

## CHAPTER SIX

# RESEARCH QUESTION TWO: THE SHOW PEOPLE'S PRACTICES OF RESISTANCE

*"I've had things happen with different principals and their attitudes have been not very good. But I always **make** the point **of** setting [them] straight, because unless they learn and they know what we're about, nothing is going to improve. So you tend to try and. . .[move] in the right direction."*

Y1P2

*"And there's no boundaries in terms of our education, both in terms of geographical boundaries and in terms of what we can do and can't do."*

Y4A1

## 6.1 Overview of the chapter

The previous chapter answered the first research question 'outlined in the introduction to this thesis. Following a de Certollian analysis, the show people's experiences of marginalisation, arising from their itinerancy, were classified as being focussed on their absence of place, constructions of their otherness and forms of unproblematic knowledge that effectively excluded them from equitable access to conventional schooling.

If that analysis captured the full range of the show people's situation, they would emerge as passive victims, forever destined to respond to circumstances as they arose and incapable of influencing or even shaping the conditions in which they experience education. Yet, as has been contended elsewhere (Danaher, 2000a), acknowledgment of the show people's marginalisation is the beginning, not the end, of the story. The argument underpinning this study is that the show people's successful lobbying for the Brisbane School of Distance Education program and subsequently for a separate school for their children constitutes a counternarrative to the traditional narratives about Traveller education within which show people are constructed as 'different' and 'deviant'. This counternarrative concentrates on the recognition and valuing of multiple forms of residence and hence of educational provision.

Further to my conscious desire to eschew idealising show people and their success as educational innovators (for example, by not suggesting that such a process was 'automatic' or 'easy'), I must emphasise at this point that the move from marginalisation to transformation implicit in the unfolding of this counternarrative is by no means straightforward or unproblematic. On the

contrary, several elements combined to make such a move possible. In particular, resistance – conceived as a positive and agential force, or what McVeigh (1997) termed “*the continued possibility of alternatives*” (p. 22) – is a necessary but by no means sufficient precondition if marginalisation is to give way to transformation. Exploration of that resistance and its complex nature is the focus of this chapter.

Specifically, the purpose of the chapter is to address the second research question explicated in the introduction: “**How** do the *show* people resist their marginalised status?”. The chapter follows the same structure as, and articulates with and expands on the points elaborated in, the previous chapter. Thus the chapter consists of the following four sections:

- a review of de Certeau’s (1984) concept of ‘tactics of resistance’, which provides the chapter’s conceptual framework
- an account of the show people’s resistance of their absence of place, illustrated by their multiple understandings of ‘home’
- an analysis of the show people’s resistance of the constructions of their otherness, demonstrated by their uses of the terms ‘showies’, ‘local’s and ‘mugs’
- an examination of the show people’s resistance of forms of unproblematic knowledge that enormously restricted their previous educational options, exemplified by their lobbying for and refinements of the Brisbane School of Distance Education program.

## 6.2 Tactics of resistance

In the previous chapter, I synthesised the most salient features of de Certeau's (1984) conceptualisation of strategies of marginalisation as the organising framework for understanding the show people's routine experiences of marginalisation. Here I provide a complementary overview of de Certeau's conceptualisation of tactics of resistance as a means of interrogating the show people's practices in resisting that marginalisation. As with the discussion in Chapter Five, this account articulates with the more sustained theoretical analysis of de Certeau's ideas contained in Chapter Three.

I stated in Chapter Five that de Certeau (1984) conceptualised strategies of marginalisation in terms of three elements: that they proceed from "*a subject of will and power*"; that they proceed from "*a place than can be circumscribed as proper (propre)*"; and that they engage in "*generating relations with an exterior distance from*" their source (p. xix). This delineation of marginalising strategies as being intimately connected with power, 'place' and 'otherness' found its counterpoint in de Certeau's corresponding elaboration of what he envisaged as tactics of resistance:

*I call a "tactic," on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. The "proper" is a victory of space over time.*

*On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized “on the wing.” Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into “opportunities.” The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them. . . (p. xix)*

Thus tactics of resistance are deployed by “*The weak*”, in contrast to the exercise of marginalising strategies by the powerful. Similarly, this lack of power helps to explain why a tactic “*has at its disposal no base*” and why “*it does not have a place*”. That is, tactics are restricted to unstable ‘space’, with occasional and temporary forays into the ‘place’ of the powerful. Furthermore, tactics are resorted to by those who are constructed as ‘other’ by the forces of power with marginalising strategies at their disposal. All three of these characteristics of tactics of resistance therefore position them as diametrically opposed to strategies of marginalisation: instead of having power, ‘place’ and ‘otherness’, they lack power, they have only fleeting access to ‘place’ and they are constructed as ‘other’ through their marginalising experiences.

As with his elaboration in Chapter Three of *The practice of everyday life* (1984) of his earlier synthesised overview of strategies, so de Certeau extended in the same chapter his initially compressed account of tactics:

*. . . a tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. . . It operates in isolated*

*actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of “opportunities” and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep. This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment. It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse.* (pp. 36-37)

I wish to emphasise two elements of this elaborated conceptualisation of tactics. Firstly, the lack of “*the condition necessary for autonomy*” means that “*The space of a tactic is the space of the other*”. That is, ‘tactic’ and ‘space’ are the devalued and marginalised binary pairs of the more powerful and commanding ‘strategy’ and ‘place’. The previous chapter demonstrated the direct and varied consequences of the show people of their absence of place – including the constructions of their otherness and the pervasiveness of forms of knowledge that routinely exclude them. So power and its absence are as much in the centre of the conceptualisation of tactics and ‘space’ as they are evident in ‘the centre’s’ deployment of marginalising strategies as outlined in Chapter Five.

Secondly, the reference to a tactic’s having “*a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment*” recalls two crucial features of the show people’s literal mobility. The first is that that mobility is a visible sign of the show people’s assumed absence of place – that they have no ‘home’ of their

own, and so their itinerancy is at once a cause and a consequence of their absence of de Certollian place. The second is that that same mobility gives show people opportunities to resist the marginalising strategies that they encounter in each new place, by seizing “*on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment*”. This suggests that the show people are attentive to such “*possibilities*” and work “*vigilantly*” to make the most of them.

I indicated in Chapter Five that de Certeau followed his detailed conceptualisation of strategies of marginalisation with a delineation of three key attributes of such strategies: that they deny a place to those whom they conceive as enemies; that they construct those enemies as ‘other’; and that they perpetuate their power through the establishment of forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge about the world. Correspondingly, de Certeau followed his detailed conceptualisation of tactics of resistance with three further comments (*albeit* in a slightly different sequence) that provide another counterpoint to his remarks about strategies. Firstly, he noted:

*Lacking its own place, lacking a view of the whole, limited by the blindness (which may lead to perspicacity) resulting from combat at close quarters, limited by the possibilities of the moment, a tactic is determined by the absence of power just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power. (p. 38)*

Here is the obverse and the consequence of a strategy’s working to deny a place to the less powerful: the absence of place is directly correlated with “*the absence of power*”. This lack is precisely what animates and motivates a tactic.

Secondly, de Certeau argued:

*In short, a tactic is an art **of** the weak. . . .[T]rickery is possible **for** the weak, and often it is his [sic] only possibility, as a "last resort": "The weaker the forces at the disposition **of** the strategist, the more the strategist will be able to use deception." I translate: the more the strategy is transformed into tactics. (p. 37)*

This refers to the tactic's response to the construction of the less powerful as 'other'. It is important to make it clear here that I interpret "*an art of the weak*" in this context as referring more to a relative than an absolute lack of power and agency. That is, I envisage tactics as potentially contributing to the 'writing' and 'speaking' of counternarratives in ways that actively resist, and possibly transform, constructions of groups like the show people as 'other'.

Thirdly, de Certeau contended that

*. . . a tactic boldly juxtaposes diverse elements in order suddenly to produce a flash shedding a different light on the language of a place and to strike the hearer. Cross-cuts, fragments, cracks and lucky hits in the framework **of** a system, consumers' ways **of** operating are the practical equivalents of wit. (pp. 37-38)*

I regard this as an effective counterpoint to the strategy's complicity in concealing the existence of power behind forms of apparently unproblematic knowledge about the world. The reference to "*a flash shedding a different light on the language **of** a place*" conjures up a faint but persistent illumination of something previously taken for granted that reveals it in its 'true colours' – that is, as the realm of 'the centre', supposedly invisible and



innocent, but actually the source of the marginalising strategies that work to privilege some groups over others. In this way, little by little, alternative forms of knowledge can be inserted into the ‘place’ of ‘the centre’.

