

For one of the editors (Davis), growing up in a provincial city in England in the 1950s, the experience of circus was vastly different from today. The major circuses – Chipperfield's, Billy Smart's, and Bertram Mills' – each visited every three years, thus ensuring an annual opportunity to attend the circus. These were all one-ring circuses and still featured wild animal acts, clowning, trapeze acts, and much more, even, in some cases, a Wild West finale. Chipperfield's opened with three wild animal acts – lions, tigers, brown bears, and polar bears – and there were also other animal acts, such as elephants and horses, as well as a trapeze-and-balancing act billed as 'Gina the Girl in the Moon'. ('Gina' later died after falling from her trapeze.) Bertram Mills' Circus was the home of Coco, England's most popular clown in the 1950s. The ringmaster, with his top hat, red coat, whip, and boots, was an important part of each of these circuses. As well as the circus itself, circus acts could be viewed at an annual fair held every August, one of the highlights of which was the 'Dive of Death', in which the diver appeared to set himself alight and then dived forty feet into a tank of water, the surface of which was also alight. At the local cinemas,

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movies such as *Three-Ring-Circus* (1954) and *Merry Andrew* with Danny Kaye (1958) or *Trapeze* with Burt Lancaster and Gina Lollobrigida (1956) were on offer, while a regular item on children's television was *Circus Boy* starring Micky Dolenz (1956–8). In between programmes, advertisements for PG Tips tea, featuring circus chimpanzees engaged in a tea party, were frequent. At Christmas, circus-style acrobats were often engaged for the annual pantomime, to play Chinese policemen in *Aladdin* for example. Children's books available to buy or to borrow from the local library included the perennially popular *Dr Doolittle's Circus*, while the backs of Kellogg's cornflakes and other cereal packets featured cut-out masks of famous clowns.

For editor Arrighi, growing up in New Zealand in the 1960s–70s meant the visit of a circus was a rarer event than in the major cities of the United Kingdom or the United States, but television brought circus shows from the northern hemisphere into the home. My first experience of live circus was a family outing to the Great Moscow Circus in Wellington in 1971. While we had never been to a circus before, my siblings and I knew its forms from watching repeat episodes of the NBC series *International Showtime* during the late 1960s. Hosted by the debonair American actor Don Ameche, the shows had been filmed at different European circuses between 1961 and 1965, with Ameche introducing television viewers to international circus acts from his arena seat at each show. Quite apart from Ameche's commentary about clowns, animal trainers, tightrope, slack rope, flying trapeze, and equestrian acts, these shows also introduced viewers to the music, costumes, grotesquery, and format of the single-ring European circus of the mid-twentieth century. Circus-themed movies such as *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952) were screened periodically on television on Saturday afternoons, and while Tod Browning's movie *Freaks* had been banned in New Zealand shortly after its release in 1932, I recall seeing it at a Wellington cinema in the mid-1970s, shortly after the censorship ban was lifted. As a country that looked to Britain and the United States for its cultural influences, the iconography of the classical circus was present during my New Zealand childhood, emblazoned on everyday objects such as playing cards, biscuit tins, greeting cards, and toys. Growing up in a suburb of Wellington, my sense of the circus was that it was foreign, the performers' skills were extraordinary, it happened elsewhere, and people in other countries seemed to appreciate it. What I have since learned is that New Zealand has a long history of circus entertainments that has yet to be thoroughly investigated.

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The development of the circus as a discrete business in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries created opportunities to bring together a range of itinerant acts, many of which from the eighteenth century onwards also appeared in fairgrounds and pleasure gardens. Rope dancers, tumblers, clowns, balancing acts, and slack-wire performers were providing entertainment way before Astley came to prominence. Astley's Amphitheatre itself was as much a theatrical venue as a circus venue, if not more so, and throughout the nineteenth century what we now would deem circus acts were also hired by theatres, music halls, and variety venues. Van Amburgh appeared with his lions at Drury Lane Theatre, for example, while the transvestite aerialist, Lulu, performed at the Britannia Theatre. Acts involving performing dogs partly developed from the early nineteenth-century vogue for dog melodramas in the theatres. The circus clown and the theatrical clown, most famously represented by Joey Grimaldi, evolved in tandem, but there must have been some degree of overlap.[1] The circus itself took place in a variety of structures, some temporary, some permanent, and not always enclosed within a ring, while its performers adapted their acts to a variety of venues. Alongside the circus, menageries developed and were sometimes accommodated within the overall structure of the circus business. An economic history of the circus is still to be written – indeed, it may never be, as early financial records are rare and, in many cases, non-existent[2] – but the emergence of circus as a collective economic entity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is an important aspect of its development.

