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## Lion on Display: Culture, Nature, and Totality in a Circus Performance

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**Abstract** This article deals with exclusion and the construction of periphery as modes of ritualizing and binding together a dominant social order. Under scrutiny is the peripheral British traveling circus and the way its traveling and performance define the margins of the modern fragmented order, particularly vis-à-vis the crisis of the premodern Culture/Nature paradigm. A lion act presents the Culture/Nature opposition, that is, human trainer, props, routines versus animals, in the context of circus traveling (fieldwork carried out in 1975–79). The circus display of both animals and humans as exemplifications of their own kind erases their “realness,” turning them into images in the public’s perception. However, a totalization of the performance and of the display of circus traveling reifies the animal and human images and the circus image, with the effect of placing them out of social time and relations. On the margin of the fragmented modern order, the reified traveling circus thus embodies transcendence of culture/nature categories and implies its own ontological apartness. For its nostalgic spectators, it thereby illusorily resurrects a totality of order—from which the circus itself is apart.

TO PAUL BOUISSAC

The discourse of exclusion, of that which is socially and cosmically peripheral, is a discourse of boundaries, of mapping and defining identities. The edges of the dominant social order (the insane, the sexually deviant, the

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criminal, the freak but also the slum dweller, the subjugated woman, any member of an ethnic minority) is where the order's cosmology, its main categories, are "mythologized" (Barthes 1986 [1957]) as natural, normal, morally right. As such, the construction of peripherality, of the socially peripheral, and even the dynamics seemingly internal to the periphery often carry a symbolic significance that extends much beyond the social place and condition of the peripheral in that they encapsulate the dominant group's statements on the order itself (e.g., Babcock 1978; Foucault 1984; Stallybrass and White 1986).

The symbolic significance of exclusion turns the construction and delineation of the peripheral categories and groups into processes intensely permeated with ambiguity. For the dominant groups, periphery is at one and the same time fearful, a portent of contamination, yet attractive and an object of voyeurism—me contested and cast by that which is not me (e.g., Stallybrass and White 1986: 17–26). The actual encounter, the negotiation and reproduction of the peripheral condition, is therefore imbued with ritual—it is here that the order is cleansed and finds rebirth. But it may also become a locus of play and display, of order transcendence (as in Bakhtin's carnival) whereby the peripheral itself turns into a metaphor, not just for the forbidden, but also for the dominant order's reflection (Handelman 1977). The deep significance of the peripheral condition becomes salient in periods of transformation. Forms of exclusion may encapsulate a still-present past but may also disclose a vicarious coping, a nostalgic yearning for a world that has been lost. In any case, the peripheral can itself be reinterpreted, newly adopted, even incorporated: its significance then gets transformed as the peripheral moves into the center.

Under scrutiny in this article is the "traditional" traveling circus as unfolding a unique symbolic periphery for the cosmological and social order we find emerging with modernity. The article's particular interest is in the representation of a major aspect of modernity's crisis, namely, the crisis of the West's premodern Culture/Nature cosmological paradigm, here approached through the Man/Animal performance in a lions ("big cats") act.

The context in which the social and cosmological transformation and the circus periphery are examined is that of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Britain. Among the features of the rising modern order are the loss of the prevailing forms of community and patronage, increased urbanization, growing fragmentariness, and the commoditization of labor. An experience of "abysses," of "crushing gravitational force" (Marx's images) is particularly intensified: the social and economic realms of everyday life transform in relation to the wider experience of the undermining of the order's cosmological bases. The opposition between Nature and

Culture was long an integral part of Western metaphysics (e.g., Horigan 1988; Evernden 1992). In the Judeo-Christian religious context of Western metaphysics, Man and Nature are God's creations, Man's identity defined through his ruling Nature. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, already separated from God (e.g., Park and Daston 1981), Nature prevails as the given, the raw, a metaphor for a prehuman, presocial condition. Culture is then defined as what gradually "takes over" Nature (i.e., "industry . . . commodities . . . account of time . . . arts . . . letters" [Hobbes 1981: 186]), the overcoming of Nature by social contract (as in Hobbes and Locke). In nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western cosmology, Nature is still the site of the given, a key metaphor for the authentic and the primordial (e.g., Strathern 1992), the opposite of and ground for Culture. However, Culture now undermines Nature. The unprocessed, the "objectively" real now becomes rationalized through scientific classifications, dominated through expanding industrial technology and the rapid growth of the cities (e.g., Park and Daston 1981; Evernden 1992).

The process creates ambivalences. Through its growing mastery of Nature, Culture simultaneously undermined its own grounding. Culture's supremacy thus invokes a sense of loss of the real, arouses anxiety, and awakens nostalgia for Nature's otherness (e.g., Turner 1980; Thomas 1984; Evernden 1992).

With its origins in the late eighteenth century and its heyday during the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the popularly called "traditional circus" is thus particularly intriguing for the vantage point it offers vis-à-vis the modern order. **Through its peripheral wandering, the modern "traditional circus" constituted a comment on that order's fragmentariness. Through its particular tropes, the peripheral circus formed the locus where a disruption of cosmological categories playfully crystallized into objectified, imagelike animals and humans, who illusorily transcended Culture/Nature categories. The peripheral circus thus encapsulated the predicaments of the modern order, the relations between Culture and Nature, and their transcendence. On a different level of analysis, the peripheral traveling circus highlights the import of the imaginary and the spectacle in the construction of boundaries. The reshaping of the "traditional circus" in the postmodern order is of particular significance in these respects.**

This article centers around a lion and lionesses ("big cats") act as performed in Gerry Cottle's circus, a British traveling show in which I conducted a fifteen-month period of fieldwork between 1975 and 1979.<sup>1</sup> I first describe the act and follow it by a brief history of traveling circuses in

1. An earlier version of the act's analysis appeared in Carmeli 1999.

England. I then proceed to an interpretation of the act as a circus interplay of Nature/Culture, animals/trainer. The article ends with a comment on the transformation of context, and of the peripheral circus itself, as it took place between the fieldwork period and the present time.

### The Trainer and His Lions Act

The “wild animals” in Cottle’s were trained and presented by the then sixty-six-year-old trainer, Sidney Howes. Sid and his wife Tess had come to Cottle’s from Robert Brothers’ Circus (another British show), where, for twenty years, he had presented the “big cats” in a very similar act. The couple had two children. The son, Gordon, had trained lions in another circus but in 1977, during a training session, was killed by one of the animals. Their daughter, Barbara, had married a German circus technician, and the pair would sometimes travel with Barbara’s parents in Cottle’s and work on the show. Sid had a groom, named Robert, who helped him in the daily care of the animals.