Again as he did in the case of strategies and ‘place’, de Certeau provided a useful summary of his conceptions of tactics and ‘space’:

*Tactics are procedures that gain validity in relation to the pertinence they lend to time—to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms into a favorable situation, to the rapidity of the movements that change the organization of a space, to the relations among successive moments in an action, to the possible intersections of durations and heterogeneous rhythms, etc. . . [T]actics are a clever utilization of time, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power. (pp. 38-39)*

From this perspective, if show people are to resist the marginalising strategies that confront them on account of their itinerancy, they need to take full advantage of time, by maximising “the opportunities it presents”. That is, they need to use the limited time that they have in each new space through which they pass on their travels and their negotiations to seek to resist traditional narratives, or ways of portraying and understanding show people, and to replace those narratives with counternarratives based on more positive, agential and transformative constructions of themselves. Only in this way will they have any possibility of contesting and transforming “the foundations of power” that represent them as ‘different’ and ‘deviant’.

### 6.3 Resisting absence of place: “*Where is home to you?*”

Following de Certeau (1984), I argued in Chapter Five that a major element of the show people's experiences of marginalisation is their alleged absence of place. Their itinerant lifestyle is held to position them ‘outside’ the purview and the concern of ‘the centre’, which, it is possible to argue, finds their constant movement through space a threat to its dominance and which seeks to neutralise that threat by speaking and writing them ‘off the page’ of official discourse. So absence of official place for the show people functions to prevent their entry into terrain that is crucial to ‘the centre’s’ power and vital to “*the foundation of an autonomous place*” that is fundamental to the ‘proper’s’ “triumph of place over time” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 36).

Yet, as shall become clear, the show people do not accept meekly or unquestioningly the official status of their absence of place. On the contrary, they use all means at their disposal to construct ‘a home away from home’ when they are travelling, whereby they strive for similar comforts and routines as those enjoyed by permanent residents. This, of course, is an obvious point: to evince surprise at this situation would be to perpetuate the same stereotypes already critiqued. Less obvious, however, is the fact that they are very well aware of the link between resiliently stereotypical assumptions that they have no home other than their caravans and the perpetuation of their marginalised status. Accordingly they exploit opportunities such as this research project to seek to dispel those assumptions by talking openly about the reality of their residential arrangements. Even more fundamentally, they exhibit a complex and variable set of understandings and experiences of home whose effect is to

give them, on their own terms, a sustaining sense of place. In combination, these tactics effectively resist the absence of place that is ascribed to show people and that is deeply complicit in their marginalisation.

The political significance of this resistance of absence of place cannot be overemphasised. If the show people are to counter traditional and stereotypical images of their otherness, and if they are to achieve a specialised form of educational provision that responds to their difference, they must first be accepted by decision makers and shapers of attitudes that they have a legitimate existence and a legal and moral right to expect equity of access to resources and services. This acceptance in turn depends crucially on their capacity to convince others of their rightful 'speaking position' – as having the knowledge and understanding required to articulate their needs and aspirations. Unless they can replace the marginalising strategy that denies them a 'place' (and hence a respected 'speaking position'), they will not be able to convince anyone of anything, because they will not be heard.

In this context, it is helpful to recall de Certeau's (1984, p. 18) assertion:

*Innumerable ways of playing and foiling the other's game. . . , that is, the space instituted by others, characterize the subtle, stubborn, resistant activity of groups which, since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations. People have to make do with what they have.*

The point to emphasise here is that challenging dominant discourses about what is 'home', and all the associated benefits and resources, is a political tactic by show people that helps them "to get along in a network of already

*established forces and representations*". This tactic of "*mak[ing] do with what they have*" reflects strength rather than weakness, because it represents an act of political ability and agency by the show people to legitimatise their multiple experiences and understandings of 'home' as a means of resisting their absence of place.

Within the parameters of this argument, then, many show people readily referred to the show people's caravans as their 'homes'. A twelve year old girl explained how she helped her parents to sell food bags from a canteen at the show: "*Sometimes I do about an hour a day when I come home from school, working in there*" (Y2C4). A seven year old boy commented, "*I've got a big stack of books that I like at home*" (Y1C7). One boy explained about his seven year old friend, a fellow show child: "*He has to do his chores at home*" (Y1C2). A mother stated, "*My children come home from school; they're allowed to go and play*", and she was pleased that "*the kids come home bouncing and happy. . .*" (Y1P2). She described how she supervised her son's homework in the family caravan: "*As you would as a parent that was in any school situation, you see what comes home and you ask where he's up to*" (Y1P2).

For the show people, their references to their caravans as 'home' was closely connected with their common cultural identity, and hence with resisting their absence of place. The caravan is for show people a functional necessity: it is their means of efficient, reliable movement from one town to the next; it must accommodate themselves and their possessions in a very restricted space; and it is one of the very few 'private places' in a lifestyle in which privacy of thought, word and action is at a premium. The caravan is also a

tangible link with the show people of previous generations, who depended in the same sorts of respects on conveyances similar in function to, but very different in form from, those used by the contemporary 'showies'.

At a deeper level, the initial identification of 'home' as caravan in most interviews functions simultaneously in several different ways. Firstly, it is an obvious and tangible marker of difference between show people and non-show people, thereby illustrating the connection between absence of place and marginalisation (even though the distinction between 'showies' and 'non-showies' is fluid, as the next section of this chapter demonstrates, and even though many Australian who have no connection with show life live in caravans).

Secondly, the show people's identification of their caravans as 'home' reveals a great deal about their sense of their own identity. Although occasionally irate about the work involved in justifying this to others, they are comfortable with publicly identifying a moving residence as their 'home', and one show person was confident enough to conduct a videotaped interview in a caravan (Y4P6) – admittedly her sister's rather than her own, on the grounds that her sister's caravan had recently been extensively remodelled and would therefore convey a more positive image of show people's living conditions. This is significant because it demonstrates how the show people tell other, alternative stories about itinerancy and home and thus wear down the power of traditional narratives about those concepts.

Thirdly, show people vary in the extent to which they conceive of their caravans as their homes on a permanent basis. Apart from being likely to differ in the longevity of their commitment to spending their working lives on

the show circuits, show people understand 'home' in several ways apart from being their caravans. This suggests less a degree of impermanence in the show people's lives than their capacity to engage as creatively with changes to physical residence as with changes to less tangible aspects of their lives.

The point that I am emphasising here is that show people's references to their caravans as 'home', and their use, appropriation and re-definition of that term, reflect the habituated and situated nature of their experiences of living on the show circuits. That is, on a day to day basis such references are literally factually correct: 'showies' are 'at home' when they travel in their caravans. Their differing and complex responses to my explicit question "*Where is home to you?*", however, demonstrate their awareness that the 'home:caravan' homology is the one uppermost in local people's stereotyped views of 'showies', and furthermore that that homology forms the basis of their marginalised status. This awareness is vital to the show people's resistance of their absence of place through their deployment of multiple meanings of 'home'.

Show children made varying responses to the question "*Where is home to you?*". An eleven year old boy answered, "*Probably where I'm like living now. Dayboro*" (Y2C1). Many of the nuances in discussions of 'home' were encapsulated in the following exchange with a ten year old boy:

*[But if I said to you, "Where is home to you?", what would you say?]*

*Brisbane.*

*[Brisbane. You've got a house in Brisbane?]*

*Oh, it's not really mine, it's my aunty's, but we usually live there.*  
(Y1C1)

A ten year old girl reported a similar residential situation:

*. . .we have a house in Brisbane, and my nana, sometimes, because she's getting too old now, so she just stays at home, and she tries to help me in school work, so I stay home with her most of the time.* (Y1C8)

Another ten year old girl referred to home as

*Brisbane. . .because we [stay there] about two or three times a year. It's really our nana's, but, you know. We have a place in Sydney, but I haven't been there since I was about two.* (Y1C4)

One other ten year old girl, who claimed not to remember where she was born, identified home as being “*in Queensland*” (Y2C3).

Adults connected with the show circuits also responded in various ways to the question “*Where is home for you?*”. One parent replied, “*Here. Here this week. We just travel all year round*” (Y1P1). Another parent said, “*Yes. Sort of. Off and on*” (Y2P4) in answer to the question, “*So is Melbourne home to you?*”.

The potential contradiction implicit in the conflation of show people's understandings of ‘home’ as a caravan and a house can be explained partly by the interpolation of the explicit question “*Where is home to you?*” posed by an interviewer who presumably lived in one place. Under these circumstances, the most likely response to the question was probably going to refer to a specific residence in a particular town. Nevertheless, this conflation of

understandings is significant in this discussion of the show people's resistance of their absence of place. Far from being perpetually 'itinerant' or 'nomadic', these people are fully acquainted with the benefits and drawbacks of both sets of living conditions – of travelling from one town to another once or twice a week, and also of living in one place for a defined period. The latter experience is an important element of the show people's identity. This circumstance points also to an adaptability and a versatility that indicates show people's ongoing engagement with change in their everyday lives and that belies the stereotyped image of a show person seeking refuge from 'the real world' in the glamorous allure of an itinerant lifestyle. Furthermore, this circumstance is a direct riposte to 'the centre's' ascription of absence of place to the show people: measured in 'the centre's' terms, the show people are in fact regularly present in the place officially denied to them.