The range of literature, academic and popular, now available on circus is formidable. From the start, biographies and memoirs contributed to our knowledge of circus and they still do, from Decastro's *Memoirs* (1824) to Rebecca Truman's moving account, *Aerialist: The Colourful Life of a Trapeze Artist* (2018). The impact of circus and circus acts on the arts is also significant. Frith includes tumblers in his epic Victorian painting *Derby Day* (1856–8), while Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, Seurat, Renoir, Picasso, Matisse, and Chagall feature acrobats and other circus performers in their paintings. Rouault was noted for his paintings of clowns. Circus has also generated over the years an impressive amount of poster art. Twentieth-century theatre practitioners indebted to circus influences include Vsevelod Meyerhold, Jacques Copeau, and Peter Brook. Circus has influenced music theatre, as with *Barnum* (1980), which has now become a feature film, *The Greatest Showman* (2017). Circus has also generated an extensive filmography, sometimes, as in Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932) or Francis Lawrence's *Water for Elephants* (2011), revealing

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the darker elements of circus life. *Water for Elephants* started life as a novel by Sara Gruen (2006) and circus has regularly featured in fiction, as in Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984), or Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus* (2011).

Circus is not only a historical and contemporary phenomenon but also functions as metaphor. In *Hard Times*, through its emphasis on amusement and entertainment, circus provides an antidote to the grim misery of industrial labour and an over-pedantic emphasis on factual knowledge. Symbolically, circus is a key to unlocking the imagination, and its performers embody human warmth and camaraderie. Dickens idealised the circus, as Ruskin idealised mid-Victorian pantomime, as indicative of another, better world. Overall, the ways in which circus has been disseminated through the arts or through the nostalgia of childhood recollection has, until recent years, tended to emphasise traditional circus and its history. This is no longer possible, given the evolution of circus into multiple structures, many of which emphasise not just skills but also participation, collaboration, diversity, and social engagement. As well as spectacle, circus today generates active involvement in the world it both reflects and mediates.

All of the authors whose specialist research appears in this book are also recognised contributors to the new field of academic enquiry known as Circus Studies. Their different disciplinary backgrounds in the intellectual domains of theatre and performance studies, history, sociology, social anthropology, modern languages, and literature are in turn representative of the multidisciplinarity of Circus Studies and academic institutions' relatively recent embrace of circus arts and of circus, as a complex field of human activity warranting sustained critical investigation from diverse disciplinary positions. This book functions then as an introduction to the circus by presenting an overview of its specialised histories, aesthetics, and distinctive performances, from its early origins in commercial equestrian performance during the late eighteenth century to contemporary inflections of circus arts in major international festivals, regional arts festivals, educational environments, and settings concerned with social justice. While providing a guide for students, scholars, teachers, researchers, and practitioners seeking perspectives on the foundations and evolution of the modern circus, this book also functions as an introduction to the recently established and swiftly evolving academic field of Circus Studies and the specialised literature available to support further enquiry. In France, Belgium, Canada, Australia, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States, Argentina, and Mexico, academic

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institutions offer training programmes that prepare students for a professional career in circus. In these countries, and in Brazil and Germany, universities are offering courses and research programmes in circus aesthetics as well as critical and theoretical considerations of the circus. Increasingly, circus is also making its way into tertiary courses concerned with general histories of performance, aesthetics, and literature.