Although in the mid-1970s there were already various legal restrictions in place and protests by the Royal Society For Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and other organizations were growing louder, the performance of Cottle’s lion and lionesses was still highly popular with the public. In Cottle’s 1975 bills, the lions act formed one of the main attractions. It was scheduled as the opening act of the second half of the show, a time slot dictated by the interval necessary for the erection of the mobile circus cage but also set aside (along with some other strategic slots) for the more sensational performances. Among the decorated circus caravans, the one that belonged to Sid and Tess carried a “Victorian” inscription: “Captain Sidney Howes Lord of the Lions.” In the circus “Souvenir Programme,” the trainer’s life story, illustrated with pictures of himself and the lion and lionesses in performance, featured prominently. In a BBC TV series titled *Circus*, which was shot on Cottle’s premises, Sid had an important part as “an old circus lion tamer.”

As the second half of the show is about to begin, the ringmaster calls the audience back to their seats. The spectators’ attention is drawn to the metal cage the ring boys have erected in the ring during the show’s interval. The act’s props have also been brought into the ring. They include pedestals set out in a semicircle in the front part of the cage, their platforms painted white, their metal frames red. Two higher pedestals, somewhat apart from each other, have been positioned in the back. Then there are a white-painted beam, a long stick with a big hoop at one end, two more

pedestals, higher still than the others, and a fifth pedestal, smaller than the others and particularly heavy. The props are positioned along the bars on the inside of the cage and will be moved about and positioned in certain ways by Sid himself throughout the performance.

The cage is fully lit. The ringmaster welcomes the public to the second half of the show. With a solemn air, which the public well remembers from previous visits to the circus, he announces the act that now follows as “extremely dangerous.” The public is asked to remain seated, not to walk about in the passages or around the ring; no camera flashes are allowed. The spectators notice how several circus people are taking up position near the cage’s doors, no doubt in case of an emergency. In a voice sounding both festive and deferential, the ringmaster now announces the performer: “Ladies and Gentlemen, for fifty years in the circus, Britain’s oldest wild animals trainer, star of the BBC TV series *Circus*, Captain Sidney Howes!”

The band strikes up a fanfare and Sidney Howes enters the cage. His age may be obvious but his bearing is firm. He is dressed in a beige-colored uniform, features a pith helmet (colonial hat) and gloves, and wears boots. In his left hand he holds a short baton, in his right a long whip. The cage’s door is then closed behind him (the ringmaster and Sid’s groom, Robert, will remain positioned there, outside the cage, for the duration of the act). The “big cats” are already on their way from the cage-wagon outside, through the “tunnel” that leads into the tent and into the performing cage. Now the partition between the tunnel and the inside space of the cage is lifted (via a rope pulled up by Robert from the outside) and the animals rush in—a lion and six lionesses.

The band starts playing the “Captain Sidney Howes March,” written especially for him when he was still with the Robert Brothers. Sid urges the animals around the ring, making sure to keep a narrow distance between their bodies and his own, and directs them onto the pedestals located at the front of the cage. There the animals are soon orderly “seated,” all facing the trainer, and with Pasha, the male animal, at the right end of the line. Sid now stands in the middle of the ring, upright, whip and baton in one hand, the other raised in a gesture which signals that this first routine has been completed but also asserting the trainer’s superiority and calling for the spectators’ acknowledgment. The band underscores this with a loud chord in the major, and the public applauds.

The animals growl on their pedestals, and the band again strikes up the march. Without turning his back on the animals for a moment, Sid takes up the hoop and with quick and decisive moves fixes it in between the two medium-high pedestals at the cage’s rear part. He turns toward the male animal, whip raised in the air, loudly calling his name and ordering him off

the pedestal. He makes one of the lionesses seated at the center come down from her pedestal, too. Sid drives and presses both animals around and, all the while shouting and cracking his whip, makes them jump onto one of the back pedestals, then through the hoop and onto another pedestal, each jump punctuated by a loud major chord from the band. The props (pedestals, hoop) are simple and familiar to everyone. The routine, too, is familiar to the spectators from the performances of other circuses. When, as often happens in other circuses, this routine is dramatized by setting the hoop alight, it becomes the act's emblematic scene, its (final) most spectacular routine. But in Sid's act, the public's excitement was created purely by the speed of the action, the trainer's forcefully given commands, and the apparent resistance put up by the present lioness and Pasha, a resistance "encouraged" (i.e., staged) but then, of course, also conquered by the trainer. The routine is repeated three times in an orderly fashion, its completion each time confirmed by the band with a loud chord, each time applauded by the public, after which the big cats are again rushed to their place.

Again hardly ever turning his back to the animals, Sid then with a few quick moves pushes the hoop aside, drags the medium-sized pedestals farther apart, and pulls the two higher pedestals between them, placing the red-painted beam across between the two high pedestals. One of the lionesses is then instructed off her pedestal-seat in the front and onto the pyramid created by the midsize and higher pedestals. After making the climb, she seems to refuse the next move of stepping onto and then across the beam. During each show, twice a day, Sid stands below and bangs with his baton against the pedestal she occupies, as though forcing her to move on, while she roars and growls in "refusal." When finally she successfully balances across the beam and is then driven back to her pedestal, Sid claims the public's applause, and the public obliges.

Sid now removes the beam and from the back of the cage picks up a small pedestal. A solid prop with a metal frame at its base, this is now placed on top, bridging the two higher pedestals. Pasha is driven to the top, so that his front legs stand on the top platform, his hind legs one step below and his head is turned toward the public. With the male lion thus posturing as its own culturally popular iconic representation, one of the lionesses is driven to pose symmetrically on the other side, front legs on the top pedestal, head leaning toward Pasha's (as her head is behind Pasha's and cannot really be seen by the public, the symmetry is not quite perfect). The other lionesses are then driven to take their places on both flanks of the configuration, and a wild animals "pyramid" is accomplished in the ring, with the whole troop included and Pasha the male lion at the top. While the band plays the final chords of "Rule Britannia," Captain Sid, standing in the front part of the

cage and doffing his hat, gestures toward the feat he has achieved in the pyramid and claims the audience's applause for its completion.

With the spectators still applauding, the trainer drives the animals off the pedestals and forces them back to the regular pedestals, so as to start a routine, familiar from almost all English circuses, in which all the big cats are made to lie down at his feet. The band quietly strikes up the Beatles' "Yesterday." Now cracking his whip softly, from a distance, Sid leads one of the lionesses off her pedestal onto the ring's floor. Frequently growling and ostensibly trying to defy the trainer's whip, the lioness rolls her body on the ground toward the trainer, ending up at his feet. The others are then made to follow suit. The routine is finalized when Sid has a whole line of big cats on the ground at his feet, again underscored by a loud major chord from the band. With whip and baton in hand, the trainer proudly stands alongside the line of big cats, facing the public, calling for applause.

