

Jean David

WHAT A CIRQUE!

My general theory of reality.

**From Cirque du Soleil
to National brainstorming**



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QUEL CIRQUE!
Ma théorie générale de la réalité.

THE EARLY YEARS

“Truth must not be confined within us; it must be manifested in the world around us and actualized in reality.”

I was born in Quebec City, the fourth in a family of six children with five boys and the eldest a girl. My parents had to work hard to make ends meet. We led a simple life, content with the few things we had. All in all, life was beautiful. When I was six or seven years of age, life, people, and events seemed like a mystery to me. I would look through the living room window at the houses across the street and think: “Those people must be really intelligent.”

One morning, curiosity got the better of me, and I ventured across the street. I had a chat with them and found out they weren't different from me or the people I knew. Like many children, I wanted to understand everything. What was life about? Why were there subjects nobody mentioned? What were they? Why couldn't they be explained? I was sure it was possible. Life was full of wonder.

My childhood was calm and uneventful. One summer, I spent a few days with my godfather and godmother, Brian and H  l  ne Blais, in the village of Baie-Saint-Paul. Uncle Brian, an engineer, was working on the construction of the new hospital. The couple lived in a modest home near the pier. While I was there something wonderful happened: the circus came to town, pitching its tent a stone's throw from the house. What could be more thrilling for a little boy? A world of wonderment. In the eyes of an adult it was a simple enough occurrence, but for me, it would take on new meaning 20 years later.

When I was 14, as I walked to school through Limoilou, a working-class district in Quebec City, I looked at the apartment buildings along the way. The people in there must be geniuses, I thought. But what did geniuses look like? Would I recognize them if I saw them on the street. Like many of my mates, I was more interested in the schoolyard than in the classroom. Everything seemed more stimulating, concrete, and real outside with my friends. And I didn't take homework seriously. I had my own ideas about how I wanted to spend my time. My curiosity was insatiable.

And I was never really shy. When school let out, I sometimes wandered around the school basement, peering into the rooms to see what was going on. I saw lots of people talking things over and preparing for the next day. I tried to listen in. I wanted to be involved, to participate, and to make a contribution. It was like a game, combining daring and youthful determination. It was a challenge. Something was going on, and I wanted to be in on it.

A teacher told us that people use only 10% of their brain capacity. There must be lots of things to discover, I thought. Fantastic! Just think what we could do if we used

100%. My friends and I had a good time imagining all the fun we'd have: we'd become invisible, we'd read people's minds, and we'd talk to the animals.

Like most people, the teacher thought that as we used only 10% of our capacity, we could hardly imagine what human beings would be like if they used their maximum potential. It was only logical. We weren't intelligent enough to conceive of a truly intelligent person. As I was a teenager, I came up with an analogy: our brain is like a computer that is as big as the Empire State Building, but we're only using the basement.

I concluded that our understanding of human beings and society was based on a limited use of our intellectual capacity. No wonder there were so many problems in the world! I was convinced that the future would hold the answers to a multitude of questions. For me the future meant the year 2000!

When I was 17 years old, I studied Communications at Jonquière College. It was a remarkable if somewhat truncated year. One of our teachers Yves Doré really impressed us. It was an extraordinary learning experience. He taught us about Marshall McLuhan and his theory of the global village. He introduced us to a whole new world: the extensions of man, brain hemisphere specialization, mental imagery, initiation in the technique of collage, dissonance, redundancy, the notion of subjectivity ... At last, I'd found something stimulating, something that could really challenge me! In that brief period of time, for a variety of reasons, mainly due to my personality, I started to participate in student activities. I was chosen student representative on the department's educational committee.

At one of the committee meetings, the head of the department, singling out Yves Doré, admonished teachers to concentrate on the curriculum and make sure not to let students get them off topic. When we went to work in the media, he said, our future bosses certainly would not be brain surgeons or college professors and they would take a dim view of us if we seem smarter than they were. Worst still, he added, we would risk compromising the good name of the department and of the college. Imagine that! The department was in crisis, and I was fed up. Why should I attend classes? At best, I'd end up with a worthless diploma. So I quit before the end of the first year. I was a dropout and proud to be. Even today, I notice, the dropout rate is pretty high.

A few months after I left college, an extraordinary book entitled *Les ZooGep camp de concentrations* (Éditions Tribales, 1973) recounting the events that highlighted that year at college appeared. The author was none other than Yves Doré, who had left the department by then. The work was done in collaboration with illustrator Serge Bureau, a former student. An excerpt from the book reads as follows: "In my mind the disgust young people feel towards school has two main causes first the academic institutions are administered by administrators who administrate for the sake of administrating the administered and even that they do badly." (Cf. Dr Girouard, Cégep de Saint-Hyacinthe).

"The second cause is even more appalling. In the past 25 years, the West has undergone an important Mutation but few adults (not even teachers) are aware of it.

Today's schools were designed by Westerners of the old school (Mgr. Parent, Soeur Roquet). It's as if the schools are trying in vain to educate a generation of young people who, in fact, no longer exist. And the young people who do exist are forced to live in cages at the ZOO (ZooGONDAIRE, ZooGEP, ZooNIVERSITÉ) where their trainers reward them with diplomas for grimacing and carrying on like monkeys. I call this GENOCIDE."

Published 30 years ago, the book is still relevant. I recommend it to students, teachers, and administrators at every level of every educational system in the land. I never went back to school. For a long time I proudly kept the word "dropout" in the Academic Background section of my résumé. When I left college there were two things I was sure of: first, I loved communications and I had chosen the right career; second, I didn't know very much and I had a lot to learn.

By quitting school, I was refusing to play the role of an idiot that society wanted to assign me. I decided to do things my way. I went into business. Some friends and I founded MODUX Communications Inc., a small agency involved in advertising (to earn a living) and communications research (to learn about life).

And, oddly enough, I went into politics. When I was just a little kid, my paternal grandfather got a kick out of standing me up on the dining-room table and telling me to "make a speech." One day, you'll be Prime Minister, he said. With this early conditioning it's hardly surprising that I jumped at the chance to get into politics. I certainly wasn't bashful. I wasn't afraid to express my opinion. At 17, I was named the first chairman of the Quebec Liberal Party's youth commission. Robert Bourassa was the Liberal leader at the time. The winds of change were blowing through society, and the feeling was that everything was possible.

I loved the cut and thrust of political debate. Organizing meetings and participating in something grand was exhilarating. In those days, I was far more active at the grassroots level than in conference rooms or ministers' suites. In the 1973 election campaign, I served on the provincial speakers committee, a flying squad of speakers who undertook a variety of assignments.

Once I was addressing an audience of nearly a thousand people in Cabano, in the Bas-du-Fleuve region of Quebec. My job was to warm up the room for a Cabinet minister who was speaking next. My talk was supposed to last 20 minutes, but after only ten, I went blank. Worse still, I felt completely empty inside. It suddenly occurred to me that I had no idea what I was talking about. I was just regurgitating other people's ideas. So much for the presentation; so much for my political career! Within months I'd handed in my resignation, swearing that the next time I got into politics, I'd know what I was doing and why I was doing it. It was years before I could bring myself to speak in public again.

In those days, mass communications and new phenomena fascinated me. I was intrigued by anything to do with mental pictures. I couldn't learn enough about these topics. I was a voracious reader; I consumed everything I could lay my hands on. A recent

discovery that nearly caused a revolution among thinkers fired my imagination. It concerned the idea that the hemispheres of the brain are specialized for the performance of different tasks. The brain is divided into two hemispheres popularly known as the left brain and the right brain. According to the theory, the left brain is rational and logical; it thinks in concepts; it is objective. The right brain is intuitive and emotional; it thinks in images; it is subjective.

If an object is viewed by the two hemispheres, you could say that the right brain, viewing it from the inside, perceives a sphere; the left brain, viewing it from the outside, perceives a cube. Similarly, the left brain perceives time as past, present, and future while the right brain perceives it as infinite, omnipresent, even compressed. This is a simple way of presenting an extremely complex process.

Déjà vu, the feeling of having already experienced the present moment or situation, also captured my attention. Every time I had this feeling a multitude of questions arose. What did it mean? I often dismissed it as a fragment of a dream. And I found this somewhat disconcerting. I was searching for a meaning, some association. What consequences could it have? But then, the feeling would fade away, and nothing but a vague impression remained. I was left wanting more.

Déjà vu loomed large in my mind. The feeling occurred frequently. Each time, the same questions and doubts resurfaced. It was troubling. But then, I told myself that, after all, I was young and a bit of a dreamer. Since I was preoccupied with déjà vu, it was only natural that I experienced the feeling more and more. Finally I grew tired of wrestling with unanswerable questions. They were all very interesting, but they didn't lead anywhere.

Since I hadn't found a rational explanation of déjà vu, I tried to come up with my own. I concluded that déjà vu is nothing more than "psychic fart." Just as our digestive system occasionally gives rise to flatulence, the brain too gives rise to psychic flatulence. As strange as it may seem, once I came up with the idea, my concerns vanished. Better still, so did déjà vu ... I learned it was possible to eliminate false problems.

At 20 years of age, I still couldn't understand why no one could explain how the brain functioned and our thought process worked. It would make a wonderful theme for a TV series: *The Brain Connection!* I thought it odd how this fundamental aspect of human beings was shrouded in silence, treated as if it were taboo. Silence allowed every sort of belief to exist. I understood that our society and the world in general were out of whack, governed by arbitrary notions mainly to do with the world economic order and with other factors in which I had no confidence.

I had a funny feeling that the human species had somehow gone astray. It seemed really odd to find myself in a world that was so profoundly lost. How could you know where you're going when you don't know where you come from? There had to be some explanation! Some religions and belief systems taught us to abandon all attempt to

understand. This didn't satisfy me. We have a head on our shoulders. So why not use it to understand what's going on?

I must have been 21 or 22 years old when it first occurred to me that truth must not be confined within us; it must be manifested in the world around us and actualized in reality. This is a principle that I have lived by.

What do you believe in?

THE APPOINTMENT

*“I had just turned the big 30 and
I thought it was about time
I did something with my life...”*

1982. I was working as an account executive for a Quebec advertising firm when I got a call from an old pal Robert Lagueux. He headed the High Heels Club, a non-profit troupe that did street theater on stilts. His group was putting on a festival of street performers in picturesque Baie-Saint-Paul, a charming little town about 60 kilometers from Quebec City and he wanted me to lend a hand. The event had drawn performers from around the world: about fifty of them in all. In between contracts, they were only too glad to earn a few bucks, especially since they could get together and renew old acquaintances. The festival offered free outdoor shows, public workshops on circus arts, as well as parades and indoor shows.

As it happened, my three-week vacation coincided with the festival: the Fête foraine de Baie-Saint-Paul. As I also had some organization and logistics experience, I accepted his invitation. So there I was production manager of the event. The work was straight forward enough; it was even fun. I had to see everything ran smoothly, that the artists, technicians, stages and public showed up at the right place and the right time. But participating in a big event takes discipline and that isn't exactly the street performers' forte—they're used to being their own bosses, plying their skills on busy street corners all over the world—they needed someone to instill a little structure and organization. As everyone was looking forward to having a good time, my little job was very pleasant.

Mainly young street performers, the festival organizers had a hard time cobbling together an operating budget. For the most part the group consisted of people without a steady job, dropouts, the unemployed, occasional welfare recipients—in short, self-employed workers with little or no credit history. Barely two days after I arrived, the team asked me to make a little contribution to the cause. So I found myself at the bank co-signing a \$5,000 loan! There were a few financial glitches, but the event was a huge success because it was entertaining, fun and original.

The highlight of the first edition of the entertainers' festival was the closing show. It was probably the precursor of the Cirque du Soleil. It was the first time we presented dozens of street artists, buskers and clowns. The result was an unforgettable finale. I acted as floor manager backstage with the artists. The excitement, the energy, the power and intensity generated by the artists together on one big stage created an electricity that was communicated to the audience. Little did we realize what impact that evening would have one day.

The Fête foraine de Baie-Saint-Paul was repeated the following two years. I collaborated on the second edition. The work and the conditions were pretty well the same. But this time the festival drew even more street performers and a larger audience. It was an even bigger hit, and there were no financial woes. The Fête foraine de Baie-Saint-Paul launched the young theater troupe on stilts; it opened the door to a world of possibilities and adventure. In 1984, the event served as a reference for an important contract that launched the Cirque du Soleil.

That year, the Quebec government wanted to commemorate the 450th anniversary of the arrival in Canada of Jacques Cartier, the first French citizen to set foot on North American soil. The government created the Commissariat général aux célébrations 1534-1984, an organization charged with putting on celebrations, and gave it a budget of about \$12 million. Then Quebec show producers were invited to submit projects. The High Heels Club headed by Guy Laliberté and Robert Lagueux, jumped at the opportunity and submitted a project that was quite bold for the time. Our group took the Fête foraine model and turned it into a traveling show. We planned to stage the event in at least 11 towns around Quebec over a three-month period. For each town, we planned an organization (local jobs) in which we invited artists and crafts persons to take part. As much as possible, we integrated everything into the community.

I attended some of the meetings to prepare the project. Many people took a dim view of street performers. Gilles Loiselle, the head of the Commissariat général, was sympathetic to our project, but a bunch of buskers, clowns, jugglers, and fire-eaters hardly met the criteria of official culture. At the Quebec Cultural Affairs ministry, with Clément Richard at the helm, our stock wasn't very high. And provincial coffers offered no subsidies for circuses, no money for the performers. Laliberté and Lagueux battled long and hard to convince the authorities they could trust a band of longhaired street performers, who were unemployed, with no official status, and worse still very young. Fortunately, Quebec prime minister René Lévesque took up our cause with the skeptics. He considered our proposal innovative and his interest never wavered. It's thanks to his intervention that the project finally took shape.

At the time, I was self-employed, offering my services as a communications freelancer. I also did volunteer work in community radio. I was having fun. The previous fall, I had traveled to Paris with the Office franco-québécois pour la jeunesse for a three-week workshop on French advertising. And I was amazed at what I learned. Of course, the big French agencies hosting us had spared no effort to impress their North American cousins. That fall, when I returned to Quebec, it was quite a letdown to find myself operating

within the constraints of the advertising agency. I decided to drop everything. All too often, my work as an advertising executive had led me into contradictions, choosing between what clients wanted me to do and what I believed should be done; I'd had enough.

In the spring of 1984, when the project got government approval, Guy Laliberté and Robert Lagueux offered to take me on as tour manager. I had just turned the big 30 and I thought it was about time I did something with my life... At any rate, the project was exciting and it was a magnificent opportunity to do something that had never been done. So, I accepted the offer. But, no sooner was I hired than I got fired! I was the first employee to get the sack at Cirque du Soleil.

The contract that I signed in April said I was supposed to start in June. Meanwhile, my friends hired Guy St-Amour, a "brilliant young" technical operations manager with vast event production experience. His first move was to refuse to work with me. He didn't know me, he'd never even set eyes on me, but he convinced my "friends" that I lacked the experience for an event of this scope. At any rate, the work called for two people. And he just happened to know a couple of excellent stage managers and he preferred to work with them; my bosses "agreed."

One morning, Guy Laliberté summoned me to his office and told me that he'd given the new technical director full authority. The last thing my "friends" wanted to do was to upset him. And just like that, they thanked me for my services. I was stunned, devastated. I'd been looking forward to the adventure, getting involved, spending a few months on the road with new friends. Besides, I had just declined a speaking engagement at the 3rd Festival de la radio FM, in La Rochelle, France. But their decision was final; there was no appeal. So, there I was with my first severance pay. At least it allowed me to fly to France just in time to give my talk.

A few weeks later, when I got back from Europe, Robert Lagueux contacted me to let me know that things weren't going well. During Cirque du Soleil's rehearsals in Sainte-Thérèse, a town north of Montreal, a violent storm had severely damaged the big top. The weight of the accumulated water had bent the masts, rendering the whole installation unusable. Nevertheless, the tour had got underway as scheduled in Gaspé. The show was performed in an improvised venue, a tent that the troupe had borrowed from the federal government, much to the displeasure of provincial government representatives.

Lodging and logistics were a nightmare. A revolt was brewing in the troupe. To make matters worse, the stage managers hired to replace me had jumped ship during the night and St-Amour had fallen ill. Not a pretty picture! Robert pleaded with me to come back. They would rehire me on the spot. But I set my conditions: clear contract terms, a pay raise; I left nothing out. I was rehired; what's more, I had carte blanche. The situation was completely reversed; it was even more than I had expected.

A few days later, I flew from Quebec City to Baie-Comeau, the next stop on the tour. My "mandate" mainly consisted of seeing that the organization respected its engagements to

the government. Failure to do so would render the contract null and void and the entire operation would be at risk. From a technical standpoint, the shipyard in Rimouski manufacturing new masts for us promised they'd be ready when we visited the town three weeks later. Until we could use our big top again, we'd have to make do with whatever arenas we could rent. The situation was far from ideal, but, at least, we'd find shelter and the show could go on.

Clearly, there was a distinct lack of organization! I had to deal with strong willed personalities from diverse backgrounds. There were egos as huge as a big-top. To find out what was going on and get to know the employees, I interviewed every one of them. I assessed their experience, the skills they brought to the table, their job description. Above all, I listened to them. I picked their brains to find what was wrong and what should be done immediately to make things better.

After a few days, I had met all 40 members of the little company, and I had a good idea what had to be done. The employees needed support and reassurance in carrying out their tasks. Things needed to be clarified for everyone. Someone had to take charge of the operation. I scrutinized the job descriptions and proposed some team changes. There followed a brief period of considerable reflection!

The troupe was drawn from many nationalities. Inevitably, there were significant cultural differences among the group's leadership. Soon their diametrically opposed points of view and widely differing attitudes emerged about some issues: after all, street performers march to the beat of their own drum. But one thing was crystal clear: this youthful management team needed to do the job as administrators and entrepreneurs. We had commitments: nothing and nobody in the world could stand in the way.

Rimouski—On the pier, a significant event in Cirque du Soleil's first tour occurred. The replacement masts were delivered. Compared with the original delicate Italian structures, which had collapsed, these were enormous. The whole technical team was present. The new masts were placed on the ground and the canvas of the big top was in position. Everything was ready. We were about to proceed when our assembly foreman, Swiss big-top expert Gérard Bétant brought things to a halt. The new structure was too heavy, he claimed. It was a little weak; it could collapse. People could get hurt. So here was the expert in charge of assembling the big top suddenly refusing to do it.

But the shipyard engineer from Québec, standing beside him, would have none of it. He scoffed at the danger. The new structure would be ten times as solid as the original masts, he said. But the technicians were nervous. You could see the tension etched on their faces. After all, they had hoisted the tent only once since the tour began and that had been a fiasco. And the expert we'd hired didn't want anything to do with the new masts. Then technical director Guy St-Amour rushed in, declaring that he sided with the assembly foreman. He and his men wouldn't touch the structure. We had to find an alternative—some arena or other. Things were getting worse by the minute! The engineer from Quebec couldn't believe it; neither could I. St-Amour vanished as quickly as he'd come!

The poor chap had stomach cramps and had to go and rest in his room, leaving me to solve the problem. Guy Laliberté was there and, like me, he seemed not a little upset.

We had a commitment with the government and the big top represented a substantial portion of our budget. Not being able to use the big top for shows would be an obstacle that could endanger subsequent contract payments. Failure was not an option. So, I put my faith in the engineer. After all, he was the expert who had built the masts. I told Gérard Bétant in front of everyone that he was relieved of his functions, that I no longer needed him and I asked him to leave the premises! I also simply told the others I was going to see to it personally that the big top was assembled and that to do so, I just needed a few volunteers. No more bickering! Seeing my attitude, the whole group backed me and with the engineer advising us, we got down to work. We toiled away to the end of the day and enjoyed every minute of it. Finally the big top was up, magnificent, incredibly strong and solid, good for the whole tour.

Early in the evening, when St-Amour showed up, his stomach did back flips when he saw we'd mounted the big top. Like everyone else, he could see how robust the installation was, so he agreed to work on it. A little later, government representatives dropped by and were delighted to see that the masts had been delivered on time. The big top was in place and everything was running smoothly. The Cirque du Soleil project was finally shaping up as planned, and the first show under the big tent had a magical effect on the whole company. The objective had been fulfilled. The team spirit was extraordinary and everything was running like a charm! Ex-Tent Master Gérard Bétant was reassigned: as a chief usher, he was perfect...

Now, we could all contribute to the best of our abilities and I could sense a feeling of camaraderie infusing the team. Assembling and dismounting the tent was still a mighty task, but our pride and sense of accomplishment more than compensated for our efforts. As the tour traveled from town to town things got better and better. The whole operation was a huge success. I felt my job was done and I actually thought about leaving the troupe then. We were performing before sold-out audiences explained in part by the ticket prices: \$2 for adults and \$1 for children. The show met with unanimous audience approval; the public loved it. After every performance, many spectators were so moved by the experience that they were crying as they left the big top.

One of the significant aspects of the tour was the media response. We were met with enormous acclaim in the press. The show and the entire operation earned full-page reports in the big dailies and wide coverage in the electronic media. The media even quoted spectators who said that they were delighted to see that the government was finally investing their money wisely. What more could we ask for? The first tour was a real market study. No doubt about it, there was a demand for the product. And the extremely positive results encouraged us to pursue the adventure and define new objectives. I agreed to get even more involved in the project. It was the start of a new career!

Are you looking for new challenges?

WHAT! NO ANIMALS!

“... better to hire 20 young Canadian acrobats than four American elephants;”

Cirque du Soleil is an animal free circus. In fact, this is one of the keys to its success. But, it wasn't really the result of a decision we made. It was a natural outgrowth of who we were. After all, Cirque began as a group of street performers: acrobats, stilt walkers, fire eaters, clowns. And none of them used animals. The absence of animal acts in Cirque was a matter of artistic preference.

In the early 1980s, Canada had no real circus tradition to speak of. Sure, traveling circuses with animal acts crisscrossed the country, but they were American-owned. Our troupe consisted of street performers, not traditional circus artists. Animals didn't enter the picture. At first, we didn't anticipate the impact a circus without animals would have. Later on, we found out!

In early 1985, we took the Cirque to Ontario. We needed to extend our season, and the rich, heavily populated neighboring province seemed an ideal destination. So, that summer, we penetrated an English-language market for the first time. In a way we didn't know what we were getting into. It was uncharted territory. None of us had any experience working with the Ontario market. To facilitate communications and media relations, we billed ourselves as “Sun Circus.” People needed to understand who we were and what we offered.

I was invited to Toronto for an interview on a nationwide radio program on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. My English was none too good, but my sense of humor was as keen as ever. The host started off the segment by asking me point blank why the show didn't have any animal acts. Any circus worthy of the name, he insisted, featured animals. I couldn't understand why it seemed to be an issue. To me, it seemed perfectly natural that we didn't have animals. His line of questioning floored me. When I had got over the surprise, my answer was brief, if somewhat colorful. I told him with a straight face that we'd tried to do a number with beavers, our national symbol. Unfortunately, our wooden set didn't survive the test. It took only three shows for the little critters to gnaw their way through the ring.

I added that we'd also intended to arrive in the city with a big parade featuring caribou and polar bears. But we ran into logistical problems. The police turned us down at the last minute. The interviewer wondered whether I was pulling his leg... I reminded him that Canada didn't have a circus tradition, so there was no tradition to respect... And finally I said that we thought it was better to hire 20 young Canadian acrobats than four American elephants; artists cost less to feed! He finally understood! I left the interview proud as a peacock!

Our first entry into the English-language market was a disaster. Let's face it we bombed. It was one of the worst performances in our history! That year more people requested refunds than ever before. In Toronto, only 20 minutes into the show customers would begin storming out of the big top dragging their children in tears and demanding their money back. It was perfectly understandable: "The Cirque du Soleil isn't a circus," they complained, "Where are the animals?" For them, the word "circus" had a very precise meaning, perhaps too precise. It meant a traditional traveling show with animals, cotton candy, popcorn, and children's laughter. But we'd understood too late. Playing in Ottawa, Toronto and Niagara Falls, we were \$750,000 CA in the red. A marketing fiasco that threatened to bury us. Some lesson!

Our analysis of the situation inevitably led us to the most important decision we ever made: never translate the name Cirque du Soleil. Leave well enough alone. Our French name, reflecting our origins and our identity, was our trademark. We didn't realize at the time, but the decision would define our audience and would be a constant catalyst to our growth.

As early as the following year, after merely placing inserts with our French name in English-Canadian newspapers, we discovered the demographic attracted by the exoticism of the message. Most of the people were women, 60% of whom were aged 24 to 45. They had a higher than average level of education, and not surprisingly, a higher family income. Quite simply, they were the arts community clientele. Everywhere we performed from 1984 to 1999, our target public was the same. You'd think we'd been cherry-picking our customers at the big top gate. The surveys we carried out in every town confirmed these characteristics.

And wherever we went, the animal issue came up, particularly during our first years on American soil. In 1988, at a premiere in the Los Angeles area, all of a sudden there were 50 demonstrators brandishing posters and chanting slogans as the guests entered the big top. At first, we were taken aback. What in the world was happening! Then, it dawned on us, they were animal-rights advocates shouting words of encouragement to our customers: "Cirque du Soleil is a good circus; it doesn't use animals; you've made the right choice." We could hardly have asked for more.

The same reaction spread across the United States. In Washington, Seattle, and Chicago, American animal-rights groups cited us as a role model, in contrast to traditional circuses. They handed out pamphlets to patrons at these shows, urging people to support us. A number of North American towns banned shows with animal acts. Our name came up in the debates that swirled around the topic. After a few years, we realized that we could never use an animal in our shows, not even a rat! Our trademark would forever bear the label "*ANIMAL FREE*."

Without realizing it, we'd made a decision with social implications, responding to a growing preoccupation among our clientele. But, out of respect for our colleagues in traditional circuses, we turned down invitations to join animal-rights organizations. We were in showbiz, not politics! Traditional circuses appeal mostly to children. Cirque du

Soleil, on the other hand, drew largely an adult clientele despite repeated efforts to set a family-friendly pricing policy. In American markets such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, adults made up to 95% of our audiences; children (aged 12 or less), 5%. Children brought their parents to traditional circuses with animals. Parents tried to persuade their children to go to our circus and ended up calling a babysitter so they could enjoy an extraordinary night out.

What's your favorite animal!

GOING BEYOND YOURSELF

“...We had little management experience, but the clowns, tumblers, jugglers, musicians and contortionists were our models and points of reference”

As our incredible adventure got under way, the spectators were delighted and we were very proud of our show. The excellence and commitment of the artists motivated all of us: technicians and management alike. The performers were going all out on stage and we felt that, in the office and backstage, we had to step up to the plate and match their effort. We had to be as good as they were for the project to excel. We had little management experience, but the example set by our troupe of clowns, tumblers, jugglers, contortionists and musicians was truly inspirational.

The feeling of confidence and teamwork was organic to the group, which was infused with incredible energy. We were in the middle of a fireball of interaction and discussion, a constant sharing of ideas. Everyone was welcome to give an opinion about any aspect of the project: the artistic and technical sides, logistics, communications, marketing, as well as public and administrative services. It was give and take. Everyone was free to make suggestions; none of us had a lock on the truth. There was a real effort to reach consensus; no one had the right to impose his or her views. Common sense prevailed. Excellence came from within. Shaped by camaraderie, confidence and solidarity, the approach fostered a group dynamic that gave the team tremendous drive and attracted wide appeal with the public and suppliers.

The youthful members of Cirque du Soleil's original team had several traits in common. We were completely open and had nothing to lose. Our obligations and personal responsibilities were minimal. “Good for nothing but ready to take on anything,” as the song goes. We had the sense that together we were doing something that had never been done. We were driven by a keen sense of belonging coupled with a passion and determination to accomplish the tasks at hand. The feeling of openness we shared translated into a willingness to invest ourselves fully. We poured our time and energy,

gave both body and soul to our enterprise and to the public. Our group was united, strong, colorful, even the stuff of cartoons.

At the time, arts and culture had long been considered a weak, disorganized sector too often governed by emotion. Words like financial performance, surplus, return and investment were almost totally absent from the basic vocabulary of people in the milieu. We were making a naïve attempt to ally the performance arts and business as if no one had ever tried to do so before. We were convinced that the two spheres were compatible and we fully intended to prove it. It was possible to achieve profitability and financial performance in the cultural arena. We just had to work a little harder than everyone else to prove it.

We were hungry to conquer new markets, to reinvent ourselves. We had the capacity to take on new challenges and we weren't afraid to try. That's what I call the art of going beyond yourself. It became a game we played on the stage, in the office, on the site and even in management meetings. We had the deep conviction that we were taking part in something bigger than us, something extraordinary, hard to define, hard to explain. We combined an entrepreneurial spirit with a warrior's soul.

We were brimming with ambition. We constantly strived to do better. Combining rigor with determination, we doubled our sales figures year after year. Our performances were exhilarating. We were sailing on a sea of passion, riding the winds of success. Hard as we tried to make medium- and long-term forecasts, none of our three- or five-year plans stood up. Every six months, we had to reassess the way we did things, reevaluate our teams and our budgets. Rapid and constant growth became one of the biggest problems confronting the company every day. It was hell!

