

**CHAPTER SEVEN**

**RESEARCH QUESTION**

**THREE:**

**THE SHOW PEOPLE'S**

**TRANSFORMATION OF**

**THEIR MARGINALISING**

**EXPERIENCES AND**

**RESISTANT PRACTICES**

*"...I teach primary [show] kids...I can take into it my experiences from outside. I can open up their imaginations, I suppose, to things...on a wider scale, which I know is what the parents want."*

Y3HT1

*"...who knows what the potential is of this program? It's like the potential of all children."*

Y4T1

## 7.1 Overview of the chapter

In Chapter Five of this thesis, I argued that the show people's itinerant lifestyle subjects them to what de Certeau (1984) identified as three key attributes of strategies of marginalisation. These three elements related specifically to the show people's absence of place, the construction of their otherness and forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge about where and how itinerant people should receive their schooling. In Chapter Six, I asserted that the show people engage in direct and effective resistance of those marginalising strategies, as evidenced through their multiple experiences and understandings of 'home', their own uses of the terms 'showies', 'locals' and 'mugs', and their lobbying for and consumption of a specialised educational program under the auspices of the Brisbane School of Distance Education. These resistant practices were identified as exhibiting de Certeau's (1984) concept of 'tactics of consumption', and as reflecting the show people's determination to turn the alienating 'space' of conventional schooling into a welcoming and enabling 'place' of Traveller education.

In this chapter, I provide answers to the third research question guiding the thesis: *"How do the show people transform their marginalising experiences and resistant practices?"*. In doing so, I demonstrate how the show people's deployment of various 'tactics of consumption' is a prelude to their efforts to change 'the rules of the game' that construct them as marginalised and 'other' to 'mainstream' Australia. That is, my reading of the show people's words and actions focusses on how their politically informed subversion of those 'rules' make alternative and more positive frameworks of Traveller education possible as a counternarrative. It is through these processes of change and transformation that the show people are able to

change the marginalised ‘spaces’ of itinerancy into valued ‘places’ of their own. It is important to acknowledge at the outset that these processes occur on a multitude of fronts. For the purposes of this study, however, I have concentrated on the ways in which the various dimensions of the Traveller education program can be read as illustrating resistance and transformation.

The chapter consists of four sections:

- outsidedness, creative understanding and transformation
- transforming absence of place: a place of their own
- transforming constructions of otherness: valuing difference
- transforming forms of unproblematic knowledge: a separate show school.

In the first section, I draw on Bakhtin’s (1986a) ideas of outsidedness and creative understanding to provide a conceptual bridge from de Certeau’s (1984) focus on marginalisation and resistance to transformation. In the second and third sections, I use the words of the home tutors and the Brisbane School of Distance Education teachers to demonstrate the transformation of the show people’s previous absence of place and constructed otherness. Here the argument is that the other groups’ growing awareness of the show people’s struggles to assert their own notions of ‘home’ and their positive views of their identities are a testament to the potential for productive change in previously devaluing situations. In the fourth section, I use the show people’s words about their idealised hopes for Traveller education to argue that the newly established separate school for show children represents a powerful transformation of previous marginalising and alienating assumptions about the education of itinerant people. In combination, these points illustrate the capacity of the show people, a supposedly disempowered and marginalised group, to work in concert with representatives of the ‘mainstream’ society

whom they enlist to their 'cause' in order to circulate and replicate counternarratives that are more understanding and valuing of the show people's lifestyle and culture.

## **7.2 Outsidedness, creative understanding and transformation**

Resistant 'tactics of consumption' are a necessary but by no means a sufficient prerequisite for more fundamental and permanent change occurring to the strategies of marginalisation faced by the Queensland show people. In particular, I perceive the transformation of their marginalising experiences and resistant practices as being directly and inextricably linked with their capacity to enlist the understanding and support of other people. As long as the 'battle lines' are drawn between 'them' and 'us', show people are inevitably at a recurring political disadvantage. However, if others take up the battle on their behalf, and work with them to challenge stereotypes and subvert alienating policies, 'the rules of the games' can be altered and a new terrain can be mapped out in which show people can potentially obtain a 'place' of their own.

Theoretically, my concern with transformation begins with de Certeau (1984). I indicated in Chapter Three my dissension from the consensus view that his distinctions between 'strategies of marginalisation' and 'tactics of consumption' and between 'place' and 'space' constitute a static model of social life. On the contrary, I argued that his conceptual framework is dynamic and mobile and fully aware of the political interstices into which subversive tactics can be inserted in order to generate productive change.

It is helpful to be reminded of de Certeau's explicit acknowledgment of the role of transformation in his social theory. As I noted in Chapter Three, de Certeau (1984) stated:

*It is as though the opportunity ~~for~~ a sociopolitical renewal ~~of~~ Western societies were emerging along its fringes, precisely where it has been the most oppressive. Out of what Western societies have held in contempt, combated and believed they had subjugated, there are arising political alternatives and social models which represent, perhaps, the only hope ~~for~~ reversing the massive acceleration and reproduction ~~of~~ totalitarian, homogenising effects generated by the power structures and technology of the West. (p. 231)*

Here is a direct explication of how de Certeau envisaged 'the rules of the games' being changed, centred on the "*political alternatives and social models*" that have been "*emerging along. . .[the] fringes*" of "*Western societies*". I regard the show people's actions as a striking example of how groups on the "*fringes*" of 'mainstream' communities, which the same 'mainstream' communities "*have held in contempt, combated and believed they had subjugated*", are able to counteract the "*totalitarian, homogenizing effects*" of those 'mainstream communities'.