The sixteen chapters in this book draw on knowledge and theoretical understanding from a wide field of intellectual enquiry including gender, identity, and race; performance analysis; animal and interspecies studies; education; physiological science; natural sciences; mobility studies; youth studies; humour; cultural policy; film studies; semiotics; cultural history; and more. They reveal the circus's entwined history with theatre, literature, and film and with popular entertainments such as pantomime, puppetry, clowns, variety, and vaudeville. Some of the chapters also explore the extent to which circus has been mobilised in the service of nationalist and colonial narratives in different geo-political territories. The diverse critical and methodological approaches employed in the writing of this book demonstrate how the circus, as an entertainment, social, and business practice engages with human activity and critical thinking about that activity. We suggest that the circus and the academic enquiries it gives rise to can be usefully visualised as a hub-and-spoke model, where the circus, as a unique collection of integrated aesthetic, repertoire, and business practices is the hub, at the centre of many different spokes that represent a multitude of different perspectives and investigations. Yet another way to conceptualise the circus is as a social structure that functions as a mirror, in that it is capable of reflecting the wider historical and cultural processes of its day.[3] Notions of the circus as a multifaceted glass, capable of reflecting and performatively reproducing human experience, sociopolitical relations, and human knowledge recur in recent scholarship on the circus and feature in several chapters in this volume.

The evolving intellectual diversity of Circus Studies, in tandem with the aesthetic diversity of contemporary circus performance, now challenges uncomplicated use of the term 'circus', as if the term maintains a singular or straightforward meaning. A correlation of this point can be made with the term 'theatre', which in a similar way lacks meaningful specificity in scholarship and functions more as a generic term, an umbrella, as it were, beneath which sit a multitude of aesthetic performance practices, which in turn stimulate historic and critical enquiries that modulate according to the cultural place and time of the practice and of the enquiry. To critically talk about 'circus' now requires specific reference to geographic region and

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historic period, or in other words the place and time when the circus event took place. Use of the term 'circus' may also require identification of the specific act or category of skill under consideration, such as ground acrobatics, acts of strength and balance, juggling and object manipulation, aerial acts, clowning, equestrian performance, or trained animal acts, since each skill category and the various apparatus employed by each skill has its own genealogy of historical emergence, development, and use. The intended target audience for a circus event and, increasingly in recent decades, consideration of the social purpose of circus events, are likewise recognised as important to the critical investigation of circus arts and circus practice.

Responding to the recent rise in interest in circus as a subject for critical study, *The Cambridge Companion to the Circus* is organised in four thematic parts, which are designed to lead readers through the histories of the modern circus to the present day. It introduces key acts that have been foundational to the circus in different epochs, the various manifestations of circus arts in recent times, and the theoretical approaches that thread through Circus Studies scholarship. The cardinal points of the book's compass address the origin and spread of the circus (Part I); key acts that are germane to circus aesthetics (Part II); the circus's evolution and contemporary expressions of circus arts (Part III); methodologies and multidisciplinary perspectives in Circus Studies scholarship (Part IV).

Throughout the development and writing of this book, the editors have grappled with the diversity of nomenclature applied to innovations in the circus arts since the 1970s. This was the era when new circus, or nouveau cirque, emerged in Australia, France, Canada, and the United States, and gave rise to animal-free circus that frequently espoused a political agenda and was devised by performers who did not necessarily hail from traditional circus families. Taking into consideration the circus's specialised histories in different countries, together with sociopolitical trends and influences unique to each region where circus has established an aesthetic and cultural presence, it is unsurprising that different authors are accustomed to using slightly different nomenclature for various identifiable streams of change. Among circus scholars the terms *traditional circus* and *classical circus* broadly refer to productions that include the exhibition of trained animals. But this becomes problematic when we consider productions by contemporary companies such as Théâtre Zingaro, Théâtre du Centaure, and Cavalia, which present new narratives while performing acts with a long history, specifically, equestrian acts that demonstrate 'a relationship between a trained horse and a trained human' (108). Emergence of