With everything moving so fast, the organization was under constant pressure. Far from discouraging us, the rapid developments stimulated and excited us. We were forced to change because the environment was shifting and the parameters we had set no longer existed. We struggled to keep up with events; we were obliged to adjust. I must admit that we soon developed a taste for the hectic pace; growth was like a drug for us. Our greatest satisfaction came from getting optimal results: drawing bigger audiences at each show, every day and in every town, penetrating new markets and conquering new territories.

Of course, rapid growth took a toll on the employees. It spoiled them. At the same time, it was a painful learning experience, forcing us to constantly reevaluate ourselves. The need to constantly improve our performance also meant having less and less room for error: mistakes had their consequences. At the same time, rapid growth encouraged humility. Success didn't depend on one person; everyone was involved: audiences, employees, artists, technicians, management and associates. Humility encouraged us to be tolerant toward others and open to the unknown.

I well remember how I felt driven to become more professional, less of a generalist, more specialized and responsible: a daunting challenge! For the early tours, I performed a number of functions. Then, from one year to the next, I had fewer tasks, but my

responsibilities grew and with them came added stress. For my co-workers and me, constant growth provided the most intense, difficult but also creative of learning experiences.

Do you have the guts?

HEADS OR TAILS

“Our head told us to drop the city from our tour plan but our heart told us to keep it.”

Circumstances led Cirque du Soleil to set up its first headquarters in Quebec City. The team had been based in Baie-Saint-Paul, but when we got our first contract in 1984, Quebec City became a more strategic location for setting up production and managing relations with the government. Cirque du Soleil then moved to Montreal in 1985.

Quebec City played a key role in Cirque’s development. We achieved our first success in the town where we received the constant support of the media, the spectators and the public in general. But, as we grew and North America opened up for us, Quebec City soon became our smallest market and very early in the 1990s, it was no longer a profitable destination. Even playing to sold-out audiences, we lost money there. Production costs when measured against the maximum number of performances the population basin would allow, ticket prices and taxes made the town economically unsound.

Cirque management often debated the viability of playing in Quebec City. Our heads told us to drop the city from our tour plan, but our hearts told us to keep it. I listened to my heart. Having been present in every stage of the organization’s development, I thought it important to make the effort and perform there.

In a way, the city represented Quebec taxpayers to whom we were indebted. One day, in a tour planning session, the debate about retaining Quebec City raged once more. After agonizing over the pros and cons, we had to make a decision. Both camps were digging in their heels, so the owners, Daniel Gauthier and Guy Laliberté, decided to settle the issue by a coin toss (heads or tails). And that’s how Quebec City became a tour fixture. Unless someone someday decides otherwise.

What would you have done in our place?

O CANADA!

“When you pee in Lake Superior, the water rises in San Francisco.”

In 1985, the Ontario fiasco left us over \$750,000 CA in debt. Technically we were nearly bankrupt. We asked Claude Castonguay, then a Canadian insurance company CEO, to help get us back in gear. The previous summer I had run into him at our Quebec City show. He was looking for tickets, but the show was sold out. I gave him courtesy tickets in the front row of the big top and a tour of our humble facilities.

In the weeks that followed, he sent me a thank-you letter, offering me his support. ... It was far from a hollow offer. In fact, he and his marketing vice-president, Pierre Melançon, helped us devise a sponsorship plan, injecting a little more rigor and professionalism into our business. Claude Castonguay also signed a letter addressed to our creditors and the Montreal business community, vaunting the merits of our project and dynamic young team. The object was twofold: to win people’s trust and gain time. Mission accomplished!

In a matter of weeks, we were awarded an important Canadian government contract that took us to Vancouver. Our show opened the Canada Pavilion at Expo 86. Our team also acted as host for a month. Meanwhile, we took part in the Vancouver International Children’s Festival. Both operations were a success, enabling us to get the Canadian tour off to a flying start.

My analysis of our Ontario setback revealed that our success in Quebec in 1984 and 1985 had no impact whatsoever in the English-Canadian market. I learned what everyone around me already knew: Canada is divided into two worlds: one Francophone and the other Anglophone. There are two separate communications network and little crossover between them. Our Quebec triumph failed to resonate in the English-Canadian media. In a way, we were total strangers in our own country. But success in Vancouver meant scoring points in Toronto.

In communications, I swear by the principle “When you pee in Lake Superior, the water rises in San Francisco.” An action in one place may have consequences elsewhere... You’ve probably guessed! I had the chance to confirm the theory that year: our success in Vancouver resonated throughout English-Canada, especially in Toronto. A few months later, Cirque du Soleil’s excellent performances in that metropolis completely eliminated the losses we had incurred the previous year. Still, nothing had a bigger effect in Canada than the success we registered in the US. The exchange rate, the population density, and climate all have a negative impact on the Canadian market. As a result, we have a minimal “sea-to-shining-sea” presence in Canada.

Are you familiar with the expression “who says what to whom, by what means and to what effect”?

THE ART OF RECRUITING

“... a work environment that encouraged and rewarded individual expression and initiative by every member of the team.”

Like any good manager, I valued the people I worked with, particularly those under my direction. I loved what I was doing and, to maintain the right atmosphere, I surrounded myself with people who shared my passion. As in most organizations, the jobs were demanding. Expectations were high, so when the time came to form teams, we needed individuals we could count on.

Indeed, the daily workload and multitude of tasks to be performed obliged us to be open, and highly focused. Often, the members of your team made the difference in the quality of work that you could do. I set simple hiring criteria: above all, I wanted people who were autonomous, proactive, and creative. I encouraged them not only to identify the problems but also to find solutions.

This brings to mind confrontations I had with Human Resources: some of them disagreed with my opinions and my decisions. I believed that will and determination displayed by candidates in their interviews were much more important criteria than their current skill level or previous experience. I wasn't too shy to step up and declare that I was willing to accept responsibility for the consequences of my decisions. Time and events proved me right. Most of my staff became indispensable to the organization. They set standards for excellence in their sector.

I was proud of my employees and associates. Together, we made a formidable team. Our strategic position in the company constantly forced us to seek fresh ways of doing things. Our approach to planning led to success. Many times, we served as a model for other departments. And I welcomed the situation. At the office, I always emphasized the organizational climate. I long felt that my primary role was to foster a work environment that encouraged and rewarded individual expression and initiative by every member of the team. A poor atmosphere makes people uncomfortable. So, it's a manager's responsibility to maintain the right environment.

What environment do you like to work in?

STARTING AT THE TOP

“Are you real?”

We entered the American market, starting at the top: HOLLYWOOD. The Quebec delegation in Los Angeles helped us get in touch with Robert Fitzpatrick, the founder and

director of the Los Angeles Festival. An outgrowth of the Olympic Games, this arts festival saw the light of day in 1984 but was not repeated. Then, at the request of Mayor Tom Bradley, a group of promoters launched it again in 1987. It was a somewhat elitist event with great works, big companies and famous names... Festival directors were on the lookout for a show with a little more popular appeal. Not surprisingly, our exotic, and novel presentation appealed to them. Thus we quickly reached an agreement that involved considerable risk for us.

At the time, the troupe numbered over 80 people and had to transport hundreds of tons of equipment. It was an enormous operation and the Los Angeles Festival did not want to foot the bill. Festival officials thought that the event was too risky for their young organization. If our show failed, the consequences would have a disastrous impact on their operating budget and their reputation in the American entertainment industry.

We struck a deal: the festival didn't produce our show; it assumed no financial risk; we shouldered the risks. But we did get some advantages: the festival included us in their programming, and its advertising campaign supported our ticket sales. Our show enjoyed the same benefits as the other shows for which the festival actually assumed production costs. And even better, we were on the front page of the festival program, a million copies of which were distributed in the Los Angeles Times. What a coup!

Finally, the key element that convinced us the risk was worth taking was that we had a very favorable place in the schedule... Our show would kick off the festival. Much to our surprise, the announcement of the agreement got a cold reception in Hollywood. Many media outlets and critics from the arts world castigated the organizers for opening the festival with a "circus." What was a circus doing in such a major event? Criticism was heaped on the festival. Rumor had it on opening night that the cultural elite would be lying in wait for us under the big top in the industrial quarter of Little Tokyo. The outlook was decidedly grim. The media had no idea who we were. But they would soon find out.

During the months that preceded the event, we set the stage for our arrival in Los Angeles. My first working visit was also my first trip to California. Everything about the city impressed me; I'd never seen anything like it. But I was a little concerned. Los Angeles is a huge city and we had to market our show, work out partnership deals with the media, hire a PR firm, see to a thousand and one details, and, above all, create the event.

The first time I met people in Hollywood, I asked them, "Are you real?" touching them on the shoulder to make sure. They looked at me funny. It was hard to tell fact from fiction in the film capital, I explained. I wondered if the people were real or merely extras in a big-budget film. I was enjoying myself...

The same week, we set up our first meeting with the local public relations agency recommended by the festival operators. It was a highly experienced firm with a long list of show business clients and contacts. But they left us cooling our heels in the conference room for a good twenty minutes. Our appointment was scheduled for 4:00 p.m. and it was

4:20. I couldn't understand what was happening. It was a crucial meeting but the head of the agency hadn't showed up yet.

Spontaneously, I stormed out of the conference room overlooking the main work area where a dozen people were toiling away. And I bellowed, "*Hello! I'm the client, I'm the client and I'm waiting. Hello!*" In a matter of 30 seconds, the boss came racing down the hall; the staff was aghast. There was a crazy client in the conference room. I was the client.

I informed the gentleman that I was just as busy as he was, that I had no time to lose and that as a client, I had a right to insist that our meetings start on time. Finally, we all got down to work. The gentleman explained how complicated things were in Hollywood: the media had more cover stories than they could handle, nobody had heard of us, or our *circus*, we had to be patient and, above all, not expect too much. They'd do what they could to help us. Very encouraging wasn't it? Our relationship with the man and his firm was short-lived.

The run-up to opening night was a real challenge. We lacked notoriety. In fact, to the people we met, we were complete strangers. We also knew zilch about Hollywood culture and had to bust our butts to get results and a little attention. Of course, some people did what they could to help us. For the premiere, only about 5,000 of the more than 55,000 tickets available were sold though we practically gave the tickets away: \$15 for adults. The company had poured everything into its first American operation and we didn't have enough money left to pay for the gas to drive back to Montreal. We had to lay everything on the line.

The troupe was under enormous stress. Despite that, our spirits were high. We had unshakable faith in our artists and the show. Our advertising used our French name, *Cirque du Soleil*, accompanied by the slogan "*We reinvent the circus.*" People needed to know what we had to offer. Some observers considered the slogan pretentious, but I thought it reflected who we were.

Opening night would change our lives. The response by the press and the public provoked a media frenzy. The next day, the headlines read "There's a festival in the festival." Also, a lengthy debate began: Was it really a circus? Critics and the cultural vultures had been looking forward to lambasting us, but they were so enchanted by what they saw that they considered our show the only one in the festival worth seeing. A complete reversal of the situation. There was widespread astonishment. Many observers wondered what part of the United States we were from. We must be American! They're from Canada? Quebec? You're kidding!

We sold out in less than a week. The company had to erect a huge fence around the site and set up valet parking. I had never seen so many limousines in my life. Something incredible was happening in Hollywood and in our organization. It was almost overwhelming.

Within hours of the first press reviews, dozens of producers, managers, agents and sales persons of all sorts showed up. Americans, Israelis, Germans, Japanese, Arabs—they all wanted to see us to negotiate, talk, buy the company, rent our services, produce us, represent us, film us, finance us, assist us, advise us...

We had to stay calm and keep our feet on the ground. It was all so tempting, so very tempting. Finally, we decided that the priority was to keep expanding our market share in the US and building our distribution network. And for all the people who wanted to do business with us, we had a word of advice: "Take a number and wait your turn."

Our principal sponsor, Canadian Airlines International Ltd., (CAI was a relative unknown in the market at the time), started getting hundreds of calls to its Los Angeles office. Their switchboard was flooded. CAI management couldn't believe it: every travel agent in the city suddenly wanted to talk to them. People weren't calling for plane tickets; they wanted tickets for the CAI *circus*... The airline even ended up selling the callers plane tickets!

Our festival contract stipulated that the show couldn't stay in Los Angeles and we couldn't hold over. We'd have to leave when the scheduled performances were over and then return. As the festival management had refused to share the financial risk for our show, it couldn't share in the profits generated by our success. They rued their decision; what seemed like a wise position a few weeks ago had suddenly turned into a tremendous business opportunity lost. Oh well, that's life. After a brief stay in San Diego, we returned to the Los Angeles area, this time setting up on Santa Monica Pier. It was the start of a long and remarkable relationship. America was ours!

What would you say about packing your bags?

PERSUASION

"We were candy for the media: we offered them youth, fashion, performance, logistics, business, creativity a touch of the avant-garde, and exoticism."

Cirque du Soleil mastered the art of information control or, if you like, public communications. Media relations played a pivotal role in our company's success. Above all, much like publicity it helped boost ticket sales. Media relations directly affected everything written or said about our shows and organization.

For over 50% of the clientele, the rumor mill and word of mouth were the most important factors in drawing their attention to our product. Media relations fed the rumor mill. It was people's perceptions of the company that mattered. I was so conscious of this that in

the souvenir program for the 1985 tour, I included a quotation by Laurence J. Peter: “Competence, like truth, beauty, and contact lenses, are in the eye of the beholder.”

In 1984, on its first Quebec tour, Cirque du Soleil was just a small-scale operation, but it was already earning full-page reports in the major dailies. Already, it was as if we were giants. The whole series of reports in the media was meticulously planned to support the sales effort. And this applied to every other marketing operation.

Before a tour got underway, we mapped out our media relations activities. We determined the content of our press kit containing all the information we wanted to give the media as we traveled from town to town. The kit was completely adapted for every show and updated for every town on the tour.

From the start of our second year, we established relations with journalists and the media. Journalists were always hungry for content. More specifically they’d ask us what subjects to cover. So we crafted a series of press releases indicating newsworthy coverage angles. It was astonishing to see newspapers gobbling up our press releases and reproducing them word for word. Sometimes the papers copied our spelling mistakes! It’s still like that now. That’s the media for you! But over the years, we met outstanding journalists who went way beyond our humble press kit.

In 1985, we launched our Quebec-Ontario tour. The new show debuted in Montreal. But a week went by, and the Montreal daily *La Presse* still hadn’t deigned to publish a review. When I queried our press attaché, Lise Huneault, and our local media relations agent, Danielle Papineau-Couture, they confirmed that not a single journalist from the paper had attended one of the performances.

We needed the article; press coverage was essential to the success of our operations. Friends informed me that *La Presse’s* Arts and Entertainment editor refused to cover the event, claiming that Cirque du Soleil wasn’t really a circus. What an insult! I was doing a slow boil. My friends tried to calm me down. But I wasn’t having it. I called him up and told him I’d be dropping by in an hour and that it would only take a few minutes of his time.

He was courteous enough, but he reiterated that the paper had no intention of covering the event. I calmly pointed out that we were a young cultural organization in Quebec. I added that the average age of the employees was about 20 to 21, that we were taking enormous risks launching the enterprise, that we were doing our utmost to succeed and that the artists were giving their all on stage to please the audience.

“Can your newspaper, *the biggest French-language daily in North America*, just out of respect for them, give them a review?” I asked. “Write what you like, but at least, write something; they deserve some feed-back!” To sweeten the pill, I reminded him of the wonderful two-page article on Michael Jackson that his team had published in the Arts and Entertainment section on the previous weekend edition. We finally got a review the

next week. It wasn't exactly glowing, but we got it. It was the last time I had this kind of trouble with the paper.

In every city on the tour, we hired a local media relations agency, ideally, a small firm specializing in theatre. It's better to be a big client with a small agency than a small client with a big agency. We liked to work with enthusiastic people who had direct control over their activities. A number of these agencies had a contract with Cirque du Soleil for many years; some still have.

The agencies were a key component in our operations. They helped us figure out the "*who's who*" in a town. We needed the information for our premiere invitations. The first performance was a turning point in our whole marketing operation. In a way, that's when our artistic and marketing teams came together on the ground. On the night of a premiere, I used to tell my colleagues in the creative end of things: "The ball's in your hands now!"

In the months and weeks before we arrived in a town, we wove a vast web of advertising and media relations. On premiere night, the web was deployed. The premiere was the spark that gave our whole undertaking meaning. It crystallized our marketing activities. Our best sales argument by far was the show itself. The show triggered an informal but extremely powerful communications process: the rumor mill, word of mouth.

To enhance the force and quality of the rumor, we carefully selected our guests working closely with our media relations agency. Invitations were sent out to partners and sponsors and to people in the media. Then I made sure to invite everybody who's anybody in the arts and culture milieu. My reasoning was quite simple: our show was a cultural product that redefined the standards.

So what's more natural than to be judged by your peers! They had earned credibility in their community. So systematically, our guest list included poets, sculptors, writers, singers, dancers, actors, theater directors, painters and art critics. They enjoyed expressing their opinion in public; we simply gave them the chance to do it.

From town to town, from tour to tour, we executed the same marketing plan. Important aspects of the message we conveyed went unchanged. For every show, we grouped all the press relations parameters and activities in one document: the media relations guide. Basic but extraordinary tool, it contained all the distinctive elements of the show: the story angles to cover, the sequence of press relations activities for each city as well as the ways and means. Everything was there. The guide was an ideal tool for the agencies and for us as well. It enabled us to exert greater control over media activities and content.

In choosing reporting angles for journalists, I targeted every section in a major daily. The aim was to place an article or a photo in each section of the key dailies in every tour city. My approach was clear: "We have news for you!" We would target the main News section with the arrival of the convoy; the Around Town section with the assembling of the big top; that of Arts and Entertainment through in-depth interviews with the director and the artists as well as the review of the show; the Style section with anecdotes of life

on the tour; Fashion with the show's costumes; the Food/Cooking section with our restaurant, the kitchen team and our menus; Business with our sponsors and the growth of our company; and the Sports section with the Olympic-class caliber of our athletes...

At the very least, we were determined; not aggressive, simply determined. We were candy for the media: we offered them youth, fashion, performance, logistics, business, creativity a touch of the avant-garde, and exoticism.

In 1992, when *Saltimbanco* was created in Montreal, I organized an event that would become a fixture in the organization, an annual meeting with all the press relations agencies and our principal associates to present our new show, inform them of the latest developments and let them know about projects in preparation. We discussed every aspect of our activities. It gave everyone a chance to benefit from other people's experience. A genuine happening! The meetings soon became highly popular not only because they were extremely useful and effective, but also because the participants got to meet collaborators from all over the world. Thus, we were able to harmonize our communications activities worldwide.

Globalization imposes a certain rigor. When we have a message to deliver in one town we must disseminate the same messages all over the planet. An interview with a journalist in London may appear almost simultaneously in newspapers in Los Angeles, Toronto, and Sydney, Australia.

Are you true to yourself and your principles?

CHOOSING YOUR PARTNER

"Look, we're not a shopping mall!"

Right from the beginning, our sponsors were also our suppliers and creditors. We negotiated with them as best we could in the early years. During that period, Cirque du Soleil's attitude towards sponsorship evolved. We had little money and means at our disposal; so we were open to any interesting proposal from sponsors. But the proposals didn't come when we needed them. As a result, our position hardened somewhat about sponsorship, and we came to appreciate the notion of artistic integrity.

As time went by, we became increasingly protective of our product. We found it difficult to accept proposals that might detract from the show. The artistic dimension predominated; we got used to functioning that way. Lacking sponsorship, we were forced to rely on ticket sales and merchandise to maximize revenues.

Better to offer a superior artistic product of integrity than a mediocre heavily sponsored work. We received some curious requests made in all seriousness: to paint in giant format

a sponsor's logo on the outer canvas of the big top, to place a car in the ring when the public arrived, and to make a sponsor's product part of one of the acts.

We used to say, "Look, we're not a shopping mall!" Certainly, the distinction between the world of entertainment and that of consumption has been blurred. Shopping malls entice their customers with extraordinary cultural experiences, offering exotic environments that put them in the right frame of mind for shopping.

We made every effort to point out to potential sponsors the obvious differences between a music festival and our product. For example, a business that had a stage bearing its name in an open-door festival would also benefit from the exposure generated by televised reports. With Cirque du Soleil on the other hand, the sponsor's banner inside the big top would disappear from view the moment the show began. In the late 1980s, I met a director of a big Canadian oil company who said that our trademark enjoyed greater notoriety than his firm. He feared Cirque would eclipse his firm... Nevertheless, we were well aware of the value of sponsorship and partnering with companies.

The partnerships developed an extremely stimulating business dynamic. I found those relationships enormously enriching. They presented new challenges and forced us to be more rigorous and more professional. We also had to be creative in reaping the benefits of sponsorship. During negotiations, we endeavored to make sure that sponsors fully grasped the meaning and extent of their investment. We asked a simple question: How can we help you meet your marketing objectives? This may seem strange, but we sometimes met business executives eager to sponsor us without really knowing how to integrate us into their marketing activities. They just wanted to be associated with Cirque du Soleil.

In assessing the performance of a partnership, it is a good idea to recall the objectives and determine whether they have been met. Before we became truly successful, we formulated a sponsorship policy that excluded certain companies from any future partnership: arms dealers, fast-food chains and, obviously, cigarette manufacturers.

There were many reasons why a sponsor might want to be associated with Cirque du Soleil: quality, originality, creativity, authenticity, and a sense of the avant-garde. But the one element that sponsors find most appealing is our extraordinary clientele. The majority of our clients are women, 60% of them aged 24 to 45. They had a higher level of education and family income than average. Children constituted only a very small part of our client base.

To obtain this kind of information, right from the start, I set up a survey mechanism for our patrons. In each city, year after year, we confirmed our client profile, assessed the performance of our communications activities and determined the public's degree of satisfaction with our product and services (ticketing, reception, merchandise, etc.). It was a valuable investment.

Our findings were the same all over the planet. Analyzing the results enabled us to fine-tune our advertising campaigns and to determine the essential elements of our marketing operations. Compiling the data gave us feedback about the quality of our services. We forwarded the results of these surveys to the departments concerned. So, in each town, we could offer a product that met our customers' expectations. The members of the artistic team were the only ones who didn't want to let the results influence their work. Yet, they insisted on knowing them, though they denied using them.

People cautioned us against making shows based on surveys. I shared their opinion, and I didn't wish to influence decisions affecting the productions, but I thought it was vital that the public had the opportunity to give their opinion about the artistic side of our activities. Sponsors were eager to see these reports, and the characteristics of our clientele never ceased to be the envy of their marketing specialists.

Over the years, we had the opportunity to work with very big companies and smaller ones, too. In some cases, the presence of sponsors was essential in launching a tour: Kirin Lager and Nissan in Japan or Schöller AG in Europe. In other cases, the quality and originality of the partnership set a new standard: AT&T in the United States, Oetzal Arena in Europe, Acura in the United States, Canadian Airlines International Ltd. in North America, Ultramar in Quebec, etc. In every case, at the heart of these agreements, were people who shared our passion and who were committed to the success of our business relationship. With them, we built precious friendships.

Internationalizing Cirque's activities created a fair number of sponsorship challenges. Finding firms ready to work across boundaries in this domain was amazingly difficult. Most sponsorship decisions involving activities in foreign countries were taken in the capitals concerned in a context of decentralization. Though globalization is a fact it is yet to take effect in cultural event sponsorship. It has wider acceptance in sports, particularly in the Olympic Games because they have become highly televised and commercialized.

Do you have another way of looking at things?

PACKAGING

*"...our product was unique;
it deserved exceptional marketing."*

Based on my experience in advertising, I decided that from the start we needed to control our communications and "do it ourselves." I didn't want to work with an advertising agency where the atmosphere is fiercely competitive. Besides, we couldn't afford to pay for one! So, early in 1985, we decided to set up a graphics section. I remember calling Thérèse Mondor, my girlfriend at the time: we got married since then... Thérèse was a gifted, young graphic designer working in a small but excellent graphic design agency run by a friend of mine. I said to Thérèse, "I need someone in graphics and I thought of

you. I'm offering you \$50 a week more than you make now. But there's one condition: you have to bring your drawing table and chair." In graphics, people weren't using computers at the time, at least not in Quebec. The company had hardly gotten started and already we had to think about cost cutting. Thérèse accepted the offer; it was the beginning of a long and remarkable work relationship.

That's how we developed over the years, with the help of freelance collaborators, our advertising imagery, and line of merchandise. For every show, we created an original visual directly inspired by comments from the team of designers. Like the shows, our visuals and base lines were universal. Very rarely (in Paris and Japan) did we have to modify a visual. Michel-Thomas Poulin was one of the freelance artists who did the most to shape the Cirque du Soleil style. Michel-Thomas designed all the images and illustrations for the shows from 1985 to 1994. Some like *Saltimbanco*, *Alegria*, and *Mystère* visuals are still being used. Ideally, the marketing and artistic teams agreed on the choice of a show's base line and visual. We held lengthy discussions, trying to identify the aim and intent of every show. These discussions would end just in time for us to launch the advertising campaign... Each group had its legitimate needs, and when the discussions came to an impasse, we let Guy Laliberté decide.

Every year, the Cirque du Soleil poured millions of dollars into advertising. The quality and extent of these investments directly affected our results; so it was hardly surprising that we were loath to leave as strategic an operation as an advertising campaign in the hands of strangers. In North America and in Europe, we conducted over 85% of the negotiations and media placement; this was a major marketing operation. And many people around the world made a valuable contribution. Selling tickets is a retail activity. So as in any business, we could measure the impact of advertising on sales.

As the years went by, one thing became crystal clear: our product was unique; it deserved exceptional marketing. We developed and experimented with a marketing practice that we adapted to places and circumstances. The ads in major newspapers and specialized weekly publications could represent up to 50% of our investments; outdoor signs, billboards and advertisement on buses, up to 20%; television, radio, and eventually the Internet accounted for the rest. We spared no effort in creating a veritable media event.

Cirque du Soleil established media partnerships in every town. By involving our partners in the presentation of the show, we were able to increase the value of our advertising campaigns two-, three-, even four-fold. We created our own ads and we produced our own radio and television commercials. It was important for me to feel that our show, advertising art and campaign deployment were intimately related. When every aspect of the process meshed, I felt like a violinmaker who has controlled every phase in the building of a magnificent instrument.

Do you have things well in hand?

STRATEGY

“... our audiences are intelligent.”

We were quite open-minded toward our competition. There was no direct rivalry with traditional circuses. Our customers and products were very different from theirs; so we didn't consider them rivals. Our real competition came essentially from cultural products like movies, festivals, theater, dance, and opera. Our clientele had a higher than average income, but they were also much coveted. So vigilance was the watchword if we wanted to attain the enormous sales objectives we set for each city.

Engaging in lengthy presale periods was one of the best ways to maximize commercial performance. Our growing fame allowed us to offer tickets to consumers from three to twelve months before a show hit a city. We let them know several months in advance that we'd be back with a brand new product. Consumers could plan their entertainment budget accordingly. We realized they had to make choices. Of course, this approach required rigorous planning and skillful coordination of our activities but it offered multiple advantages. It forced us to act promptly in negotiating and signing land lease contracts. In so doing we had a better choice of sites.

Because we were prepared well in advance, we had a chance to “shop around” and tie up our media partnership agreements well in advance. Since the media hadn't yet committed their entire budgets and had to plan their activities effectively, our prompt approach was always welcome and, as a rule, their proposals were quite generous.

Thus, we were in a proactive position vis-à-vis our sponsors. I soon realized that our strategic planning activities had a remarkable impact on them. They considered us credible partners. Even more important, we were a real asset in their own planning of marketing activities.

Long presale periods did not result in additional advertising costs. On the contrary, we were able to maximize the reach of our advertising investments. We were also able to develop innovative promotional programs with our sponsors and our partners in the media. We could put in place all the ingredients we needed to create and build a real event. Word of mouth, the primary factor in our customers' decision-making process, could circulate and operate freely. Because we were well prepared, time was on our side! I thought we had to take full advantage of the situation.

As a manager, I had to make daily decisions that directly impacted the Cirque, our brand image, and our audiences. One thing about our shows that I always bore in mind and that I tried to share with our collaborators was that our audiences were discerning. To some people, this may have seemed obvious, but it was a defining characteristic of the Cirque du Soleil. The artistic team never forgot that our patrons were discriminating. It was a basic premise of the Cirque experience itself. I believed that we had to bear it in mind in

everything we did, whether it was in our advertising campaigns, our communications, our promotions and our customer service policy.

In my initial contacts with sponsors, business partners and the media, I noticed that many of them were under the illusion that you couldn't ask too much of the public. In their eyes, the public was dull, unsophisticated. You could put things over on them. I found this attitude surprising; I refused to accept it. I was certain it had no basis in fact. So we had to educate our new collaborators.