Further evidence of de Certeau's (1984) recognition of the displacement potential of 'tactics of consumption' can be found in his use of the term 'transform' in his elaboration of his social theory. For example, he noted:

*There is no longer an elsewhere. Because ~~of~~ this, the "strategic" model is also transformed, as if defeated by its own success: it was by definition based on the definition ~~of~~ a "proper" distinct ~~from~~ everything*

*else; but now that “proper” has become the whole.* (p. 40; emphasis added)

He referred to the purpose of his own inquiry as being “*totransform what was represented as a matrix-force of history into a mobile infinity of tactics*” (p. 41; emphasis added). He also noted the transformative tendencies of ‘space’, as when “*the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers*” (p. 117; emphasis in original).

In this chapter, I analyse interview statements by show people, home tutors and Brisbane School of Distance Education teachers for evidence of the ways in which tactics of consumption become transformative. In doing so, I emphasise what I consider the most significant aspect of that potential: the opportunity to construct a counternarrative about who show people are and how they should receive an education. What I have in mind here is what was conveyed by de Certeau’s (1984) reference to “*. . .the tactical trajectories which, according to their own criteria, select fragments taken from the vast ensembles of production in order to compose new stories with them*” (p. 35).

It remains the case, however, that de Certeau devoted more attention to the resistance than to the transformation of marginalisation. Consequently he was less suggestive about how transformative actions might be identified and analysed than about the nature of tactics of consumption. Accordingly I have turned to Bakhtin (1986a), and particularly his concepts of outsidedness and creative understanding, to provide a more detailed conceptual framework for understanding how the show people’s resistant practices can be transformed into enduring displacements of their marginalising experiences.

As I indicated in Chapters Three and Four, Bakhtin (1986a) provided a helpful overview of the links between outsiderness and creative understanding:

*Creative understanding does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding—in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot even really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are others.* (p. 7; emphasis in original)

I have taken Bakhtin's precept of the importance "*for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding—in time, in space, in culture*" as a rationale for the organisation of the next two sections of this chapter. As I indicated at the outset, those sections analyse the comments by home tutors and teachers about the show people's supposed absence of place and the constructions of their otherness. This is a crucial element of my understanding of transformation: the show people can and do talk about how they resist those marginalising strategies, but it is necessary for 'outsiders' to do the same if real change in the show people's situation is to occur. (I see a parallel here with debates about Indigenous Australian 'reconciliation': while meanings attached to this term vary widely, the underlying concept is predicated on the active involvement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians alike.) The final major section of the chapter then argues that that evidence of the home tutors' and teachers' creative – and

transformed – understanding of the show people's possession of a place of their own and their difference rather than otherness contributes directly to the show people's transformation of forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge about schooling into their successful establishment of a separate school for show children.

This approach to analysing transformation resonates with Rowan and Brennan's (1998) overview of some of the crucial elements of fundamental and enduring shifts in cultural life. Firstly, they argued that:

*The work of cultural transformation is thus not so much an intended 'rational project' in line with some pre-set view of 'progress' as a set of partial and reflexive interventions into constantly changing and reproducing institutions and subjectivities. (p. 5)*

This chapter is very much *my* reading of ongoing alterations in the show people's marginalised status, a reading that derives from the particular combination of conceptual resources that I have mobilised in this thesis. Similarly, as I indicated in Chapter Six, I eschew a teleological view of social change in favour of one that constructs the gains made by show people as tentative and needing to be constantly reviewed in order to guard against slippage back into the previous, marginalising situation.

Secondly, and conversely, I concur with Rowan and Brennan's (1998) observation that *"The acknowledgment that marginality is produced rather than permanently and naturally inscribed draws attention to the potential for its resultant material consequences to be displaced..."* (p. 9). Herein lie the explanation and the justification for the argument presented in this chapter: through resistance and transformation, the show people are able to use against the strategies of marginalisation the same tools deployed by those strategies to



marginalise them. That is, the show people succeed in changing ‘the rules of the games’ by arguing that those rules are neither ‘natural’ nor ‘neutral’, the same charges levelled against the show people in the process of constructing them as marginalised.

Thirdly, Rowan and Brennan (1998) referred to “*counternarratives...[as] stories of cultural change*” (p. 10). This chapter demonstrates the effectiveness of the show people’s counternarratives in presenting alternative and resistant constructions of their own ‘place’ and their difference rather than otherness as the basis of, and the justification for, different and more positive forms of Traveller education. Indeed, this chapter and the study of which it forms a part seek to contribute to the creation of those counternarratives about the show people’s lives and learning.

### **7.3 Transforming absence of place: A place of their own**

As I indicated above, my task in this section of the chapter is to demonstrate the show people’s transformation of their ascribed absence of place into a place of their own through the words and understandings of the home tutors and the Brisbane School of Distance Education teachers. That transformation relies partly on the home tutors and teachers acknowledging the show people’s ‘right’ to pass onto ‘their terrain’ in their role as representatives of ‘the centre’ by virtue of their own, more ‘normal’ residence in fixed locations.

As a consequence of the show people’s multiple experiences and understandings of home being communicated to these ‘outsiders’ to the show circuits, the home tutors and teachers are enlisted to spread a counternarrative

about the show people's forms of residence and group relationships that disrupt the stereotype of no fixed location – and hence of no political 'place'. So the spaces of itinerancy become 'a place of their own' in the hearts and minds of these others, who in turn report those new understandings to those whom they encounter. These shifts in awareness can be likened to moves from outsideness and creative understanding (Bakhtin, 1986a) that I posited above as the basis of transformation in the context of this study.