All of this emphasises the pervasiveness of the stereotyped association between 'home' and a single site of permanent residence. In talking about 'home', show people are aware that for many Australians permanent residence is a mark of stability, reliability and trustworthiness. This awareness has a major influence on their resistance of their absence of place, resulting in their tendency to talk to non-show people (including educational researchers) about 'home' in terms of where their family homes are located. This suggests that it is difficult – but not impossible – for show people to insert alternative forms of residence into the dominant discourse on 'home', forms that undermine the dominant assumption of fixed settlement. It indicates also the enormous impact of that dominant discourse in separating show people from other Australians and in turning their perceived lack of a 'proper home' into the basis of their marginalisation.



Significantly, one of the show parents remarked, in the context of describing previous career changes by other family members and herself, “But as they say, *you* always come home” (Y4P4). This comment encapsulates many of the multiple meanings identified in this section of the chapter as being ascribed to the term ‘home’. Those multiple meanings in turn are vital elements of the show people’s complex and subtle sense of place, which this section of the chapter has demonstrated as being a direct and powerful counterpoint to their ascribed absence of place.

This tactic resonates with de Certeau’s (1986, p. 227; emphasis in original) insight that “. . .the political relevance *of* the geo-graphical distinctions between separate places is echoed. . .in the distribution *of* places *of* power. . .”. As I argued at the beginning of the section, constantly reasserting their legitimate and appropriate experiences and understandings of ‘home’ is far from being mere pedantry on the show people’s part. On the contrary, they are playing for extremely high stakes: nothing less than official and public recognition of their right to live the lifestyle of their choosing, and their concomitant right of access to specialised educational provision. From this perspective, their alternative conceptions of ‘home’ function to sustain them in their resistance of marginalisation and to underpin their counternarrative to official discourses that construct them as ‘other’ on the basis of their alleged absence of place.

## 6.4 Resisting constructions of otherness: 'Showies', 'locals' and 'mugs'

In the previous section of this chapter, I indicated how the show people use their understandings of 'home' to resist, strongly and repetitively, consequences arising from dominant perceptions that they lack not just a static residence but also a political 'place'. Now I turn to examine how they resist, equally strongly and repetitively, their marginalised status in the eyes of 'mainstream society' on account of their perceived 'difference', 'lack' and 'deviance'. In Chapter Five, following de Certeau (1984), I explained how defining the show people as foreign objects led directly and inexorably to the constructions of their otherness. As I cited in that chapter, de Certeau used a dramatic metaphor to convey the power and force of such a construction:

*It [the "proper"] is also a mastery of places through sight. The division of space makes possible a panoptic practice proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus control and "include" them within its scope of vision. To be able to see (far into the distance) is also to be able to predict, to run ahead of time by reading a space. (p. 36)*

In this section, I demonstrate that the show people deploy their own uses of identity associated with the terms 'showies', 'locals' and 'mugs' to resist their constructed otherness. I wish to emphasise at the outset that those alternative uses of names are **far** from being mere quibbles over nomenclature: they go to the heart of how the show people see themselves 'on their own terms' as well as in relation to others. Their naming practices act in concert

with their multiple experiences and understandings of home, described above, to contest and subvert the debilitating marginalisation to which they have traditionally been subject. Finally, as I explore in the next section of this chapter, the show people's subversive naming practices in turn enable them to resist the forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge about appropriate schooling for itinerant people outlined at the end of the previous chapter.

What I am arguing, therefore, is that the show people's efforts to recapture and remake in their own image the term 'showies', and use it in combination with the terms 'locals' and 'mugs', are an act of tactical and political resistance. That resistance is directed squarely at the "panoptic practice *proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured*" identified by de Certeau (1984, p. 36), and is intended to nullify 'the centre's' power to "*control and 'include' them within its scope of vision*" (p. 36). Elsewhere de Certeau recognised language's 'double-edged' capacity to function as an ally of both/either marginalisation and/or resistance when he noted that ". . . *language is indeed the privileged terrain on which to discern the formal rules proper to such practices* [of resistant or tactical consumption]" (p. 32).

I argue that the show people carry out this resistance by putting forward their own alternative and positive constructions of who they are, both on their own terms and in relation to other Australians. This is based on the assumption that if social agents, which is how I understand the show people to be, seek to resist their marginalised status it is not sufficient for them to say, 'I am not like your view of what I am'. On the contrary, they need to go much further, to be proactive rather than merely reactive, and to say, loudly, clearly

and often, 'This and this and this are what I am – not just *that*'. Resistance understood in this way is crucial to understanding how the show people move from marginalisation, through resistance, towards transformation of their situation.

From the perspective of the preceding conceptual framework, then, the show people resist the use of the term 'showies' by non-show people to mark the show people as 'different', 'lacking' and 'deviant', thereby contributing to the construction of their otherness. That construction is centred on the fact that the term 'showies' is used by non-show people in ways that homogenise the show people. The consequences of this homogenisation include the elision of the diversity of life on the show circuits and its reduction to a single label, and the essentialisation of the show people's 'difference' and 'marginality', by assuming something to the effect of 'once a showie, always a showie'. In combination, this homogenisation and essentialisation work to represent the show people as always and irredeemably 'other' to 'normal', permanently resident citizens.

Evidence of the marginalising stereotypes ascribed to show people, and hence of their constructed otherness, was presented in Chapter Two. As a reminder of those stereotypes, in the view of Broome with Jackomos (1998), Australian "*showpeople were viewed by the rest of society with both fear and wonder, and as outcasts*" (p. viii). Examples were provided by two of Bob Morgan's interlocutors in *The showies* (Morgan, 1995). According to Tommy Castles:

*...in the old days when the showies came to town, the townspeople used to lock up their daughters and chooks [chickens] – in that order – because these terrible interlopers were all considered gypsies, and occasionally there was a ‘wildCard’ in the pack. (p. 13)*

Similarly, Frank Foster recalled:

*You’ve got to remember that we show people get a load of bad publicity. In days gone by when the show came into town people used to say, “Pull your washing in and lock your daughters up”. (Cited in Morgan, 1995, p. 128)*

These acknowledgments of marginalising stereotypes provided the launchpad for the show people’s resistance of the constructions of their otherness.

The show people resist those constructions of otherness in three principal ways, all of which reflect their ability to make of the label ‘showies’ “*something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind*” and an associated commitment to using it “*with respect to ends and references foreign to the system*” in which they are located (de Certeau, 1984, p. xiii). Firstly, the show people assign to the label ‘showies’ different, and far more positively valenced, connotations than those understood by non-show people. In doing so, they are effectively saying, ‘This is the label by which others know us, but we shall use this label in ways that suit us and strengthen rather than weaken us’. Secondly, the show people disrupt the homogenised and essentialist cast of ‘showies’ as used by non-show people. They do this by using the terms ‘showies’ and ‘locals’ in ways that make the distinction between those terms dynamic and fluid rather than a rigid and marginalising

dichotomy. Thirdly, the show people sometimes deploy the term 'mug' as a kind of reverse terminology, whereby 'mugs' are representatives of 'the centre' that thinks that it has safely marginalised and weakened the 'showies', who are in fact stronger and more resilient than they appear and are indeed more competent and successful than those representatives when they venture onto the show people's territory. All of this reinforces the view that the terms 'showies', 'locals' and 'mugs', as deployed by the show people, are the sites of overt and continuing resistance of their constructed otherness.

#### **6.4.1**    Giving 'showies' a positive valence

Several show people made comments that reflected the first means of resisting their otherness identified above – that is, their attribution of special and positive features to 'showies'. One set of such comments was concerned with identifying certain characteristics or qualities that the speaker asserted as being present among show people and implied as being absent from local people. One man praised the adaptability of show people.

*As Tex Morton once said, "Show me a showman's son or daughter and there's no fools amongst them". He sang a song about them. They were . . . [such] good children, they adapted to other things. (Y4P3)*

One woman explained how this adaptability operated in the practical, everyday conditions of show life.

*I mean, it might sound fun, travelling and all that, but there's a lot of hard work involved and it's very hard. . .to teach children and travel and work and that. (Y4P1)*

The speaker asserted that, because “*they see so much with the travelling*”, show children’s “*outlook on life is really great*” (Y4P1). Another woman referred to show children’s special maturity, which by implication derived from their capacity to adapt to changing circumstances.