I insisted that our publicity be serious. There was no room for puffing the product. We also avoided giving too much or too little detail. Our public could figure things out for themselves. As well, ticket prices wouldn't discourage our customers. But when we first approached American cities about an eventual tour, our sponsors and media partners suggested that we offer price reductions or put discount coupons in papers and magazines.

They were very surprised when we told them that our customers couldn't care less about reductions. The most expensive tickets were always the first to sell out. Our customers wanted the best seats, period. Similarly, the announcement of our arrival created a remarkable interest, partially due to the hallmark quality of our product.

From 1990 on, we developed an almost permanent tour plan for North America for a two and eventually a three-year period. Our fans knew that the shows had a limited run so they'd have to wait at least two years before they could see us again. This helped build interest. Cirque was in a very different position than theater, classical music, and modern dance. No products in our market were really comparable to our shows. The fact that our product was so rare boosted presales. It also heightened media and consumer appreciation of the shows. Rarity, long an important brand characteristic, placed us in a privileged position in the minds of our audiences.

“Our show will be held over!” Among the marketing elements contributing to our success was the policy of putting tickets on sale in stages. If, for example, we planned on giving 60 performances over a seven-week period in a big top that seated 2500, we could expect to draw a total of 150,000 spectators. Until the late 1980s, it was our practice to put tickets on sale for our entire stay.

But we found out that most people bought tickets for shows in the last weeks of the run, leaving our first weeks half empty. The phenomenon generated overall occupancy rates that could vary between 70% and 80%, even if the final weeks were sold out. To remedy the situation, we sold tickets for an initial number of performances and then announced that the show would be held over. For example, if there were 60 performances in seven weeks, we would sell tickets for the first three weeks, that is for 20 shows. And, as soon as we had sold 70% of the tickets, we announced that there would be additional performances for one or two extra weeks, and so on until all the tickets for the entire seven weeks were on sale.

This approach gave us sold-out performances right from the start of an engagement, intensifying word-of-mouth activity and allowing us to achieve 95% occupancy. The approach seems quite normal today, but, at the time, applied systematically and meticulously from town to town, it was highly innovative and produced fantastic results.

Do you take the time to pause and reflect?

MARK OF EXCELLENCE

“...Cirque du Soleil was a stamp of quality, a mark of excellence.”

Until 1989, but for our first incursion into Ontario as “Sun Circus,” our shows were billed as Cirque du Soleil in every city we visited. Sometimes, we used the slogan *We reinvent the circus* or *La magie continue* (The magic continues). Everything went swimmingly until 1989, when we returned to Santa Monica Beach with a slightly modified version of the show we’d put on earlier in California. But *Los Angeles Times* Critics sounded a bit of a sour note. If you’ve seen them already there’s no point going to see them again, but if you haven’t, it’s worth checking them out, they advised. It was the first time we’d had comments like that. The show seemed a little *déjà-vu*, and we began to understand the risk we ran.

Traditional circuses face the same kind of challenges. Year after year, they return to the same cities with the same acts, the same tigers: the same old same old. It’s the kind of situation that we absolutely wanted to avoid. Our show was particularly valued for its rarity. Clearly, we had to provide our loyal fans with new adequately promoted fare.

At the time a completely new show was in the works for our 1990-1991 North American tour. We were reinventing ourselves! Upon reflection, we concluded that we had to give our show a distinct name and identity. We needed to identify the distinctive characteristics of each new creation, baptize it like a newborn baby, and give it a personality that the public could easily recognize. So, the name Cirque du Soleil would appear under the new trademark, giving it the stamp of quality.

Thus *Nouvelle Experience/Cirque du Soleil* was born in 1990. It was both the show’s title and a promise we were making in our advertising: “Cirque du Soleil is offering you a new experience.” But we had to be prudent about this experiment. That’s why proposed titles like *Big Bang* and *Gaia* were turned down. From then on, every new production would be given a title once and for all. That’s how a powerful company tradition was established: giving each show a name establishing its identity. So *Fascination*, *Mystère*, *Saltimbanco*, *Alegria*, *Quidam*, *O*, *La Nouba*, *Dralion*, and others saw the light of day.

Obviously, this decision made life much easier for everyone. When I say everyone, I’m thinking of the artistic team in particular. Their orders couldn’t be simpler: give us a new

show, PLEASE. It also facilitated the marketing team's task: we were offering a new product, with new artists, music, decors, costumes and acts... The media couldn't wait to get a glimpse of it. Finally, the titles made for stimulating conversation: I saw *Kà* and *Mystère*; I wanted to see *Saltimbanco*; I loved *Alegria* and *Love*; I was looking for tickets for *O*... What more could we ask!

The practice of personalizing shows ran into difficulty right from the very start. It was the fall of 1991, in the old fire station, the company's Montreal headquarters at the time. There was a very important meeting with representatives of Fuji television Network, the biggest private TV network in Japan. None other than head honcho Dan Yoshida led the Fuji delegation. He had come to negotiate with us about Cirque's first Japan tour. I attended the meeting with Guy Laliberté, who chaired the negotiations and Roger Parent, our delegate producer. Negotiations were all but rapped up. But there remained one little detail: Yoshida had a personal request.

He wanted us to call the show *Fascination*. He liked the name. Fine. No problem, we thought. But he had another request he considered even more important: he didn't want the name Cirque du Soleil to appear under the show's title *Fascination*. It would only complicate things for the Japanese public, he argued. They couldn't understand or pronounce French words. This was the first time we were negotiating with the Japanese, and the stakes were high. It was a \$40 million operation, the biggest tour in the history of the land of the rising sun.

Like a true CEO, Guy Laliberté was eager to clinch the deal; he immediately accepted Dan Yoshida's proposition. I literally jumped out of my seat. The idea didn't square with our brand positioning. While Roger steered Guy away from the discussion so I could intervene, I told Mr. Yoshida that we couldn't accept his request because it violated the basic principles of our marketing plan. "Cirque du Soleil" was a stamp of quality, a mark of excellence. Like Chanel or Louis Vuitton, it was a trademark. And with his know-how and support, we intended to develop the brand and make it increasingly popular with the Japanese public.

After a few vigorous exchanges long remembered by my Japanese counterparts, Yoshida came round to my point of view, which I took as a "sign of trust." It was a narrow escape. Eventually, the Cirque du Soleil trademark was just as solidly established in Japan as it was in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere in the world.

What did you notice?

GEARING UP

“Sheer nonsense! It just can’t be done. What are you talking about?”

One morning early in the 1990s, I addressed the bimonthly executive meeting of Cirque du Soleil. The company was engaged in an intense period of activity: for us it was business as usual. I had asked to make an important announcement to the entire management team. I really set it up — I was enjoying myself — “My friends I have big news,” I said, “Starting tomorrow, Cirque du Soleil ticketing services will function 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year!” To say the least, I hadn’t anticipated the committee’s reaction. There were shouts of: “Sheer nonsense! It just can’t be done. What are you talking about?” At least the meetings were never dull.

My colleagues were incredulous. I feared there would be a serious learning curve. Management was absolutely convinced that what I told them was impossible. They didn’t believe we could change the way we did things, especially in as sensitive an area as ticket sales. So I pointed out that we had engaged in rigorously coordinated planning with our ticketing centre and our tour development director to set up a presale system in North America that eliminated delays from town to town and year to year.

Everyone was curious to learn more, so I continued. I told them we were even going to put tickets on sale for coming productions that were getting under way in Montreal though we weren’t sure what the content would be. The public was convinced of the quality of the product we were offering them. What they really wanted was to have good seats. We had already confirmed the scheduling for the new shows with the artistic team. There remained to finalize an agreement in principle with Montreal’s Old Port, which had already assured us of their collaboration; that was enough for us to proceed with ticket sales.

We were merely offering tickets for the new show. We would give details about the production at the appropriate time and place. From then on, there would always be tickets on sale for a Cirque du Soleil show. Always. Our tickets would be available 365 days a year. Then I said something that really made their eyes light up: “These presale changes will increase our liquidity!”

My announcement that morning marked an important stage in our company’s revenue growth and capital management. From that day on, there was no going back. We were innovative; we had to continue to be and go even further.

How far are you willing to go to defend an idea?

STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY

“The employees take pride in their work and the customers are open-minded and respectful towards them.”

“Tickets, please!” It’s worth noting this aspect of Cirque du Soleil’s operations. Few companies can employ Cirque’s approach to customer service. It’s one of the great mysteries of modern management.

One day, as the 20th century drew to a close, I was back in Montreal serving on a business conference panel on customer service. The speakers who preceded me came from major service firms (telephone, electricity, malls, etc.) For nearly two hours, I had listened to them discuss the need to pump huge sums of money into staff training and recruitment. Some even cited statistics comparing performance with the length of training.

Others boasted about the vast amounts their company had invested the previous year. The participants with eyes agape dutifully took notes, enthralled by such a display of wisdom and modernity. But I could hardly relate to their remarks. I might have been on another planet. In fact, I started to question my professionalism. Was I a marketing VP or not?

When my turn came, I felt a little ill at ease. I wondered whether I’d do better to keep my counsel, feign sickness and slip away ... What a pity to put a damper on such *fin-de-siècle* sagacity and mutual admiration among major corporations. But someone had to tell them the “truth”! Summoning up my courage, I began my presentation by congratulating the previous speakers. I acknowledged the complexity of their system, the high degree of sophistication required; a truly inspiring demonstration of the art of human resources. Then I revealed I had a little surprise in store for them.

In an important aspect, Cirque du Soleil resembles other retail firms: employees in direct contact with the public handle customer service: the ticket-booth clerks, the ushers and concession staff. But the problem is that these people are temporary, hired for the length of our engagement. Their primary qualification is their availability. In some periods of the year and in some towns, they can be hard to find.

Job applicants are usually hired on the spot. So you’ll find a diversity of people with respect to age, race, sex, and hair color. You’ll find piercing adepts, retirees, students, the unemployed, and welfare recipients — quite a team! We give them four hours of training for a specific job and... “Tickets please!” What’s amazing is that normally it all works out very well. The employees take pride in their work and the customers are open-minded and respectful towards them. It’s as if there’s a certain understanding between the public and temporary employees. What more could we ask for? That’s how we manage to defy the laws of customer service.

My co-panelists were somewhere between stunned and amused. They insisted that I must be an exception. The audience didn’t take notes during my presentation. Some looked a

little puzzled. They didn't know what to think! Good for them! Others beamed, happy to see that there were other ways of doing things. The conference coordinator was encouraging: "It takes people like you to get things moving; don't give up Jean!" So, off the beaten track, you can often get where you want to go!

Where are you going?

SOUVENIRS HERE!

"Without direct experience, there's no authenticity."

"T-shirts, programs, posters, clown's noses... get your souvenirs here!" From the time Cirque du Soleil began, merchandise sales were always important to the company. It was a highly lucrative sector of activity, contributing to the deployment and exploitation of the brand. We gradually developed our merchandise through trial and error, an approach that brought improvements year after year and yielded excellent results.

As the 1985 tour began, we just started with our first line of products (T-shirts, programs, posters, sweatshirts, clown's noses, etc. Our approach was simple and intuitive. A few days before the first performance on the tour, Guy burst into my office. He was beside himself. He gave me a dressing down as only he could do. He was furious that I had authorized such a large order of products. He claimed we didn't have enough liquidity to justify a big inventory. I pointed out that our order was based on extremely conservative sales projections and that, in my opinion, it was the least we could produce if we wanted to have a favorable cost price ratio.

I also assured him that I had taken care to negotiate reasonable terms of payment with our suppliers. But to no avail. The tirade continued unabated. I attributed his reaction to stress brought on by the tour launch. The next Monday, after our first week of shows, Guy called me up and tore into me again because, he said, we risked running out of stock. Customers couldn't get enough of our products: our merchandise was flying off the shelves and during the first weekend our sales succeeded all expectations.

We never really suffered from product shortfalls while I was running the marketing department. Consumers appreciated our highly diversified range of articles as to price and type of product. They were happy they could find items for as little as a dollar and as much as \$500. What was really amazing is that fewer than 10% of the products generated over 85% of the revenues. This applied to almost every city we visited in the world. Our best sellers were our videos, music, and souvenir programs.

In the early 1990s, we tried to set up a licensing program, in which we granted operating licenses for use of our trademark to manufacturers who distributed their products in large stores and specialized boutiques. We teamed up with Determined Productions, a San

Francisco firm, with solid experience in the domain. The company acted for us, developing concepts, models and visuals, which it offered other firms involved in clothing, accessories, toys, jewelry, etc. Company founder and chairperson Connie Boucher fell in love with Cirque du Soleil. She was passionate, honest, dedicated, and a bit of a visionary. She was an artist. Jean Laliberté, Guy's dynamic younger brother ran this highly ambitious project.

Could the qualities of our new show trademark be projected onto clothes and other popular consumer items? A number of factors had to be taken into consideration. First, brand recognition. How recognizable was our brand to consumers and what did it conjure up in their minds? And what demographic should we target initially? Children, teenagers, adults, men, women? We also had to determine the range of products to create. Which should we choose: sports clothes, leisure wear, jackets, pants, dresses, ties, scarves, travel items, decorations, wallpaper, gift items, Christmas articles? The list was endless. There were so many questions, that our agent preferred not to answer them directly but to get advice from manufacturers who had a sense of flair.

Our agent's concepts appealed to some of the manufacturers who attended our shows. Quite rightly, he wanted to take full advantage of the imagery and creations we'd developed over the years. But after a few years our efforts had failed to bear fruit. Especially after the death of our beloved Connie, the firm's chairperson and principal stockholder, her estate decided to end the partnership.

Nonetheless, the experience taught us how to exploit the brand. Souvenir merchandising received more emphasis. Our products sold best when they were directly linked with our shows. That's one reason why Cirque du Soleil boutiques are so successful in Orlando and Las Vegas because they are located near the theater.

I believed that brand exploitation deserved particular attention. The recent events led me to draw the following conclusions: we were among the best in the world in the live show sector, and we'd carved out an international reputation for excellence. Our merchandise sales were strongest on the show sites themselves.

In distributing the music from our shows internationally, we faced stiff competition. All you have to do is go to a record shop to see that. The same applied to our television shows, films, videos, cartoons and variety shows, etc. In these sectors, the competition was generally light years ahead of us.

Associating the characteristics of our brand with other areas of activity — amusement parks, hotels, restaurants, spas, — was, I feared, a risky proposition. There are limits to how far you can stretch a brand, and the limits vary from one brand to another. Apart from the financial incentive, what's the point of trying to "force" such a fragile and unique brand to expand? Why risk cheapening a treasure?

Some brands lend themselves to all sorts of exploitation. Virgin is an outstanding example. But as far as I was concerned, the Cirque du Soleil brand was intimately related

to the Cirque du Soleil experience. The word that best encapsulated the qualities of our shows was authenticity. The further the consumers were from the experience, the less credible and appealing they found our merchandise. Without direct experience, there was no authenticity.

What do you think?

SEIZE THE MOMENT

“We need to know ourselves ...”

The timing of Cirque du Soleil’s launch couldn’t have been better. It was 1984 and there were ongoing celebrations marking the 450th anniversary of Jacques Cartier’s arrival in Canada. And that was the year that Cirque du Soleil was born. In 1985, World Youth Year, the federal and provincial governments instituted programs to subsidize young entrepreneurs and businesses; naturally Cirque du Soleil qualified. Then in 1986, for EXPO 86 in Vancouver the company won an important month long contract to host the Canada Pavilion. Next at the Los Angeles Festival in 1987 we had the honor of holding the opening gala under the big top; we’d entered the American market in a big way.

What was really extraordinary about this adventure is that we had recognized these opportunities and took full advantage of them. Every day of our lives, we run across opportunities, some big and some small. Often, small opportunities turn out to be significant if only we recognize them. We must be open to new ideas and occasions. We need to know ourselves and be aware of what’s happening around us.

Have you ever been called an opportunist?

DIPLOMACY’S EVERYTHING!

“...to save taxpayers money ...”

In our travels around the world, we always touched base with the Canadian embassies and consulates as well as the Quebec delegations. Our relations with our country’s representatives took many forms depending on the situation, our needs and the people we were dealing with. As far as I was concerned our representatives were there to provide support. As a taxpayer, I thought, “We’re paying their salary, they’re there to help us, let’s see how we can work together.”

Our relations with diplomats evolved a great deal. When we first started touring abroad, we’d go to see the cultural attaché who would do everything possible to assist us. We would have preferred to work with economic advisers, but they generally didn’t see any

point in meeting us. Ever on the lookout for sponsors, we knew the advisors were in frequent contact with local enterprises.

We constantly encouraged the embassy, consulate, and delegation to take advantage of the opportunity to invite their various acquaintances to our shows. We were an excellent tool for establishing business relations. It took a number of years before the economic advisers got on board and the approach became common practice. In fact, it didn't happen until we became really famous. One day, the Canadian Consul General in San Francisco confessed that Cirque's presence in the city generated more press coverage and general interest in Quebec and the rest of Canada than a visit by any government minister, including the prime minister. He jokingly confided to me that if we could guarantee that we'd be in northern California every year, he could close the consulate and save taxpayers money... I found his suggestion very interesting.

In 1990, both the Quebec delegation and the Canadian embassy wanted to hold a reception after our debut performance at the Cirque d'hiver Bouglione in Paris. They were prepared to share the costs. They wanted to sign the invitation card and say a few words of greeting to the guests of honor. We were happy to oblige since it helped cut expenses... But the Quebec delegate general was reluctant to be associated with the Canadian ambassador, and vice versa. It was never done. This was an old story typical of Canada-Quebec relations in Paris.

Representatives of both sides informed us that in France, the signatures of the ambassador and the delegate general never appeared together on an official invitation card for this type of social event. It just wasn't done! I assured them that I understood but I offered a simple suggestion: either you co-sign the little card or we'll get along without you, and of course, neither one of you will be mentioned! You'll just be another guest... That evening we witnessed another first: they were kind enough to accept our offer. That's politics!

Did your name ever appear on an invitation card?

FIRST STEPS ACROSS THE SEA

“Safe sex, safe circus.”

For years, we'd dreamed of performing in Europe. We were convinced that there was a place for our shows there. In 1989, a business opportunity opened up for us. We needed a new show for our 1990-1991 North American tour, and *Le Cirque réinventé* (The Circus Reinvented) with which we had opened the United States, became available to be presented elsewhere. In Europe, Germany was our first choice. Circuses are very popular there; they draw a sophisticated, affluent clientele.

We were determined to try our luck. We'd been negotiating with a German producer for three months. But the agreement fell through at the last minute. Clearly, there had been some misunderstanding. We rushed to adjust our plans because the artists and technicians were as good as hired. We had to find an alternative solution and in a hurry. We decided to perform in London and Paris—and do it on our own.

In London, we located a site, the Jubilee Gardens; we also found a big top. We were pressed for time. London, the entertainment capital of Europe, is enormous. The English knew nothing about Cirque du Soleil, and we knew little about them; the challenge was considerable. Nevertheless, we knew that just as in North America, the people most likely to buy tickets and appreciate our show had an above average level of education and family income.

After engaging in much preparation, and putting many safeguards and installations in place, we premiered on July 31, 1990. But that summer, England suffered its worst heat wave in 60 years. To make matters worse, the big top wasn't air-conditioned. The heat wave lasted a good three weeks; it was a disaster. The only tickets people were buying were the least expensive seats on the side. The most expensive seats, those around the ring and in the center stands were empty. People who could have afforded to pay for them had fled the city to take advantage of the fresh seaside air.

To top it all, opinions were divided in the English media about our show. Some reviewers complained that our show was too clean, too colorful. Journalists also grumbled that our performers smiled too much and their teeth were too white. One magazine even quipped “safe sex, safe circus.” It was a long, hot and humid summer, but the team hung in there. September brought some relief; our target clientele returned to the city; and word of mouth began to work for us. But it was too little, too late; our financial losses were substantial. Yet, we had drawn a little over 50,000 spectators, and it was some consolation that no other Canadian cultural product had attracted as many customers in a single run in London.

Paris was waiting. There, we didn't play in a big top; we performed in a theater, in the form of a big top at Cirque d'Hiver Bouglione in the 11th arrondissement. Built under Napoleon III, the theatre was owned by the Bouglione family, who were circus legends. We signed contracts with TF1 and Groupe Europe, an important French media group. We were privileged to work with some of the best people in the industry: Rose Léandry, Gérard Louvin, Tony Krantz, and Dominique Larmoyer. It has often been said that it's tough to do business with the French. And it's true! Nothing that works elsewhere on the planet can work in France. Everything had to be reconsidered, re-done: signs, slogans, and communications. And yet, I love the French!

Finally, it was the day of the premiere. I'll let you in on a little secret: it was the finest premiere evening in my whole time with Cirque du Soleil. An absolutely magical evening that took your breath away. Many of the oldest, most celebrated European circus families accepted our invitation. Our room was filled with history. It was as if ghosts were present. We got excellent reviews — the media were less divided than in London — and French

audiences loved our artists' sparkling costumes, smiles and white teeth. The Paris operation paid for itself financially and even yielded a slight profit. But, before we finished our run, the Gulf War broke out and along with it a collective psychosis. We packed our bags and returned to Canada. Game postponed due to bombing!

Did you ever have a smashing success?

KNOW WHEN TO SAY “NO!”

“...the operation proved so popular ...”

Cirque National Suisse Knie asked us for permission to present *Le Cirque réinventé*. It would be a follow-up to our visits to London and Paris. From a Business perspective, the Knie family was requesting us to grant them a licensing agreement for our show. It would assume the production costs and pay royalties on ticket and merchandise sales. Knie presented Cirque du Soleil on its annual tour of 60 cities, villages and cantons. Under the Knie's big top were united all the elements of *Le Cirque réinventé*: music, décor, costumes, artists, and direction. In addition, there were the Cirque Knie animals for which we designed costumes matching the colors of the show. The entire operation took place on Swiss territory.

After London and Paris, we believed that being involved in the Cirque Knie tour was an excellent way to gain exposure with a new European clientele and to test our product. It was 1991 and the tour was quite a success everywhere. In Switzerland, Cirque Knie was an institution, and its annual tour was eagerly awaited. In fact, the operation proved so popular that the Knie family wanted us to come back... They were eager to stage *Nouvelle Expérience*, which was capping off a magnificent two-year tour in North America. The Knie offer was interesting, but we decided to decline, and retain the possibility of introducing our shows on European soil ourselves. Sometimes you have to know how to say “no.”

Are you difficult to convince?

BE YOURSELF

*“...culture is the currency of human beings
in search of an identity...”*

In marketing our shows throughout the world, I kept certain basic principles in mind. They were inspired by popular sayings my parents taught me when I was a child. They apply to all sorts of situations. In my professional life some are particularly relevant. Why

look for complicated theories when we can access our cultural background for tried-and-true principles?

Here are two of the sayings: “In Rome, do as the Romans do” and “If you want something done well, do it yourself.” These sayings propose a straightforward approach to life. Taken together, they may seem paradoxical. Let’s look at the two. “In Rome, do as the Romans do.” In international marketing, obviously you need to understand how locals do things. That way you draw inspiration from them. Above all, you can break down the resistance to your product or service. Globalization has forced us to think globally but act locally.

To reduce the gap between consumers and our product, we had to reach out to the community, become a part of it. We had to be aware of their social and cultural context. All this was necessary to ensure the success of our operations. In the process, we got to know extraordinary individuals teeming with ideas.

As a rule, the people we met producers, promoters, public relations consultants, communicators and the media found our openness charming. In fact, some even became our friends. Yet, there was a drawback. Most of the local collaborators we met on our travels were so eager to share their expertise with us that sometimes they wouldn’t take no for an answer.

Usually, they weren’t aware of what they were doing. It was only natural for them to suggest tried-and-true ways of doing things that they used every day, and that worked very well most of the time. Seldom, did these professionals completely understand that since our product was original, it required an original approach. That’s when I went by the dictum “If you want something done well, do it yourself.”

Our marketing objectives bore no resemblance whatever to those normally driving the entertainment industry. We were operating on a scale way beyond what our local partners were used to seeing. “Hello. You don’t know us but we’re a circus the likes of which you’ve never experienced. We’re lugging around our big top, which seats 2500. We’ve decided to perform in your fine city, where we’ll sell between 100,000 and 250,000 full-price tickets!”

With ambitions came responsibilities. We had to make sure things were done correctly. So we spelled out the way we wanted them done. And we left no doubt in their minds about our expectations, clearly explained the sequence of activities, presented a precise action plan, provided the means for carrying it out and saw to it that our goals were achieved.

Part of my job in Marketing was to act as Cirque du Soleil brand manager. In the context of exporting our product, it felt more like brand protection. We were presenting a live show to an audience inside a venue closely resembling a huge sailboat. Careful! It’s fragile! The operation had to be carried out with the utmost care. I was not only concerned about the uniqueness of our product; I was concerned about its vulnerability. I

knew that paying attention to detail would be rewarded in the way the public, opinion setters and media perceived us. It would also impact in our results.

People often asked me what were the differences between Japanese, American, Dutch, Chinese, English, Canadian, and German customers. Truth to tell, there were many. In the age of market globalization, though tariff barriers have been abolished, cultural differences fortunately have survived. Above and beyond differences in the exportation process, the people had one point in common: as consumers, they knew how to recognize quality in a product or service. Their needs were real; their expectations constantly evolved.

It's important to remember that the personality of consumers is continually changing. It may be surprising, but in this respect, things move very fast! It's not that time is going faster; it's that the information disseminated is denser, more focused and, above all, more pertinent. Technology is accelerating the circulation of ideas. All this leads me to think that the 21st century won't tolerate redundancy. There's a tendency to eliminate it. The global village really exists; what's more, it brings forth unforeseen developments.

The Cirque du Soleil marketing philosophy could be summed up in three words: creativity, identity, and competitiveness.

CREATIVITY: Our product was innovative and universal. We always invested in the creation of new shows and we clearly demonstrated our capacity for renewal and transformation. Our greatest passion was the pursuit of bold new artistic challenges.

IDENTITY: Our focus was youth, and more than 25 nations were represented on our staff. In our organization, we affirmed our cultural distinctiveness around the world, and we strongly supported bold entrepreneurship.

COMPETITIVENESS: We set new standards of excellence in our sphere of activity. In all our markets, our commitment to excellence became the standard. We didn't aim to succeed at all costs; we simply wanted to finish what we had begun.

In exporting our shows, we have been highly successful. We have met with acclaim and affection around the world. Our most significant marketing triumph was our unique positioning with our consumers. For many entertainment industry observers, Cirque du Soleil was a sign of things to come. It was an organization that positioned itself in a context in which culture was the currency of human beings in search of an identity.

Can you juggle with paradoxes?

A LITTLE FARTHER west

“..It can throw you for a loop!”

A fascinating nation with a rich culture, Japan was eager to have us. In the autumn of 1987, Japanese producers were flocking to the big top in Los Angeles. But it took a few years for us to cut a deal. Fuji Television, the country’s biggest private TV network, became our privileged partner. The media giant had vast experience in producing shows of all sorts: variety, opera, and theater. The Japanese can’t get enough of big American-style shows. And Fuji television capitalizes on their viewers’ interest. Ever innovative, Fuji saw *Cirque du Soleil* as a golden opportunity.

It was the beginning of a long-term partnership. During the early negotiations, I must admit we were a little apprehensive. You can’t help being impressed by the Japanese. Their culture is so different from ours that at first it can throw you for a loop. We teamed up with Fuji on a number of productions and co-productions in the 1990s. And they were mega-projects: astronomical costs, multiple shows and gargantuan operations.

During that time, we had numerous dealings involving untold hours of meetings where decorum resembled protocol more than anything else. These marathon negotiations played out like a big game in which the ground rules are supposedly set. Everything is established, the major themes are agreed upon, the roles are clearly defined, the order of discussions is pre-synchronized, and if you’re patient and determined, you’ll probably manage to have a say about the next meeting’s agenda.

Sometimes, the negotiations reached a dead end. Many a time, our Japanese colleagues would give a firm “no” to our requests. Then in the evening, leaving the bar, they’d freely concede that we were absolutely right and that they’d ok our conditions. The next morning, it was scene one, take two, and their answer was a categorical “no.” It was pointless to remind them that only a few hours before, they’d told us we were right: It would have been impolite! But the Japanese are absolutely delightful. They have a great sense of humor when you get used to it... Often, they give the impression that things are more complicated than they really are. Maybe, it’s because they prefer settling things among themselves in their own way. They take great care to make sure that no one loses face.

I find different cultures fascinating. To me, a foreign language represents a different perspective on life, another way of seeing the world. In *The Hidden Dimension*, author Edward T. Hall explains that “people from different cultures, not only speak different languages but, more importantly, inhabit different sensory worlds.” I agree completely.

Over the years, I have participated in meetings and negotiations in a wide variety of countries. I have had two fascinating linguistic experiences that were really rather similar. Both cases involved intense business negotiations: once with Japanese partners and another time with German colleagues. The conditions were the same: marathon

negotiations that had been going on for 48 hours. The stakes were high. Everything had to be crystal clear; each dot and comma would count.