Sid then firmly distances himself, turning toward the animals. As the band shifts into "Tiger Rag," the trainer, one more time, rushes the animals to their pedestals. This is the moment at which "a wild animal's rage" is often evoked, as a lioness "refuses to obey" the trainer's command and Sid "has to" come closer to her, the baton positioned between his body and the animal. With all the animals eventually on pedestals, Sid uses his long whip to make them all raise their front legs and the upper parts of their bodies, whereby they perform a quasi-human "standing" on their hind legs and "waving" their front legs. Sid turns to the public, and the band celebrates the successful conclusion of the act with another long-held major chord.

At this point Robert, Sid's groom, who all this time has been standing by the cage's locked doors, pulls the rope to lift up the metal partition that separates the cage from the tunnel. Sid rushes the animals off their pedestals and into the tunnel that leads back to the circus cage-wagon. As the last animal enters the tunnel and the partition comes down behind it, the band accompanies Sid's last claim for applause. The ringmaster loudly pronounces, one last time: "Ladies and Gentlemen, Captain Sidney Howes!"

With the cage door opening behind him, Sid takes his leave as the clowns are coming into the ring: performing their gag in the front part of the ring, they will cover up the ring boys already busy dismantling the cage.

### **The Circus: Origins and Transformation**

The modern traveling circus has several roots. One of them can be traced back to the open-air displays of horsemanship as first seen in London in the late eighteenth century. When these displays moved to a ring, and then later gradually came to be accompanied by clowning, acrobatics, and ani-



mal acts, a new form of entertainment—called circus—came into being (Speaight 1980; Kwint 1994). By the mid-nineteenth century, the circus had developed a strong mimetic dimension. Feats of horsemanship, including the horses themselves, were presented in so-called “hippodramas,” where classical (“ancient Greek,” Shakespearean) tales served as narrative frameworks. Other “stories” were provided by contemporary battles between Britain and France, as this was the era of patriotism and nation building (Saxon 1968; Tuttle 1972; Speaight 1980; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Kwint 1994).

Another source of the modern circus and of performances like Sid’s is the preindustrial and early industrial nomadic fairs and traveling menageries (Frost 1875; Disher 1942; Cunningham 1980; Speaight 1980; Park and Daston 1981). In the preindustrial, primarily agrarian and autarkic order, it was at fairs that foreign commodities were exchanged, occasional and seasonal labor was hired, and pastime and entertainment activities crossed the borders of legitimacy. The “exterritorial” fair, situated in the margins of the social order, constituted a liminal framing for the acrobatic performances and presentations of human and animal freaks: it turned them into auratic signs and their “exhibitions” into boundary rituals of the social and the human (Malcolmson 1973; Carmeli 1992). The traveling menageries, which were often part of the early modern fairs, presented behind the bars of their mobile cages “collections” of “exotic” and rare animals. Continuously popular throughout the nineteenth century, these displays of the margins of “civilization” projected the domination of Nature by Culture as well as Britain’s domination of the imperial territories. They also helped popularize scientific (zoological) knowledge and current Darwinian notions (Frost 1874; Speaight 1980; see Turner 1980; Ritvo 1990).

Some circuses—taking up the example of shows in the big cities—grew out of the traveling fair and its menageries. Others traveled alongside the fair or used the fair event as a context for their own performances (Disher 1942). Though offering several performances together within a ring, these circus shows did not emphasize role playing or provide an encompassing story. Rather, they presented a fragmented show, with animal acts, human acts, and clowning following each other in the ring. During the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century, these circuses found themselves traveling within an increasingly urban, rationalized, and regulated order. Within this order, the fairs gradually lost their economic and recreational functions. As foci of resistance to the rising bourgeois domination, the fairs came under the ever-stricter inspection and control of local authorities (Malcolmson 1973; Cunningham 1980). Historically, the traveling circuses survived the big nineteenth-century urban spectacles as well

as the old menageries and the traditional fair (Saxon 1968; Kwint 1994). Rather than depending for their timing on holy days, like the fair, the circuses followed their own course and calendar. Rather than running repeatedly throughout whole days, like the fair, they performed twice an evening, in the public's leisure time, after work. With their performing tents and their mobile homes (first pulled by horses, later by cars), the performers and performances of these "traditional circuses" of the late-nineteenth and the twentieth centuries were gradually legitimized when legal inspection of animal performances (the Performing Animals Act 1925 [*Halsbury's Statutes of England* 1968–1970, 2:240–41]) and legal regulations for the performing profession were introduced. In 1935, traveling performers were legally differentiated from the "rogue and vagabond" (the Vagrancy Act 1935 [*ibid.*, 8: 315]). Signs of social and cosmic boundaries in premodern order, these marginal travelers were thus acknowledged as human beings, much like their public (see also the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 [*ibid.*, 24: 146–71]).

In Cottle's 1975 and other tenting shows in Britain, the premodern fair-like traveling had since long been transformed from a liminal boundary phenomenon into a display of the traveling condition itself, that is, a display of by now legally acknowledged human performers, of their own extraordinary life (Carmeli 1987, 1990, 1994). As expected by the public, this traveling condition and the character of Circus Traveler were constituted in a particular way: through the self-display of humans and animals as they paraded down the main street of town; through the presence, on the common, of the colorful mobile homes, themselves on display; through the travelers' own repeated displaying, even flaunting of their unique presence in the local launderette, the café, the fish-and-chips corner; through the framing of the totality of this display of humans and animals in town as abrupt ("In Town For A Few Days Only"), and yet being there, in time, "since ever" (as circus posters declare and circus fan books always recount [Carmeli 1994, 1996]). Thanks to the anticipated totality of its self-display, and to its particular temporality, the Circus and the character of Circus Traveler were perceived as real life objectified—as being out of intersubjective social time and as standing apart from social relations.<sup>2</sup>

In the traveling circus of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there

2. There were seven "big" and "midsize" tenting circuses on the road in Britain in 1975 and twenty-five smaller traveling circus shows. As an analysis of the traveling and its possible alternatives shows, circus performers travel not only to reach a new public, but also to create their public (Carmeli 1987). There were several stationary circuses in Britain in 1975, two in holiday resorts, which constituted a special context. The same goes for Christmastime performances in halls. One more stationary circus operated in a recreation center (*ibid.*).

emerged a new concept of margins, formed within the context of the modern order. A historical marginality of travelers and performances was playfully transformed into a secular, existential, and “ontological” marginality. With the Circus being performed as beyond social time, beyond community, the spectators’ own illusory “history,” “community,” “personal biography” were nostalgically conjured. This Circus, as the totality of real life objectified, became the context for the human and animal performances in the ring.