*. . .I think they're pretty well very smart kids to start with. They're very grown up. . . .[My daughter is] only seven, but you can sit down and have a conversation with her like she's an adult. They know what's going on outside. (Y4P2)*

I should point out here that this study was not intended to verify these perceptions articulated by show people. My concern is with their significance as manifestations of the show people’s representations of themselves and non-show people, not with the veracity of the show people’s claims. From that perspective, these statements are powerful demonstrations of a belief that show people are ‘different’ and ‘special’, less with an exclusionary purpose than as an expression of identification with and pride in a particular cultural heritage. Furthermore, if that heritage is perceived as ‘normal’, ‘natural’ and ‘desirable’, show people are more likely to demand access to what others construct as ‘normal’ resources, including educational provision – in other words, to resist their absence of place and their constructed otherness. At the same time, I need to emphasise that ‘difference’ is not automatically associated with ‘deviance’ or ‘lack’ – that the show people take active agential pride in their multiple signifiers of identity, rather than merely and passively using those

signifiers as 'protective shields' against the hostile strategies of marginalisation.

The belief that show people have special attributes deriving from the exigencies of their distinctive lifestyle prompted a couple of assertions of identity demarcation. In discussing the difficulties faced by newcomers to the show circuits, one woman stated explicitly, *"But it is better, I suppose, if you can marry within your own boundaries"* (Y4P1). Another woman, whose nine and seven year old children were currently living with her parents while she travelled on the show circuits, asserted: *"If we get a good school or a good education department that will teach our kids in our own environment, I'll bring them back then for sure"* (Y4P4). Both these statements reflected a direct association between show life and being in one's *"own boundaries"* or one's *"own environment"*. The corollary of this association is the necessity of 'the other' as a way of defining what falls within and what lies outside those boundaries and that environment. This is the function of the show people's representations of 'locals', which as I discuss below accordingly and inevitably has a less positive valance than 'showies' for many show people.

This theme of resisting constructed otherness by means of adding a positive charge to the term 'showies' certainly underpinned several statements by the show person whom, for reasons outlined in the previous chapter, I interviewed twice. For example, during the videotaped interview she emphasised the advantages of the show people's lifestyle.

*I must be biased, because I think we have the best lifestyle. We have everything. We have Australia's most beautiful places that we see every year. We have travelling, life, colour, movement, all in our world. We do*



*things, we move, we have activities, we have a little taste of everything. We go to places where they do bungee jumping. We all try. . . whatever's the tourist spot in town, we go and have a look. We get to look at all this beautiful scenery, the countryside. We get to do all that, plus we can earn a living and do it. We don't have the stressful [need to] get up at nine o'clock, but we'll work hard. But we have so much scope in what we can do. . . [W]hat we experience every day is not regular, and it's not routine. So therefore it's exciting to get up each day and not know what may be at the end of the day. . . . But it's so good. You have so many advantages that people can't even conceive. (Y4P5)*

This is a powerful and proud articulation of the pleasures and benefits of occupational travelling. It is noteworthy that the speaker argued strongly that show life is full of variety, experience and excitement. Moreover, she represents the show people's lifestyle as being “better” than that of “most people”, with “so many advantages that people can't even conceive”. This representation suggests that this show person had a clear notion of her own identity and that of her fellow ‘showies’, and that that identity gave her a secure basis for resisting ‘the centre’s’ efforts to construct her peers and herself as ‘other’.

Secondly, the speaker identified certain special characteristics that she ascribed to ‘showies’, and that by implication were the prerequisite of their enjoying the special advantages that she had already outlined.

*We've got the drive, we're not scared to work. See, the thing is with our growing up is our form of doing things is that if it's broken, you **fix** it. You don't have to ask someone, you have to do it today. We're here for two days, we earn our money now, we do our jobs now. (Y4P5)*

This statement functions to position the show people as a young, energetic, dynamic group of people, in contrast to the inbuilt conservatism of some business and government bureaucracies. According to this admittedly simplistic representation, the 'showies' are utilitarian and practical in their approach to life: "*if it's broken, you fix it*". They are also task oriented and well organised, largely owing to the regularity with which they move from town to town. This regularity means that they must complete tasks here and now: "*It's always urgent*". Again, the assumption is that these are special characteristics of show people, and that they need to be recognised and celebrated, in place of others' less positive constructions of 'showies' as 'other'.

Thirdly, the speaker's identification of distinctive qualities of 'showies' led her to stake a claim for those qualities underpinning a special identity.

*. . . we need to have our own identity, we need to be separate, and we need to be able to have flexibility within ourselves to do things that we need. We can't have to wait for bureaucracy or if it doesn't please one person, they say, "No", and all of a sudden we have to put our hands down. We're not those sort of people. We're the sort of people who get things done and do things. And if we have that independence and freedom, we'll do a lot. (Y4P5)*

For the speaker, the basis of the show people's "own identity", and of their "need to be separate", is their "flexibility", "independence" and "freedom". These qualities – by implication specific but not necessarily exclusive to 'showies' – make them "the sort of people" that they are: hard working achievers who do not have time to waste on "bureaucracy" and the obstructions of people who do not understand show life and who certainly could not survive on the show circuits. On the other hand, if decision makers have the foresight to give show people what they seek, the 'showies' will be very successful at whatever they set out to achieve: "we'll do a lot".

This is the crucial point about this particular approach to resisting otherness: the show people have something positive to replace the 'deficit' and negative stereotypes ascribed to them by others. This point articulates with one of de Certeau's (1984, p. 30) examples of tactics of consumption in operation:

*Thus a North African living in Paris or Roubaix (France) insinuates into the system imposed on him [sic passim] by the construction of a low-income housing development or of the French language the ways of "dwelling" (in a house or a language) peculiar to his native Kabylia. He superimposes them and, by that combination, creates ~~for~~ himself a space in which he can find ways of using the constraining order of the place or of the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law ~~for~~ him, he establishes within it a degree ~~of~~ plurality and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation.*

I argue that the show people's attaching a positive valence to the term 'showies' is a striking example of how they have created "*for [themselves] a space in which [they] can find ways of using the constraining order of the place or of the language*", by loading the term with a far greater range of semantic associations than that envisaged by 'the centre'. This avowedly political tactic resonates with other minority groups' appropriations of derogatory terms such as 'black', 'gay' and 'queer' to disrupt the marginalising strategies connected with their original use. The greater range of meanings assigned by the show people to 'showies' is an example of their establishment of "*a degree of plurality and creativity*", because it is based on a flexibility and multiplicity of linguistic usage that resist efforts to homogenise and essentialise 'showies'. Furthermore, by 'turning the tables' on 'the centre's' efforts to elide the show people's identity and agency, the show people have indeed drawn "*unexpected results from [their] situation*".

#### 6.4.2 Disrupting the 'showie'-'non-showie' dichotomy

The second approach to resisting constructions of otherness that I identified earlier in this section was the way in which show people break down the seemingly essentialised, fixed and homogenised 'showie' – 'non-showie' dichotomy. This is another way of contesting and subverting the marginalising strategy of representing the show people as naturally and irredeemably 'marginal' and 'other' to 'normal' Australians, by demonstrating that the conceptual barrier on which such a construction is predicated is actually a fluid and shifting set of discourses.

In that context, the show children made several references to the ‘showie’–‘local’ division being fluid and temporary. A twelve year old girl asserted strongly, “*No, we travel around, because we’re with the showmen*” (Y2C4). She explained: “*We settled down ~~for~~ a while and went to school, and then mum got us correspondence and we started travelling again*” (Y2C4). Her reference to having “*settled down*” suggests that the change of status from ‘showie’ to ‘local’ and back to ‘showie’ was not necessarily an easy or straightforward transition for her. Her description of relations with ‘locals’ was a somewhat negative one. She recalled that local teachers

*. . . treated us different[ly] from the locals. We weren’t allowed to do things that they were allowed to do. . . [W]hen they used to go. . . swimming. . . , we weren’t allowed to go.* (Y2C4)

Despite her earlier reference to having “*settled down*” as a ‘local’, here ‘locals’ assumes a different meaning and purpose – to point out how in her view show children have been poorly treated by educational providers. Yet her explanation of her situation also indicates the transitional rather than the separate links between ‘showie’ and ‘local’.

One boy, who stated that “*I’ve got a couple offriends who are locals*” (Y1C5) but most of whose friends followed the show circuits, described at second hand the reverse transition from the ‘showie’ to the ‘local’ categories. He explained that “*my brother and Z had a friend and he went off the show and he’s a local. . . [and I don’t know where he lives]*” (Y1C5). Perhaps his concern at the loss of a friendship underlay his assertion that ‘locals’ “*can come back*” to the show circuits, and his statement that “*I think a few ~~of~~ them*” actually do so (Y1C5). Here this boy’s discussion of ‘showies’ and

'locals' is tempered by his personal knowledge of someone who had traversed the boundary between those categories, and by his evident regret that this process had ended a valued friendship.