In the first case, my Japanese counterparts started talking things over among themselves. I could sense that there was a misunderstanding; I felt they were misinterpreting what I had said. So I interrupted them and explained that there was a problem of interpretation: what they were discussing was not exactly what I had said. Then I rephrased my remarks. They were stunned. Some of them were convinced I understood Japanese.

The same situation occurred one day in Nuremburg with a group of German businessmen. Of course, I don't speak Japanese or German. What I picked up was the body language. I used my intuition. It was a question of attention and interest.

Do you have a lot of confidence in yourself?

PLACE YOUR BETS!

“Finally, a real show with real emotions.”

Playing in Las Vegas wasn't just a pipe-dream. The resounding success our show registered in California in 1987, made some people consider the possibility of setting up our big top in Las Vegas. But it wasn't until the early 1990s, that serious negotiations got underway with Caesar's Palace. It was a very complex process indeed. There were many difficulties to iron out: the idea of a permanent show in the city was a fascinating and innovative concept, but there were many unknowns.

Vegas casinos were old hands at producing all kinds of shows. Typically, they presented superstars who cost them a small fortune. Nevertheless, their investment in entertainment permitted them to draw hordes of customers who were tempted to try their luck at the gambling tables, and that's where the casinos make their money. So entertainment had always had a privileged place in Las Vegas. Now there was a real need in the city for something new.

Las Vegas wanted to reposition itself to attract a family clientele. Baby-boomers had contributed to Vegas' development. They'd settled down, married, and had children, but they hadn't lost their taste for gambling. Casinos had to offer them a new, modern product, fresh entertainment and something that would excite every member of the family. Cirque du Soleil, with its innovative shows, was just what the market needed. And Caesar's management was intrigued.

In fact, if Cirque du Soleil's was a permanent fixture, total production costs could be amortized over a few years, making the investment extremely appealing. With 60% occupancy rates, it was even possible to foresee realizing a profit, a rather uncommon phenomenon in the Las Vegas entertainment scene. But the long months of negotiations

between Caesar's and Cirque ended abruptly. A few hours before the deal was sealed, Caesar's management walked away. They probably thought the project too risky. For one of the world's most famous gambling establishments, it was hardly a case of leading by example.

Yet, the negotiations had been the talk of the town. The entire community was aware that the deal had fallen through. So Steve Wynn, who headed the Mirage Group, called to say that he wanted to see us. The meeting was held in Toronto where the Cirque had a show at the time. In a matter of hours we mapped out a very simple arrangement.

The Mirage Group would build a hotel, the Treasure Island Hotel, scheduled to open in 1993. It would set up a magnificent performance space that met our technical requirements. In return, we undertook to produce a show exclusively for that venue. Cirque du Soleil and Mirage agreed on an investment recovery mechanism for each party, royalty payments and profit sharing. The contract was finalized in the weeks that followed.

It was the start of an enduring and profitable partnership. The premiere of our new production *Mystère* left the spectators enchanted. Steve Wynn, a man of courage and foresight, received a standing ovation for making the whole thing possible. Scarcely three months after the show debuted, all ten performances a week sold out.

The residents of the city were very proud. "Finally, a true show with true emotions." And they weren't afraid to express their feelings to anyone who'd listen. Guy Laliberté liked to say we'd planted a flower in the desert. *Mystère* embodied to perfection the transformation of Las Vegas. The show gave definite meaning to the town's desire for renewal, which had started out as nothing but a gigantic marketing operation.

From the outset, the Mirage and Cirque teams underwent many adjustments. The companies had very different corporate cultures, which were not incompatible but extremely different. Many times I had to iron things out with my opposite numbers Allen Feldman and John Schadler. The success and good will displayed by both parties was an excellent recipe for building a trusting relationship.

At a press conference announcing the partnership, Steve Wynn detailed the remarkable things he intended to accomplish with us and spoke at length about the many millions of dollars in profit that he expected to make in this relationship. Mirage was listed on the stock exchange, and he loved to impress his shareholders. His firm stood in stark contrast to us, a private enterprise, which had received tens of millions of dollars in government grants.

Cirque du Soleil was somewhat reticent about publicly revealing this kind of information. With the announcement of the project, many people feared we would lose our soul at the gambling tables. But I knew that Las Vegas would receive us with open arms. We weren't changing the way we did shows; we were just furthering our development.

After we'd played before full houses for a few years, Las Vegas knew entertainment could be a moneymaking enterprise. This was a mini-revolution. And Steve Wynn had other plans. He intended to build Le Bellagio, a hotel with a performance space tailored to Cirque du Soleil. We were encouraged to be even more creative, to imagine the unimaginable. The hotel project included a water theme, which was incorporated into the new show. On stage, there was a volume of water equivalent to three Olympic-sized swimming pools. So, for the most expensive hotel in the world, we created *O*, the most magnificent show in the world.

Cirque du Soleil transformed the face of Las Vegas. It helped change the way things were done. It set new standards in business partnerships and raised the bar as to the kind and quality of shows presented. Now MGM, Caesar's and Wynn Resorts rival one another in staging shows of superior class. All the mega-projects by the three groups have been created by Cirque du Soleil or the team headed by former Cirque du Soleil director Franco Dragone. Apparently Americans love winning formulas.

Do you have any suggestions to offer them?

THINKING BIG

*"...an historical event
right in the middle of
globalization."*

Cirque du Soleil had a lot riding on a successful return to the European market in 1995. Repeating the errors we made in 1990 was not an option. This time we had to get it right. The company had grown in maturity and experience over the years. We had far more means at our disposal. We'd take Europe by storm. It would be an extraordinary adventure.

In 1994, we decided to set up a headquarters there. Several cities were considered: among them, London, Berlin, Munich, even Paris. Most of us would have opted for the latter, but we were in Europe to do business, and compared with other countries we were contemplating, France unfortunately didn't offer the same advantages to foreign companies wishing to set up shop. Finally we chose Amsterdam. In fact, the tax people were the ones who convinced us. The Dutch government allowed the best tax breaks. We established a permanent division: Cirque du Soleil Europe. Holland also gave us access to a highly qualified, multilingual workforce, and Amsterdam turned out to be a fine city to live in.

I applied for executive director of this fascinating project. I was eager for a new challenge. My wife was more than willing to move, and our two sons, aged five and seven, loved to fly. Unfortunately, my application was promptly turned down; there was another candidate, Danny Pelchat, a friend of mine, who had been with Cirque du Soleil from the very start.

According to my bosses, they needed my marketing expertise for the entire operation. “Oh well,” I thought. “At least I tried.” I ended up spending a lot of time in Europe anyway. Guy specifically asked me to divide my time between the Montreal headquarters and the Amsterdam office until the project could fly on its own in Europe. So, for the next two years, I worked two weeks in Amsterdam and two in Montreal every month: a kind of intercontinental ping-pong!

The first thing we did was to put together a management team: a little band of mercenaries. Actually they were management types drawn from the ranks of the company. They were real go-getters. An odd assortment perhaps, but highly motivated, passionate and, above all, determined.

Europe had a great circus tradition. There were scores of companies from all nationalities. They're mainly small local troupes performing under very basic conditions. Primarily catering to a family clientele, their shows are simple, charming, and unpretentious. Of course, France, Switzerland, Italy and Germany boast big circuses as well. Archaos, a *nouveau cirque* troupe from France was a sort of techno, Madmax-style circus. It targeted a clientele that I jokingly call hooligans. But the other circuses take a traditional approach emphasizing rigor, quality and professionalism. At the time, Roncalli from Germany was the biggest circus in Europe. It offered spectators a one-ring circus with animals and gave a great deal of attention to detail: it was a classic of its kind. We admired and respected all of these circuses. In a way they were our peers. We shared the same milieu, art and origins.

The entertainment industry was well aware that we were offering a concept, a product unlike anything else. Our reputation was solidly established and the principal European actors feared our entry in their market. Yet, for the general public, we were unknown, mere foreigners. Confident in the originality and the strength of our product, we prioritized on two additional aspects that could set us apart from the competition: venue and marketing.

By venue, I mean the site, the Grand Chapiteau, the big top, which we transported with us. In North America, we had a 2500-seat blue and yellow striped big top. It had a European look and a traditional form pleasing to North Americans. In Europe, on the other hand, there was a plethora of blue and yellow striped big tops. We also noted that most European reception tents were tiny. Circuses use these tents to check tickets and sell souvenirs and refreshments. Above all, they serve as a meeting place and the commercial center of the circus.

We were looking for something to set us apart from our competitors. So we built a spectacular white big top, the Grand Chapiteau, along with a gigantic modernistic reception tent. The interior was magnificent: mounted on the two main masts were huge mechanized sculptures in the form of aviaries revolving overhead. Absolute works of art! The creator, set designer Michel Crête, did a magnificent job. Visitors were literally blown away as they entered the service tent. The site had a futuristic look with everything

in white—tents, trucks and caravans. Passersby craned their necks trying to find out what was going on inside the Grand Chapiteau. The mere sight of our installations amazed people. It was the talk of the town. Of course, that was the purpose of the exercise!

Marketing was the second component of our effort to rise above the others. In this domain, we combined an outstanding track record with extraordinary expertise. European traveling circuses tend toward the traditional. As a rule, they're highly mobile. Their engagements last only a few days but they visit a large number of towns and villages. The nearly century-old practice of touring allows circuses to perform before sold-out audiences while cutting financial risks to a certain extent. Their advertising campaign consists mainly of plastering posters around town. It's a tried and true method recognized by everyone, and the public in particular. Some circuses even advertise in the newspapers, often offering discount coupons. A little unsophisticated perhaps, but, we must admit, it works pretty well for them

We had developed another approach in North America, a highly effective advertising campaign that mobilized all the media. For a new market, the company invested up to 10% of the total projected revenue, or even more, in advertising. For example, if the sell-out revenue for a city was expected to be \$5 million, it pumped \$500,000 into an advertising campaign, including media relations expenses.

Compared with other types of shows, we always made very ambitious revenue projections for each city. In that respect, other circuses didn't begin to compare. So we operated from a position of strength, with resources that allowed us to conduct advertising campaigns combining newspapers, television, radio, billboards, as well as posting in buses and on the streets. Our campaigns had an incredible impact on the public: they had never seen such a media blitz. But on the Old Continent, it seems form and protocol are everything. At least, that's what some people tried to make us believe.

Germany accounted for nearly half of our first tour. With a huge population of over 80 million people, it is a major market. Germans are a proud and articulate people, eager consumers of cultural products. They have been called the Americans of Europe. The German press is highly diversified: powerful national dailies, avant-garde magazines, brilliant journalists, a numerous and active regional press with the same obsession for detail, research, analysis and accuracy. So Germany became a reference point for the entire first operation.

We set up a sort of brains trust of friends and business associates from the entertainment, recording and television industries. We asked the group to assess our strategies, give us insights on people's lifestyles, and establish new contacts. At a meeting in Munich in 1994, the "sages" described the highly complex and sophisticated German media. They underlined the importance of securing a proper introduction to the principal editors, bureau chiefs and journalists.

This phase of our entry into Germany had a decisive effect on the quality and extent of press coverage we could expect. For an operation like ours to succeed, our advisers were

unanimous: we had to enlist a big German star, a celebrity from the entertainment community who knew the people who counted. We needed someone whose stature and credibility would enable us to obtain tangible results and excellent press coverage. The group was absolutely insistent about this recommendation. Guy bought into the idea and encouraged me to act promptly.

But I wasn't convinced. I just couldn't see myself spending a few hundred thousand euros to hire a perfect stranger who had nothing in common with us. I understood the reasoning, but the idea didn't jive with my sense of who we were. Yes, the German press was sophisticated, but all the same! Surely, we could do something better with the money.

I returned to our Amsterdam offices to mull it over. Nevertheless I admired and respected the brains trust. Two key elements in their recommendations were indisputable. First, we needed to identify the key German media figures, recognize the decision-makers in each sector, and classify them according to their skills and credibility. In other words we had to put together a press list to meet our needs. One of our friends in Zurich, a PR agent in the cultural area, did business in Germany. We invited him to spend a couple of days in Amsterdam. For a few hundred euros, he helped compile a list of names, addresses and telephone numbers. That took care of the first point.

The second point concerned the need for adequate representation with these media people and institutions. Six months before, we had hired a press attaché, Andrée Deissenberg. A young woman in her early twenties, she had dual citizenship (French and American) and spoke fluent French, English and German. She was a graduate of the Université de Paris, and the Cirque du Soleil was her first real job. At the time, she admits, she was very shy, but her intelligence allowed her to overcome this slight handicap. As far as I'm concerned, she embodied many of Cirque du Soleil's essential values and qualities: youth, originality, innocence, multiculturalism, and a promising potential.

So we assigned her to make the initial contact with the German media. She was well prepared and I was convinced she would succeed. A few weeks later, she visited the editorial rooms of the biggest German, Austrian and Dutch dailies and magazines. Everywhere she went, she was a hit, never failing to earn an enthusiastic response. She was a terrific representative. There was real synergy between her personality, the company, the show and our approach to the European market. Of course, Andrée didn't go to the media with empty hands. She even offered some of them an incredible press junket.

In the fall of 1994, we gave a few dozen journalists, photographers, directors, and television people the opportunity to get to know Cirque du Soleil at our expense. The weeklong trip took them to Montreal to visit company headquarters, and especially to see *Saltimbanco*, the show that we hoped would conquer Europe. It was being presented in preparation for the major tour. Then our guests were flown to Los Angeles to take in *Alegria* on Santa Monica Pier. Finally, they were off to Los Vegas, to see *Mystère*; playing to sold-out audiences since 1993, the show was permanently located at Treasure Island Hotel. The junket could have been dubbed Operation Knockout... Everyone on the

trip came away stunned by the world of Cirque du Soleil. They'd never seen anything like it.

It all added up to a dazzling media campaign. Our futuristic venue and innovative marketing campaign mirrored the show's quality and originality. The campaign generated tremendous energy and enthusiasm. Some dailies and magazines even ran articles praising our marketing operations. More important, the tour's bottom line fully met our expectations; the results were extraordinary.

Considering the frenzy of activity surrounding our European tour preparations and the many things that had to be put in place for a successful operation, Guy Laliberté advised me to "Go easy." He thought we should avoid making a lot of noise and alarming people (other circuses, for instance). We didn't want to be seen like a big North American company arriving on the continent and hustling everything under the sun ... He urged me to keep a low profile. I shared his concern and promised to give the matter special consideration.

I did point out that we couldn't hide our record of achievement from the press and the public. Besides we were in a development phase, and the costs for the whole operation were exorbitant and the financial objectives were equally high. No one on the management team wanted a deficit. Guy absolutely agreed with me on that point. So I thought we had to put our best foot forward. Ironically, not long after, once everything was in place, I came up with the name "The Bulldozer Tour."

My European marketing strategy took account of the fact that the continent was laying the groundwork for unification. Negotiations, projections and debates had been the media's daily bread for years. The countries concerned were preparing for a new status; they were about to give birth to one big Europe. It was the fulfillment of a dream. The negotiations were sending waves of exhilaration and excitement through every sector of society. Something extraordinary was happening. At the close of the century, people were witnessing a pivotal moment in history.

It was in this context that I put in place our marketing operation. It occurred to me that we must take advantage of the repositioning of the continent. And why couldn't we? It was just a matter of perspective. In Europe, the time and the events were providing a magnificent opportunity that was well within our grasp. We would position ourselves as one of the advantages offered by the new Europe: a world-class show from Cirque du Soleil, a forward-looking company setting up a Pan-European tour network. Cirque du Soleil would reap the benefits from the current of change sweeping the continent.

We had encountered a similar situation on our first visit to Atlanta in 1991. The city had just been awarded the Olympic Games. Buoyed by the authorities and the media, the public was basking in the feeling that Atlanta had arrived as an international city. News of our coming was somehow associated with the new status by some opinion leaders in the world of culture and the arts. The local media quickly bought into the idea and people saw our arrival as a foretaste of the cultural events that the city would host during the

Olympics... We could hardly have asked for better strategic positioning. We played to sold-out audiences.

What do you say we break some records?

AT THE SUMMIT

“Thank you, Mr. President!”

Early in the spring of 1995, we got a call from Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, asking us to perform at the G7 conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia. It was a little inconvenient. Normally Cirque du Soleil didn't take part in special events. Besides, it would mean quickly putting together a show with artists and technicians, setting up a big top, and rehearsing so that we could offer a quality product. The operation would also entail marshalling considerable human and material resources. It would also require much work and organization. Still, we knew that the seven world leaders represented countries that had the majority of our customers, so we thought we should make a special effort. And it was our prime minister making the request.

After assessing the feasibility of the project, we were inclined to accept. But there was an ethical issue about the government picking up the tab. It was no secret that Canadians were heavily taxed. Citizens might question the relevance of spending over a million dollars for the project. We didn't relish the idea of finding ourselves in the midst of a controversy. So we accepted to do the project on one condition: the private sector had to foot the bill. And we weren't fooling! After a little back-and-forth, the government agreed. Two Canadian corporations, Bombardier and Air Canada, undertook to sponsor the event and share the expenses.

The Halifax summit offered us a splendid opportunity to conduct a vast public relations operation with the 3,000 journalists gathered from around the world to cover the event. I assembled a team consisting of publicity staff from our Montreal headquarters and from our North American, Asian, and European divisions. So we could communicate in French, English, Spanish, German, and Japanese. We were in the media centre. As a result of this successful operation we came away with a better grasp of the international reach and scope of our activities.

Undoubtedly, for us the highlight of the summit was meeting the G7 leaders. Forty-five minutes before the show began, a cocktail party was held in a tent adjacent to the big top. Our sponsors, Guy Laliberté, Daniel Gauthier, his wife Hélène Dufresne, and I were invited to join the leaders, and their finance and foreign affairs ministers. This brief event turned out to be very interesting!

We chatted with John Major and Helmut Kohl. President Clinton confided to us that at their first session, Prime Minister Chrétien had distributed the event program and everyone was delighted to learn that Cirque du Soleil would be performing. Bill Clinton

also described us to the other leaders because he was the only one who had seen a show. In fact, he'd seen two of them.

Meeting French President Jacques Chirac was even more interesting. After exchanging greetings, Mr. Chirac asked us why we weren't performing in France on a regular basis. I replied that we'd been venue hunting in Paris for a long time, but that none of the sites proposed by city bureaucrats met our criteria. When I mentioned that we'd called his office when he was still the mayor of Paris, he admitted that he'd heard of our request and said he was sorry he hadn't given our project the attention it deserved. He reminded us that he was involved in a presidential campaign and that he had a full schedule. He was kind enough to encourage us to contact the bureaucrats again. Thanks, Mr. President!

Are you very diplomatic?

PEOPLE YOU MEET

"We're all headed in the same direction."

As the proverb goes: "Traveling forms youth!" The world is round, so we might as well travel around it. I like to think that the average lifespan of human beings should be as long as it would take to cross all the continents on foot!

I'm a people person; I enjoy meeting them, and talking to them. Very early on, when I was still in my early twenties, I found out that business trips were far more stimulating than tourist trips. When you're a tourist in a foreign country, your contact with people is always too brief: taxi drivers, hotel janitors, restaurant employees and clerks are generally friendly enough but they're busy doing their jobs.

When I travel on business, I meet many people in a profession that I love. I spend hours listening, discussing, negotiating, and trying to understand. I have to get my point of view across while finding some common ground for agreement. This vital professional exercise has given me much satisfaction. It gives me the opportunity to get to know people from very different cultures. Such diversity and surprising similarity! You could never have such an enriching experience as a mere tourist.

In my travels around the world, I've been lucky enough to meet extraordinary people involved in a multitude of interests and pursuits. I've tried to get to know them as well as I can and to see what makes them stand out. I've made many friends. Often, these relationships were of brief duration because of distances and commitments, but in no way did time diminish the quality of our friendship. I've learned that human beings have much in common, that they share the same legacy, and that they'll be facing the same challenges in the future. We're all headed in the same direction.

Have you made any new friends lately?

DARING TO DARE

“... an island, a city...”

Hong Kong is an island, a metropolis, a place right out of an adventure tale. One day, we found ourselves in this little beehive of activity with our big top in magnificent Victoria Park, an incredible site in the heart of the city. To say the least, the project was ambitious. You can well imagine that we didn't pitch our tent there without a lot of preparation. Fortunately we had the support of Swire Properties; without them I'm not sure we would have come to the island.

Our installation and preparations coincided with Hong Kong's retrocession to Chinese sovereignty. A feeling of exuberance marked the countdown; the atmosphere was electric. It was also a period of uncertainty. Some people feared that they were witnessing the final days of freedom, but most were optimistic, confident that Beijing would want to reap the benefits of the island's booming economy.

Our show received an extraordinary welcome. Our VIP service catering to customers desiring more personalized treatment proved to be very popular on the island. Our experience in Hong Kong marked another stage in our development since it was the first time we performed before predominantly Chinese audiences. We were rather proud of the fact.

Do you have any friends who live more than 5,000 miles away?

SURPRISE!

“... the floor collapsed.”

Our first visit to Washington attracted a great deal of interest. We were doing business with the Abe Pollen group. A major local producer, involved in a multitude of activities, gave us a lot of support. Washington is a fascinating and dynamic city. As the nation's capital, it is governed by a plethora of rules and regulations. Pollen and the Canadian embassy helped us set up on the Mall, an area of great historical significance. An expanse of parkland in the center of the city within walking distance of the White House, the Mall stretches from the Lincoln memorial to the US Capitol. Senators could observe us from their windows.

To comply with the regulation banning commercial activity on the Mall, we set up ticketing on the adjacent street, about 20 yards from the reception tent. It was a bold move. We liked to take chances. Besides in terms of location, the place met our requirements.

Cirque set such high occupancy objectives that we took pains to find the most coveted venue, offering the most visibility. In so doing, the company differed from traditional circuses, which usually set up in the suburbs for economic reasons.

For the Washington premiere on the Mall esplanade, the big top overflowed with the who's who in American politics. In addition there were ambassadors, financiers and, of course, the cultural elite. It was also the first time AT&T acted as our major sponsor. For the occasion, the giant corporation had invited every key business associate in Washington.

As usual there was an intermission. In the reception tent, we had installed a raised floor. The Mall's esplanade was made of grass, so we needed a floor to protect the public in case of rain. Just before the second half began, when most of the spectators were coming back to the big top, the floor collapsed. Fortunately, no one was hurt, and most of the witnesses to the accident were either Cirque du Soleil or AT&T employees.

There was no drama and no diplomatic incident. No ambassador or senator disappeared under the floor. Within minutes, a bevy of technicians, led by Richard Bouthillier, the big top and technical expert, set to work rebuilding the entire floor. It was a race against time. The second part of the show lasted only 50 minutes and spectators would be passing through the reception tent to exit the site. We had quite a scare but it all worked out in the end. The premiere was a huge success; the reviews were excellent. Noting the location of the big top opposite the Capitol, the journalists commented that now there were two circuses on The Mall.

Which circus would you choose?

ROOM FOR EVERYONE

"... strange encounter of the three kinds."

New York is a huge city that has something for every taste. It was an important stage in our quest to conquer the American market. In fact, a documentary entitled, *Un cirque en Amérique* (A Circus in America), recounting these pivotal events in Cirque du Soleil was directed by Montreal journalist Nathalie Petrowski and produced by the National Film Board of Canada (NFB).

There is no shortage of competition for the entertainment dollar in New York. So the circuses tried to avoid direct competition. The operators were careful not to hurt the others. We even exchanged tour plans. The idea was very simple: avoid putting anyone at risk. Yet one day, circus-goers could choose between Ringling Brothers at Madison Square Garden, the Big Apple Circus at Lincoln Center, and Cirque du Soleil in Barry Park opposite Wall Street.

Many people feared the worst, but in the end, none of the circuses suffered by this strange encounter of the three kinds. After all, the shows addressed different clienteles. Their advertising campaigns were a study in contrast. They crossed each other's path but they didn't compete. In describing the situation, journalists remarked that the three companies complemented one another. The circuses had clearly demonstrated that the market could accommodate a few circuses, especially in New York.

Are you willing to take risks?

THIRST FOR RENEWAL

*“If you keep hammering the same nail,
you'll end up damaging the building.”*

Producers whether they were American, Japanese, German, French, Dutch or English, often asked me whether we had other artists, troupes or cultural products to offer them. The entertainment world has an insatiable appetite for innovative products of quality. Paradoxically, in the global village the entertainment industry is becoming homogenized.

Yet, globalization also has its positive sides. It also permits the expression and the manifestation of the world's cultures. Huge corporations were involved in the formation of vast strategic alliances in the 1990s, the deployment of major communication networks and the rapid development of the Internet. Facilitating the emergence of new cultural content was essential to the survival of these corporations.

People are more educated and better informed than ever before. They're becoming increasingly discerning about their entertainment. For over 20 years, every Western society has witnessed declining interest in, even a rejection of values espoused by traditional institutions. Instead, there has been a growing emphasis on personal ethics.

These rules or standards of personal conduct are in keeping with individual aspirations principally related to the need to have true quality of life. Around the world, people are also increasingly critical of the omnipresence of American culture. But Hollywood has yet to understand that if you keep hammering the same nail, you'll end up damaging the building.

Everywhere on the planet, there's a need for renewal and a clear desire to be exposed to other cultures. Culture is the lifeblood of our soul. We must create a new business dynamic based on both individual and group expression for the betterment of society. Indeed the future of society is inextricably linked to the fostering of its citizens' creative potential.

Can it be done?

ULTIMATE BRANDING

“...an identical solution.”

The most valuable asset a company can possess is to be perceived to be an innovative enterprise by the public — innovation is the ultimate branding. And observers are unanimous that Cirque du Soleil is innovative. A reputation for innovation opens many doors. People believe you have the capacity to meet any number of their needs.

Cirque du Soleil’s experience in Las Vegas and with Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida is a vivid illustration of the power of innovation. In the early 1990s, the Las Vegas market was undergoing rapid growth. This adult destination drew millions of tourists every year. But the clientele had evolved. Gaming aficionados had gotten married; they’d taken time to have children. Sure, they wanted to keep visiting Vegas, but they wanted to bring their families. So the hitherto adult destination was seeking to reposition itself to appeal to a new demographic.

To send a clear message that the town had truly changed, promoters proposed a diversity of projects. One of these involved boldly innovative Cirque du Soleil whose product matched the spirit of renewal sweeping Las Vegas. No sooner said than done; Cirque du Soleil became a fixture in Vegas.

In the late 1990s, on the other side of the United States, Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida was in full expansion. Millions of tourists were flocking to it every year. Unlike Vegas, Walt Disney World, a family destination, wanted to enhance its appeal to the adult clientele. Having built immense infrastructures to accommodate major conferences, Disney was now a preferred destination for millions of adults.

These adults who had come without children were looking for suitable entertainment. The Disney people proposed a variety of projects. They called on Cirque du Soleil who offered the ideal product to meet their needs. They provided Cirque permanent residency in the Downtown Disney section. No sooner said than done; Cirque du Soleil became a fixture in Orlando.

Disney and Vegas, pursuing two very different positioning objectives, found one solution: Cirque du Soleil. Such is the power of innovation!

Does this suggest something to you?

BEWARE THE TECHNOCRATS

“The hunt is on!”

People often ask me, “What are the biggest problems Cirque du Soleil has faced?” Apart from growth, meddling technocrats were our biggest problem. Then just when the company was growing rapidly, the bosses decided to hire management specialists to guide us through the development process. They became consultants or senior executives in the company. They wasted our time in meetings, discussing theories they’d learned by rote at university. Their ideas contributed nothing because they were already obsolete. These technocrats devised five-year plans that just weren’t viable. It was unbelievable!

These so-called experts created a lot of confusion; they were useless. They had complete disregard for our needs. While claiming to work within a system that was already functioning they insisted on imposing their own. They knew nothing about our shows, the public, and the company’s turnover. They couldn’t relate to the *raison d’être* of the organization. Worse still, they did everything in their power to distance us from it.

The new art of organization: wasting time together. Someday, I’d like to meet the guy who invented it. The technocrats had no idea what we were doing. They did everything in their power to impose their theoretical notions of what a big organization should be, and they did it with the bosses’ backing. Eventually I realized that these consultants had been hired merely to compensate for a lack of confidence and leadership skills on the part of some senior executives.

When you talked to these people, you always came away with the same feeling: “There must be something I haven’t understood.” And suddenly you felt less intelligent than you were when you got up in the morning. Meanwhile, the technocrat was happy as a lark, and went strolling down the halls adorned with works of art to his office to prepare his report. It was my most painful experience at Cirque du Soleil, and I know there were others who felt the same. Unfortunately, you find these technocrats throughout society.

What’s really appalling is that they’re products of our educational system. They leave our universities with the blessing of their thesis director and the education minister. Our educational system must be in sorry shape to inflict individuals with so little humanity on the job market. There’s a fascinating book by Patricia Pitcher that explains the role these individuals play in organizations. The title: *Artists, Craftsmen and Technocrats*. Read it and then you’ll be able to pick them out. The hunt is on!