### **Nature/Culture, Animal/Human in the Circus Den**

Six lionesses and one lion are being displayed in a circus cage into which a human being then enters to face them. The display in Cottle’s resembled in many ways the exhibitions of the menageries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As with the menageries, the circus “big cats” act takes place within the context of a display of other animals. The animals’ appearance (their size, teeth, color) and behavior (their bearing, agility, their occasional roaring, and their fierceness) become a display of their innate nature, familiar to and expected by the audience. As such, the animals are representations of the spectators’ prevailing notions of “Nature.”

Nature, as invoked and embodied in the menagerie-like scenes of Cottle’s traveling circus, is caged in, captured, and dominated by Culture. In Sid’s act, the eventual obedience of the wild animals was perhaps most marked toward the end of the act, when these proud, magnificent animals were made to crawl and roll on the ground toward the trainer’s feet. By the mid-1970s, this menagerie-like routine (as well as others, e.g., forcing animals onto pedestals, whereby an animal would sometimes fail, sometimes fall) began to arouse resentment among some of the public and led to charges of cruelty. These were indications of an encompassing change in the attitude toward Nature.

The confrontation between trainer and circus “big cats” has been analyzed by Paul Bouissac, a pioneer in the study of the circus. Bouissac (1976) suggests that we read a circus lion act’s messages as text and outlines some formal properties pertaining to the message’s constitutive structure. These properties include “clear-cut boundaries . . . that delimit a finite set of interwoven meaningful elements . . . [E]ndurance over time, which makes it possible to ‘read’ a message again and again. . . . A deep system of relations [among elements] ensuring the surface coherence of the message” (ibid.: 90–91). The elements necessary for the production of a cage act are the trainer (his name, costumes, etc.), the animals, the props, the musical accompaniment, the lights, and the circus program, which together define

a “hero” and a “hostile force” (97). The deep system of relations among these elements, which is repeated in all the text’s “narrative segments” (98), is described, cybernetically, as “a state of balance (an obstacle separates the predator from the potential prey) [which] is transformed into a new situation (the obstacle no longer separates them), that could result in a radical change (disappearance of the prey)” (98). What constitute the messages as text are also properties that pertain to the situation or context of the message, that is, “the conditions relative to the production and consumption of the message” (91). Each of the elements is selected from several culturally given possibilities (e.g., the trainer may be costumed in different ways), and the audience decodes, or understands, the message through metonymic and metaphorical processes (105–7) within a “framework provided by numerous other texts of its culture” (102). Examples brought by Bouissac include various representations in Christian religious iconography, in comics, the zoo’s exhibitions (103).

Adapting Bouissac’s structuralist analysis to the study of a traveling, historically margin-encapsulating circus like Cottle’s requires a few comments on contextualization as well as a suggested revision. Bouissac’s analysis refers to circus “in general” (e.g., Rogers 1979), but the examples he adduces for the repertoire of cultural texts by which a lion act can be interpreted clearly contextualize the analysis within the Western cultural tradition. Similarly, Bouissac’s “hero,” “hostile force,” and the system of relations between them, as identified through his analysis, remain anchored in the Western Culture/Nature cosmology outlined above for the nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

Configured within this historical cosmological paradigm, the structure of “hero” (Culture)/“hostile force” (Nature) and their relations is at the core of many nineteenth-century British, menagerie-like narratives that come together in the big cats act in Cottle’s. The wilderness where these particular wild animals “belong,” the audience knows, is Africa. Metonymically, the lions thus represent the empire’s remote territories, their taming (as the “wilderness” is being caged in and despoiled) represents the empire’s domination. The “hero” in Cottle’s is a white man single-handedly facing the animals, his particular costuming is that of the colonial soldier and hunter. Not just the ruler, the imperial race, but a whole nineteenth-century code of masculinity and virility is, in a sense, reenacted in his presence. It is a man, that is, a soldier or hunter (the latter as both pioneering scout and elitist male character; Mackenzie 1986), who is seen engaging in a deadly contest for the control of Nature and also a male seen subduing a mainly female troop of wild animals. Again, among the animals, the only one of his own sex is the lion, “king of the animals,” adopted by the British as their

national and imperial symbol. In this symbolic complex, the lion, metonym for wilderness, becomes metaphor, epitomizing the empire and its virility. In a scene typical of what Bouissac (1976) calls “circus poetics”—with Pasha spectacularly high up atop the pyramid and Sid in his commanding position in front—layers of significance are combined and explicated: alone in the ring, old and experienced, a Master, a victorious hero, Sid is himself lion, becomes himself the British, that is, the epitome of civilization, apex in the evolution of Culture. Thus, we find nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century issues—a victory of Culture over Nature—still largely present in a 1975 display of the traveling circus (for comparison with texts of “orientalist” presentations in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American circus, see Davis 1993).

The above interpretation, however, does not yet exhaust the spectators’ experience of Cottle’s act. First, by 1975, the images and significances which the spectators continued to confer on the various elements of the “big cats” act, and expected to find invoked when coming to the circus, had already lost some of their relevance and validity. The empire is remembered but has, of course, been lost for a generation and more. The colonial hunter is still a familiar character, but manliness is no longer achieved through “ruling the wilderness.” To most of the audience, lions and lionesses were long since more familiar from cinema and TV, if not from visits to the zoo. The struggle between man and the wild animal, between Culture and Nature, as still performed in the circus ring, has to a large extent become anachronistic, as highlighted by the growing protest against cruelty.<sup>3</sup>

Second, the old, menagerie-linked significances have lost much of their validity not only because the general life experience that people bring to the circus has changed. Rather, this transformation is actively geared to—crystallized through—the performance itself. In what follows I will argue that, in the marginal traveling circus, Human presence and heroism, Nature’s presence (resistance), and Animal fierceness are not only presented but also explicitly enacted and dramatized and thereby playfully deconstructed and derealized. I will also argue that the attraction and impact that Sid’s “Big Cats” act exerted on the public in Cottle’s 1975 derived not only from the display of the Culture/Nature conflict, the “live” menagerie-like “realness” that clung to it, the representations and metaphors that all

3. In their efforts to confront these cruelty charges, mid-1970s British circuses claimed a pro-animal position. “Souvenir programmes” mention that their healthy, well-kept “wild” cats were born and raised in captivity, i.e., in the circus and not in Africa. Still, this is done in small print so as not to downgrade the traditional drama of the Man/Animal confrontation (e.g., Chipperfield Circus 1976 souvenir program, Hoffman Brothers Circus 1973 souvenir program, and others).

these still invoked. Evolving in the context of modernity, and in the periphery of modernity's new order, circus is also where Culture and Nature are playfully confronted, so that their opposition can be shattered, and the terms become conceptually deconstructed and ontologically "decomposed." With the general historical transformation from the premodern to the modern order, and the transition from the peripheral fair to the peripheral circus, the deep structure that binds together the elements of the lion act has also been transformed: Culture/Nature (Human/Animal, hero/hostile force) are displayed vis-à-vis each other, not just opposed but objectified and "derealized," their opposition disintegrated and the distinction between them dissolved through the display of either's presence. Finally, I will argue that what is now conjured via the spectators' reifying perception is a spectacle of Culture/Nature transcended. Performed in the context of a wholly objectified, ontologically remote traveling circus, this visualized transcendence illusorily invokes an experience of order tied together "again." This nostalgic experience, this illusion of order and self "regained," are at the heart of the expectations people bring to the circus.