Turning first to the home tutors, their 'outsider' status enabled them potentially to combine relatively detached comments about their students' and employers' ideas about 'home' with their own references to this concept (a point that is implicit in the habitual use of 'home' in front of the identification of their role as 'tutors'). One home tutor stated that, at the end of her employment as a home tutor, *"I went home, to Mackay. . ."* (Y5HT1). Another home tutor explained how she *"went home"* after an initial period of working on a show circuit: *"That was in Maryborough, because that's where I come from"* (Y1HT1). For a home tutor, this statement was an unusually explicit association between 'home' and *"coming from"* or 'belonging to' somewhere. This statement differed from the show people's initial connection between 'home' and their caravans, but paralleled those same people's references in particular contexts to specific towns as being 'home'.

The home tutors reinforced the show people's correlation between 'home' and the caravans in which they lived. One home tutor stated that *"I've been able to spend some time with the kids at home, in their little van things"* (Y3HT1). Another home tutor, in the context of explaining how for the show children *"Money's just an everyday issue. . ."*, added a reference to the

caravan as home: “. . .they’ll sort of get home and see their parents counting out the change ~~for~~ the next day. . .” (Y1HT1).

In many ways the ‘outsider’ home tutors found life on the show circuits exciting and intriguing. In other respects it was stressful for them; they were away from their own families and social networks, and sometimes they found it difficult to become accepted as authentic ‘teachers’ by their young charges (and occasionally by their employers, the parents). Perhaps some of this tension underlay a home tutor’s reference to “*anywherethey call home*”, and his strong opinion (unsubstantiated in the interview) that “*if some of the kids were honest they would probably say it would be really nice to live somewhere and not just shift all the time*” (Y3HT1). On the other hand, the same home tutor commented perceptively about the centrality of the show circuits in the children’s distinctive lifestyle: “. . .their routine is to be at a show – that’s their home – to pull up everything – business, home – and shift. . .that’s the routine” (Y3HT1). This statement by a home tutor reflected a presumably unconscious incorporation of show people’s constructions of the “*routine*” shifts of the show circuits as a defining characteristic that separates them from other people.

I interpret the ambivalence underlying these home tutors’ comments about the show people’s conceptions of ‘home’ as reflecting a crucial and in some ways ongoing struggle between outsideness and creative understanding. The home tutors’ difficulties with constantly moving ‘home’ are a symptom of the resilience of the marginalising stereotypes about show people’s absence of place analysed in Chapter Five. The deleterious effects of generations of lack of understanding and respect do not disappear overnight. On the other hand, the home tutors’ comments about ‘home’ also reflect a

growing comprehension of the centrality of the itinerant lifestyle to the show people's *raison d'être*, and hence of the validity and vitality of that lifestyle. For me, this growing comprehension recalls Bakhtin's (1986b) distinction between creative understanding and empathy and his associated insistence on the need for outsidedness if genuine understanding were to result:

*One cannot understand understanding as emotional empathy, as the placement of the self in the other's position (loss of one's own position). This is required only for peripheral aspects of understanding. One [also] cannot understand understanding as a translation from the other's language into one's own. (p. 141)*

At least some of the home tutors' perceptions of 'home' cited above were shared by the Brisbane School of Distance Education teachers. After all, they shared with the home tutors – although for shorter periods of time – many of the difficulties attendant on leaving their families and living out of suitcases. One of the teachers, in his first year of involvement with the show people, used his account of how his colleagues and he worked with the show children at local schools to equate their 'home' with their caravan: "*We often look at a project for the week. . .so we can finish the documents at the end of the week that they take home. . .*" (Y2T1). However, his perception of certain limitations in the show children's schooling prompted his reference to a different location of 'home':

*Sometimes I'd love to be able to take them home, and bring them into a school for an extended period of time, and really get them up to speed because there's a couple of little gaps, and you stumble across the gaps sometimes. (Y2T1)*

For this teacher, ‘home’ represented the predictable routines of living in one place, a situation in which the distractions of constantly moving gave way to an opportunity to work intensively on perceived learning “*gaps*”.

By contrast, a teacher who had been involved with the program from the outset argued strongly that “*part of the success*” of that program for the show children

*... is the development of understandings about the working lifestyle, and the huge time constraints and commitments by our families in maintaining their family, and their working lifestyle, their profession.* (Y4T1)

The reference to “*our families*” reflected the extent to which this teacher in particular had come to identify personally as well as professionally with the distinctive needs of the show people. This identification helped to underpin her construction of the show people as actively contesting and transforming marginalisation into a way of life that is positive, productive and agential. This sense of the transformation of marginalisation was encapsulated in the speaker’s reference to “*their working lifestyle, their profession*”, a form of words that placed the show people on the same plane as teachers, whose “*profession*” remains valuable and vital for all that it is currently subjected to media and political belittling. Implicit in that reference was a recognition of both the difference and the validity of the show people’s multiple experiences and understandings of home.

I have sought in this section of the chapter to trace some of the elements of the transformation in others’ understandings of the show people’s lifestyle and values. That transformation helps to facilitate the show people’s success in moving from an absence of place to a place of their own. In doing so, I argue that the home tutors’ and teachers’ growing comprehension of the

distinctive meanings that show people attach to 'home' articulates with the show people's resistance of the fact, noted in Chapter Five, that "*The 'proper' is a triumph of place over time*", and that "*It is a mastery of time through the foundation of an autonomous place*" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 36). That resistance, as I observed in Chapter Six, resonates with de Certeau's (1984) insight that ". . . the political relevance of the geo-graphical distinctions between separate places is echoed. . . in the distribution of places of power. . ." (p. 227). The taking up of that resistance by the home tutors and teachers – albeit tentatively and inconsistently in some cases – helps to turn the disruption of resistance into the displacement of transformation.