Do you have a keen eye?

THE REVELATOR

“They have been literally possessed by a completely unexpected form of intelligent life — possessed by themselves.”

From the time Cirque du Soleil began performing in 1984, something fascinating occurred. Many people were moved to tears by the end of every performance. The comments we gathered from spectators were heartfelt and sincere. It was beautiful to see. People were touched by the originality and the simplicity of the spectacle. We were offering an entirely new and original type of show.

In addition, the artists were street entertainers who found themselves on stage before a captive audience. They had mastered the art of interacting with the public. This intimate relationship between artists and public became a defining characteristic of Cirque du Soleil. Its creations left audience enthralled. Everywhere we went, we encountered the same reaction, enthusiasm, and appreciation. It was a marketing manager’s dream. It was really extraordinary to be able to count on such a fantastic product.

In the early years, I spent a good deal of time at the big top. I made it a point to be there when the public arrived and when they left. I wanted to see the people — to meet our spectators, our customers. Time after time we got the same reaction. Who we were and what we were offering the public gradually became clearer in my mind, but I still lacked the words to describe what I saw and felt.

One day, in 1986, I was attending a show in Toronto. Sitting in the last row, my friend and I were observing the performance and the audience reaction. My friend asked me why people everywhere loved our shows. I pointed out that the success was largely due to the artists whose industry and skill had previously gone unrecognized.

There is something noble about public entertainers. They possess energy, spontaneity, freshness and desire. It was as if the troupe was riding a incredibly powerful wave. Our task was to stay on top of the situation and to make sure that everything ran smoothly. It was a little like surfing: when there’s a huge wave and you have to keep from falling off.

Franco Dragone’s arrival as artistic director marked a new era at Cirque du Soleil and gave a new dimension to the shows. Dragone was inspired by the commedia dell’arte — *“a form of popular comedy dating back to the Middle Ages, at the time when farces were performed in various regional Italian dialects; professional troupes, composed of minstrels and wandering acrobats, perfected a form of entertainment adapted to the general public.”*

Working closely with set designer Michel Crête, costume designer Dominique Lemieux, lighting designer Luc Lafortune, choreographer Debra Brown, along with composers René Dupéré and later Benoît Jutras, Franco Dragone instituted a more coherent creative approach. His intent was to give meaning to the artistic experience. Together, the team

went on an extraordinary journey, an unparalleled exploration of the human spirit in which each show pushed the limits.

In this creative process, certain characteristics emerged. Language, as such, played no part in the works: no words were spoken, just sounds or phonemes intended to express feelings, emotions, and situations. It was almost like an invented language. The advantage of using sounds was their universality; they were not culture specific; they were universal: audiences everywhere understood them. This approach did much to establish the universality of our product. The same show was performed unchanged in New York, Vienna, Madrid, and Hong Kong.

The artistic team's commitment to communicate with spectators through emotion soon became a hallmark of Cirque du Soleil. The set design, costumes, lighting, choreography, music, and artistic performance combined to create an atmosphere that gave spectators a heightened sense of participation and conveyed the intent of the artists on stage and every acrobatic stunt in a surreal environment.

During my years at Cirque du Soleil, there was an ongoing discussion between Marketing and the artistic team about the story a show was attempting to depict. Was there a narrative thread? And if so, what was it? Since each new production was an original creation, Marketing never knew in advance what message or story the show intended to convey. Often, we had to wait for the performance in front of the public and media before we could formulate a description.

In marketing, our work included introducing new shows to the press and public. It was a challenge to explain what the work was about. The decor conjured up this, the costumes evoked that, the music transported us to another universe, the acts were breathtaking, and the clowns weren't always intended to be funny... In my department, the staff grumbled a bit because they wanted something concrete, something they could get their teeth into, but my confidence in the artistic team was unshakable.

Leaving the shows, the spectators often had the same comments: it's the most wonderful thing we've ever seen. The story was extraordinary, incredibly beautiful. I realized that spectators were making up their own story. They invested the spectacle they witnessed with meaning. And that meaning was extremely personal.

Spectators all over the globe left the big top with the feeling that they had taken part in an adventure. Gilles Ste-Croix and my other colleagues on the creative side, never failed to tease me about that! "You see, Jean, the spectators don't need us to tell them a story; they see and they understand." To work for Cirque du Soleil, you needed a sense of humor.

I carried out an analysis of audience participation independently of the artistic team. I took the time to analyze the impact of the work on the public from the spectator's perspective and not as a theater critic trying to explain the work. Understandably, we were inundated with that sort of review. My fascination with the issue of audience participation was very personal, a reflection of my curiosity about the relationship

between communications and society. As the years went by, my desire to understand what was really happening grew and I intensified my research and analysis. I thought that the spectator viewing our show was analogous to a visitor at a museum observing of a painting.

Standing before a painting in a museum, we tend to search within us for internal cultural and personal frames of reference. It is a normal response that allows us to assess, appreciate, and appropriate the work. We do it automatically. The need to understand obliges us to identify an occurrence, a situation, a feeling, or an idea in our memory to situate the work. The more abstract, diffuse or vague the object of our attention, the deeper, more arduous the search for a frame of reference. We categorize the object, and invest it with meaning, intimately relating it to our own life story. In doing so, we revisit and, to a certain extent, validate our identity.

Of course, this process is short-lived: only a matter of seconds. We engage in it “unconsciously” every day and in many circumstances. For example, you go to the store and admire a stunning new dress collection. Or you contemplate buying a new car and visit showrooms feasting your eyes on the latest models. It is exactly the same process as when you’re looking at a magnificent painting. You look inside yourself to see what you relate to, to see the object you can really identify with. The example of the museum visit enables us to see this phenomenon more clearly. We can replay the process in our head and analyze the various stages involved.

For Cirque du Soleil spectators, the same phenomenon occurs but it is far more intense. As observers, they are invited to delve inside themselves to give meaning to the spectacle on stage. They are inhabiting an extraordinary game, literally a mind game! The elements and stimuli presented by the artistic team are very broad, quite vague, indefinite enough that they give spectators the chance to imagine for themselves the true meaning of what they’re observing. They are explicitly invited to complete what they’re seeing. The overall artistic effect is a unique, highly intense experience.

Every show directed by Franco Dragone incorporated the notion of a living work of art, in which the spectator’s mind was flooded with a set of highly original stimuli. A plethora of colors in movement, omnipresent music in many tones that shaped the whole experience, a magnificent décor open to interpretation. Characterizing his art were the absence of stars, cultural barriers and competition. Complementing these qualities were the universality of language pushed to the extreme, the keen sense of risk juxtaposed with fear, joy, hope, happiness, anger, melancholy, and the absurd. Dragone’s work appealed to a whole range of emotions in a single instant.

Dragone’s work pushed the boundaries, aiming to stimulate the brain and engage the mind. Thus, the spectators were invited to complete the work; their minds were so stimulated that they had no other choice but to make instant associations between the elements of the show. Thrust into a totally unaccustomed situation, spectators underwent a unique sensory experience.

They were projected into a process in which they had to explore their own feelings and emotions. They played every role, performed every acrobatic feat; they were both the music and the light. In reality, what the spectators saw was a part of themselves that they'd never seen before. No wonder most spectators left the show beaming broadly. That's why customer satisfaction levels exceeded 90%.

The spectator's experience takes place at the border between the conscious and the unconscious. Have you ever wondered what you can do in a billionth of a billionth of a second? Well, that's all it takes to form an idea. Our spectators were captive actors, rather than a captive audience; they had no alternative but to get involved.

Cirque du Soleil made spectators see themselves in an entirely new way, with unprecedented intensity. The word that best encapsulated the Cirque du Soleil experience was "authenticity." This, I believe, accounted for the enormous popularity of our productions. People were coming to see themselves, to discover themselves.

Of all Cirque du Soleil's shows, the best, the most complete, the most innovative, and the most captivating was *O*, performed at Hotel Bellagio in Las Vegas. The show was the last product at the end of the creative process implemented by Franco Dragone and Cirque du Soleil's artistic team.

In fact, the team exploded within months of *O*'s delivery. According to the official version, the time had come for them to move on to something new, but in reality, they had attained their ultimate goal. Show after show, the team had gone on a quest in the world of the imaginary, exploring the vast human landscape.

In their decade-long quest, they inventoried nearly the entire range of human emotions. This magnificent journey into the universe of our souls, this investigation of human nature ended abruptly with the creation of *O*. The work was a celebration of "life, love, and death," as the official Cirque du Soleil media kit put it. Like the artistic team, senior management also blew apart, swept away by the impact of *O*, the Revelator, as I like to call it.

I think the word *Revelator* best describes the show's effect on the audience. It opens you up, tears away your mask, and invites you to reveal yourself to others. It is a fascinating phenomenon of spectator participation, unique to the Cirque du Soleil experience. *O*'s impact explains the power of the company's previous productions. That's why I'd like to take the time to examine the various aspects of the work.

The interface between spectator and show reaches maximum proportions and the intensity between the two is incredible. For the audience, the overall experience reaches new heights thanks to the nature and force of the elements involved. Like previous Cirque du Soleil shows, *O* propels spectators on a roller coaster ride of thoughts, feelings and sensations.

But what quickens the senses even more is the presence of water: 1.5 million gallons of it to be exact. In psychology, water symbolizes the unconscious. And in this case, the symbolism takes real and dramatic form. Water consecrates the depth and fluidity of the spectator's experience.

To fully absorb the experience, spectators delve within themselves for references that will give meaning to their participation; they have no choice; their mind has embarked on an ultimate odyssey. It is astonishing to see spectators' reactions and body language right from the opening minutes of the show. They are riveted to their seats, awestruck, unsettled by the presentation. There is no returning, they are completely enthralled.

That's when the Revelator effect begins. Spectators reflexively dig deep inside their resources; but the force of the interface and the fluidity of the elements create a vortex setting off a process of integration and auto-transcription across the spinal column, the nervous system and the unconscious. Spectators grasping for some frame of reference, suddenly plunge into the deepest part of themselves. Amazingly, they become both the lead actor and the only witness of the phenomenon. It's as if they have been ensnared by their own curiosity and propelled into the heart of an undreamed of event, for which they are absolutely unprepared.

In a way, each spectator is a microcosm of the global village. Integration and auto-transcription combine to provoke what I call "a flooding of the global village." A deluge of the self. In the process, spectators acknowledge and experience every part of their being. They truly get in touch with themselves and they are obliged to take possession of themselves. They have been literally "possessed" by a completely unexpected form of intelligent life — possessed by themselves. For some people, it comes as quite a surprise. The thought process of the spectators is deployed throughout their organism and acquires a kind of measurable energy mass. The phenomenon can be expressed by the equation: $E = GC^2$. Energy (thought) is equal to gravity projected at the square of the speed of light. I believe it is a unique phenomenon in the world, which merits our attention, because the consequences for the individual and society are, to say the least, unparalleled.

There's an interesting analogy that helps us understand and assess the impact of the phenomenon. It's as if the entire universe suddenly acquired a center so it could situate itself, define itself, and find a reference point. Considering the entropic nature of the environment in which we live, I would describe the Revelator effect as a "staggering reversal." Each spectator embodies this center, this frame of reference, and must therefore decide whether or not to assume the "responsibility." In the days, months and years that follow, individuals are impelled to discover and reveal their true identity. So they are driven to take stock because for the first time in their lives they feel empowered.

It's as if spectators enter an immense mansion full of riches, treasures and ideas. In passing, they discover the owner's manual containing details about the residence. They're encouraged to see the many possibilities and advantages available, and they are urged to note the obligations that accrue to their situation. Their impulse is, of course, to do a little internal housecleaning. Then, comes the most difficult part: they decide what they're

going to do with the information they've just received. They're confronted with more and more events that permit less and less latitude. Despite themselves, spectators in turn become revelators of identity, setting off a remarkable chain of events in their environment.

To date, nearly five million people have seen *O* and have been exposed to the Revelator. I have always thought that Cirque du Soleil shows had a positive effect on the public, but I must admit that this show goes much further. To a certain extent, it "situates" individuals in their true context and restitutes them to themselves for one brief but intense moment. WOW! Spectators are agape; they leave the theater awestruck. They know something extraordinary and transcendent has occurred, but they're incapable of describing it since nothing in their cultural and educational background has prepared them for it. I don't think the casino owners could ever have imagined they would offer their distinguished clientele entertainment like this; it isn't really described in the program.

The creative process launched and developed by Franco Dragone and the Cirque du Soleil artistic team ended up devising a formidable feedback machine for people in search of authenticity. It's like the ultimate happening, a mutant factory, a fantastic braingate technology with, in particular, undreamed of effects on our environment.

Have you seen O?

THE FINISH LINE

"The end of the journey."

In 1987, we signed an agreement-in-principle with Australia's Sydney Festival, an important cultural event held in January, the middle of the summer down under.

Cirque du Soleil was slated to play there in January 1988. In the previous months, we had been involved in the planning and preparation for our arrival in the Los Angeles market. Meanwhile, at the other end of the globe, the announcement of our participation in the Sydney Festival raised the hackles of Australian trade unions, who saw us as a threat to local jobs. The Australian press reflected the unions' fears, giving us even greater cause for concern!

Cirque had never performed in Australia before. Furthermore, there was a strong resurgence of protectionism in the country. How could we seriously consider undertaking an operation of such scope in such circumstances? In mid-September, a few days after our triumphant debut in Los Angeles, I went to Melbourne and Sydney to assess the situation, rate the chances of success and try to forge strategic alliances. Given our success in Los Angeles, why should we risk going to Australia? And the union controversy was an excellent pretext for not going. Let's shelve the project. Game postponed for eleven years!

We returned to Australia as we were setting up the Asian division. Directed by my friend, H  l  ne Lariv  e, the division was headquartered in Singapore. Australia was part of a tour plan that initially included Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. We used *Saltimbanco* to penetrate the market. I dubbed *Saltimbanco* Cirque du Soleil’s flagship because it opened doors for us in many countries.

The Australian project was ambitious. It was carried out amidst the country’s feverish preparations for the Summer Olympics. We counted on highly qualified and efficient local human resources; they were an extraordinary team. We worked with Michael Edgley and Andrew Guild, the best producers in Australia. The whole operation was a smoothly running model of precision and rigor. We benefited from the vast experience of our local collaborators and our business partners. The tour was a huge success; the audiences were remarkably generous and spontaneous. It was a real pleasure.

The Australian tour was my last professional activity with Cirque du Soleil. Power doesn’t interest me. I’m for individual expression and a free exchange of ideas. After 15 years with the organization, I had to admit that though I had helped build the enterprise it did not belong to me. In fact, it had never belonged to me. As far as the owners were concerned, the values and principles that had guided me along the journey were no longer priorities. On the day before the Australian tour premiered in January 1999, I met with Daniel Gauthier and Guy Lalibert   in Sydney. We reached an agreement about the terms of my departure, which I set for June 16, 1999, the date of Cirque du Soleil’s fifteenth anniversary. The end of the journey.

Do you have any projects in mind?

KEY TO THE FUTURE

“Companies, including Cirque du Soleil, will find that their biggest challenges lie within their organizations.”

I don’t have a crystal ball; I can’t predict Cirque du Soleil’s future. I do believe that the company has fulfilled its mission. The company’s most significant undertaking and its greatest contribution was the development of the creative process and the work of the artistic group that led to the production of *O*. The show was Cirque du Soleil’s crowning achievement. Since then, it has been repeating the formula, trying to use it for all sorts of applications. There’s nothing wrong with this; on the contrary. That’s the way our consumer society operates in the economy of redundancy. The organization set the bar so high that it will take time to come down; unless...

When I left, I suggested that my bosses set up a creativity training and promotion program in the organization. My reasoning was as follows: Cirque du Soleil was

considered an innovative enterprise by industry and the public. And what was innovative about Cirque du Soleil? The shows! They didn't follow up on the idea. What role does creativity play in the company?

Well creativity is central to the daily activities of a core group of individuals: designers and their assistants, a few artisans and that's about all. The other 2500 employees are involved in drudgery much like the workers in any factory or assembly line in Detroit, Bordeaux, Amman, Manchester, Mexico, Taipei, Melbourne, Calcutta, Tel-Aviv, Kiev, Düsseldorf, Teheran, or Osaka.

Unfortunately, Cirque does little to encourage employee creativity. People are asked to show up, do their job, follow the rules, and that's enough. Perish the thought that they should exhibit one iota of creativity. And if they did, management wouldn't know what to do. Sure, the employees take pride in their work and they're "well-treated." there are many statistics to prove it.

On the other hand, the organization underestimates the individual employee's potential for creativity and imagination even though consultants, human resource people, and specialized journals are always talking about Cirque du Soleil's creativity. It seems to be the hot topic, but no one in senior management is really interested. Certainly, no one dares to take concrete action. The few attempts to improve the situation have been short-lived.

The challenge for every organization is to insure that creativity is at the heart of every activity. Creativity should not be the sole property of a small group of individuals. The following are guidelines for fostering creativity in the work place: establish a climate and design concrete projects that encourage the creative contribution of every employee; support these initiatives with training in creative problem-solving; give employees the tools and the encouragement they need to be creative; stop making pious promises; walk the talk; setup an employee appreciation program; institute not only a new management model, but a genuine communication model; revamp the hierarchical structure and the bonus system to reflect the creative contribution of the employees; dare to provide innovative management by putting the company at the service of every employee. Try this approach and you'll get results.

Employees are a company's greatest asset. For an organization to take this into account in its daily life, it takes courage, determination, and leadership. Maybe this is too much to expect of the heads of our modern enterprises. Business leaders certainly haven't received the training they would need. Companies, including Cirque du Soleil, will find that their biggest challenges lie within their organizations. I'm convinced that companies have a responsibility toward their employees to constantly strive to help them realize their potential. For companies ready to take up this challenge, the future is bright. There can be no better business plan!

Are you ready to put your shoulder to the wheel?

PAUSE

From The Smallest To the Biggest

*“In life, Virtue is not enough
since it also needs the support
of a favorable destiny.”*

(Zeno, Greek philosopher, 490 to 430 BC)

TRANSITION

*“It felt as if I’d just awakened from
a fifteen-year sleep...”*

After leaving Cirque du Soleil, I engaged in a period of profound introspection motivated by two factors. First, I had taken part in an enterprise that was far more extraordinary than the entertainment industry and the media realized. My friends offered their support: “You’re in mourning. Give it time. You’ll get over it...” But I knew that Cirque du Soleil was much more than the success story of a band of street performers. It was more than a moneymaking machine. But I had to admit that the image I’d had of Cirque du Soleil — an image which had inspired me all those years — was a far cry from the company’s official discourse.

Throughout my journey with Cirque du Soleil, I believed I was participating in an incredible adventure. My certainty that we had embarked on a noble mission gave me the strength to overcome the obstacles that lay in my path. But what happened? Why was there such a discrepancy between the image I had in my head and reality? To answer these questions I decided to write about what I had seen and heard. It was important not to forget what had really happened. I had to describe how my belief in our mission communicated itself to people around me. I also wanted to get things clear in my mind so I decided to take another look at my experience with Cirque.

The second factor that made me engage in a process of introspection was somewhat disturbing: it felt as if I’d just awakened from a fifteen-year sleep... as if a part of me had been dreaming in a make-believe world. I recalled ideas, beliefs and goals that had inspired me 15, even 20 years before. What a strange feeling! I was amazed at the incredible clarity of these recollections.

How the world had changed! How the spirit of the time had been transformed! Traveling around the world with the Cirque du Soleil, I realized that, I’d been both a witness and an actor in globalization, which had transformed our value system, impacted the global village, and disrupted the lives of its inhabitants at the end of the 20th century. It was as if I had traveled around the world while a huge tornado swept away centuries of tradition. These values, which were the foundation of our societies have been blown away and replaced by arbitrary notions that fluctuate according to the situation.

I have the impression that society has yet to adjust to this volatile new environment. In fact society doesn’t fully understand what has happened to it. The leaders in the global village are overwhelmed by the events. Their actions seem impulsive, incoherent, and all too often dictated by interest groups. Oddly enough, something seems to be diverting our attention and preventing us from becoming aware of what’s happening. But I have my ideas about what is going on, and I am convinced I can explain it.

Throughout my life, I have enjoyed a good deal of autonomy and freedom of thought, which I have cultivated and fully benefited from. I spent a good deal of time observing

people and events, trying to figure things out and to understand the meaning of this incredible human adventure. So now I feel much more comfortable in the world of ideas than in the world of consumption, and I wonder about a number of things. There must be a solution, some way out.

When I considered the human condition, I was convinced something had to be done. Could I do something? Could I help? Could anyone help? Could creativity flourish in our organizations? What could I do about it? How could I use my experience to make things better? How could we learn to value events, life, and people? As you see, there was no shortage of questions. Finding the answers was another matter.

The terms under which I left Cirque du Soleil left me with the time to search for the answers to my questions. But to find the answers, learn how to be most effective, use everything I had learned in life, and take concrete action, I would need to consider a multitude of factors, most of which I knew nothing about. I soon realized that I couldn't do it all on my own. So I went for broke; I'd do a collage!

Do you ever take stock?

THE ART OF FEEDBACK AND FEEDFORWARD: THE TECHNOLOGY OF COLLAGE

*«Collage is mental dynamite,
liberating inhibited feelings, emotions, and inner thoughts,
transposing and translating them into reality.»*

Ever since I was a youth of 17, in pursuing my research and in my quest to understand thought, human nature and myself, I have been using a simple, but potent tool — collage. My initiation in this art occurred in college. In the years that followed, I made extensive use of this technique, primarily as a communication tool. I've continued this practice to the present day.

Invented in the early 20th century, collage was the brainchild of the founders of the Dada movement. Principal among them was the German artist Max Ernst, renowned for his ingenious and disquieting images. He and his colleagues used the medium as art and provocation. They even vaunted the technique's capacity to predict the future. But for my purposes, collage is not about assembling shapes and colors for esthetic effect. It is a powerful communication and feedback tool. What's more, it's user friendly: you just need a dash of patience and a good dose of humility. Collage is a great means of revelation and discovery.

Collage materials are simple and inexpensive: any size cardboard will do, magazines, newspapers, or other publications destined for the recycling bin, scissors and glue. Flip through the pages and cut out anything that catches your fancy. Let intuition be your guide. Don't try to tell a story or deliver a message. Just pick words and images based on how you feel. Be playful. It's not about precision or logic; that's not the object of the exercise. This isn't a test. It's easy: just let yourself go; clip whatever touches you, whatever speaks to you. Arrange the words and images on the cardboard as you go along. Assemble your collage gradually, intuitively. Keep an open mind; proceed as you see fit, that's the ticket. Collage is a powerful creative act; it frees up your mind. Keep cutting out and placing whatever you come up with on the cardboard until it is completely covered or until you feel you've done enough. But remember: collage takes at least three images! Once you decide everything's in place, start pasting. Glue your images, shapes, and words on the cardboard. I love this final stage because it is a wonderful wellspring of ideas.

Collage captures and identifies emotions, feelings and inner thoughts. Throughout the activity, they are revealed and then projected into words and images. We delve deep into our inner core to find them and externalize them. It's spontaneous! More often than not, these emotions have not been decoded. They have yet to be processed in our brain's control centre. The seeds of emotions are everywhere; they circulate from our unconscious to the collective unconscious and vice-versa. The emotions inhabiting us are part of a gradual process of emergence and materialization. There is a layering of diffuse feelings, emotions and thoughts, neither decoded nor externalized, waiting to materialize in the world.

The build-up of emotions, feelings, and thoughts can be compared to the gradual accumulation of ice in winter. As we know, dynamite breaks up a river ice jam, allowing the waters to run freely. Collage is mental dynamite, liberating inhibited feelings, emotions, and inner thoughts, transposing and translating them into reality. That is exactly what is involved. Schools teach us nothing about the mechanisms of thought. Some education! We're not shown how to recognize, identify and manage our mental processes. Even less do we learn how to promote the free flow of feelings, emotions and thoughts. We're drilled and grilled, conditioned to swallow material and regurgitate it at the right time and place. If we aspire to more than that, we're left to our own devices.

Once our collage is finished, once our diffuse feelings, emotions and thoughts have been seized and assembled, our mind must adapt accordingly. And that's when the surprise comes in! It's like being on "Candid Camera," or "Spy TV." Something emerges from within us and takes on a life of its own. And we have no choice but to acknowledge it. It's like the ice jam break-up or, if you prefer, the equivalent of release, surrendering, and letting go. Something inside us has been set free. It has been revealed. It no longer needs to cling on, to hide, or to hole up in its prehistoric cave.

And on top of that, there's the basic gestalt principle that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." This idea applies to collage in which the finished product is much more than the mere sum of the words and images. The finished collage has an original and

highly amazing effect on the mind. It can be startling. Sometimes, it's as if I'm viewing a much more intriguing newscast than the run-of-the-mill fare we normally see. It's like watching a new specialty channel: MIND NEWS! that keeps us up to date on the latest developments in the human mind. And the channel has an incredible number of foreign correspondents, posted in the collective unconscious. Its programming features a startlingly original history series and the world's most authentic reality show. What is striking about this specialty channel is that we are at once the viewer, the host, the news itself, the producer and the station director. As a bonus: the channel is commercial free.

Collage intensifies my investigation into all sorts of ideas. During the process, some ideas appear vital. Other times, collages remind me that some issues are not important, that I don't need to concern myself with them and that I can go on to other things. Collage helps me separate the wheat from the chaff. It saves me a great deal of time.

Astonishingly, collage gives us the distinct impression we're programming a compelling future. It helps us see and materialize in the here and now elements of our inner life that have not yet found concrete expression. We are projected into our own future. It's as if we are trailblazing our future landscape. It's as if we're strolling along a country path, tossing our feelings and emotions ahead of us and then catching up with them. On the way, they seem familiar to us. They are no longer in our way. Better still, we can feel our progress dramatically accelerating (feedforward). It is exhilarating to find out how much more there is to discover.

There are common threads from one collage to another. The process is like a transparent layering of key ideas that are taken up again and contextualized anew. As time went by, I discovered common threads from one collage to the next:

- History: ancestors, previous eras, a return to the past, artifacts.
- Place: house, town, office, spaces, Earth, planet, atom, cell, solar system.
- Situation: meeting, announcement, opportunity, context, particular moment, circumstances.
- Viewpoint: witness, actor, observer, precursor, victim, roles – as in a play, situation seen from different angles.
- Development: I'm described, guided, comforted, helped, I'm told certain things, I'm prepared, I'm revealed to myself, feelings, memories and emotions are revealed to me.
- Health: relief from headaches, stress and anxiety.

We can create a collage about a specific theme or person. The principle is the same: with the theme or person in mind, select words and images based on how you feel. Occasionally, you can include photos of yourself, other personal photos, your writing, key ideas, and phrases that capture your imagination; in short, anything you want. You can also do collages and send them to someone important in your life. This is the sexy side of collage. Here are some suggestions: family, in-laws, friends, an old flame, a school teacher, colleagues at work, your boss, a supplier, the mayor, your member of the legislature, your favorite stars of TV, sports and the arts, etc.

When I first entered the exhilarating world of collages, I offered them to friends and family. I was engaged in a period of introspection and needed to clarify my relationships or, at least, to reassure myself about the quality of my relationships. So I gave collages to the people around me and derived great benefit from doing so. I felt I had found a positive, original and effective way of putting my relationships in order. In using this technique, I realized that every family has not only a genetic heritage, but an affective heritage as well. This heritage is passed on from generation to generation and it surfaces from time to time. We find ourselves wrestling with a particular facet of our history that is almost unavoidable. Present in family heritage, these facets carry emotional charges (negative or positive) that tend to impact family members. In the series of collages for family and friends, I literally collected these emotional charges, translated them and externalized them. And they vanished. As easy as that! Something emerges from within us and takes on a life of its own. And we're compelled to come to terms with it. It's just like the ice jam break-up. I'm left with the same feeling I have when I wake up in the morning and recall a dream.

A fascinating and poignant illustration of collage's impact concerns my father. Unfortunately, he passed away since then, but I know he wouldn't have objected to my telling this story. I created three or four 9-inch x 12-inch cardboard collages with him in mind of course. Without any preconceived ideas. I wasn't trying to tell him a specific story. But my intent was clear: I wanted to tell him I had to "go further in life" and to do that, I had to relinquish certain values he'd taught me. I didn't want to jettison the entire heritage he'd given me, just shed some aspects. I knew that to fulfill my dreams, I had to get rid of some baggage that risked becoming a burden. So I finished the collages. But I was at a loss as to how to interpret them. Whatever they recounted wasn't familiar to me.

I visited my father at work and handed him an envelope containing the collages. "I've got a gift for you," I said. He opened the envelope and took a couple of minutes to look at the collages. I could see the emotion welling up in his eyes. Clearly, the images spoke to him; they had special meaning for him. I couldn't see what it was. But I knew the collages resonated with him. "Who told you that? Who told you about all that?" he asked. I confessed I didn't know what my collages conveyed. I had done them intuitively, without trying to relate anything specific.