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what is termed *new circus*, or *nouveau cirque*, saw young troupes of performers steadfastly advocating animal-free circus, and, as Kim Baston explains, '[c]ontemporary unease about the ethics of animal entertainment has problematised and diminished the inclusion of all animal acts in the circus, although the most vocal opposition is to "wild" animal acts' (107). In recent times – and it would be inappropriate for the editors to be more specific, given the geo-political sweep of this volume – circus scholars and practitioners have begun to identify *contemporary circus* as a category distinct from new circus/nouveau cirque, which they argue can reasonably be designated as another historic category of the *modern circus* (with the modern circus being identified as everything since Philip Astley). Yet the term contemporary is again problematic. There are contemporary circus companies working in a classical format, and usage is not identical with contemporary as applied to dance, for example. What is contemporary today will be 'old hat' or passé in time to come. To be contemporary is to be cutting edge, innovative, boundary breaking; to eschew or subvert previous paradigms and jettison at least some of what has gone before. Artists working today to create new expressions derived from technical skills draw on many creative threads, such as music, dance, and narrative, to give structure or provide meaning for those skills.[4]

Arguably, the circus institution, since Astley, has always followed trajectories of innovation, producing experimental fusions with other aesthetic forms, committing to that which is authentically new in terms of staging, scale, technology, mobility, marketing, narrative possibilities, and social intervention.[5] Astley's initiatives were contemporary, as were the staging, aesthetic, and managerial innovations introduced by other circus enterprises such as P. T. Barnum, the Ringling Brothers, 'Lord' George Sanger, and Cirque du Soleil. Which brings us back to the point that in our current moment, the term 'contemporary circus' is used to talk about recent aesthetic developments that are recognisably different to the creations by the first wave of new circus companies of the 1970s–1990s. Throughout the book we have adopted the standard new circus/nouveau cirque (rather than New Circus or Nouveau Cirque). Individual authors have for the most part inserted rough date ranges when using the terms new circus/nouveau cirque and contemporary circus. The authors of this volume tend towards use of the term traditional circus, rather than classical circus, but preference for one or other of these terms is also a matter for ongoing debate among circus performers and those who write about circus.

Part I, 'Transnational Geographies of the Modern Circus', introduces the emergence of the modern circus in late eighteenth-century London and

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its transmission to many parts of the globe during the nineteenth century. The chapters in this section reveal the circus's capacity to evolve in the face of diverse influences, such as different geographies and sociopolitical contexts, as well as its capacity to integrate with vernacular performance genres. Following Astley's innovative shows in London in the 1760s, the circus quickly found a foothold in France, Russia, Scandinavia, and other regions of Europe (Chapter 1). Introduced to the United States in 1793, the modern circus commenced its global dispersion, transforming into a movable tent show by 1825 and operating in tune with the continental climate. With the development of railroad transport following the Civil War, the now uniquely American circus transformed again into an industrialised force capable of covering vast distances to entertain people in cities and towns across the length and breadth of the country. During what have been defined in American history as the Gilded Age (1865–1900) and Progressive Era (1900–20) the American railroad circus was at its peak in terms of the number of touring companies, the amount and diversity of acts, and the magnitude of its advancements in technology and management. As Sakina M. Hughes explains in Chapter 2,

> It connected urban and rural areas, rich and poor, and national and international audiences of all colours and races. Shrewd businessmen captured the nationalist and imperialistic spirit of America, put it under a big tent, and sold it back to diverse American spectators one village, one town, and one city at a time. (36)

Arguing that the American railroad circus 'reflected all the great trends in America' (such as national expansion, technological modernisation, entrepreneurship, and labour solidarity, to name just a few) and that 'ideas of race were at the centre of all these trends, be they nationalism, imperialism, expansion, or big business', Hughes draws attention to the experiences of African Americans working in the circuses of this era. Her research introduces an important and hitherto under-investigated enquiry about 'the importance of American race relations in this form of popular culture' (36).

Transmitted across the globe through the British colonial project, the circus took root and flourished in the settler colonies of Australasia (Australia and New Zealand), the territories of Southeast Asia (including present-day Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines), and the South Asian territories of the Indian subcontinent and South Asia. In Chapter 3, Gillian Arrighi brings to light the ways that highly mobile circus troupes were agents of colonialism and conduits of aesthetic innovation throughout this vast region from the mid- to late nineteenth

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century, the period that was both the Age of Empire and the Age of Modernity. The spread of the circus to South America is taken up by Julieta Infantino in Chapter 4, where the fusion of circus arts with Argentina's vernacular *criollista-gaucho* genre (a dramatic form derived from a literary movement that venerated the character of the Argentine gaucho as an emblem of nationality) gave rise to the unique Criollo Circus, or Circus Theatre. This 'generic variant' was characterised by a performance divided into two parts: in the first part the artists presented a range of circus skills, and in the second part they presented a theatricalised narrative based on the popular *criollista-gaucho* genre. Infantino examines the emergence and aesthetic legitimisation of the Criollo Circus within the socio-historic context of the consolidation of the Argentine nation state and evaluates the legacy of this fusion between circus arts and theatrical representation to the subsequent development of Argentina's national theatre forms.