I now return to the lion act in Cottle's.

### ***The Lions***

Starting with Nature, that is, with the lions, one notes that there was nothing inside Cottle's cage that belonged to their "real" (wild) world: no signs of Africa's savannah, no other animals in the same cage.<sup>4</sup> The circus "ring boxes" making up the ring, the blue cage, the painted props (mobile and modular) are all salient in their artificial, man-made colorfulness. There is no Nature among the big cats' props, just the displayed Culture's constraints, through which, in turn, the animals themselves are displayed.

The presence of the circus trainer emphasized the presence of Animal versus Human. In the circus, the actual lions displayed the Animal. Furthermore, the lion and lionesses were there in the circus cage to display Lions. Unlike the menagerie's exhibition, which put real lions and lionesses on show in cages as embodying and presenting Nature, in the circus act of the "big cats," the animals' appearance, their "natural" moves, their roaring and growling, have become signs (Bouissac 1976: 95) or, perhaps more precisely, exemplifications (Goodman 1976: 52–57) of their own kind. As such, it is not just that the actual animals in the ring are loaded, as it were, with anthropomorphic images and metaphoric significances; they are both

4. See Berger 1977, 1980 for decontextualization of animals in the (old) zoos. A systematic comparison of circus and zoo is beyond the scope of this article. Zoos, however, still represent nature "out there," while circus, in this article's argument, deconstructs and textualizes nature.

“natural” and denatured, that is, derealized through the very display the public expects as part of the familiar circus repertoire.

Still, Cottle’s lion and lionesses are seen to bare their teeth and are heard to roar. In descriptions of the late menageries’ scenes, the main attraction is always the animals’ fierceness and the trainer’s (“heroic”) courage. In Sid’s circus act, fierceness and real danger still predominate. But given the act’s anachronism and through its highly regulated form—its being a bounded unit in an entire circus show—wildness and fierceness are also keyed as themes. In the public’s perception, real fierceness prevails but is also observed as directed, solicited, and dramatized through the trainer’s maneuvering (in Cottle’s 1976 souvenir program, lions are said to be “really great performers . . . that are able to sense an audience’s mood as keenly as the finest human actor”). The actual, Nature-embodiment animals are present yet simultaneously are derealized as they perform their own stereotyped images. In this way, the trainer’s baton no longer just subdues and confronts them but shatters and textualizes their Nature.

This simultaneous performance of Nature’s realness and Nature’s derealization is further articulated as the act’s routines unfold. The taming of the big cats followed a specific code: the wild Animals are taught to perform Human (Cultural) configurations. Nature is both performed and consumed through the trope of category reversal: it is shattered through the animals’ enactment of artificial (i.e., humanly designed) symmetrical pyramids, whole troop in a semicircle, whole troop in a straight line, through humanlike body postures (“sitting” on pedestals, “standing” on hind legs), through the tamed miming of humanlike intentions (“refusing”) and humanlike manners (“waving with hands”). In Sid’s act, as in other big cats presentations, these are humanlike performances, intended to be perceived as such by the public. Throughout the performance, these forms and configurations are perceptually finalized through the public’s perception. Yet their anticipated completion, the experience of their “appearance” and their “disclosure” (i.e., as if external to the public eyes), provides the measure for the “accomplishment” of the routine and for the public’s applause for the trainer.

Anthropomorphic play—Animals made to “act” and “mime” their Human opposite (and representations thereof)—can be found before the circus came into being (e.g. Frost 1874). Their transforming significances and modes of exclusion encapsulated a shifting Nature/Culture cosmology as well as changing concepts of boundaries and order. In the premodern world, in which a religiously anchored Human superiority ruled over the whole Animal order, anthropomorphic displays were excluded as miracle or witchcraft (e.g., Park and Daston 1981). (A famous late-sixteenth-century

example is the horse Morocco, which performed various humanlike feats. Horse and operator, one John Bank, were burnt, apparently at the pope's order [for a discussion see Sebeok 1980].) Later on, in the early modern fair, anthropomorphic Culture/Nature reversals were thought of as "Nature's wonders," "curiosities," as well as grotesque playful displays of showmen's trickery (a famous example is the fair's presentations of the "talking" pig [e.g., Turner 1980]). The popular anthropomorphic play performed on the periphery rehearsed both the dominant Culture/Nature cosmology and its historical undermining: in the secular order of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, Culture's celebrated victory over Nature also evoked fears of Nature, and a similar ambivalence pervaded the attitude toward animals. In addition to its religious origins, the premodern Human/Animal hierarchy had a philosophical-scientific anchorage—all the way from Aristotle to Descartes. However, already in the Renaissance, other voices pointed to the anatomical similarity between animals and humans or considered the question of animals' reason (e.g., Sorabji 1993), thus undermining the foundations of Human superiority. The era that witnessed the increased use of animals for scientific experiment, the locking of animals in the early zoos, was also the era that increasingly accepted intimacy with animals (i.e., the popularity of pets amongst the middle class) and made ever-louder demands for the protection of animals. The latter, again, generated ambivalence and anxiety as Darwinian theories ranked Humans and Animals close together within the scientific concept of their natural origin, to the loss of both ontological and epistemological grounds for Human supremacy (e.g., Turner 1980).

Ironic and grotesque anthropomorphic images, encapsulating the sense of this threat, prevailed in both low and high literary genres (e.g., Turner 1980; Stallybrass and White 1986; Ritvo 1990). Following Benjamin (1982) on the anthropomorphic images in the graphic work of Grandville, Susan Buck-Morss (1991: 149) has pointed out how, for Grandville, anthropomorphism served as ironic critique of the bourgeois attempt to subsume nature under its own categories, that is, as a commodity: "Grandville allows nature to gain the upper hand. An active, rebellious nature takes its revenge on the humans who would fetishize it as a commodity."