I told him I intended to seek new horizons and I had to let go of certain things he had given me. I was simply giving them back to him. His reaction bowled me over. He took it all in stride. Glancing at the collages again, he said he understood. He accepted my "gift." The meeting was brief and cordial, but charged with emotion.

I soon realized what happens when I offer people a collage. They search for meaning in the collage, project themselves into it and relate it to their inner life and personal history. It's an automatic reaction. Their interpretation is necessarily subjective. I'm convinced the people themselves, as I perceive them, are actually doing the collages. Often, people are astonished by what they see; they get completely involved. They discover meaning, which they alone can fully comprehend. I find it very rewarding.

Giving people a collage helps me see myself in relation to them. I also discover the kind of relationship I could have with them. Sometimes, the insight a collage brings can end a relationship. In other situations, a collage highlights what the two people have in common, enriching their relationship. Collage helps people regain their centre, encouraging them to focus on their personal concerns and take care of their own affairs.

In our society, the process involves a form of projection. As everyone knows, individuals tend to project themselves on one another. By projection I mean attributing to others intentions or suppositions that bear an emotional and affective charge. How we project ourselves depends on our education, problems, desires, and ambitions. We also receive and sustain projections from others. Some people hardly project at all, but can be extremely receptive to other people's projections. With others, it's just the opposite; they constantly project themselves everywhere and on everyone. It's like a game with them. Projection is a veritable scourge; a virus plaguing human relationships since time immemorial, poisoning them. It originated with our ancestors, the first reptiles. Based on the dominant-dominated relationship, projection slyly insinuates itself into every aspect of personality, mainly driven by fear and hatred. Maybe evolution should have evolved a bit further. So, when we create a collage for people, we tap into their projections, translate them into current cultural references and return them. That's why recipients of collages identify with them. In that case collages produce an awesome boomerang effect.

A friend and psychologist Dr. René Bernèche has remarked that my collages remind him of mandalas, which are basically geometric representations of the cosmos in Hindu and Buddhist Tantrism. In *The Dance of Life*, Edward T. Hall wrote that the symbol is one of the most ancient forms of classification ever used: a mandala is generally in the shape of a circle or square, and it functions much like a matrix in algebra. Mandalas are particularly useful when the relationships concerned are paradoxical, in that they are both complementary and contradictory at once; or when we are considering pairs or sets of dissimilar facts, the relationship of which we grasp intuitively without having associated, linked or combined them in a single system.

Reading Hall's work was particularly enlightening. It helped me understand one of the fundamental aspects of collage. He discusses the manifestations of human expression, and points to the uniquely human capacity to externalize at many levels. He underlines our ability to go outside ourselves, to create. According to Hall, culture stems from this faculty; it is the fruit of human expression. He also points out that culture equals mind; it is the mind of a human being that is projected. I saw the link with collages: the words and pictures used are essentially cultural elements. In doing a collage, I'm selecting pieces of culture, of mind, and then rearranging them on cardboard. Mind is certainly present in collages. Therefore, they are extraordinary communication and feedback tools for self-discovery and self-realization.

Collage often delivers a specific, even highly complex message. Often, it gives me a sense of direction and helps define objectives. I feel I'm getting somewhere. It's as if I was walking in pitch darkness but, by doing a collage, I avoid obstacles and move rapidly

ahead. It's a peculiar feeling. But gradually, I must make a choice. Do I really trust the message my collages convey?

I discovered that collage externalizes our thought structures. The process makes us more attuned to the state of our brain's junction points. Collage acts as a nervous impulse on them, facilitating the flow of information from one neuron to another (ice break-up). Also, collage updates our mind tools. It helps us acquire new connections, ways of thinking, and points of view. It is major mental renovation. It is a magnificent research tool with far-reaching effects on our lives.

Recently, after making a series of personal collages, I decided to translate them into words. The results were remarkable. So now, once the collages are finished, I explain and interpret them. For each of them, I enter my version of the facts, my explanation on the computer. I also transcribe the words, phrases and texts contained in the collage. It reminds me of dream journaling, in which we record our dreams to discern their meaning. Of course, translating a collage is a very subjective, freewheeling, and spontaneous exercise, but it has transformed my relationship with the medium. In so doing, I'm raising collage to another level of communication. I'm reinforcing, supporting, integrating and appropriating the exercise, its content and its message. Translating and transcribing collages energizes me, giving me the momentum to sustain a constant flow of creative ideas. It is an extraordinary feeling.

So, in pursuing my investigation, I decided to take the exercise even further by writing this book. Certain themes came immediately to mind, but something was missing. Either I lacked the information I needed or I didn't see how the data were related. So I jotted down the themes I wanted to tackle, and did a specific collage for each of them. Here's a list: The Political Dimension, O the Revelator, The media, Creativity/brain 10%, The Self-Contained Experiment, Identity Crisis/Total Memory Environment, In regard to this certitude/this reference within me, The common thread/The One Spirit Movement, Passage. Now, instead of waiting until I completed the collage before translating it and writing down my impressions, I took notes as I went along. I looked at the words and pictures I was cutting out and, immediately after placing them on the cardboard, I noted the ideas, reflections and questions triggered by the picture or the text. I did this until the collage was finished. Once I had pasted all my words and pictures on the cardboard, I immediately entered my notes on the computer. The notes stimulated and nourished my writing; they inspired me with new ideas and enabled me to discern new relationships. And that's how I was able to finish writing the second part of my book.

Ready to take off with collage?

Please visit:
www.jeandavidcollages.com

Part two

My general theory of reality.

*«It is the theory
which decides what we can observe»*

(Albert Einstein, German-born theoretical physicist, 1879-1955)

AVE CESAR

“... *hero worship.*”

In June 1999, Guy Laliberté invited my wife Thérèse and me to attend the Montreal Grand Prix. It's the mega-attraction of the year. I had never gone to a Formula One race before, and to be honest, it wasn't really something I had thought of doing. You've probably guessed that I'm not a big fan of professional sports. Still, we were delighted to be invited. Many of our friends and colleagues, including Franco Dragone, were going to be there. The invitation combined business and pleasure so we were happy to accept.

The day of the race, we drove to an airport in the suburbs, parked our car there, and boarded a helicopter. Our host certainly went all out! Then we flew to the race site in Île Notre-Dame on the St. Lawrence. From there we went by car to a boat that took us to our destination. We were in the VIP lodge, just above the pit.

In fact, we were in a big restaurant. A bevy of waiters and waitresses regaled us with fine wine and gourmet food. The place was teeming with politicians, local personalities from the business and television worlds as well as foreign visitors in Montreal especially for the occasion. The stands opposite us were jammed with tens of thousands of spectators waiting, under a blazing sun, for the start of the race. The heat was fierce, the humidity unbearable: a typical day in June in Montreal.

When we finished the meal, we were invited to go on a pit lane walkabout to check out the cars, meet the racing crew and, of course, be SEEN by the other guest VIPs, practicing the art of the jet set! Then we returned to our lodge to get a close-up view of the much-anticipated start of the race. Then the ear-piercing roar of powerful engines. As a matter of fact, all during the race the noise was overwhelming. Our ears were literally assaulted by the roar of technological monsters, an awesome experience! You have to wear earplugs if you don't want to lose your hearing.

We could also watch the race on TV; just as well because we could see very little of the race from our vantage point. After an hour and a half of the incredible racket during which it was impossible to hold a conversation, the race ended much to the relief of our eardrums. To leave the site and return to our point of departure, we had to go back the way we came: by boat, car and helicopter. It was incredible to see dozens of helicopters taking off and landing together to pick up hundreds of VIPs; it was like a remake of *Apocalypse Now*...

On the way back, I couldn't help thinking about the whole experience. It left me with a funny feeling that I mentioned to my friends. For a few hours, I imagined myself back in Ancient Rome in the time of Julius Cesar. That weekend, there were Imperial chariot races in the Coliseum and we had been invited by some local dignitary to accompany his retinue to witness the great event. We had the honor of meeting the drivers, examining

their incredible chariots, and admiring their magnificent horses; it was all taking place amid an orgy of food and drink. On the other side of the arena were the plebeians, giving cries of joy, under a blazing sun. All hail the winner, the embodiment of the grandeur and ingenuity of the citizens of the Empire...

I had to admit that human beings hadn't changed much in two thousand years. The same reactions, the same situations, the same people involved, the same emotions. In fact what has really changed is technology. The rest, in other words human nature, seems exactly the same. And that's surprising. It's not normal; we keep doing the same things over and over. It's as if human nature had come down with a fatal disease, some extraterrestrial virus: redundancy. How can we remedy the situation, what's the antidote? We need to come up with a brilliant idea to transform this phenomenon, which takes the form, in this case, of hero worship, because that's exactly what professional sports are about and it's the same in practically every other aspect of our society. The cult of the hero.

I wonder whether we can change our culture and our attitudes so that we take time to give ourselves the attention, trust and esteem that we normally reserve for others. These are the unifying elements of our personality and, above all, of our identity. Can we stop projecting these qualities that we have onto others—when they should be directed at us—and reserved for us? They belong to us, but no one reminds us that it is our fundamental responsibility to foster them. On the contrary, it seems as if we are deprived of them.

American writers Davis and Meyer in their compelling book entitled *Blur: The Speed of Change in the Connected Economy*, point out that attention (our attention) is “the next scarce resource.” There are a growing number of demands on our attention, be they things, people, activities, responsibilities or specialty TV networks. The authors make the very astute prediction that will surely please the advocates of our consumer society: “...in the next decade, attention-getting skills will take center stage.” I believe that the demands on our attention—as individuals, citizens, consumers, human beings in short—are too intense, have gone too far. It's as if we have been sucked into a vast black hole that pulls us further and further away from ourselves. When you really think about it, you soon see that society has reached a tipping point, and we have a choice to make: we have a red alert!

Are you ready for anything!

CHANGES

*“The extraordinary turbulence
in the external world is just
a reflection of the turbulence
going on inside us all.”*

Everything is speeding up. Our world is changing faster and faster and this is a growing phenomenon. What's really surprising is that our generation can witness changes taking

place at a frantic rate unlike our ancestors in the Middle Ages and people two thousand years ago who lived in a world where there was change, all be it much slower. Have you noticed that the phases of human evolution become shorter and shorter?

From the BIG BANG to Today

Donald Trump: 4 years ago
Cirque du Soleil 30 years ago
Internet: 50 years ago
Television: 60 years ago
Jesus Christ: 2 thousand years ago
Homo sapiens in North America: 40 thousand years ago
Homo sapiens, speech: 180 thousand years ago
Homo erectus, discovery of fire: 4540 thousand years ago
Beginning of the Quaternary Period, appearance of humans: 1.6 million years ago
Beginning of the Tertiary Period, disappearance of the dinosaurs: 65 million years ago
Beginning of the Mesozoic Era, appearance of the dinosaurs: 245 million years ago
Beginning of the Paleozoic Era: 540 million years ago
Beginning of the Precambrian Era: 3 billion years ago
Formation of the solar system: 4.5 billion years ago
BIG BANG: 15 billion years ago

Clearly, things are speeding up. There have been more changes in human history in the last 100 years than in the previous 1000 years. Similarly, more changes have occurred in the last ten years than in the hundred years prior to that. And we can expect even more changes next year!

The rate of change seems to follow an exponential curve. In the last 100 years, the changes have been primarily technological in nature. Technologies have advanced at a phenomenal rate; their progress has given birth to globalization and the global village. Here we are right in the middle of this global village, in which our lifestyles, actions, and behavior are scrutinized, observed and assessed by everybody.

Living in the global village, we must constantly question ourselves. We have access to more information; we are better informed about the state of this village and thus are expected to respond accordingly. The exponential curve of change will maintain its path, but there must be a transformation in the essential nature of the changes taking place and that will have a dramatic impact in the social sciences; our attention is required.

Our world is in full mutation. Everything, absolutely everything, must confront change. It is no longer possible to make future projections that are stable and immutable. Time, people, emotions, groups, situations, society, everything is hurtling along on a tightrope. The mass of available data in our electronic environment is reaching incredible proportions. The information technology has become a world onto itself where everything is moving at blur speed. This environment is so complex that it is giving rise to a new phenomenon.

For the first time in human history, we can access a volume of information commensurate with the cognitive capacity of our brains. Now there is both a concordance and an equivalence relation between our mental universe and the mass of information available in our electronic environment. In other words, the density and volume of data available in the global village is beginning to match the brain's capacity. Surprise!

What is most affected by this hitherto unimaginable situation is our frame of reference as consumers and citizens. This frame of reference, transmitted through our education, and which is still being passed on today, has been disrupted by the incredible pressure exerted by the volume of information at our disposal. It is now completely outmoded and obsolete! Things are no longer stable, fixed and immutable. And worse still, no individual or institution can control the speed of change. We are living, despite ourselves, in a time of gigantic mutation! To be congruent, we must renew ourselves and recharge everyday. The extraordinary turbulence in the external world is just a reflection of the turbulence going on inside us all.

Many things can no longer continue as they were or at least they can no longer be hidden. Things inevitably come out in the open. Here are some obvious examples: wars, genocides, corporate financial scandals, accounting firms no longer above suspicion, the cowardice of our elected representatives, our ailing health system, contradictory roles of the pharmaceutical industry, declining public interest in many professional sports, polluter nations who would rather save jobs than save the planet, and food production and processing gone haywire. All this, not to mention the number of endangered animal and plant species, many of which are in fact disappearing.

It's quite simple, an increasing number of situations no longer make sense; we can no longer rely on them. In the coming years, even in the coming months, we can expect an increasing number of upheavals and sudden reversals, which not long ago were unimaginable.

At this rate, we'll create a new art, the art of disaster. Our society has tried so hard to stand in the way of the evolution of values, principles, individuals and organizations that it is only normal that they will be the first to be affected. There is no shortage of issues to address, to reexamine and to question. Three sectors of human activity that deserve special attention are politics, education and the media.

What do you think needs changing?

POLITICS

«... Out with them all!»

Surprisingly after leaving Cirque du Soleil, I got back into politics. What could be more exhilarating than the prospect of forging a blueprint for society, inspired by the idea that

people are our greatest natural resource? Political action, I believed, was the one tool in society capable of effecting real change.

So nearly 30 years after I first ventured into politics, there I was working with the same party as a volunteer. I was bent on changing things, fired by childlike enthusiasm, but this time armed with solid life experience. To my dismay, I found people who had spent their lives toadying up to power brokers. People I'd known 30 years before. I had a feeling of nostalgia mixed with disillusion. I couldn't help wondering: Why are they still in it? What are they looking for? What's driving them? What have they achieved? Has society really benefited from their hanging on? Of course, the answers were in the questions. Needless to say, I didn't stay around long.

In the three years I was involved in politics, I kept my eye on the prize: creativity, innovation, change and a blueprint for society. I'd never followed the latest trend or catered to particular interests, and I soon found myself isolated as my friends became increasingly intoxicated by the proximity of power. When I first returned to the political arena, people welcomed me with open arms; here was a guy with a lot of ideas. After a while, they dismissed me as a wonk!

Finally I came to the conclusion that our political organizations had no real desire for change, no real interest in acting differently. The leaders offer up a semblance of change to save the furniture. They are empty shells with a simplistic, linear approach to political action. They can only plan and execute one thing at a time. They live by the motto "prepare for all eventualities; avoid planning like the plague." That way they don't look like they're waffling. They behave like 21st century Neanderthals. Unfortunately, this is true of politicians all around the world. I had been committed to bring about change. But the abstruseness, total absence of planning, and unwillingness to innovate or to consider real issues proved to be too much for me.

In our political parties, an archaic silo management model prevails. Not surprisingly government functions the same way. This state of affairs precludes planning, coherence and rigor. It is justified by the strategy of "divide and rule." But who wins? For years, nearly everywhere in the world, professional politicians have controlled our institutions. A political party's sole *raison d'être* is power. It's time we realize that political parties are no longer vehicles for democratic expression; they are merely commercial enterprises of dubious legitimacy. They seduce people with promises that last the length of an election campaign and provide their acolytes and supporters with connections, patronage... in short, illusionists at play in the world of showbiz, to the delight of journalists; and the taxpayers foot the bill.

And the parties put on a façade of participatory democracy with their memberships, conventions, and platforms. But just glance behind the façade and what do you see? A cartel protecting its own interests. The winds of change are blowing through society but our leaders offer no guidance. So don't expect them to produce a collective purpose for society: they don't see the short term gain in it. They've got too much at stake to risk embarking on a long-term project. They are simply not interested. Overwhelmed by

events, they realize they lack the skills to publicly and intelligently articulate a plan. Our political parties aren't up to the challenge. It's time we realize this. Political parties are the institutions most resistant to change. They are dinosaurs.

The consumer society has hijacked our democratic institutions. So institutions treat people like consumers not citizens. The word "citizen" has lost nearly all meaning; but it doesn't prevent politicians from mouthing the word to serve their own interests. Meanwhile, people have to clean up the mess and deal with the incoherence that characterizes our society's organization. The players in the political arena are dismayed to discover everyone is aware of their pitiful performance, anyone can see they are part of the problem. It's too late for them to hide! Quite simply, what they got away with yesterday, they can't get away with today and the jig is up. Our political parties are like a driver that's lost control. They can't hold the road, and the victims will be our institutions. The art of disaster!

Unfortunately, these organizations are at the heart of our democratic system. And this system is at the helm of every organization in our society. And we are adrift: pirates have hijacked the ship. Society has been taken hostage. Everyone's in danger; we have to act fast. Time flies; we have to reclaim our rights, assume our responsibilities and engage in a fresh reflection about the future. Individually and collectively, we must assume our responsibilities and send our political parties and their leaders packing. Out with them all!

Were you planning on running as a candidate in the next election?

THE MEDIA

... slow death ahead.

I might as well fess up: I've got little sympathy for the media; I don't like how they're used and I don't like what they've become. Forty years ago, Marshall McLuhan said, "*The medium is the message.*" In other words, the media's message isn't what matters. What really counts is the medium itself. At the time, McLuhan's thesis was highly relevant, even revolutionary. But his concept advances a very specific theory that technologies are extensions of human beings. He might as well have said, "The medium is a message in and of itself."

When McLuhan signaled the advent of the global village, television was still young. Kennedy hadn't been assassinated yet; few people, and even fewer Americans, could locate Vietnam on the map, and hippies were just starting to roll their joints. Then events accelerated, and we soon learned that what seemed like good news was really bad news. Meanwhile, media moguls pondered the significance of the McLuhan declaration. They acknowledged his genius; they took him at face value. The medium is the message, so anything goes!

That's when things started to go south. Media strategists discovered what grabbed the masses. The answer was simple: disaster. An economic equation fired media barons' imagination: disaster = higher ratings, and the sum of the two boosts advertising revenues and therefore shareholder profits. Bingo!

The formula may seem a little simplistic, but it neatly sums up what parameters drive the media in our societies. Sure, some people have concocted variations, purporting to pursue lofty societal or national missions. And we can be thankful for quality specialized networks. Still, nothing could match the dominant industry formula. Little has changed in forty years, but now at least things are crystal clear.

The first to feel the impact of the cozy relationship between disaster and the media were the industry and the people who worked for it. Events traumatized them and the word "courage" lost all meaning for them. JFK's assassination was a case in point. The media threw in the towel. Ever since, they've been running around in circles, mesmerized by technological advances they witness but can't control. They're muzzled and unwitting hostages in the global village. They go about performing their role, not knowing what else to do. They have no idea what they're talking about. Worse still, they completely misunderstand their public.

The media are like a vast school of fish. An event occurs and they chase after it; another event happens and they drop the first and run after that! They are on automatic. Overwhelmed by events, they're perpetually playing catch-up and rather proud of it. Bewildered and bemused, they abdicate their social role and stifle their imagination for the benefit of the market economy. And so today, it's showbiz all the way, and reality shows recreate Adam-and-Eve psychodrama in an earthly paradise of ratings. But that's not all. The media are perfectly comfortable feeding like vultures on the world's heritage.

Their leaders make a great show of kindness and benevolence toward the public. At a loss what to do, they cheerfully serve up antediluvian "family values." They tell each other they're reaching the greatest possible number of people. Despite the charming and creative image they project, they're amplifiers of catastrophe and producers of stress, past masters in the art of kitsch.

They're afflicted with a weird condition. No one knows its origin, but I call it the "know-it-all" syndrome. "Listen, to me, look at me, read what I've written, I'll tell you, I've got the answer, I know everything, and what I don't know, doesn't exist, but I can simulate it ..." Things just can't get any better! They spend most of their time telling us the same things over and over. It's like a mantra. It's as if they're trying to convince themselves. And to vindicate themselves, they churn out the same programs, excerpts, songs, and articles day after day, year after year. In fact, all they do is repeat the same things over and over. Innovation is an alien concept. The media exist and prosper thanks to redundancy: the most insidious and widespread WMD in history.

And surfing network news, what do you find to your dismay? Anchors reading the same text about the same current event in the same authoritative tones as if they've actually

witnessed the event they're talking about. And what about the poor foreign correspondents who risk their skin to fill a 30-second spot so the news editor can feed viewers a daily dose of anxiety? This puffed up realism is symptomatic of profound trauma.

Not knowing what else to do, the media help perpetrate the biggest scam in modern times. The media offer their substitutes for reality, truth and meaning. But who has authorized them to play the role? Worst of all, they're pretentious. And introspection is the furthest thing from their minds. Desperately clinging to their jobs, they do everything they can to convince us that the world we live in is toxic, negative, unstable and, above all, extremely dangerous. That way they protect themselves, telling you and me we need them for our "peace of mind." The media are to the human spirit what greenhouse gases are to the earth's atmosphere. Danger: slow death ahead.

This may seem like a scathing indictment of the media, but the fact is that most people in the industry would admit they are part of an immense problem. But that's no excuse; it's more a confession of guilt and impotence. To whom it may concern: there's no Viagra for the will ... Apart from our educational systems and democratic institutions, the sector most in need of reform is the media. When I look at all this, I can't help rejoicing at the prospect of recycling an entire industry; the project will generate thousands of new jobs for liberated young people bursting with imagination.

Does life turn you on?

EDUCATION

How could we redefine the way we are in the world?

Children, citizens, human beings, we are society's greatest natural resource. But no raw material on the planet is less understood and more underdeveloped. And it's the one that holds the most surprises for us. Human beings are like a form of technology, an incredible biological technology, a complex set of millions of extraordinary components and properties, and we master only a few. Imagine for a moment a PC that lands amidst a gentle primitive tribe lost somewhere in time. And there's no user's guide. They look at the computer. The color appeals to them. They use the computer for a table: they have no idea what it's for.

In a way we humans are in an analogous predicament: we don't come with a set of instructions. And based on ordinary observation, we do our best to figure out what our functions are for; but that's as far as it goes. Do the best you can, but whatever you do, don't try to understand because there's nothing to understand. It wouldn't change anything if you did. Meanwhile, just leave your children to us! We'll look after them. Our excellent system will give them education "tailored" to the consumer society! It's as if human beings were a herd of several billion idiots and proud to be. This also applies to

the wealthiest, best educated, and most influential members of our society. Do you want to do something to improve the situation? How could we redefine the way we are in the world? How about a little collective awakening? It comes with the tour package!

True, there are many things we don't know, and lord knows, we're constantly reminded that human nature being what it is, we use barely 10% of our brain capacity, just like we did 30 years ago and just like people probably did in ancient Rome. Wow! But let's look at the problem from another angle and change our approach. Forget IQ tests. Intelligence can't be measured; it should be savored and appreciated. Anyway, we shouldn't assess other people's intelligence we should concentrate on our own. At best the idea that we use only 10% of our brain capacity is mechanistic and reductive. I much prefer a systemic approach that makes us conscious of our whole mental space. Our cranial cavity is like a sound box, defining a space given us, a space that belongs to us. So that's the space we should occupy! Our education encourages us to take up only a tiny portion of this space, probably 10%. The remaining 90% might as well be thrown to the lions!

The traditional concept of our brain capacity is limiting. It fails to distinguish between our abilities and the environment in which we develop them. Our capacities are deployed in a tiny part of ourselves... When we're born, we're bundled off to a tiny room that will shelter us for our entire life. The tiny room is located in an immense castle, and we are its sole owner. But we're not supposed to know that. We can only dream about it!

When I asked myself, "What does it take to get out of this room?" I discovered a crack in the wall. I wondered what it was. The answer was creativity. That's the escape route, the road to a new world out there for all to explore. We need to revamp our educational system so we can encourage people to fully assume their identity. We need to offer them activities that reinforce and celebrate their originality. I thought the future had arrived with the year 2000. It was time for the signs to appear.

All we have to do is look around us to see that creativity is a quality everyone possesses. If there's one tool, one way of getting out of the mental space confining us, it's creativity. If we think of ourselves as a form of biological technology, then our principal function should be to create.

In the years to come maybe even in the months or days to come, we will see a sea change in the social sciences and humanities, the attitudes, behaviors, ideas, and even our way of being. It's time we take a good look at the expectations we have of others, what they expect of us, and the ways the people around us limit us. We need to examine the whole range of human activity: family, school, work, media and society. We have to revamp the image we have of ourselves and stretch the limits of our potential beyond frontiers we can't even imagine.

So here we are in the 21st century. Technology has made enormous strides, but a slew of questions remain unanswered. It's as if no one dares take the first step toward a solution. Education is in even worse shape than it was 30 thirty years ago. And it is far less stimulating than in the time of the ancient Greeks. Dehumanized technocrats are

implanting an archaic, outmoded and decrepit operating system in children's brains. It's as if they're preparing kids for hunting woolly mammoths with peashooters while half the people in the world go hungry. Meanwhile, on the way to and from school, the system uses giant billboards to brainwash kids with visions of the next lottery jackpot. It's as if I'm witnessing the collective exploitation of children, a kind of genocide! Someone somewhere is working overtime, conditioning people to engage in completely old-fashioned thinking out of touch with 21st century reality. As if there was no one in these institutions aware of the situation. As if we were overwhelmed by events. As if the whole system were permanently dysfunctional. The elite prize institutional performance more than student development. And just look at the health sector. Government is more concerned with the health of the system than the health of the citizen. We care more about structures than about citizens: a form of collective insanity.

Paradoxically, leafing through help wanted ads in the world's daily newspapers, we soon realize they're looking for creativity in graduates. The trouble is the system hasn't equipped them with this in mind. Students spend years in the classroom, but few people take time to teach them how to think or act differently. Just the opposite: they are conditioned to think and act like everyone else! The whole society is undergoing a transformation unparalleled in history, and our educational system doesn't know what to do... It seems the people in charge don't have manuals telling them how to cope with this kind of situation, and they find themselves at sea! And the strangest thing is that I've yet to meet a university professor who disagrees with me. The only people who try to convince me they've got everything under control are technocratic administrators, zealous bureaucrats and politicians.

For decades, we have known that our brain consists of two cerebral hemispheres, one left and one right. Experts agree that one hemisphere is rational and conceptual in function, and the other is intuitive and works in images. Psychology and creative problem solving recognize two modes of thinking directly linked to the cerebral hemispheres: divergent thinking, a right-brain process, is intuitive, and convergent thinking, a left-brain process, is logical. Creative problem solving is the simplest, most accessible tool I know. It's a terrific way to get our thinking apparatus up and running. It's like warming-up and stretching before you play a sport (In the Appendix, creative problem solving is described). CPS should be a compulsory part of a student's education. High school graduates should be leaders in CPS. As leaders they could teach others. Our society would greatly benefit from it. Young people would be freer to make choices and spread their wings in society.

We can work together to change our attitude about people. We can finally see that our vocation in life is, at least, to be creative. We must make sure that as our children go through school, we equip them with the tools they require for self-actualization. Above all, it is critical to build an environment that fosters individual creativity, originality and expression in the family, school, workplace and mass media. What a beautiful project for the society! The sooner we get down to it, the better for our planet. But this bold enterprise calls for considerable soul-searching about the way society is organized. Yet I don't see this as a problem. It's an extraordinary project to meet the challenges we face. A

Greek philosopher might well have said 2,500 years ago: the universe is not in a hurry; human beings are. Today, I say: the universe has no time to lose; we have no choice, let's get down to work!

How good's your imagination?

CREATIVITY and the EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

When I asked my friend René Bernèche, a PhD in psychology and world-renowned creativity expert, how we could make the nurturing of young people's creativity an integral part of every level of the educational system, this is what he had to say.

There are various levels of education and there are a number of elements that must be considered in defining creativity: the qualities and talents associated with the creative personality, the procedures or processes associated with the realization, productivity (innovation) and environment that fosters the creative act. Thus, there are many potential points of intersection linking creativity and education. My objective is to point out what creative pedagogy tailored to the different levels of our educational system would entail.

Elementary school

When children leave nursery school or kindergarten and go to elementary school, it's no time to signal the end of play-time period. Clearly, learning takes place in a different physical context in a qualified program, but the learning experience must still take place in a dynamic suitable for children, where the love of play leads to discovery. Young children already have an array of tools that they continue to improve as they explore their world.