The establishment and development of circus arts in Central Europe has resulted in two distinctly different styles of circus currently existing side by side: the traditional (or classical) circus that maintains artistic codes from the mid-nineteenth-century and contemporary circus. Employing their transnational awareness of the sociopolitical histories of Central Europe, alongside their individual research interests in historic and contemporary circus, the authors of Chapter 5, Hanuš Jordan and Veronika Štefanová, explore the origin and transformation of traditional and contemporary circus forms in the region now known as the Czech Republic, with reference to circus activity in the neighbouring Visegrád Group (V4) countries of Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary. Offering critical insights about the complications arising from the division of circus arts into either traditional or contemporary, an approach that is 'prevalent in all Central European countries', Jordan and Štefanová reveal that unlike France, Belgium, or Scandinavia, where aesthetic innovations in contemporary circus constitute established performing arts practice, 'contemporary circus in Central Europe is still searching for its rightful place among well-established genres such as dance, theatre, film, and music' (89). Their explanation of the tensions between traditional circus, 'perceived as a romantic vestige of the traditions of the past that also aspires to cultural heritage status', and contemporary circus, which arises from 'an emerging generation of artists dedicated to searching for new forms of expression and transcending boundaries between individual art forms' (89), illuminates the sociocultural processes influencing circus arts and Circus Studies in this part of the world.

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In the final chapter of Part I, Rosemary Farrell examines the pervasive influence of Chinese acrobatic acts on both traditional and contemporary circus (Chapter 6). In contrast to the first five chapters, which examine the dispersal of the modern circus from Britain to other regions of the globe, Farrell draws attention to the transnational movement of ancient acrobatic acts from the East to the West. Her principal attention is on the transplantation of acts by Chinese performers to the West since the Chinese-Australian government-brokered Nanjing Project of 1983–4 (an event that injected Chinese acrobatic training and acts into the repertoires of Australian new circus and then American new circus) and the longer-term legacy of Chinese acrobats (who were at different times both official and unofficial cultural envoys from Communist China) to the subsequent evolution of contemporary new circus. In this chapter, Farrell also explains both the practice and the long history of many acrobatic and object-manipulation acts that originated in China before finding aesthetic acceptance and a new social context in Western circus productions dating from the early 1980s onwards. Threading through Farrell's investigation of the influence of ancient Chinese acrobatic practice upon contemporary and new circus innovations of the past four decades is recognition of the circus's innate ability for reinvention and modernisation. Her attention to transnational transference and the aesthetic practice of Chinese acrobatic acts means this chapter provides an apposite bridge to the next part of the book.

Part II, 'Circus Acts and Aesthetics', critically investigates dominant divisions of circus arts that have been fundamental to the modern circus throughout much of its history: equestrian acts and spectacles involving trained animals; clowns and comedy; and aerial performance. Equestrian acts and trick riding were the foundation of the early circus and dominated circuses up until the early twentieth century. Picking up themes introduced in Matthew Wittman's chapter on the origins of the modern circus, Baston explores the repertoire of equestrian acts, adopting a case-study approach to examine the legacy of historic practice to contemporary equestrian performance (Chapter 7). By the late nineteenth century, menageries and performances involving exotic animals predominated in major circuses around the globe. Building on her own specialist research in this field as well as extant scholarship concerning animals in the circus, Peta Tait (Chapter 8) draws attention to ways that fast-moving military action and battle re-enactments with animals were imbedded in circus spectacle throughout the nineteenth century. Tait's examples include the Battle of Waterloo (1815) enacted in circus and theatre from 1824; Wild West shows that from 1883 re-enacted conflicts between the American military and its

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cowboy scouts and the Indian nations; colonial conflicts in southern Africa, Australia, and New Zealand and the Boer War, which were also enacted from the 1890s in circus productions. Tait reveals how the staging of

> credible battles with the riding movement of military forces and their weaponry impacted on the circus form as it progressively developed from feats of skilled fast riding in co-opted military action to large-scale spectacles of colonial war towards the end of the nineteenth century. (138)

Circus production, she argues, became complicit in colonising practices and attitudes to colonised peoples in the British colonies and explicitly reinforced the exploitation of animals in the colonial era.