I contend that this shift reflects the interplay between Bakhtinian outsidedness and creative understanding. Specifically, I assert that the comments about the show people's meanings of 'home' by outsiders who had been with them for a longer period provided evidence for Bakhtin's later identification of creative understanding as a four stage process, as reported by Morson and Emerson (1990):

. . . first, the physical perception, then its recognition, then a grasping of its significance in context, and finally – and this is the crucial step – "active-dialogic understanding." This fourth step is more than an acknowledgment of existing context; it is implicitly creative, and presumes ever-new, and surprisingly new, contexts. (p. 99)

For me, a vital dimension of those "ever-new, and surprisingly new, contexts" is the implication that the home tutors' and teachers' increased awareness of the show people's multiple experiences and understandings of home is a crucial element of their transformation from an absence of place to having a place of their own.

## 7.4 Transforming constructions of otherness: Valuing difference

In Chapter Five, I noted de Certeau's (1984) identification of constructions of otherness as one of the key attributes of strategies of marginalisation of particular social groups. I traced the 'progressive' – in the sense of sequential rather than 'enlightened' – development of those constructions in relation to show people through 'locals' perceptions of show people's 'strangeness' to regarding them as objects of pity to treating them with animosity and hostility to replicating negative stereotypes that they are 'dirty' and likely to be thieves to subliminal associations between show people and Gypsies. I argued that the ever increasing antipathy exhibited by 'locals' towards show people was tied directly, and led inexorably, to their construction as 'other' to the norms and values of the 'mainstream' community and hence as outside that community's protection and unable to gain equitable access to its resources and services.

In Chapter Six, I demonstrated that the show people actively and effectively resist the marginalising constructions of their otherness. They do this through particular 'tactics of consumption': giving the term 'showies' a positive valence; disrupting the 'showie'-'non-showie' dichotomy by emphasising how show people regularly move on and off the show circuits; and giving a negative valence to the term 'mugs', and thereby engaging in some reversal of terminology (in a similar way to other marginalised groups deploying terms such as 'black', 'gay' and 'queer' against their oppressors). This tactic works to turn the 'gaze of surveillance' back onto 'the centre' and allow the show people to present their lifestyle as valid and valuable.

My purpose in this section of this chapter is to use the home tutors' and teachers' words and understandings to gauge the degree of transformation in constructions of show people's identities, by moving from a focus on their otherness to an emphasis on valuing their difference. As I have insisted throughout this chapter, 'the rules of the game' that construct show people as 'other' can be changed, and a new terrain for valuing their difference can be mapped, only if they are demonstrably successful in inserting and circulating counternarratives about who they **are** and want to become. A crucial element of this transformation is the extent of their capacity to displace traditional and marginalising stereotypes about themselves by demonstrating that those stereotypes, far from being 'natural' or 'neutral', are in fact political constructions with tremendously deleterious effects. My aim is to illustrate how dominant, generally negative, attitudes towards the show people can be, and have been, transformed via an exploration of the changing views and growing understandings of the home tutors and teachers.

From that perspective, I turn first to the home tutors' statements about how they perceived the show people. One home tutor noted:

*But I found most of them to be really good. Some **of** them aren't, some of them are. It just. . . some **of** them will be wonderful to you, and other people won't be that nice to you. (Y1HT1)*

This home tutor endorsed the comment by a parent that the show children's lifestyle sometimes approaches "afantasy land" for them (Y1P2). She asserted about the show children: "I think they have a ball, just play [ing] with each other. See, as they get older there's different rides that they're allowed onto. . ." (Y1HT1) She went further and stated, "I think a lot **of** them get a bit spoilt. Not spoilt rotten, but they are used to having money. . ." (Y1HT1).



As in the previous section of this chapter, I detect considerable ambivalence in some of the ‘outsiders’ perceptions of show people. As I noted earlier, it takes a great deal of time and persistence for ingrained assumptions about the show people’s identities – the constructions of their otherness identified in Chapter Five and resisted in Chapter Six – to be dispelled and replaced with more positive counternarratives. This home tutor’s remarks encapsulated much of that ambivalence, which displayed outsidedness more than creative understanding in Bakhtin’s (1986a) terms. Nevertheless there were sparks of valuing the show people’s difference evident in comments such as “...*some of them will be wonderful to you*” and “*I think they have a ball, just play[ing] with each other*”.

Another home tutor, who positioned himself explicitly as expressing “*an outsider’s point of view*” (Y3HT1), identified with local people’s desire to attend the annual show.

*...people seem to be willing to go to the show because it was an event that they remember as kids and wanted to perpetuate it with their own kids. Kids want to go because in a town like this perhaps nothing much happens.* (Y3HT1)

This home tutor’s distancing of himself from the show people prompted him to speculate on their reaction to him as a home tutor who was also competent at driving a truck.

*I think they’re wary at first. ...perhaps because I’m older – that affords you **some** sort of respect anyway, because they know that you’ve got qualifications and they know that you’re experienced and [don’t] speak like a lot of the people they mix with speak.* ..(Y3HT1)

Superficially these comments indicate the speaker's explicit identification with 'locals' and a consequent, even if implicit, dissociation from show people. Yet I analyse his statements in a different vein: rather than replicating the 'showie'-'local' divide, I perceive his remarks as exhibiting both outsidedness and creative understanding. The explicit self-positioning as expressing "*an outsider's point of view*" implied two elements: a recognition of the fundamental differences between 'showies' and 'locals'; and an implicit suggestion that his detachment enabled him to observe positive aspects of the show people's lifestyle. This was evident in his identification of reasons why rural parents take their children to the show: that identification indicated that the show people perform a valuable service by providing entertainment "*in a town like this*". Similarly, the ascribed recognition by show people "*that you've got qualifications and. . . [don't] speak like a lot of the people they mix with speak. . .*" suggested his reciprocal acceptance that many show people also have "*qualifications*" and speak 'properly' – otherwise they would be unable to perceive those 'virtues' in him.