Learning to walk, they expand the frontiers of their universe and, from the first sounds they utter to the time they acquire the rudiments of their native language, they invent their own world of communication. For children, play is a serious activity, in which they invest their curiosity, innocence, generosity and imagination. In physical activities, even in sports, they imitate their heroes. Creative pedagogy can accommodate a diversity of learning activities and appraising methods. Children's capacity for wonder is nourished by reading stories and manifested in the many questions they ask.

Many authors stress the importance of listening to a child's questions in a spirit of openness and respect even when they may seem somewhat unusual. It is important to maintain a degree of order and discipline during activities and exercises since chaos tends to impede the development of creative potential and decision-making skills. If these conditions are met, the classroom becomes an ideal place for meeting and sharing with others. The enrichment is constant. In my opinion, two essential ingredients in creative elementary education are a love of play and the joy of discovery.

High school

Students need to be highly motivated on their long journey through a growth period that brings about significant changes, even times of turbulence. In high school, creative problem solving (CPS) should be taught and practiced as part of the program (see Sylvain Matte's article in the Appendix). Creative problem solving, which can take a variety of stimulating educational forms, has proved effective in many different learning contexts. The process makes it possible to pinpoint the original issue or challenge as well as inventory the facts and actions associated with it. It also stimulates the search for new ideas that can be turned into an action plan.

The qualities teenagers developed in early childhood help maintain their interest and motivation now. Creative problem solving encourages teenagers to become involved, express themselves freely without fear of judgment, and take on responsibilities. Isn't the ultimate goal of education to help adolescents become responsible adults?

By gradually introducing the process in various subjects, we can enrich the curriculum and offer teenagers a variety of ways to actualize their creative potential. Naturally, teachers using creative problem solving also develop their own creativity. Imagine the individual and group projects that will emerge from the curriculum, encouraging teenagers to take charge of an activity, investing their curiosity, interest, passion for research, and decision-making ability. Not only do students become more motivated but their personality blossoms.

College

Success at this level depends on students' capacity to make wise choices, and, I would add, their capacity to take risks. In a theory of change or of the motivation to generate change, the ultimate creative act is to forge a "unique" self. Our whole life is devoted to this masterpiece. Thus, in college, decisions about educational pathways determine the learning experiences that define individuals as they are about to enter the world of work, determine their commitment to assume these choices with the attendant adjustments and errors, and shape their transition from late adolescence to early adulthood: making decisions, taking responsibility for them, making them part of the process of building a unique self.

Young people familiar with creative problem solving consider their choices with their "life project" in mind. Support from consultants, instructors and professors facilitates the process. Whether college students receive the support individually or in groups, they benefit from their teachers' experience. As students see their choices come into play in their courses, a creative approach should enable them to own their learning, taking into account the factors motivating their career choice.

So, students should be given many occasions to define the topic they're working on and make oral presentations. Accepting the risk of involving the "self" is a dynamic part of

developing one's identity and originality. This circumstance must prevail if creativity is to flourish in all its complexity. This educational approach combines on one hand, the diversity of choices so that an individual's uniqueness emerges and is affirmed, and on the other, risk-taking in self-expression.

The integration of creative problem solving is an on-going process: it is involved in choosing educational pathways, courses, options, topics for individual or group work, and modes of communication for term projects. In the transition from adolescence to adulthood in an academic setting where personal responsibilities are ever more demanding, pedagogical support worthy of the name encourages students to accept the responsibility of building their professional identity.

University

There is room for creativity for both students and professors: in the pedagogical approach, in testing knowledge and skills as well as in professional and personal development. I've often found one thing particularly astonishing: whenever master's or doctoral students ask me to supervise their research, I ask them: "What question is your research attempting to answer?" Their convoluted reply almost invariably involves a vast subject of general interest.

But where is the question, the hypothesis? Drowning in a multitude of data, in educational projects and in high-principled and noble ideals. Students come to university, overflowing with data, and they want to specialize even further. Still more subjects, optional courses and research methods to master. Some programs even add on professional training at the end. What happens after college studies if it isn't more force-feeding of data and of methods and techniques during the final phase of education?

Professors claim that the content they teach in their field of expertise is indispensable! So be it! Yet have they thought to include in their pedagogy the ingredients that will tap into the creative potential of students and to invent appraising methods that allow students to see the link between the theory and practice, to develop critical thinking, to incorporate their knowledge into their life project, their career plan? Let us stop insulting our students' intelligence. Instead, let us encourage them to choose research that enriches their academic work, guided by questions that stimulate thought related to their new field of expertise. Not only do students need to acquire methodological tools, they must also learn how to formulate a question, a relevant hypothesis.

This brings us back to creative problem solving. If we fail to master this process, we are back to square one. The arguments calling for a standardization of university pedagogy and testing methods are numerous: overcrowded classes, lack of resources to assist professors, etc.

True, to the teacher, the situation poses two challenges. How to foster innovation in the young when talent is measured by convergent criteria: giving the only correct answer to a multiple-choice exam question, fitting in on a research team when the whole program is

predetermined...? The passion for discovery is always sparked by a stimulating question, by a fascinating research topic that holds appeal on many levels.

University is a place for reflection; it should favor the genesis of questions, hypotheses, challenges that show young people the relevance and scope of their knowledge and encourage them to develop what they will own: their expertise. In this sense, if our students' most challenging creative project is to become their own masterpiece, to become unique individuals capable of involving the self in their work, university must open up to diversity.

At every level of activity, the teacher faces a daunting but gratifying mission when it involves meeting challenges that require creativity. Is it time to reconsider the definition of the mission?

René Bernèche, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
Université du Québec à Montréal

IDENTITY CRISIS

...our collective memory is deploying all over the planet before our very eyes.

As you have seen many things in society need to be called into question: among them the democratic system, the media and the educational system. These are the three fundamental sectors most in need of reappraisal. The issues concerning them have a common denominator: they arise from an identical source directly related to our collective identity and the image we have of ourselves.

Since we are uncertain about our origins or those of the universe and, thus, can't be sure about our collective identity, we define ourselves in terms of our cultural environment. That is what essentially distinguishes us and helps us establish our identity. Race, place and year of birth, the century in which we live — these factors help define who we are. Culture defines our identity. Beyond these basic parameters, our cultural environment plays an even bigger role in establishing our personality and identity. Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung's work helps us understand that our environment essentially consists of signs, symbols and references harkening back to our deepest origins. Among other things, he brilliantly demonstrates how the signs have evolved through the ages, from one epoch to another, while retaining their profound meaning.

Here, the perspectives of the American anthropologist Edward T. Hall and the Canadian communications guru Marshall McLuhan intersect. Both maintain that the human environment has changed to such an extent that it is taking on astonishing proportions. To McLuhan, technologies have essentially become extensions of our senses; technologies have created the global village and are making us live daily in a universe where the

prevailing theme is instantaneity and simultaneity, which the author calls acoustic space. By way of illustration, McLuhan declared with his habitual bluntness that “man is beginning to wear his brain outside his skull...” I would add: our nervous systems are blowing in the wind.

Edward T. Hall’s approach is just as incisive. He sees man as an organism that has created extensions of itself and has brought them to such a degree of specialization that “they have taken over from nature and are rapidly replacing it. In other words, man has created a new dimension, the cultural dimension.” Even more to the point, he asserts, “the relationship between man and the cultural dimension is one in which both man and his environment participate in molding each other.” Hall goes even further in his reflections on culture: he notes with considerable justification that all human culture, expression and projection are representations and manifestations of the mind, of our mind (which is difficult to grasp, very intelligent with a hint of the divine and, above all, unpredictable). So there it is: identity equals culture and culture equals mind. A very simple equation!

What is fascinating is that Hall and McLuhan made these observations over 30 years ago! But what’s happened since? How have things changed? What condition do we find ourselves in today? Impacted by the technological explosion in the knowledge-based economy, our cultural environment has undergone a lightening transformation unparalleled in human history. The volume of information in the global village has reached unequalled levels, encompassing every aspect of human expression and history. All over the planet our collective memory is deploying before our very eyes.

We are living in what I call a *Total Memory Environment*. Every morning, we wake up in the middle of a worldwide soap opera, the *Big Bang Show*, in which the story of our origins, our genetic legacy, is part of our daily environment. It’s all around us, omnipresent. This environment surrounds us completely in the simplest possible forms and signs as well as the most basic aspects that we can’t even identify. Unfortunately, we don’t see them as signs. We show a spectacular inability to see how the Total Memory Environment is related to our lives. All we have to work with is the boring, simplified, and practical interpretation that our education has taught us. We can’t get in touch with our true identity. We have simply not been trained or educated to do so. It’s as if the whole society has convinced itself that it’s impossible.

For centuries, we have preferred to remain stuck in the way we see things. For a long time many thinkers believed the Earth was flat. In the last 50 years, science and technology have made immense progress. Yet the only links we are making are the references spoon-fed to us by the consumer society. Obviously, we haven’t practiced thinking otherwise. It seems we’ve all been too busy consuming.

Collectively, we find ourselves in a bizarre situation. Living in a Total Memory Environment has a surprising impact on our individual and collective identity. Yes, individually we’re still the same, our date and place of birth haven’t changed, but collectively, we see that our cultural and educational references have ceased to exist; they

can't cope with the mass of data engulfing us. They have disappeared and been replaced by other references that have already vanished into thin air.

Our identity is in constant mutation. It is caught up in a boiling over of our collective memory like a gigantic volcanic eruption of our origins. Just as technologies are extensions of our senses (*hardware*), our genetic code has become the supreme cultural factor, the database (*software*)! DNA is the superstar; it's all over the TV networks, it's in every role in every film at the box office, it occupies all of the spots on the charts, and hogs magazine content all over the world. Welcome to the *Big Bang Show*!

We live in a consumer society that chases profit and performance at all cost. From a very simple, ordered society in the 1950s, humdrum and conservative, we find ourselves today in a paradise of paradox, of triviality, simulation, exaggeration and contradiction. We are star-obsessed, caught up in the cult of celebrity, in which meaning and authenticity have no place because they can't be bought. Instead of facing its mysteries and enigmas, society wants nothing more than to avoid them. Our entire planet is holding itself hostage. Unfortunately, the education we got as children holds us captive. Society is caught in a trap, and citizens, sitting in ringside seats, are both jailers and prisoners. It would be hard to find a more interactive experiment!

The world is like a vast iceberg. Our inability to make associations, to recognize, understand and incorporate the cultural signs of our collective identity in our environment produces a sort of "mental warming" in every individual and causes what I term a collective psychological drift. Continental drift is nothing compared with this phenomenon. Now, I'd like to cite just a few modern examples of psychological drift: famine, war, idolatry, dependency on others, stress, education, the consumer society, political parties, technocrats, lobby groups, news programs, redundancy, advertising, the omnipresence of American culture, etc.

We've all heard the saying "history repeats itself." When you look at the world, it seems as if history does repeat itself. It's been doing this for far too long and it's exhausted; it can't go on anymore; it's about to collapse. Our collective history is thrown in our faces everyday, and there we are gape-mouthed, absolutely out of it. In fact, our incomprehension is a sign that our brain is in a state of memory overload, literally stuck in a veritable jam caused by the convergence of all the elements of our origins, causing a backup of the sewers of our collective unconscious. This "unbearable" condition is at the root of psychological drift. In other words, the whole of human evolution is in profound crisis. What a way to start the century!

The psychological drift engulfing humanity is clearly not a new phenomenon. It did not suddenly materialize in the latter half of the 20th century. On the contrary, the situation has endured since the dawn of time. The enormous accelerator effect of recent technological development has made the drift more evident, more palpable. What is new about psychological drift is its proximity, clarity, omnipresence and the fact that we can observe, describe and talk about it. This "sudden appearance" is an alarm, signaling the clear urgency to act before the sky falls on our heads.

Today, we face a daunting challenge. How can we emerge from a state of total incomprehension about our environment and begin to decipher it? How can we integrate into our everyday identity the historical elements that confront, expose, and even bombard us daily? If we understood these signs, how would it influence our lives? How would processing 15 billion years of data on our evolution impact the 21st century? These questions are fundamental because we must find a solution, change our way of doing things, and innovate. Something within us is growing impatient, telling us the time has come ...

The crisis in human evolution, or rather our understanding of the crisis, leaves us no choice but to recognize that we have reached the end of a lengthy exercise. We are approaching the end of the world, the end of a world, of a way of viewing life, people and ourselves. The only historical narrative we know is a hodgepodge of scientific theories based on a game of “guessing who’s that skeleton” reeking of carbon, juxtaposed with a nice Biblical tale like Adam and Eve that only complicates matters. Is this the best we can do? Between us, it’s hardly the way to go about things. It has brought us here, but it’s a dead end.

We have to change the way we see things and give ourselves the means to interpret the information in our environment. It’s time to move on to something else; it’s time for evolution to “evolve”! On closer inspection, I realize that we are in the midst of a huge experiment that seems to have gone haywire and is crying out for repair! Fortunately, the experiment contains every aspect of the problem and every ingredient to solve it. I truly believe there is a solution.

We can console ourselves with the thought that in the coming decades, in the future, major changes and discoveries will transform the way our societies are organized. We can no longer put things off; it’s too late to procrastinate! So we need to accept our responsibilities here and now. Becoming aware is not enough; we must individually and collectively claim this state of awareness, nurture it and preserve it.

Living in the Total Memory Environment means we must get a better grasp of the real meaning of life, people, events, our work, our family, our relations, our decisions, our personal odyssey, and, above all, our choices. Before doing anything else, we must solve the problem and complete the exercise. We have homework to do.... We cannot naïvely slip through time and history, stick our heads in the sand or play the fool. Warning to those concerned: the game’s over!

In ancient Greece, 2500 years ago, philosophers considered that it was the responsibility of the individual to recover the memory of our origins. Today, it has become a collective phenomenon in which we must participate. In the world today, we have no alternative.

Does this story ring a bell?

A BOLD PROJECT

Our universe is an immense lab in which all the components are at our disposal.

There are solutions for the profound crisis in human evolution. But some of these solutions need to be put in place: nature abhors a vacuum. As individuals, we can make choices that help us reconsider our attitudes toward people, things and ourselves. We can change our thought habits. Still, our collective psychological drift impacts the organization of our communities down to the slightest detail. Just think about the partial list of examples of “drift” and you realize the extent of the problem. Our condition requires wide-scale action in the global village, but it isn’t easy to come up with a universal solution since we have to sneak up on the problem and “catch it by surprise” in front of billions of witnesses. I admit that the approach might seem strange but remember: society is trapped, and its citizens, sitting in ringside seats, are both the jailers and prisoners. We’re looking for a solution that will “please” and not directly threaten the “position” of our leading actors, that is, the spectators: the jailers and prisoners. One thing is clear: we must be innovative.

Humanity has never faced a situation like this before. Taking a closer look at our astonishing condition, we realize that it’s not as simple as repairing a flat tire or changing a motor part so you can keep your car on the road. It’s a very unusual problem that calls for skill. There are no spare parts to install. The problem is the person driving the car. In other words, we are the problem. We can’t just change the driver; there aren’t any others.

From time immemorial, we’ve been racing along at breakneck speed, going faster and faster, on a bridge to nowhere. We’re going so fast we’ve lost our sense of direction. The rearview mirror is where the windshield should be, and we’re feeling around for the controls. We’ve got a feeling of euphoria; we can’t make sense of our lives, individually and collectively. And we’re about to fall into a deep coma while our speed keeps increasing. The driver, i.e. humanity, needs help! How do we give it *feedback* about its plight? How do we make it aware it’d better stop before it’s too late and get it to look at the road map so it can decide on the direction it really wants to take?

As you see, it’s not that simple; it’s a matter of perception, intention, fluidity, will and decision. This is nothing like auto mechanics. Yet I think the situation can be compared to a river ice jam, and the key we’re searching for will trigger the breakup. Our goal should be to raise the consciousness of the inhabitants of the global village and enlist their participation. Our situation calls for collective action as a demonstration of our resolve to improve the situation and launch evolution toward new horizons.

The challenge is to create a public event marking the passage from one state to another, from one way of seeing things and being to another way of seeing things and being. We are talking about mind and thought. And I tell myself, “The best thing to break up the jam would be an explosion; we need nothing less than an ‘archetypal event.’ A public event

that will transcend the problem, delve deep into our origins and propel us toward the future. Nothing less!”

The event may seem ambitious, but a project like this is within our reach. Besides it can easily fit into our everyday activities. Our world is an immense lab in which all the components are at our disposal (*a self-contained experiment*). The great physicists realized this last century and used some of the material. What I suggest is that we do another kind of experiment, less dangerous, but with potentially far greater impact: a major experiment in the social sciences and humanities.

I believe the intersection between our collective problem and its transposition into 21st-century reality is at the heart of our democratic process in the means citizens have to express themselves. This is where we must act, and demonstrate our determination to move to another stage in our evolution. We must bear in mind that for every one of us this worldwide intersection embodies harmony and balance between our mental world and the mass of information in our electronic environment. This is a unique situation. The experiment in the social sciences and humanities that I’m recommending is innovative and bold. It requires all citizens to contribute and invites them to participate in an entirely new dynamic of collective expression.

To succeed, we must seize the opportunity the current context is offering us and help people make our experiment a part of their reality and daily lives. For citizens to participate, they have to see what they stand “to gain” individually and collectively. There must be something tangible, here and now. This is a prerequisite in a consumer society. Our solution must also be simple, plausible and accessible. Common sense demands that the solution go through the citizens themselves and that it offers them a chance to get control over their lives, and reclaim their rights, authority, power and identity.

Citizens all over the world have become more demanding. Their vision of the world and of themselves has been broadened and transformed. There are growing demands and expectations about societal organization. This gives us a unique occasion to redefine the role of citizens, their values, rights and responsibilities. At first, the exercise may seem surprising. But upon closer examination, we see that this exercise will incorporate all the components of a powerful lever, raising the public imagination and the “deepest” aspirations of individuals. That’s what it’s about: giving citizens a tool, an opportunity to reclaim their freedom to dream, to control their destiny and, above all, to believe in themselves, in their capacity to grow, and to affect the world around them. In this experiment, the citizens will confront the democratic system and take it back. By supporting this initiative, they’re sending a clear signal that a sea change is under way in our society, a change for the better, and a change for our future.

I propose that a National Brainstorming session be held in every state or country on the planet. A unique experiment in the social sciences and humanities specific to every cultural group, a large-scale idea-generating exercise, a collective explosion of ideas, a celebration of human thought and creativity, a quantum leap for individuals and society.

What do you think of this as a plot twist?

TOWARD A COMMUNICATION SOCIETY

...the discovery and development of every citizen's full potential.

Nowadays, citizens are more critical about the organization of society, disillusioned by media cynicism, fed up with the redundancy and absurdity of the system. They're tired of feeling that they're running around in circles and they want to move on to something that makes more sense for them and their children. At the same time, the public is suffering a crisis of confidence about the democratic institutions. Understandably so. Already, at the very beginning of the 21st century, there are critical choices to make, and the situation requires a new approach by all the stakeholders on the political scene.

First, there's much work to be done at the level of perception. We need to develop a greater collective awareness of our situation in order to adjust our attitudes and open the door to multiple solutions (the breakup) that are just waiting for us to give the signal. So, I think that citizens must be allowed to express themselves freely about their concerns, dreams and vision for the future. They must be encouraged to take a moment to reflect with their families, colleagues and friends. Together, they must discuss, listen, exchange and give free reign to their imagination. May their hearts and minds come together to visualize a better future for themselves, as they see it. I'd like to invite people to say what they want for themselves and their families. I want to urge them to experience a new dynamic in human relations in their community and encourage them to become aware of their rights and privileges, which daily life does everything possible to make them forget.

The operation has an enormous objective. Ultimately, it aims to transform our consumer society into a communication society; an open and transparent society in which our symptoms of psychological drift are clearly in regression and about to disappear. It's the kind of thing that takes a little time to put in place. But it is a collective goal that makes sense because it converges toward a single reality: the discovery and development of every individual's full potential. It is a good point of departure and a fascinating project for humanity. Creativity and innovation in our daily lives! To begin the journey toward a communication society, we must take a giant step. We have to transform our values to adapt them to an entirely new human dynamic.

People are the greatest natural resource we possess. This is the single constant and fundamental fact in our societies. The worldwide brainstorming project is based on this premise. The surprise, novelty and freshness created by launching this operation should attract great participation by the strata of the population most aware of the need for change. The project is nothing less than an innovative approach to democracy, proposing a different kind of participation designed to complement the official electoral process.

In this approach, people can give their comments during a process of public consultation and everyone will be encouraged to contribute. Its greatest strength lies in its modernity and its capacity to kindle the imagination of an entire population.

Are you an idealist?

NATIONAL BRAINSTORMING

*Much of the solution will be
put in place that week...*

At first, many people might consider the project irrational, out of touch with reality. When you read about it, you'll realize it's highly innovative and, though, I agree, it may seem a little disconcerting, just like Cirque du Soleil when it began... Here, I'd like to take a moment to define and clarify the characteristics and basic parameters of the National Brainstorming. I call it national because there should be as many kinds of sessions as there are countries or states: respecting cultural and political identities is crucial. This chapter may be a bit technical, but it gives a concrete description of the various stages of this great experiment in the social sciences and the humanities. I intended to give the project a very open, free and generous dimension, making it easy for anyone to take part. What's more, it allows us to count on tangible results right away; the consumer society demands it.

Please bear in mind that the impact of the initiative comes from its realization. It's a wonderful idea, but it's absolutely worthless if it is not realized. It would make no sense not to do this project. If we didn't, we would be rightfully dismissed as just another bunch of idealists. Imagine for a moment, that you're a researcher in your lab, and you have to carry out an experiment to test the validity of your theory, your idea, and your convictions. With your cooperation, that's just what I intend to do. The following chapters will explain how the project is to take place in a tangible, bold and surprising framework. Let's get busy!

A two-stage process

The first objective of the process is to encourage maximum participation and generate as many ideas as possible. So I suggest we engage in a process inspired by brainstorming, a remarkably creative tool. The second objective is to turn the results of a brainstorming session into tangible reality. The project will reflect the standard of living in industrialized societies. Obviously, many other countries lack the facilities and resources to conduct this kind of undertaking. They'll need our help and support.

Phase One

Gathering millions of ideas

Every home will receive a brief questionnaire with a set of instructions. People can also access the questionnaire and instructions on the official brainstorming Web site, which describes the project and provides details about the process. Citizens will be asked to answer the questionnaire within a prescribed period of time.

National Brainstorming Week

National Brainstorming Week needs the support and participation of every citizen and every student. To be successful, the exercise should be carried out in groups (a maximum of 12 to 15 people), ideally in a family setting. All institutions and businesses will be encouraged to give their staff time to participate in the exercise with their fellow employees. To maximize interest among citizens, institutions, businesses and the media, the initial phase should be limited to a short, specific period with a deadline: a seven-day week. An extensive public relations and advertising campaign will urge citizens to participate and explain the brainstorming session rules to them. Artists and personalities from every walk of life will be asked to pitch in during National Brainstorm Week. The operation will take place in a spirit of geniality, originality, generosity and openness.

Unlike most polls and surveys, the questionnaire will ask open questions that stimulate reflection and creative thinking. Here are some suggestions that might provide guidelines for the questionnaire: allow citizens to freely express their concerns, dreams and vision for the future; identify three principal issues confronting society and suggest a solution for each; offer three ideas that might allow them to improve their environment and that of their neighbors; project into the relatively near future (10 or 15 years) and identify what will be different and what we will manage to improve.

National Brainstorming Week will be at the core of our vast experiment in the social sciences and humanities, this great explosion of ideas. It will be one of the pivotal moments in the entire experiment. Much of the solution will fall in place that week, with mass citizen participation and media frenzy.

Rules for Participating

People will be asked to return the questionnaire in a self-addressed envelope. They can also fill out the questionnaire on the Web site. In fact, they'll be encouraged to do so to save time and money. A person can participate more than once. For example, a family can take part together at home and then they can also do the exercise at school or at work. There is no minimum age requirement: if you can express yourself, you can take part.

Only one type of participation will not be accepted since it would be incompatible with the new democratic process. This would involve an agency, organization or lobby group that encourages its members to produce standard answers. This would be a form of cheating!

Compilation

A sample of the completed questionnaires will be taken. The size will depend on the number of citizens involved and their geographic distribution. Proven research methodology will be employed. The sample will be used for compilation and comprehensive analysis. A team of scientists will prepare a coding and analysis table. A group of Master's students will codify and analyze (read) the thousands of questionnaires selected. This is a quick, reliable way to produce a quantitative and qualitative report. The report will show the themes that preoccupy the most citizens. These themes will help identify the main tendencies, principal challenges and key ideas that drive progress.

Phase Two

Open Forum

Not only will brainstorming session findings be released to the public, they will be submitted to a control group consisting of 300 to 2,000 volunteers chosen at random among the respondents. The volunteers will come from every region of the state or country concerned. The group will be responsible for the ideation exercise based on the key themes culled from the brainstorming session. The group will also identify the goals, recommendations, priorities and measures likely to have a positive impact on the future of society in the short, medium and long term. How can we ensure that so many people of such diverse origins collaborate for two whole days and guarantee that they leave with the satisfaction of having made a constructive contribution to the meeting? What can we do to ensure that the meeting produces tangible results? The Open Forum is a proven approach that meets both objectives and infuses the participants with a sense of responsibility.

Tangible results

The Forum's findings will be included with the brainstorming results. Then, the findings will be formally presented to the public and submitted to local government authorities. The authorities will be asked to state their position about the results of the public consultation and to show how willing they are to meet citizens' aspirations. Citizens in other parts of the world can also access the results. That's where the experiment will really take off and then, there will be a new debate on both the form of the experiment and the event as well as on the tangible results and the ideas generated by it.

Project management

In each country, a nonpartisan national committee will orchestrate and direct the overall project. The committee will consist of members of a non-governmental organization (NGO). The NGO will receive the funding and assume responsibility for every aspect of the process. The group's sole purpose is the operation's success, which is measured by the expression of the greatest number of citizens and the translation of this expression

into a concrete project. Each national committee will set up a group of experts to ensure scientific rigor and high-level methodology.

Schedule

It may take a considerable length of time to prepare, but the operation should take place in a 12-to-16 week span from the time the financial resources are in place until the time the final report is submitted a few days after the weekend Forum. This schedule is tight but realistic. The beginning and the end of the project should be clearly defined to avoid getting bogged down in bureaucracy by overzealous technocrats. The national committee may remain operational for some months to ensure continuity. It can prepare an assessment of the operation, query government authorities about the possibility of making the whole exercise a permanent part of the democratic process and support other National Brainstorming committees.

Operational costs and funding

The operating budget should cover all the costs of personnel, printing, mailing, publicity, the Web site, the Forum, etc. Public or private interests, businesses or individuals can finance the operation. It is normal, even recommended, to mention the sources of contributions, but commercial exposure for sponsorship cannot be offered as compensation for a financial participation. Individuals, businesses, institutions and governments interested in supporting the endeavor will be invited to do so on a voluntary basis and in a disinterested manner. This policy is intended to prevent interest groups (businesses, media, etc.) from taking over a particularly universal enterprise. The policy will encourage as many individuals, institutions and businesses as possible to promote and support the event.

What's the most fascinating thing about National Brainstorming Week?

IMMEDIATE IMPACT

...on the image we have of ourselves

The project will open the door to a new way of seeing citizens, events and the key issues that confront our society. Above all, it will do much more than raise the consciousness of citizens. It will empower them to view themselves from an entirely new perspective. They will see that they're not the only ones with a different point of view. The project will give everyone a chance to see things, people and life in general in another way. Thus, everything is in place to set up a powerful, modern, innovative vehicle for democratic expression. At first, the project may get a lukewarm reception. It may even be greeted with some derision. Many people are reluctant to make the slightest change in their lives. That's their right. In my opinion, we're all facing an entirely unique situation. But we have the information we need to understand the issue we are grappling with, individually and collectively. Common sense — there is such a thing — dictates that we act, that we take the appropriate measures to solve the problems confronting us. In these

circumstances, doing nothing and taking a *laissez-faire* attitude says a lot about who you are and what you think about life.

The experiment should have a major impact on societies. Newscasts will become much more relevant or we may decide to eliminate them entirely in their present form. Do you remember the question “What impact will capturing data on 15 billion years of evolution, on 15 billion ideas have on the 21st century?” I believe we’ll have to make a sort of assessment, put a little bit of order in our heads, in our memories. We’ll probably have to draw certain conclusions. As one of my friends said, we should be able to get at least one idea out of it! To go back to our image of a driver, he would have to get his head together, become aware of his situation and choose a new direction, no matter which, but a destination that leads somewhere.

The direct impact on society should be on the image we have of ourselves and, consequently, of others. The breakup phenomenon should rapidly bring about major changes in individuals of all origins, social strata and education levels. The behavioral stereotypes cluttering our minds will gradually disappear. These stereotypes are based on cultural references rooted in historical issues intimately linked to the jam in which humanity is trapped. The stereotypes will literally explode, take on entirely different meanings and, thus, virtually defuse every form of truism. New ideas will emerge, new ways of seeing and acting. Just think of the fun ahead!