Another boy described at second hand the change from 'local' to 'showie' status, a change with a different outcome from the situation quoted in the previous paragraph. He explained how his friendship with another boy endured the latter's changing status in connection with show life that derived from his parents joining the show circuit.

*Well, . . . [he wasn't] actually a local. See, what it was ~~is~~ I said -, which is our friend really, the one on the show, because what it was is I was friends with him about two years back when he was a local, but now he's a full showman.*

*[. . . When he's a local, what does that mean?]*

*That means, like now we can get free rides and all that and he couldn't and all that, and he had to pay ~~for~~ the tickets.*

*[If he's a local doesn't ~~he~~ travel with the show?]*

*No. He has to stay in one place. But now he's a showman. (Y1C2)*

In both these cases, the show children's references to individuals moving on and off the show circuits in some respects parallel the show people's traversing the physical and symbolic spaces of itinerancy. That is, the emphasis is on fluid and shifting markers of identity and signifiers of meaning, rather than fixed essences. The particular point that I am emphasising here is it is that fluid and shifting character that show people

exploit in resisting the constructions of their otherness – in this case, by emphasising that the difference between them and others is less clearly defined and permanent than other people might realise or like to think. This argument resonates with McVeigh's (1997) contention that historically "*the sedentary/nomad distinction was much more ambiguous than it is in contemporary societies*", and that

*. . .even when this distinction does become unambiguous. . .it bears emphasis that nomadic–sedentary transition is not a one-way process. Just as people can exchange a nomadic ~~for~~ a sedentary existence, so they can exchange a sedentary ~~for~~ a nomadic existence.* (p. 11)

The means of resisting the show people's constructed otherness outlined in this subsection recalls a vivid metaphor provided by de Certeau (1984) and previously discussed in Chapter Two. The preceding discussion has established how the show people's dissolution of the supposedly rigid Qchotomy between 'showies' and 'locals'

*. . .enables the [show people] to avoid being disseminated in the occupiers' power grid, to avoid being captured by the dominating, interpretive systems ~~of~~ discourse (or by the simple inversion ~~of~~ those discourses, a tactic which remains prisoner to their logic).* (p. 229)

By this means, show people have succeeded in replacing the ascribed and marginalising ideology of "You are not like me and never can be like me" with the more dynamic representation of "You and I are in many respects not so different after all". This resistance sows the seeds of transformation of the show people's identity constructions, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

### **6.4.3**    Giving 'mugs' a negative valence

Finally in this section of the chapter, I turn to the show people's use of the term 'mugs'. I indicated earlier in the section that the third approach to resisting otherness adopted by the show people was to use 'mugs' to describe local people in a similar way to many non-show people's use of the term 'showies' – that is, as a negatively charged label that sets the labelled apart from the labellers. The significance of this approach is less that it is a device of revenge than its reversal role. That is, when 'showies' use the term 'mugs', they are referring to the way that 'locals' operate when they are on the show people's territory – generally incompetently, because they lack the specialised cultural capital that make the show people masters and mistresses of their domain. This version of resisting otherness says that 'These people who marginalise us are not competent in functioning on our territory, so therefore the cultural capital that equips them to construct us as "other" is invalid and weak' – precisely the stereotyped characteristics ascribed to show people.

For me, this is a vivid example of de Certeau's (1984) reference to "*the indigenous Indian cultures*" (p. 31) conquered by Spanish colonisation: "*They metaphorized the dominant order; they made it function in another register*" (p. 32). At the same time, it is worthwhile remembering McVeigh's (1997) timely injunction:



*We must contrast the capacity of the overwhelmingly dominant settled population to racialise, marginalise and discriminate against the nomad with the incapacity of the nomad to operationalise any anti-sedentary prejudice he or she may hold. (p. 12)*

From this perspective, what is surprising is not that show people are routinely and enduringly marginalised in multiple ways, but rather that their tactics of resistance take various forms and are often effective.

In an example of what I mean by this, a twelve year old girl explained the meaning of the term ‘mugs’ in the context of describing interactions between show children and local children.

*...we call them ‘mugs’.*

*[What does ‘mugs’ mean?]*

*Oh, it just means that they’re locals and we’re show kids. So mugs have to pay to get on the rides and we don’t because we know all the show kids.*

*[So if they talk to you like that, you’re not going to talk to them about your school work, are you?]*

*No, we don’t talk to them nice[ly] if they talk to us like that. We call them ‘wankers’ and that. (Y2C4)*

This exchange between interviewer and respondent recalled a show child’s explanation, cited earlier in this section, of another child’s change of status from ‘local’ to ‘showie’. In both instances ‘showies’ were represented

as not having to pay money to enjoy the rides of 'sideshow alley' – and by implication **as** experiencing the benefits of an itinerant lifestyle, travelling from town to town. In the earlier exchange, 'local' was taken to refer to a permanent resident in a particular location or locality. In this exchange, 'mug' takes on a certain negative valence, in comparison with the more neutral valence of 'local'. It implies someone who is not very intelligent, or else someone who is being duped or misled. It certainly implies a greater level of hostility, of disdain verging on contempt, than that suggested by the term 'local'. This is a reversal of terminology – and its associated meanings – at work in resisting otherness.

One of the parents also referred to 'mugs'. In the process of explaining why including information about shows in the education program implemented by the Brisbane School of Distance Education was *"not really relevant to us"*, she stated, *"I mean, most ~~of~~ the [show] kids, they take as much money from the mugs as we can"* (Y3P1). This statement suggests that 'mugs' has a more restricted usage than 'locals', and perhaps that 'mugs' are the 'locals' who come to the shows and who spend their money without being aware of the ways in which they are encouraged to do so. This statement also indicates that show people attach considerable cultural capital to a person's skill at being able to part 'mugs' from their money. Furthermore, it would seem that the 'showie'–'mug' distinction is more securely fixed than the 'showie'–'local' distinction. For example, while some show people referred to their change of status from 'showie' to 'local' and back again, none of my respondents constructed herself or himself as a 'mug'. This point reinforces the perceived differences between show people and non-show people, and it also emphasises the instability and the contextualised character of those differenc-

es. It also underlines the multiple and successful ways in which the show people resist their constructed otherness.

This section of the chapter has outlined the show people's representations of themselves and other people according to the respective attributes of the categories 'showies', 'locals' and 'mugs'. Assigning these labels to people allows show people to say who they are on the basis of identifying who they are not – a powerful and effective reversal of efforts to construct them as 'other' on account of who they are and are not. Attaching a positive valence to 'showies', disrupting the dichotomy between 'showies' and 'locals' and assigning a negative valence to 'mugs' function in combination to contest and subvert the

*...panoptic practice proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus control and "include" them within its scope of vision. (de Certeau, 1984, p. 36)*

That same resistance of the show people's constructed otherness also serves to equip them to resist the forms of unproblematic knowledge attending their previous educational experiences.

## 6.5 Resisting forms of unproblematic knowledge: The Brisbane School of Distance Education program

To this point in the chapter, I have examined the multiple ways in which the show people successfully resist their absence of place and the constructions of their otherness. That resistance places them in a stronger position to resist the educational dimension of their marginalisation. I identified in the previous chapter the forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge that had marginalised the show people from equitable educational access for generations. Their previous educational experiences were centred on six options, all of which required them to choose between their traditional lifestyle and their children's formal education. The inadequacy and injustice of those options derived from unquestioned assumptions by educational authorities about how and where 'normal' people live in relation to the authorised sites of schooling.

As de Certeau (1984) noted about the third strategy of marginalisation that he identified:

*It would be legitimate to define the power of knowledge by this ability to transform the uncertainties of history into readable spaces. But it would be more correct to recognize in these "strategies" a specific type of knowledge, one sustained and determined by the power to provide oneself with one's own place. Thus military or scientific strategies have always been inaugurated through the constitution of their "own" areas (autonomous cities, "neutral" or "independent" institutions, laboratories pursuing "disinterested" research, etc.). In other words, a certain power is the precondition of this knowledge and not merely its effect or*

*its attribute. It makes this knowledge possible and at the same time determines its characteristics. It produces itself in and through this knowledge.* (p. 36; emphasis added)

From this perspective, unquestioned assumptions that most ‘normal’ students travel from home to school to receive their education, and that a minority of students stays at a permanently located home to receive distance education, are complicit with, and an integral part of, the means by which “a certain power. . .*produces itself in and through this knowledge*”.

The show people’s resistance of forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge about how and where show people learn occurred in two distinct phases:

- establishing a specialised program with the Brisbane School of Distance Education
- consuming the program through a close monitoring of its operations.

While the phases were chronologically distinct, they had in common the show people’s determination to turn educational provision for their children from a marginalising and alienating institution into a set of practices directly responsive to their specialised learning needs and aspirations. This constituted a mastery of history, by transforming it into readable spaces. In the process, they sought to attain positive and practical achievements from their resistance of the forms of unproblematic knowledge to which they were traditionally subjected.