I contend that this reverse recognition exemplifies Bakhtin's (1986a) notions of outsidedness and creative understanding. As Morson and Emerson (1990) related Bakhtin's concepts to different languages:

*To realize and develop the potential of a language, "outsidedness" – the outsidedness of another language – is required. That outsidedness may lead to an exchange in which each language reveals to the other what it did not know about itself, and in which new insights are produced that neither wholly contained before. (p. 310)*

This home tutor's articulation of "*an outsider's point of view*" enabled him to express "*new insights*" into the show people's contributions to local communities and their levels of cultural capital. In doing so, his statements contributed to the critique of the show people's constructed otherness and to the transformation of that otherness into a valued difference.

Another home tutor emphasised what she saw as the fixed character of the boundary between 'showies' and 'locals'. She stated, "*Everyone's that's outside the show's an outsider*" (Y5HT1). Later she reinforced this point when she described people being "*on the outside*" of the show circuits (Y5HT1). She added, ". . . [there is] *nothing like an outside influence that brings them all together. . .*" (Y5HT1), implying the existence of heterogeneous groups on the show circuits. Given this supposedly fixed division between 'us' and 'them', the home tutor considered that show life provided a safe and secure environment for the expression of group and individual identity. Show life "*is their whole world*", so that, despite inevitable interpersonal and inter-group tensions, many show people feel comfortable in their relationships on the show circuits, "*withouthaving to compete with the rest of the otherpeople in society*" (Y5HT1).

In contrast to the previous home tutor cited above, who positioned himself as articulating "*an outsider's point of view*" (Y3HT1), this home tutor was at pains to identify herself as being associated in important respects (although not in every respect) with the 'showies'. An indication of her acceptance by the 'showies' was when her employer "*showed me where the secret gate [into the showgrounds] was to get in so I didn't have to pay*" (Y5HT1). Here the avoidance of paying entrance fees was a badge of identification with show people that the speaker prized highly, indicating in

doing so the considerable cultural capital attached to this relatively modest piece of financial capital. On the other hand, the speaker was aware of the unspoken but understood boundaries around her acceptance as a 'showie':

*"I'm not a showman, I'm still an outsider" (Y5HT1).* She also stated, *"I'm just a person who just lives with the showmen. . ."* (a comment that also implied that the show people do have a definite 'home'), rather than describing herself as one of those *"showmen"* (Y5HT1). These fine distinctions reveal the complexity and dynamism of the 'showie'-'local' divide, despite this speaker's own suggestions that this divide was uncomplicated and unchangeable. This revelation suggested the home tutor's implicit acceptance of the show people's tactic – analysed at length in Chapter Six – of highlighting that complexity and dynamism in order to resist the negative stereotype of 'once a show person, always a show person'.

As I indicated in Chapter Five, a recurring theme in this home tutor's discourse was the assertion that show people have traditionally been poorly treated by the wider society, and that that poor treatment has caused them to retreat into a separate existence on the show circuits.

*. . .no other outsiders would be welcome. . .inside [the show circuits]. They would not. Well, . . .the world wasn't interested in them, . . .the communities. . .didn't know them, all they thought of them was – scum, really. (Y5HT1)*

Shortly after this statement, the home tutor reinforced this view.

*Everything that the showmen are is a product of the way we treat them – the way their pride is, the way they work, the way they are – is a product of years and years, centuries of our treatment of them. And that is the basic line. (Y5HT1)*

Later in the interview, the speaker elaborated this view.

*Like I said, the way they are, and the way they act, it's years and years of our treatment of them. That's the basic line. . .because of the way we. . .have treated them. Their own respect has come from the way they put us down, . . .the way the people outside have put them down. (Y5HT1)*

For this reason, the speaker claimed, the 'showies' generally confine their interest in the world to the events of show life: ". . .why should they go out of their way. . .for the outer community, when the outer community have never treated them anything but. . .[poorly]?" (Y5HT1).

From one perspective, these comments could be considered patronising, with the show people's identity being constructed purely in terms defined by the broader society. From a different viewpoint, however, this was the strongest statement by a home tutor championing the show people as an oppressed and marginalised group. Furthermore, this was consequently the most direct evidence among my interviews with home tutors of the shift from outsideness to creative understanding. This was a striking example of Morson and Emerson's (1990) observation that, within Bakhtin's (1986a) theoretical framework, people "cantake maximal advantage of the differences and of their outsideness by an act of creative understanding that is truly dialogic in the best sense" (p. 429). From that perspective, this home tutor's clear articulation of the show people's traditional marginalisation, and her use of the interview with me to posit an alternative view of who they are and want to be, were indeed part of "an act of creative understanding" based on valuing the show people's "differences" and thereby displacing the constructions of their otherness.