The solution I’m proposing will solve one problem, the profound crisis in human evolution. The solution will absolutely not interfere with subsequent decisions we will eventually have to make. We won’t lose our freedom. On the contrary, we will enjoy it in a way that we could hardly have imagined. The solution will give us back the tools and resources we need to make the most suitable and judicious choices in our lives. We should be on top of our game, fresh and ready to build our own future on a solid and authentic foundation. A future we have decided to embrace as individuals and as a society. It’s easier to decide where you’re going when you know where you’re coming from.

Where will you go?

DOMINO EFFECT

So we have to start somewhere.

I realize that some time may elapse between the time we become aware of our situation and the time we complete the experiment in social sciences and humanities, i.e. the brainstorming project. But the project will intrigue people all over the globe. Singapore, Scandinavia, California, Holland, France, New York State, Germany, Italy, South Africa, England, Brazil, Japan, to name just a few. Nations, states and places where people are fascinated by innovation and the development of human potential. My friends and

associates in those places would be delighted to accept the challenge of conducting National Brainstorming sessions where they live.

Of course, you must be wondering: To ignite awareness in the global village, how often does the experiment have to be performed? How many states and countries need to conduct their own experiment? How many people have to take part before significant changes occur in society? In my opinion, one National Brainstorming session will launch the whole process. Just one, but in the right place. The first session will trigger a domino effect in other states and countries. I'm sure you've seen rows of dominos lined up by the hundreds or thousands to form an incredible chain. A gentle nudge on one sets off a chain reaction that makes all the others fall. Maximum impact with minimum effort.

So we have to start somewhere. Not surprisingly, the inhabitants of the global village need to see an initial attempt to convince them of the truth, interest and necessity of the experiment. I have a suggestion. There's one place in the world where the experiment would really make sense, a place where there is an obvious case of a less than obvious reality... In this grand experiment in social sciences and humanities, in this chain of dominos, the first piece is Quebec, a province with a Francophone majority in Canada.

There is a striking resemblance between the problems people around the world face and the issues confronting Quebecers. As I said previously, to succeed, we must take advantage of the context and make our experiment a part of people's everyday reality. If we want citizens to participate, they need to see what's in it for them, be able, individually and as a group, to derive some tangible benefit from it, here and now; a *sine qua non* in a consumer society. The political context in Quebec and the rest of Canada offers us an ideal opportunity

Many of the symptoms of psychological drift are present in Quebec; some more than others and, in several cases, at intensities reaching critical levels. Surprisingly, as a collectivity, we find elements that are incredibly similar to the condition of the cerebral hemispheres of an individual deep in psychological drift. The more neocortical, cerebral, detached, abstract nature of English Canadians vs. the more dreamy, good-natured, engaged, emotional side of Quebecers and Francophones in the rest of Canada. The notion of a Canadian duality, the famous concept of two solitudes that are determinant factors in the Canadian psyche. All the elements that have helped create the unsolvable traps rooted in every moment of Canada's history and have endured since the colonial era.

Despite the country's apparent prosperity, the citizens find themselves prisoners of a situation, suffering from an acute, unresolved ambiguity filling them with a chronic lassitude. It's the kind of old chimerical, impenetrable, absurd problem that goes unnoticed but is essential. We have the impression it is insoluble. In my mind, the situation embodies our universal problem, the crisis of identity.

Quebec society has come to a crossroads unprecedented in the province's history. Quebecers are caught in an immense cultural paradox, an impasse created by an erosion

of confidence about their institutions combined with the historical imperative of affirming themselves as a social entity and as a nation in the international community. I suggest we use this impasse as an opportunity to surpass ourselves; it's a way of using a situation to best advantage. Thanks to the historical and geographical situation, Quebecers are propelled to the forefront of a remarkable process involving a change in values and in ways of seeing, doing and talking about things. But this process is not limited to Quebec society; it affects every society. It provides the context for our cultural paradox; it's a determinant factor in the issues we face and I'm suggesting that we turn it into a solution.

Because of their cultural specificity, Quebecers need an objective, a game plan they can rally around, identify with and thus affirm themselves as a people and express their originality. In fact, Quebecers are convinced that no political party, in Quebec or the rest of Canada, has the authority to define their society, whether or not they are part of Canada. No politician is willing to admit that it's up to the citizens themselves to decide. And unfortunately, the citizens have no practical way of going about this. Whether through election or referendum, political party initiatives have proven to be misguided, dishonest, self-interested and inadequate. Leaders will never acknowledge this because they have no other solution to offer: nothing new from sea to shining sea.

It's as if Quebecers have come to a fast-flowing river that they have to cross, but they don't know what's awaiting them on the other side. And worse still, nobody has taught them how to swim and they're suffering a crisis of confidence. This experiment will empower Quebecers: in a way, they'll learn how to swim, regain confidence in the system and define for themselves what awaits them on the other side. Most Quebecers I know would be very proud to take part in this experiment and to help resolve their own dilemma, send a clear signal to the rest of the world and launch our domino effect.

To avoid any misunderstanding about my intentions, I would like to point out that I am motivated by a desire to make a contribution to the community and by my intense interest in the development of the people of Quebec, the rest of Canada and the entire world. My motivation has nothing to do with partisan interest, and I recognize the validity of different political orientations in a democracy. I'm not a politician and I don't want to be. As you have seen, I have other interests. My main concern is to find a way we can work together to seize this magnificent opportunity to move forward.

I think our first large-scale experiment in the social sciences and humanities, the first National Brainstorm session, should take place in Quebec. Why not let Quebecers' legitimate aspirations serve all citizens in the global village?

Would you be happy with the 21st century I'm proposing?

MAKING IT HAPPEN

..Reaching the financial objective will spark the entire operation.

It's a wonderful idea. But it must be brought to fruition. You probably agree launching an operation like this takes a great deal of resources. You have to create a business, raise funds, and set up an organization. People say where there's a will there's a way. But funding is essential. Without money, you can't do anything. So I rolled up my sleeves and started organizing the project. I am convinced the project is necessary and, with your help, I'm sure it will succeed.

Here's the plan. I estimate it will cost nearly \$3.5 million CA to hold the first National Brainstorming session in Quebec and, thus, set the first piece in the domino effect in motion in the global village. The money will cover all the above-mentioned project costs. The figure may seem enormous, but it's a modest sum compared with the usual election or referendum costs. I'm sure we can count on a great deal of public support, so we should have access to many free services. I have created a business structure (non-profit corporation) for the whole operation: the National Brainstorm.

Furthermore, e-business has attained a remarkable level of quality, rigor and security. So, I have used the nationalbrainstorm.org Web site to set up a simple mechanism to raise \$3.5 million. People can access the site to make financial contributions on-line from anywhere in the world. Any individual, business or institution can make a financial contribution. The money's not tax deductible because The National Brainstorm is not a foundation, political party or charitable organization. But donors will receive an official certificate attesting to their contribution by email. People can also follow the company's progress on-line. A "thermometer" tracks contributions as they come in, just as in a fundraising campaign. Reaching the financial objective will spark the entire operation. Everyone will be able to follow the progress on our Web site. I think it's absolutely fantastic that people all over the world can make a financial contribution to this grand enterprise. The situation concerns all of us, so I've conceived of this approach to allow every citizen in the global village to participate.

I realize there is a lot to do to launch this operation, but this is a starting point: the adventure can get under way. As soon as we cover production costs, I'll personally produce the first National Brainstorming session, making sure the operation is professional and respects the objectives of this grand experiment. SEE YOU SOON!

Can I count on you?

ADDENDUM

CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

By Sylvain Matte, MBA

At some point in time, you will have a problem to solve, a challenge to overcome, or something new to design. So, whether you realize it or not, you will probably engage in a fairly generic process, which you may have made your own, combining logic and intuition, rigor and creativity. Indeed, if you want or need to come up with innovative ideas, you may even make a conscious effort in your attempt to be more creative.

Creative Problem Solving (CPS) is undoubtedly the most widely used and recognized approach focusing on the deliberate use of creativity to overcome challenges, seize opportunities, develop new concepts, and even more. The following pages provide an outline of this tried-and-tested process and the principles that guarantee its effectiveness. But first, a short historical outline will identify some of the pioneers who helped demystify creativity and paved the way for its application in our daily lives.

Historical outline

The creative process has intrigued human beings for centuries. Even ancient Greek and Roman thinkers debated such apparently simple issues as “How do we think?” and “How do we use our imagination?” Many considered creativity a mysterious gift or the result of inspiration from a muse; in other words, a phenomenon that defied scientific research and explanation. Sadly, even today, many still hold the same opinion.

Fortunately, for over 50 years, researchers in psychology and in the behavioral sciences have demystified creativity. They have revealed it to be a function of our cognitive and intellectual capacities. Pioneers who have transformed our understanding of creativity include:

- J.P. Guilford, president of the American Psychological Association. In the early 1950s, he challenged his colleagues to study creativity; later, his research allowed him to confirm that creative abilities are measurable, and also to develop a highly complex model, which he called the “Structure of Intellect” (SI) model.
- E. Paul Torrance, researcher and educator. He has allowed us to better understand certain fundamental skills associated with creativity and devised measurements to help recognize the factors of fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration in the creative process.
- Alex F. Osborn, founding partner of the BBDO advertising agency. In 1953, he published *Applied Imagination*, a book that introduced the world to the term *brainstorming* and to a seven-step process called “Creative Problem Solving.” The seven steps he suggested then were orientation, preparation, analysis, hypothesis, incubation, synthesis and verification.
- Sidney J. Parnes, researcher and educator. He devoted his life to creativity and the processes associated with it. He joined Alex Osborn in the mid 1950s and collaborated in further developing Osborn’s initial concepts and transforming them into a systematic, effective, and easily taught approach to creative problem-

solving. He wrote about it in numerous articles and books, including *The Magic of Your Mind*.

Over the years, Osborn, Parnes and their numerous collaborators (Guilford, Torrance and many others) have demonstrated that everyone is creative in one way or another, that individuals can be taught how to use and leverage their creative abilities, and that we can learn how to solve problems more efficiently by tapping into our creative potential. Their work has led to CPS, the Creative Problem Solving process that will be discussed in the following pages.

The essence of CPS: divergence and convergence

One of the most fundamental aspects of CPS is what is called the dynamic balance of creativity, or in other words, the deliberate alternation between divergent and convergent thinking. Indeed, it has been proven essential to separate both and to maintain a fair balance between the two in order to maximize the contribution from each thinking process, and both hemispheres of the brain. This has been demonstrated and validated in research (including work by Guilford, Torrance, Parnes and others) and in practice (through validations carried out by Osborn in his field, and by many others since).

In brief:

- In divergent thinking (referred to by some as creative thinking), we allow ourselves to generate multiple options while suspending judgment or criticism. Miller, Vehar and Firestein, in their book *Creativity Unbound*, associate it with the writer's mind, which involves freewheeling and imaginative thinking.
- In convergent thinking (sometimes called critical thinking), we take time to constructively assess the options generated and to make choices. The authors who associate divergent thinking to the writer's mind also relate convergent thinking to the editor's mind, more focused on constructive selection and improvement of the initial ideas, words and phrases.

In fact, we all engage in, and should engage in, both ways of thinking daily. The key to creating new ideas is to become more aware of the mode of thinking we are using at any given moment in time so we can distinguish between the two, and avoid diverging and converging simultaneously.

Guidelines for divergence and convergence

Given the aforementioned concepts of divergence and convergence, the effectiveness of the CPS process depends greatly on the extent to which those using it will follow certain basic rules (or guidelines) for divergent thinking and convergent thinking.

In the literature, these are formulated in a variety of ways, but here is a brief outline.

Basic guidelines for divergent thinking

- ***Suspend judgment.*** Do not criticize or comment on what is expressed, either by word or through gesture (nonverbally). This includes avoiding self-censuring.

- **Go for quantity.** There is much research to indicate that the greater the number of options, the better the solutions. So push divergence to the maximum.
- **Seek unusual ideas.** Osborn asserts that it is easier to tame a wild idea than to give energy (or life) to a weak (or dead) one; so do not be afraid of wild ideas, you can always evaluate, adapt or strengthen them later.
- **Seek combinations.** Let ideas that come up (whether they are yours or not) generate others, and combine the ideas, letting your imagination make all kinds of connections.
- **Write everything down.** Capture every contribution without editing, as otherwise others might perceive there is some judgment being applied to ideas they generated.

Basic guidelines for convergent thinking

- **Use affirmative judgment.** Be disciplined enough to look for the advantages and positive sides of each idea before reflexively indulging in negative criticism.
- **Be deliberate.** Avoid hasty decisions. Give every idea a fair chance, and use a due process that will minimize the effects of any prejudice.
- **Improve the ideas.** Not all ideas generated during divergence are solutions that can be applied immediately. Even promising ideas need refining and strengthening. So take time to improve them... it is allowed.
- **Stay on course.** Despite the appeal of novelty or one's attraction for what is familiar, beware of ideas that stand out but that do not bring you closer to your goal. Also be wary of comfortable ideas that maintain the status quo.
- **Welcome novelty.** Dare! Do not overlook, or be frightened by, a wild or unusual idea, a little out of the ordinary. Instead, think about how you can refine it and make it practical.

Overview of CPS

Ever since Osborn's first formulation of CPS in the early 1950s (and the various "versions" jointly produced by Osborn and Parnes since then), CPS has been represented in numerous ways. Over the years, the number of phases and steps has also varied depending on the author(s). In this book, we have chosen to use a new representation of the model, resulting from our efforts to integrate the ideas and styles of various authors we have had the opportunity to work with over the years.

Such a representation has the following characteristics and advantages:

- It differs from more linear depictions of the CPS process, which is not linear in its use and application (though the steps will obviously be presented in their logical sequence);
- It is visually easy to follow and understand, which can help anyone involved quickly figure out where he or she stands in the process, what input should be available (from the outcomes of the previous steps), and what should happen next;
- It uses simple formulations to identify the phases and steps of CPS.

This representation also includes a new orientation step, labeled Assess the Task at Hand, which results from the work done by Gerard Puccio and other researchers at the

International Center for Studies in Creativity (Buffalo State College, Buffalo, NY, USA), and which is explained below.

Following is an overview of each of the steps shown in the above diagram. The steps are presented in their logical sequence, but the process is not implicitly linear, meaning that one can start at any step and stop at any step, depending on the task at hand and the client's needs and objectives. This has led to an additional step, not part of the creative process per se, but aimed at achieving an efficient use of the process.

Assess the Task at Hand

Objective

This step is really for the CPS process facilitator who must duly assess what the client is trying to achieve (overcome a challenge, seize an opportunity, address a concern, generate ideas for a new product, ...) and develop the best approach to help this client achieve his/her goal. This includes confirming whether or not CPS is the best process to use and, if so, where to start in the process, and how far to go (when looking at the 3 phases and 7 steps as a linear process).

Divergence

Explore the situation the client faces and wants to overcome so as to understand the needs and the ultimate goal. Use an interview-like process to gather basic data about the current situation, the desired outcome, the history leading to the current situation, its urgency, and so on. Discuss other approaches that could be used, who should be involved in the process (and why), and discuss why the use of CPS was considered.

Convergence

Confirm the goal the client really wants to achieve. Identify the key data from what the client shared, as well as the participants who should be involved in the process. Make sure the client has motivation, influence, and a real need for imagination (or creative thinking). Also confirm the expected outcomes and deliverables, and the relevance of using CPS.

Result

A good understanding of the situation and the task at hand for the person who will facilitate the process, highlighted by the key data gathered. Clearly formulated desired outcomes and expected deliverables for the client. Confirmation that CPS is the appropriate methodology for addressing the situation at hand, and a starting point within CPS (and maybe also a stopping point), with a plan for using the appropriate tools and techniques at specific steps of the process to meet the client objectives.

While the orientation phase (or step) is aimed at the facilitator of the process, the following steps are presented as if you were the client.

Identify the Challenge

Objective

Identify the challenge or opportunity (or wish, goal, desire) so you can clearly state your ultimate objective (what you really want to work on).

Divergence

State a wide variety of challenges or opportunities, goals, wishes, or desires. Also explore the situations that you face, that you want to overcome and in which you have to clarify challenges. Formulate each of them beginning with a stem such as “It would be great if...”, or “I wish...”. Even if the objective is clear (or if you were provided with a specific objective), make sure that this challenge meets the three convergence criteria, and then proceed to the next step.

Convergence

Choose the challenge statement that you really want to work on. Make sure you meet the three convergence criteria: *ownership* (do you have authority or power to make sure the solution is implemented?), *motivation* (do you really want to achieve this objective?) and a real need for *imagination* (and creativity... or is it a challenge that doesn't really require CPS?). Check off the statements that match any of the above three criteria. The statements that meet these three criteria are good candidates for the CPS steps that follow.

Result

A single statement of the challenge, formulated as “It would be great if...” or “I wish...”.

Gather Data

Objective

Gather data, impressions, perceptions, emotions and other information about the challenge, then decide which are the most important. This step gives you a clearer picture of the context around the current situation and underlying the challenge to be overcome (why this is a challenge), as well as insights into the problem that really has to be solved to meet this challenge.

Divergence

Explore the data relating to the challenge. What do you know about it? Why is it a goal, a challenge or an opportunity? Analyze the context and the facts from multiple points of view to get a precise idea of the situation. Identify all the facts, observations, impressions, perceptions, emotions, intuitions, questions and other data that you need to consider so you can understand the present situation and the target situation (a sort of vision that you have of the future, once the challenge is overcome). Identify what you do not know but would need to know to move forward.

Convergence

Identify the most relevant data. Review the list of data you have collected, looking for elements that seem interesting or that give you a fresh perspective on the situation and the challenge.

Result

A list of the key data related to your statement of the challenge or opportunity. The list will help you clarify the problem that needs to be solved to meet the challenge.

Clarify the Problem**Objective**

Develop a number of ways to state the real problem that needs to be solved in order to meet or overcome the challenge. This step helps you realize the gap between your present reality and the future you desire. It also helps you identify the problem(s) to be solved so as to bridge this gap.

Divergence

State the problem in as many ways as possible. Restate the challenge from multiple perspectives. Use the following stems to formulate problem statements: “How might I/We ...?”, “What do I/We need to do ...?”, “In what ways could I/We ...?”, or “What might be all the ways to ...?”. If you find yourself blocked, check the key data again and restate issues or concerns emerging from this data as one or many problem statements, and use various tools that help bring about divergent thinking. Even if the problem is clear or was clearly stated for you, make sure it meets the three convergence criteria. Then proceed to the next step.

Convergence

Choose the problem statement that best describes what you have to solve to meet your challenge, using appropriate convergence tools. As you did when identifying the challenge, make sure you have ownership, motivation and a real need for imagination to solve this problem. Statements that meet these three criteria are good candidates for the CPS phases that follow.

Result

A single, well-defined statement of the basic problem that needs to be resolved to overcome the challenge. The statement should begin with a stem such as “How might I/We...?”, “In what ways could I/We...?”, or “What might be all the ways to...?”.

Generate ideas**Objective**

Give yourself many varied and innovative ideas for solving your problem. Remember that you are looking for “raw” ideas or concepts. In other words, the ideas

do not have to be polished, be in their final form, or be ready to be implemented. In the next step, the process will allow you to turn the best raw ideas into a workable solution.

Divergence

Generate a wide variety and great quantity of ideas to solve the problem, bearing in mind that you are trying to find out all the ways you might solve the problem. Set an ambitious goal about how many ideas you want to generate. Do not hesitate to surpass your goal. Even when you get good ideas, keep trying to increase the number of original ideas. Keep aiming for more! Use the appropriate divergence tools for the degree of innovation you are seeking.

Convergence

Select the ideas that are the most promising and attractive to you. Do not hesitate to go through more than one selection iteration. Make your choices. You can group them if there is some duplication or if some ideas can be combined. Repeat a second time if you still have more than ten options left.

Result

A short list of ideas (ideally fewer than ten but more than one) that could solve the problem.

Develop the solution

Objective

Turn your ideas into a workable solution. In this step, the objective is to analyze, compare and evaluate your raw ideas so that you can retain the most promising ones, then develop them and strengthen them into a concrete solution (that can consist of a single idea or a combination of many ideas from the previous step).

To diverge or converge? That is the question.

What you do in this step depends on what happened in the previous step - Generate ideas. In fact, your approach and even your techniques will vary depending on whether you have chosen one idea or more than one, whether your ideas are more similar than different, more complementary than competing (ideas that cannot really be combined or that are in fact very different alternatives to the problem), etc. You may have to diverge and converge more than once. So it is important at this stage to keep in mind the concepts of divergence and convergence, but above all, focus on two distinct activities that you must perform, namely:

Choose the most promising ideas

Analyze, compare, evaluate and even refine ideas (selected in the previous step). Choose the most promising ideas, the ones that represent possible solutions, then combine them and make a statement that begins as follows: “What I see myself doing is... ”.

Strengthen the solution

Develop (go into more detail) and strengthen your most promising ideas so you can combine them and turn them into an even better solution. Identify the concerns you might have about each of these ideas, then brainstorm ways or options to overcome these concerns. Select the best ideas from these brainstormed options and add them to the initial formulation of your ideas so that you now have a richer, fuller solution.

Result

A concrete, relevant and workable solution, combining your selected ideas and the options generated to strengthen them, all restated as follows: “What I see myself doing *now* is....”

Plan for acceptance

Objective

Increase the likelihood of successfully implementing the solution by examining the conditions, the circumstances, and the stakeholders that surround the proposed solution. In short, study your solution from the perspective of all stakeholders so you can get better general acceptance for it. The aim here is to pave the way to successfully implement the solution by getting the support you need and minimizing resistance.

Divergence

List all potential sources of support (helping you win acceptance for your solution), and all potential sources of resistance (preventing you from implementing your solution). The scope of such an examination can be broad and include a variety of interrelated variables, such as: people (all stakeholders), timing, location, cost, political environment, receptiveness, and resources. Then generate ideas about how to take advantage of sources of assistance and how to minimize the potential effects of the sources of resistance.

Convergence

Select the key actions you need to include into the action plan (to be developed in the next step), to fully leverage or involve each source of assistance, and to eliminate (or at least minimize the impact of) sources of resistance.

Result

A list of concrete actions (or areas in which) to involve sources of assistance, a similar list of actions aimed at minimizing (or eliminating) sources of resistance, and a list of actions that will help improve the conditions and circumstances that will support or hinder success.

Develop the action plan

Objective

Develop a detailed plan with specific, measurable action steps that will lead to the desired goal. This plan should not only be sufficiently detailed to drive action and successfully meet or overcome the challenge, but should also include action steps

detailing how the action plan steps and activities will be monitored over time until the goal has been reached.

Divergence

Use appropriate divergent thinking tools to identify all the possible actions that need to be taken so as to allow you to implement your solution. This is in fact equivalent to further brainstorming more detailed activities for the ideas making up your solution. Use a similar process to determine what resources you require, and the actions to effectively monitor progress and measure success.

Convergence

Consolidate all actions already identified in the solution statement “What I see myself doing *now* is...”, all action steps converged upon when planning for acceptance, and all actions generated in the divergence phase for developing the action plan. Use an appropriate convergent thinking tool to select, from this consolidated list, all the action steps that must end up in your action plan, combining action steps when relevant. Then draw up a specific, detailed and coherent action plan (with the usual who does what, when, with whom, how and/or with what). Draw up a schedule or timeline (based on task dependencies), then add any other detail relevant to your situation.

Result

A concrete, thorough action plan describing in detail the action steps required to find a successful solution to the problem that needs to be solved to overcome the challenge, with all relevant details, such as who will do what, when, with whom, how and/or what, producing what result(s), and acting under what set of controls.

Applying CPS effectively

For over 50 years, numerous researchers and practitioners have been enriching and improving Osborn’s original model. It works. Unfortunately, knowing, understanding and even deciding to use the CPS process may not be enough. We need to keep the right balance between divergence and convergence, and make sure all those involved duly apply the guidelines. We also need to recognize the blocks to our creativity, reduce their effect, and even turn them into catalysts.

These blocks may be:

- **Perceptual:** what we take for granted, what we perceive to be the situation compared with the actual situation, etc.;
- **Emotional:** the fear of making mistakes, rash judgments or the inability to tolerate ambiguity,
- **Cultural:** taboos, stereotypes, extreme pragmatism, or conformism;
- **Environmental:** organizational culture (autocracy, status quo bias etc.), physical space (is it a suitable place for creativity?);
- **Intellectual:** rigidity, superficiality, too little or too much knowledge about the subject.

And on top of these, we also face paradigms, regardless of how one classifies them. In fact, it is not even important. Indeed, you might find as many ways to classify creative blocks and paradigms as there are authors. What matters is to recognize them (our own and those of others), notice how they appear in each individual and in the group, remember that the process alone is not enough, and that if you really want to succeed, you need a proven combination of process and tools to help participants individually, and the team as a whole, overcome their blocks to creative thinking.

It is also important to state, once more, that CPS is not a linear process. Indeed, if you have a clearly defined challenge (even if it was set for you), it is then logical and acceptable to start with Gathering data, just as it would be appropriate to begin at Generating ideas if you were sure you fully understand the basic problem, and have it clearly and properly formulated. Similarly, further on in the process, it is possible (even wise) to go back to a previous step if you need more data, or if the problem is not as clearly formulated as you thought. And in this spirit, it might be expected that the process will stop once a workable solution has been found, for example in situations where a different team is expected to develop action (or project) plans.

As mentioned earlier, the key to successfully leveraging the full potential of the CPS process is knowing how to leverage the dynamic balance of creativity, i.e. making sure to alternate between divergent and convergent thinking. Similarly, the relevance and validity of the results will depend on your comprehension of the nature and objective of each phase and step in the process, on your ability to understand how the results of one step affect progress in the others, on your capacity in overcoming your personal blocks to creativity, and on your ability in knowing how to use the right tools and techniques at the right time to help overcome these blocks and maximize creativity throughout our process. And remember to have fun!

COLLABORATORS

René Bernèche, PhD

René Bernèche earned his doctorate in psychology at the Université de Bordeaux in France. His postdoctoral work took him to the University of California at Santa Cruz and at Berkley where he specialized in the Psychology of Creative Behavior. His expertise in this field led him to introduce courses on creativity and change management in various programs at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) where he was a professor for over 30 years, and at Université de Montréal. Experienced leader at the Creative Problem Solving Institute, he was elected by his colleagues to the Board of Trustees of the Creative Education Foundation and was awarded the Distinguished Leader Award. He has designed and conducted numerous training sessions in creativity and innovation in Quebec, Ontario, the United States and Europe. He is one of the collaborators in An Idea Whose Time Has Come inc., a firm dedicated to creativity development (www.whosetimehascome.com).

Sylvain Matte, MBA

Sylvain Matte, MBA, is the founder and senior partner of *Coefficient Management inc.*, a Quebec-based management consulting, training and facilitation firm. He is one of the collaborators of *An idea whose time has come inc.*, (www.whosetimehascome.com), a consulting and training firm committed to helping businesses bring out, develop, and put forward innovative ideas. Sylvain is also a partner and creativity broker at *New & Improved*, an American consulting company that helps leading companies create growth through innovation.

Sylvain Matte is also a lecturer at two different Quebec Universities, teaching graduate courses on Creativity and Innovation (at the University of Sherbrooke), and on Change Management and Project Management (at HEC Montréal). He is a life-member of the Creative Education Foundation and has been a leader since 1993 at their Creative Problem Solving Institute conference where he was awarded their Distinguished Leader Award in 1999 and the Distinguished Service Award in 2005. He is also a leader at the CREA Conference of the Creativity European Association.

Sylvain has translated a training manual on applied creativity, and was involved in the translation of a psychometric instrument allowing individuals to better understand their personal approach to creative problem solving. He has had the opportunity to deliver programs, manage projects and facilitate hundreds of sessions in Canada, the United States, South America, Europe, Northern Africa, and China.

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ABOUT JEAN DAVID



Biography

An active professional speaker on the international scene and one of Cirque du Soleil's leading architects as described in *The Blue Ocean Strategy*. He is one of the pioneers and builders of Cirque du Soleil, where he managed the marketing department as Vice President for 15 years from 1984 to 1999. During this period, he distinguished himself through innovative methods by marketing and introducing the magic of the Big Top to other cultures on four continents.

Jean is a consultant in creativity and event marketing. He is a man of vision and passion and a determined entrepreneur of ideas who does not hesitate to express his perceptions and concepts on the application of creativity to the promotion of change and innovation.

Jean David excels particularly with leaders and managers by fostering a climate and attitude that facilitates the emergence of the future.

Self-taught, he published: *Quel Cirque!* a book about Cirque du Soleil's fabulous adventure, where he presents his vision of society and invites us to make room for creativity.

Jean David
514.824.8145
www.jeandavid.me
www.jeandavid.collages
[linkedin.com/in/monsieurdavid](https://www.linkedin.com/in/monsieurdavid)