#### 6.5.1 Establishing the program

The education program provided for the show people’s children by the Brisbane School of Distance Education had certain distinctive features. It was

targeted at preschool and primary school children and combined face to face and distance education. Teachers from the school travelled to selected sites along the coastal and western Queensland show circuits and worked with the children in a spare classroom in a local school or in a church hall. They provided enriching activities designed to help the children to complete the written papers prepared by the Queensland Open Access Support Centre for all Queensland distance education students (most of whom live on cattle and sheep properties). When the teachers returned to Brisbane, the children continued working on the papers, sending their work regularly to the teachers for marking. They communicated with the teachers via telephone and facsimile machine as the need arose. Some children had access to home tutors employed by their parents to facilitate the completion of their written papers. Even when the show circuits took the children out of Queensland, they continued working on the Queensland program.

Effective learning partnerships among teachers, students and home tutors were clearly vital to the success of the program. In Queensland, teachers apply specifically to join the staff of one of the Schools of Distance Education; successful applicants already have experience in conventional classrooms, and they need to demonstrate a commitment to developing pedagogies and using technologies in ways appropriate to teaching at a distance. Teachers involved in the show children's program applied specifically to join it, and in doing so needed to acquire an understanding of the distinctive learning experiences of those children. This understanding was augmented by formal and informal contacts between teachers and show people, as awareness and appreciation of the other group's circumstances grew. From the teachers' perspective, that awareness and appreciation in turn underpinned their adaptation of the Open

Access Support Centre materials and their preparation of the distance learning packages for the show children. The fact that they had volunteered to work with those children reflected their determination to make the program as successful **as** possible.

The home tutors' role was equally crucial to maximising the show children's learning outcomes. They needed to maintain the children's enthusiasm and motivation when the teachers were not present; to supervise the children's completion of designated work and to send that work to the teachers; and to provide a communication link between teachers and students. As I indicated in the previous chapter, some home tutors were relatives of the children who performed their role on a voluntary basis; others were people from outside the show circuits employed especially for the task. (I explore in Chapter Seven the home tutors' – and the teachers' – perceptions of the show people's transformations of their marginalising experiences and resistant practices.)

The change from the six inadequate schooling options outlined in the previous chapter to the program described above, catering specifically for itinerant students (and largely for show children, with a small number of circus children being enrolled as the program progressed) within Queensland's largest school of distance education, demonstrated starkly the efficacy of the show people's resistance of previous assumptions about educating Travellers. The motivation underlying this resistance, and the tactical approach fuelled by that motivation, were clearly articulated by a member of the Showmen's Guild:

*. . .it wasn't just one person. There were a group of people who sat down around the campfire one day and said, "What are we going to do? Our kids are going to be uneducated. They're not going to learn through correspondence" in terms of what correspondence was.*  
(Y4A1)

At one level, the idealised image of decision making "*around the camp fire*" might be regarded as exemplifying poetic licence. At a more fundamental level, the speaker used a strongly evocative metaphor to (re)present a local event in mythic terms, thereby underlining its significance for the show people's community. The emphasis in this statement was on focussed discussion on the benefits and limitations of available options and the possibility of extending the range of such options. This focussed discussion, derived from a collective experience of an itinerant lifestyle and of the most potentially productive avenues of change, led to the formulation of a plan of equally collective action, while recognising that individual show people's contributions to the resistance would vary according to circumstance.

This notion of collectively motivated and individually varied resistance of forms of unproblematic knowledge about Traveller education was recognised by one of the teachers involved in delivering the program:

*. . .a number of women who were Guild members lobbied hard and strong to get a program like this up and running. Through their hard work they have achieved a lot. . . .That's often the only way to get it done, unless you've got a mum who's prepared to take time away from work and do that, because they are very busy, very businesslike in their approach to their jobs, and very efficient.* (Y2T1)



This observation was noteworthy in three respects. Firstly, the references to the show people's being "*very busy, . . . very businesslike. . . , and very efficient*" suggested that their resistance to unproblematic knowledge would be systematic, tactical and targeted. That is, they would deploy their customary skills of organisation and orderliness in a different arena to achieve their goal of extending and maximising their educational options. Secondly, the reference to "*the only way to get it done*" acknowledged a considerable degree of self-sacrifice on the show people's part: they were prepared to interrupt, perhaps even disrupt, their business routine to devote their energies to operating in a very different arena, that of an educational bureaucracy. Thirdly, operating in that different arena required the show people to take risks of self-disclosure with individuals who were armed with bureaucratic authority. That kind of self-disclosure betokened both courage and determination in challenging and resisting authorised assumptions about the 'place' and form of Traveller education.

These three features of the show people's resistance – organisation, self-sacrifice and self-disclosure – were very much in evidence in a particular tactic in which they engaged. This tactic centred on their interactions with the then Queensland Minister for Education, as one of the participating show people recalled:

*There were three of us that went to the Minister ~~for~~ Education in the beginning and that's where. . . [the program] started. It started with some correspondence to the Education Department, but ~~we~~ didn't really know where to channel our correspondence, and a friend ~~of~~ a friend. . . gave us the opportunity to meet with the Minister at the Royal Brisbane*

*Show, . . . and through that meeting we got the program going. And that was the big step. (YIP2)*

I recognise that, although many members of the general public have sent “some correspondence to the Education Department”, very few such people have “the opportunity to meet with the Minister” for Education. That the speaker and her colleagues were provided with that opportunity by “a friend of a friend”, who was highly connected with “the Royal Brisbane Show”, was testament to the show people’s determination and their capacity to enlist the support of people with sufficient capital to bring about an introduction to the state official who was most likely to achieve the outcomes that they desired. In this situation, resistance took the form of refusing to allow themselves to be sidetracked by bureaucratic obfuscation or to be sidelined by circuitous conversations with underlings.

Although it is rarely at the disposal of resistant groups, the tactic of ‘going straight to the top’ was in this case highly effective at subverting taken for granted assumptions about educating itinerant people. On this occasion, the show people were successful at building on the power associated with the institution of the government, and enlisting that power to garner support for their educational agenda. This calls to mind de Certeau’s (1984) lively metaphor about the nature and effect of resistance:

*Statistics can tell us virtually nothing about the currents in this sea theoretically governed by the institutional frameworks that it in fact gradually erodes and displaces. Indeed, it is less a matter of a liquid circulating in the interstices of a solid than of different movements making use of the elements of the terrain. (p. 34; emphasis in original)*

This analysis of the show people's lobbying for the Brisbane School of Distance Education program demonstrates the literal mobility associated with this kind of resistance of inadequate educational provision,

The success of this tactic of resistance was evident in the speaker's account of the events that followed that meeting:

*Before I got to the Minister, . . . I was starting to get a little bit lost with it, because there're so many different people in charge of different sections that you didn't really know where to tap into to get a response back. . . And once we got to the Minister and he realised there was such a need for it, there were no problems after that. It followed suit. There were other people appointed to judge our situation, and we worked with it from there. (Y1P2)*

The outcome of the initial meeting was therefore that, in contrast to their previous status **as** supplicants 'outside the system', the show people had 'forced an entry' to position themselves 'inside the system' – or at least to position themselves much more strongly with the personal endorsement of "the Minister", which endorsement would undoubtedly change the way that the "other people appointed to judge our situation" exercised that judgment. So identifying the most likely change agent was a very effective antidote to the experience of "starting to get a little bit lost with it" in the bureaucracy of a government department, and was certainly likely to ensure that when the show people contacted that department in the future they would indeed "get a response back". The crucial significance of these actions was that they helped to insert a counternarrative into official educational discourses, one based on the realities of an itinerant lifestyle rather than either replicating inaccurate stereotypes about such a lifestyle or omitting it from consideration at all.

The same speaker conveyed her assumption about how this tactic of resistance works when she stated:

*I've always said it's not what you know but **who** you know to a certain point, because obviously **f** we hadn't gotten to see the Minister – he was the only real one to put. . .[the program] into the budget. (Y1P2)*

Conversely, she described the result if the directly interpersonal element is absent from the equation:

*I was in America when it was all happening [in Victoria] and I missed out on helping. It's hard – I don't really know **how** to get involved down there, because it's a different **group** of people. (Y1P2)*

Identifying, and forming effective working relationships with, people able to make decisions that lead to change are therefore integral elements of the show people's approach to resisting unproblematic knowledge about who they are and how they should be educated.

This tactic of creating new categories and rules as a corollary of resisting old and marginalising ones was evident in the following statement by the same show person: “. . .[we] were handed over to so many different people. 'That's not really my category', but there was no real category **for** us. It was a whole new thing” (Y1P2). Again the show people demonstrated unambiguously their determination and their capacity to resist, rather than passively accept, their marginalisation through not belonging to any “*real category at all*”.