It is in this context of an industrial and commodified order, of the "fear and trembling" at the loss of Nature, that the new circus play emerged on the periphery. Anthropomorphism is being played here anew and gains new significances. It is no longer just part of the narrative of control and subjugation of Nature, as some "anti-circus" voices would argue (e.g., Ings 1987; Johnson 1990). It is no longer just a trope of critical irony, of the grotesque, as in Grandville. Rather, the circus's anthropomorphic segments, in their



repetitive, fragmented display and decontextualization of Nature, where Animals are “self-referentially” absorbed into Human forms, bring to the surface the syntax of anthropomorphism itself (Gella 1978), its Nature/Culture reversal: as perceived by the circus spectators, Nature is constantly there, in those anthropomorphic segments of the act, yet it is constantly being disintegrated, transgressed, and textualized. In an era fearing the loss of Nature, it is in the periphery, that is, the circus, that this loss is playfully pushed to the extreme and experientially “realized.”

Elsewhere (Carmeli 1997) I have looked at this circus experience as part of a phenomenological interpretation of the accusations the “anti-circus” group level against circus cruelty to animals. My argument was that the experience of “cruelty” among some of the spectators in circus animal acts does not originate in the witnessing of actual torture inflicted on animals during the performance (for research into circus treatment of animals and measures of their good condition, see Hediger 1968 and Kiley-Worthington 1990). If the accusations leveled against the circus do persist, it is because “cruelty” arises from the public’s perceptual experience of Nature as being shattered and transgressed in the circus performance. This circus experience of transgression, evoked at the sight of Nature being made an object of play, impacts on the spectators’ sense of their own ontological grounds. In the peripheral circus performance, the public’s Nature-mirrored (Animal-opposed) Human self is playfully endangered.

Nor does this performance of Nature’s derealization, however extreme, exhaust the significance of the anthropomorphic play on the periphery. The fans inside the tent are led further in their experience. I observe again with what eager eyes the spectators are watching the moves of the “big cats” in the ring, I follow their applause when cued by Sid and the band’s chords, and I register the moments they perceptually constitute the accomplishment of each of the act’s routines in the ring. These moments come when the whole troop on their pedestals are perceptually disclosed as “finally” standing, properly erected on their rear legs; the “pyramid,” as known and anticipated, is perceptually made to be “finally” formed; the lion is perceptually acknowledged as “finally” posturing as ruler. For a brief glimpse the animal body is perceived as totally “in-corporated” in its display. Under the circus spotlight, Nature is grasped as momentarily fully derealized. The circus animals have become emptied images, ephemeral embodiments of Nature transcended. At this moment it is not the deconstruction of Nature, or of the spectators’ own Nature-grounded selves, that they ratify. It is rather the visualization, their own conjuring and disclosure, of a “surreal,” Nature-transcending ontology.

Through its anticipation and its perceptual completion of circus configu-

rations, the public shares in the disintegration of Nature and of the basis of daily life. But in the totalization of the display, in the spectacularization and consumption of Nature, a higher-order mirroring is conjured on the periphery. A totality of lost order is illusorily tied up through its being mirrored by the circus's Nature-transcending and apartness. As Modernity's experience of loss of Nature, the spectators' loss of ground is nostalgically, illusorily overcome.

This conception of Nature's total display—of transcending categories in the peripheral “big cats” presentation—unfolds further when we turn to the trainer—an actual Human being and, within the act, the embodiment of Culture.

### **The Trainer**

Sid's predecessors presented wild animals in cages in the traveling menageries. Gradually the exhibition of the animals was extended when their “keepers” began performing inside the cage. The fair was the context that gave the danger of these displays its significance. Alongside the fair's “Nature wonders,” all frequently exhibited behind bars, the danger that was dramatized in the performances (of the nimble funambulist, the sword swallower, the wild animals' keeper) was perceived by the visitors in the context of the fair's extraordinary, liminal status and the performers' own outsidership. (E.g., a famous lion trainer in European menageries was a black man, dressed as “African” and called Macomo [Frost 1874, 1875].) The tradition followed in the act of the peripheral traveling circus is different. To begin with, much more than his menagerie predecessor, Sid is perceived as a human being, like his public. As already noted, this results from a general historical trend, which also brought the traveling performers under the law: what the public sees in the ring are human beings enacting their part in the “circus show.” Moreover, when Cottle's circus trainer enters the cage to confront the lions, the public identifies his colonial outfit and responds to the imperial narrative. They have seen circus acts with lions and lion trainers before, and those, vaguely remembered, were dressed differently.<sup>5</sup> A role-acting dimension is thereby disclosed, a human performer “within”

5. During these same years, lions and lionesses were presented in other circus shows in the same cultural context. In one case, the performer (younger and taller than Sid) was costumed as a gladiator. In another, the trainer was costumed as Tarzan. Variability went even further. A very famous presenter in Britain of the 1970s was Mary Chipperfield, daughter of a well-known circus family. Female trainers had already appeared in the nineteenth-century menageries but disappeared after some fatal accidents (these could be tolerated with men only). The way Mary Chipperfield presented wild animals was completely different from Sid's—it was “friendly,” soft, even seductive. Still, her reputation was based on her being “the only woman in Britain who is a wild animal trainer” (quote is from Cottle's program 1977).

the trainer's costume. As the ringmaster reminds them, this particular performer even appeared on TV.

For the circus spectators, however, Sidney Howes, when he steps into the ring, is there not just in his identity and actuality as a human being. Rather, like the lions he faces, Sid, the actual person, is displayed, that is, abstracted and derealized through the performance. This derealization is already being conveyed through the photographs and circus biographical accounts in the Souvenir Programmes that are sold in the tent's entrance for the public's perusal before the show starts.