A similar process was evident in the same home tutor's reference to 'mugs'. She asserted strongly, "*Ohno, not me, I wasn't a mug*" (Y5HT1) in a part of the interview where I was seeking to delineate terms that show people used to separate themselves from other people. Yet this tutor also indicated that, although she had travelled with the 'showies' for almost two years, for most of that time she dwelt on the margins of identity, not accepted by show people as a complete 'showie' and yet perceived by 'locals' who attended the shows as being associated with the show circuits. In that context, the speaker's rejection of the label 'mug' as having applied to her at any time reinforces the proposition that it is a more derogatory and specialised term than 'local'. This proposition was supported by the home tutor's subsequent reference to 'mug' in connection with 'rort', as a description of a 'rigged' game: "*I mean, how are you going to knock these down? That's a joke!*" (Y5HT1). So 'mug' in this sense has a more restricted meaning and use than the more generalised term 'local' – a point that I made in Chapter Six in connection with the show people's use of the term as a reversal tactic to counteract the derogatory terms routinely levelled at them. This home tutor's implicit acceptance of the function of that tactic was evident in her recognition of its negative valence.

Turning the focus from home tutors to the teachers from the Brisbane School of Distance Education, one teacher's admiration for the show children's courage in the face of adversity enlivened his account of a particular action by show children that spanned age differences:

*But they're also very protective of their own. A couple of the bigger boys, I've got a lot of time ~~for~~. And they're all very close, and they'll see the younger blokes, and they're not necessarily related to them, little boys in*

*Grade One, and they'll go and get a drink and the big boys can see some ~~of~~ the locals, they call them 'locals', giving them a bit ~~of~~ stick. And they'll quietly walk over and let them know, not in an unfriendly way, that they're around and like to be seen near their friends. And I'm always very proud ~~of~~ them when they do that because they just handle it. (Y2T1)*

The teacher reflected on his own response to a potentially stressful situation that appeared to occur in nearly all the local schools attended by the show children:

*I feel sorry ~~for~~ them that it would be great ~~f~~ they could just come into a school, enjoy the facilities without being hassled. . . . Sometimes the [show] kids go out and play footy with the [local] kids, and they get involved, but on the whole they tend to stick to themselves. (Y2T1)*

This teacher had not been involved with teaching the show children for very long, and he identified elements of their lifestyle that he considered educationally marginalising. In that context, it was suggestive that he complimented the social maturity of particular show children in their interactions with local children. **As** a relative newcomer to the show children's education program, he tended to take at face value show people's constructions of the division between 'showies' and 'locals' as fixed and permanent, whereas teachers with a longer involvement with the show people qualified those constructions with references to specific contexts and individual people.

On the other hand, this teacher acknowledged instances of friendly interaction between show children and local children. He cited **as** evidence the particular approach to the 'buddy system' that was in operation at a school on the western Queensland show circuit.

*. . .we went into a classroom and we were invited to work in the classroom with our kids and we were made to feel part of that class. The kids in that class adopted our kids, and they were always coming up to us and saying, "Would you like to play with us?", and being very kind to the kids. That was lovely. (Y2T1)*

The selected statements by this teacher encapsulate my argument in this section of the chapter. The teacher's outsiderness was revealed in such comments as "*I feel sorry for them*" which, taken alone, could shade into the marginalising constructions of the show people's otherness identified in Chapter Five. In the context of the teacher's educational discourse, however, his reference to the older show children's maturity in dealing with a potentially hostile situation, and his pleased reaction to instances of show children and local children working and playing together amicably, reflected his growing creative understanding of the pressures on show people and their productive engagements with those pressures.

The home tutor's recognition that show people have to work at disrupting their marginalising and constructed otherness in turn recalled for me Morson and Emerson's (1990) account of Bakhtin's insight – reflected in the works of the German writer Goethe – that

*. . .a real sense of creativity would have to involve human work. . .It must involve work growing out of concrete needs but producing something that is also genuinely new and not exhaustively specified by the past. (p. 415)*

This is the real and twofold significance of the home tutor's comments about the show children for my argument: the move from outsiderness to creative understanding "*must involve work*" and a genuine commitment to mutual



comprehension on ‘both sides’; and such a move can indeed be successful in *“producing something that is also genuinely new and not exhaustively specified by the past”*. Transformative counternarratives that value the show people’s difference rather than replicate constructions of their otherness are striking examples of this kind of production.

## **7.5 Transforming forms of unproblematic knowledge: A separate show school**

To this point in the chapter, I have discussed the show people’s transformations of their marginalising experiences and resistant practices in relation to changing their absence of place into a place of their own and changing the constructions of their otherness into a valuing of their difference. These transformations are important in their own right, as they go directly to the heart and centre of what it means to be a show person and how that meaning is open to dynamic flows as show people imagine themselves otherwise. These transformations are also vital to the show people’s educational experiences and opportunities, as this section of the chapter will demonstrate.

In Chapter Five, I focussed on the third key attribute of strategies of marginalisation identified by de Certeau (1984): the forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge about how and where show people should receive formal schooling. I explained that, while some of the six options previously available to show people for educating their children were better than others, all of them were fundamentally flawed because they derived from a conceptual opposition between the show people’s itinerant lifestyle and maximising their children’s educational outcomes. I related that fundamental flaw to de

Certeau's (1984) insight that "*the power to provide oneself with one's own place*" is the same power that "*produces itself in and through*" (p. 36) forms of "*knowledge*" that are neither innocent nor objective, but that are instead actively complicit with perpetuating the power of 'the centre'. That is, implicitly and unquestioningly assuming that 'normal' children remain in one place to receive their schooling was the basis of the show people's educational marginalisation.