In de Certollian (1984) terms, the show people's effective lobbying for a specialised program within the remit of the Brisbane School of Distance Education reflected the utility of “a way of using” (p. 18) what was previous-

ly available to them educationally to create something new and more appropriate. According to de Certeau:

*. . . a way ~~of~~ using imposed systems constitutes the resistance to the historical law of a state of affairs and its dogmatic legitimations. A practice of the order constructed by others redistributes its space; it creates at least a certain play in that order, a space for manoeuvres of unequal forces and ~~for~~ utopian points of reference. (p. 18)*

From this perspective, the show people's lobbying for the Brisbane School of Distance Education was a stark example of "resistance to the historical law of a state ~~of~~ affairs and its dogmatic legitimations" – in this case, "dogmatic legitimations" through the authorised but inadequate educational options previously available to the show people. Furthermore, the program's establishment constituted "a certain play" in the established order, and it created for the show people "a space for manoeuvres of unequal forces and ~~for~~ utopian points of reference" that enabled them to begin to insert and circulate their counternarrative about what and how Traveller education could and should be.

More broadly, the reference to "a space *for* maneuvers" recalls de Certeau's (1984) conceptualisation of space elaborated in Chapter Three. Specifically:

*.In short, space is a practised place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers. In the same way, an act ~~of~~ reading is the space produced by the practice ~~of~~ a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs. (p. 117)*

*“In the same way”*, the preceding analysis has demonstrated how the show people’s lobbying for the Brisbane School of Distance Education clearly indicates their efforts to turn the *“place”* of formal schooling into *“the space”* in which they feel comfortable and are able to achieve academically ‘on their own terms’. Making this *“space”* into *“a practised place”* by means of the program’s establishment was a crucial element of the show people’s resistance of the forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge about their educational experiences and opportunities identified in the previous chapter. At the same time, I must reiterate that that establishment was never a foregone conclusion but rather the outcome of a long and continuing struggle. Indeed, the lack of guaranteed permanence associated with the program induced the show people to monitor its implementation very closely.

#### 6.5.2 Consuming the program

The preceding subsection analysed the show people’s establishment of the Brisbane School of Distance Education program as resistance of forms of unproblematic knowledge about how itinerant people should be educated. I turn now to argue that the show people’s consumption of that program demonstrated a similar resistance. ‘Consuming the program’ in this context refers to the de Certeauian sense of consumption outlined in Chapter Two, whereby consumers are not passive recipients of production but instead make their own uses of what is produced – sometimes uses that are significantly different from the producers’ intentions. As de Certeau (1984) noted:

*...between the person (who uses them) and these products (indexes of the “order” which is imposed on him [sic]), there is a gap of varying proportions opened by the use that he makes of them. (p. 32)*

Furthermore:

*...once the images broadcast by television and the time spent in front of the TV set have been analyzed, it remains to be asked what the consumer makes of these images and during these hours. The thousands of people who buy a health magazine, the customers in a supermarket, the practitioners of urban space, the consumers of newspaper stories and legends—what do they make of what they “absorb”, receive, and pay for? What do they do with it? (p. 31)*

The short response to de Certeau’s question “What do they do with it?” is that the show people took every available opportunity to make the program closer to their image of specialised Traveller education. That image was centred on aligning as closely as possible the maintenance of their itinerant lifestyle and the maximisation of their children’s educational and employment opportunities. They were aware how superior the program was to the inadequate educational options previously available to them and detailed in Chapter Five. They were also aware how long ‘and how hard they had had to struggle to establish the program. They were therefore determined to consume or use it in ways likely to make it a success.

This indicates that there is a qualitative difference between the forms of consumption identified in this and the preceding subsections of this chapter. When the show people were lobbying for the program’s establishment, they were consuming what had previously been available to them, in the sense of ‘malung do’, or ‘malung the best of a bad situation’. They were ‘pushing the boundaries’ and using ‘trial and error’ to try to see what could be done to enhance their children’s educational prospects against a backdrop of generations of neglect. By contrast, after the program’s establishment the

show people consumed that program, in the sense of constantly monitoring its implementation in order to refine it and maximise its alignment with their distinctive learning needs. This suggests that after the program had been established the show people did not automatically assume that it was merely a transition to having their own school. On the contrary, **as** far **as** they knew at the time having a separate school was little more than a 'pipe dream', and hence they were determined to make the program **as** closely 'in their own image' **as** possible.

From that perspective of consumption as monitoring, it was to be expected that most comments pertaining to the program were complimentary. This situation reflected the show people's conscious awareness of the options that had previously been available to them in educating their children, **as** well as the fact that a number of show people had been directly involved in lobbying for the program's establishment and subsequently for its extension from the coastal to the western Queensland show circuits. Accordingly they had greater 'ownership' of the program's implementation and refinement. More broadly, the program had been incorporated into the practice of the show people's everyday lives, and consequently was seen **as** functioning as a 'consumer production' and a 'tactics of practice' of their own, **as** opposed to an imposition from state authorities. The much greater responsiveness of the program to the show people's distinctive educational needs and aspirations meant that it was helping to resist the show people's marginalised status and particularly the forms of previously unproblematic knowledge about the appropriate 'place' of conventional schooling. In addition, the program was seen to promote the show people's social agency in turning education from a 'place' to a 'space' (a practised place).



Within that context, then, several parents commented on the perceived advantages of the education program in comparison with the options available under their previous educational experiences. According to an older show person, “. . .we’re very proud of what our ladies have been doing in bringing this education program forward. . . .[I]t’s a very good step for our way of life and our industry. . .” (Y4P3). This was a significant endorsement of the program, because it reflected an acknowledgment that, unlike the previous options available to show people in educating their children, the program was at least and at last responsive to the show people’s distinctive educational needs and aspirations encapsulated in “*our way of life and our industry*”.

This crucial point was echoed by a younger show person with a seven year old daughter:

. . .here you’ve got the best of both worlds. You can still work, [and] you’re not leaving your children. Your kids are still there all the time and that, so it’s good. (Y4P2)

The reference to “*the best of both worlds*” is important: the presumption was that, unlike previous educational options, the program had allowed show people to combine their itinerant lifestyle and their children’s educational opportunities, rather than having to choose between them **as** unproblematic assumptions about educating itinerant people had required. This was a clear example of how the show people closely monitored the program and thereby consumed it to fit as closely as possible with their distinctive learning needs: being “*the best of both worlds*” functioned as a gauge for evaluating the program’s continued effectiveness in meeting those needs.

One parent said that, **as** a result of the program's establishment, "*We have got a very good relationship with the schools in Queensland. They're getting better – every year it's getting better*" (Y1P2). This 'special relationship' was often expressed in terms of interactions with individual teachers from the Brisbane School of Distance Education. For example, after the involvement of a particular teacher began, the program "*skyrocketed*" partly because "*. . . she really pushes things along, gets things going*" (Y1P2). In other words, the program was a developing situation rather than a static entity: "*. . . I think the program's been essential for the children and that it has progressed considerably during the last three **or** four years*" (Y1P2). She reaffirmed in relation to the show children's education:

*. . . [I]t's so much better than what they had before the program started. So they're a thousand times better **off** than they were four years ago. . . . This is so much better.* (Y1P2)

It was instructive to gain this parent's perception of the success of a program in whose establishment she had been so active. She had no doubt that the program was achieving its aims. A principal benefit was that the children now derived some meaning from their schooling.

***Now** with the program they're not only a part of something that belongs to them, that they feel apart of, we have a gauge, a learning system that we can control. . . . I know with. . . my son who's eight, in Grade Three, he's right **up** to date with the average school, and in some subjects he's also ahead, so you can't be happier with the program.* (Y1P2)

Although there had been some problems with the postal service, this parent felt that her son's work had not suffered.

*So that's the only gauge you can use. As long as they're up to date and you are getting the work through quickly. And the quality is very, very good, everything's excellent. (Y1P2)*

She believed also that the children's social skills had improved significantly: "Now, as I said, these kids are a part of something and they know it, and their self esteem and confidence is **up** here" (Y1P2). The reference to using a "gauge" to measure the program's effectiveness reflected the show people's close monitoring of its implementation, while identifying the show children **as** "a part of something" was **an** implicit acknowledgment that previously show people had been dislocated from, rather than being integrated with, formal educational provision. This close monitoring, **as** I posited above, represents a particular form of consumption of the program, and hence a resistance of traditional assumptions about how and where itinerant people should be educated.