The story presenting Sid insists from the start on establishing a seemingly ordinary person: "The one question which everyone wants to ask a lion trainer is 'Why do you do it? Why risk your life?' . . . [Sidney Howes] has always answered calmly: 'To make a living.' This tells a lot about the man: he is surprisingly ordinary, and engagingly undramatic." However, as the public anticipates, this highlighting of the ordinary nature of the man in the den merely introduces his construction as both a social and a cosmic other. "He comes from a circus stock [the program now mentions famous names in circus history]. By the age of 12 or 13 he had begun to learn the business. . . . His innate ability was clear from the start. . . . It remains a dangerous job. . . . He has had his share of accidents. Wild animals can only be trained, never tamed. Yet with so much experience behind him the danger has diminished." In a British circus, the public is not after "stars" or after the particular biographies of certain performers but after the tokens of Circus-life stories. With regards to performers like the man in the den, the public expects the fixed narrative of a "Circus" story: the lore of the circus performer as repeating a "family" token (Carmeli 1991, 1996), some esoteric wisdom, accidents he survived, his long experience, his age. In Britain, where circuses are typified by the travelers' self-display and where the public expects, not variability and difference among circus shows, but a repetitive appearance of the Circus Traveler,<sup>6</sup> the narration of Sid's story was designed to epitomize the circus's standing apart from ordinary community, its independence of history, its being always (out) "there." In other words, for the public watching the act, the actual animal trainer, Sid, is both objectified and abstracted while embodying the character of a Circus Trainer. Even when acting on TV, this actual particular person is objectified and derealized through "his own" story. Sid the actual person is abstracted yet further through the Traveler, being totally apart from social

6. During fieldwork, I often heard it said among the public that "circuses are always the same," i.e., repeating the Circus, meaning that they were expected to be that way (Carmeli 1996).

life. (For circus characters as symbolic types see Handelman 1991 and also Bouissac 1981.)

Similarly, a derealizing structure runs through Sid's performance in the circus ring. First, a Human is dramatized in Cottle's ring by the isolation and ostension (Eco 1976: 225) of Sid as against the Animals. Opposed to the lion and lionesses, Sid—like them—exemplifies his own kind. The Human is further dramatized through the relations of both domination and danger. As he chases and drives the Animals and “finally” poses victoriously by the pyramid, Sid is a Human. At the same time, once inside, he is himself caged and thus Human as potential prey. The lions' teeth that Sid challenges are concrete, sharp, and dangerous. Yet in the Circus context, they also symbolically represent the circus trainer's abstraction, turning him from actual person into sign and Human “being.”

In the public's perception, the mode of being of the Circus Human itself comes under threat of erasure, as the process of distancing and derealization unfolds along with the drama of the circus routines. Dominating yet apprehensive of the animals, Sid directs these routines, shattering the Animals' Nature. Paradoxically, however, the more the Trainer rules the Animals' conduct, the more he “struggles” to deconstruct and textualize their Nature, the more he is experienced as shattering his own, and thus the public's own Animal-mirror: on the periphery of the modern order, the symbolic shattering of the Animal's Nature dramatizes the undermining of the Human and Culture grounds. The lions act comes to encapsulate the era's Culture/Nature crisis.

This undermining is illustrated by the occasional occurrences when the Human design of the act as a whole (its play frame, its routines, its regulated progression) is experienced as getting out of hand. Culture experientially collapses and disintegrates when the public witnesses a circus “accident.”

“Accidents” in the circus are not infrequent—though serious ones are fairly rare—and the public always expects them. Within the narrative of Culture's domination of Nature, a Circus accident is, in the public's experience, that moment when Man briefly loses control, when Nature threatens to regain the upper hand. The circus “accident” marks a brief chaotic interlude of Nature mirroring, a momentary interruption in the drama of its deconstruction. In performances of the traditional traveling circus in the 1970s, the anticipated “accident”—the slipping of a tightrope walker or a trainer's body mangled by his animals—invoked an ambiguous experience: of the abject Human and the transcendence of the Human.

In late 1977, the son of Sid and Tess, Gordon, died in the ring of an Irish circus while training the big cats. This was a terrible blow for the parents. A little over a year later, in the summer of 1979, a near accident also occurred

in Sid's act, during the stay of Cottle's circus in the holiday town of Bournemouth. In the afternoon show of July 29, while chasing the "big cats" and moving close to one of the lionesses, Sid suddenly had a blackout: people nearby could see clearly how he turned pale and had to lean back against one of the pedestals to steady himself. Quickly the cage door behind him was opened and his daughter Barbara helped Sid out of the cage.

In the days that followed, the tent was packed. The ringmaster's solemn apology for Sid's being absent from the show aroused loud applause. The story became back-page news in the national press. The *Daily Star* (July 30) came out with a brief story headlined "Lion Girl Saves Dad," describing how "veteran circus lion tamer . . . was saved . . . after he was savaged by a lioness. [His daughter] dashed into the cage and drove the animals out." The *Daily Mirror* (page 7, July 30) reported "Fainting Lion Man Saved by the Band." The text that followed read: "Lion tamer Sydney Howes was saved by the band after he fainted in the circus ring. They struck up the tune Tiger Rag, the signal for the lions to leave the ring. . . . Sydney's daughter and other attendants rushed to open a gate so that the lions could get out through the tunnel." The report concluded by reminding its readers that "Sidney's son Gordon was killed by a lion last year."

In Bournemouth itself, journalists were summoned by Cottle, the circus owner, immediately following the call for an ambulance. The local *Evening Echo* (July 30) reported on the "Drama in the Big Top" on its third page:

The circus audience at King's Park, Boscombe, watched in horror on Saturday as the veteran lion trainer collapsed in the cage. . . . Silence fell over the Big Top as the trainer was carried out motionless by elephant trainer Carlos Mcmanus. . . . While a call went out for any doctor in the audience, ringside spectator Mr. Vic House, of Lymington Road, Highcliffe, a former RAF nurse, dashed forward and began attempts to revive him. . . . [House:] "If he had collapsed two seconds earlier then the cats would have had him." Mr. House said the circus audience were stunned by the incident, and added that the atmosphere backstage was really electric.

Sid himself also was interviewed. "'My boy didn't have that luck,' added Capt Howes, in a reference to his son Gordon, also a lion trainer, who was killed in a circus cage by lions in Dublin some 18 months ago" (*Evening Echo*, July 30).

The accident was the final item in a weekly broadcast on local TV. The newsreader opened the short report with the ironic comment: "If there is something you would not like to be this is a circus lion trainer." Sid and Barbara were interviewed. An experienced performer, Sid described the event in detail and recalled the death of his son.

Often told amongst circus folks and occasionally found in books on the

circus is the story of how, following a fatal accident in the ring in which the trainer had been dragged by the lions into the tunnel, a lady approached the ringmaster to ask whether this had been a part of the show.

Real accidents or even death inside the cage were shocking occurrences in the old menageries, too. These were, however, conceived of in terms of the performers' esoteric nature rather than as performances of a "text."<sup>7</sup> In the mid-1970s Circus, things are different. We note the press's rhetoric of play when discussing Sid's near-fatal accident: the ironic framing (as in the TV story or in the report of his life being saved by the band); the construction of the real protagonists as characters ("lion tamer," "elephant trainer," "lion girl" [though Barbara never tried any wild animals training]); the sensational scenario of a Circus mishap (drama in the big top, the trainer savaged, the public stunned, the horror and silence, the dashing effort to extricate him). We note the construction of the event of a Human being fatally savaged in the ring (the death of the son) as part of a story, a story performed through the real life and real bodies of the circus travelers, a story now performed again through Sid's own life.