In Chapter Six, I demonstrated that the show people have resisted those seemingly unproblematic forms of knowledge about schooling provision by means of two particular resistant practices: their lobbying for the establishment of the special Brisbane School of Distance Education program for their children; and their tactical consumption of that program to refine and reshape it continuously to fit more closely with their distinctive learning needs. I used the show people's words about the program to reveal their very strong commitment to enhancing their children's educational outcomes and their determination to institutionalise the educational innovation. This commitment and this determination derived from the show people's recognition that gains in soliciting understanding of their situation were by no means guaranteed, and reflected de Certeau's (1984) depiction of tactics as ephemeral and transient in character.

I turn now to examine how the show people, animated and encouraged by their success in transforming their absence of place and their constructed otherness, transform the forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge about their schooling into a particular manifestation of Traveller education that reflects and suits their distinctive circumstances. Their calls for, and their success in obtaining, a separate school of their own constitutes a counter-nar-

rative that reverses ‘the rules of the game’ and a new terrain in educational provision. As I have emphasised throughout this thesis, this transformation is the response to generations of neglect and the result of years of energy and labour; it is therefore less teleological and triumphalist than conceived as the possibly temporary outcome of an ongoing struggle about identities and life chances. As de Certeau (1986) noted about the South American “*Indians*” in their resistance of the Spanish invasion:

*. . .if the survivors’ resistance has found political expression, it is because. . .their communities continued to return periodically to the home village, to claim their rights to the land and to maintain, through this collective alliance on a common soil, an anchorage in the particularity of a place.* (p. 229)

The fact that “*the survivors. . .continued to return periodically to the home village*” is a powerful metaphor for the multiple ways in which the show people have continually revisited their own inadequate educational experiences to ‘recharge the batteries’ of their efforts to create something new: a genuinely Australian version of Traveller education.

From that perspective, the show people’s efforts to transform forms of unproblematic knowledge about their schooling varied according to whether they believed that the Brisbane School of Distance Education program could be amended to accord with their developing expectations or that only fundamental structural change would meet those expectations – in short, whether ‘evolution’ or ‘revolution’ should be the basis of a transformative Traveller education for them.

In looking ahead, the show people sought to identify ways in which Traveller education could fit more and more easily into the spaces of their itinerancy, and consequently ways in which they could continue to turn those spaces into 'places' consumed and occupied by themselves. In doing so, they reflected their continuing awareness of the crucial importance of harnessing the outsideness and enhancing the creative understanding of educational providers, whose support they would continue to need if they were to succeed in their progressively more ambitious plans. It is in this respect that my interpretation of Traveller education for Queensland show people is not teleological: each 'settlement' is tentative and temporary, and gains can quickly become losses if the show people do not consciously safeguard their terrain.

In this account of the show people's transformation of forms of unproblematic knowledge I move from the 'evolutionary' to the 'revolutionary'. Some respondents concentrated on the structural basis of the program rather than its components. These speakers identified the program's association with the Queensland government as a major restriction on its future expansion. They speculated about the potential benefits of adding a national government dimension to the Traveller education available to the show children. For example, one parent said of her daughter, *"Maybe by the time she's ready to go [to school], it will be right throughout Australia, and that will be even better"* (Y1P1). Another parent elaborated this perception:

*What I thought was, we tend to work basically in the four states of Australia, which would be Queensland, the Northern Territory, Victoria and New South Wales. And basically, because the setup's been done with the [School of] Distance Education in Brisbane, . . . the kiddies still*

*do their work, [but] they don't do it as far as the program with the schools, the classrooms and so on in New South Wales and Victoria. If it was funded nationally, federally, it would be a much better idea, I believe. If it was possible to get a grant or something. Because it's very hard for one government to accept the responsibility, basically. (Y2P3)*

As the program developed, however, several stakeholders came to the belief that the show people's future educational experiences lay along a very different path: the establishment of a separate school for show children. A nascent indication of this thinking became evident in the first year of data gathering, in the fourth year of the program's operation, when a show person stated:

*When I think this program would go in leaps and bounds, what would help it, is to have a teacher who could travel with us. There was a situation for. . . thirty years on the showground, where a policeman travelled the circuit with us and stayed in motels in each town. And he was the p[ublic] r[elations] through the community **for** the showmen. And it was really great. Now **if** they had a teacher who could come and travel with us **for** this length **o**f time. . . because what we found the problem is, every time the children go into the next classroom, that whole first **day** is taken up just finding out **for** that new teacher where the kids are at. But **if** there was a teacher that could keep them in line and organised and know each town where they were at, it would be so [good], and they could work one on one every day with a different child. It would be such a bonus to the program; it would be excellent. (Y1P2)*

It is important to point out that the speaker was referring to a situation in which one or more teachers travelled full time or permanently with the show circuits, rather than returning to Brisbane after every second show as occurred at the time of her suggestion. At this early stage, this parent still thought in terms of this permanently travelling teacher or teachers as being part of Education Queensland:

*. . . maybe we could fund the money, maybe use certain parts of the money to have a teacher to travel. And as. . . one of the teachers suggested, . . . a big 'bus would be great that they could stack up the library books and just drive, and if they wanted to build a room in it, [a] self-contained room, they could camp in our area. . . . [Which] would cost them no rent or anything; it would cost them nothing once it was initiated, once it was there. And we might use it **for** three or **four** months of the year, and perhaps the Education Department could use it in other situations **for** the rest of the year. (Y1P2)*

As the show people's constructions of their future educational experiences developed over time, however, a distinct shift occurred away from this notion of sharing resources with Education Queensland to calls for specialised resources being allocated for the exclusive use of the show people. Another parent articulated the rationale underpinning this shift in mindset:

*We tried to do it where they were integrated, but we're a different system altogether. The distance. . . education. . . kids are there, but they're just there. . . . They're out a hundred k[ilometre]s on a property, and they come to town every so often, and they're contactable, and they're there. **Our** kids are completely a different system. So we can't take their rules and make them work **for** us. And we've done it **for** a few years, and*

*we've found it's just inhibiting us too much on what we can strive ~~for~~ and do. . . . And we are specialised, so therefore we should specialise on us.* (Y4P5)

This speaker's mobilisation of a discourse centred on being "*different*" and "*specialised*" again reflected the process whereby the show people's resistance of forms of unproblematic knowledge about their schooling shaded into transformation of those forms through the construction of the new terrain of Traveller education. That is, the interviewee's 'spealung position' was located in an awareness of the need to subvert "*their rules*", which they found "*just inhibiting us too much*", and create new rules of their own. As in the two previous sections of this chapter, part of that transformation was associated with engaging with educational policy makers' outsideness from, and developing creative understanding of, the show people's situation. Equally crucial to the process, however, was a confidence in establishing new rules and categories if the existing ones were inappropriate or deleterious. This confidence is central to the show people's construction of the counternarrative of Traveller education.

This assertion of a "*different*" and "*specialised*" status for the educational needs and aspirations of show children led, seemingly inexorably, to calls for the establishment of a separate school for such children. The same parent who articulated this status elaborated this call: "*We're talking about being a separate school. I think that being a separate school only means that we can specialise and concentrate on the needs of our children*" (Y4P5). In making this call, she emphasised that the school would not be restricted to children of members of the Showmen's Guild:

*...the itinerant children, there are a few [of them], and our system is open to them, even though it will be called "The Showmen's Guild of Austral[as]ia School" – it won't cut out any people. (Y4P5)*

Furthermore, another parent explained that, even though she also wanted a special education program for show children:

*...I don't mean we can't mix with other kids. We're not saying that. We don't think we should be all in a little thing with the kids. We need to learn on our own because we're different like that, [but we] can still play with all the other kids. They need that too. Still play with all the kids. (Y4P6)*

At about the same time, a member of the Showmen's Guild outlined a variation on this call for a government school for the show children:

*...in another twenty years' time, when the showmen's education program has its own school, and I'd like to see it one day become a private school in some sense. Not so much a public or a state school, but certainly one that might be based here [at the Guild's headquarters at Yatala, south of Brisbane], down the back or somewhere like that. It might have its own library, and all this type of thing. It's a pipe dream, but certainly it's a possibility one day. (Y4A1)*

In the event, after the data gathering phase of this research project had been completed, the show people lobbied the Howard Coalition federal government for the establishment of a separate school for show children. They proved adept at using the government's discourse of 'freedom of choice' in relation to education and at capitalising on the government's 'new schools' policy. At the time of writing, a school for show children has been set up with federal government approval and under the auspices of the Queensland state



government. One of the teachers involved with the Brisbane School of Distance Education program has been appointed as principal, and two teams of teachers travel along the circuits teaching the show children full time (Anonymous, 2000; Special Broadcasting Service, 2000).

De Certeau (1984) identified in strategies of marginalisation “*aspecific type of knowledge, one sustained and determined by the power to provide oneself with one’s own place*” (p. 36) and conversely by the power to deny such a knowledge to others. This section of the chapter has traced the show people’s determination “*to provide [themselves] with [their] own place*”, through the establishment of a separate school for their children. That determination has been fuelled by their resistance of the inadequate schooling options previously available to them and by their lobbying for and consumption of the Brisbane School of Distance Education program. That determination has been strengthened also by the show people’s success at having their ‘spealung positions’ on education recognised and valued by others, notably government officials, whose initial outsideness has been turned into creative understanding of the show people’s situation. These several currents of energy and activity have converged in the new school’s opening, which marks a ‘sea change’ in the institution of Australian Traveller education as a counternarrative to the show people’s educational marginalisation and resistance.

## **7.6 Review of the chapter**

This chapter has answered the third research question framing this thesis: “**How** do the show people transform their marginalising experiences and resistant practices?”. The posing of that question reflected an assumption

that, in addition to and beyond the show people's resistance of their marginalised situation arising from their itinerancy, their actions have resulted in fundamental changes to 'the rules of the game' governing their previous educational options and have succeeded in creating a new terrain of Australian Traveller education.

Conceptually the chapter was guided by acknowledging that de Certeau (1984) recognised the potential for resistance to lead to transformation of marginalisation, and by deploying Bakhtin's (1986a) notions of outsidedness and creative understanding. Specifically, I applied Bakhtin's explication of the integral links between outsidedness and creative understanding to my analysis of the words of home tutors and Brisbane School of Distance Education teachers in order to demonstrate the extent of the show people's success at enlisting those others in circulating new stories about the show people's lives and education. In doing so, I made the following specific points:

- The show people, through the home tutors and teachers, have transformed their ascribed absence of place into a place of their own and hence into a location of power by extending to those others their multiple experiences and understandings of 'home'.
- The show people, through the home tutors and teachers, have transformed the constructions of their otherness into a valuing of their difference by communicating to those others the positive valence of the term 'showies'.
- The show people have transformed forms of seemingly unproblematic knowledge about the appropriate forms and places of educating itinerant people by successfully lobbying for a separate school for show children.

This analysis suggests that, although such an outcome was neither inevitable nor permanent, the show people have succeeded in generating a

counternarrative to the traditional marginalisation and resistance of their identities and educational opportunities. From this perspective, the show people's transformative actions, 'spaces' that they turn into 'places' through their exploitation of outsideness and their facilitation of creative understanding, are a fundamental component of their 'learning on the run'.