Clowns and comedy have always been essential elements of the modern circus since its commencement, and in Chapter 9 Louise Peacock explores the development of the circus clown in Europe and the United States. Her diachronic survey moves from the late eighteenth century through to the disruptive aesthetic innovations of the 1970s that produced new circus/nouveau cirque, revealing how the performance strategies, costume, and make-up of some of the best-known clowns developed in response to changes in the scale of the circus in each region at different historic moments. As she explains,

> the creation of the three-ring circus in the USA in the late nineteenth century placed particular performance demands on the clowns in terms of both run-ins and entrées, which were quite different to the challenges faced by clowns in single-ring circuses of Europe and the United Kingdom. (141)

Gender disparity in the ranks of circus clowns and the prevalence of male clowns throughout much of the modern circus's history is also examined in Chapter 9.

The nineteenth-century circus was characterised by equestrianism, but as the prevalence of horses in the circus ring waned in the early twentieth century the new elite performers were the aerialists, some of whom became international celebrities. Since 1859, when the French gymnast Jules Léotard is credited with the invention of flying trapeze action at the Cirque Napoleon in Paris, aerial performers have developed acts on a variety of apparatus. As Kate Holmes explains in Chapter 10, aerial equipment nowadays includes three different variations of a steel bar suspended from two ropes, known as the static, swinging, and flying trapeze; a single rope (corde lisse); long pieces of fabric (silks or tissue); an aerial hoop (or lyra); and a rope attached to the ceiling by two ends

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(cloudswing). Human daring and high-level physical skill underpin aerial acts, which by their very nature communicate the sensation of risk and danger to the audience. Focusing on key historical figures and innovations in contemporary aerial practice, Holmes explores the history and aesthetics of aerial performance.

In Part III, 'Circus: A Constantly Evolving Form', four chapters pick up and extend the themes of evolution, transference, and transformation alluded to in earlier chapters. Moving forward in time, these chapters introduce readers to the diversification of the circus and its cultural processes since the late nineteenth century. Catherine M. Young extends the scholarship boundaries of Circus Studies by exploring the influence of the circus arts on variety, vaudeville, and pantomime stages during the apex of these popular entertainments, a span of roughly thirty years from the 1890s to 1920, which she terms the Variety Era. Focusing on a popular touring act, Lockhart's Elephants, at leading variety venues in London, Paris, and New York City, Young demonstrates the interconnections between modern circus and music hall/vaudeville. Her investigation of this dynamic relationship 'complicates our understanding of circus, pantomime, and variety as distinct genres', and reminds us 'to reconsider the relative stability with which we deploy the terms' (174).

The late twentieth-century new circus/nouveau cirque phenomenon and its influence upon European circus to the present day is the focus of Chapter 12. Designating the emergence of nouveau cirque in France as both an aesthetic and a political revolution, Agathe Dumont approaches the topic from a sociological perspective, applying Nathalie Heinich and Roberta Shapiro's term 'artification', indicating 'the transformation process of "non-art" to "art", in a given sociocultural context' (194). Beginning with the careers of several prominent French circus artists of the 1970s and 1980s, Dumont explains how their legacies have significantly improved recognition of circus arts in French and Belgian cultural policy. Dumont's focus then moves forward in time and opens out to a European-wide consideration of the influence of new circus/nouveau cirque on contemporary circus today.