The expectation of real accidents is a part of the drama in the peripheral traveling circus.<sup>8</sup> As the cosmologically opposed and mutually dependent categories of Human / Animal were first isolated and displayed in the show, their opposition and mutuality both contextualize, and are themselves shattered, through the sight of the "accident" in the circus ring. A Human body, objectified and made abject through the "accident," symbolizes the undermining of the Human in the context of undermined Nature. Loss of life and Human significance epitomizes the traveler's exclusion, a playful sacrificial consumption of the Human (Jacob 1999), a mirroring of a higher order.

However, the significance of Sid's near-fatal accident, the part it is given in the construction of the particular ontology of the Human, can be more fully comprehended by reference to a more encompassing dimension of its performance context than the Circus's Culture/Nature opposition. This is the context or dimension in which we see the whole real life of the traveler as being displayed by the text, the whole person as consumed in conjuring the Circus and the Circus-invented Order.

7. In the nineteenth-century cage, Nature was represented as being out there. The man/animal confrontation concentrated on their opposition. (Frost [1874: 363] describes a performance of the 1860s "representing a so called 'lion-hunt,' an exhibition which . . . consists in chasing the animals about the cage, the performer being armed with a sword and pistols, and throwing into the mimic sport as much semblance of reality as the circumstances allow.") The performers, however, were perceived as unordinary human performers (Macomo was twice wounded in the cage [ibid.: 361]).

8. Real danger was not all that much expected in the more spectacular shows and in "Continental" or "Russian" circuses (Carmeli 1990).

I turn to data once more. As described above, the display of Sid's "real" life is extended by both performers and townsfolk onto his caravan, his family, his daily presence in town, his nomadism. On my analysis of the performance, these displays are not occasional overflows beyond their frame, the ring fringes. Rather, as no allowances are made for a backstage space, no play within a play, no Circus performing subject in Sid—just a subject objectified—this extension and inclusion of the totality of real life as display reifies the illusory Circus exclusion. In the Circus periphery, as created between townsfolk and travelers, a totality of performance comes to validate the "realness" of Circus and, thus, of the dream order it conjures. Sid's near-fatal accident (and his body, his life), becomes wholly engulfed within the Trainer and Circus text, so as to reify the totality of Order lost in modernity.<sup>9</sup>

In the mid-1970s, this signification of a Circus "accident," this reification of Circus and Order, could also be followed beyond the circus act itself and the expectations of the Circus encounter in town, beyond the way a genuine event of misfortune was applauded and turned into a Circus story by back-page reports. It was formed in the more general, institutional discourse of circus life/Circus "text" relations as well. On this level, the most conspicuous datum proves to be the total absence, in Britain, of any "serious" considerations of cruelty to circus humans (the lion trainer, the acrobat in the air, the midget displaying his body, etc.). Compared with the growing protests against circus cruelty to animals, this "blind spot" when it comes to cruelty to humans cannot be explained only by the social insignificance of the travelers, as if people like Sid were just "out of sight." (Besides being "seen" twice a day by their public, Circus travelers were inspected by local authorities, police, income tax people, RSPCA people, and occasionally journalists.) Neither can this blindness to humans and their hardships be explained by an argument that, when Sid gets inside the den, he does so, unlike the animals, of his own free will. After all, the state often protects people from doing harm to themselves (Feinberg 1986). Rather, the performance of Circus, the discourse of Circus exclusion, the molding of Human/Animal-transcending embodiments, and the reification of the Circus have taken precedence not only over the perception of a lady watching an accident, but over common sense as well as the general public's moral and legal perceptions. In their vehement rejection of the circus as "cruel," immoral, excluded from human community, in a way even the "anti-circus"

9. It is often said that, nostalgic and eager, the public comes to watch the man in the den in order to witness the "really real." It is their own "really real" self, the sense of subjectification and the illusory total order which they discover through the circus act.

party shared in this Circus performance and in the conjuring of the Circus nostalgic dream (Carmeli forthcoming).

## Epilogue

The modern circus is more than two centuries old, and nearly 150 years have passed since the genre of the peripheral “traditional” traveling show crystallized. The central experience which motivates the public’s and the performers’ construction of this periphery is—so we argued—the crisis of modernity. A secular, disenchanting, industrial order is being illusorily bounded by a peripheral Circus, “in town for a few days only,” a Circus which keeps traveling, “repeatedly” appearing each time it comes to town.

In the circus periphery, lost community and biography are nostalgically disclosed through the Travelers’ total exclusion, fragmentariness and commodification are transcended by objectification and total commodification, the crisis of Culture/Nature cosmology is coped with through an illusory transcendence. Circus periphery is constituted through total display, through derealization and mirror reification. Though deconstructing and seemingly challenging order, these Circus displays and spectacle, including acts like Sid’s, are in Britain fundamentally anchored in the mid-nineteenth-century through mid-twentieth-century bourgeois order, supportive of its dominance.

As early as the late 1940s and more so in the 1970s and 1980s, this “traditional circus” encountered great difficulties. In the emerging postmodern order, the performance that assumed order fragmented, structure in crisis, lost some of its intensity. In the context of a “decentered” society, and one where the very distinction between real and play is eroded, the search for an authentic and centered self, the search for totality—so much at the core of the Circus illusion—lost part of its relevance. More recently there has been a growing attack on the old Human/Animal distinction that the traditional circus assumed in its performance. Nature is being looked at for new forms of “otherness” and mutuality. The performance of “cruelty” to animals has been stripped of its power of illusion and transformation.

In Cottle’s Circus, Sid retired from lion training after the Bournemouth accident. Sid’s groom, Robert, took the old man’s place. But Robert later married a woman for whom the traveling life of the circus held little attraction, and eventually he became a gardener. Gerry Cottle, the circus owner, got tired of the continuous struggle against the “anti-circus” party. By the 1990s, all wild animals had gone from Cottle’s show, as they had from most other circuses in Britain.

This does not mean that the days of the circus were, or are, over. Some



experiments (such as the British-French “Circus Archaos” in the late 1980s [Little 1995] or the “Horror Circus” presented by Cottle’s since the late 1990s) offer a radical “postmodern” version of the circus and some of its rule-breaking, cruelty, and danger motives. In the West in general (spear-headed by the Canadian Cirque de Soleil), and in Britain as well, circus spectacles are seeing a significant revival (e.g., Ciret 1999). In a way, the circus is becoming the epitome of the new postmodern social and cosmological order. From the periphery, that is, the circus is shifting toward the center.

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