Another parent, a relative newcomer to the showgrounds, concurred about the value of the program:

*I think the program itself is excellent. I mean, it would be nearly . . . impossible if the program wasn't made available. It's something that they have where they were having nothing in the years past. (Y2P5)*

This person explained that, although her own children were too young to be involved in the program, she had heard good reports of its operations from other parents:

*I do know that from my understanding of materials that get sent to them [the teachers], they review it, they grade it and send it back for them to review. They keep them up with their lessons, and I think that's the most important aspect of it. I mean, if you didn't have that you couldn't do it.*

*So it's vital. . . .A lot of the interaction that goes on is between teacher and mother, not teacher and child. So it's good when the teachers come out to see the kids. The kids get a chance to then interact with the actual teachers themselves. (Y2P5)*

This statement again reflected the close monitoring to which the show people subjected the program; this parent revealed a detailed working knowledge of the program even though she was not involved in it. This suggested not only the considerable degree of dialogue among parents and between parents and teachers about the program's consumption, but also how central that consumption **was** to the show people's ongoing resistance of their previous educational marginalisation.

Another parent was very enthusiastic about the program: “. . .it's very successful for us. We love what we've got” (Y2P1). She added: “With this, it's presented so easy. Everything comes over clear and easy. . .” (Y2P1). She summed up her overall approval of the program's operation:

*Our kids love school. They love school. The teachers are fantastic. If you give them work, it's not like in a classroom, our kids do it all. They might be a little bit backward. . . .In a classroom, there's always the kids up the back that you never **know**, and they get to sixth grade and they still can't read and write. Our kids, when they're given proper first grade work, they don't not learn. We've had a couple [of children] who went onto boarding school, and they are high in their grades. You've got to learn from this; it has to work. We do all right. We're coping. (Y2P1)*

Another parent was equally pleased with the outcomes of the program to date. She noted that the “*teachers are very good. I mean, everyone’s happy with the teachers*” (Y3P1). Furthermore, she was particularly enthusiastic about another innovation associated with the program:

*. . .we now have a school camp because of this program. Our kids actually go to school camp, whereas they didn’t before. They’ve done it for the last one, two, three years now. . . .It gets them all together away from school, away from home.* (Y3P1)

These disparate comments by parents shared a conscious and publicly stated determination to consume the program by subjecting it to ongoing scrutiny and critique, in order to consolidate the educational gains that they had made on behalf of their children.

The show children, the most direct ‘tactical consumers’ of the education program, were also complimentary about its implementation. They had established strong rapport with the itinerant teachers (whom they addressed by their Christian names, and who in some cases were regarded as members of the extended family), and they largely enjoyed the program. One boy claimed that the show children “*have a lot of fun*” (Y1C1) with the itinerant teachers. A ten year old girl said that she preferred going to school in Queensland rather than New South Wales because of the program’s operation in Queensland and the company of her friends from the show circuit (Y1C8). When asked from whom they seek help with difficult work, students most often identified the Brisbane teachers; otherwise a parent, a grandparent or an older sibling might be called on for assistance.

Children recognised that some subjects were more relevant to the show children's distinctive lifestyle than others. One eight year old boy explained his preference for studying mathematics – which was echoed by many of his contemporaries thus: *“Because I like working at the sums, and you gets lots of [games] in mathematics”* (Y1C6). This was verified by one of the home tutors, who commented that the show children handled money from an early age as part of the work expected of them within the family business (Y1HT1). The same eight year old boy explained the different phases of learning involved in the program: content work in the papers when the teachers were in Brisbane, and interactive activities with the teachers when they visited the children along the show circuits:

*When we come to a school, . . . we don't do much with our work. We get activities done on the theme we're on and then we do something, and might just do an afternoon, like a bit of maths, a bit of language arts and a bit of social studies at the end of the day when we come into school.*  
(Y1C6)

One ten year old girl found the work easy to understand: *“ . . . once you know all your stuff, for example, it's real easy to go along, once you know what you're doing”* (Y1C4). A twelve year old girl concurred, saying about the program: *“ . . . because it's better. It's easier”* (Y2C4). A seven year old boy identified the Brisbane School of Distance Education teachers as *“our real teachers. . . [who] never get grouchy – never get grumpy like those old teachers”* in local schools (Y1C7).

My argument about these laudatory comments about the program by show parents and children is that they reflected the show people's conscious and deliberate consumption of the program that they had lobbied to establish

through a close and careful monitoring of its implementation. This underscores the crucial observation that consumption from this perspective is a continuing process rather than an end point. Furthermore, the positive remarks about the program demonstrated the show people's determined resistance of previous assumptions about educating itinerant people that had provided them with inadequate options for their children's schooling. This resistance was evident in the show people's careful identification of the program's positive features, all of which are related to a greater alignment between an itinerant lifestyle and maximum educational opportunities. Whether the comments referred to the quality of the distance education papers, the children's liking for this kind of schooling or the empathetic understandings of the teachers, they encapsulated the show people's active involvement in ensuring the retention and refinement of a program that they had worked hard to establish.

The significance of this argument for relating the show people's consumption of the education program to the study's conceptual framework cannot be overestimated. De Certeau (1984) referred to

*...the models of action characteristic of users whose status as the dominated element in society (a status that does not mean that they are either passive **or** docile) is concealed by the euphemistic term 'consumer' (pp. xi-xii)*

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that the show people are indeed far from being "*either passive **or** docile*" in consuming the program: on the contrary, they have been actively involved in refining it to suit their distinctive needs and circumstances. Moreover, the analysis has highlighted the validity of de Certeau's (1984) bald assertion: "*The tactics **of** consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a*

*political dimension to everyday practices*" (p. xvii). The show people's consumption of the problem certainly has "*apolitical dimension*", largely because resistance is an avowedly political practice.

Finally, the preceding analysis has also confirmed the appropriateness of de Certeau's (1984) identification of

*. . . forces that are the starting point for an intellectual creativity as persistent as it is subtle, tireless, ready for every opportunity, scattered over the terrain of the dominant order and foreign to the rules laid down and imposed by a rationality founded on established rights and property.* (p. 38)

These forces, of which the show people's resistant lobbying for and consumption of the education program are a striking example, point the way forward to creating a new "*terrain*" by virtue of their "*intellectual creativity*". That same "*intellectual creativity*" enables the resistance and subversion of the "*rationality*" that underpins the construction of "*the dominant order*". That "*rationality*" in turn articulates with de Certeau's (1984) reference to "*the power of knowledge. . . [being] to provide oneself with one's own place*" (p. 36). So "*rationality*" is actually complicit with forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge – in this case about the 'place' of schooling and the 'place' of itinerant people – and is therefore suffused with power. This power is, as far as possible, counteracted by the show people's resistance of those forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge, as reflected in their lobbying for and consumption of the Brisbane School of Distance education program for their children.



## 6.6 Review of the chapter

I argued in the previous chapter that the show people's experiences of marginalisation, which denied them access to institutional or strategic power as a direct consequence of their itinerancy, were usefully summarised by de Certeau's (1984) identification of three key attributes of strategies of marginalisation:

- the show people's absence of place
- the construction of their otherness
- the imposition of forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge about how they should be educated.

The purpose of this chapter has been to address the study's second research question: "*How do the show people resist their marginalised status?*". The posing of this question reflected an assumption that, far from being 'passive victims' of their marginalisation, the show people exhibit enormous agency and ingenuity in subverting that status. Responding to the research question required the application of de Certeau's (1984) concept of 'tactics of consumption', aided by his notion of 'space'. His synthesis of the overlap between these ideas is a timely reminder of their emphasis on agency and ingenuity and of their avowedly politicised dimension:

*Tactics are procedures that gain validity in relation to the pertinence they lend to time—to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms into a favorable situation, to the rapidity of the movements that change the organization of a space, to the relations among successive moments in an action, to the possible intersections of durations and heterogeneous rhythms, etc. . . [T]actics are a clever*

utilization of time, *of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power.* (pp. 38-39)

Specifically in relation to the three attributes of strategies of marginalisation identified above, I have made the following key points about the show people's tactics of consumption and their use of space:

- They resist their ascribed absence of place through their multiple experiences and understandings of 'home', which enable them to lay claim to a place of their own and hence to a location of power.
- They resist their constructed otherness by giving the term 'showies' a positive valence to counteract the negative stereotypes ascribed to it by others, disrupting the 'showie'-'non-showie' dichotomy and giving the term 'mugs' a negative valence as a tactic of reversal.
- They resist forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge about their schooling through their lobbying for, and consumption of, a specialised educational program operated by the Brisbane School of Distance Education, thereby countering the six inadequate and marginalising educational options previously available to them.

It is timely to reiterate that there is nothing inevitable or certain about the effectiveness of the show people's resistance of their marginalised status; their tactics of consumption have had to be deployed across a large range of sites and in a considerable number of contexts. What has unified those disparate endeavours has been their recognition that education holds the key to their efforts to establish a counternarrative to their marginalisation. The show people's resistant practices are therefore as integral as the strategies of marginalisation identified in the previous chapter to their 'learning on the run'.