Many current and future students studying circus arts will of necessity seek employment outside of mainstream circus companies, either in the well-established field of youth circus or the more recent field of social circus. It is also likely that some students studying circus arts programmes in the higher-education sector have learned skills through participation in circus arts programmes aimed specifically at young people. Emerging in different countries since the 1970s, youth circus refers to not-for-profit

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organisations that provide recreational, extracurricular circus-skills training to young people aged up to eighteen years (and in some cases, up to twenty-five years) through weekly classes and performance projects. The term also extends to circus-in-schools programmes driven by independent school initiatives or national curriculum projects. In Chapter 13, Alisan Funk discusses the historical emergence of youth circus, then utilises the framework of 'risky play' to consider the accumulation of physical, social, and emotional skills that contemporary research is showing can be learned through practising circus arts in a collaborative and supportive environment during the pre-adult stages of life.

In Chapter 14, Jennifer B. Spiegel introduces readers to the pedagogies and practices of social circus (cirque social) and the cultural factors that have supported the emergence of this global 'movement', which during the past two decades has become one of 'the fastest-growing forms of "art for social change"' (216). According to Cirque du Monde, the term social circus

> prioritizes the personal and social growth of participants. It encourages the development of self-esteem and the acquisition of social skills, artistic expression and occupational integration . . . social circus is distinct from what we might call the professional circus or even the recreational circus insofar as it gives more importance to the experience had by the participants than to the artistic result of this experience, and it establishes a relationship between the participants and the community that goes beyond the aesthetic and entertaining role of the traditional circus.[6]

Focusing primarily upon the evolution of social circus programmes in the Americas, Spiegel brings forward current research pertaining to the pedagogies, social organisation, and evaluation of this applied practice.

The final section of the book, Part IV, 'Circus Studies Scholarship', introduces the wide variety of research methods that have supported the emergence of Circus Studies. Charles Batson and Karen Fricker draw attention to the fact that the field is in a period of ongoing and dynamic formation and is thus continuing to produce new methods of research (Chapter 15). Adopting an international overview of current research trends, Anna-Sophie Jürgens (Chapter 16) brings to light the ways that academic enquiries from the different disciplinary areas of the humanities and science are exploring surprising potentials of the circus arts and thus expanding the boundaries of Circus Studies. The notion of the circus as a 'looking glass', capable of reflecting and performatively producing reality

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is explored by Jürgens within the context of 'natural scientific and humanistic interests in the circus' (251). This final chapter of this volume brings forward numerous perspectives and ideas that have recently arisen as the result of intersections between different disciplines engaging with the circus.

Before closing this introduction, we want to make some further observations with the intention of alerting readers to the extensive body of literature about the circus that has been accruing since the late nineteenth century. Writing in 1951 circus historian Antony Hippisley Coxe observed in his book *A Seat at the Circus* that 'Several thousand books have been written about the circus, and I doubt that one of them is completely accurate.'[7] Putting aside the question of the veracity of these numerous volumes, and acknowledging that Coxe was probably referring to books written in English, we nevertheless believe it is important for students, scholars, aficionados, and those readers with an interest in the forms, histories, aesthetics, and contemporary innovations in circus to read as widely as possible. Each chapter of this book draws on a discrete body of specialised literature and provides a short list of further reading, a strategy that is intended to provide readers with an authoritative introduction to the topic as well as point them to resources that have been selected to augment their understanding of the knowledge base of each chapter. In the Bibliography, very early scholarship on the circus is represented, for example Thomas Frost's first historiographical account of the circus in England, *Circus Life and Circus Celebrities* (1881) and Hugues Le Roux and Jules Garnier's 1889 publication *Les jeux du cirque et la vie foraine* (Acrobats and mountebanks). Also listed are histories of the circus from different countries, as well as biographies and autobiographies of circus performers, animal trainers, and impresarios, thus demonstrating that contemporary scholarship in Circus Studies stands on the shoulders of past research undertaken by people working outside the higher-education setting. We are keenly aware of certain absences in the scope of this volume's chapters and timeline but also acknowledge that literature pertaining to histories and contemporary developments of circus in countries such as Japan, India, Russia, Brazil, and elsewhere have yet to be translated into English. We also fervently hope to see further scholarship emerging from these and other territories in the near future, as Circus Studies infiltrates academic research across the globe.

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Notes

1. See J. S. Bratton and Ann Featherstone, *The Victorian Clown* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
2. Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 201.
3. Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).
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